

Harnessing Leadership Skills through the Bhagavad Gita: Framework for Integrative School Curriculum

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Abstract:

The cultivation of leadership among school students is crucial to prepare them for participatory democracy and the challenges of a complex society. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly advocates the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems, fostering holistic growth, ethical values, and contextual skills within the curriculum. The Bhagavad Gita, an iconic Indian text acclaimed for its philosophies on duty, resilience, and self-management, provides universal principles of strong, ethical, and resilient leadership relevant for contemporary learners. This paper develops a contextual leadership framework based on the Bhagavad Gita, with five core dimensions: Determination, Sense of Enjoyment, Cognitive Approaches, Challenge Management, and Initiative Taking. Embedding these elements into curriculum and classroom practice across subjects and co-curricular activities can nurture leadership aptitude in adolescents, supporting their transition into a democratic society and contributing to school success. The synergy between IKS and modern pedagogy empowers students to embody responsible leadership, critical thinking, and self-regulation, thereby fulfilling the vision of NEP-2020 for globally aware, ethically anchored Indian citizens.

Keywords — **Bhagavad Gita, Leadership, Curriculum Integration**

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a need for responsible leaders in emerging societies. Let it be at the professional/non-professional workplace, government, and non-profit agencies, we need leaders. Who will be the next generation's leaders? Yes...they are today's adolescents. Schools are one of the few opportunities to address today's adolescents about the acquisition of leadership abilities. Leadership qualities can be integrated into the school curriculum ultimately, enabling teenagers to lead society.

National Education Policy (2020) has highlighted the major elements of ancient Indian knowledge. Indian knowledge contributes to modern India's successes and challenges. It inspires a strong idea of India's subsequent academic aspirations, which are

to be incorporated accurately and systematically wherever relevant throughout the school curriculum. One such valuable asset of our Indigenous knowledge base is the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is India's most cherished and well-known spiritual work, which consists of 700 verses in Sanskrit that include chapters 23 – 40 in the Bhishma-Parva of the legendary literature, Mahabharata, which was written around the third or fourth century BCE. It contains everlasting insights and counsel about our true nature and life's purpose. The objective of the Bhagavad Gita is to explain larger concepts such as the essence of human existence, nature of the soul, how one can lead a purposeful life, the value of spiritual striving, and the

multiple pathways of enlightenment/wisdom, rather than to just present a how-to guide.

The sage Vyasa is credited with writing the Mahabharata. According to belief, Ganesha recorded it using one of his tusks as a stylus while Vyasa was narrating. The story begins on a battlefield, right before a huge war begins, with Arjuna seeking Krishna's counsel. Arjuna is presented with a personal and ethical dilemma since he knows that by fighting in this conflict, he will lose family members, gurus, and friends on both sides of the battle line. The next discussion between Krishna and Arjuna turns into a discussion about the philosophy of life. All of the philosophies and techniques mentioned are simple to apply and adapt into everyday living.

Bhagavad Gita provides a greater opportunity for learning and internalizing the wisdom of this enduring literature. Spending time for reflection on what has been learned and how it relates to your life is the only thing necessary to accomplish. Learners can acquire an advanced grasp of what contributes to a successful leader and what pulls someone back from establishing themselves as a renowned leader, especially, when they will continue to improve their leadership style throughout school, college, and their jobs. In this paper, we tend to focus on specific texts from Bhagavad Gita which provides the contextual perspectives of leadership in order to spotlight the need of integrating it into the school curriculum.

II. RATIONALE

Leadership is an essential ability for middle and high school students to develop. It is crucial to learners' achievement in their learning spaces, as the school-level learners are about to enter a democratic setup. Transformational leaders can have a positive impact on their surroundings and urge their followers to be creative and imaginative in order to make any radical changes, effectively, and qualified, and also make them evolve into future leaders (Sandiasa, 2017). House et al. (1999) described leadership as the individual's ability to influence, motivate, and enable other individuals to contribute to the group's effectiveness and success. Kothari Commission had stressed that in order to make the Indian democracy permanently viable, it is necessary to ensure the

foundations are deeply rooted by the creation of an educated electorate along with a dedicated and competent leadership (Kothari, 1964). NEP (2020) has highlighted that Educational Leadership is one of the primary issues that the Indian higher education system is now dealing with. Leadership ought to be the standard to ensure the smooth operation of institutions.

While the NEP 2020 has also shown a greater emphasis on promoting ancient Indian knowledge. The Bhagavad Gita, as part of one of the world's great epics, Mahabharata, is a timeless and priceless asset of our Indigenous Knowledge System and It was our Indian masterpiece that has to be inevitably recognized by it. Many leaders of the Indian independence movement, notably Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, were inspired by Gita's call for altruistic action, Gandhi even referred to Gita as his 'spiritual dictionary'. According to Rival, leadership is defined as a leader's ability to influence others by instilling positive feelings in the persons he leads in order to achieve the desired outcomes (Rivai, 2012). Leadership is a dynamic practice in which leaders mobilize others to accomplish extraordinary goals (Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Several contemporary leadership concepts like emotional intelligence, situational leadership, character, and integrity, were already being described in the Bhagavad Gita thousands of years ago. The positive contributions of indigenous knowledge to modern India, as well as a good understanding of India's upcoming ambitions in quality of learning, health, and the environment, are particularly given importance in the recent national education policy, and wherever possible, these aspects shall be integrated into the school curriculum in a precise and systematic way, with a focus on indigenous and traditional learning methods. The wisdom of the Gita is presented in the form of slokas which should be chanted in a particular way. As a matter of fact, the Gita is been considered as a complete package of indigenous wisdom, as articulated by the current education policy, and stipulates almost all of the contextual aspects of leadership that contribute to developing successful leaders. Hence, we are exploring the leadership skills from this treasure and

describing its importance of integration in the school curriculum.

III. STUDY QUESTIONS

The authors have taken a deliberate effort to explore leadership through Bhagavad Gita. The direction of exploration is based on the following questions.

- What essential qualities of an effective leader can be explored in the Bhagavad Gita?
- How can leadership qualities be imparted in the school curriculum through Bhagavad-Gita?
- What is the relevance of integrating Bhagavad-Gita in the curriculum?

IV. STUDY APPROACH

Whether or not leadership can be taught, there is no doubt that most great leaders possess a set of essential competencies. These skills can be learned in the same way as any other. Some such indispensable skills are taken into count and described how they are related to leadership.

Focusing qualities of leadership

Through an extensive review of Bhagavad Gita, the author could find the following five elements/qualities required for responsible leadership.

1. **Determination:** It is also referred to as willpower which means not to leave the work in between, A good leader usually stands out because of the determination to follow his or her vision. Determination is a pleasant emotional feeling that entails overcoming barriers to achieve a challenging goal (Wikipedia, 2022). It is a fuel source for the leader that allows him or her to keep struggling for the goals which are set. It is impossible to achieve one's ambitions without determination. In times of difficulty, a committed leader inspires confidence in others, who will rely on the leader's willpower. Determination is a requirement for success because the strength of willingness involved gives the leader, motivation to keep moving forward toward

the actual goal (Sloka-BG 2.41). Many significant events in our life are inseparably tied to our willpower, most notably our ability to overcome difficulties or challenges and succeed in the face of hardship.

Sloka-BG 2.41 reflecting Determination:

व्यवसायात्मिकाबुद्धिरेकेहकुरुनन्दन |

बहुशाखाह्यनन्ताश्चबुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम् || 41||

vyavasāyātmikābuddhirekeha kuru-nandana

bahu-śhākhāhyantāśh

cha

buddhayo 'vyavasāyinām

Translation- The intellect of those who are on the spiritual path is determined, and their aim is single-pointed. But the intellect of those who are irresolute is infinitely-branched(endless).

Interpretation- Attachment is a psychic function. It shows up as the mind gravitating to the object of its attachment, which could be people, sensuous things, prestige, bodily comfort, situations, and so on. So, if thoughts of a particular person or thing come to mind repeatedly, is this an indicator that the mind is attached to it? Is there a role for the intellect in the removal of attachments and impediments in the process of becoming determined?

Human intelligence has the ability to manage the mind. As a result, we must instill suitable knowledge in the intellect and use it to drive the mind efficiently. Buddhi Yoga is the practice of separating the mind from the fruits of one's efforts by cultivating a firm conviction in one's intellect. A person of resolute intelligence who cultivates a standard focus on the mission and travels the path like an arrow shot from a bow. In the later phases of sadhana (practice), this resolve grows so powerful that nothing can stop the saadhak (practitioner) from following the path. Even if there are millions of obstructions in their way, even if the entire world criticizes them, even if they have to lay down their life, they will not give up their sadhana. Those with a multi-branched intellect, on the other hand, find their minds running in several directions. They are

unable to cultivate the mental focus required to continue down the path to destiny.

- 2. Sense of Enjoyment:** Leadership is been considered a passion. Leadership is defined as thinking outside the box, being inventive, and going against the tide. A better level of connection allows a leader to appreciate their profession more thoroughly. When you choose to enjoy your profession, you have more influence as a leader and can make a positive difference in people's lives. Leaders who prioritize happiness are energized and fulfilled by their work, and they also inspire their employees and consumers. Organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and well-being are the three components of work enjoyment (Müller, 2013). Enjoyment, defined as a favorable impression resulting from positive stimuli or a feeling of contentment, is an essential component of a well-balanced life. Enjoyment is understood as the state or process of taking pleasure in something. This is critical because being in harmony implies feeling safe, appreciated, and needed as a member of a group, which includes a learning community. Many studies have shown that enjoyment has a favorable impact on learning and social conduct (Hernik, Joanna, and Jaworska, Elbieta. 2018).

Sloka-BG 2.44 reflecting Sense of enjoyment:

भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानांतयापहतचेतसाम् |

व्यवसायात्मिकाबुद्धिः समाधौनविधीयते || 44||

Translation- With their minds profoundly engaged to material delights, their mindsets puzzled by such things. They lack a strong commitment which is necessary to succeed.

Interpretation- People whose thoughts are oriented to sensuous pleasure are concerned with Bhoga (gratification), and Aishwarya (satisfaction) (luxury). They apply their minds to raise their income and ponder how to expand their material goods and boost their delight. They are unable to build the solid

resolution necessary to traverse the path to Self-realization because they are confounded in this way.

- 3. Ways of Thinking:** It is a word that characterizes a particular mentality or thinking pattern (Entwistle, 2009; Nakamura, 1991). David Sousa (2016), in his book, *How the Brain Learns* made a point of saying that some of the numerous ways of thinking that eventually materialize in our actions and behaviors are creativity, communication, reasoning, intuiting, generalization, anticipation, valuing, and conceiving, according to the study. As commonly proposed by knowledge-to-action models, these ways of thinking promote various tactics for innovation and impact the subsequent actions to tackle challenges (Best & Holmes, 2010).

A successful leader will be able to objectively evaluate the organization or team in which they operate and have a thorough awareness of its strengths, flaws, opportunities, and dangers (and how they as an individual can work to support or overcome these). They'll be able to make corrections as needed and review their work to see how it fits into the wider company strategy and goals. We've witnessed children constantly studying their parents, who serve as 'Leaders,' and consciously or unconsciously adopting all of those attributes just by watching. As a result, a leader must use extreme caution at all times. As a leader, he is the focal point, thus he must always keep in mind that someone is watching him and trying to emulate him, and he must avoid doing anything immoral. Others should be inspired and motivated by the leader who can establish the route and direction for his or her subordinates. A leader must have a clear vision, be able to guide his team through difficult times, stand up for them, motivate them, and bring out the best in them.

Sloka-BG 2.47 reflecting Ways of thinking:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्तेमाफलेषुकदाचन

माकर्मफलहेतुर्भूमतिसङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ 47 ॥

karmaṇy-evādhikāraṣṭemāphaleṣhukadāchana

mā karma-phala-heturbhūrmātesaṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi

Translation- You have the right to carry out your responsibilities, but not with the regard to the outcomes. Don't ever consider that you are to blame for the outcomes of your actions, nor should you be connected to inactivity.

Interpretation- This is such a well-known line from the Bhagavad Gita that even most Indian schoolchildren are familiar with it. The poem contains four directions for the study of work: 1) Perform your duties without regard for the outcome. 2) The consequences of your activities should never motivate you. 3) Give up your executorship pride even while working. 4) Don't get caught up in inactivity.

4. **Tackling the Challenges:** Being a successful leader entails being open to new ideas, opportunities, and viewpoints and realizing that there is no "correct" way to accomplish things. Some challenges are losing an opportunity, Mastering your mind, Failure, Setbacks, etc. Leadership requires the understanding that success requires a willingness to modify how things are done, bringing in fresh eyes to stimulate new ideas, and thinking outside the box as much as possible. Leaders must be able to listen, observe, and adjust their course as needed. A good leadership trait is the ability to make rapid and effective decisions in a crisis without panicking.

In an emergency, the amount of time available to consider what is right and what is not right is significantly reduced. There will be insufficient time to seek out others' ideas, comments, recommendations, and even assistance.

One must make a firm decision on which the situation's success or failure is predicated. It's a potentially life-or-death situation. If one's judgment or action fails, one cannot even estimate the amount of damage that will be caused. As a result, making the correct decisions at such a critical time is a valuable leadership characteristic. In an emergency, some people are unable to think and act quickly. Only good leaders can make the proper decisions, and they will succeed in practically every situation with the main focus on the efforts rather than the outcomes which are not in our hands(Sloka-BG 2.48), which adds another feather to their heads.

Sloka-BG 2.48 reflecting Tackling the challenges:

योगस्थः कुरुकर्मणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ 48 ॥

yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇisaṅgaṁ tyaktvādhananñjaya

siddhy-asiddhyoḥsamobhūtvāsamatvaṁ yoga uchyate

Translation- Be persistent in your duties, letting go of attachments, and being equally at ease in both victory and loss. This equanimity is the process of integrating individual awareness with the ultimate consciousness.

Interpretation- When we realize that the effort, not the outcome, is in our hands, we are just concerned with completing our job. We devote the outcomes to the supreme power. Now, if the outcomes do not meet our expectations, we accept them calmly as the will of that supreme power. We may accept fame and dishonour, victory and defeat, pleasure and suffering as the greatest power in this way, and when we learn to embrace both equally, we gain the tranquillity that was talked about.

It is natural to expect the waves of the ocean to shake the boat if we are sailing in the ocean on a boat. Our miseries would be infinite if we were disturbed every time the boat is hit by a wave. And if we don't try to anticipate the waves to appear, we might as well expect the ocean to change from its natural state.

Waves are an inescapable part of the ocean's ecosystem. Similarly, when we go across life's ocean, we encounter a variety of waves that are beyond our control. We will be unable to avoid unhappiness if we continue to struggle to eliminate negative situations. We will have surrendered to the will of the greatest power if we can learn to accept all that comes our way without compromising our best efforts.

- 5. Taking Initiation:** If there is one characteristic that best defines a leader, it is the willingness to take initiation and appropriately lead others. More than any other quality, the initiative recognizes and characterizes a leader. Taking charge is what drives all successful ventures, both in business and in personal life, ahead (Sloka-BG 2.31).

Instead of forcing the followers alone into the fire and shouting from distance or giving orders to do this or that, he/she should be ready to step into the fire, and encourage and offer strength to the rest to get in.

Lack of initiative frequently has a devastating impact on our efforts, like the one that aimed at establishing a successful organization. Knowing when to act is another important part of taking initiative. Quality leadership is all about making the right decisions at the right time. It has also been proven that persons who take initiative at work are more likely to have successful careers and end up in positions of leadership in society.

Sloka-BG 2.31 reflecting Taking initiation:

स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि |

धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत्क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते || 31||

swa-dharmam api chāvekṣhya na vikampitum arhasi
dharmyāddhi yuddhāch chhreyo 'nyat kṣhatriyasya
na vidyate

Translation- Furthermore, you should not hesitate in your duties as a warrior. There is no better

engagement for a warrior than taking initiation and battling for the maintaining of justice.

Interpretation- According to the Vedas, Swa-dharma is an individual's responsibility. Para dharma, or spiritual responsibilities, and apara dharma, or worldly responsibilities, are the two types of Swa-dharmas, or specified duties for the person. The mandated duty, if one considers oneself to be the soul, is to love and serve God with devotion. This is referred to as para dharma. The Vedas also prescribe obligations for individuals who consider themselves as the body, because the great bulk of humanity lacks this spiritual perspective. These responsibilities are determined by one's ashram (station of life) and varna(occupation). They are known as Apara dharma or ordinary responsibilities. Arjun was a warrior by occupation, and one of his responsibilities as a warrior was to battle for the defence of dharma by taking initiation without any hesitation.

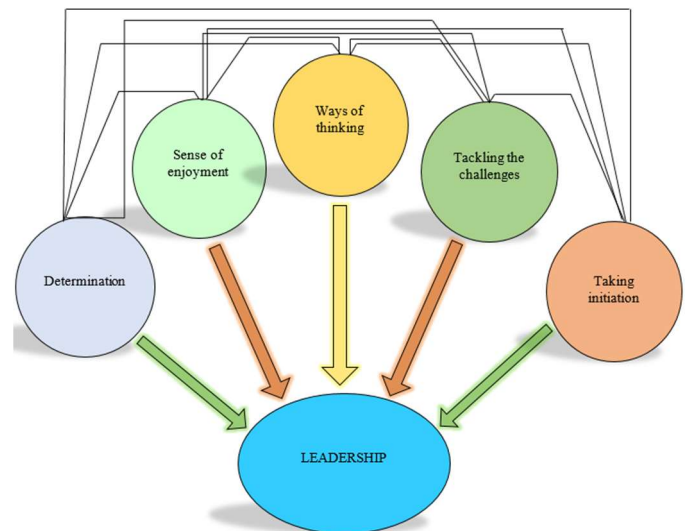


Fig. 1 Skills explored through Bhagavad Gita contributing towards effective leadership (Determination, sense of enjoyment, ways of thinking, tackling the challenges, taking initiation)

V. INTEGRATING BHAGAVAD GITA IN SCHOOL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Curriculum integration is much more than restructuring the topics. Beane, J. A. (1997), In his book, Curriculum Integration: Designing the Core of Democratic Education, the author defines

curriculum integration as a curriculum design concerned with enhancing the possibilities for personal and social integration through the organization of curriculum, based on significant problems and issues without regard for subject-area boundaries Curriculum integration partakes students as active learners who, in most of the situations, takes the decision about what they learn (Brown, 2016). A major practitioner stated that the Curriculum integration takes as its ultimate goal helping learners lead better lives now and also in the future, not just to accumulate more knowledge for future possible use (Springer, 2006). Educators need to be ever mindful of the overarching purpose of successful schools for young adolescents, which is to "enhance the healthy growth of young adolescents as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient young people who are optimistic about the future" (National Middle School Association, 2003). An integrated curriculum's major goal is to create a student-centered curriculum that engages students, improves their learning, and stimulates their interest. The importance of higher-order thinking abilities, cooperative learning, and taking into account the values of other learners is emphasized. Students and teachers cooperate to design lessons that address social issues and student concerns (Vars, 2001). Students could very well notice the material's meaning and purpose when it is taught as part of an integrated curriculum. In addition, students gain a better knowledge of the content (Watkins & Kritsonis, 2011).

Three foundations should be considered while building an integrated curriculum: (1) psychological, (2) sociological, and (3) philosophical (Vars, 2001). Bhagavad Gita as a package covering all the aspects has been suggested to integrate into the curriculum.

NEP 2020 has thrown light upon incorporating indigenous knowledge along with the indigenous and traditional ways of learning. In a way, the slokas can be practiced by the proper chanting. (Literature on uses of chanting-scientifically).

As an elective or core subject:

Our new edition of education policy also affirmed that students in secondary school will be able to take an engaging course on Indian Knowledge Systems as

an elective, So Bhagavad Gita can not only be integrated into the core curriculum but also can be offered as an elective course to the non-literature students especially in the higher education scenarios

VI. WAYS OF INTEGRATING DETERMINATION, THINKING WAYS, TACKLING CHALLENGES, INITIATIONS, SENSE OF ENJOYMENT IN THE CURRICULUM

Competitions

Various interesting competitions like chanting, reciting and explaining the slokas, extempore, treasure hunt, video documentaries, etc.. can be conducted.

Cultural tours

As part of cultural exchange programs, learners can be taken to the present-day Jyotisar, Kurukshetra district of the state, Haryana. They can locate where the Gita was delivered to Arjuna and relate the happenings described in the Gita.

Planning worksheets

By giving learners to opt-out the ways of completing assignments.

Various methods of reflecting the conceptual knowledge or skills like the projects/posters/essays/presentations/video making/role plays etc are to be selected by the learners. By this, there will be a sense of enjoyment which leads to the enjoyment in learning

Assigning long term projects

This helps the learner to identify the pros and cons along with providing enough time to use the trial-and-error method of learning which places the learner in the position of an investigator and learns to tackle challenges.

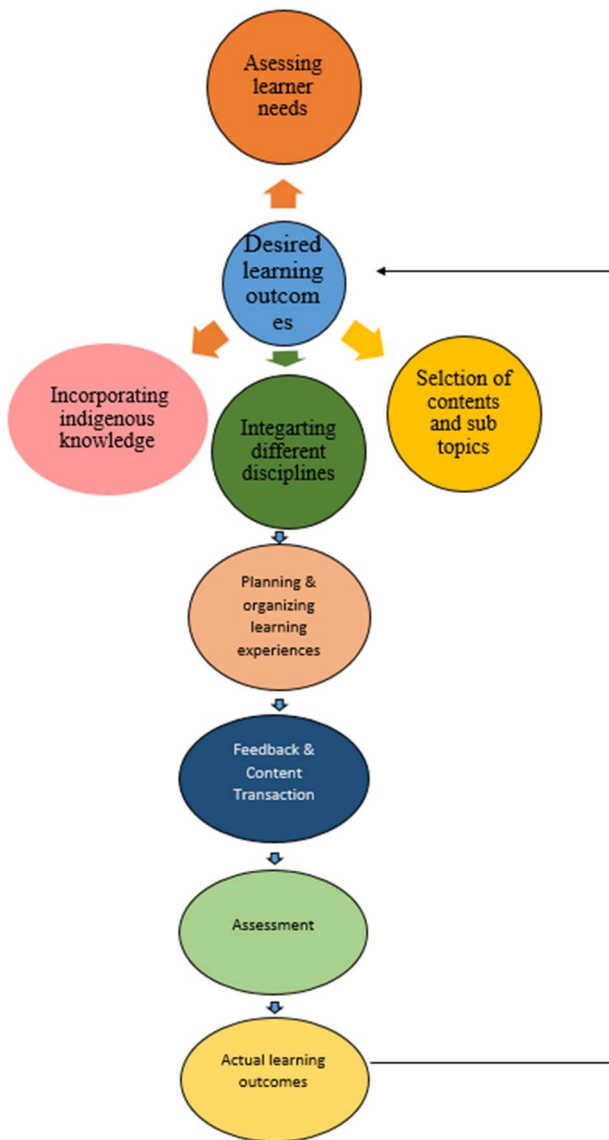


Fig. 2 Proposed Framework

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOL CURRICULUM

- 10-15% of the course syllabus should focus on developing leadership skills
- 3 out of 10% should be dedicated to the theoretical part wherein the learners come to know various freedom movements, struggles, great and worst leadership skills illustrated in the past and their consequences in the long run which impacted the present
- The rest 7% should be the skills that should be incorporated in various activities to be performed and analysis of situations

prescribed in the duration of the course (either through direct or hidden curriculum) etc.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This research examines some of the most important characteristics of good leadership, and it is proposed that they should be incorporated into school curricula to help youth develop effective leadership skills from an early age. These identified qualities are explored from indigenous knowledge as the recent policy on education is also emphasizing integrating Indian knowledge in the present education system. The features discovered via indigenous knowledge have been integrated.

The necessity of the hour is to focus on Determination, Sense of enjoyment, Ways of thinking, Tackling Challenges, and Taking Initiative. Incorporating all of these essential abilities into young children would undoubtedly aid in their development as responsible future citizens in this democratic society. The fundamental goal should be to contribute a modest share to a truly democratic and corruption-free society.

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