



# From Rote Learning to Experiential Learning: A Transition in Pedagogical Approaches within Government Educational Institutions

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## Abstract

Learning in India has traditionally revolved around examination-focused, rote-based methods, especially in government-run schools. While rote learning helps learners memorise content and perform well academically, it often does not allow students to develop their creative skills, think critically, understand concepts, or engage with lessons. Recent discussions on education in India are more focused on moving toward learning that is experiential, child-centric, and skill-based. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and the NIPUN Bharat Mission strongly recommend joyful and experiential learning in classrooms.

This paper analyses the shift from rote learning to experiential learning in Indian public school education systems. Constructivist and progressive theories of education, as articulated by John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, David Kolb, and Paulo Freire, will be discussed. These theories highlight that experiential learning aids learners in comprehending more effectively, promotes independence, allows socialisation, evokes emotion, and enables meaningful knowledge acquisition. In addition, issues related to the introduction of experiential learning methods into school education have been addressed, including infrastructure constraints, large class sizes, examination pressures, inadequate training, and rigid curriculum designs. At the same time, the benefits of experiential learning have been highlighted.

Drawing on the literature, pedagogical analysis, and policy interpretation, the paper shows that experiential learning is more than a pedagogical technique; rather, it is an educational philosophy with the power to transform classrooms into humanistic settings and to enable children's learning. This research concludes that any sustainable change in government schools is possible through learner-centric pedagogical practice.

**Keywords:** child-centred education, foundational literacy, experiential learning, curriculum, rote learning, pedagogy



## **I. Introduction**

The educational process influences not only academic achievement but also students' mental, psychological, social, and moral growth. Traditional Indian education, particularly in government schools, has favoured memorisation and textbook-based teaching over experiential learning. Students often memorise information without grasping its true significance. While rote learning may aid temporary recall, it eventually prevents students from exercising curiosity and imagination, reducing them to passive recipients of knowledge. This approach fosters fear and diminishes learners' interest.

In recent times, there has been a paradigm shift in educational discourse across the globe in favour of experiential and learner-based education. There has been a gradual shift in focus from "what children memorise" to "how children learn." Experiential learning recognises that children learn best when they interact, explore, observe, reflect, participate, and engage with real-life situations.

Since India's independence in 1947, several commissions have been constituted over the past 20 years to design the concept and structure of the country's independent education system. Over time, the central government has increasingly recognised the need for a national policy framework to promote and regulate education in India. Four important national education policies in India have been enacted since independence, beginning with the first in 1968, followed by others in 1986, 1992, and 2020. The latest national education policy adopted by India in 2020 is called the National Education Policy 2020 or 'NEP'. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) strongly advocates experiential, competency-based, and discovery-oriented learning practices. The policy discourages rote memorisation and promotes holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and joyful learning environments. Similarly, the NIPUN Bharat Mission highlights foundational literacy, activity-based learning, and child-centred pedagogies within government schools.

As an educationist engaged in academic mentoring and classroom observation in government schools, the researcher has observed that children respond more positively when learning is interactive, participatory, and experiential. Classrooms where children are encouraged to ask questions, discuss ideas, engage in storytelling, collaborate with peers, and connect learning to everyday life become more inclusive and meaningful. The present paper, therefore, seeks to critically analyse the transition from rote learning to experiential learning in government schools and to explore the pedagogical possibilities associated with this transformation.

## **II. A review of the Literature**

Engaging in "Hands-on Experience" is one of the most effective ways to develop a deeper understanding of any topic. Academic literature indicates that experiential learning offers numerous advantages, including enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as increased learner engagement. Beard & Wilson (2013) contend that experiential learning integrates practical application with theoretical understanding, thereby allowing students to acquire knowledge through authentic experience.

Experiential learning is a core teaching strategy grounded in real-world experience, reflection, and participation. Globally recognised in contemporary times, with greater emphasis on skill development, this approach dates back to John Dewey, who held that education should be based on practical experience and reflection. Dewey (1938) was convinced that meaningful learning takes place through interaction with the environment. David A. Kolb further developed this idea and proposed the Experiential Learning Theory.

Recent educational research shows that experiential strategies significantly boost student motivation and retention, particularly in language and activity-based settings (Yardley, Teunissen, and Dornan, 2012). The literature suggests that experiential learning enhances not only cognitive skills but also emotional, social, and reflective development. Overall, many scholars highlight the shortcomings of rote memorisation and emphasise the value of experiential pedagogies. Dewey (1938) argued that meaningful education arises from experience and reflective engagement rather than mechanical memorisation. Kolb (1984) highlighted that experiential learning facilitates deeper comprehension by engaging learners in the active construction of knowledge. Research on child-centred pedagogy demonstrates that experiential classroom environments enhance learner motivation, participation, communication skills, and conceptual understanding.



Studies in Indian schools indicate that activity-based learning practices significantly enhance children's engagement, particularly in the early grades. The NCF 2005 criticised rote memorisation and promoted constructivist methods that encourage inquiry, creativity, and active involvement. The National Education Policy 2020 highlighted competency-based education, hands-on learning, multilingual teaching, flexibility, and overall development. Additionally, studies of government schools show that experiential strategies such as storytelling, role-playing, group tasks, project work, and peer interaction help create more inclusive and enjoyable classrooms. Within the social structure of our country, a classroom is not merely a place to learn academic concepts; it also teaches children to collaborate, build human connections, learn in peer groups, and develop emotional stability. Thus, experiential learning supports the holistic development of a child.

However, several studies also identify challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teacher training, examination pressure, infrastructural limitations, and inadequate pedagogical resources. The multilevel classrooms in our country are a boon in disguise, yet they also pose a variety of challenges. The present paper contributes to the existing discourse by critically synthesising pedagogical theories, educational policies, and classroom realities associated with experiential learning in government schools.

### III. Objectives of the Study

While serving as a teacher-mentor in the government sector and observing classrooms in urban and rural areas, the researcher noted a common pattern in students' learning across the pre-primary, primary, and junior years. Many studies have focused on how children learn. This study aims to reinforce the belief that children "learn by doing" and to show how this is particularly relevant today, given the focus on Experiential learning in NEP 2020.

1. To understand the drawbacks of memorisation learning methods in government schools.
2. To analyse the meaning and importance of experiential learning.
3. To study various educational theories that support experiential education.
4. To understand the role of experiential learning in today's government schools.
5. To know about the challenges and opportunities of implementing experiential learning pedagogy in India's educational system.
6. To propose various teaching methodologies to encourage learner-centred instruction.

### IV. Learning Approaches: Traditional vs Contemporary

Rote learning primarily focuses on developing oral skills and reproducing learned information when required. It is the process of memorising information through repetition without necessarily understanding its meaning or context. In traditional classrooms, students are often encouraged to memorise definitions, formulae, and textbook content for examinations. This approach rarely involves understanding the concepts. For a very long period in the national educational context, this became an inseparable part of the teaching-learning environment. Rote learning emerged within examination-driven educational systems, where the written reproduction of information largely measured academic success. In schools, the pressure to cover the syllabus, achieve examination results, and maintain rigid classroom discipline has continued to reinforce rote pedagogical practices. The conventional method does not require much personal involvement between the teacher and the learner and, hence, often fails to deliver the desired learning outcomes. Rote learning primarily engages the visual and auditory senses, with limited use of the brain. Characteristics of rote learning include:

- Mechanical memorisation without the component of comprehension
- Teacher-centred instruction with one-way communication.
- Minimal interaction in the classroom without any peer or group learning is an essential component of "Hands-on Experiment."
- Passive learner participation as a recipient of information only.
- Emphasis on examinations where the focus is only on reproducing learned text in a written presentation.
- Lack of conceptual understanding, as memorisation lacks experience.



- Minimal creativity and critical thinking because higher-order learning skills are associated with the application of knowledge.

Although rote learning may help with memorising certain factual information, excessive reliance on such methods often weakens children's analytical abilities and intrinsic motivation to learn.

Experiential learning is the process of acquiring knowledge through direct experience, reflection, observation, participation, and active engagement. It emphasises that learning becomes meaningful when learners integrate knowledge into real-life contexts and actively construct understanding. Classroom transactions involving children in groups or with peers are precursors to achieving the associated learning outcomes. This approach is fundamentally based on the belief that children are not passive recipients to be filled with information; instead, they are active meaning-makers who learn through interaction with their environment. The children are young learners who are associated with task completion responsibilities and show greater involvement and responsible behaviours. Only in such a learning environment may one see the emergence of leadership and balanced individual personas. What makes such learning highly significant lies in its key characteristics, including aspects already highlighted by many scholars.

- Child-centred pedagogy where the teaching strategies are individualised.
- Active learner participation involves engaging all senses and using the brain.
- Reflection and inquiry call for better neural connections. (Schon 26)
- Collaborative learning. (Bruner 39)
- Real-life application. (Piaget 69)
- Critical thinking. (Paul, Elder 4)
- Creativity and problem-solving. (Robinson 41)
- Emotional engagement. (Goleman 43)

Experiential learning transforms classrooms into interactive spaces where children explore, discuss, question, create, and reflect. It helps create the best learning environment in classrooms and engages children wholeheartedly in learning.

## **V.I. Theoretical basis of Experiential learning:**

### **V.I. 1. John Dewey and Learning by Doing**

John Dewey remains a foundational thinker in progressive and experiential education. His educational philosophy emerged as a critique of rigid, authoritarian school systems that treated children as passive recipients of information. Dewey strongly opposed educational practices centred solely on memorisation, mechanical repetition, and examination performance. Such teacher-centred practices were prevalent in Indian classrooms in recent years, particularly over the past few decades. Evolving education policies shifted the paradigm toward contemporary needs and advocated learning skills rather than acquiring only the theoretical part of the subject. According to Dewey, education should not be separated from life. He argued that meaningful learning emerges through direct interaction with experience, social participation, reflective inquiry, and practical engagement with real-world situations. His famous principle of "learning by doing" emphasised that children understand concepts more deeply when they actively participate rather than merely listen to verbal instruction.

Dewey believed that classrooms should be democratic spaces where learners can ask questions, solve problems, collaborate with peers, investigate ideas, and construct understanding through participation. For him, the teacher was not merely an authority figure transmitting knowledge but a facilitator who guides learners towards reflective thinking and experiential understanding. This required personal attachments, too. Dewey's theory is particularly relevant in government schools in recent years, where traditional rote-learning practices often dominate instruction. In many such classrooms, children were memorising textbook content without connecting it to real-life experiences. Deweyan pedagogy seeks to bridge this gap by integrating experience with education. For example, experiential classroom practices inspired by Dewey may include characteristics that foster a highly inclusive classroom environment. The significant practices adopted here are:



- storytelling,
- role play,
- environmental observation,
- activity-based mathematics,
- classroom discussion,
- project work,
- and collaborative learning.

These methods transform learning into an active and meaningful process rather than a mechanical one. Dewey also emphasised reflective thinking as an essential component of education. According to him, experiences become educational only when learners reflect on them critically. Reflection enables children to connect practical experiences with conceptual understanding. Within the framework of NEP 2020, Dewey's philosophy gains renewed relevance because the policy advocates:

- competency-based learning, a critical component
- Experiential pedagogy makes it learner-centric
- flexibility, which allows learners to work at their own pace, and creativity, which involves making the most of the brain.
- joyful classroom engagement promoting empathy and social mingling

Thus, Dewey's theory continues to influence contemporary educational reforms that seek to humanise learning environments and promote child-centred education in government schools. This theory was further strengthened by Kolb's groundbreaking work in 1984. The next section elaborates on this ELT theory to provide a clear understanding.

### V. 1. 2. David Kolb and the Experiential Learning Cycle

David Kolb developed Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which systematised experiential learning into a pedagogical model. Kolb proposed that learning occurs through a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and practical application. Unlike traditional learning models that focus primarily on information transmission, Kolb viewed learning as an active, dynamic process in which learners continuously construct and reconstruct knowledge through experience. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle comprises four interconnected stages, defined below:

#### a. Concrete Experience

At this stage, learners actively engage in an activity or experience. Learning begins through participation rather than passive listening. This approach is particularly important in the foundational years. It is also an integral part of the Montessori educational system, founded by Maria Montessori in 1907. The pedagogy that rests on concrete experience uses specific tools to facilitate hands-on learning. These may include specially designed apparatuses or, in recent years, teaching aids such as the wonder box, science kit, and maths kit, designed by NECRT and SCERT to aid classroom teaching in the primary and junior years, as per NEP 2020 guidelines. These aids are playing a pivotal role in this pedagogy. As a mentor to teachers, the scholar noticed that these aids were highly relevant to achieving students' learning outcomes. All suggested methods that are significant in the promotion of Experiential learning focus on creating a student-friendly atmosphere in the class.

Examples of such practices in classrooms may include:

- science experiments, for upper primary years
- storytelling,
- field observation,
- group activities,
- classroom games,
- and role play.



Concrete experience creates emotional and cognitive involvement among learners. The direct connections to the learning environment also serve as a simulation technique.

#### **b. Reflective Observation**

After participating in an activity, learners reflect upon their experiences. Reflection allows children to think critically about what they observed, felt, or understood. It is also a way for a teacher-facilitator to reflect on how well the learning process was targeted to achieve the outcomes. Teachers may encourage reflection through:

- classroom discussion,
- learner sharing,
- oral interaction,
- questioning,
- reflective writing.

This stage develops analytical thinking and self-awareness. This period can also be used to conduct formative assessments for learning. It is different from the assessment of learning, i.e., cumulative assessments.

#### **c. Abstract Conceptualisation**

In this stage, learners connect experiences with concepts, principles, and theoretical understanding. Children begin to form generalised ideas based on their observations and reflections. For instance, after a practical science activity, learners may derive scientific concepts from their experiences rather than mechanically memorising textbook definitions. Conceptualisation, therefore, transforms experience into meaningful knowledge. At this stage, the development of “higher-order learning outcomes” may be accelerated.

#### **d. Active Experimentation**

The final stage involves applying newly acquired understanding to future situations. Learners test ideas, solve problems, and experiment with concepts practically. In this phase, one can apply knowledge in one's practical life. This stage strengthens confidence, creativity, independent thinking, and problem-solving ability.

Kolb's theory is highly relevant to government school pedagogy, as many learners struggle when instruction is limited to memorisation. Experiential learning offers opportunities for participation, reflection, and application, making learning more inclusive and meaningful. Kolb's cycle also aligns closely with contemporary Indian educational reforms under the NEP 2020, which advocate experiential, competency-based, and learner-centred classrooms. In foundational literacy classrooms, for example, children may listen to stories, discuss characters, connect stories with personal experiences, and create their own narratives.

Such practices reflect Kolb's experiential cycle, in which learning progresses through participation, reflection, conceptualisation, and application. Thus, Kolb's framework offers teachers a practical pedagogical structure for transforming traditional classrooms into interactive learning environments.



## John Dewey's Model of Learning vs. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

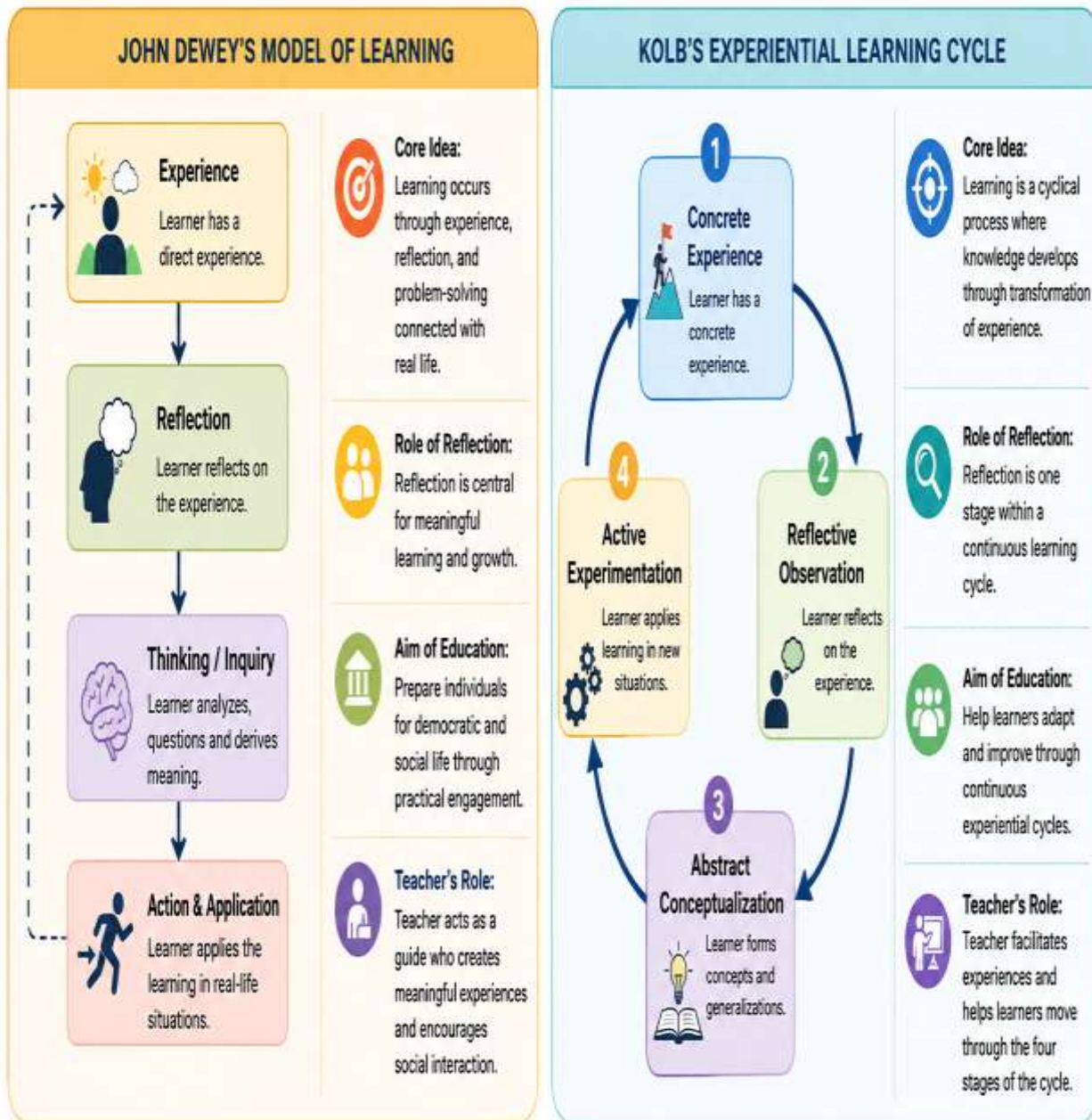


Figure 1: Experience-Based Learning Systems. "Kolb Learning Cycle."

<https://learningexperience.com/themes/experience-learning-cycle>

Encyclopedia Britannica. "John Dewey." <http://.britannica.com//biography/John-Dewey>



## John Dewey’s Model of Learning vs David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle:

Index point	John Dewey’s Model of Learning	David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle
<b>Core Idea</b>	Learning occurs through <b>experience, reflection, and problem-solving</b> connected with real life.	Learning is a <b>cyclical process</b> where knowledge develops through transformation of experience.
<b>Learning Process</b>	Emphasizes inquiry: experiencing → reflecting thinking → acting.	Follows a four-stage cycle: Concrete Experience → Reflective Observation → Abstract Conceptualization → Active Experimentation.
<b>Role of Reflection</b>	Reflection is central for meaningful learning and growth.	Reflection is one stage within a continuous learning cycle.
<b>Aim of Education</b>	Education should prepare individuals for democratic and social life through practical engagement.	Education helps learners adapt and improve through continuous experiential cycles.
<b>Teacher’s Role</b>	Teacher acts as a guide who creates meaningful experiences and social interaction.	Teacher facilitates experiences and helps learners move through the four stages of the cycle.

### VI. Experiential Learning as a part of the classroom transaction

Meghna Dhulla expresses concern about the decline of curiosity in the recent education system in our country. She writes in *Marks over Mind: The Crises of Curiosity in Indian Schools*, “Students quickly learn that asking difficult ‘why’ questions can slow them down in the race for marks. As a result, curiosity is often pushed aside by the pressure to complete syllabi and secure marks” (8). She further notes that as the demands of global employment change, problem-solving ability, creativity, and analytical thinking are the main concerns rather than memorisation of information. This is why NEP2020 focuses on these skills, and schools are introducing competency-based and project-based questions in their classroom transactions. The recent introduction of experiential learning in schools is a significant step in this direction. Experiential learning in government schools can take multiple forms, depending on the classroom context, teachers’ creativity, and learners’ needs. The major practices can be as follows:

#### a. Activity-Based Learning

Activity-based learning encourages children to learn concepts through participation and exploration rather than passive listening. Examples include classroom games, science experiments, role play, group projects, and hands-on activities. Such practices improve conceptual understanding and classroom engagement.

#### b. Storytelling and Language Learning

Storytelling is a powerful experiential strategy that promotes imagination, language development, listening skills, and emotional engagement. Children often participate more actively when stories are integrated into classroom teaching. Storytelling also supports multilingual classrooms by connecting learning with familiar experiences.



### **c. Peer Learning and Collaborative Pedagogy**

Collaborative learning fosters social interaction and mutual support among learners. Peer reading, group discussion, pair work, and collaborative tasks reduce fear and encourage participation. These practices are particularly important in government schools, where learners may have diverse learning levels.

### **d. Experiential Mathematics and Science Learning**

Mathematics and science become more meaningful when linked with real-life situations and practical experiences. Measurement activities, environmental observation, experiments, and problem-solving tasks enable learners to understand concepts more deeply.

### **e. Art-Integrated and Play-Based Learning**

Art, music, drawing, theatre, and play-based activities encourage creativity and emotional expression. Experiential pedagogy recognises that learning is not restricted to textbooks alone. Such methods are especially effective in foundational and primary classrooms.

## **VI. 1. Challenges in Implementing Experiential Learning**

Despite its pedagogical value, experiential learning faces several challenges within government school systems.

### **a. Examination-Oriented Culture**

The dominance of examinations often compels teachers to prioritise syllabus completion and memorisation. Changing an educational environment is a big challenge, as parents, as part of the country's social strata, measure a learner's success through scores. The competitive fabric designed for key carrier fields and bureaucratic positions is marks-based only.

### **b. Large Classrooms**

Overcrowded classrooms make individualised and activity-based teaching difficult. In particular, in private educational institutions in urban areas, teachers are overburdened by the pressure to complete courses, mark students' assignments, maintain classroom discipline, oversee co-curricular activities, handle regular homework, and perform other non-teaching tasks in line with school policies.

### **c. Lack of Teacher Training**

Earlier, many teachers received limited exposure to experiential pedagogies during professional training. In this regard, since the arrival of NEP2020, state governments and central bodies such as NCERT have taken concrete steps to develop training modules for teachers, both in-person and online.

### **d. Infrastructural Limitations**

The lack of teaching-learning materials, adaptable classroom environments, and library resources limits the use of innovative approaches. In recent years, following the implementation of NEP2020, the government has made ongoing efforts to address this shortfall by introducing plans for improved infrastructure development and the annual supply of TLM in Government schools. The 'Kayakalp' plan and 'Project Alankar' in Uttar Pradesh are worth mentioning.

### **e. Time Constraints**

Educators often face substantial administrative responsibilities and time constraints. The freedom to devise classroom strategies that foster skill development and a problem-solving attitude in children has recently come into focus in discussions among policymakers and mentors.

### **f. Resistance to Pedagogical Change**

Traditional beliefs about discipline and learning sometimes create resistance to learner-centred methods. This issue requires a change in mindset and must therefore be treated as a matter of societal commentary. Schools must take frequent steps, such as parent orientations and community meetings, to keep parents and the community informed about current needs.

### **e. Possibilities and Emerging Transformations**

Despite challenges, several positive transformations are evident in government school education. The emergence of various media platforms for sharing best practices and innovative teaching methods within teaching communities is playing a very positive role. Self-motivated teachers can create a catalytic environment and help



social groups spread the best strategies from the classroom. Facebook, WhatsApp, X by Meta, and Instagram are frequently used media for promotion, with broad reach and strong performance in achieving their audience-reach targets.

## **VI. 2. Experiential Learning, NEP 2020 and NIPUN Bharat Mission**

The National Education Policy has placed renewed emphasis on experiential and competency-based learning. The policy emphasises all key aspects of experiential learning, including foundational literacy, critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, and holistic education.

The NIPUN Bharat Mission promotes joyful learning and foundational literacy practices in the early grades. Experiential methods, such as storytelling, activity-based learning, and classroom interaction, are increasingly encouraged. Many government school teachers are developing low-cost teaching-learning materials and implementing innovative classroom practices.

Teacher-led initiatives demonstrate that meaningful learning can occur even in resource-constrained settings. Experiential pedagogy enables teachers to connect the curriculum to children's lived experiences, local environment, and cultural background. This contextual learning strengthens relevance and participation.

## **VI. 3. Pedagogical Suggestions**

The pedagogical approaches that can help to create an Experiential learning in government schools can include the following:

1. Stimulate classroom discussions and questioning to promote the curiosity element in children.
2. Incorporate stories and play-based techniques that prove everlasting effects in learning.
3. Facilitate collaboration-based learning tasks to enhance teamwork strategies.
4. Utilise locally available and inexpensive instructional resources for a better connection within the classroom community.
5. Avoid over-reliance on rote learning as it lacks conceptual understanding.
6. Adopt reflective exercises and learner feedback mechanisms for the regular updating of teaching-learning processes.
7. Conduct experiential learning projects and observation exercises to measure the learning outcomes.
8. Improve teachers' knowledge of constructivist pedagogy, learning in groups and with peers.
9. Ensure a supportive and emotionally secure classroom environment for better emotional quotients in students.
10. Incorporate arts, language, and activity-based learning approaches as the new focus is on a multidisciplinary approach to education, removing all compartmentalisation.

## **VII. Case Study: Experiential Learning and the Transformation of a Rural Learner**

To comprehend the practical significance of experiential learning within government schools, it is essential to analyse the impact of child-centred pedagogical approaches on individual learners at the grassroots level. The subsequent case study, derived from rural classroom realities frequently observed in government schools in Uttar Pradesh, exemplifies the transformative potential of experiential learning methodologies.

### **Case Study of Ankita: A Rural Government School Learner**

Anand Kumar Pandey, Senior Professional and Assistant Director, Quality Unit, SSA, U.P, opines (2024), We are working for the world's most valuable resource-children. We firmly believe, as evidenced by thousands of success stories, that with the right strategies, tools, and coordinated efforts, we can turn this into the greatest success story. And we can do it. Yes! We can change the story.

His statement motivates all the teachers and mentors who work with children, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds. Working at the middle level of academic leadership and providing hand-holding to teachers, we make classroom observation part of our routine. At the same time, subject teaching in our schools allows us to closely monitor the outcomes of best practices in classroom transactions. Below is a case study in which positive behaviour changes in targeted adolescent learners were identified.

*Ankita* (name changed), a Class 6 student at a rural government upper primary school, came from an economically disadvantaged farming family. Her parents were first-generation learners with limited formal



education. Like many children in rural government schools, *Ankita* initially saw schooling as memorising textbook answers and reproducing them in examinations. In traditional classroom settings, she hesitated to participate in discussions and rarely volunteered to answer questions. Reading in English caused her anxiety, and she often remained silent during oral classroom activities. Her learning pattern reflected the consequences of rote-oriented pedagogy, in which children memorise without meaningful conceptual engagement.

However, noticeable changes emerged when experiential learning activities were gradually introduced into classroom teaching. During storytelling sessions, role-play activities, and group discussions, *Ankita* began to participate more actively because learning no longer seemed threatening or examination-centred. The transformation in *Ankita's* participation can be interpreted through the lens of John Dewey's educational philosophy. Dewey argued that learning becomes meaningful when learners actively engage with experiences rather than passively receive information. *Ankita's* confidence increased as classroom learning shifted from mechanical memorisation towards interactive participation. These activities connected learning with her social environment and daily experiences.

For example, during an activity-based environmental studies lesson, students were asked to observe local plants and discuss their uses in village life. *Ankita* participated enthusiastically because the activity was directly relevant to her lived experience. Dewey's principle of "learning by doing" became evident through such contextual, experience-centred classroom engagement. Similarly, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle can also explain her gradual academic confidence. Concrete Experience became part of his learning as *Ankita* actively participated in storytelling, role-play, and observational classroom activities.

In the Reflective Observation, she reflected on classroom experiences through discussion and peer interaction. In the Abstract Conceptualisation stage, she gradually began to understand concepts rather than memorising isolated information. In the Active Experimentation stage, Rani confidently applied her understanding during classroom participation and independent activities.

Over time, teachers observed that she voluntarily participated in reading activities, collaborated more comfortably with peers, and showed greater curiosity in lessons. Her fear of making mistakes decreased significantly as experiential pedagogy fostered a safer, more supportive classroom environment. She learnt to express her views and even connected with teachers and parents. She carved out her own niche in the village and raised awareness among parents, encouraging them to send their children to school regularly. After passing Class 12, she now wishes to pursue a career in the police service.

The case study demonstrates that experiential learning is particularly important in rural government schools, where children may lack exposure, confidence, or academic support outside school. Experiential and collaborative pedagogies help bridge this gap by recognising children's lived realities, local knowledge, emotions, and participation. Rani's experience symbolises that of many rural learners whose potential often remains hidden within rigid, rote-based systems. When classrooms become interactive, democratic, and reflective, learners begin to see education not as fear-driven memorisation but as meaningful engagement with life.

### **VIII. Discussion**

The transition from rote learning to experiential learning marks a significant pedagogical shift in contemporary education. Experiential pedagogy challenges traditional assumptions that learning occurs primarily through memorisation and repetition. Theoretical perspectives proposed by Dewey and Kolb collectively emphasise that learning is dynamic, participatory, reflective, and socially situated. In government schools, experiential learning is particularly important because children often come from diverse linguistic, social, and economic backgrounds. Activity-based and collaborative learning practices create opportunities for inclusion, confidence-building, and learner participation.

The study also highlights that experiential learning does not depend solely on sophisticated infrastructure. Even low-cost strategies, such as storytelling, peer interaction, classroom discussion, role-play, and locally available materials, can significantly transform classroom experiences. At the same time, educational reform requires



sustained teacher support, institutional flexibility, and pedagogical training. Teachers must be seen not merely as transmitters of the syllabus but as facilitators of meaningful learning experiences. Experiential learning ultimately humanises education by recognising children as active participants with curiosity, imagination, emotions, and potential.

### **IX. Conclusion**

The present paper concludes that the shift from rote learning to experiential learning is an essential transformation in contemporary government school education. Traditional memorisation-based practices often constrain creativity, critical thinking, and learner engagement, whereas experiential pedagogy fosters participation, understanding, reflection, and meaningful learning. Theoretical insights from Dewey and Kolb strongly support the idea that education should be learner-centred, interactive, and socially relevant. Policies such as NEP 2020 and the NIPUN Bharat Mission have further strengthened the need for joyful, activity-based, and competency-oriented education within government schools. The study emphasises that educational transformation need not require expensive infrastructure. Instead, meaningful change can emerge through reflective teaching practices, collaborative learning, storytelling, experiential activities, and child-centred pedagogy.

As an educationist associated with government school academic environments, the researcher believes that experiential learning has the potential to create more inclusive, democratic, and humanised classrooms where children learn not merely for examinations but for life itself.

### **X. Declaration of Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare that they have no financial interests or personal relationships with members of the study's concern that may influence the findings of this study.

### **XI . Acknowledgement**

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