

HOLISTIC HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

* Shashi Yadav & ** Dr. Pratibha Ursal

* PVDT College of Education for Women SNDT Women's University Mumbai.

Abstract:

The rising prevalence of stress, anxiety, and lifestyle disorders among children and youth necessitates a shift from purely academic education to holistic development. Indian Knowledge System (IKS), rooted in ancient traditions like Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda and yoga, offers a holistic approach to education that integrates body, mind, and spirit. The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern education provides a culturally rooted and scientifically relevant framework for enhancing mental health, wellness, and sustainable living. Using a qualitative review approach, this paper explores how practices such as yoga, pranayama, meditation, Ayurveda, and value-based education contribute to emotional regulation, resilience, and ecological consciousness. Drawing on recent research and policy frameworks like NEP 2020, the paper argues that IKS integration fosters holistic well-being and equips young learners with sustainable life skills. The integration of IKS into education represents a paradigm shift from information-centric to life-centric learning. By addressing mental health, wellness, and sustainability simultaneously, IKS offers a comprehensive solution to contemporary challenges.

Key words: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Wellness, Sustainable Lifestyle, Ayurveda, Yoga, Holistic Health, Mental Well-being.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial Use Provided the Original Author and Source Are Credited.

Introduction:

Mental health among children and adolescents has emerged as a pressing concern in the 21st century. According to global health reports, a significant proportion of young individuals experience psychological distress due to academic competition, social pressures, and lifestyle disruptions. In India, these challenges are further intensified by rapid urbanization, digital dependency, and changing family structures. Conventional education systems have largely focused on cognitive and academic outcomes, often neglecting emotional, psychological, and ethical development. This fragmented approach has led to an imbalance in the holistic growth of students. The rich heritage of knowledge created and acquired by Indians over several millennia needs to be integrated into today's education system. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), rooted in ancient traditions like the Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda, and Yoga, offer a holistic approach to education that integrates body, mind, and spirit. In response, there is a growing need to adopt educational frameworks that nurture the whole individual. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to education. IKS emphasizes harmony between body,

mind, and environment. It promotes values such as self-discipline, mindfulness, compassion, and ecological balance.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems in education to make learning more holistic, experiential, and contextually relevant. Within this framework, integrating IKS into education can play a crucial role in addressing mental health challenges while fostering sustainable lifestyles among children and youth.

Ancient education vs modern education:

The ancient education (gurukul) system not only imparted knowledge but also prepared individuals to navigate the complexities of life and society. Long before Western education introduced the idea of holistic development, ancient Indian philosophy had already conceptualised it through the Panchakosha Theory described in the Taittiriya Upanishad. This theory explains human existence as comprising five interconnected layers, moving from the physical to the spiritual. The Annamaya Kosha relates to the physical body, while the Pranamaya Kosha represents vital energy. The Manomaya Kosha focuses on the mind and emotional regulation, and the Vigyanamaya Kosha reflects intellectual growth and wisdom. At the deepest level, the Anandamaya Kosha signifies spiritual well-being and inner bliss. Together, these sheaths offer a comprehensive framework for holistic human development.

The ancient Indian education system was holistic, combining spiritual and practical knowledge and skills. Children were taught to live in harmony with nature. The attitude towards nature was worshipful, with a feeling of co-existence and conservation. Changes in Indian society have consistently shaped and reshaped its education system over time. As society moved from traditional, community-based living to a more modern and industrialised structure, the need for formal, structured education grew. As Indian society evolved in its values, economy, and aspirations, the education system adapted to meet its changing needs and priorities. Knowledge that was once rooted in spirituality, internal, holistic, experiential, and grounded in timeless values, gradually evolved into a system that is more scientific, analytical, evidence-based, and objective. While this shift has enabled innovation, rational inquiry, and technological progress, it has also, to some extent, led to the neglect of the inner self and reflective awareness. The earlier sense of reverence, balance, and coexistence with nature has been replaced by a more utilitarian outlook, where nature is often viewed as a resource to be used and a commodity for consumption. This transformation highlights a shift not only in knowledge systems but also in the underlying values guiding human interaction with the world. The unique feature of the Indian knowledge system was its holistic approach. IKS does not compartmentalise knowledge and life; it views them as an integrated whole. IKS considered the body, mind, soul, nature, and society as interconnected and complementary. This holism makes IKS not just an intellectual exercise but an art of living. Great emphasis was placed on building a strong and resilient self. Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda, yoga and Bhagavat Gita -all of these reflect this approach. The Indian knowledge system emphasised self-development and harmonious coexistence with nature, and these aspects are missing in our modern education. The modern education does not equip students to deal with their emotions effectively.

Students often struggle to cope with life's challenging situations. Integration of IKS into modern education can provide a holistic, culturally grounded, and sustainable framework to address growing psychological challenges among schoolchildren in India.

Conceptual Framework:

This study is grounded in the principles of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which emphasise holistic development through the integration of physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. It is primarily based on the Taittiriya Upanishad, which presents the Panchakosha Theory, conceptualising human existence into five interconnected sheaths—Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, and Anandamaya. Within this framework, IKS-based practices such as yoga, pranayama, meditation, and value education act as key inputs that nurture physical health, energy balance, emotional regulation, cognitive growth, and spiritual well-being. The integration of these dimensions leads to improved mental health, enhanced overall wellness, and the development of sustainable lifestyle practices.

Central to this framework is the principle of interconnectedness, reinforced by the philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which views the world as one unified family. This perspective extends to ecological harmony, highlighting that individual well-being is inseparable from societal and environmental well-being, thereby fostering empathy, responsibility, and sustainable living among learners.

Present scenario of mental health among school children and adolescents in India - Prevalence & Magnitude:

Technological advancement, urbanisation, and industrialisation have significantly enhanced human life by improving convenience, efficiency, and overall quality of living. However, it has also introduced new layers of complexity. As the focus has gradually shifted away from inner growth and self-development, many young people today are not fully equipped to manage their emotions or navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing environment. At the same time, the pursuit of progress and material benefits has led to the exploitation of nature, resulting in serious environmental issues that ultimately affect human well-being. This reflects a growing imbalance between external development and internal awareness, highlighting the need for a more holistic approach to progress. India is currently experiencing a significant and growing burden of mental health issues among children and adolescents, making it a major educational concern. Estimates indicate that 7–10% of adolescents (13–17 years) in India experience diagnosable mental disorders, while broader assessments, including stress and emotional difficulties, suggest a higher prevalence of 20–25%. Additionally, nearly 40% of teenagers report significant stress and anxiety, aligning with global findings that one in seven adolescents faces mental health challenges. This highlights that a substantial proportion of school-going children are psychologically vulnerable, even without formal diagnoses. India reports high suicide rates among youth, with thousands of student suicides annually, which are linked to Academic stress, Emotional distress, and lack of support systems. NCERT survey (2022) reported that 43% students experienced mood swings, 14% faced extreme emotional distress, 11% reported anxiety symptoms. These findings indicate that emotional instability and psychological distress are highly prevalent even in non-

clinical populations. Recent evidence highlights several concerning trends in adolescent well-being. Mental health disorders are emerging at increasingly younger ages, often before 18. At the same time, excessive digital engagement has become widespread, with adolescents spending nearly six to seven hours daily online, contributing to patterns of dependency. These shifts are accompanied by rising sleep disturbances, feelings of loneliness, and social isolation. Additionally, studies and helpline reports indicate a worrying increase in self-harm behaviours and suicidal ideation among young people, underscoring the urgent need for preventive and holistic interventions.

The student well-being report (2025) found that 1 in 5 students rarely feel calm or motivated, reflecting declining emotional well-being. From the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) perspective, such rising distress reflects a disruption in the holistic balance between mind, body, and lifestyle, underscoring the relevance of preventive, value-based, and integrative approaches to well-being. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), rooted in traditions such as Yoga, Ayurveda, Vedanta, and classical Indian psychology, offer a holistic understanding of mental health. Unlike the biomedical model, IKS conceptualises mental well-being as a dynamic balance between body (sharira), mind (manas), senses (indriyas), and environment (**prakriti**). The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems in education offers a transformative approach to addressing the mental health crisis among children and youth. By combining ancient wisdom with modern pedagogy, IKS can foster holistic development, emotional resilience, ecological awareness, and sustainable living practices. It shifts education from mere knowledge transmission to **life-oriented learning**, preparing students to lead balanced, healthy, and meaningful lives.

Role of IKS in Promoting Mental Health:

IKS can serve as a preventive mental health model in schools if yoga meditation and pranayams are implemented in the school curriculum

1. Yoga as a Psychosomatic Practice-

Yoga, derived from the Sanskrit root “Yuj,” meaning union, is a holistic practice that integrates physical postures (asanas), regulated breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditative practices (dhyana) to harmonise the body and mind. Contemporary research highlights its significant psychological and physiological benefits, demonstrating that regular engagement in yoga can reduce cortisol levels, thereby stress, while also enhancing cognitive functioning and emotional regulation. When incorporated into school settings, yoga-based programs have been found to effectively lower anxiety levels and improve attention span among students, contributing to better academic engagement and overall well-being.

2. Pranayama and Neurophysiological Regulation

Pranayama involves controlled breathing techniques that regulate the autonomic nervous system. Practices such as alternate nostril breathing promote parasympathetic activation, leading to relaxation and reduced stress.

3. Meditation and Mindfulness

Meditation practices (Dhyan) rooted in IKS enhance mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional

stability. These practices align with contemporary mindfulness-based interventions used in psychology.

4. Value-Based Education and Emotional Resilience

IKS emphasises ethical values such as truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), and self-discipline (Tapas). These values contribute to emotional resilience and social harmony.

IKS and Holistic Wellness:

a. Physical wellness

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) promote physical wellness through various Asanas and traditional practices that enhance flexibility, strength, immunity, and overall fitness. Additionally, Ayurveda emphasizes preventive healthcare by advocating a balanced diet, daily routine, and lifestyle harmony.

b. Emotional Wellness

IKS practices such as meditation and pranayama foster emotional balance, effective stress management, and a positive mindset. These practices help individuals regulate emotions and develop resilience in the face of challenges.

c. Social Wellness

Through ethical teachings and value-based education, IKS nurtures empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity. This contributes to healthy interpersonal relationships and a sense of social responsibility among learners

d. Spiritual Wellness

IKS supports spiritual well-being by guiding individuals toward inner peace, a sense of purpose, and self-realization. It encourages reflective practices that deepen self-awareness and connection with the larger existence.

Iks and sustainable lifestyle:

1. Ecological Consciousness in IKS

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) cultivate environmental consciousness by emphasizing harmony with nature through principles such as the Panchamahabhuta (five elements, earth, air, water, fire and space) sacred ecological traditions, and deep respect for biodiversity. This ecological awareness is closely linked with mindful consumption, where IKS advocates minimalism, balanced use of resources, and avoidance of excess. Together, these principles encourage individuals to adopt sustainable lifestyles rooted in responsibility, restraint, and alignment with natural systems.

2. Sustainable Habits

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) nurture sustainable habits by encouraging students to adopt eco-friendly practices, use resources responsibly, and think with a long-term perspective. Such habits promote conscious living and help learners understand the impact of their actions on the environment and future generations.

3. Behavioural Transformation

IKS-based education facilitates meaningful behavioural transformation by guiding students toward

sustainable decision-making, ethical responsibility, and environmental stewardship. It fosters a value-driven mindset that supports consistent, responsible actions aligned with sustainability and collective well-being.

4. Sustainable Development Goals

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) meaningfully contribute to global sustainability frameworks by supporting SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through practices like yoga, meditation, and Ayurveda that promote preventive and holistic health. Simultaneously, IKS strengthens SDG 4 (Quality Education) by fostering holistic, value-based, and experiential learning approaches that nurture the overall development of learner.

Pedagogical strategies for IKS integration:

KS can be meaningfully integrated across disciplines to create a holistic learning experience. Concepts from Ayurveda and ecology can enrich science education, yoga can be embedded in physical education, and ethical and cultural dimensions of IKS can strengthen social studies, making learning more contextual and value-oriented.

1. Experiential Learning

Experiential approaches are essential for effective IKS integration. Practices such as meditation sessions, nature-based learning, and community service enable students to internalise concepts through direct experience, fostering deeper understanding and personal connection.

2. Teacher Training

Successful implementation of IKS requires well-prepared educators. Teachers need training in foundational IKS concepts, practical classroom applications, and student-centred pedagogies to facilitate holistic and meaningful learning experiences.

3. School Practices

Schools play a crucial role in institutionalising IKS through daily practices. Incorporating yoga sessions, mindfulness activities, and value education programs into the routine helps create an environment that supports overall well-being and character development.

Challenges and Limitations:

a. Lack of Awareness

Many educators lack an understanding of IKS and its scientific relevance.

b. Curriculum Constraints

Rigid academic structures limit integration.

c. Misconceptions

IKS is often misunderstood as religious rather than scientific.

d. Limited Research

More empirical studies are needed to validate outcomes

Conclusion:

Indian Knowledge Systems provide a timeless and holistic framework for education that addresses the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of human development. Their integration into modern education systems can significantly enhance mental health, promote holistic wellness, and foster sustainable lifestyle practices among children and youth. IKS can bridge a gap between traditional wisdom and modern education, creating a system that is not only academically enriching but also life-enhancing. In an era marked by uncertainty and complexity, IKS offers not only knowledge but wisdom, guiding individuals toward balanced, meaningful, and sustainable lives. Future research should advance large-scale implementation and empirical inquiry through interdisciplinary models, grounded in the understanding that Indian Knowledge Systems reject compartmentalisation and instead embody a unified epistemological framework that integrates diverse dimensions of knowledge and human experience.

References:

1. Daniel Goleman (2020). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (25th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing.
2. Goleman, D. (2006). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. Bantam Books.
3. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Government of India
4. Radhakrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*
5. Sharma, R. N. *Indian Educational Thought*
6. Field, T. (2016). Yoga research review. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 24, 145–161.
7. Saraswati, S. (2013). *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. Bihar School of Yoga.
8. WHO. (2021). *Adolescent Mental Health Report*.
9. Raina, M. K. (2019). *Indigenous knowledge systems and education*.
10. Mishra, M., Soni, R., & Singh, V. (2025). *Bhartiya gyan parampara aur samkaleen shikshashastra: Punaravishkar ki disha mein*. Lion's Publication
11. John P. Miller. (2007). *The holistic curriculum* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
12. John P. Miller, Karsten, S., Denton, D., Orr, D., & Colalillo, G. (2005). *Holistic learning and spirituality in education: Breaking new ground*. State University of New York Press.

Cite This Article: Yadav S. & Dr. Ursal P. (2026). Holistic health and sustainability–Theoretical perspective from the Indian knowledge system In **Educreator Research Journal: Vol. XIII (Issue III)**, pp. 397-403