

From Gurukula Values to Digital Classrooms: The Changing Nature of Teacher–Student Relationships

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Abstract— Across generations, the relationship between teachers and students has remained one of the most influential factors shaping the learning experience. A teacher’s role extends beyond subject instruction and influences student’s values, discipline, attitudes, and personal growth. In traditional Indian education, particularly the Gurukula system, learning was closely connected with personal guidance, respect, and a strong bond between the teacher and learner. Over time, the nature of this relationship has changed due to developments in the education system, changes in family life, social transformations, and the increasing influence of technology. Modern education has provided students with greater opportunities, freedom, and access to knowledge. At the same time, changes in classroom behaviour, discipline, and emotional connection between teachers and students have become areas of concern. This article reflects on the evolution of the teacher–student relationship from Gurukula values to digital-age classrooms and highlights the need to develop a balanced relationship based on respect, responsibility, and mutual understanding.

Index Terms— Teacher–student relationship, Gurukula education, classroom culture, student behaviour, digital learning, educational change.

I. INTRODUCTION

A teacher entering a classroom today often experiences an environment different from that of previous generations. A classroom is not merely a place where lessons are delivered; it is a space where relationships influence learning, behaviour, confidence, and personal development. Teachers have always played an important role not only in providing knowledge but also in shaping student’s attitudes, values, and approach towards life.

In the traditional Gurukula system, the relationship between teacher and student was based on close interaction and personal guidance. The teacher was considered a mentor responsible for the intellectual, moral, and personal development of students. Learning extended beyond textbooks and included discipline, values, and life skills.

The development of modern school education brought several positive changes. Education became accessible to larger sections of society, and students gained opportunities to learn through structured curricula, scientific approaches, and diverse resources. However, the relationship between teachers and students also changed as education moved from a close personal system to a large institutional framework.

The present educational environment is influenced by technology, changing family patterns, and new expectations from students and parents. Students today have access to information through online platforms and digital tools, changing the traditional role of teachers as the primary source of knowledge. Although these changes have provided new opportunities for learning, they have also created concerns about maintaining classroom discipline, developing mutual respect, and preserving the personal connection between teachers and students.

This discussion traces the journey of the teacher–student bond from the Gurukula tradition to the realities of digital-age classrooms. It attempts to understand the reasons behind this transformation and discusses how education can preserve valuable aspects of traditional relationships while adapting to modern learning environments.

II. TEACHER STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN THE GURUKULA TRADITION

In the Gurukula tradition, learning was based on a close relationship between the teacher and the student. The Guru was not viewed merely as a person who taught academic subjects but as a guide who helped students develop knowledge, discipline, values, and character. Education was not limited to academic knowledge but also focused on the development of values, discipline, and personal growth.

Unlike the present school system, where interaction between teachers and students is usually limited to classroom hours, the Gurukula system involved continuous association. Students lived with their teachers, observed their way of life, and learned through direct guidance and experience. The teacher’s responsibility extended beyond academic instruction to include the development of responsible behaviour and ethical values.

A significant feature of this system was the respect and trust given to the teacher. Students generally accepted the guidance of teachers with humility and discipline because the teacher was considered a person with knowledge, experience, and concern for their welfare. The authority of the teacher was not based only on position but also on the personal relationship developed with students.

The bond between teachers and students often extended beyond formal education. Teachers were regarded as mentors who guided students in different stages of life, and students maintained a sense of gratitude and respect towards them even after completing their studies. In many cases, the relationship resembled that of a parent and child, where teachers considered the progress and well-being of their students as an important responsibility.

The lasting relevance of the Gurukula approach lies mainly in the personal connection between teacher and learner and its emphasis on character development. However, it also had limitations, including restricted access to education and a highly teacher-centred structure. Therefore, the aim of modern education should not be to recreate the past completely, but to preserve valuable elements such as personal guidance, respect, and commitment between teachers and learners.

III. TRANSITION FROM GURUKULA TO MODERN SCHOOL EDUCATION

The transition from the Gurukula system to modern schooling brought significant changes in the organisation and experience of education. Traditional education was based on a close relationship between the teacher and a small group of learners, while modern education developed as a structured system with classrooms, curricula, examinations, and larger groups of students.

Modern education expanded learning opportunities by making education accessible to a wider section of society. It introduced diverse subjects, scientific knowledge, and new methods of learning while giving greater importance to student participation and individual differences.

However, the movement from a personal learning environment to an institutional system influenced the teacher–student relationship. In the Gurukula system, continuous interaction helped teachers understand students closely. In modern schools, larger classrooms, academic responsibilities, and administrative duties may reduce opportunities for personal guidance.

The role of teachers has also changed. Earlier, teachers were considered the main source of knowledge and guidance. Today, with access to digital resources and other sources of information, teachers have become facilitators who help students understand and apply knowledge.

This transformation should not be viewed as a decline in the importance of teachers. Modern education has brought accessibility and freedom of learning, while the values of personal connection, respect, and mentoring from traditional education remain important. The challenge is to combine both approaches to create meaningful learning environments.

IV. CHANGING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AND CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS

A teacher entering a classroom today often experiences a learning environment different from that of previous generations. Changes in student behaviour, communication patterns, and attitudes towards learning are influenced by wider changes in family life, society, and educational practices. For teachers, these are not merely theoretical discussions but everyday experiences observed in classrooms.

One noticeable change is the difference in the emotional connection between teachers and students. Earlier, teachers often remained important figures in student's lives even after their formal education. Students approached teachers for guidance beyond academic matters. In many present-day situations, the relationship is often limited to classroom interactions, examinations, and academic requirements. Teachers are sometimes viewed mainly as subject experts rather than as mentors and guides.

Expressions of respect in classrooms have also changed over time. Practices such as greeting teachers, maintaining classroom discipline, showing attention during lessons, and handling learning materials carefully were traditionally considered natural expressions of respect. Today, these practices may require conscious effort and guidance from teachers. This reflects a change in how discipline and respect are understood in modern classrooms.

Another concern is the changing attitude towards learning. Some students approach education mainly as a requirement for examinations, marks, or future employment rather than as a process of personal growth. When learning becomes limited to external goals, curiosity, independent thinking, and the desire to understand concepts may reduce.

The perception of teachers has also changed. Earlier, teachers were widely considered mentors who guided students academically and personally. In some situations today, their role is viewed mainly in terms of completing academic responsibilities, which may affect the mutual respect and responsibility essential for effective education.

However, these changes should be viewed with balance. Modern students are often more confident, expressive, and willing to question ideas. The aim should not be a return to fear-based discipline but the creation of classrooms where freedom exists along with responsibility, and where respect develops through trust and understanding.

V. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHER – STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The teacher–student relationship has been influenced by various changes in society, technology, and the educational system. Understanding these factors is important for strengthening this relationship in the present context.

One major factor is the changing role of parents in education. Earlier, parents generally trusted teachers and supported their decisions regarding learning and discipline. Today, increased awareness about children's rights and emotional needs has changed parent–teacher interactions. While protecting students is important, a lack of understanding of the teacher's perspective may create challenges in maintaining discipline and accountability.

Discipline practices in schools have also changed significantly. Modern education has moved away from strict methods and focuses more on student dignity and positive discipline. However, this requires effective approaches that encourage responsibility while maintaining classroom order.

Technology has further influenced educational relationships. Digital platforms, online classes, and artificial intelligence-based resources have made learning more accessible and flexible. However, excessive dependence on digital tools, including mobile phone use for learning activities, requires proper guidance. Technology can support learning but cannot replace the personal connection, encouragement, and understanding developed through teacher–student interaction.

Changing social values have also influenced student's expectations. Greater emphasis on freedom and individual choice has changed traditional ideas of authority. Therefore, modern teachers need to balance academic responsibilities with the ability to build trust and meaningful relationships with students.

VI. REBUILDING THE TEACHER – STUDENT BOND

The changing educational environment does not require a complete return to traditional methods or acceptance of unrestricted freedom without responsibility. The need of the present time is to create a balanced relationship where respect, trust, and understanding exist between teachers and students.

Teachers need to continue their role as mentors who support students not only in academic learning but also in developing confidence, responsibility, and positive values. Authority in the classroom should not depend only on position; it should come from the teacher's knowledge, fairness, and genuine concern for student's growth.

Students also need to understand that freedom in education should be accompanied by discipline and responsibility. Questioning, discussion, and independent thinking are essential aspects of modern learning, but they should develop within an environment of mutual respect. Learning becomes meaningful when students recognise teachers as guides rather than merely providers of academic services.

Parents also have an important role in rebuilding this relationship. A supportive partnership between parents and teachers helps students understand the importance of discipline, effort, and accountability. Protecting student's emotional well-being and encouraging responsibility should go together.

In the digital era, teachers may no longer be the only source of information, but their role as mentors remains irreplaceable. Technology can provide knowledge, but the human connection, encouragement, and personal guidance offered by teachers continue to be essential for meaningful education.

VII. CONCLUSION

The journey of the teacher–student relationship from the Gurukula tradition to digital-age classrooms reflects the continuous changes taking place in society and education. Traditional education gave greater importance to personal relationships, discipline, and respect, whereas modern education has expanded opportunities through accessibility, freedom, and varied learning methods. The future of education does not depend on choosing between traditional and modern approaches; it depends on finding a meaningful balance between the values of both. Education needs the respect and emotional connection of earlier systems along with the openness and opportunities provided by contemporary learning environments.

A strong teacher–student bond cannot be built through authority alone or through complete freedom without responsibility. It develops through trust, empathy, mutual respect, and a shared commitment towards learning. Although the role of teachers has changed in the digital age, their influence as mentors and guides remains central to the purpose of education.

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