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Pedagogical Strategies in Ayurveda Samhita: A Scientific Appraisal

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Abstract

Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine originating in India, has been passed down through generations primarily via texts known as *Samhitas*. These texts contain a wealth of knowledge about holistic health and healing practices. This scientific study aims to delve into the pedagogical approaches employed within *Ayurveda Samhitas* to understand how this ancient knowledge was transmitted and comprehended. The study uses a multidisciplinary research framework that combines historical analysis, linguistics, and educational theory to shed light on the pedagogical strategies employed within *Ayurvedic* texts. The study employs a multidisciplinary research framework that combines textual analysis, historical examination, and contemporary educational theories. By critically reviewing the primary *Ayurvedic* texts, such as the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, this research aims to elucidate the instructional strategies, learning methodologies, and knowledge transmission systems embedded within *Ayurveda Samhita*. The findings of this research have the potential to enhance *Ayurvedic* education, refine teaching practices, and bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary learning methodologies for the advancement of *Ayurveda* as a comprehensive healthcare system.

Keywords: Teaching Methodology, *Adhyayana*, *Adhyapana*, *Tadvidhya Sambhasha*

Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine originating from the Indian subcontinent, has garnered global attention for its holistic approach to healthcare and well-being. Rooted in millennia-old texts known as "*Samhitas*," *Ayurveda* offers a rich repository of knowledge encompassing the principles of life, health, and healing. These classical texts, written in *Sanskrit*, include foundational works like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya Samhita*, among others, which have served as the cornerstone of *Ayurvedic* education and practice for centuries. In ancient India, the prevalent method of *Ayurvedic* training was the "*Gurukula*" system of education. A "*Gurukula*" referred to a place where a teacher, known as a "*Guru*," resided with their family while instructing and mentoring students. The ancient *Ayurvedic* texts extensively describe methods for acquiring knowledge that benefit both the teacher and the student. This current review article emphasizes the instructional and learning approaches employed by our ancient Acharyas.

Materials and Methods

The primary data source for this study is the *Ayurveda Samhita*, including the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Vagbhata's Ashtanga Hridaya*. Commentaries and secondary literature were also searched to gain insights into historical pedagogical practices.

Aim and objectives

1. To Analyze the pedagogical approaches employed within *Ayurveda Samhitas*.
2. To Explore the linguistic and instructional methods used in these texts
3. To examine specific sections of the *Ayurveda Samhitas*, including the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Vagbhata's Ashtanga Hridayam*, with a focus on identifying pedagogical elements, instructional strategies, and the structure of knowledge dissemination.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively analyze pedagogical approaches within *Ayurveda Samhita*. A systematic review of *Ayurveda Samhita* texts will be conducted to identify and extract pedagogical content and methodologies.

Prerequisites for optimal pedagogy and learning outcome

- **A Superlative Educator:** A "Superlative Educator" is a term used to describe an exceptional or outstanding educator who goes above and beyond in their profession. These educators are characterized by their dedication, passion, and effectiveness in teaching and inspiring students. They often possess a combination of qualities and skills that set them apart from others in their field. Some characteristics that might be associated with a superlative educator are Passion for Teaching, Innovative Teaching Methods, Empathy and Excellent Communication skills.
- **An Ideal Student:** An ideal student is characterized by a combination of qualities and behaviours that contribute to academic success, personal growth, and positive contributions to society. These qualities and behaviours include Diligence and Hard Work, Discipline, Respect for Teachers and Peers, Curiosity and Eagerness to Learn.
- **Understanding and mastery of technical terminology:** The students were given advice to focus attentively on understanding technical terms such as *Tantrayukti*, *Tantraguna*, *Tantradosha*, *Tachchilya*, *Vadamarga*, *Kalpna*, *Arthashraya* and *Nyayas*. Without proficiency in these areas, it becomes challenging to correctly interpret the science of *Ayurveda*. *Ayurvedic* subject matter is typically presented in a concise manner through verses, known as "*Sutra Rupa*," and the comprehensive interpretation and practical application are left to the reader's discretion. Therefore, in order to comprehend and interpret this material effectively, one must possess a solid grasp of technical terminology like *Tantrayuktis*, *Tantraguna*, *Tantradosha*, *Tachchilya*, *Vadamarga*, *Kalpna*, *Arthashraya* and *Nyayas*.

Educational approaches and study techniques in *charaka samhita*

The initial step in grasping the science of *Ayurveda* involves acquiring a strong foundation in theoretical knowledge. This foundational understanding is best imparted by an exemplary teacher. During the era when *Ayurvedic* knowledge was documented, the texts were composed in a concise manner referred to as the *Sutra* style. These texts were a blend of both prose and verse. The prose was characterized by its brevity, while the verse was primarily in the straightforward '*Anusthup*' form. The text follows a specific style of presentation known as the "*Samas-Vyas Shaili*," which involves a structured approach to providing both concise and detailed descriptions.^[1] The chapter employs a distinct pattern for presenting its content, including the introduction of propositions, in-depth discussions, summarization of key points, and a concluding colophon. The subject matter of each chapter is closely interconnected with that of another chapter, and the content

of one section relates closely to the content of another section. These texts were primarily designed for the oral transmission of knowledge. This method of knowledge transfer was also employed for the acquisition of Vedic knowledge and Ayurvedic science. To comprehend the principles of *Ayurveda* and attain expertise in this field, one must follow the following approach.

1. *Adhyayana, Adhyapana and Tadvidhya Sambhasha*

Knowledge and skill acquisition can be achieved through three main methods: learning (*Adhyayanam*), teaching (*Adhyapanam*), and engaging in discussions (*Tadvidya Sambhasha*) with individuals who are knowledgeable in the subject.

(A) *Adhyayana* (Methodology of learning/Learning style)^[2]:

Acharya Charaka advises the student to sit on a clean and level surface. With focused concentration, the student should carefully sequentially go through the aphorisms, repeating them repeatedly while comprehending their meanings thoroughly. This practice aims to identify and rectify one's own reading errors and discern the proficiency of others in their reading abilities.

After completing the daily regime and rituals, the *Shastra* should be practised regularly at the appropriate place in a sufficiently loud voice and with suitable pronunciation in the morning, afternoon, evening, and night.

(B) *Adhyapana* (Methodology of teaching)^[3]:

The teaching method known as *Adhyapana* involved the practice of exposition, where the subject matter was explained in detail to the students. *Adhyapana*, or the act of teaching others, was considered essential for clarifying the subject matter for both the teacher and the students, ensuring a proper understanding of the science. A teacher who imparts knowledge to deserving disciples will receive numerous positive outcomes from teaching, including those that have been described as well as unforeseen benefits. This process of teaching is the established approach. The science of *Ayurveda* is best acquired through direct instruction from an experienced teacher, followed by repeated study and practical application.

(C) *Tadvidhya Sambhasha* (Methodology of Practical training for empowering presentation skill)^[4]:

Tadvidya Sambhasha is a method of discussion and debate between two knowledgeable physicians in the presence of viewers. *Tadvidya Sambhasha*, i.e. assembly of physicians is important for eradicating doubts with regard to the line of treatment. Physicians should engage in conversations with their fellow physicians. Such discussions are beneficial as they foster the pursuit and progression of knowledge, enhance communication skills, elevate one's reputation, clarify any uncertainties in medical literature through repeated exposure to relevant topics, and instill confidence through a deep understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, these interactions can lead to the discovery of new ideas that were previously unknown. This is because the teacher, pleased with a dedicated student, gradually imparts secret knowledge, which the student then passionately shares during discussions,

aiming to achieve victory. *Tadvidya Sambhasha* is of two types, viz. *Sandhaya Sambhasha* (~friendly discussions) and *Vigrihya Sambhasha* (~hostile discussions). This can be likened to contemporary clinical gatherings held by medical institutions and conferences.

2. **Vakyasha, Vakyarthasha and Arthavayasha:** Acharya Charaka emphasizes that a student of *Ayurveda* should possess the ability to comprehensively elucidate the entire text, as well as the various sections, chapters, and specific subjects within each chapter. This proficiency is achieved through mastery of three key aspects: understanding the text's statements (*Vakyasha*), interpreting their meanings (*Vakyarthasha*), and grasping the nuances of their constituent parts (*Arthavayavasha*).
- (A) **Vakyasha** ^[5]: It refers to the "reading the *Sutra* as told in the *Tantra*" which means interpreting or studying the *Sutra* in accordance with the teachings or guidance found in the *Tantra*. It can also refer to grasping the *Sutra's* literal meaning and understanding it in its straightforward sense.
- (B) **Vakyarthasha** ^[6]: The meaning is obtained through a thorough understanding and interpretation of a *Vakya*.
- (C) **Arthavayasha** ^[7]: These words are complex and require focused attention, along with detailed explanations and the application of specific techniques like *Tantrayukti* etc.
3. **Four Fold of Examination:** All things in the world can be categorized into two groups: those that represent truth or existence and those that represent falsehood or non-existence. There are four approaches to scrutinizing and understanding these categories: *Aptopdesh* (~words of persons with superior intellect, or sages), *Pratyaksha* (~directly perceiving things through observation), *Anumana* (~ Inference), and *Yukti* (~employing reasoning and logical thinking) ^[8].

Educational approaches and study techniques in *Sushruta Samhita*

According to Acharya Sushruta, the teacher should diligently impart knowledge to a disciple who is pure, well-groomed, and attentive during the study period. The teaching should involve instructing either a single word (~*Pada*), two or more word (~ *Paada*), or the entire verse (~*Shloka*), and the disciple should thoroughly review and investigate the sections taught accordingly. Some key Points to keep in mind while studying-

- Take your time, and don't speak too quickly or too slowly.
- Speak confidently without any fear, enunciating each letter distinctly and avoiding nasal speech.
- Maintain clear pronunciation of the letters without causing any difficulty or discomfort.
- Convey your thoughts without relying on facial expressions, eye movements, lip gestures, or hand gestures. Speak using appropriate tone and volume, neither too loud nor too low.

During study hours, both the teacher and the student are advised not to engage in conversations with anyone. In this way, study under the guidance of the teacher ^[9].

According to *Sushruta Samhita* the *Adhyayana Vidhi* can be categorized into the following steps -

Step 1: Simultaneous execution of theoretical learning by *Anuvarnana* (~description by teacher) and *Anushravana* (~understood by students).

Step 2: *Prabhashana*- Once more read and write with understanding and recall in the evening about the same subject learned in the morning. Here is the end of the theoretical study.

Step 3: *Yogyas*- The practical demonstration by the teacher and simultaneously done by students.

Step 4: *Siddhi*- Repeated practice lead the students to the final stage of basic learning to become skilled graduate.

Even after this process of *Adhyayana*; graduates need constant practice to have *Vak Shaushtava* (confidence of expressing knowledge), *Artha Vijnana* (applicable knowledge), *Pragalbha* (winning spirit to treat even previous disease) and *Karma Naipunyata* (skill).^[10]

Methods to Enhance Intelligence and Acumen

According to Acharya Sushruta - Continuous study, engaging in debates and discussions on various subjects, acquiring knowledge from different systems like *Nyaya Darshan*, *Vaisheshik Darshan*, *Vyakaran* etc. and learning from experts in those fields, along with serving the teachers of these disciplines, all contribute to enhancing a person's intelligence and acumen.^[11]

Educational approaches and study techniques in *Ashtanga Hridaya*

(1) *Paatha, Avabodha and Anusthana*

The *Ashtanga Hridaya*, an ancient text in *Ayurvedic* medicine, provides a systematic approach to both learning and teaching this traditional medical system these are - "*Paatha*" refers to the act of reading, "*Avabodha*" signifies the process of comprehending or grasping, and "*Anusthana*" denotes the action of putting knowledge or learning into practice ^[12].

According to *Ashtanga Hridaya*; Longevity, health, righteousness, wealth, and happiness are achieved by following the principles of learning and practising diligently ^[13].

According to the commentary by Arundutta on the *Ashtanga Hridaya*, it is essential to understand the hierarchical structure of study materials before diving into any subject. ^[14] This structure includes:

1. **Pada:** Individual words.
2. **Vaakya:** Groups of words forming sentences or phrases.
3. **Prakaran:** The context of a word or sentence, which includes the words or sentences that come before and after it.
4. **Adhyaya:** A collection of related contexts or chapters.
5. **Sthan:** A group of chapters.
6. **Tantra:** The highest level, comprising various *Sthans*.

In summary, Arundutta emphasizes the importance of grasping the building blocks of language and context, gradually moving up to more comprehensive levels of study, and ultimately reaching the highest level of understanding, which is *Tantra*.

Arundutta eloquently describes effective teaching methods in his commentary on the first chapter of *Sutrasthana* in

Ashtanga Hrudaya. According to him, a teacher should elucidate each verse by addressing the following aspects.^[15]

Padartah - Breaking down the verse word by word.

Arthatah - Explaining the meaning of each word.

Prayojanartah - Demonstrating the utility or practical application.

Chodyatah - Encouraging questions and addressing doubts.

Pariharatah - Providing clarification and resolution for the doubts.

Sambandhatah - Establishing the relationship of the verse with the ultimate aim.

Abhidheyatah - Elaborating on the subject matter intended to be conveyed.

Importance of Practical Knowledge^[16]

Understanding precious metals and gems is best achieved through regular observation and hands-on experience with different types of metals and gems. Solely relying on textual knowledge is not enough to differentiate between high and low-quality items. Similarly, both theoretical and practical knowledge are crucial to becoming a successful practitioner in the field.

Discussion

Teaching plays a crucial role in society, offering valuable expertise through specialized instruction. This contribution involves guiding individuals and communities in their learning journey, considering their values, needs, and cultural norms. The foundational texts of *Ayurveda* stress the importance of having a solid grasp of a subject's core principles to become proficient. Furthermore, employing a variety of teaching and learning methods enhances one's comprehension of the subject, making it more precise. Practical training complements this knowledge by enabling the practical application of what has been learned. While a thorough examination of traditional texts leads to knowledge acquisition, genuine wisdom is nurtured through extensive hands-on experience. This discussion, scientifically appraise the pedagogical strategies embedded in *Ayurveda Samhitas*.

Oral Tradition

The *Ayurveda Samhitas* utilize a fundamental educational approach centered on oral tradition, where students acquire knowledge from their teachers by reciting and memorizing the texts. This method has been substantiated by contemporary cognitive science research, which indicates that it not only bolsters memory retention but also promotes a profound understanding of the subject matter. Scientifically, this approach is believed to reinforce neural connections and foster in-depth learning.

Sanskrit Language

The *Ayurveda Samhitas* primarily use *Sanskrit*, a meticulously structured and phonetically precise language. Mastering *Sanskrit* demands a deep comprehension of its grammar and syntax, potentially boosting cognitive skills. Additionally, the specialized terminology in *Ayurveda Samhitas* promotes a common language among practitioners, nurturing a feeling of unity and facilitating the exchange of knowledge.

Story telling

Ayurveda Samhitas often employ storytelling techniques to make complex concepts more understandable and memorable. These strategies align with modern educational

psychology, emphasizing the importance of engaging narratives and memory aids in effective learning. In *Ayurveda*, various types of logical reasoning or "Nyayas" are cited in their suitable context. Ex. *Kaakdanta Nyaya*, *Govalivarda Nyaya*, *Ghunakshar Nyaya*, *Chhatrinogacchanti Nyaya* etc.

Continuous Learning

Ayurveda Samhitas promote the idea of ongoing education, highlighting the importance of continually seeking knowledge. This mirrors modern educational principles that underscore the significance of lifelong learning and adaptability in a constantly changing world.

Conclusion

The teaching methods utilized in *Ayurveda Samhitas*, which have their origins in ancient traditions, demonstrate a noteworthy correlation with contemporary educational principles and scientific knowledge. These methods include the use of spoken tradition, proficiency in language, memory aids, practical application, holistic thinking, mentorship, and a dedication to lifelong learning. An examination from a scientific perspective reveals their efficacy in promoting profound learning, enhancing memory retention, and fostering a comprehensive grasp of *Ayurveda*. As the world increasingly acknowledges the significance of holistic and traditional knowledge systems, *Ayurveda Samhitas* stand as an enduring example of effective teaching methods.

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Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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