


Research Article

Reconceptualising Education: From Learning Styles to Learning Diversity in the context of NEP 2020

Sasmita Maharana ^{1*}, Dr. Praveen Bobby Binjha ²

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India

² Associate Professor, CIET, NCERT, New Delhi, India

Corresponding Author: *Sasmita Maharana

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20036941>

Abstract

For decades, teaching practices were shaped by learning style-based approaches. However, research across disciplines has challenged the idea of fixed learning styles and the effectiveness of matching instruction to them. Instead, it supports the use of flexible and multimodal teaching strategies. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises a shift from traditional practices to approaches that recognise learner diversity. It promotes inclusive, flexible, and holistic education. This paper examines the transition from learning style-based classrooms to practices that foster inclusive learning and the development of 21st-century skills.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 11-04-2026
- Accepted: 29-04-2026
- Published: 05-05-2026
- IJCRM:5(3); 2026: 37-41
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Maharana S, Binjha P B. Reconceptualising Education: From Learning Styles to Learning Diversity in the context of NEP 2020. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(3):37-41.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Learning styles, Multimodal learning, Learner diversity, National education policy 2020, 21st-century skills.

INTRODUCTION

Classrooms in India have traditionally been characterised by a one-size-fits-all approach, marked by uniformity in instructional design, delivery methods, assignments, and assessment processes. Such an approach leaves minimal scope for addressing individual differences and learners’ diverse abilities (Sun & Xiao, 2022; Koenig & Guertler, 2021; Rajak & Dey, 2025). Historically, these classrooms were teacher-centric, where teachers acted as the primary decision-makers, and the emphasis remained largely on what to teach rather than how learners learn. However, with the recommendations of key educational reforms such as the Kothari Commission and the National Curriculum Framework (2005), along with the growing influence of the Constructivism paradigm, there has been a gradual shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach. In this evolving framework, teachers are encouraged to adapt instructional strategies and classroom practices according to learners’ preferences, needs, and abilities (NCF 2005; Schreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014; Mal & Halder Adhya, 2020).

Learners differ significantly in terms of cognitive abilities, pace of learning, competencies in LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) skills, and sensory preferences (Roehr-Brackin et al., 2021). Based on variations in cognitive processing, sensory capacities, as well as biological and environmental factors, individuals have often been categorised into distinct learning styles (Liew et al., 2015; Alwawi et al.,

2026). However, over time, it has become evident that rigid classification of learners into fixed learning style categories is inadequate. Most learners demonstrate flexibility and benefit from multiple learning approaches rather than being confined to a single category (Rohrer & Pashler, 2012; Pashler et al., 2008; Clinton-Lisell & Litzinger, 2024). Recognising these limitations, the National Education Policy (2020) shifts the focus away from rigid learner classification toward creating diversified and inclusive classroom environments. It envisions classrooms as dynamic spaces offering varied, interconnected learning experiences that support the holistic development of learners. Such an approach aligns with the demands of the 21st century, fostering critical thinking, adaptability, and a broad range of skills essential for lifelong learning.

Existing Categories of Learning Styles

Learning styles refer to the individual preferences learners demonstrate in acquiring, processing, and retaining knowledge (Clinton-Lisell & Litzinger, 2024; Pashler et al., 2008; Hattie & O’Leary, 2025). Over time, various theoretical frameworks have been developed to classify learners based on how they approach learning. Some models emphasise indirect influences, such as personality traits or cognitive abilities, while others focus more directly on observable learning preferences and behaviours.

Several well-known models categorise learners into distinct groups, as summarised below:

Table 1: Major Learning Style Models and Their Classifications

Name of the model	Core idea	Number of categories	Name of the categories
Kolb’s learning model	Learning emerges through experience and reflection	4	Diverging: Concrete Experience (CE)+ Reflective Observation (RO)
			Assimilating: Reflective Observation (RO) + Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)
			Converging: Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)+Active Experimentation (AE)
			Accommodating: Concrete Experience (CE)+Active Experimentation (AE)
Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model	Learning depends on how information is perceived and processed	8	Active/reflective learners
			Sensing/intuitive learners
			Visual/verbal learners
			Sequential/global learners
Gregorc Style Delineator	Focuses on how individuals perceive and organise information	4	Concrete sequential learners
			Abstract sequential learners
			Abstract random learners
			Concrete random learners
Honey and Mumford Learning Styles	Emphasises engagement with and application of experience	4	Activist learners
			Reflector learners
			Theorist learners
			Pragmatist learners
Fleming’s VAK model	Based on the preferred sensory mode of learning	3	Visual learners
			Auditory learners
			Kinesthetic learners
VARK model	Extension of VAK with an added literacy dimension	4	Visual learners
			Auditory learners
			Reading/writing learners
			Kinesthetic learners

Although these models offer useful ways to understand learner diversity, research suggests that simply matching teaching methods to a learner’s preferred style does not consistently improve learning outcomes. Instead, approaches that integrate

Multiple modes of instruction tend to be more effective, as they engage learners in varied ways and support deeper understanding (Clinton-Lisell & Litzinger, 2024; Rogowsky et al., 2015; Riener & Willingham, 2010; Cuevas, 2015).

In the context of modern education, particularly with the emphasis on developing well-rounded individuals in the 21st century, a flexible and inclusive teaching approach is essential (Voogt & Roblin, 2012; Care, Griffin, & Wilson, 2018; Marwah, Anisah, & Nurzakiah, 2025; Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019). Classrooms are increasingly diverse, and instructional strategies should reflect this diversity rather than rely on fixed learner categories. In line with this perspective, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates for adaptable and learner-centred pedagogies, encouraging educators to move beyond rigid classifications and adopt more holistic teaching practices.

NEP 2020 Vision Beyond Learning Styles

Educational research suggests that learning does not become effective simply by matching instruction to a single preferred learning style of students (Pashler et al., 2008; Newton & Miah, 2017). Instead, learning outcomes depend on a combination of factors such as the nature of the content, learning context, students' prior experiences, interests, motivation, teaching strategies, and the quality of teacher–student relationships (Bransford et al., 2000; Hattie, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Cardenal et al., 2023). Therefore, categorising learners into fixed learning styles is now widely considered a misconception/neuromyth (Newton & Miah, 2017; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2021; Newton, 2015). This idea is supported by the Dual Coding Theory proposed by Allan Paivio and the cognitive load theory proposed by John Sweller. According to

this theory, the human mind processes information more effectively when it is presented through two interconnected channels: verbal (words) and non-verbal (visuals). The integration of these channels in a relevant and well-integrated manner enhances understanding and retention (Sweller, 1988; Sweller et al., 1998; Paivio, 1990).

Aligned with this perspective, the National Education Policy 2020 aims to transform the Indian education system into a more inclusive and globally competitive framework. The policy emphasises that no learner should be left behind due to differences in learning pace or style. Instead, it promotes a holistic, 360-degree approach to education. Hence, the policy encourages:

- Multilingual education, which supports linguistic diversity and better comprehension.
- Experiential learning, including art integration and sports integration, to make learning more engaging and practical.
- Flexible subject choices, allowing students to develop competencies across disciplines such as arts and sciences, thereby breaking traditional academic boundaries.

These reforms move away from rigid categorisation of learners (such as being only strong in mathematics or languages) and instead promote the development of well-rounded individuals. To support a more flexible and inclusive classroom environment in India, NEP 2020 proposes several key transformations in existing practices. These are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table-2: The shift of India classrooms in NEP 2020 vision-driven classrooms

Existing Indian classrooms	NEP 2020 vision-driven classrooms
Categorising learners as fixed categories	Making learners diverse and flexible
Specific learning modes	Multimodal learning opportunities
Rigid disciplinary education system	Flexible multidisciplinary educational system
Rote memorisation-based learning system	Concept-based, application-based, and problem-solving-based learning system
Using technology as a tool	Integrating technology into the regular pedagogical practices.
Universalised learning experiences	Personalised learning experience
Focus on the summative evaluation system (teacher assessment)	Regular formative evaluation system (self, peer, and teacher assessment)
Basically, cognitive domain-based learning	A holistic learning process that aims at covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, including social, cultural, and environmental domains.

Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020 in Classroom Practices

Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a forward-looking framework for transforming education in India, its implementation at the ground level is likely to encounter several practical challenges.

1. Large Class Sizes and High Student-Teacher Ratio

India's large population makes it difficult to maintain ideal class sizes of 20–25 students as envisioned by the policy. In many schools, often one teacher for nearly 50 or fewer students, which limits individual attention and makes effective classroom management challenging within the limited time available (Times of India, 2025; Press Trust of India, 2025; OECD, 2024; Datta & Kingdon, 2021).

2. Infrastructural and Resource Limitations

A significant number of schools still lack basic infrastructure such as adequate classrooms, proper sanitation, laboratories, and barrier-free access. Additionally, the absence of assistive and adaptive technologies for both general and differently-abled learners creates obstacles in achieving inclusive and quality education as proposed by NEP 2020 (Mangat, 2024; Patra et al., 2025; Ministry of Education, Government of India, n.d.; Das, 2023).

3. Digital Divide

Despite rapid technological advancement, many regions continue to face unreliable internet connectivity and inconsistent electricity supply. These issues hinder the effective integration of digital tools in teaching and learning, limiting the full potential of technology-enabled education (Aneesh et al.,

2024; Baidya & Das, 2025; Laskar, 2023; Xiang & Stillwell, 2023).

4. Resistance to Change in Teaching Practices

Traditional teaching methods, particularly lecture-based approaches centred on the chalkboard, remain widely practised. Shifting from these conventional methods to more interactive and learner-centred approaches requires time, training, and a change in mindset. Resistance to adopting new roles and strategies can slow down the transition envisioned by the policy (Mir et al., 2024; Lomba-Portela et al., 2022; Amin et al., 2025; Wayal, 2024).

4. Overburdened Teachers

Teachers are often assigned multiple non-academic duties such as election work, census activities, mid-day meal management, and administrative tasks. This added workload leads to physical and mental fatigue, reduces instructional time, and ultimately affects the quality of the teaching-learning process (Pacaol, 2021; Choudhari, 2013; Kulkarni et al., 2025; Longmuir & McKay, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Research has consistently shown that effective teaching and learning do not depend solely on aligning instruction with individual learning styles. Instead, meaningful learning occurs when multiple senses are actively and pertinently engaged through varied and rich learning experiences (Mayer, 2009; Fiorella & Mayer, 2015; Nancekivell et al., 2021). In line with this understanding, NEP 2020 emphasises a shift from rigid “learning style” approaches to a broader concept of learning diversity. This approach promotes an education system that is inclusive, flexible, and holistic. It recognises that learners differ in their abilities, interests, and needs, and seeks to accommodate these differences rather than standardise them.

This transition also supports the principle of equity by valuing each learner’s strengths while addressing their limitations to improve overall learning outcomes. The focus is no longer on forcing children to adapt to a fixed system, but on designing a system that adapts to them, making learning more engaging and meaningful. By fostering an enjoyable and supportive learning environment, this approach aims to nurture responsible, capable, and forward-thinking citizens suited to the demands of the 21st century. Achieving the vision of NEP 2020, building a strong and productive nation, requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, educators, parents, and learners alike.

REFERENCES

- Alwawi DA, Madi H, Abu-Dahab SMN, et al. Beyond learning preferences: Exploring the relationship between learning styles and sensory processing among university students. *BMC Med Educ.* 2026;26(1):452. doi:10.1186/s12909-026-08655-4.
- Amin R, Sultana S, Begum A, Tumung M. Impact of NEP 2020 on teacher education in India: Implementation challenges and opportunities. *Int J Adv Res.* 2025;13(11):1379-1388. doi:10.21474/IJAR01/22271.
- Aneesh MR, Maya K, Aneesh KA. Education inequality in India: An empirical analysis using National Sample Survey data. *J Asian Afr Stud.* 2024;59(2):1-15. doi:10.1177/09737030241280145.
- Baidya M, Das P. A critical analysis of the digital divide in the context of NEP 2020 and implementation strategies. *Int J Res Publ Rev.* 2025;6(5):15733-15736.
- Cardenal ME, Díaz-Santana O, González-Betancor SM. Teacher–student relationship and teaching styles in primary education: A model of analysis. *J Prof Cap Community.* 2023;8(3):165-183. doi:10.1108/JPCC-09-2022-0053.
- Care E, Griffin P, Wilson M, editors. *Assessment and teaching of 21st century skills: Research and applications.* Cham: Springer; 2018.
- Choudhari A. Overworked teachers can't provide quality education. *The Times of India.* 2013 Sep 5.
- Clinton-Lisell V, Litzinger C. Is it really a neuromyth? A meta-analysis of the learning styles matching hypothesis. *Front Psychol.* 2024;15:1428732. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1428732.
- Cuevas J. Is learning styles-based instruction effective? *Educ Psychol Rev.* 2015;27(3):451-472. doi:10.1007/s10648-014-9273-1.
- Das S. Inequality in educational attainment: Urban-rural comparison in the Indian context. *Int J Law Manag Humanit.* 2023;6(4):2189-2208.
- Datta S, Kingdon GG. Class size and learning: Has India spent too much on reducing class size? *FCDO Report.* 2021.
- Felder RM, Silverman LK. *Learning and teaching styles in engineering education.* *Eng Educ.* 1988;78(7):674-681.
- Fiorella L, Mayer RE. *Learning as a generative activity: Eight learning strategies that promote understanding.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2015.
- Fleming ND. I’m different; not dumb: Modes of presentation (VARK) in the tertiary classroom. In: Zelmer A, editor. *Res Dev High Educ.* 1992;18:308-313.
- Fleming ND. *Teaching and learning styles: VARK strategies.* Christchurch: Neil Fleming; 2001.
- Hattie J, O’Leary T. Learning styles, preferences, or strategies? *Educ Psychol Rev.* 2025;37(1):31. doi:10.1007/s10648-025-10002-w.
- Honey P, Mumford A. *The manual of learning styles.* Maidenhead: Peter Honey Publications; 1986.
- Koenig E, Guertler K. One size does not fit all. *Engl Teach Learn.* 2021;45(3):303-324. doi:10.1007/s42321-021-00076-4.
- Kolb DA. *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall; 1984.
- Kulkarni R, Pareek P, Mandalika S, Karkera S, Chandrasekar C. Knowledge and awareness of the mid-day meal scheme among parents and teachers. *Cureus.* 2025;17(8):e89988. doi:10.7759/cureus.89988.
- Laskar MH. Digital divide in India. *Front Sociol.* 2023;8:1145221. doi:10.3389/fsoc.2023.1145221.

22. Liew SC, Sidhu J, Barua A. Learning preferences and outcomes among medical students. *BMC Med Educ.* 2015;15(1):44.
23. Lomba-Portela L, Domínguez-Lloria S, Pino-Juste MR. Resistances to educational change. *Educ Sci.* 2022;12(5):359.
24. Longmuir F, McKay A. Teacher workload strain. *Curric Perspect.* 2024;44(4):561-565.
25. Mal BC, Halder Adhya D. Constructivism-based blended teaching learning. In: *Reimagining Indian Universities.* AIU; 2020.
26. Mangat PK. Inclusivity in higher education under NEP 2020. *ShodhKosh.* 2024;5(1):1900-1910.
27. Marwah SS, Anisah AS, Nurzakiah. Inclusive education in the 21st century. *Eduscape.* 2025;3(2):96-109.
28. Mayer RE. *Multimedia learning.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2009.
29. Ministry of Education. *National Education Policy 2020.* New Delhi: Government of India; 2020.
30. Nancekivell SE, Sun X, Gelman SA, Shah P. Learning style beliefs and reasoning. *Cogn Sci.* 2021;45(10):e13047.
31. Newton PM. The learning styles myth is thriving. *Front Psychol.* 2015;6:1908.
32. Newton PM, Miah M. Evidence-based higher education. *Front Psychol.* 2017;8:444.
33. OECD. *Education at a glance 2024.* Paris: OECD Publishing; 2024.
34. Paivio, A. *Mental representations: A dual coding approach.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1990.
35. Papadatou-Pastou M, Touloumakos AK, Koutouveli C, et al. Learning Styles Neuromyth. *Eur J Psychol Educ.* 2021;36(2):511-531.
36. Pashler H, McDaniel M, Rohrer D, Bjork R. Learning styles: Concepts and evidence. *Psychol Sci Public Interest.* 2008;9(3):105-119.
37. Patra D, Dutta M, Bharti N. Educational infrastructure challenges in tribal regions in India. *J Soc Econ Dev.* 2025;27(1):1-12.
38. Press Trust of India. 35% schools in India enrol fewer than 50 students. *Econ Times.* 2025 Feb 25.
39. Rajak KK, Dey NG. Differentiated assessment strategies. *Asian J Educ Soc Stud.* 2025;51(1):17-24.
40. Riener C, Willingham D. The myth of learning styles. *Change.* 2010;42(5):32-35.
41. Rohrer D, Pashler H. Learning styles: Where's the evidence? *Med Educ.* 2012;46(7):634-635.
42. Roehr-Brackin K, Gánem-Gutiérrez GA, Olivera-Smith L, Torres-Marín MT. Cognitive abilities and learning performance. *Lang Awareness.* 2021;30(4):391-412.
43. Rogowsky BA, Calhoun BM, Tallal P. Matching learning style to instruction. *J Educ Psychol.* 2015;107(1):64-78.
44. Schreurs J, Dumbraveanu R. Teacher-centred to learner-centred approach. *Int J Eng Pedag.* 2014;4(3):50-62.
45. Stehle SM, Peters-Burton EE. Developing 21st-century skills. *Int J STEM Educ.* 2019;6(1):39.
46. Sun Y, Xiao L. Differentiated instruction trends. *Educ Stud.* 2022;48(5):1-17.
47. Sweller J. Cognitive load during problem solving. *Cogn Sci.* 1988;12(2):257-285.
48. Sweller J, van Merriënboer JGG, Paas FGWC. Cognitive architecture and instructional design. *Educ Psychol Rev.* 1998;10(3):251-296.
49. Times of India. Report reveals 35% Indian schools enrol fewer than 50 students. *The Times of India.* 2025 Feb 26.
50. Voogt J, Roblin NP. 21st century competences. *J Curric Stud.* 2012;44(3):299-321.
51. Wayal LS. Teacher education reforms in NEP 2020. *Int J Res Technol.* 2024;12(4):150-158.
52. Xiang L, Stillwell J. Rural–urban educational inequalities in China. *Appl Spat Anal Policy.* 2023;16(4):873-896.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–Non-Commercial–No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license. This license permits sharing and redistribution of the article in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, provided that appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and source. No modifications, adaptations, or derivative works are permitted under this license.

About the Corresponding Author



Sasmita Maharana is a Ph.D. Scholar in the Department of Education at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India. Her research focuses on contemporary educational issues, pedagogy, and policy reforms. She is dedicated to academic excellence and contributes to scholarly research through critical analysis, innovative perspectives, and a commitment to advancing the field of education.