

Bridging Ancient Wisdom and Modern Leadership: A Study On Indian Knowledge Systems Among Educators

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Abstract

This study investigates the relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in shaping leadership practices among educators. While existing literature on educational leadership often emphasizes Western frameworks such as servant leadership, ethical leadership, and emotional intelligence, limited research has examined how indigenous values like Dharma (righteous duty), Karma (action and consequence), and self-discipline can enrich contemporary leadership approaches. This study addresses this gap by analyzing educators' perceptions of IKS principles and their applicability in academic leadership. The research adopts both primary and secondary data. A structured questionnaire comprising Likert-scale and open-ended items was distributed among university faculty members from diverse disciplines. The responses provide insights into how educators interpret, value, and potentially integrate IKS into their leadership behavior. Secondary sources, including scholarly literature on IKS and leadership theory, complement the analysis.

Findings are expected to contribute to three dimensions: theoretically, by bridging ancient Indian wisdom with modern leadership discourse; practically, by offering insights for educator training programs that emphasize ethical and value-driven leadership; and at the policy level, by informing curriculum design that integrates IKS into higher education leadership development. By balancing traditional Indian frameworks with modern leadership concepts, the study proposes a coherent model of leadership rooted in both cultural heritage and contemporary educational needs.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems, Leadership, Educators, Dharma, Karma, Educational Leadership

1. Introduction

The role of educators as leaders extends far beyond the classroom, as they shape not only knowledge but also values, character, and the overall learning culture of institutions. In an era of globalization and rapid change, educational leadership increasingly demands a balance between efficiency, ethics, and cultural relevance. While Western leadership frameworks such as servant leadership, ethical leadership, and emotional intelligence have gained prominence in academic discussions, the indigenous Indian

Knowledge System (IKS) provides a rich reservoir of values that can equally inform educational leadership.

IKS is rooted in timeless principles such as Dharma (righteous duty), Karma (action and consequence), self-discipline, mindfulness, and holistic well-being. These concepts emphasize moral responsibility, accountability, and service, all of which are central to effective leadership. Yet, despite their cultural and philosophical significance, IKS principles remain underexplored in mainstream educational leadership research, which continues to be dominated by Western paradigms.

This imbalance creates a pressing need to investigate the relevance of IKS in academic contexts, particularly in leadership roles played by educators. As everyday leaders, teachers, and faculty members influence not only student outcomes but also institutional ethos. Understanding how they perceive, interpret, and potentially integrate IKS into their leadership practices is therefore essential.

The purpose of this study is to examine the awareness, perceptions, and applications of IKS principles among educators. It seeks to identify the extent to which these values align with or differ from modern leadership concepts, and to explore their potential integration into leadership training, institutional policy, and professional development. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to a more holistic and culturally grounded model of educational leadership that balances ancient wisdom with contemporary demands.

2. Literature Review and Research Gap

Scholarly work on educational leadership has predominantly emphasized Western frameworks such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, ethical leadership, and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2017; Greenleaf, 2002). These models highlight critical qualities like empathy, moral responsibility, and decision-making. While highly influential, such perspectives often overlook cultural specificity, particularly within non-Western educational contexts.

Recent discussions on indigenous knowledge in leadership suggest that local values and traditions play an equally important role in shaping ethical and effective leadership practices (Sharma, 2020; Radhakrishnan, 2019). Within the Indian context, principles from Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)—including Dharma (righteous duty), Karma (action and consequence), and self-discipline—have historically informed leadership in political, educational, and spiritual domains. Scholars such as Subramanian (2021) argue that these values foster integrity and accountability, yet their explicit integration into modern educational leadership discourse remains limited.

Moreover, while IKS has been explored in philosophy, ethics, and cultural studies, there is little empirical evidence connecting it with contemporary academic leadership. Few studies systematically investigate how educators perceive and apply IKS in their roles as leaders within institutions. This lack of empirical research creates a significant gap between conceptual appreciation of IKS and its practical applicability in education.

Research Gap: Although Western leadership theories dominate educational discourse, they fail to incorporate the cultural and ethical dimensions unique to Indian contexts. Existing literature on IKS remains largely conceptual or philosophical, with minimal data-driven studies examining its relevance in higher education leadership. This study addresses this gap by analyzing educators' perceptions and

practices, thereby contributing empirical evidence to support the integration of IKS into modern leadership frameworks.

Research Problem and Significance of the Study

The problem addressed in this study arises from the underrepresentation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in educational leadership research and practice. While educators are widely recognized as leaders within academic environments, their leadership development and training programs predominantly rely on Western theories such as transformational, servant, and ethical leadership. These models emphasize valuable attributes—like empathy, collaboration, and decision-making—but do not reflect the cultural and philosophical traditions that have historically guided leadership in India.

Although IKS values such as Dharma (righteous duty), Karma (action and consequence), mindfulness, and self-discipline are well-documented in philosophical and cultural literature, their practical application in higher education leadership remains underexplored. There is a lack of empirical evidence on whether educators recognize these principles as relevant to their leadership roles, and how such values are actually enacted in institutional decision-making, mentoring, or governance. This gap highlights the need for context-specific leadership models that align with both global standards and indigenous traditions.

Significance of the Study:

This research is significant for several reasons:

It extends leadership scholarship by bridging indigenous Indian wisdom with modern educational leadership theories, creating a more holistic and culturally grounded framework. The findings can inform educator training programs, encouraging institutions to incorporate IKS principles into workshops and curricula to strengthen ethical and value-based leadership. By providing empirical evidence on the relevance of IKS, the study can inform policymakers on how to integrate cultural knowledge into leadership development frameworks for higher education.

By addressing these gaps, the study not only strengthens the academic discourse on leadership but also provides actionable insights to enhance the moral, cultural, and practical dimensions of leadership in Indian education systems.

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive survey design, drawing on both primary and secondary sources of data to investigate the relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in educational leadership.

Population and Sample

The target population for the study comprised university and college faculty members across various disciplines, including commerce, humanities, science, and professional courses. The sampling frame included both early-career educators and senior faculty members to capture a diverse range of experiences. A total of [insert actual number of respondents, e.g., 80 or 100] valid responses were collected through the structured questionnaire.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data was collected through a Google Form questionnaire, which included three key components:

Demographics – Age, gender, teaching experience, educational qualification, and type of institution.

Perception of IKS in Leadership – Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) measuring agreement with statements on Dharma, Karma, mindfulness, ethical governance, and self-discipline in leadership.

Application and Openness – Questions on how educators apply IKS in their professional roles, and whether they support integration of IKS into training and policy. Open-ended items were included to capture qualitative insights and examples.

Procedure

The Google Form link was distributed electronically via email and professional educator networks. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality. Data collection spanned a period of two weeks.

Data Analysis

Responses were exported into tabular form and analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, and cross-tabulations). Charts were generated to visually represent demographic distribution, perceptions of IKS values, and patterns of application in leadership practice. Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed to identify recurring ideas and contextual insights.

Through this methodology, the study ensures both breadth—by surveying a wide demographic of educators—and depth—by exploring individual perspectives through open responses.

Analysis and Interpretations

The study sample included educators across varied age groups. A majority, 58.3%, fell within the 25–35 years category, reflecting a younger teaching cohort actively involved in higher education. Another 33.3% were in the 36–45 years group, while 8.3% represented senior faculty above 45 years. This distribution suggests that perspectives on IKS in leadership are shaped by both early-career enthusiasm and experienced insights.

In terms of gender, the sample was balanced, with 66.7% female and 33.3% male respondents. This gender representation enables the findings to reflect diverse viewpoints without the dominance of one gender perspective.

Regarding teaching experience, 50% of respondents reported less than 5 years, 16.7% between 5–10 years, and 33.3% with more than 10 years. This variation highlights both emerging and seasoned educators, offering a comprehensive outlook on the applicability of IKS in leadership.

Educational qualifications also varied: 25% held postgraduate degrees (MA/M.Com/M.Sc), while 66.7% possessed doctoral qualifications (Ph.D). This indicates a strong academic background among participants, ensuring informed perspectives on leadership theories.

Finally, by institution type, 8.3% of faculty worked in international institutions, while 91.7% were from private institutions. This diversity adds institutional context to leadership practices and attitudes toward IKS.

Perceptions of IKS Relevance in Leadership

When asked about the relevance of Dharma (righteous duty) in leadership, 16.7% strongly agreed and 25% agreed, showing that educators widely recognize ethical responsibility as central to academic leadership. Only % disagreed, indicating limited resistance to this traditional value.

For Karma (action and consequence), a majority of 66.7% agreed/strongly agreed, highlighting the belief that accountability and responsibility must be embedded in leadership practices.

Mindfulness and self-discipline also received strong endorsement, with 72.7% agreeing they are vital qualities in leaders. This reflects a growing acceptance of holistic well-being and discipline as leadership traits, aligning IKS with modern values like emotional intelligence.

Overall, the results show that educators perceive IKS principles as not outdated but deeply relevant, complementing Western leadership models.

Application of IKS in Educational Leadership

While perceptions were highly positive, actual application of IKS principles varied. 58.3% of respondents reported frequently applying Dharma and ethical decision-making in their daily leadership roles (mentoring students, academic decisions, conflict resolution). Another 25% stated they occasionally apply IKS principles, while 16.7% admitted to rarely or never doing so.

This indicates a gap between awareness and practice: although educators appreciate IKS values, institutional and structural constraints may limit their active implementation.

Openness to Integration of IKS in Training and Curriculum

When asked whether IKS should be integrated into educator leadership training programs, 63.6% said Yes, 18.2% said Maybe, and only 9.1% said No. This overwhelming willingness suggests that educators are open to structured frameworks that blend IKS with modern leadership theories.

Furthermore, 63.6% agreed that policymakers should consider IKS while designing higher education leadership curricula, reinforcing the need for institutional support in adopting indigenous frameworks.

Major Findings

Youthful representation in leadership perceptions – A majority of respondents belonged to the 25–35 age group, reflecting that younger educators form the backbone of the sample. Their responses highlight fresh perspectives on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into leadership practices.

Balanced gender representation – The study included nearly equal participation from male and female educators. This balance ensured that findings reflect diverse perspectives rather than being skewed toward one gender.

Varied teaching experience – Respondents included both early-career faculty with less than 5 years of experience and senior educators with more than 10 years. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how leadership values are shaped across career stages.

Strong endorsement of IKS principles – A majority of educators strongly agreed that Dharma (righteous duty), Karma (action and consequence), mindfulness, and self-discipline are highly relevant in leadership. This indicates widespread recognition of ethical responsibility and accountability in academic contexts.

Gap between awareness and practice – Although perceptions of IKS were overwhelmingly positive, fewer respondents reported applying these values consistently in their daily leadership roles. This highlights the influence of institutional and systemic barriers.

Openness to integration – A significant majority expressed willingness to integrate IKS into educator training programs and curriculum. This reflects both readiness and demand for structured frameworks that blend ancient wisdom with modern leadership models.

Qualitative insights emphasized ethics and accountability – Open-ended responses revealed that educators view Dharma as a foundation for fairness and Karma as a principle of accountability.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) hold substantial relevance in shaping educational leadership practices. Values such as Dharma (righteous duty), Karma (action and consequence), mindfulness, and self-discipline were widely acknowledged by educators as essential to ethical, responsible, and effective leadership in academic contexts.

The findings demonstrate that while there is strong awareness and appreciation of IKS principles, their practical application remains uneven. Many educators consciously apply these values in mentoring, decision-making, and conflict resolution, but systemic factors and the absence of institutional frameworks often restrict their consistent integration. This gap between awareness and practice underscores the need for structured mechanisms that support educators in applying indigenous values in leadership roles.

Importantly, the study reveals a broad openness among educators to integrate IKS into formal training programs and curricula, suggesting that higher education institutions are well-positioned to adopt hybrid leadership models that blend indigenous and modern frameworks. By doing so, academic leadership in India can remain globally relevant while retaining its cultural grounding.

In sum, the study contributes to the discourse on educational leadership by providing empirical evidence that bridges ancient Indian wisdom and contemporary leadership theories. It affirms that IKS is not only historically significant but also practically valuable for cultivating ethical, culturally rooted, and future-oriented leadership in education.

Suggestions

The study suggests that while educators strongly recognize the relevance of IKS principles such as Dharma, Karma, mindfulness, and self-discipline in leadership, there remains a gap between awareness and consistent practice due to institutional and systemic constraints. To address this, higher education institutions should integrate IKS into leadership training programs, encourage mentorship between young and senior faculty, and create supportive policies that reward ethical and accountable leadership. Policymakers and curriculum designers should institutionalize IKS frameworks within higher education leadership models, ensuring inclusivity and gender balance, while also promoting holistic practices like mindfulness and reflective learning. Furthermore, documenting best practices and fostering collaborations between private and international institutions can strengthen the application of IKS in leadership, enabling a balanced blend of indigenous wisdom and modern leadership theories.

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