

Thirukkural and Education

S. Alfeno Marie

Assistant Professor

Shantiniketan Educational Institutions, Bangalore, India

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 5

Month: March

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Alfeno Marie, S.
“Thirukkural and
Education.” *Shanlax
International Journal
of Arts, Science and
Humanities*, vol. 13,
no. S5, 2026, pp. 70–75.

*Corresponding Author:
alfeshiva@gmail.com

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS5-Mar.11087>

Abstract

Thirukkural is celebrated as Ulaga Pothumarai (the Universal Code of Conduct) because of the timeless ethical and philosophical principles embedded in its verses. In this sense, Thirukkural may be regarded as a treasure house of knowledge and wisdom for humanity across the world. The text illuminates a wide range of subjects including society, agriculture, water management, kingship, governance, rights and duties, equality, education, family life, love, and virtuous living. Structurally, it is divided into three major sections: Aram (Virtue), Porul (Wealth), and Inbam (Love). In the modern world, where education is increasingly reduced to a means of economic advancement, the educational ideals proposed by Thiruvalluvar continue to serve as a guiding force in shaping meaningful learning. Through the celebrated aphorism “Karka Kasadara Karpavai” (learn thoroughly what is worth learning), Thiruvalluvar clearly defines both the purpose and the ultimate outcome of education. Focusing primarily on the chapters dealing with education (Kalvi), this paper highlights how the Kurals articulate foundational principles necessary for the holistic development of human personality. Further, the study examines the relevance of Thirukkural in addressing contemporary educational challenges such as rote learning, widening skill gaps, and the decline of social responsibility, while also briefly exploring the relationship between its educational philosophy and modern Dravidian thought.

Keywords: Thirukkural, Education, Learning, Value System, Holistic Development, Social Responsibility.

Introduction

Thirukkural, the immortal ancient Tamil literature, talks about the three dimensions of human life (Thiruvalluvar, (2017)). 1. Aram (Virtue), 2. Porul (Wealth), and 3. Inbam (Love). Kurals on education in the Thirukkural primarily fall under the second part, namely, Porul (Wealth, Politics and Conduct of life). There are Kurals dedicated to learning in Chapter 39 (Adhigaram) and the wisdom that comes from it. But one cannot deny the fact that the impact of education touches upon Aram (Virtue) and proper living, emphasizing that true wealth is learning which invites the learners to lead a good life (Varadarasanar, 2017). Above all forms of wealth, Valluvar considered knowledge to be the supreme treasure. In Chapters under Porul (Wealth), we find Kurals giving practical guidance for life, and education is emphasized as foundation stone for success, morality and prosperity. Since education is the main focus in this article, Chapters 39, 40 and 41, which talk about education, will be dealt with in detail. Chapter 39 focusses on the importance of study and learning (Katal – Learning), Chapter 40 emphasizes the need to master what is learnt (Karka kasadara – Learning faultlessly) and Chapter 41 deals with the application part of whatever has been learnt, (Kartravaaru Nitral – Living as Learned).

Methods

In this article, a qualitative research approach is adopted to explore the relevance of Thirukkural in education. The method involves a literature review of the original Tamil text and its translations, along with secondary sources such as commentaries and scholarly articles, to identify Kurals that address themes of learning, moral conduct, discipline, and teacher-student relationships. Selected verses are analysed thematically to categorize their educational significance under moral, intellectual, and social dimensions. The study suggests methods for integrating the Kurals into classroom pedagogy, including discussion, reflection exercises, storytelling, and role-play activities. This approach aims to demonstrate how the ethical and intellectual principles of Thirukkural can foster holistic learning and character development in contemporary education.

Hypothesis

H₁: Importance of Education and Thirukkural – This links Thirukkural's emphasis on virtue, learning and character building to the foundational purpose of education.

H₂: Scientific concepts, skill gap and Thirukkural – This stresses learning from experience and observation, which can be aligned with scientific methods and vocational skill development.

H₃: Education, Leadership and Dravidian Ideology in Thirukkural – This connects Thirukkural's guidance on leadership and social conduct with Dravidian ideals of equality and rational education.

Analysis

H1: Importance of Education and Thirukkural

Role of Education

The Indian education system has often been criticized for failing to impart essential human values such as ethics, compassion, inclusiveness, and broad-mindedness to students. As a result, even highly educated individuals engaged in public service sometimes display little empathy toward the true sovereigns of India-the common people. In this context, the incorporation of Thirukkural into school curricula across the country can play a significant role in value-based education. Mohamed and Safeek (2024) argue that “educators can benefit from a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical foundations for integrating Thirukkural into curricula, thus enriching the learning experience for students” (p. 29). The timeless wisdom contained in this Tamil classic can help future generations develop critical thinking, moral responsibility, and social consciousness. Its chapters on knowledge, learning, and wisdom strongly emphasize the importance of providing children with a meaningful and ethical education.

Key Verses on Education

கற்க கசடறக் கற்பவை கற்றபின்

நிற்க அதற்குத் தக. (Kural 391)

Karka kasadarak karpavai katrapin

Nirka atharku thaga. (Transliteration)

This verse stresses the importance of not just acquiring knowledge, but also applying it to one's life in a way that leads to righteous living. Through this verse Valluvar insists that education is not merely the acquisition of information but the transformation of character. When individuals live in accordance with what they have learned, they embody wisdom, integrity and responsibility (Pope, 2017). This kural remains relevant today, reminding that the true measure of education lies not in certificates or qualifications but in the values that learning inspires.

கேடு இல் விழுச் செல்வம் கல்வி ஒருவனுக்கு

மாடு அல்ல மற்றையவை. (Kural 400)

Kedil vizhich selvam kalvi oruvanukku
Maadu alla matrayavai. (Transliteration)

Learning is the excellent wealth that none can destroy; all other things afford no real joy to man. This Kural highlights learning as the most valuable and lasting asset, as it cannot be taken away because learning alone provides true happiness. Valluvar says that this is the only form of wealth that is free from decay, loss or destruction. He elevates education as the highest and most secure asset a person can possess.

யாதானு நாடாமா ஓராமா லென்னொருவன்
சாந்துணையுங் கல்லாத வாறு. (Kural 397)
Yaathanu nhaadaamaa luraamaa lennoruvan
Saanhthunainh kallaatha vaaru. (Transliteration)

This verse suggests that a learned person can feel at home anywhere in the world, they make each land their own, in every city they can find a home, but the unlearned are destined to wander aimlessly wasting their life. Valluvar emphasizes that education is the true foundation of a person's stability, respect and confidence.

தொட்டனைத் தூறும் மணற்கேணி மாந்தர்க்குக்
கற்றனைத் தூறும் அறிவு. (Kural 396)
Thottainaith thoorum manarkeni maandharku
Karranaith thoorum arivu. (Transliteration)

The deeper a well is dug, the more the water that springs; the more one learns, the more the wisdom it brings. This is a metaphor for how knowledge and wisdom grow with continuous learning and effort. Valluvar suggests that human intelligence expands naturally and abundantly the moment it comes into contact with meaningful education, just as water rises effortlessly in a sandy well.

செல்வத்துள் செல்வம் செவிச்செல்வம் அச்செல்வம்
செல்வத்துள் எல்லாம் தலை. (குரல் 411)
Selvaththul selvam sevichchelvam achchelvam
Selvaththul ellam thalai. (Transliteration)

Valluvar says the wealth of all wealth is the wealth of hearing. It out-tops all other wealth. This Kural emphasises the importance of listening, the gift of hearing. Learning through listening (hearing) is an essential requirement and an important tool in education. The wealth of the ear is the chief of all wealth; that wealth is the foremost among all possessions. The Kural highlights the pre-eminence of intellectual wealth over material wealth. The primary objective of this research is to clarify the fundamental educational tenets preached by Thiruvalluvar, enabling students in today's competitive global environment to evolve into personalities rooted in virtue, rather than merely dreaming to acquire grades or running after celebrities.

Plan of Studying

In the teaching-learning process, both the teacher and the student must understand the purpose of learning, the methodology of learning, the ultimate goal of education, and Thirukkural's approach to tackle current educational challenges (Mohamed & Safeek, 2024).

H2: Scientific Concepts, Skill Gap and Thirukkural Scientific Concepts & Theories

When Thirukkural discusses education, it aligns with several scientific concepts and theories in psychology and sociology.

Value Education (Pedagogy)

Thirukkural emphasizes the importance of learning. The emphasis here is not to learn for the sake of learning, but the learned should live a life worthy of what is learnt. This is the value Valluvar inculcates in the mind of the learned. Education is for better living, higher the education, better the standard of living in all walks of life. This is value education. This is the value Thiruvalluvar talks about when he says,

கற்க கசடறக் கற்பவை கற்றபின்
நிற்க அதற்குத் தக. (Kural 391)
Karka Kasadara Karpavai Katrapin
Nirka Adharkuth Thaga. (Transliteration)

This mandates that one should learn what is worth learning flawlessly and subsequently conduct oneself according to what is learnt. This precept strongly advocates for the Continuous Learning or Lifelong Learning principle espoused by modern pedagogy, established over two thousand years ago.

The Purpose of Knowledge – Social Responsibility Theory

Valluvar does not confine the ultimate benefit of education to individual growth alone. He stresses that the educated persons must utilize their acquired knowledge to contribute to society, fulfilling a social obligation (Nagasamy, 2021).

உடையார்முன் இல்லார்போல் ஏக்கற்றுங் கற்றார்
கடையரே கல்லாதவர். (Kural 395)
Udaiyarmun Illarpol ekkatrum katraar
Kadaiyare kallaathavar. (Transliteration)

By suggesting that the educated should eagerly learn and serve society, Thirukkural strongly advocates the Social Responsibility Theory, asserting that those with knowledge must contribute to the progress of the community.

Cognitive Psychology in Learning (Listening)

Thirukkural gives significant importance to 'listening' (Kēlvi). Listening is a crucial part of the brain's cognitive function in acquiring knowledge.

செவிக்கு உணவில்லாத போது சிறிது
வயிற்றுக்கும் ஈயப் படும். (Kural 412)
Sevikku unavillaatha pothu sirithu
Vayirukkum iiyap padum. (Transliteration)

People must think a little about eating, only when the ear is not fed. Valluvar's statement that the stomach will only yearn for food when the ears (mind) lack intellectual nourishment. It clarifies the psychological idea that the mind's need (knowledge) is superior to the body's need (hunger).

The Skill Gap and Thirukkural

Contemporary education often halts at memorization and some technical knowledge. However, Valluvar considers clear thinking and eloquent communication (solvanmai) to be indispensable attributes of an educated person.

எண் பொருலவாகக் செலச் சொல்லி தான் பிறர்வாய்
நுண் பொருள் காண்பது அறிவு. (குரல் 424)
Ye porulavaagach selach solli, thaana pirarvaai
Nhun porul kaanpathu arivu. (Transliteration)

Wisdom unravels things subtle and seeks them in others. The Kural defines wisdom as that which directs one towards the beneficial path. This shows that Valluvar prioritizes Critical Thinking and Decision Making Skills over mere factual knowledge, which aligns with the critical demands of today's professional industries.

H3: Education, Leadership and Dravidian Ideology in Thirukkural

Dravidian Ideology and Thirukkural Education

Thirukkural does not define a person's greatness or knowledge based on birth.

பிறப்பொக்கும் எல்லா உயிர்க்கும் சிறப்பொவ்வா

செய்தொழில் வேற்றுமை யான். (Kural 972)

Pirapokkum ellaa uyirkkum sirappovvaa

Seithozhil verrumai yaan. (Transliteration)

This principle of equality is the bedrock of Dravidian ideology. Valluvar firmly establishes the concept that education is universal, and distinction lies only in the quality of one's actions. This perspective reinforces the Dravidian thought that quality education must be made accessible to all sections of society.

Education and Leadership

Thirukkural connects education with leadership qualities. Valluvar establishes, particularly in the chapters 'Wisdom' and 'Listening', that only a person who utilizes his learning to guide others can be a leader. He insists that a leader must 'listen to what is worthy of hearing' and then 'carefully analyse' (by wisdom) before taking action, which forms the fundamental tenet of modern Management Education and ethical leadership.

Global Relevance

Thirukkural's educational philosophy is not confined to any specific language or race. Its ethics are capable of enhancing universal human character. Thirukkural uniquely presents a system of Holistic Education that combines self-restraint, worldly knowledge, and a commitment to social duty (Rasamanikkanaar, 2023).

Results and Discussion

The analysis of Thirukkural in relation to contemporary educational, scientific, leadership and socio-cultural frameworks reveals a strong convergence between ancient ethical wisdom and modern development needs. The findings confirm that Thirukkural, though composed over two millennia ago, offers enduring principles relevant to present day discussions on educational importance, scientific reasoning, skill development and leadership within Dravidian ideological perspectives. Thirukkural highlights education as an empowering and transformative force. Thiruvalluvar viewed education as a lifelong process shaping individual character and societal harmony. These insights parallel contemporary educational frameworks that stress value-based learning, critical thinking, and ethical citizenship. This article affirms that Thirukkural's educational philosophy aligns with modern aspirations for holistic and equitable education. Moreover, the integration of empirical thinking with ethical conduct highlights Valluvar's nuanced understanding of nature and human responsibility. It portrays leadership not as a position of privilege but as a service-oriented responsibility towards the common people, which resonates with Dravidian emphasis on social upliftment through education. Overall, the combined findings demonstrate that Thirukkural is not merely an ethical text but a comprehensive guide that addresses modern challenges in education, scientific literacy, skill development and leadership.

Conclusion

Thirukkural, a classic Tamil literature, gives elaborate guidelines on ethics and morality, education and empowerment, the rulers and the ruled, etc. We understand that the current education system fails to teach essential life values because we still follow the British model in our system of education in India. Education at school level itself must sow the seeds of values in the minds and hearts of children to develop empathy, compassion, civic sense and character formation. According to Thirukkural, real education is not just memorizing facts but understanding deeply and living with virtue. A truly educated person is one who uses knowledge to help others and improve society. Through these teachings, the Thirukkural shows that education is essential for personal growth, moral character, and a harmonious society.

References

1. Thiruvalluvar. (2017). Thirukkural (G. U. Pope, Trans.). Asian Educational Services.
2. Varadarasanar, M. (2017). Thirukkuralin Samooga Nooku. Paari Nilayam.
3. Nagasamy, R. (2021). Political philosophy of Thiruvalluvar. *Semmozhi Tamil Aayvu*, 8(1), 112–135.
4. Rasamanikkanaar, M. (2023). Relevance of Thirukkural in modern society. *Koodal Ilakkiya Malar*, 12(4), 78–95.
5. Mohamed, A., & Safeek, M. (2024). Integrating Thirukkural in modern education. *Journal of Tamil Studies*, 15(2), 25–35.