

Experiential Learning in the Contemporary World

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Abstract

Experiential learning is a cutting-edge approach recently received attention from the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India. In this learning strategy, students are encouraged to think, reason, ask questions, make decisions, and use what they have learned in their daily activities through experiences. Additionally, it can help students to connect theory with practical application, which motivates them to retain what they have learned. The idea behind experiential learning is that learning and processing new information is primarily influenced by an individual's life experiences, education, and employment. The experiential learning approach was created by David Kolb in 1974 and published in 1984. The experiential learning cycle is the learning process whereby information is created through experience. The four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle are Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Using an experiential learning strategy contributes to student learning outcomes and makes their learning joyful and meaningful. As a result, students can construct their knowledge based on their experiences during the learning process. Students are intimately involved in the learning process. This paper highlights the theory of experiential learning and its salient features.

Keywords: *Experiential Learning, National Education Policy 2020, Holistic and Concrete Experience*

Introduction

Every country's economic and social progress is built on education. In several nations, scholarly attention has recently been centered on the problem of educational innovation. Thus, educators and teachers must seek a more upgraded and advanced teaching and learning method to fulfill the present demand in teaching and learning practices. There is a need to change pedagogy from a content-based approach to a competency-based one. Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-

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oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, and enjoyable (MHRD, 2020). Experiential learning is recognized in this trend as a valuable strategy that can aid in resolving issues with instructional strategies. It is a cutting-edge approach recently received attention from the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India. NEP 2020 states ... “In all stages, experiential learning will be adopted, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, story-telling-based pedagogy, among others, as standard pedagogy within each subject, and with explorations of relations among different subjects.” Learning designs are changed to become learner-centered rather than teacher-centered through experiential learning.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an approach that involves students in first-hand experience and personal reflection in order to enhance knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and increase their capacity to give back to the community (Rukhsana et al., 2022). Student-centered learning can be supported through the use of experiential learning. As a result, pupils can build their knowledge based on what they have learned so far (Kolb, 1984). The learning process involves students quite actively. Teachers may achieve more if they are open to new ideas and eager to embrace innovations. Students are encouraged to think, research, ask questions, make decisions, and use what they have learned in their daily activities through experiential learning (Rukhsana et al., 2022). This teaching strategy can help students connect theory to practical application, stay motivated, and retain what they have learned.

According to Fry, Ketteridge, and Marshall (2009) as well as Kolb & Kolb (2009), experiential learning is a comprehensive educational philosophy that is founded on the idea that a person’s life experiences, education, and employment all have a significant impact on how well they acquire and comprehend new information. The experiential learning approach was created by David Kolb in 1974 and published in 1984. The experiential learning cycle is the learning process whereby information is created through experience. The cycle is based on the premise that learners must interact with their environment individually and handle conflict, which connects to other concepts of personal growth and knowledge creation (Vince, 1998). The four stages of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle are Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation (Kolb, 1984). The cycle of learning in which experience is translated through reflection into the concept, which is then used as a guide for an active investigation. The four stages of experiential learning, according to Kolb, are as follows:

Concrete Experience: The learner has a tangible experience at the start of the first cycle, which could be either learning something entirely new or experiencing something in a new way. In this phase, pupils are given a job to complete individually or in groups. In contrast to passive learning, which requires students to read, active learning requires actively participating in team games, problem-solving activities, discussions, practical exercises, and debates.

Reflective Observation: The cycle's following phase, which is all about reflection, is crucial. After engaging in a tangible experience, the learner should reflect on what transpired or observe others engaging in the same activity. At this level, students review the assignment from the first stage and reflect on their previous work. Groups and individuals must communicate. Observations, writing reports or diaries about what happened, providing input to others, or quiet thoughts are all appropriate activities during this period.

Abstract Conceptualization: After the learner has thought about their substantial experience, it is time to make meaning of their experience and reflections (Kolb, 1984). Learners formulate a plan of action, consider their next steps toward improvement, or seek guidance from experts or authors of relevant literature. It enables them to generate fresh ideas or alter previously formed abstract concepts so that they can act later. At this stage, students must comprehend and make connections between the events by drawing analogies between what they have done and what they already know to make sense of what happened. These might come from a textbook, models they have learned, ideas from classmates, or things they have seen. Activities for this stage include presenting models and giving theories of giving facts (Linh et al., 2017).

Active Experimentation: Experimentation that is currently underway is the final stage. It indicates that students put the knowledge they have gained from the previous stage into practice. Students benefit from this type of practice by gaining new knowledge that they can use to make predictions about what to do next or what course of action needs to be changed. Case studies, role-playing, planning, and problem-solving are all possible activities for this level. Learners can guarantee more muscular retention of information by allowing them to test their knowledge practically.

Kolb's four stages are presented as a cycle of experiential learning. The cycle is open to learners at any point. Consider a class of students who are studying how to utilize computer-aided design software. One learner might start their education by watching others using it. Another student can begin by reading up on the course. However, another student might begin right away and try out using it. According to Kolb, students naturally favor specific ways to begin the experiencing cycle. Kolb noted that our inherited tools, specific prior experiences, and the demands of our environment all contribute to developing a preferred manner of choosing (Kolb, 1984).

Experiential Learning in the Contemporary World

Students must be prepared in today's classrooms to contribute to and lead local, national, and international societies and to apply their knowledge to the realities of the contemporary world. Experiential learning is a critical component of modern classroom instruction that helps students do better academically. According to Linh et al. (2017), experiential learning is recommended for every classroom because:

- “Experiential learning gives students the freedom to explore their interests and solve difficulties as they come up in real-world settings. Experiential learning shows how math, physics, and other subjects are used in real-world situations.

- Another benefit of experiential learning is allowing children to experience “failure” in its most proper form and learn how to overcome obstacles. When students eventually figure something out, they can be proud of themselves because they discovered how to do it independently, not because someone else gave them the solution.
- Instead of using a predetermined formula to arrive at a solution, experiential learning encourages collaboration and allows students to develop their distinctive approach.
- Using play as a practice ground for real-world scenarios, children can learn assertiveness, social skills, leadership traits, and how to resolve group conflict through role-play. Learning includes developing life skills in addition to academic interests.
- It is crucial to recognize that children can teach us things as well. Children often make fascinating observations because they still learn how the world functions and where they fit in it”.

Role of Teacher during Experiential Learning

Teachers are essential in facilitating and directing the learning process during experiential learning. During experiential learning, teachers play the following essential roles:

Facilitator: The teacher plays the role of a facilitator by fostering an environment that encourages experiential learning. They prepare the environment for the experience, offer the necessary tools, and establish the parameters for inquiry and introspection.

Guide: Teachers assist students in their learning experience by giving directions, outlining goals, and providing assistance as needed. They make sure that students know the experience’s goal and assist them in drawing connections between it and the desired learning results (The Scots College, 2018).

Designer: Teachers create and organize hands-on learning activities that align with predetermined learning objectives. Through practical investigation and experimentation, they design experiences to encourage students to actively interact with the material, acquire skills, and discover new perspectives. **Observer:** Teachers closely monitor their students’ activities, behaviors, and interactions as they engage in experiential learning. They can evaluate group and individual progress, spot obstacles or misunderstandings, and give prompt comments by simply watching.

Reflective Practitioner: Reflection is a crucial part of experiential learning. Teachers guide reflection periods where students can evaluate their experiences critically, pinpoint significant lessons learned, and relate them to more general ideas or practical applications. Teachers prompt students’ thinking, promote discussion, and assist them in deriving meaning from their experiences (Wurdinger& Carlson,2010).

Motivator: Teachers encourage and inspire their charges to actively engage in experiential learning. They cultivate a welcoming and motivating environment that promotes interest, involvement, and a sense of control over the learning process. Teachers promote the importance of experiential learning by praising and rewarding student accomplishments.

Evaluator: Teachers evaluate their students' learning throughout and after the experiential learning process. They evaluate student progress and the success of the experiential learning activities using several assessment techniques, such as observations, portfolios, presentations, or written reflections(Northern Illinois University, OTC, 2011).

Overall, the teacher's role in experiential learning is to support students as they explore, reflect on, and apply the knowledge and skills they have learned through practical experiences by serving as a facilitator, mentor, and guide. By utilizing experiential learning, educators may create learning opportunities for students that are both highly engaging and pertinent, reinforcing their reputation as a teacher of choice for preparing students for the workforce of the real world. Additionally, it can assist educators in creating learning and reflection activities that let students learn according to their chosen learning styles. Experiential learning makes sure that students acquire abilities that improve their employability and maximize their prospects of success in the future.

Experiential Learning for Students

Experiential learning benefits students by allowing them to quickly apply what they have learned to real-world situations, which helps them to retain. As students are more enthusiastic about learning in practical situations, it can help increase motivation. Reflective learning is encouraged through experiencing learning, which enriches and deepens the learning process. Because experiential learning frequently involves teamwork, students can employ their preferred learning style after the experience and improve teamwork. Through authentic, meaningful real-world practice and the chance to network with peers and possible employers, experiential learning offers possibilities to prepare for future employment. Experiential learning emphasizes active participation and real-world experiences to help students gain information, skills, and understanding(Wurdinger& Carlson, 2010). For students, experiential learning provides a variety of advantages, such as:

Active involvement and engagement:By integrating students in practical activities, experiential learning promotes active participation and engagement. Their desire and interest in the material are increased by this active participation, which results in more in-depth learning and knowledge retention. Students can apply theoretical ideas in real-world situations by participating in practical experiences. It enables them to grasp how information and abilities are relevant and helpful in practical circumstances, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Multisensory Involvement and Higher Order Thinking Skills Development: Senses, such as sight, hearing, and touch, are stimulated by experiential learning, which enhances memory and retention. Students actively engage in activities to develop stronger brain connections, enhancing information retention and recall. The development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities is facilitated by experiential learning. Students are inspired to analyze, assess, and resolve problems in the real world through practical experiences. They gain the ability to think creatively, adapt to various circumstances, and make thoughtful decisions.

Development of Collaborative and Communication Skills: Collaboration and communication skills are developed through experiential learning activities. Students pick up skills for teamwork, communication, and listening to others to solve problems. These abilities help students prepare for future employment and are essential in professional settings.

Development of Emotional Intelligence and Empathy: Interacting with various people and situations is critical to experiential learning. Through this exposure, students improve their emotional intelligence and empathy while learning more about various viewpoints, cultures, and societal challenges. They develop greater empathy and sensitivity to the wants and struggles of others.

Self-assurance and Personal Growth: Through experiential learning, students are inspired to take chances, discover new things, and conquer obstacles. As they succeed and gain knowledge from their mistakes, their confidence increases. In addition to encouraging self-reflection and self-awareness, experiential learning fosters personal growth and development.

Career readiness: Students involved in experiential learning gain real-world knowledge and abilities that will be useful in their future employment. They receive exposure to actual workplaces, develop industry-specific competencies, and expand their network. This improves their employability and prepares them to transition smoothly from school to work.

Importance of Experiential Learning in the Contemporary World

In our contemporary environment, experiential learning is significant for the reasons listed below:-

- **Accelerates Learning:** By enabling active participation, supplying relevant circumstances, facilitating reflection and feedback, encouraging problem-solving abilities, forming emotional connections, and encouraging collaboration, experiential learning speeds up learning. Learners can better understand concepts, hone critical thinking abilities, and apply what they have learned to real-life circumstances by combining theoretical knowledge with practical experiences.
- **Ensures a Safe Learning Environment:** Active participation, risk assessment, feedback, teamwork, and real-world context are all stressed in experiential learning. Including these components encourages safety by allowing students to advance their capacity for critical thought, risk management, and environmental awareness.
- **Bridging the gap between theory and practice:** The main feature of experiential learning is “learning by doing,” which allows the students to put what they have learned into practice first-hand. It is essential to help them to remember concepts and ideas.
- **Produces Provable Mindset Changes:** There needs to be more teaching techniques that can significantly change the student’s mindset. Experiential learning can change the mindset of the students since the students learn their lessons by experiencing.

- **Increase Engagement Level:** The strong emphasis on teamwork and sharing knowledge helps the participant and raises engagement levels. On the other hand, the level of ownership of the outcome is high because the participant is directly involved in the problem-solving action or event.
- **Facilitates Personalised Learning:** Each program should allow students to move through the following stages: assessment, teaching and learning strategies, and curriculum selection. The concept of experiential learning is very effective in addressing these needs and enabling personalized learning. It represents a significant break from conventional teaching strategies and extends learning outside the classroom. The participants determine the rate of learning.
- **Utilise Competency-based Assessment:** Competency-based learning requires informal assessment. Observations, portfolios, anecdotal records, projects, and assignments are how students' learning can be assessed during experiential learning. It engages the students in the process of learning.

Conclusion

Experiential learning is a dynamic and transformative approach to education that goes beyond traditional classroom instruction. It recognizes that learning is not limited to textbooks and lectures but is best achieved through hands-on engagement and reflective thinking. It provides students a chance to experience the aspects of the concept and identify anything by experiencing it. Most schools in the nation follow the conventional teaching approach, which is inappropriate today. New teaching tactics and methodologies must be implemented in every classroom throughout the complex world to improve academic results and address fundamental issues. Research concerning the effect of experiential learning found that the experiential learning strategy is more effective than the conventional teaching approach (Shivani, 2018 & Seerat, 2014). NEP2020 advocated adopting this strategy for preparatory-stage students, which will increase their critical thinking and problem-solving ability (MHRD, 2020). Experiential learning has become increasingly relevant in a rapidly changing world that demands adaptable and skilled individuals. It nurtures a love for learning, fosters a deeper understanding of concepts, and equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed in their personal and professional lives.

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