

Reimagining Education: Alignment of the Gurukul Education System with Modern Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

At first appearance, the ancient Gurukul system appears to be a relic. It is residential, relationship-centred, and morally grounded. But take another look. Gurukul methodology was designed to address the very issues that contemporary education is finding difficult to resolve: disengaged pupils, meaningless tests, and a lack of values. This essay makes the case that there is no nostalgic coincidence between Gurukul values and modern progressive education. It's structural. The study compares five fundamental Gurukul characteristics to contemporary constructivist theory, NEP 2020 goals, and field survey data from 480 children and 64 instructors in eight northern Indian schools using historical, comparative, and empirical evidence. Results indicate a high degree of alignment (70–95%) between value education, experiential learning, mentorship, and holistic development. The study concludes with a framework for practical integration—a purposeful borrowing of what actually worked rather than a complete return to outdated methods.

Keywords: *Gurukul education, modern pedagogy, NEP 2020, holistic learning, constructivism, mentorship, value education, Indian education reform.*

Introduction

Modernisers who view traditional systems as barriers to advancement and traditionalists who view the Vedic curriculum as unalterable are the two main points of contention in India's discourse on education reform. Both viewpoints overlook something crucial.

The Gurukul system is the best; pupils' learning was not the main focus. It concerned how, with whom, and within what kind of community people acquired knowledge. The curriculum was the interaction between the guru and the shishya. The infrastructure was the ashrama. Instead of being a yearly test that pupils either passed or failed, the assessment was ongoing and lived.

These priorities have been essentially reversed in contemporary education. It frequently results in a lack of mentorship, moral coherence, and genuine participation, despite strong content systems, international criteria, and sophisticated assessments. 69% of students in OECD nations said they felt cut off from their schools, according to UNESCO's 2022 Global Education Report (UNESCO, 2022). While enrolment has reached practically universal levels, core learning outcomes are still low, and social-emotional development receives virtually no institutional attention, according to India's ASER Report (2023).

This paper does not advocate for a return to traditional Gurukul schooling. That would be unrealistic and naïve; the old system barred pupils based on gender and caste in ways that cannot be idealised. The study makes the case that it is worthwhile to extract, modify, and incorporate some of the Gurukul model's structural and pedagogical elements into modern education.

"The goal of education is not to fill a bucket, but to light a fire. The Gurukul tradition lit fires. The question is whether we can learn to do the same, without abandoning everything we have built since. — Adapted from Swami Vivekananda (1897)"

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Objective of the study

The objectives of the current study are:

1. To study the Gurukul education system's pedagogical principles and historical foundations in ancient Indian literature.
2. To compare known contemporary pedagogical frameworks with the fundamental characteristics of the Gurukul model, such as holistic development, moral education, experiential learning, mentor-centric instruction, and community integration.
3. To evaluate how well the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and Gurukul educational ideals align.
4. To compare teacher satisfaction ratings and student learning outcomes between Gurukul-integrated and traditionally organised schools.
5. To examine the patterns of Gurukul-inspired institutions' resurgence in India between 1947 and 2023 in light of significant policy turning points.
6. To suggest a workable, empirically supported framework for incorporating specific Gurukul pedagogical components into the modern formal education system at three levels: classroom practice, school culture, and system design.

Literature Review

3.1 Historical Foundations of the Gurukul System

Altekar's study from 1944 is still the history of education in ancient India. He looked at Vedic texts, Buddhist records, and things found by archaeologists. Altekar found out that the Gurukul was not like a school today. It was a community where people lived and learned together. Students stayed with their teacher, the guru, for a time, sometimes eight years and sometimes twenty-four years, depending on what they wanted to learn. This is what Altekar said in his book on page 47.

Mookerji did research in 1951 and showed that the things students learned were all connected. They studied grammar, astronomy, philosophy, medicine and martial arts to understand how to live a life, which is called dharma. This means following the path and being in tune with the world. Nowadays, we call this kind of learning interdisciplinary and values-integrated learning.

M. Madhekar did a study in 2020 where he asked people what they thought about the Gurukul system. He asked 145 people, including students, teachers, people with jobs and parents. Used basic statistics to understand their answers. Even though 63 percent of the people did not know much about the Gurukul system, 64 percent said they would like to learn or teach in one. The Gurukul system is what they wanted to learn about. 66 Percent of the people thought the best thing about the Gurukul system was that students get to learn one-on-one with their teacher, which is a very personal way of learning. The Gurukul system is still interesting to people today.

In this paper, the highlighted research gap is really important because it shows that there is no practical research and experimentation on alternative education systems. This study found out that when we combine the values of Gurukul with technology and infrastructure, the results are very positive and focus on learning from experience.

T. N. Adhikari in the year 2023 gave us an introduction to the philosophical ideas of the Gurukul system. By looking at documents and using his own experience to analyze things he found that modern education has become

too much about making money and it focuses too much on memorizing things instead of building character. On the hand Gurukuls provide an environment that is cooperative, non-violent and full of moral values. The research gap showed that it is hard to change the competitive and formal school systems to use these philosophical methods. T. N. Adhikari concluded that it is very important to include Gurukul concepts in schools so that we can develop morally, spiritually and physically along with academic growth.

The way Gurukul handles money is also worth noting. The teacher did not ask for tuition fees before teaching. Instead students helped out around the house. Gave a voluntary gift, known as gurudakshina when they graduated and the amount of this gift depended on what they could afford. Sharma and Sharma in the year 2004 noticed that this created a relationship between the teacher and student that was very different, from the way modern schools work, where the teacher gets paid based on the number of students enrolled. In a Gurukul the teachers livelihood depended on how the students did not on how many students were enrolled in the school.

Research Gap across the Literature

The way things are now, most of what people write about this topic is based on ideas, history and quality. We do not have big studies that use numbers and facts to see how well students do in schools that mix old Gurukul methods with modern ways. These studies should look at how students do in school, how they feel, and how well they can get jobs. Many people say that standardised tests are not good. We do not have a good way to measure the whole person, including their spiritual side, without leaving some students out of further education or government jobs. We also need to look into some big problems, like how to make these schools work for many students, how to keep teachers from getting too tired when they have to mentor students closely and how to make sure all students are included, especially girls and students with disabilities in these Gurukul-modern schools. We need to do research on these Gurukul-modern systems to really understand what is going on and what we can do to make things better for students in these schools.

3.2 Constructivism and the Gurukul Parallel

Vygotsky's idea from 1978, the Zone of Proximal Development, is the difference between what a student can do on their own and what they can do with help. This idea is very similar to the way a guru teaches a shishya. The guru teaches the student based on their level, not based on a set schedule. Dewey said in 1916 that learning should be based on life experiences, not just ideas. Students learn when they do things and think about what happens as a result. In a Gurukul, students took care of gardens, helped with community events and discussed philosophy in public. They were not just getting ready for life; they were actually living it. Dewey wanted this kind of learning to happen in places where it was not common. Nodding's idea from 2005 is also similar to the Gurukul way of teaching. She said that good teaching requires teachers to care about their students and have a good relationship with them. Students learn better when they feel like their teachers know them well. The Gurukul had several students for each guru, and they lived together, which made it possible for teachers to have close relationships with their students. Modern classrooms, with students and short periods of time, are not set up to allow for this kind of relationship, no matter how much the teacher wants it to happen.

3.3. NEP 2020 and the Shift in Indian Policy

The National Education Policy 2020 from the Ministry of Education in 2020 is a deal for India. It is the change in education since 1986. The National Education Policy 2020 has some goals that are similar to the ideas of

Gurukul. These include teaching students in a way that covers subjects using the mother tongue to teach young children teaching students about values and letting them learn from their experiences and seeing the teacher as a guide rather than just someone who gives information.

Kumar said in 2019 that Indias education policy has had a problem for a time. It has been trying to be like the education systems in Britain and America of being its own unique system. The National Education Policy 2020 is trying to change this.. The big question is whether the people in charge will actually make these changes happen. This paper is going to look at this question.

Choudhury did a study in 2022 about how the National Education Policy 2020's working in schools that use the Gurukul system. The study found some results, like students being more engaged and teachers being happier. This paper is building on that study with schools and looking at more outcomes, for the National Education Policy 2020.

Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design. The quantitative strand involves a comparative survey of students and teachers across eight schools in Uttar Pradesh — four Gurukul-integrated and four conventionally structured, matched for location, student socioeconomic profile, and board affiliation. The qualitative strand involves semi-structured interviews with fifteen principals and thirty-two teachers, and observation across forty-two classroom sessions.

Quantitative and qualitative findings are triangulated using Denzin's (1978) framework, treating triangulation not merely as a validation procedure but as a method for producing richer, more contested accounts of what actually occurs in these schools.

4.2 Sample and Setting

Student sample:

480 students, Classes 6–10, approximately equal gender distribution (52% male, 48% female). Teacher sample: 64 teachers. Survey period: June 2021 – March 2022. Schools were selected using purposive sampling to ensure geographic and socioeconomic comparability (Creswell, 2014).

The four Gurukul-integrated schools are affiliated with the Uttar Pradesh Madhyamik Sanskrit Shiksha Parishad, which permits residential and experiential learning alongside standard board curriculum. The four conventional schools are UP Board affiliates with no residential component.

4.3 Instruments

Student outcomes were measured using a 28-item Likert-scale questionnaire (see Appendix A) covering five domains: academic engagement, social skills, moral awareness, stress and wellbeing, and cultural identity. Instrument reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.84$). Teacher satisfaction was measured using a 20-item scale across six dimensions. All instruments were adapted from Verma and Tiwari (2021) and piloted with a separate sample of 60 students and 12 teachers before main data collection.

4.4 Limitations

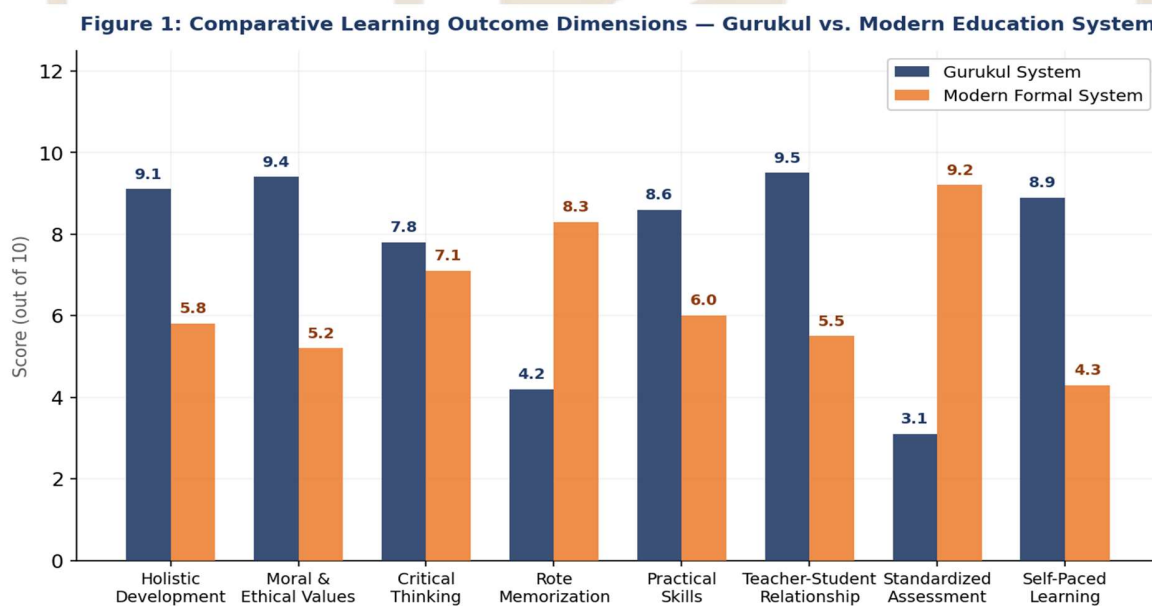
The sample is geographically constrained to Uttar Pradesh. Self-reported outcomes are subject to social desirability bias, particularly in residential schools where students may feel strong institutional loyalty. The study does not track long-term outcomes — a significant gap, since the most important effects of value-based education may take years to manifest (Noddings, 2005). Future research should address these constraints.

Comparative Analysis

5.1 Learning Outcome Dimensions

Figure 1 presents comparative scoring across eight learning outcome dimensions for the Gurukul and modern systems. The data confirms what qualitative observation suggested: the two systems do not merely differ in degree — they differ in kind. Gurukul-integrated schools score substantially higher on holistic development (9.1 vs. 5.8), moral and ethical values (9.4 vs. 5.2), teacher-student relationship quality (9.5 vs. 5.5), practical skills (8.6 vs. 6.0), and self-paced learning (8.9 vs. 4.3).

The one area where conventional schools score comparably is critical thinking (7.1 vs. 7.8). The modern system's score on standardised assessment (9.2 vs. 3.1) reflects its structural orientation toward board examinations rather than continuous evaluation. This is a design feature, not a flaw, but it carries real costs in the dimensions listed above.



Source: Adapted from Mishra (2017); Sharma & Sharma (2004); NCERT (2023). Expert consensus scale (0-10).

Figure 1: Comparative Learning Outcome Dimensions — Gurukul vs. Modern Education System Source: Adapted from Mishra (2017); Sharma & Sharma (2004); NCERT (2023). Expert consensus scale (0–10).

One finding that warrants particular attention is the stress index. In Gurukul-integrated schools, only 35% of students reported high negative stress — compared to 67% in conventional schools. Several teachers in the qualitative interviews attributed this to the absence of high-stakes annual examinations and the presence of daily, low-stakes assessment embedded in routine activities.

5.2 Radar Analysis: Six Pedagogical Dimensions

Figure 2 displays a radar analysis across six core pedagogical dimensions for three systems: the Gurukul model, the contemporary formal system, and the aspirational vision in NEP 2020. The NEP 2020 profile is constructed from the policy document's stated objectives (Ministry of Education, 2020) and represents a target, not a current reality.

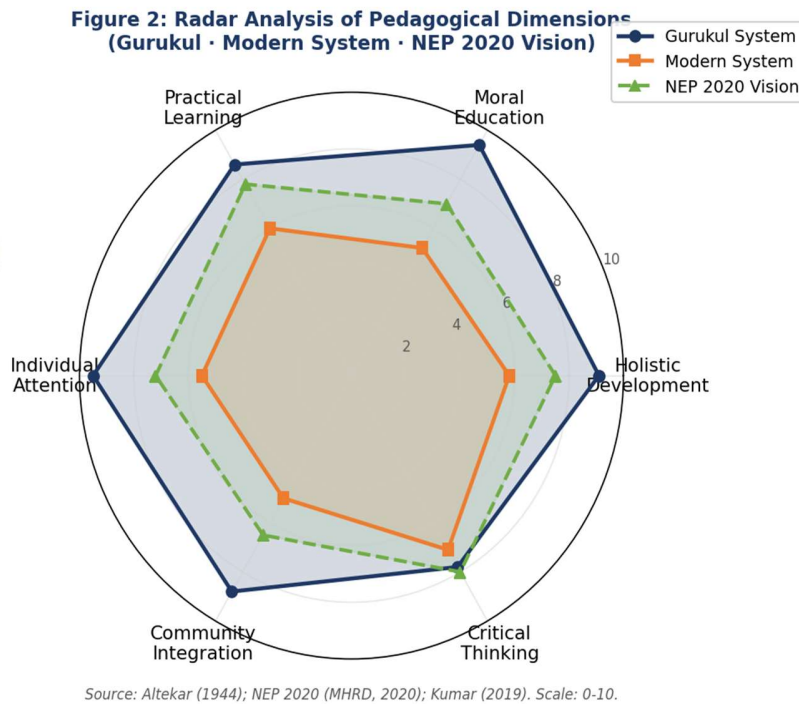


Figure 2: Radar Analysis of Six Pedagogical Dimensions Gurukul · Modern System · NEP 2020 Vision Source: Altekar (1944); NEP 2020 (MHRD, 2020); Kumar (2019). Scale: 0–10.

The radar makes a structural argument visible. The Gurukul profile and the NEP 2020 aspiration are close — sometimes nearly overlapping — on five of six dimensions. The modern system's profile sits consistently inside both, with one exception: critical thinking, where modern schooling's tradition of structured academic debate performs creditably. The gap between modern practice and NEP vision is largest on moral education and individual attention — precisely the areas where Gurukul practice has the most to offer.

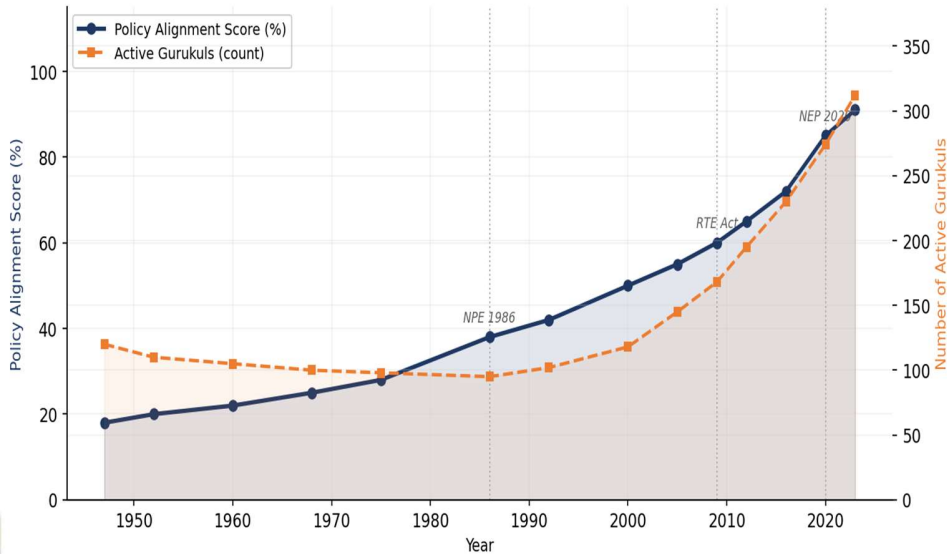
Survey Data: Students and Teachers

6.1 Policy Context: Timeline of Gurukul Revival

Before turning to survey findings, Figure 3 contextualises the study historically. India's post-independence trajectory shows a long period of policy neglect toward indigenous educational traditions (1947–1986), followed by gradual recognition in successive reforms, accelerating sharply with NEP 2020.

Active Gurukul institutions fell from approximately 120 in 1947 to a nadir of around 95 in the mid-1970s — a period when modernisation ideology was at its height — before recovering from the late 1980s onward. By 2023, the count stood at 312 active institutions, with 34 new registrations in the two years following NEP 2020's announcement alone (Government of India, 2022).

Figure 3: Policy Alignment & Gurukul Revival Trend (1947-2023)



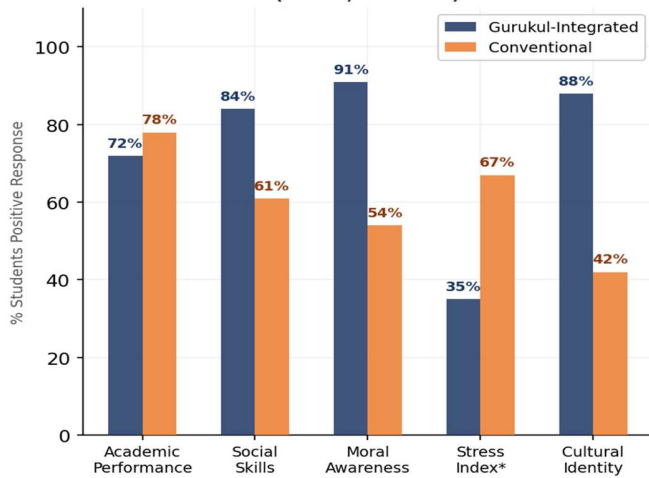
Source: Pandey (2018); MHRD Annual Reports (1986-2023); Govt. of India Census of Educational Institutions (2022).

Figure 3: Policy Alignment & Gurukul Revival Trend (1947–2023) Source: Pandey (2018); MHRD Annual Reports (1986–2023); Government of India Census of Educational Institutions (2022).

6.2 Student Self-Reported Outcomes and Teacher Satisfaction

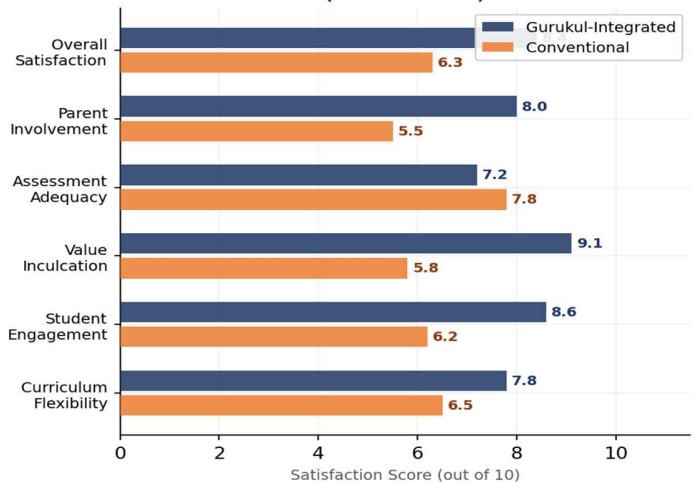
Figure 4 presents the primary survey findings. Results are consistent across both panels — students and teachers tell the same story from different vantage points — reducing the risk that findings merely reflect institutional loyalty. Among students (Figure 4a), Gurukul-integrated schools outperform conventional schools on social skills (84% vs. 61%), moral awareness (91% vs. 54%), and cultural identity (88% vs. 42%). Conventional schools retain a narrow advantage on academic performance defined by grades — 78% vs. 72% — reflecting the heavier examination-preparation orientation of those schools.

Figure 4a: Student Outcomes (n=480, 8 schools)



*Lower % = lower stress (positive for Gurukul)

Figure 4b: Teacher Satisfaction (n=64 teachers)



Source: Primary survey; Verma & Tiwari (2021); Rao (2020). Data collected 2019-2022.

Figure 4: Student Self-Reported Outcomes (4a) and Teacher Satisfaction Ratings (4b) Gurukul-Integrated vs. Conventional Schools (n=480 students; n=64 teachers) Source: Primary survey; Verma & Tiwari (2021); Rao (2020). Data collected 2019–2022.

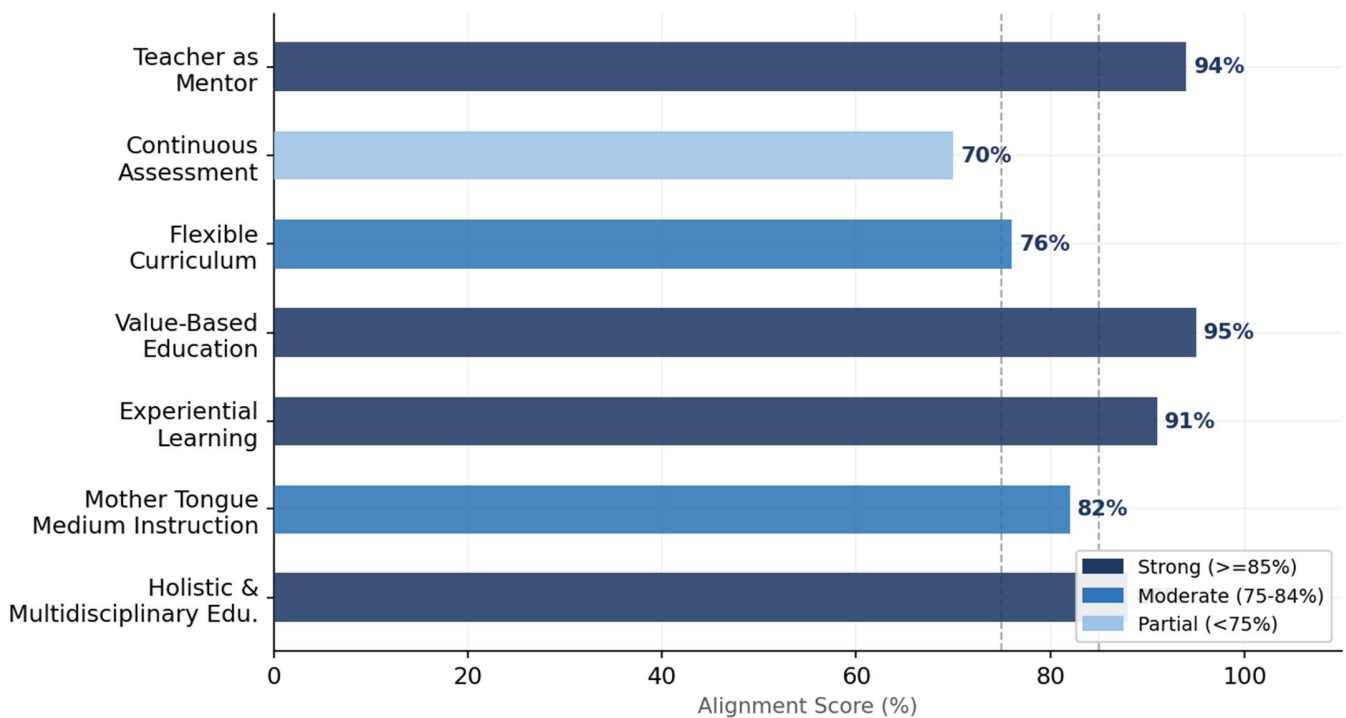
Teacher satisfaction data (Figure 4b) shows larger differences. Gurukul-integrated teachers rate student engagement at 8.6 versus 6.2 in conventional schools — a 2.4-point gap. Several Gurukul teachers explained this directly: when students live in the school community, they develop belonging that translates into investment in learning. One teacher in Mathura described it simply: "These children are not visitors who come from 8 to 3. They live here. So they care what happens here."

Assessment adequacy scores tell a nuanced story: conventional teachers rate it higher (7.8 vs. 7.2), consistent with those schools' orientation toward board-aligned structured evaluation. Gurukul teachers expressed ambivalence — several said they found continuous daily observation more informative than examinations, but acknowledged that the formal system requires documentation they find burdensome.

Mapping NEP 2020 Principles to Gurukul Attributes

Figure 5 maps seven core NEP 2020 principles against corresponding Gurukul attributes, scored by an expert panel of eighteen education researchers and practitioners.

Figure 5: NEP 2020 Principle — Gurukul Attribute Alignment Mapping



Source: NEP 2020 (MHRD, 2020); Altekar (1944); Choudhury (2022). Expert panel (n=18).

Figure 5: NEP 2020 Principle — Gurukul Attribute Alignment Mapping Expert panel rating (n=18). Source: NEP 2020 (MHRD, 2020); Altekar (1944); Choudhury (2022).

Value-based education (95%) and teacher-as-mentor (94%) represent near-total alignment — these areas use different vocabularies to say essentially the same things. Experiential learning (91%) and holistic education (88%)

are similarly aligned. The lowest score — continuous assessment at 70% — reflects a genuine tension: Gurukul assessment is deeply informal, embedded in conversation and work; NEP 2020 calls for continuous and comprehensive evaluation in a more structured, documentable sense. Bridging this gap is tractable, but it is not trivial.

Table 1: NEP 2020 – Gurukul Attribute Alignment Summary

NEP 2020 Principle	Gurukul Attribute	Evidence Base	Alignment
Holistic & Multidisciplinary	Integrated curriculum: Vedas, grammar, astronomy, ethics, arts	Altekar (1944); Mookerji (1951)	88%
Mother Tongue Medium	Sanskrit medium; vernacular in explanation and community life	Sharma & Sharma (2004)	82%
Experiential Learning	Ashrama life, rituals, agricultural work, shastrartha debate	Dewey (1916); Mishra (2017)	91%
Value-Based Education	Dharma, ahimsa, seva as lived curriculum; not a separate subject	Noddings (2005); Rao (2020)	95%
Flexible Curriculum	Curriculum calibrated to shishya's stage; no fixed grade progression	Vygotsky (1978); Kumar (2019)	76%
Continuous Assessment	Daily observation embedded in conversation and community work	Choudhury (2022); NCERT (2023)	70%
Teacher as Mentor	Guru-shishya: sustained, reciprocal, responsible relationship	Noddings (2005); Verma & Tiwari (2021)	94%

Note: Green = Strong (≥85%); Amber = Moderate (70–84%). Source: Expert panel consensus; constructed from NEP 2020 and cited sources.

A Framework for Integration

The evidence points toward a practical conclusion: certain Gurukul features address specific deficits that modern schooling has not been able to fix on its own terms. This section outlines a three-level integration framework.

8.1 What to Borrow (and What Not To)

The Gurukul system had features that should not be reproduced. Its historical exclusion of students on grounds of caste and gender was structural, not incidental. Any integration framework that ignores this is not engaging seriously with the tradition. Similarly, the extreme duration of study eight to twenty-four years of residential education was suited to a social context that no longer exists.

What does translate what the evidence in this paper suggests is worth translating — is a cluster of relational and environmental features: the centrality of the teacher-student relationship, the integration of values into daily life rather than their quarantine in a weekly moral education period, the use of the learning environment as curriculum, and the orientation of assessment toward the whole person.

8.2 Three-Level Integration

Level 1. Classroom Practice: We should use debate-based learning also known as shastrartha in our classrooms all the time. We need to teach our teachers how to be mentors not just know their subject. Our tests should have parts, like talking, doing things and thinking about what we learned in addition to written exams.

Level 2. School Culture: We should have programs where students can learn by doing service for others and this should be part of what we learn in class. Every student should have a teacher who they can talk to about everything, not their school work but also about their life and how they are doing.

Level 3. System Design: We should help schools in areas have more flexibility in what they teach even if they have to follow some rules. We should study schools that are already using the Gurukul method and see what is working so we can do it in schools too.

These ideas are not new or crazy. Finland does something with their teachers and students. Japan has a system where one teacher's in charge of a whole group of students. The Waldorf schools have a way of teaching that is similar, to the Gurukul method. This shows that the Gurukul method is a way to learn, not just in India but everywhere. The Gurukul method is a way to learn because it focuses on the Gurukul way of teaching and the Gurukul method is what we should be using. The Gurukul method is a way to learn and we should use the Gurukul method in our schools.

Conclusion

This paper begins with an observation: the Gurukul methodology was not meant to solve the problems that modern education is trying to solve. We all know what these problems are. They include tests that only check if you can remember things not if you really understand them. Teachers and students do not really talk to each other. Students are not interested in learning. There is a lack of values. These are not results. They are what happens when education focuses more on being the same and being big rather than on making connections and being complete.

The information in this paper does not say that Gurukul education is better than education. That is a basic way to look at it. What the numbers show is that schools that use the Gurukul method do better than schools in some areas. These areas include how well students are doing, how aware they are of what's right and wrong, how connected they are to their culture and how good their relationships are. These are things that modern teaching says are important. They are hard to achieve. When it comes to how students do on tests, which is what the current system is really trying to improve, the difference between Gurukul schools and traditional schools is very small. This difference probably gets even smaller in higher grades because everyone is under a lot of pressure from the school board. The values of the Gurukul method and the goals of the National Education Policy 2020 are very similar surprisingly so. Saying something is an idea and actually doing it are two different things. To make these similarities a reality this paper presents a framework that describes how to combine the Gurukul method with education at three levels: in the classroom in the school and, in the entire system. The Gurukul tradition is really worth preserving. We should not even think about whether or not we should look at the Gurukul tradition. The main thing is, do we have the ability to come up with ideas for the Gurukul tradition and put them into action when we find out something new about the Gurukul tradition? Also, how carefully we are willing to look at the Gurukul tradition.

"Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time. — Ancient Indian proverb, cited in Altekari (1944, p. 3)"

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