

COGNITIVE STYLES & CULTURAL STYLES

Dr.Felvia Shanthi Ph.D *

Abstract

Keywords:

Cognitive Styles;
Cultural Styles;

The unique ways in which students learn and teachers teach along with or learning and teaching styles are closely related to cultural values and personality types. Matching preferred styles can prevent school failure, enhance success, and motivate students to stay in school and develop talents to their fullest. Making teaching experience more satisfying for educators may lead to increase the effectiveness of educational programs by matching students' preferred styles. Virtues and Philosophies of life are reflected by cultural styles that are highlighted by families and communities. By the time children attend school, they have developed specific cultural and cognitive styles that are related to how they like to learn and how they process and retain information. The challenge to improve the Indian system of education facing parents, educators, and social scientists is enormous. As Indian society and its economy become more complex, the demand for well educated, flexible, adaptable citizens becomes more pressing. The individuality of students and teachers needs to be acknowledged and recognized, and educational environments that recognize, respect, and promote this individuality need to be developed. Ultimately, when a student mingles with his society, the so called corrupted society only wins.

Copyright © 201x International Journals of Multidisciplinary Research Academy. All rights reserved.

Author correspondence:

Dr.P.Felvia Shanthi M.A., M.A., M.Sc., M.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D., PGDCA,
Prof & Head, School of Education, VISTAS, Chennai 600 117.
eMail: shanthi125f@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The unique ways in which students learn and teachers teach along with or learning and teaching styles are closely related to cultural values and personality types. Matching preferred styles can prevent school failure, enhance success, and motivate students to stay in school and develop talents to their fullest. Matching students' preferred styles can also make the teaching experience more satisfying for educators and can increase the effectiveness of educational programs. However, as Indian society becomes more complex and diverse, schools and teachers are finding it more difficult to identify and match the preferred cultural and cognitive styles of students. Cultural styles reflect virtues and philosophies of life that are emphasized by families, communities, and cultures. As one component of learning styles, they serve as guideposts or markers that children use as they move through life in search of the careers and the life goals they find meaningful and fulfilling. A second major component of students' unique learning styles and teachers' instructional styles is cognitive styles. These are styles of personality that determine how students like to learn, the ways in which they prefer to relate, the types of rewards that make success in school meaningfully the preferred manner of communication, and leadership style.

* Professor and Head, School of Education, VISTAS, Chennai 600 117, India.

Cognitive styles are related to cultural styles through the process of socialization and instruction by parents, other authority figures, and cultural experiences in the home and community. By the time children attend school, they have developed specific cultural and cognitive styles that are related to how they like to learn and how they process and retain information. These cultural and cognitive styles may or may not be compatible with their instructors' teaching styles and the cultural styles emphasized by the schools they attend. Some cultures and families emphasize emotional IQ, or the importance of understanding people and relationships, being a helpful and spiritual person who is a contributing member of a family and society. Instruction by adults is largely done by modeling and demonstration simultaneously discouraging deviation from set practices and procedures. Other families and cultures tend to emphasize the value of traditional educational skills such as reading and math, focusing on the individual and the importance of the individual is over that of the group. Instruction in these families is largely transmitted through trial-and-error learning where the child is encouraged to learn and work independently. It is argued that the ultimate goal of education should be to identify the uniqueness of learners in order to match the individuality of expression in learning environments. Specifically, the goal should be to match preferred student styles and worldviews in order to ensure enthusiasm for learning and success, thereby enhancing the adaptability and flexibility necessary to live happily and meaningfully in a diverse society and a global world.

2. Cultural Styles

Manuel Ramirez and Alfredo Castaneda's theory of cultural and cognitive styles flexibility proposes that cultures, communities, and families hold certain belief systems and perspectives on the meaning of life, identified as cultural styles, which can be classified on a traditionalism-modernism continuum. Bicultural or multicultural styles are considered to represent a combination of traditional and modern views. Examples of three major dimensions of traditional and modern styles are presented in

Table 1: Traditional and Modern Cultural Styles

Focus of Belief	Traditional	Modern
Creation of the Universe	Sacred	Rational
Primary Life Goal	Salvation	Living life to the fullest
Characteristics of the "Good Person"	Caring & Compassionate "Role Model"	Self determination or freedom to pursue Life goals.

The traditional-modern belief systems dichotomy was introduced by Robert Nisbet to conceptualize a conflict in societal ideology that emerged at the end of the 19th century. The conflict was given form by the democratic revolution and the Industrial Revolution. These worldviews define different perceptions of reality. For example, the view of creation of the universe has been couched recently as intelligent design, or creationism, versus evolution. Another example is the perspective of the primary life goal, characterized by some as seeking salvation in the afterlife and by others as attaining meaning and fulfillment in the present life. Another way of understanding how cultural styles influence individuals is the measure of a "good" person. Cultural styles are transmitted or moderated through socialization and the educational practices of parents, communities, and cultures. By the time children first encounter educational environments, they have developed preferred cultural styles that either match or do not match the preferred cultural styles of teachers, as well as the educational practices and programs of the schools they attend.

3. Cognitive Styles

To ensure student success in educational settings, it is important to match their cultural styles and their personality styles. Educators are encouraged to become sensitive to the manner in which students approach new learning situations and to their motivation to learn. The type of relationship students prefer to have with teachers is also important, as is the types of rewards that encourage learning and retention. Cognitive styles have five major components: Relational styles, Communication styles, Motivational styles, Learning styles, and Teaching & Supervisory styles. The three major cognitive styles identified by Ramirez and Castaneda are as follows:

1. Field independent—this personality style is characterized by a formal manner of relating to others (including both peers and teachers).
2. Field sensitive—this style is characterized by a tendency toward a more personal and informal style of relating to others.
3. Bicognitive—this last style is characterized by the ability to switch personality and cultural styles depending on the learning challenge or situation encountered.

Some examples of some classroom behaviors related to field independent and field sensitive styles are presented in Table 2.

Table: 2 Learning Behaviour

Instructional Relationship to Teacher	
Field Independent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Likes to try new tasks without teacher's help 2. Seeks nonsocial rewards such as gold stars
Field Sensitive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seek guidance and demonstration from teacher 2. Sees rewards such as praise, which strengthen relationship with teacher.

4. Thinking Style

Field Independent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focuses on details and parts of things 2. Likes discovery or trial-and-error learning
Field Sensitive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focuses on the global nature of concepts of ideas 2. Prefers discovery of concepts in humanized, personalized and story format.

Research on development of individual differences in cognitive styles indicates that socialization practices play a key role in determining learning behavior preferences in children. The teaching styles of parents and other family members and the types of learning behaviors encouraged in families seem to contribute to the development of preferred learning behaviors. For example, one family may emphasize the importance of people, such as how people relate to each other and their respective roles in the family. The child in this family may learn about motivation and about why people do certain things in certain ways. For this student, a close interaction between teacher and learner is encouraged. These children may learn many things by modeling what they see older people doing. These children develop the skills of what has been come to be known as emotional IQ. Another family may encourage their child at an early age to find things independently. Children from such families may have learned to work out problems by trial and error. They will enjoy experiments with new materials and new games, but may not enjoy learning concepts requiring careful and exact observation and imitation. They may not learn to be a part of a group as children from the family described previously.

5. Assessment and Testing

As testing has become an indispensable component of the Indian educational system, it has also become a barrier to individualization of instruction and to a culturally democratic education. Cultural and cognitive styles in students can be mismatched by standardized administration procedures as well as mismatch of the content and structure of the assessment instruments. Mismatch through testing can lead to inaccurate conclusions regarding level of curriculum mastery and general intellectual ability. These two issues have become salient and gone are the years of the emphasis on testing related to Education for All program. Teachers have been forced to "teach to the test" as administrators focus on school test performance scores for teacher evaluations, salary increase, and recognition. This forces teachers to remain with a independent type of curriculum and teaching strategies, thereby overlooking individual and cultural differences in their students. Ultimately, there is a double threat of mismatch: first, between the teacher and student, and second, between the teacher and the test-oriented curriculum. When teachers are forced to "teach to the test" opportunities for collaboration between children and teachers on creative classroom projects are lost. In one extreme, creative science or art projects, which encourage comparing classroom work to real problems, are considered secondary to rote and mechanized drills. For example, when teaching about the weather, students could be encouraged to play the role of meteorologists who predict and chart weather patterns rather than just memorizing information. Regarding procedures of administration for tests and evaluation instruments, research has found that field sensitive and traditional children do best under conditions in which the administrator befriends them and presents the testing situation as a game rather than the more formal and distant conditions usually suggested for test administration. Additionally, children who are mismatched by testing procedures and instruments can be barred from promotion or graduation. They are incorrectly diagnosed as mentally retarded or learning disabled. However, the cultural and cognitive flex

system of education would argue that the answer to educational reform does not necessarily lie with the privatization of education, but rather with the way teaching is usually executed, with what is emphasized in learning environments, and with the way schools are organized. The objective is to eradicate factory-model schools and the one-size fits- all mentality. When students are provided with personalized, challenging, and meaningful experiences, they are allowed to use their preferred cultural and cognitive styles gradually learning to unfamiliar styles without negative consequences. Flexibility of learning is a necessity in our new society, as adaptability is to working with people from diverse backgrounds. In a leadership research study, leaders of ethnically mixed groups, who vary in cultural and cognitive flex, were asked to make every effort to reach group consensus on solutions to group problems that were impossible to solve. These leaders were observed and rated on effectiveness of effort. The findings supported the hypothesis that leaders who were more culturally and cognitively flexible were significantly more likely to use effective behaviors such as establishing group cohesiveness, soliciting the opinions of all group members, and establishing a direction for the group than the leaders who had scored lower on flexibility measures.

The challenge to improve the Indian system of education facing parents, educators, and social scientists is enormous. As Indian society and its economy become more complex, the demand for well educated, flexible, adaptable citizens becomes more pressing. The individuality of students and teachers needs to be acknowledged and recognized, and educational environments that recognize, respect, and promote this individuality need to be developed. Ultimately, when a student mingles with his society, the so called corrupted society only wins.

References

- [1] Castaneda, A. (1984). Traditionalism, modernism, and ethnicity. In J. L. Martinez & R. H. Mendoza (Eds.), *Chicano psychology* (2nd ed.). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- [2] Cox, B. G., & Ramirez, M. (1981). Cognitive styles: Implications for multiethnic education.
- [3] In J. A. Banks (Ed.), *Education in the 80s: Multiethnic education*. Washington, DC: National Educational Association.
- [4] Ramirez, M., & Castaneda, A. (1974). *Cultural democracy, bicognitive development and education*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.