

An Exploratory Study to Assess the View of Ayurveda Academicians Regarding Sanskrit Subject at Graduate Level Ayurveda Education

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Abstract:

Ancient Ayurvedic texts i. e. *Samhitas* are written in the Sanskrit language. Since ancient times, knowledge of the Sanskrit language is considered essential to study Ayurveda. Ayurveda academicians, i. e. teachers of various Ayurvedic teaching institutes were assessed for their views regarding the syllabus of Sanskrit subject and its importance in Ayurvedic studies. This cross-sectional pilot study was based on the subjective perceptions of a sample of 100 teachers from selected Ayurvedic institutions as per the convenience of investigators in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, and Pune in the form of their responses to a 15 – closed-ended questions questionnaire designed for the purpose. Most of the participants opined that the language problem should not become a barrier to understanding original Ayurvedic texts. *Panini Sutra* and *Panchatantra* are considered necessary in the syllabus of Sanskrit. They felt the necessity of the study of original Ayurvedic texts, recitation of verses & reading Sanskrit commentaries too. The current syllabus is insufficient to make students proficient in Ayurvedic studies and also the pattern of teaching & examination should be changed to some extent. Viva-voce was also considered to be necessary to check the recitation and understanding ability of the students. As a tool in Ayurvedic studies, Sanskrit is considered obviously necessary by many teachers. It would improve the general understanding (of Ayurveda) of students at the U.G. and P.G. level and would ultimately lead to the establishment of Ayurveda as a sound, safe, and the economic healthcare system. The sample size was small & a restricted geographical area was covered; however, the findings point towards the necessity of the Sanskrit subject in Ayurveda studies.

Key-words: Sanskrit subject, Ayurveda studies

Introduction:

Ayurveda is an ancient system of medicine that is currently used by large populations for their healthcare needs. Most of the original Ayurvedic texts are written in the Sanskrit language. In ancient times, the science of Ayurveda was taught by ‘*Guru*’, the teacher in his establishment (the *Gurukula*). He used to train his disciples with the help of the textbooks as ‘*samhita*’ that were authored around 1000 B.C. The languages of teaching Ayurveda were Sanskrit and various regional languages. The basic literature of Ayurveda, i. e. *samhita* was prepared to support the *Gurukula* Education system. This model suffered a setback during the medieval and colonial periods of Indian history.¹

In the last 100 years, *Ayurveda-shastra* which was taught by *Gurukula* system suddenly changed to the western university system. Education in the field of Ayurveda is regulated by the Central Council of Indian medicine (C.C.I.M.), which came into existence by the act of Parliament.² After 1971, i. e., formation of CCIM, the Ayurveda was taught in vernacular i. e., the local language. The admission criteria for the B.A.M.S. course is H.S.C. (Higher

Secondary School Certificate) passing with a minimum of 50% marks in Physics, Chemistry, and Biology.

Previously Sanskrit was one of the major subjects in I B.A.M.S. (First Year Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery) professional course for 250 marks i. e., theory of 200 marks (2 Papers of 100 marks each) and viva-voce of 50 marks.³ The teaching of Sanskrit is supposed to be such that a student must become capable of reading and understanding original Ayurvedic texts. From March 2012 (CCIM Notification), Sanskrit has become one subject of 100 marks (1 theory paper) in I B.A.M.S.⁴ There is no viva-voce for this subject. In this scenario, it might become more difficult for students to read and understand the old texts in their original form. Also, due to lack of previous exposure to Sanskrit, the language presents a barrier rather than an effective tool for many students to understand Ayurveda.⁵

Teachers, who have themselves studied this science, i.e. Ayurveda, and are teaching their respective subjects are appropriate one to comment on the current curriculum and examination pattern of the course. They can understand the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a particular syllabus as well as examination patterns in a better manner.

Keeping the above facts in mind, it was planned to conduct a pilot study to assess the views of teachers from various Ayurvedic colleges regarding the syllabus of Sanskrit subjects and their importance in Ayurvedic studies. The study was based on the subjective perceptions of a sample of teachers from various Ayurvedic institutions in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, and Pune in the form of their responses to a questionnaire designed for the purpose.

Materials and Methods:

This study was a Cross-Sectional Pilot Study. A survey method was adopted in which data was collected by questionnaire. A special Questionnaire was prepared to assess the view of Ayurvedic teachers regarding the syllabus of Sanskrit subjects and their importance in Ayurveda studies.

Total 100 participants i. e. teachers of Ayurvedic colleges who possess at least B. A. M. S. or Sanskrit or equivalent degree irrespective of their age, sex, subject specialization, designation, and experience were included in the study. Teachers of Ayurvedic colleges but not have B. A. M. S. or Sanskrit or equivalent degrees were excluded from the study (e. g. teachers of Yoga, Medical Statistics or Research Methodology). Convenience (Non-Randomized) Sampling technique was used for the selection of participants.

The questionnaires were distributed to about 100 teachers randomly through one of the teaching faculty from the department of Sanskrit Samhita Siddhanta (Basic Principles) of those selected (as per the convenience of Investigator) Ayurvedic educational institutions. The questionnaires were sent to them by e-mail with prior information of the study through telephonic conversation.

The respondents were given proper information regarding the purpose of the study and assuring the strict confidentiality related to respondents. Ample time was given to respondents to return the filled questionnaires. The questionnaires thus filled were collected and data were analyzed to draw valid conclusions.

Results:

A total of 100 teachers responded to the questionnaire out of these 34 teachers were from the Ayurvedic institutions under Deemed (Autonomous) university while 66 teachers were from the Ayurvedic institutions under Government (M. U. H. S.) university. The 100 teachers selected, comprised 51 lecturers (Assistant Professors), 36 readers (associate professors), and 13 professors in their respective institutions.

The following table gives an overall view of responses by the participants to each question as Yes, No, or Do not know in terms of percentage.

Table No. 1

Q. No.	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Do not know (%)
1-a	Which thing is more important for understanding Ayurveda or to succeed in B.A.M.S. Examinations? Prior knowledge of Sanskrit	62	37	01
1-b	Intellectual capacity and Hard-Work	97	03	00
2	▪ Do you feel, The majority of students take admission for B. A. M. S. course by their choice?	09	87	04
3	Syllabus of Sanskrit in I B.A.M.S. is sufficient to make the students proficient in Sanskrit?	42	51	07
4	<i>Does Panini Sutra</i> make any difference in learning the Sanskrit language and ultimately in understanding Ayurvedic Texts?	59	26	15
5	<i>Does Panchatantra</i> make any difference in learning the Sanskrit language and ultimately in understanding Ayurvedic Texts?	45	45	10
6	Recitation of verses is necessary to get good marks in Examinations?	90	07	03
7	More reading practice of Ayurvedic texts is necessary for Classroom?	93	07	00
8	B.A.M.S. syllabus can be structured without the use of <i>Samhita Granthas/</i> Original Ayurvedic texts (only Textbooks will suffice the purpose)?	02	98	00
9	Reading Ayurvedic texts (<i>Samhita Granthas</i>) is necessary to do Ayurvedic practice?	97	02	01
10	Students should be encouraged to read/refer Ayurvedic texts?	99	00	01
11	Inclusion of Sanskrit as a subject makes Ayurveda a piece of literature more than medical science?	27	67	06
12	B. A. M. S. syllabus can be structured without Sanskrit subject?	12	87	01
13	Is there a causal relationship between knowledge of Sanskrit language and progress in B. A. M. S. Examination?	71	20	09
14	Decrease in weightage of marks of Sanskrit subject (from 250 to 100) will affect the knowledge of Sanskrit subject?	44	44	12
15	No Viva-Voce for Sanskrit subject will affect the knowledge of Sanskrit subject?	57	35	08

Discussion and Conclusion:

The study indicates that students who have studied Sanskrit as one of the subjects at school level are considered to be comfortable in Ayurvedic studies. Prior exposure to Sanskrit facilitates students to read and understand Ayurvedic texts in better manner. Good intellectual capacity and hard work would obviously facilitate to progress in Ayurveda studies as that of in any other field of studies.

Many teachers opined that, most of the students failing to gain admission to Allopathy course, approach Ayurveda course as a means of obtaining an alternative medical degree. For such students, Ayurveda becomes more of a compulsion rather than what they really want to study. Lack of interest in science and previous non- exposure to principles of Ayurveda become hurdles for students in Ayurveda studies. It was opined that the syllabus of Sanskrit subject in I B.A.M.S. is insufficient to get proficiency in Sanskrit. Proficiency here means one can efficiently read and understand original Ayurvedic texts.

The study of any language requires knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Likewise, *Panini Sutra* is considered necessary to learn Sanskrit grammar but most of the time (according to experiential knowledge) it makes the study of Sanskrit grammar more difficult for beginners who have not studied the Sanskrit language at the school level. The Sanskrit grammar can be taught with only rules and examples from Ayurvedic texts without *Panini Sutra*.

Ayurveda, being medical science, should incorporate ethics or moral education. *Panchatantra* suffices purposes of imparting knowledge of vocabulary and also moral education. But generally, it is not perceived in the same manner by teachers and students. So, studying *Panchatantra* becomes futile in Ayurvedic studies.

Recitation i. e. *Pathana* is the first step of the knowledge-gaining process i. e. *Pathana* (recitation), *Avabodhana* (deeper understanding), and *Anushthana* (preaching, advocacy). The recitation of verses depicts the interest and hard work of students in studies as well as it would facilitate them to understand the science. More reading practice of original Ayurvedic texts would make the students proficient in correct pronunciation of words, proper understanding, and thus capable in the interpretation of texts on their own in the long run. Therefore, recitation and more reading practices of Ayurvedic texts are considered necessary by many teachers.

Only textbooks in English or in various vernacular languages are considered insufficient for proper understanding. The translations and interpretations of the Ayurvedic texts may be at times biased or misleading and may not depict the clear picture of the particular concept that the original author or commentator wants to express. Reading original texts with good knowledge of Sanskrit facilitates students in understanding and use in practice. The better knowledge of science will obviously get reflected in the Ayurvedic practice. Therefore, most of the teachers considered reading Ayurvedic texts necessary.

Teachers to a large extent opined that the inclusion of Sanskrit as a subject in I B.A.M.S. curriculum is necessary because it's a tool or instrument (*Sadhana*) in achieving the goal (*Sadhya*) i. e. Knowledge of Ayurvedic texts. As a tool in Ayurvedic studies, Sanskrit is considered obviously necessary by many teachers.

Many teachers opined that there is a causal relationship between knowledge of Sanskrit language and progress in B. A. M. S. Examinations and also decrease in weightage of marks in Sanskrit subject would affect the knowledge of Sanskrit subject. These assumptions can be verified by conducting cross-sectional studies in students of B. A. M. S. professional course assessing the relationship between knowledge of Sanskrit subject and results of B. A. M. S. Examination.

Viva-voce of Sanskrit would be considered necessary to check the recitation, understanding of verses, thinking abilities, and interpretation of the original texts. Understanding-oriented

knowledge of Sanskrit in an easier way would be preferred over the conventional method of memorizing only.

It can be said that with the help of appropriate knowledge of Sanskrit, the students would acquire a true and clear knowledge of Ayurveda and which ultimately would yield efficient Ayurvedic physicians to the society. It would improve the general understanding (of Ayurveda) of students at the U.G. and P.G. level and would ultimately lead to the establishment of Ayurveda as a sound, safe, and the economic healthcare system.

Major limitations of this pilot study were: (a) the small sample size, (b) convenience sampling method from restricted Ayurvedic colleges, (c) the questionnaire was not comprehensive. A similar study could be planned with a large sample size and wider geographical area i. e. with the inclusion of students and teachers from various Ayurvedic colleges all over India to assess the long-term learning outcomes. Such studies can be incorporated in faculty development programs so as to train teachers in these methods.

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