

Student – Teacher Relationship In Vedic Educational System

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Abstract

Research shows that there is agreement amongst teachers and educators that a positive relationship between teacher and student is beneficial. Teachers are looking for ways to develop and maintain this relationship. Ancient Indian (broadly speaking “Vedic”) education has been practiced for a long time with the same objectives.

In this paper the authors want to briefly analyze those aspects of Vedic knowledge dealing with education through the view of a few scholars. Even though it may not be easy to apply all parts of this knowledge in contemporary education, it will be reasonable to conduct a deeper study to determine which aspects could be applied and attempt to make these results available to aid teachers, parents, and educators in their tasks. The authors argue that work on improving the depth of relationships between student and teacher, could be benefitted by consideration and application of Vedic educational principles.

Keywords: Student-teacher relationship, Vedic education, human being, instructing, training,

Introduction

Since humans are by nature social beings, interpersonal dealings play a very important part in their personal development and wellbeing. Such dealings can be effectively used in the school environment for all students, children, adolescents, or adults. Students who have developed positive relationships with their teachers are happier, and more enthusiastic about being in school, and achieve greater academic results. Teachers and educators, being aware of these facts, are trying to find ways to enhance these student-teacher relationships (McFarland, 2016; Xu, 2019)

Problem statement

Teachers, parents, and educators experience that a positive relationship between teacher and student is very important, especially for the benefit of the student (Alnassery, 2014; Wilkins, 2014; Ibrahim, 2019; McFarland, 2016; Pastore, 2021; Xu, 2019; Yan, 2019), as it improves the student’s learning (Voynova, 2017), and stimulates a desire to learn (Yan, 2019). Such relationship plays an active role in the development of both, the student and the teacher (Xu, 2019).

From recent research, we can understand that scholars agree that relationships are given great importance; however, the problem is in finding the most effective way of establishing such relationships on personal level (Pastore, 2021; McFarland, 2016; Kaufman, 2010). Vedic texts strongly suggest that teachers in ancient times were aware of the importance of these personal relationships and for that reason Vedic educational practices were centered around teacher-student relationships (Altekar, 1965; Mookerji, 1947). In fact, such relationships were crucial for knowledge to be properly imparted to the student by the teacher (Bhakti vedanta Swami, 1972: 259). It behooves us to learn from the wisdom of ancient sages who authored the Vedic texts and appropriately apply some of the relevant aspects of Vedic educational insights to contemporary education.

Objectives

This paper aims to analyze the aspects of Vedic knowledge that deal with education through a view of a few scholars, and examine if the Vedic educational principles could help improving over-all development of the student – teacher relationship nowadays.

Method

A qualitative historical research design was used. The data was obtained by content analysis through available historical documents and related articles.

Criteria for inclusion:

- Research based articles
- Historical documents regarding Vedic education

Criteria for exclusion:

- Educational articles unrelated to relationships

Literature review

A literature review was conducted based on three books available on the subject of Vedic education written in English, namely, Das S.K. (1930), *The Educational System of Ancient Hindus*; Mookerji R.K. (1947), *Ancient Indian Education*; and Altekar A.S. (1965), *Education in Ancient India*. These authors carefully collected and translated valuable information about the system of Vedic education from the original Sanskrit ancient texts. As these authors exclusively translated the ancient scriptures, we can consider these books as reliable and providing systematic overviews of Vedic education in English language.

The concept of Vedic education

In his book, Das (1930) explains that by the influence of education the child was guided from the moment he was conceived until his death.

“The system included the anxious care-taking of the baby, the efficient breeding of the child, the delicate training of adolescence and the gradual developing of the sense of values in the little thought of acts of daily life. His domestic and social duties were so arranged as to develop a life of constant social service and spiritual drill, to lead finally to a surrender of the realized self in communion with the Divine. If education was conterminous, it was also co-extensive with life.” (Das, 1930: 27)

The aim of education was not only to teach students knowledge or to develop well-power, but it was also meant to build up and prepare the individual human being to live the highest quality life in all circumstances.

The relationships as a foundation of education

The system of Vedic education is primarily concerned about the individual person and his well-being. McFarland (2016) agrees that it is vital for the child from a very early age, prior to school age, to develop strong positive relationships with his parents to develop social-emotional competence and later on interpersonal relationships with his teachers. Aspects of these relationships impact students’ academic outcomes, including motivation to learn, behavior and cognitive skills.

Altekar (1965) illustrates how this relationship between student and teacher in the Vedic educational system looked like. It was regarded as filial in character by Hindu and Buddhist thinkers. The teacher was also responsible for imparting intellectual education and helping in spiritual progress. He too was responsible for their drawbacks.

“His [the teacher’s] extra academic duties were varied and numerous. He was always to keep a guard over the conduct of his pupil. He must let him know what to cultivate; and what to avoid; about what he should be earnest and what he may neglect.” (Altekar , 1965: 57)

In other words, the teacher was assisting the student, like a father would to his son, to develop right values so that he can make wise matured decision in his life. Yan (2019) supports this view by stating that teachers should provide a helpful, motivating, affectionate and supportive learning atmosphere for learners. As a facilitator, he or she also should show enthusiasm, emphatic understanding and genuine caring. Pastore (2021) also observes that emotional aspects are considered a mark of quality of teacher-student relationships. He further concludes that teacher’s empathy and closeness to their students in this sense makes a difference. These results are fundamental if we consider the students’ ability to cope with a period of greater emotional instability and give them the chance to build up identity in a healthy way.

Besides, Xu (2019) indicates that close teacher-student relationship plays an active role in the development of both teachers and students, which contributes to students’ social-emotional, behavioral, and academic adjustment. The teacher-student relationship can be regarded as predictors of students’ academic outcomes. Yan (2019) further suggests that it is vital to understand each student, satisfy their needs and minimize their negative attitudes towards learning in order to establish high-quality teacher-student relationship.

The way of Vedic education:

According to Mookerji (1947), in the Vedic system the teacher was under an obligation to fulfil his duty towards the pupil. Therefore, the teacher is to possess the highest moral and spiritual qualifications. It is also the duty of the teacher, when a fit pupil approaches him, to teach him the truth exactly as he knows it. He should not conceal anything from him, for such concealment would spell ruin to him (Mookerji, 1947: 101). These qualifications of the teacher ensured that the student developed deep respect for him and thus naturally honored his instructions.

Yan (2019) perceives that because students recognize the care and encouragement of teachers in some measurable manner, such as verbal or nonverbal encouragement or other affirming behavior, it can lead them to become more confident in their learning. Voynova (2017) concludes that the relationship established between student and teacher has a significant impact on a student’s way of approaching school, and particularly knowledge.

Das (1930) declared that in the Vedic tradition the students would be encouraged to approach the teacher with enquiries. The teaching system was individualized and the teacher would instruct each student separately. This way has created numerous opportunities to evaluate the students’ capacities and adapt this approach whenever needed (Das, 1930: 134).

Through close relationships, the teacher should understand the needs of the student better and teach him according to his individual needs. This naturally motivates the student to closely follow the teacher’s instructions with a sense of belonging. According to Alnassery (2019), when students are feeling respected by their teachers, they focus more on learning, become more motivated, and thus the learning process for them becomes very smooth. The students described that as ‘feeling at ease’. On the other hand, Ibrahim (2019) points out that negative relationships lead to student’s low sense of school belonging.

Das (1930) further stated that a function of education is to determine the greatest potential of each individual and to direct him in his education. He argues that the pedagogical principle and the formulation of the ancient Indian is ideal for a liberal education (Das, 1930: 7). Yan (2019) too confirms that effective teacher-student relationship may promote students’ learning and that understanding the dynamics of this relationship is very

important in students' learning and thus more research should be conducted in this field to find more practical ideas and methods for teachers.

Successful training of a student under the Vedic educational system requires strict discipline from both the student and teacher likewise. For the student to endure the demands, close relationship with his teacher is necessary. In this regards, Das (1930) gives us a view of the requirements and ways for such close relationships to successfully develop:

“In order to achieve this high ideal of perfect mastery over the senses, a life of strict discipline was prescribed for the student. He had to shun sensual pleasures of all kinds and lead a simple austere life. He was inspired by the high ideals of the teacher with whom he lived in close and intimate contact and imbibed social and moral virtues by his precept and example. At the same time the tender side of his nature was nourished and domestic virtues developed by the sweet and affectionate relationship with the wife and children of the teacher.” (Das, 1930: 26)

This shows a great motivation of the student to fulfil all his duties towards the teacher in order to gain knowledge and the teacher's desire to share knowledge with students.

Mookerji (1947) confirms Das' observation, saying that the making of man depends on the human factor. It depends on individual attention and treatment to be given by the teacher. Here the personal touch, the living relationship between the pupil and teacher make education.

The Aim of Education:

Mookerji (1947) points out that the individual approach to education of the student helps the teacher to successfully identify the nature, character, and conditioning of the individual student. That way the teacher can guide the student to behave a certain way socially, to develop his vocational skills, to pursue his interests etc. For the teacher to be able to achieve this, individual treatment of each student is of essence. Thus, according to Mookerji's assessment of Vedic texts, to be able to help students achieve maximum potential, the teacher should adopt an individual approach for each student, which becomes easier with the development of a deep relationship.

Conclusion:

From indications extrapolated from Vedic texts by the three authors quoted we can see that the ideals in Vedic education while dealing with children would seem to have emphasized individualization and high-quality interaction, especially such ideals were pursued for the benefit of the student, by guiding him to his best achievements, based on his individual set of emotions, character, attitude, and other aspects of his personality. Although it would be unrealistic to expect that all the aspects of Vedic educational ideals could be applied in the systems of contemporary educational practices, it should be possible for teachers, educators, and all others involved in educational field to contemplate how to adapt relevant aspects of Vedic educational ideals in their guidance of students.

The authors of this study are aware that research connected with relationships in education is rightly drawing attention of the teachers and educators. The system of Vedic education could contribute to developing teacher – student relationships on more personal level and this way help the students experience higher quality education.

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