

A Comparative Study of the Panchpadi Teaching Method and the Herbartian Teaching Method

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Abstract

Various types of teaching methods have been developed to make the teaching-learning process effective and systematic. Vidya Bharati has developed an innovative teaching method named as Panchpadi Teaching Method and is one of the teaching systems rooted in the traditional education system. It is developed by incorporating useful and meaningful aspects of the tradition of the Indian education. The Panchpadi Teaching Method consists of five stages, Adhiti, Bodh, Abhyas, Prayog and Prasar. In parallel, the Herbartian Teaching Method was developed as an important method in the field of lesson planning, emphasizing a systematic and well-organized approach to teaching. The aim of the present study is to conduct a comparative study of these two methods used in the field of education. This research paper tries to find out that how these both teaching methods can be designed and applied in a coherent and in an effective way. The study adopts a descriptive and comparative approach by analysing the existing literature and certified educational resources. Study found that both teaching methods place a strong emphasis on carrying out the teaching-learning process in a sequential and methodical way by creating a link between prior and new knowledge. It was also found that both approaches place a strong emphasis on applying the knowledge that has been learned. Study found that the intellectual foundations and pedagogical goals of the two instructional approaches differ to each other. The Herbartian method of teaching give importance on structuring the lesson in a systematic sequence, to link students' existing knowledge with new concepts, arriving at generalizations and by applying the knowledge for further situations. On the other hand, the Panchpadi teaching method emphasizes on the acquisition and comprehension of new knowledge along with its practice, application and communication because these are essential elements of the teaching-learning process. Thus, both approaches share the idea of systematic instruction but differ notably in their goals, procedures and overall educational outlook.

Keywords: Teaching Method, Panchpadi Teaching method, Herbartian teaching method, Teaching Learning Process

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human history and up to the present day, education has been one of the foundations of civilizational development, having a great influence on the development of the individual and society as a whole. It is an integral part of the country's development, socio-economic progress and future. Ancient teaching methods were teacher-centric, primarily aiming to impart textbook knowledge to students; this approach was widely practiced historically, leading students to focus heavily on acquiring knowledge of prescribed content and securing high marks in examinations. In such classrooms, teachers played the

dominant role in directing the learning process, while students were expected to maintain discipline and follow instructions to ensure an orderly learning environment. However, with rapid advancements in science and technology and the emergence of a knowledge-driven society, people's perspectives and learning needs have evolved, leading to a growing demand for more interactive, learner-centered and innovative teaching approaches (Wang, 2022). Modern education emphasizes that teaching and learning are inherently creative processes that foster innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities and the overall intellectual development of learners (Ray & Sikdar, 2023). Teaching method is an important foundation of the teaching-learning process, through which the teacher presents the subject matter in the classroom in a simple and effective manner. This method, especially when used in the teaching of social science, helps students understand the subject, develop their learning abilities and connect their knowledge with their daily life (Shanmugavelu & Parasuraman et.al., 2020). The primary purpose of teaching is to bring about meaningful and fundamental changes in the lives of learners. Teachers should adopt teaching methods that facilitate the effective transmission of knowledge and align with the intended objectives and learning outcomes. Traditionally, teacher-centred approaches were more commonly used to impart knowledge, while student-centred methods received comparatively less attention. Even today, the effectiveness of different teaching methods in enhancing students' learning remains an important area of interest in educational research (Ganyaupfu, 2013). Over the past two centuries, educationists have made efforts to organize the teaching-learning process into clear and manageable steps so that classroom instruction becomes more systematic and purposeful. Among the structured approaches that have continued to influence teaching practices, particularly in Indian schools, are the Panchpadi Method and the Herbartian Method. In contrast, the Panchpadi Method is a relatively recent and indigenous approach to teaching, developed within Vidya Bharati, a large network of schools historically associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. It was developed as an alternative pedagogical framework that gives particular importance to Indian educational traditions, values and perspectives. The Herbartian Method emerged from the psychological and philosophical work of the German thinker Johann Friedrich Herbart and was later formalised by his disciples into a five-step lesson plan that dominated teacher training programmes for over a century, including in colonial and post-colonial India. This paper examines both methods in terms of their origin, steps and guiding philosophy and then draws out a systematic comparison so as to help teacher-trainees and practising teachers judge where each method is best applied.

2. The Herbartian Method of Teaching

2.1 Origin and Background

The Herbartian Method takes its name from Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), a German philosopher and psychologist who is often regarded as the father of modern pedagogy as a distinct academic discipline. Johann Friedrich Herbart's educational theory is considered an important contribution to the development of teaching ideas in the 19th century. He viewed learning as a systematic process in which teaching should proceed in a clear and organized manner. Drawing on the psychological understanding of his time, Herbart sought to give pedagogy a more systematic structure. Herbart emphasized that students can develop learning systematically by connecting their prior knowledge with new knowledge. His theoretical contribution, which set the foundation for organised instruction, continues to impact contemporary educational techniques. These approaches emphasize connecting learning with skill development and enabling learners to adapt effectively to changing socio-economic conditions (Karaoulas, 2025). In the modern era, the goal of education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the development

of skills that enable students to adapt effectively and competently to a rapidly changing environment; these include skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and cognitive awareness, all of which are considered essential for effective learning. Herbart's teaching approach follows five sequential steps: preparation, presentation, association, generalization and application.

2.2 The Five Steps

Preparation: In this stage Students' prior knowledge is connected with the new topic. For this purpose, the teacher asks questions related to the previously taught content. Based on students' responses, their existing knowledge is connected with the new subject matter, helping them understand the new topic more easily. In the modern context, this concept is not limited to recalling prior knowledge; rather, emphasis is placed on developing students' curiosity, cognitive readiness and ability to connect new information with their existing knowledge. In this way, students become capable of understanding, reflecting upon and independently using new knowledge, thereby developing their self-directed learning skills.

Presentation: At this stage, the subject matter is presented to the students in a clear and simple manner; the teacher and students collaborate to read, discuss and explain the lesson. Concepts are explained to students through examples, experiments and activities. Relevant examples related to the subject matter are presented first, while the students' prior knowledge and experiences are taken into account to facilitate their understanding of new information. The lesson is broken down into smaller segments and presented in a systematic, sequential order. Each unit is linked back to the introduction, ensuring the subject matter is conveyed simply, logically and effectively, thereby fostering a clear and comprehensive understanding among the students.

Association (Comparison): In this stage, students are encouraged to connect new knowledge with their prior knowledge and experiences, thereby strengthening the link between existing information and new information. Special emphasis is placed on developing critical thinking and metacognitive strategies during this process. Students evaluate, analyze and compare information gathered from various sources. This stage plays a critical role in enabling students to understand their own thinking and learning processes. It fosters metacognitive awareness and reflective thinking—skills directly aligned with the demands of modern education, which prioritize the development of critical thinking and the ability to solve complex problems. Students are encouraged to analyze and synthesize information, identify connections between different concepts and devise appropriate strategies to address complex educational and social issues.

Generalisation: In this stage, the teacher engages students in various activities so that they can apply the knowledge they have acquired and build an understanding of the subject matter. During this phase, the teacher divides students into small groups and assigns them collaborative tasks. These activities provide students with the opportunity to apply their acquired knowledge to practical situations and foster the development of their understanding and skills. Thus, this phase makes the students' learning more robust, meaningful and practical.

Application: In the application stage, students utilize the knowledge and skills they have acquired to address real-life problems and navigate various situations. At this stage, students do not merely recall or repeat information; they actively apply that knowledge to new contexts. Innovation and problem-solving are considered important skills for the new generation in today's rapidly changing world. Students can use the knowledge they acquire to deal with various challenges and problems encountered in their daily lives. In the present era, education emphasizes developing students' ability to think creatively, adapt themselves to technological changes and find solutions to complex problems. The aim of education is not only to

ensure the holistic development of students but also to make them civilized, aware and responsible citizens through the development of various skills. Such students are able to effectively face the difficulties arising from rapid technological and social changes and the changing social environment with proper understanding, flexibility and creative thinking.

3. The Panchpadi Method of Vidya Bharti:

The Panchpadi teaching system was developed by Shri Lajja Ram Tomar. He sought to develop a teaching approach that was systematic and practical like Western teaching methods, while remaining rooted in the Indian educational tradition. From the Indian educational perspective, knowledge, discipline, values and character development are considered interconnected and essential components of education. Over time, the Panchpadi method became an important part of the teaching practices followed in Vidya Bharati schools, particularly Saraswati Shishu Mandir schools. The Panchpadi Five-Step Learning Process provides a systematic and learner-oriented framework for organising the teaching-learning process in accordance with the principles of NCF-SE 2023. It consists of five interconnected stages: Aditi (Introduction), Bodh (Conceptual Understanding), Abhyas (Practice), Prayog (Application) and Prasara (Expansion). Together, these stages guide learners from an initial understanding of a topic to practising, applying and extending their learning to new situations.

3.1 The five steps are:

Aditi (Introduction): Aditi is the first stage of the Panchpadi teaching-learning process. At this stage, the teacher introduces a new topic or concept by connecting it with students' prior knowledge and experiences. The teacher asks questions related to the topic, discusses it with the students and provides opportunities for them to explore and experiment with different ideas and materials. This helps develop their interest and curiosity about the new topic. In this process, the teacher does not simply provide information to the students but encourages them to ask questions, explore, investigate and experiment with different ideas and materials. In this way, students actively participate in acquiring information related to the new topic. Thus, the Aditi stage prepares students for new learning while connecting their prior knowledge, curiosity and active participation with the learning process.

Bodh (Understanding): Bodh is the second stage of the Panchpadi teaching-learning process. At this stage, students try to understand the core concepts through various activities such as play, exploration of the relevant subject matter, experiments, discussion and reading. The teacher closely observes the learning process to understand how well the students have understood the topic and where they may be facing difficulties and provides guidance whenever required. Instead of simply providing ready-made information, students are given opportunities to think independently, ask questions, participate in discussions and learn through their own experiences. The concepts that students are expected to understand and learn are identified and planned in advance by the teacher. Thus, the Bodh stage helps students develop a clear, deeper and meaningful understanding of the subject matter.

Abhyas (Practice): Abhyas is the third stage of the Panchpadi teaching-learning process. At this stage, students are provided with opportunities to practise the knowledge and skills they have learned so that they can understand them better and strengthen their learning. The teacher engages students in various activities so that they can apply their acquired knowledge and develop a clearer and deeper understanding of the subject matter. The teacher forms small groups of students and provides them with opportunities to participate in group work and other activity-based tasks. Through these activities, students get opportunities to apply their acquired knowledge in practical situations. At the same time, these activities

help develop their understanding, skills and competencies. Thus, the Abhyas (Practice) stage plays an important role in making students' learning more meaningful, strengthened and practical.

Prayog (Application): Prayog is the fourth stage of the Panchpadi teaching-learning process. At this stage, students are given opportunities to apply the knowledge they have acquired to real-life situations. The purpose is not only to help students understand the subject matter but also to enable them to learn how to use their knowledge in their everyday lives. Students are provided with projects and activities through which they can apply what they have learned in the classroom to practical situations. This gives them an opportunity to connect their knowledge with real-life experiences. Thus, the Prayog stage plays an important role in developing students' practical understanding, problem-solving abilities and capacity to apply knowledge effectively.

Prasar (Expansion/Dissemination): In this stage, students internalize knowledge through the study, understanding, practice and application of a subject and further spread and expand the knowledge they have acquired. Two primary methods are employed for this dissemination: self-study (svadhyaya) and discourse (pravachan). Self-study entails independent learning; here, students further develop their knowledge by utilizing relevant books, materials and experiences to acquire new insights, whereas through discourse, they share their knowledge with others. This process renders the students' understanding clearer, more comprehensive and more enduring.

3.2 Merits and Limitations

The strength of the Panchpadi Method lies in its emphasis on active, learner-centred engagement at every stage, its explicit provision for repeated practice and its final step of dissemination, which extends learning beyond the classroom into the community — an element largely absent from the classical Herbartian sequence. It is particularly well suited to foundational-stage and skill-based learning and aligns closely with the aims of activity-based, competency-based education promoted under the National Education Policy, 2020. Its limitations include a relatively shorter history of empirical study compared with the century-old Herbartian tradition and the practical challenge that its full implementation — particularly the Prasar step — requires time, community linkages and teacher preparation that may not be uniformly available across all schools.

4. Comparative Analysis

Both methods share the common structural feature of organising instruction into five sequential steps, moving broadly from preparing or introducing the learner, through presentation or understanding of new material, to consolidation and application. Beyond this surface similarity, however, the two methods differ in emphasis, philosophy and scope, as summarised below.

Basis of Comparison	Herbartian Method	Panchpadi Method (Vidya Bharti)
Philosophical Root	Western associationist psychology; learning as building new ideas upon an organised mass of existing ideas (apperception).	Indian/Vedic educational tradition; learning as an inward unfolding of the learner's faculties, integrating knowledge, character and social application.

Number of Steps	Five: Preparation, Presentation, Association, Generalisation, Application.	Five: Aditi, Bodh, Abhyas, Prayog, Prasar.
Primary Emphasis	Logical, sequential development of a single lesson/concept within one class period; intellectual mastery of subject matter.	Holistic development spanning cognitive understanding, repeated practice, real-life application and social dissemination of learning.
Role of Teacher	Central and directive; teacher controls pacing of each step and draws generalisations for/with learners.	Facilitative; teacher connects new learning to prior experience and creates opportunities for practice, application and sharing.
Role of Learner	Largely receptive in early steps, more active only at the application stage.	Active from the outset — questioning, exploring, practising, applying and finally teaching or sharing with peers.
Extension Beyond Classroom	Largely confined to application within or immediately after the lesson.	Explicit final step (Prasar) devoted to carrying learning into the wider community and life situations.
Character/Value Dimension	Concerned with moral education mainly through the cultivation of 'many-sidedness of interest,' not a distinct step.	Character and cultural values are woven through every step, reflecting Vidya Bharti's stated aim of holistic, value-based education.
Learning outcomes	Content-heavy, concept-based lessons requiring structured explanation, e.g., science laws, grammar rules, historical facts.	Foundational and skill-based learning where practice, application and community connection matter as much as concept formation.

5. Conclusion

The study claims that both strategies are centered around a structured and seamless teaching-learning process. Both strategies emphasize the importance of connecting prior knowledge to new knowledge and applying that knowledge in real-world situations. The Herbartian Teaching Method has five stages namely: preparation, presentation, comparison, generalization and application. It stresses on activating prior knowledge, connecting it to new knowledge and applying the acquired knowledge. Panchpadi Teaching Method comprises of five stages - Adhiti, Bodh, Abhyas, Prayog and Prasar. It emphasizes acquiring and understanding knowledge, practising it, applying it in practical situations and disseminating the acquired knowledge. They have some things in common, but also differ in important ways. The Herbartian method is based on psychological principles; however, its application is not equally suitable for all types of subjects. It has certain limitations, particularly in science teaching and cannot be applied

to all types of lessons in language teaching. In contrast, the Panchpadi Teaching Method follows a child-centred approach. It is presented as a teaching approach developed by incorporating useful features of the ancient Indian teaching tradition along with modern teaching methods. It provides learners with an active role in the process of acquiring, understanding, practising, applying and disseminating knowledge.

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