

How Knowledgeable are Gen Z about Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)?

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Abstract

The author has completed the SWAYAM online course on “IKS: Concepts and Applications in Science” offered by Chanakya University and the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. While undergoing this course, the author understood the prominence and need for the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and its applicability to present society. This has ignited curiosity among researchers to know whether Gen Z has any awareness of IKS. The questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate colleges in Telangana with the support of other faculty members. A total of 836 questionnaires were filled out. After data cleansing, only 713 responses were considered for the final study. The study revealed that students who studied Sanskrit as one of the languages at their Secondary Education and Intermediate level have some knowledge about IKS, students who lived with grand-parents and in a joint family have awareness about the Vedic Corpus (Vedas and Vedangas). Wisdom through the ages (Niti Sastras and Subhasita) is prevalent among students who learnt them at an early stage as a play in the family. Mathematics was treated as a scoring subject and as a gateway to writing various competitive exams. Astronomy is confined to Pancanga. Ayurveda is a synonym of home remedies to Gen Z. The intrinsic knowledge of Ayurveda is yet to be known to Gen Z. The study concludes that Sanskrit as a subject at the Secondary School or intermediate level and joint family culture can build a conducive environment to promote IKS. This study also highlights the role of SWAYAM and NPTEL in promoting IKS.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Sanskrit, Vedic Corpus, Pancanga, Ayurveda, SWAYAM, NPTEL, MOOCS.

Introduction

India has a rich heritage and culture. Indian Heritage and Culture (IHC) was a non-credit course in undergraduate level, and for many of the students, this paper doesn't have any significant value as it's marks are not considered for final grading. Mere passing of the course promotes the student to the next year. The author has also experienced this. The author realized the importance of knowing our roots and understanding the rich heritage and culture of India, which is ignored in the race of scoring better marks in other subjects to secure a seat in medicine, engineering, or other courses, thanks to the SWAYAM online course on “IKS: Concepts and Applications in Science” offered by Chanakya University and the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. The pun is that the basics of medicine, engineering, and other courses are in our IKS. If the student has a profound understanding of IKS at an early stage, their development and understanding of the subjects in a holistic form is possible rather than narrowing them and confining them to a specific domain. IKS makes us realize that all these courses are interrelated, and the interdependence of each is very prominent. Be it Vedas, Vedangas, Sanskrit, Niti Shastras, Subhasitas, Pancanga, Ayurveda, Astronomy, Literature, you name it, they are part of our daily lives. Overdependence on a different language, namely English, over time has erased the traces of IKS among us. English is a business language used to communicate with a wider audience, but the ignorance of the native language, especially Sanskrit, has left us 100 years behind.

This paper has also been written in English to reach a wider audience. Studying Sanskrit as a language in secondary school might help future generations understand the richness of Indian Heritage, Culture and IKS. Sanskrit Day is celebrated on the full moon day of the Shravan month (as per the Hindu calendar). Such celebrations are indeed the need of the hour to promote awareness about Sanskrit. Courses on SWAYAM and NPTEL also serve as platforms to promote IKS. For those who really want to know and delve into IKS, SWAYAM and NPTEL are a boon.

Literature Review

Sanskrit is not like any other language. Learning Sanskrit helps in the cognitive development. It is a carrier of IKS and IHC. Knowledge of Sanskrit helps in understanding and comprehending ancient texts and scripts and developing linguistic capabilities. According to Sonali Bhoyar (2020), Ayurveda can be understood and diseases can be better treated if one has knowledge of Sanskrit. All lines of treatment are explained in the form of 'Sutras'; therefore, without knowledge of Sanskrit, it is difficult to understand Ayurveda. In the book 'The Battle for Sanskrit' written by Shri. Rajiv Malhotra, the knowledge of Sanskrit helps in revival and holistic development (socioeconomic, scientific, technical and every field) of the society is well discussed.

The Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), under the 'Digital India' initiative, was launched in 2016 by the Government of India. Its aim is to provide an integrated online platform and portal for online courses. Since its inception, SWAYAM has revolutionized education and learning. Earlier, there was a discipline restriction to pursue any course. SWAYAM has ruled out these barriers and made various courses available to all aspiring learners. The role of the National Programme on Technology Enabled Learning (NPTEL), a joint initiative of IITs and IISc, has changed the face of learning with the advent of e-learning. This platform of SWAYAM has the power of disseminating the hegemony of Sanskrit through which IKS and IHC inspire the generations to come.

Objectives of the Study

The study is conducted to understand the awareness of Gen Z towards IKS, to understand the role of Sanskrit in disseminating IKS and IHS, and to understand the role of SWYAM in promoting IKS and IHC

Scope of the Study

Gen Z is independent and has an entrepreneurial mindset. They are digitally savvy, and technology aligns with their communication style, social connections, and career choices. They appreciate culture and value diversity. They are information seekers who are pragmatic and keen on opportunities for growth and development. With such unique characteristics, Gen Z has the potential to contribute to the growth and development of society and the nation. Therefore, the researcher focused on Gen Z for this study. The study is limited to undergraduate students across various undergraduate colleges in Telangana.

Methodology

The study population comprised all undergraduate students in Telangana. A convenient sampling technique was used to reach prospective respondents. The researcher approached known faculty contacts in undergraduate colleges in Telangana and explained the objective of conducting this study. With their support, data were collected from 836 respondents. Before collecting the data, the faculty clearly explained the objectives of the study and clarified any doubts that the students had. This activity helped generate accurate responses to the maximum extent. Of the 836 responses received, 713 were found to be suitable for the study, which means that 85% of the responses were used for the study and only 15% of the responses were found to be unsuitable for the study.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were collected from SWAYAM, NPTEL, and other websites. A questionnaire was designed to collect primary data. Pilot testing of the questionnaire was conducted with 100 students before using it for the final study. The pilot study revealed that some changes in the framing of the questions were required, and these

were incorporated. Two questions were eliminated after the pilot study as they conveyed similar meanings, and there was confusion on the part of the respondents, leading to ambiguity.

The demographic profile of the respondents, such as age, gender, intermediate stream, undergraduate stream, nature of family (joint, nuclear), size of family, book-reading habits in the family, and languages studied in secondary school, intermediate, and graduation, were collected through the responses. These questions were closed-ended. The awareness and knowledge of IKS pertaining to Vedic Corpus (Vedas and Vedangas), Wisdom through ages (Niti Sastras and Subhasita), Mathematics, Astronomy, Pancanga, and Ayurveda was assessed through the multiple-choice questions exclusively designed for the study. Students' awareness and opinions regarding MOOCS offered through SWAYAM and NPTEL were also captured in this study. Inferential statistics were used to interpret the data, leading to the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 1 Gender

Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	401
Female	312
Total	713

Table 2 Age

Age	Number of Respondents
Less than 18 years	11
19 years	219
20 years	189
21 years	114
22 years	138
22 years and above	42
Total	713

Table 3 Intermediate Stream

Stream	Number of Respondents
MPC	342
BiPC	211
MEC	56

CEC	68
HEC	12
MBiPC	14
Others	10
Total	713

Stream Number of Respondents

Table 4 Under Graduation Stream

Stream	Number of Respondents
BA	62
BBA	256
B Com	277
BSc	96
Others	22
Total	713

Table 5 Nature of Family

Nature	Number of Respondents
Joint	215
Nuclear	498
Total	713

Table 6 Size of the Family

Size (Number of Family Members)	Number of Respondents
Less than 3	4
3	72
4	338x
5	201
6	59
More than 6	39
Total	713

Table 7 Book Reading Habit in the Family

Book	Number of Respondents		
	Yes	No	Total
Ramayana	589	124	713
Mahabharata	609	104	713
Puranas	314	399	713
Mythologies	210	503	713
Scriptures (slokas etc.,)	478	235	713
Others	311	402	713

Table 8 Languages Studied at Secondary School Other than English

Language	Number of Respondents
Hindi	212
Telugu	395
Sanskrit	87
Others	19
Total	713

Table 9 Languages Studied at Intermediate Level Other than English

Language	Number of Respondents
Hindi	139
Telugu	112
Sanskrit	383
French	35
German	28
Arabic	16
Total	713

Table 10 Languages Studying at Under Graduation Other than English

Language	Number of Respondents
Hindi	89
Telugu	365
Sanskrit	102
French	87

German	41
Arabic	29
Total	713

Table 11 What do you understand by IKS?

Description	Number of Respondents
Ramayana	519
Mahabhrata	594
Astronomy	128
Pancanga	340
Ayurveda	289
Vastu Shastra	157
Mathematics	621

Table 12 Awareness of SWAYAM and NPTEL

Awareness	Number of Respondents
Yes	689
No	24
Total	713

Table 13 Whether SWAYAM and NPTEL can Promote IKS?

Description	Number of Respondents
Yes	632
No	57
Total	689

Table 14 Influence of Demographic Profile on Awareness of IKS

Demographics	Test	p value	Remarks
Gender	Pearson Chi-square	0.116	There is no significant association between gender and awareness of IKS
Age	Pearson Chi-square	1.026	There is no significant association between age and awareness of IKS
Intermediate stream	Pearson Chi-square	0.881	There is no significant association between intermediate stream and awareness of IKS
Under graduate stream	Pearson Chi-square	0.003	There is significant association between under graduate stream and awareness of IKS
Nature of family	Pearson Chi-square	0.012	There is significant association between nature of family and awareness of IKS
Size of family	Pearson Chi-square	0.001	There is significant association between size of family and awareness of IKS
Book reading habit in the family	Pearson Chi-square	0.000	There is significant association between book reading habit and awareness of IKS

Languages studied at secondary school other than English	Pearson Chi-square	0.010	There is significant association between languages studied at secondary school and awareness of IKS
Languages studied at intermediate level other than English	Pearson Chi-square	0.012	There is significant association between languages studied at intermediate level and awareness of IKS
Languages studying at under graduation other than English	Pearson Chi-square	0.340	There is no significant association between languages studied at secondary school and awareness of IKS

Discussion

The data reveals that gender and age does not influence awareness of IKS among Gen Z. As Gen Z is technologically savvy, they are exposed to social media and other sources of information, irrespective of their gender and age. Therefore, this could be one of the reasons for the lack of influence on IKS awareness. The choice of intermediate stream does not influence the knowledge of IKS among Gen Z, but the choice of undergraduate stream has a positive relationship with the awareness of IKS. Students who opted for BA, BBA, and B Com, are more aware of IKS than those in other streams. Joint family culture can promote awareness of IKS. Size of the family also have a significant contribution towards the awareness of IKS. Large families could be a platform for propagating IKS. Book-reading habits in families are also a greater contributor to promoting IKS among Gen Z. Languages studied at secondary school and intermediate levels have a significant influence on the awareness of IKS. Students who studied Sanskrit at the secondary school and intermediate levels had knowledge of IKS; in contrast, the language studied at the undergraduate level did not have any significance on the awareness of IKS. Students ranked Mathematics, followed by Mahabhrata, followed by Ramayana followed by Pancanga and Ayurveda when asked 'What do you understand by IKS?' This reveals that Gen Z has a very narrow approach to IKS. The ocean of knowledge in IKS is yet to be explored the Gen Z. The majority of the respondents were aware of SWAAYAM and NPTEL and strongly believed that these digital platforms could promote IKS and disseminate the wisdom of IKS.

Directions for Future Research

The present study is an exploratory study to determine the awareness of Gen Z about IKS. The study can further be carried to understand

- Organizational performance Vs employees with the knowledge of IKS
- Ethics and values Vs. employees with the knowledge of IKS
- Corporate Social Responsibility Vs. employees with the knowledge of IKS
- Corporate Governance Vs. employees with the knowledge of IKS
- Resilience and Leadership Vs. employees with the knowledge of IKS

Conclusion

'Knowledge is divine', but where does this knowledge come from? Is it already existing and lost in the Kaala chakra, or should knowledge be created? The answer to this question is left to the audience. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a broad spectrum of knowledge that draws information from various disciplines and paves the way for the healthy well-being and prosperity of mankind. Such knowledge is lost in the greed of knowing something that never belonged to us. Better late than never, it is high time for all the stakeholders to act swiftly to revive the lost glory of IKS and make the younger generation understand the beauty, need, and importance of Sanskrit in restoring the IKS. This study attempts to understand the awareness level of Gen Z towards IKS. This study shows that technology can play a prominent role in safeguarding IKS. The dissemination of IKS prowess through digital platforms such as SWAYAM and NPTEL is highly recommended. As per the researcher's observation, it is understood that as of now only

one course. “IKS: Concepts and Applications in Science” offered by Chanakya University and the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, is available on SWAYAM. The researcher opines that similar courses with discipline-specific content, such as IKS and Astronomy, IKS and Vaastu Sastra, IKS and Mathematics, and IKS and Linguistics, can be designed with a short duration of 4-6 weeks for basic level and advanced level courses ranging from 8-10 weeks accordingly. A foundation course on Sanskrit may also contribute to the preservation and promotion of IKS, as knowledge of Sanskrit is vital for a better understanding of IKS.

---Sarvejan Sukhino Bhavantu---

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