

Nepal Sanskrit University: A Preferred Institution for Elderly Learners in Nepal

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Abstract

In Nepal, only a few elderly people are involved in university education because there is no separate university for older learners in Nepal. Nepal Sanskrit University is preferred by old learners. In this context, the research examines the reasons and methods by which elderly individuals choose to enroll at Nepal Sanskrit University following their retirement. The primary focus of this study is to seek answers to the inquiries regarding why individuals are inclined to join Nepal Sanskrit University and what motivates them to pursue the study of Sanskrit in their later years. The study followed the interpretive paradigm of the qualitative research design. The conclusion of this study was based on primary data collected through a field study. The data were collected through in-depth interviews from Balmiki Vidhayapitha, a constituent Vidhayapitha of Nepal Sanskrit University. Five students aged above sixty currently studying in Balmiki Vidhayapitha were selected as the sample population. A purposive random sample method was used to select the sample from the universe. Participants enrolled at Nepal Sanskrit University with the intention of acquiring spiritual knowledge and relished the opportunity to exchange insights on religious understanding and moral values pertaining to life and the world. Participants take pleasure in learning the Sanskrit language, as well as education and philosophy.

Keywords: Education; Sanskrit; old age; university and philosophy.

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1. Introduction

Old age is one of the important stages of life. World Health Organization defined old age as is associated with physical, psychological, and social changes of life that occurred as increased with age [31]. It typically begins at sixty or sixty-five years of age, according to the national context. The United Nations noted that the later stages of life signify a time when people generally withdraw from formal work, encounter a decrease in physical vitality, and may increasingly rely on others for assistance and care [30]. It also signifies a phase of wisdom, contemplation, and community contribution, which varies across different cultures and social systems. The concept of old age can be understood in biological terms as alterations in health and functionality, psychological terms as shifts in cognition and emotions. In Nepal, individuals aged 60 and older are officially classified as senior citizens according to the Senior Citizens Act, 2063 [2006], which governs legal and policy frameworks in the country. This age cutoff is uniformly utilized in national censuses, social security initiatives, and studies on aging to define the elderly demographic [20]. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens [MoWCSC] acknowledges that 60 years marks the onset of old age for various purposes, including social security benefits, healthcare services, and the issuance of senior citizen identity cards [20]. In Nepal, old age is culturally linked to retirement, reliance on family, and spiritual activities, yet the age benchmark of 60 and above is primarily used in research and policy. Recently, many older adults over sixty have chosen to enroll in universities after retiring from government service or private enterprise. Their motivations extend beyond a single cause: lifelong learning, personal fulfillment, and a desire to stay intellectually active all play key roles. UNESCO observed that after retirement, many seniors seek purposeful activities that sustain mental agility, foster social ties, and promote emotional well-being [27]. In the same way WHO Report emphasized that attending university enhances intellectual engagement and boosts cognitive health, which can help relieve isolation and depression in old age [31]. Many older learners view higher education as a chance to pursue long-deferred ambitions or interests. Earlier in life, work and family responsibilities often prevented them from seeking advanced education. Retirement offers both the time and incentive to pursue learning for self-development rather than career advancement [9]. Universities create an environment where senior students can share experiences, deepen knowledge in fields such as humanities, spirituality, or philosophy, and connect across generations with younger students [25]. In Nepal, institutions like Nepal Sanskrit University draw older learners because of their emphasis on spiritual education, moral philosophy, and cultural heritage fields that strongly appeal to seniors in search of inner peace and cultural ties [24]. Consequently, engaging in higher education later in life transforms into not merely an academic endeavor but also a means of fostering dignity, identity, and active aging. Elderly Individuals enroll at Nepal Sanskrit University following their retirement, as they pursue spiritual development, cultural ties, and intellectual tranquility during their later years. The study of Sanskrit offers ethical direction, philosophical understanding, and religious knowledge that is deeply rooted in the ancient traditions of Nepal [23]. Upon reaching the age of 60, many people often seek to reconnect with their cultural roots and discover a more profound significance in life through the exploration of sacred texts, yoga, and philosophy [24]. Additionally, the university provides a serene academic setting that appreciates wisdom and life experience, making it an excellent choice for older learners who aspire to remain mentally engaged and socially active [28]. The involvement of elderly learners in university education is referred to as the "third age," a term noted by Laslett [16]. The idea that education is a lifelong journey has gained popularity. Organizations

and programs for "mature learners" or "senior" students, typically aged 60 and above, have become more common. The concept of universities for the third age began in France in the mid-twentieth century and has now spread globally. However, in Nepal, there is no separate university for the elderly. Instead, these individuals enroll at Nepal Sanskrit University to continue their education. This study analyzes the perceptions of elderly individuals studying Sanskrit at Balmiki Vidhayapitha, a constituent college of Nepal Sanskrit University. I chose this title because little research exists on elderly individuals' motivations to join a university after retirement in this context.

2.Theoretical Reviews

In this study, there used motivation theory of elderly and adult education and cultural motivation theory were used because these theories play a role in enrolling elderly individuals at Nepal Sanskrit University.

2.1 Motivation Theory

Motivation explains why older adults pursue higher education after retirement. For many, particularly those with social and economic stability, this journey is about self-actualization realizing their fullest potential, as outlined by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs [17]. Engaging in subjects such as Sanskrit, philosophy, and spiritual literature allows these learners to satisfy their intellectual curiosity and find meaning in later life. Self-Determination Theory Deci and Ryan, underscores that their motivation comes from autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Older adults at NSU typically seek knowledge for its own sake, not for jobs or credentials, gaining empowerment through independent learning and mastery of traditional subjects [7]. The vibrant community and culture at NSU also fosters belonging, further enhancing motivation. Specifically, in Nepal, many seniors view Sanskrit education as a path to moral and spiritual renewal [24]. NSU's intellectually and spiritually engaging environment fulfills these intrinsic needs for older learners, particularly after formal employment ends.

2.2 Theories of Elderly and Adult Education

Education in elderly age is frequently understood through the lenses of Andragogy, Geragogy, and Transformative Learning Theory. Andragogy, introduced by Malcolm Knowles in 1980, emphasizes that adults are self-directed learners driven by intrinsic motivations [10]. Adult learners possess a wealth of life experiences that influence their learning journey, favor problem-centered approaches over content-centered ones, and require an immediate connection to the relevance of their studies. Senior learners at NSU interact with Sanskrit texts not just for rote memorization but to explore ethical and philosophical inquiries pertinent to their own lives. Geragogy, a field of adult education dedicated to older adults, highlights the necessity for supportive, flexible, and respectful learning environments for these learners [11]. Given that cognitive and physical abilities can diminish with age, the pedagogy should appreciate life experiences and promote collaborative learning over competitive approaches. Nepal Sanskrit University's conventional and discussion-oriented instructional methods like *shastrartha* [philosophical debate] are in harmony with geragogical principles, nurturing mutual respect and reflective learning. Transformative Learning Theory [18] offers valuable insights into the education of the elderly. Mezirow posits that adults acquire knowledge through critical reflection on their experiences, which

results in a shift in their perspectives. Elderly learners make interaction with Sanskrit scriptures and philosophical writings facilitate contemplation on the significance of life, ethics, and spirituality. This process of reflection aids them in re-evaluating their identity during their later years and fosters emotional and psychological development. In Nepal, where there are few formal opportunities for education among the elderly, NSU provides an environment where learning is transformative instead of merely transnational. Older learners not only acquire knowledge but also redefine their sense of purpose, autonomy, and social connections [25].

2.3 Culture and Motivation Theory

The cultural aspect of education holds significant importance in Nepal, a society profoundly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Cultural Motivation Theory posits that motivation is influenced by socio-cultural values, shared beliefs, and spiritual goals [26]. In collectivist societies such as Nepal, the process of learning is frequently associated with social harmony, reverence for knowledge, and the preservation of culture. Elderly learners at NSU are driven by the aspiration to maintain and pass on traditional wisdom, rituals, and the Sanskrit language to the younger generations. This is in accordance with the idea of generativity as outlined by Erik Erikson [8] in his psychosocial stages of development. During late adulthood, individuals seek to make contributions to society and promote cultural continuity a goal achieved through education and mentorship. Consequently, learning Sanskrit transforms into both a personal and cultural endeavor. Sanskrit education carries significant prestige in Nepali society, symbolizing religious merit and intellectual refinement, and as suggested by Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, many elderly, especially in Hindu communities, join NSU to acquire or strengthen this valuable cultural asset. The university's emphasis on dharma, philosophy, and linguistics enables students to rediscover their heritage, fostering a holistic learning experience that meets both intellectual and emotional needs.

The amalgamation of these theories indicates that the motivation for elderly learners at Nepal Sanskrit University stems from both intrinsic psychological needs and cultural-spiritual influences. Maslow's and Deci & Ryan's frameworks elucidate the inner gratification obtained from learning; Knowles, Mezirow, and Formosa clarify how education for adults and the elderly can reshape identity and enhance self-worth; and cultural motivation theory illustrates how learning fosters a connection to heritage and collective identity. The synthesis of these models underscores that the involvement of the elderly in Sanskrit education is not merely a case of postponed formal learning but rather a comprehensive quest for self-fulfillment, cultural preservation, and social engagement. Consequently, institutions like NSU serve as environments for active aging, where education upholds the dignity, wisdom, and vitality of older individuals.

3. Literature Reviews

Only a few studies have been found about elderly individuals and Sanskrit education in the context of Nepal. In this regard, Adhikari noted that Sanskrit has historically served as a cornerstone of Nepal's educational framework, influencing traditional learning, philosophical thought, and academic pursuits [2]. It remains a significant factor in religious ceremonies and cultural customs, safeguarding Nepal's rich spiritual and historical legacy. It helps reduce feelings of isolation and promotes emotional well-being through active participation in

learning communities. So that elderly individuals loved to study the Sanskrit rather than modern subjects. In the same line national population report 2021 noted that elderly individuals covered 10.2% population of the total population of the nation; however, only a few individuals were involved in lifelong learning [5]. Adhikari and Acharya highlighted that for elderly individuals were in society, culture, and education become an urgent need to increase for the development of the nation [2]. It is necessary for an institution to share the experiences of elderly people in Nepal. Similarly, Joshi highlighted that literacy within elderly populations is significantly linked to their overall well-being. Older individuals in care facilities who are literate tend to report improved physical health and reduced levels of depression compared to their illiterate counterparts [13]. It suggests that although many regard Sanskrit education as culturally esteemed and spiritually significant, it encounters difficulties associated with government policy, societal perceptions, and its applicability in contemporary educational programs. Above reviews note that elderly people and their education in the context of Nepal; however, these reviews did not clearly link the issue of elderly individuals and their motto of lifelong learning, so the study highlights the issue of elderly individuals and their learning in the context of Nepal Sanskrit University.

4. Research Methodology

The study followed the interpretative paradigm of qualitative research. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. The secondary data were gathered from books, journals, and government reports. These data were collected through a library study method. The primary data were accumulated through a field study by using an in-depth interview method. For an in-depth interview, five individuals who have been studying in Balmiki Vidhayapitha Kathmandu were selected, and discussed with them about the causes of enrolling Sanskrit University at an elderly age. The purposive sampling method was used to select the sample population from the field. There has given pseudo name to the participants as p1 for the first participant, p2 for the second participants, p3 for the third participants, p4 for the fourth participants, and p5 for the fifth participants. Data were collected in a natural setting and were not forced to participate in the discussion and maintain the ethical issue for the study. The collected data were categorized and interpreted according to the title and objectives.

4.1 About Participants

P1: He is 67 years 67-year-old male have completed a first degree in management from Tribhuvan university and joined in government job. After retirement from the job, he joined in Sanskrit University in 2069. He is from the Brahmin community and follows the Hindu religion.

P2: She is 62-year female. She has completed her first degree in Major English. She is self-employed woman. She enrolled in the Sanskrit University two years before the age of sixty. She is from an ethnic community and follows Buddhism.

P3: He is 70 year 70-year-old male from the Brahmin community and follows the Hindu religion. He had completed his first degree in economics. He was admitted to Nepal Sanskrit University three years ago. He is a

retired one from the job of Nepal government.

P4: She is 65-year female from Bramin caste. She has completed a Bachelor's in Education as her first degree. She retired teacher. She enrolled Sanskrit University three years ago. She followed the Hindu religion.

P5: He is 75 year 75-year-old male from the Brahmin community and followed the Hindu religion. He had completed his first degree in Nepali. He enrolled in Nepal Sanskrit University for two years. He is a self-employed person.

5. Sanskrit University and Balmiki vidhayapitha

Nepal Sanskrit was established in 1986 as the name of Mahendra Sanskrit University, and it is known as Nepal Sanskrit University [NSU]. The center office of the university is located in the Dang district of Lumbini province. It was established with the mission of preserving and promoting Sanskrit learning through offering intermediate, bachelor's [Shastri], master's [Acharya], and doctoral courses in classical and religious studies. It is regarded as one of the main institutions in Nepal with an exclusive focus on Sanskrit and related philosophical, religious, ritualistic, and linguistic subjects. One can be admitted to the university at the bachelor's [Shastri] level after completing the +2 level, by taking the Sanskrit or completing the bridge course run by the university before being admitted Shastri level. There are 12 consistent and 7 affiliated colleges running in different parts of the nation under the umbrella of Nepal Sanskrit University [22]. The university offers courses related to modern subjects like Nepali, English, political science, economics, and mathematics. These modern subjects are only taught in the Shastri level. In the Master's level, there teaches RigVed, Yjur Ved, Atharba Ved, Nabya Nayaya, Prachya Nayaya, Byakarna [Sanskrit Grammar], Sanskrit literature, Jothis [phalit and Sidhanta], Itihans puran, purba mimamsha, Shankar vedanta, Dharma Shatra, Tantra, Yoga, Buddhist studies, and Prachya Raj shastra. Except that in the Shastri level there teaches Ramanuj Vedanta and Paurohitya are taught. The university also runs a Sanskrit language class for both foreign and Nepali students [22]. Data were gathered from the Balmiki Vidhaya Pitha, which is one of the constituent colleges as well as the oldest Sanskrit Pathasala of Nepal. It is located in the Kathmandu valley. The college runs programs like language classes and Sanskrit for foreigners at Bachelor's and master's levels.

6. Causes of Elderly Individuals Select NSU for Learning

NSU is developing as a centre for studying elderly individuals because half of the students of Balmiki Vidhaya Pitha are elderly individuals. Elderly people take an interest in enrolling in Sanskrit. In this regard, p1 notes:

Sanskrit University is the only university that teaches Veda, which is one of the oldest sources of knowledge. At a young age, I could not enroll Sanskrit school because there was pressure to earn for my family, so I joined in job and completed my job after the age of sixty. Like me other my friends also enrolled in Balmiki Vidhaya Pitha and study Sanskrit. I love the Sanskrit language, so I enrolled in college. I am happy to study Sanskrit at this age. [Personal Interview, 2025]

It shows that elderly people enrolled in the Sanskrit college due to the love of the Sanskrit language and the Veda. P1 focuses on the desire of learning Sanskrit pulls elderly people to enroll in the Sanskrit college. There have not been opportunities to learn Sanskrit in other colleges, so senior citizens choose the Sanskrit university to study Sanskrit in their old age. In the same line, p2 notes:

I have always desired to study ancient texts related to Buddhism and Tantra, as they hold deep philosophical and spiritual knowledge that continues to inspire many seekers of truth. To fulfill this long-held dream, I decided to learn Sanskrit, the language in which most of these sacred scriptures were written. For this purpose, I enrolled in Nepal Sanskrit University, where I have gained valuable insights into the structure, grammar, and profound meaning of Sanskrit texts. Studying here has opened my mind to a new world of knowledge, connecting intellectual understanding with spiritual growth. Like me, many other elderly individuals have also joined the university, motivated by the same passion to reconnect with ancient wisdom and cultural roots. Although I already have a university qualification, I had never before found the opportunity to study astrology and Tantra, subjects that have always fascinated me. Nepal Sanskrit University, therefore, is not merely an academic institution; it is a place deeply connected with spiritualism, providing a sacred environment where learning becomes a journey of inner awakening and lifelong fulfillment. [Personal Interview, 2025]. Elderly individuals have joined the Sanskrit university to fulfil the desire of learning ancient knowledge like tantra. P2 did not get opportunities to join a Sanskrit school at a young age, so she joined college after completing the bridge course prescribed by the Sanskrit university for non-Sanskrit background students, highlighting the issue P3 notes:

I love the Sanskrit language, but I have not had the chance to complete higher education at my young age, so after a long gap, I again joined this college and am studying Sanskrit. In my opinion, Sanskrit education is complete because all types of knowledge can be gained from Sanskrit education, so elderly people joined to Sanskrit college rather another college. In other colleges, there is only a shallow type of knowledge, but in Sanskrit, there is deep knowledge that supports us in managing our elderly life. I learn about yoga and other ancient knowledge related to the Sanskrit scripture. I am happy with learning Sanskrit at this age. [Personal Interview, 2025].

P3 expresses his opinion on the basis of his experience. He found complete knowledge in Sanskrit education. He did not find deep knowledge in the modern textbook book so he joined to Sanskrit college to gain deep knowledge. In the same line, p4 notes:

There is no singular reason for my decision to enroll in a Sanskrit college at this point in my life; instead, it stems from a multitude of profound personal motivations. One of my primary aspirations as I age is to pursue salvation [moksha], a form of spiritual liberation that I believe can only be attained through the study and comprehension of the Vedas and other revered Sanskrit texts. The Vedas are not simply religious documents; they serve as the bedrock of timeless knowledge that directs individuals toward truth, tranquility, and self-realization. I have always harbored a desire to study the Vedas, but my earlier lack of a suitable educational foundation in Sanskrit prevented me from doing so. Now, by enrolling in this college, I have discovered the chance to embark on this spiritual journey. While I may not yet possess the complete foundation necessary for a thorough understanding of the Vedas, I have

acquired invaluable lessons and received significant guidance from my teachers and gurus, who have assisted me in interpreting and appreciating Sanskrit literature.

This experience has not only broadened my knowledge but has also enriched my sense of faith and purpose. Like myself, many other older learners have come to this college with a shared aspiration to study the Vedas and reconnect with the spiritual heritage of our culture. For us, learning Sanskrit transcends mere academic endeavor; it is a sacred practice that links us to divine wisdom and the essence of life itself. The advantages of learning Sanskrit, particularly in later life, are numerous. It keeps the mind engaged, purifies thoughts, and provides a sense of inner tranquility that cannot be achieved through secular knowledge alone. Engaging with Sanskrit fosters a feeling of spiritual vitality and intellectual awakening, in contrast to those who remain detached from such profound insights. Since joining this college, I have come to understand that Sanskrit is not merely a language but a lifestyle that harmonizes knowledge, spirituality, and self-awareness. Studying it in my later years has infused me with renewed energy, purpose, and a sense that my life is progressing. [Personal Interview, 2025]. Sanskrit education helps to enhance the inner quality of life that cannot be found in modern education, so that elderly people who have knowledge of mundane life love to enjoy spirituality and ancient knowledge, and they join the Sanskrit college in their elderly age. In this regard, p5 argues: Sanskrit education significantly differs from the education offered in contemporary universities. In contrast to modern educational systems that primarily prioritize career advancement and material achievements, Sanskrit education places a strong emphasis on spiritual wisdom, moral values, and inner tranquility, key components necessary for leading a balanced and meaningful existence. It represents a holistic approach to learning that not only nurtures intellectual growth but also enhances emotional and spiritual health. A distinctive feature of Sanskrit education is its ability to assist individuals in discovering straightforward and practical solutions to life's intricate challenges through the teachings found in ancient scriptures, philosophy, and ethical guidelines. The insights gained from Sanskrit texts enable us to comprehend the deeper significance of life, steering us towards harmony, self-discipline, and contentment. Furthermore, Sanskrit education also offers practical avenues for older adults to stay active and self-sufficient. For example, I possessed some foundational knowledge of astrology prior to enrolling in college, but after delving deeper into Sanskrit studies, I was able to achieve a greater level of proficiency in this area. Consequently, people began to have confidence in my expertise, and I started to earn a modest income through astrology consultations. This experience has not only provided me with financial support but has also brought immense satisfaction from being able to assist others. Likewise, numerous elderly individuals who engage in Sanskrit studies participate in puja performances, mantra recitations, and ritual guidance, earning respect and a modest income within their communities. Thus, Sanskrit education plays a vital role in fostering both spiritual and physical well-being. On a spiritual level, it maintains a calm, pure, and focused mind, while on a physical level, it enables older adults to remain active, productive, and socially engaged. It instills a sense of dignity and purpose even in the later stages of life. For these reasons, I have a profound affection for studying Sanskrit in my advanced years. It not only enriches my inner life but also provides me with a sense of purpose and the means to lead a peaceful and fulfilling existence. [Personal Interview, 2025]. All the participants in this study emphasized the multiple benefits of learning Sanskrit, especially in relation to spiritual growth, moral development, and life enrichment. They highlighted how Sanskrit education helps individuals live with discipline, peace, and ethical awareness, connecting them to their cultural and spiritual roots. However, it is

interesting to note that none of them provided a convincing reason why they did not pursue a Sanskrit education during their younger years and instead chose modern education. This suggests that appreciation for Sanskrit often grows with age and life experience. In recent times, Sanskrit education has become increasingly popular among senior citizens, as it offers a deeper understanding and practical wisdom to manage emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of elderly life. Unlike modern education, which focuses mainly on material success, Sanskrit learning supports mental peace, spiritual fulfillment, and moral balance, qualities that are especially valued in later years.

6. Conclusion

This research investigated the motivations and experiences of senior learners enrolled at Nepal Sanskrit University, specifically at Balmiki Vidhayapitha in Kathmandu, utilizing a qualitative interpretative research methodology. Through comprehensive interviews with five elderly participants, the study uncovered that their choice to engage in Sanskrit education later in life is fundamentally based on personal, spiritual, and cultural motivations rather than academic or professional aspirations. The participants, who hailed from various educational and occupational backgrounds, collectively recognized that Sanskrit transcends being merely a language; it represents a holistic system of knowledge that intertwines human existence with spirituality, ethics, and inner tranquility. The results indicate that older individuals view Sanskrit education as a pathway to achieving spiritual fulfillment and moral equilibrium in their later years. The majority of participants linked their educational pursuits to a yearning for moksha [salvation] and self-discovery through the exploration of the Vedas, Upanishads, Tantra, Yoga, and other sacred texts. For instance, participants such as P1 and P4 articulated that acquiring knowledge of Sanskrit served as a means to reconnect with their cultural and spiritual heritage, which they were unable to pursue during their youth due to economic obligations or a lack of opportunities. Likewise, P2 and P3 emphasized the significance of Sanskrit in offering a deeper, more profound educational experience compared to the contemporary system, which they characterized as focused solely on material and practical benefits. In contrast, Sanskrit education provided them with timeless wisdom, emotional fulfillment, and insights into the deeper meaning of life. Moreover, the study highlighted that Sanskrit education yields practical and social advantages even in advanced age. Participants like P5 noted that their proficiency in Sanskrit and astrology enabled them to earn respect and a modest income through spiritual counseling and ritual practices. This illustrates that Sanskrit education not only enhances mental and spiritual well-being but also creates opportunities for social engagement and financial support.

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