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# Meta-Analysis on Experiential Learning in Management Education Shahanaz, D.

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Pedagogical reforms are taking place in higher education, of late, where instructional methods are been complemented with experiential learning. To enable active learning of students and develop a 'spirit of enquiry' experiential learning methods are being practiced wherein learners discover and construct knowledge of their own. Among many disciplines in education, management education, due to its applied nature has become more appropriate discipline for the use of experiential learning pedagogies than others with stronger theoretical orientations. In the light of above, the paper makes a humble attempt to review the studies on role of experiential learning in management education. In this attempt, a variety of experiential learning methods, popularly classified as classroom centric and field centric methods are identified and discussed. While conceptual studies endorse the significance of experiential learning methods in management education, the empirical studies vouch positive learning outcomes through experiential learning techniques. The paper also captures serious gaps in previous studies in terms of coverage of issues, scope for application (in different management courses) and geographical context of institutions (where the researches have been carried out).

#### Introduction

Capturing the attention of students has never been more difficult than today's academic environment. As members of Generation Y, students have lived their entire lives with technology. They desire interaction and stimulation and they thrive in an environment where they are challenged. Student engagement has become more important than ever because their attention spans are shorter (Tanner et al., 2012). Consequently education is undergoing pedagogical reforms where instructional learning methods are complemented with experiential learning methods. The focus of instructional learning is on offering courses and transferring knowledge.

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whereas experiential learning focus on creating an environment that allow learner to discover and construct knowledge of their own (Reynolds & Vince, 2008). This trend is observed in management education as well. The applied nature of business education has become more appropriate discipline for the use of experiential learning pedagogies than one with a stronger theoretical orientation. The present paper attempts to provide a conceptual understanding on experiential learning and discusses the usage of latter in management education and learning and its impact thereupon.

## Organization of the Study

The study is presented under four sections: section 1 gives an overview on experiential learning and its model and different learning styles, section 2 covers conceptual studies on experiential learning in management education followed by section 3 with empirical studies, section 4 summarizes the findings and section 5 discusses the scope for future research.

## Section 1: Overview on Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning (EL) is a pedagogical method that involves the learner in learning process. In simple words experiential learning is 'Learning by Doing'. The foundational Scholars of Experiential Learning are William James, Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, Paulo Freire, and Mary Parker Follett (Alice, Y., Kolb., & David, A, Kolb., 2008). Hoover (1974) argues that "Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement". Whilst Carl Rogers (1969) characterized experiential learning as personal involvement, self-initiated, evaluated by learner, and pervasive effects on learner. As such, according to John Dewey (1938) education is progressive if there is experiential component to the lesson, however asserted that not all experiences are educative and not all students will take away the same outlook?

David Kolb (1984) one of the major contributors to Experiential learning (EL) defines it as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". He perceives learning as a process and not an outcome. Based on the early work of John Dewey and Kurt Lewin, Kolb proposed experiential learning theory which presents a cyclical model of learning consisting four stages as shown in the Figure 1.

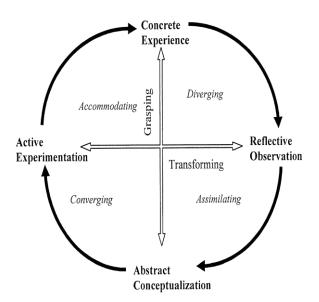


Fig.-1: Experiential Learning Cycle

Source: Reprinted from Experiential Learning Theory: A Dynamic and Holistic Approach to Management Learning, Education and Development, by A.Y. Kolb & D. A, Kolb, 2008, retrieved from https://weatherhead.case.edu/departments/organizational-behavior/workingPapers/WP-07-02.pdf

## Four Stages of Experiential Learning:

- The first stage, concrete experience (CE), is where the learner actively experiences an activity such as a lab session or field work.
- The second stage, reflective observation (RO), is when the learner consciously reflects back on that experience.
- The third stage, abstract conceptualization (AC), is where the learner attempts to conceptualize a theory or model of what is observed.
- The fourth stage, active experimentation (AE), is where the learner is trying to plan how to test a model or theory or plan for a forthcoming experience

# Four Basic Learning Styles of Experiential Learning:

- Diverging Learning Style: A person with it performs better in situations that call for generation of ideas, such as a "brainstorming" session.
- Assimilating Learning style: Individuals with an Assimilating style are less focused on people and more interested in ideas and abstract concepts
- Converging Learning style: People have the ability to solve problems and make decisions based on finding solutions to questions or problems.
- Accommodating Learning style: People have the ability to learn from primarily "hands-on" experience and involving themselves in new and challenging experiences.

# **Section 2: Conceptual Studies**

The section reviews the literature on relation between experiential learning and management education. The discussions are done in the chronological order.

Study by Rebecca, S. Cheney (2001) claims that bringing together students of different culture is a valuable form of experiential learning to teach intercultural business communication. She notifies that structured interactions such as case study, topic discussions, fieldtrips and role play, which should be adopted as experiential learning methods to help business students understand the complexities of intercultural communication.

Scott and Ramon (2008) present a series of exercises for advanced selling course in a view to socialize students to the professional world. First exercise is 'immerse learning project': Students team up with a cooperating business organization to determine a sales-related issue and work on it. Second exercise is 'coordinating a guest speaker': Assign students to coordinate a presentation by a guest speaker, right from contacting the guest speaker, providing directions till the end of the presentation. Next exercise is 'manager/coach': Senior students to serve as manager/coach to their juniors.

Sandra and Martha (2008) reports about the 'consultancy team approach' program offered at Monterrey Institute of Technology (MIT), Campus Guadalajara. It's a 16 week program, expects students beyond the classroom and into the

realms of real businesses functioning where they identify a company, work on problems, seek solutions and improvements and involve in decision making.

Roth and Smith (2009) reports different perspectives of the desired outcomes achieved by the live case approach pedagogy. From institute and students perspective, these interactions result in both internship and long term employment opportunities. From organization perspective these result in reassurance of strategic decisions taken by them and sometimes discovery of new ideas/vision as an outcome of the discussions.

Joy, R. D. (2010) discusses on the experiential learning project, adopted in the course (as the major learning assessment). It's a 16 weeks course, wherein an amalgamation of teaching and research happened, and the students were instructed to choose a problem of their interest and submit a project to enable them learn both theory and practical knowledge.

James and Laura (2010) recommend 'journaling' for management students as it engages students in acquiring, interpreting and applying information from their course work. Researchers opine that journaling promotes 'learn by doing' and in effect creates 'a living case study' experience for students.

Susan, D, Myers (2010) describes a classroom based experiential technique to teach students about consumer decision making. The activity follows a five-stage model of decision making from need recognition to post-purchase behavior. The activity involves providing a wide range of candies for selection and students are instructed to browse the options and make a decision.

Scott, Inks, et al. (2011) outlines a class project that helps students better understand the professional selling process. The project involves students in selling basketball tickets for a professional basketball franchise. The project adopts different ELTs such as classroom discussions and role plays to workshops along with applying different strategies and tactics of selling during the process. Upon conclusion of the project, the instructor initiates a class discussion with students to share their learning, encourage them to speak candidly and freely.

Liu Zhang-mei (2012) claim that marketing skills cannot be acquired through just a piece of chalk, a blackboard and a spoon-feeding method. But there is a need for the cultivation of students' practicing ability, let them be able to use the theory knowledge and methods to find, analyze and solve problems. For that, he proposed new reforms of experiential learning methods to teach marketing such as case teaching, marketing research clubs, interaction with industrialists, holding competitions.

Charles, S. Mathews., et al. (2012) discusses the need of using feature films in management education. One of the co-authors shared his experience to substantiate the notion that movies can have a significant long-term impact on student learning. They opine that understanding the theoretical

concepts of the management education and being able to select the appropriate *feature film* stands as a great challenge in this approach.

A study by Rita, D, Kosnik, et al (2013) recommend experiential learning projects (ELP) over internship programs for providing hands on experiences to management students. They claim that when compared to internship programs, ELP's are more economical and flexible as it can be coordinated and assessed by faculty as a component of the course material and class requirements, it can offer more consistent and explicit academic value.

Ruhi and Ghatrenabi (2015) proposed following experiential pedagogical methods to improve the design and delivery of Enterprise Resource Planning education in business schools such as Seminars, Case discussion; System Demos and Screen cast Tutorials, Simulations and Interactive Assessments, Workshops and Walkthrough Assignments.

Wei He (2015) draws conclusion from literature review that case study analysis suits the purpose of developing students' problem-solving skills because it well serves three types of learning goals – cognitive, affective, and practical. He claims that to invoke problem solving skills, a case has to be analyzed from— identifying problem, diagnosing causes, prescribing alternatives, and making a decision and its implementation plan.

The foregone discussions on conceptual studies advocates experiential techniques in management education. They reveal that the management education cannot be taught with just a piece of chalk and a blackboard or through a spoon-feeding lecture method, but can effectively through ELTs where there is a scope for students' practicing ability, allowing them to apply their theory knowledge.

# **Section 3: Empirical Studies**

The studies mentioned below are empirical and discussed in their chronological order.

Study by Hakeem, Salih (2001) examine the effect of a semester long *active learning project* on students learning in a business statistic course. Students engaged in project were instructed to collect data of their own interest, test hypotheses and prepare report with summary and conclusions. Findings reported that project students improved their average examination scores.

Mark, Speece (2002) shared the pedagogical reforms initiated by a Singapore university in advertising management course such as *construction of ads and ad campaigns*; identification and discussion of good and bad ads and discussion on current issues. Feedback from students on these reforms report that, the student became accustomed to focusing on important issues, doing careful analysis, thinking about application to context, debating issues, defending their thinking, and developing better answers through discussions.

Marylin et al. (2003) discussed an experiential learning program 'Trade Shows', designed and offered by an US based Delton State College (DSC). The role of the students in trade fair was to assist vendors with their booths preparation, with product demonstration, serve in a communication role to answer general questions, hand out materials, collect business cards and note requests. Students reported that they have learned about trade shows, working with others, international business practices and about themselves.

Steven (2006) studied the perception of 363 business practitioners on the significance of business college experiential learning methods as a means of developing college graduates as job market ready. In experiential learning methods internships was ranked high followed by research projects, group projects and case study methods. The lowest ranked were academic assignments, classroom lectures and textbook assignments. This is a clear evident that business practitioners prefer experiential learning methods over instructional learning methods for students job preparedness.

Patricia, & Henry (2006) explored the effectiveness of *Job shadowing* against the case study method. A project was designed to engage students in an eight hour onsite job shadowing experience. Students were made to participate in the project and reflect on their experiences. Results indicated that job shadowing was preferred over case activity by significant percentage of students.

A study by Li, Tiger, et al. (2007) share the views of students on a simulation course that was newly introduced in MBA curriculum by a southeastern public university. Results indicate that students perceive simulation course superior to lecture centered course in the areas of personal involvement and satisfaction and career preparation. Apart from that, students also evaluated simulation and lecture centered method on each of the 12 skills. Results show that simulation is significantly different (at 0.01) from lecture method for 10 out of 12 skills.

Robert Wheeler (2008) compared Problem-Based Learning (PBL) pedagogy with Project-based Learning (PJL) pedagogy to examine their effectiveness on students. Student surveys, student comments, and instructor evaluations depicted that PBL method does generate greater perceived student—instructor interaction and increased critical thinking than a PJL pedagogy.

Study of James & Gayle (2010) explains the outcomes of an industry institute interaction program organized by Southern Arkanas University for three days. The program involved interactions among students and the industrialists and there was also a competition held between students to develop and present their action plans to address the future of the company. About 12 university students participated in the program. Students felt that this platform has not only helped them to build their network but also created career opportunities for them.

Matt, Kinnich (2010) study discusses the impact of Experiential Learning (EL) practices such as group assignments, a two-week internship at the company, student clubs, conferences and international buddy program on students

in a business school. It was found that EL activities provided a practical experience to students to work with others and to be able to solve problems in groups and ability to take a formative role within those teams, demonstrate their individual definition of leadership.

Study by Henry Greene (2011) shares the learning outcomes of students after participation in The Great Cookie Challenge project. Students were asked to buy a minimum of two buckets of cookie dough and were told to make cookies from the dough and generate revenue. A qualitative assessment of students at the end of the project report that they gained an appreciation for writing a marketing plan, team organization and cooperation, and meeting deadlines.

Nittaya and Chirawan (2011) shared their experience of conducting an assignment for students at Bangkok University. Students were asked to do *eBay trading* and submit their report on the same. Faculty felt eBay trading was useful in teaching several business concepts and techniques practically.

Study of Padmaja and Sita (2012) explored the effectiveness of *computer based management simulations*. From the findings it was found that it is imperative that simulations in management education are effective in providing real life situations which are positively associated with learning. They provide an opportunity to exercise team dynamics, improve decision making and contribute to students' career preparation.

John, R, Tanner et al. (2012) studied the perceptions of management faculty on usage of simulations as teaching tools in United States (U.S.) business schools. An electronic questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 1586 marketing and management faculty. Results depict that business simulations are perceived as a useful teaching tool for their undergraduate courses. However, neither group views business simulations as offering learning opportunities that are superior to other traditional methodologies, such as case studies, service learning, or in-class discussions.

Erica and Kevin (2013) investigated the role of structured *field trip* as a teaching strategy in promoting reflective learning. For that, students were taken to field trip followed by collection of reflective learning written assignment from students. The research participants were 72 senior-level students majoring in business. Findings reported that by using a structured teaching strategy process, a field trip can effectively lead to reflective learning.

Study of Dellaportas and Hassall (2013) assessed the effects of a learning opportunity involving visits to prison by students enrolled in the final year of an accounting degree program. The survey data was collected from 86 students over a three-year period (2008–2010) from four separate field trips to prisons located in regional Victoria, Australia. Findings revealed that students appeared to have learned practical lessons on ethical conflicts and practices.

Laura and Selima (2013) done a longitudinal study on 33 students from 2008 to 2011 at Barry University, Florida. In

2008 students were exposed to only traditional learning. In 2010 students were exposed to student-led consulting projects. Analysis of data in 2008, 2010 and 2011 reported improvements in exams; student satisfaction with the course and the professor, and greater student self-confidence.

Michael and Hossam (2014) used computer simulation game to teach online course Management Information Systems. Students reported that they learnt managing technology is a challenging and dynamic task and that the IT manager has multiple roles and requires soft skills to handle them.

Claudia et al. (2014) made an attempt to convert 'Personal Selling' course from theory-based course to experiential course and explored the impact of its execution on students' perceptions and aversion to a career in sales. Findings show that there was no change in aversion to sales (attitude and intention) but it positively impacted the factors affecting aversion (knowledge, confidence, and perceptions).

Cecilia et al. (2015) examined the impact of a sales course that is embedded with experiential learning activities on students in a university. Pre- and post-test of Critical Thinking Test (CAT) was conducted on students. Results show that students' critical thinking scores showed improvement when compared to control group of students.

Robert, M, Cornell, et al. (2013) examined the role of *structured-interview* in facilitating experiential learning for accounting students. A total of 117 students were asked to administer the structured interview on individuals in charge of financial operations in a religious organization. Students felt that the experience helped them to internalize concepts from their classroom learning and enhanced their confidence and reduced anxiety.

Pru, Marriott, et al. (2015) reported the findings of a case study, on a university, that used computerized simulation in a postgraduate finance course. Student reports revealed that simulations offered a real -world experience allowing them to apply their subject knowledge, to use their intuition and judgment in their decision-making processes and to observe and reflect on their decisions, which enabled them to understand difficult and complex concepts of finance.

Dawn (2015) developed a project for a sales management class partnering with the corporate company. As a part of that, a case was developed for students with three assigned goals and was asked to role play to solve the problem. Prior to the start of the project, a pre and post project survey was administered in class before and after completion of role play. It was found that sales knowledge experienced a significant and positive increase in students at the end of the sales management experiential learning project.

Evangeline (2015) done a case study on a university in Australia that offered *work integrated learning program* (WIL) for students to provide experiential learning opportunities. They partnered with large and small-to-medium enterprise (SME) to provide pre-placement processes, training, supervision and

performance reviews for students. Findings revealed that students had a good learning experience and exposure to field work.

Winsett, Cary, et al. (2016) studied the impact of group experiential learning activity on student engagement. Group experiential activities include group projects, group discussions and group work. 88 undergraduate business management students at a medium size, regional university in the southern United States were involved in the study. Results demonstrated a positive relationship between group experiential learning activities and student engagement.

Bryan Greenberg (2016) Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania exposed its marketing students to films, exercises, guest lectures, and field assignments as part of curriculum. A pre and post course test conducted at the college demonstrated an increased comfort level in students working with diverse groups; exhibited a greater understanding of themselves and others.

Eyal et al. (2017) conducted a study to assess the value of 'Game boards' as a management education tool. The game was applied in cost management course and the students were made to participate in it. Results report that game participants had significantly higher grades than students who did not participate in the game, and that entertainment and comprehensibility of the game predict the understanding of course material.

Anup and Richa (2017) attempted to understand the value addition of management education and the enablers and barriers of management learning from student's perspective. Openended online questionnaire was used to collect the opinions from Postgraduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) students of the four management institutes. Results revealed that self-confidence was seen as the most important value addition followed by communication, presentation and management skills. Enablers of learning were experiential pedagogy, faculty and personality development activities.

From the above discussions, it is revealed that the experiential learning techniques have resulted in positive learning outcomes with regard to student's knowledge, skill and attitude.

## **Section 4: Findings**

The discussions on both conceptual and empirical research on experiential learning in management education reveal certain positive and significant findings:

a) The Experiential Learning Techniques (ELT) proposed for active learning can be grouped into two: classroom (four wall) centric techniques and field centric techniques. The classroom based techniques include role plays, computer simulations, interactive assessments, business games, case studies, group assignments, topic discussions, holding competitions, trade fairs/ shows, job shadowing, student clubs, exercises, seminars, workshops, journaling and feature films. The field based techniques include project works (problem

based and project based), industrial visits and field trips followed by reflective learning assignments, structured interviews, intercultural interactions and interaction with industrialists.

- The effectiveness of experiential learning in b) management education also revealed in many studies. For instance participation in game boards had significant impact on student's grades (Eyal et al. 2017); case study, role play and field assignments had positive influence on understanding the concepts, enhancing problem solving skills (Wei He, 2015), inter-cultural communications (Rebecca, S. Cheney, 2001), self-confidence, (Kozloski and Selima, 2013) reducing anxiety (Robert, M, Cornell et al. 2013); structured interviews facilitated practical experience of student's classroom learning (Robert, M, Cornell et al. 2013); project work and interaction with industrialists had not only exposed students to field work but also built their network and created career opportunities (Dawn, 2015); field assignments made students to learn practical lessons (Erica et al., 2013); effectiveness of computer simulations in providing a real world experience (Padmaja and Sita, 2012); group assignments and group discussions had positive relation with student engagement (Winsett et al., 2016); participation in simulation games had improved group dynamics; structured field trips promoted reflective learning (Eyal et al., 2017); participation in tradeshows (Marylin et al. 2003) and eBay trading facilitated in understanding business practices (Nittaya and Chirawan, 2011).
- c) Apart from the assessment of outcomes, there were studies that compared various pedagogical methods for their effectiveness like: Problem-Based Learning generated greater perceived student—instructor interaction and critical thinking than project-based Learning (Robert, Wheeler, 2008); students perceived simulation course is superior to lecture centered course in the areas of personal involvement and satisfaction and career preparation; (Li et al., 2007). Business practitioners preferred experiential learning methods over instructional learning methods for students' job preparedness (Steven, 2006); job shadowing was preferred over case activity by students (Patricia, et al. 2006).
- d) Meta-analysis on experiential learning and management education (covering total of 41 conceptual and empirical studies) reveal that the field assignments (12) is popularly researched (or adopted) learning technique in the management education. It is followed by project works (9), interactions with industrialists (8), case studies (7) and computer simulations (6). They are followed by personal selling activities (3), role plays (3), student clubs (2), seminars/conferences (2), feature films (2), management games (2), job shadowing (1), journaling (1) and topic discussions (1).
- e) Meta-analysis reveals that the ELTs were used by management faculties much in the marketing courses (marketing strategies, personal selling, advertisement management, sales management) and in the finance courses (accounting, finance, cost and management) and rarely in the subjects: Management Information Systems and Business

Statistics. None of the scholars focused on application of ELTs in important management specializations like Human Resource Management and Strategic Management.

f) Meta-analysis also reveals that, most of the studies were initiated by scholars hailing from the colleges in the West (mainly from Europe, Australia and USA). Hardly three out of 41 studies were (Padmaja et al. 2012, Anup and Richa, 2017 and Mark, 2002) concentrated on experiential learning in management education in the Asian context. The reason could be either the scholars have not attempted on this area or non-availability of studies on this area in the sources attempted by authors of this paper (authors relied information from standard journals).

# **Section 5: Future Research**

In the light of findings from meta-analysis on the topic, the future researchers can focus their research on the effect of experiential learning on employability skills across the management departments in state or country (as a broad study). Similarly, the educational institutions (universities or colleges) can encourage the faculties to evaluate the impact of experiential learning in improving the employable skills in the management students (as an in depth- case study). It may be pertinent to advise the academic regulators like UGC-NAAC, NBA, and AICTE (central academic bodies) and State Councils for Higher Educations (SCHEs), Commissionerates of Collegiate Education (state academic bodies), to encourage scholars in Universities and Colleges with sufficient funding for furthering research on experiential learning vis a vis employable skills in management students.

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# **Professional Experience**

- Worked as Assistant Professor for two years (2014 to 2016).
- Worked as Quality Engineering and Assurer (QEA) in Cognizant Technology Solutions (CTS) Hyderabad for 6 years (2007-2013).

#### Conferences

- Participated and presented papers in two National Conferences
- Participated in a Doctoral Colloquium held at IIT Kharagpur and presented the synopsis.

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