An Analysis of the Perception of Teachers towards use of Experiential Learning Approach in Schools of Delhi

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Abstract

With progressive changes in the curriculum frameworks and educational policies, the learner has gradually shifted from the periphery to the centre of the teaching learning process. There is a common consensus among educationists and policy makers that curriculum must be relevant and meaningful to the learners. This relevancy can only be ensured when the curriculum and teaching-learning activity is connected to the social and cultural milieu of the learner. In this context, it is believed that Experiential Learning has the potential to make the learning process student centred. The existing literature on pedagogical strategies highlights the effectiveness of Experiential Learning in facilitating permanent betta learning of the students. In the recent decades, many policies and commissions have emphasised on the use of Experiential Learning Approaches in the classrooms for active learning and making the courses more relevant to the day to day life of the students. This paper tries to examine the perception of school teachers on the use of Experiential Learning as a pedagogical approach.

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn"

—Benjamin Franklin

Introduction

Education is a lifelong process, which goes from womb to tomb or cradle to grave. In all civilized modern societies, the primary aim of education is to facilitate overall development of a child. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "Education is an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit." We can simply understand 'Education' as act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, and physical ability of an individual, and in its functional sense, Education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to another through institutions and processes (Cummings et. al, 2009). Thus, one of the main aims of Education is to develop the human personality in all dimensions - physical, intellectual, social, emotional, moral and spiritual. Learning becomes a pre-requisite in moulding an all-round individual to sustain a meaningful life. Individuals take on different roles as students, teachers, parents etc and immerse themselves in learning through experience and reflection. Thus, learning is an ongoing process that goes on throughout an individual's life.

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A majority of our learning is rooted in our everyday life experiences. Our experience pervades all forms of learning. The child begins to learn from his or her surroundings even before the child enters into formal schooling. Children are continuously observing, listening, exploring, experimenting and asking questions to gain familiarity of their surroundings. For instance, a child knows merely through experience that if he/she throws a ball towards the sky, it is bound to fall back on the ground. The child may not be aware of the concept of 'gravity' but has certain information related to it which is derived from observation and reflection. Similarly, the child looks at the mirror or any shiny surfaces and notices his/her own image in it. The child realises that the same image does not appear on other solid surfaces like wood or a wall. The child may not know about the concept of 'reflection' but learns about it through day-to-day experiences. Thus, a child learns about numerous things while he/she is observing, listening, playing and actively participating with the environments. This prior knowledge is essential in developing a link between the everyday life of the child and textbook knowledge. As the child grows, he/she builds new knowledge upon the existing knowledge with the help of teacher, peers and parents. In this context, any pedagogical approach that acknowledges the experiences of the child in the learning process can be considered as experiential learning. Active engagement is one of the basic tenets of learning, involving the person as a whole viz., cognitive domain (thoughts), affective domain (feelings) and psychomotor domain (physical activity).

Experiential Learning has been an imperative pedagogy since a long time. Eminent philosophers like John Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky etc. have worked on a similar concept of learning that takes into consideration the prior experiences of the child. This approach is commonly known as the constructivist approach. The concept of 'Basic education' by Gandhi is also heavily based on the approach of experiential learning. Many of the Commissions and Policies in the post-independence period have emphasized this approach of learning. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 suggested that children learn in a variety of ways—through experience, making and doing things, experimentation, reading, discussion, asking, listening, thinking and reflecting, and expressing oneself in speech, movement or writing—both individually and with others like family members and peers. In the year 2019, CBSE in collaboration with UNESCO developed a manual on the use of Experiential Learning for school-teachers in Indian classrooms (CBSE, 2019). The recent National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also reiterates the need and importance of Experiential Learning in Indian classrooms. One of the major objectives of this policy is to foster Experiential Learning and critical thinking among students. This major shift has been taken to address the learning crisis in the Indian education system and increase employability of students. The NEP emphasises that Experiential Learning will be operationalised at all stages of school education by including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, and story-telling-based pedagogy within each subject. In the current scenario, Experiential Learning is considered an essential learning approach because it seeks to shift from traditional teacher centric approaches, based on rote learning and memorization, to child-centred approach, focusing on learning by doing through experience and activity.

Theoretical Understanding of Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning Theory can be traced back to the works of John Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. David Kolb is considered to be the pioneer of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Kolb created a model that describes how people learn from their experiences. He based his theory on the already well-known works of Lewin's Model of Action Research, John Dewey's Model of Experiential Learning, and Piaget's Model

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Stage 1 - Concrete Experience (CE):
The learner empirically learns a lot more from his/her surroundings and real-life experiences rather than just depending on reading or observing. He/she needs to actively participate in the experience by feeling/using all the five senses-sight, hear, touch, smell and taste. The idea is to immerse the learner in the experience to generate data/information.

Stage 2 - Reflective Observation (RO):
This is the second stage where the learner uses his/her cognitive abilities to reflect about the situation/ experience before forming any opinion. The learner engages in the process of thinking and re-thinking about the experience that he/she has undergone and tries to evaluate in a systematic manner. Reflective observation focuses on observing and perceiving.

Stage 3 - Abstract Conceptualization (AC):
At this stage, the learner creates theories to explain his/her experiences. After collecting concrete information and reflecting upon it, the learner generalises the experience into reasoning. He/she develops a theory or draws conclusions of his/her own and justifications for the same. It is at this stage; the information is transformed into knowledge and gets stored in the child's brain. This focuses on learning by thinking.

Stage 4 - Active Experimentation (AE):
This is the final stage where the learner uses the conclusion drawn by him/her in the previous stage as a hypothesis to put it into practice for testing. This way he/she would indulge in a process where he/she is constantly changing or renewing the old ways of doing or thinking.

In his theory, Kolb emphasised on the following points - Kolb and Kolb (2005) :-

- Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- All learning is relearning.
- Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
- Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge.

Another important aspect of Kolb's theory of Experiential Learning is the individual learning styles. The Experiential Learning theory acknowledges that individuals have different learning styles and ability to imbibe things. In the year 1971 David Kolb developed the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) as an educational tool to understand different approaches through which individuals learn through experience. Some individuals learn by doing and some learn by just thinking and reflecting. Kolb in his theory identifies four styles of learners based on how they acquire knowledge. These are diverger, assimilator, converger and accommodator.

There are four types of learning styles. Firstly, diverges are such that individuals prefer to learn through Concrete Experiences (CE) and process it through Reflective Observation (RO). They are good at

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brainstorming and producing new ideas. They are also characterised with the ability to imagine things, having broad cultural interest and easily communicating with different people. Secondly, accommodators who fall under this category prefer to learn through hands-on experience. They collect information through Concrete Experience (CE) and engage in Active Experimentation (AC) to test those ideas. These individuals rely on instincts more than logical analysis. They depend on other people for information, are willing to take risks and very adaptive. Thirdly, an assimilator prefers to approach knowledge through Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and process it through Reflective Observation (RO). These individuals gain a wide range of information and arrange it in logical form. For them any theory must have a logical underpinning or justification. Their strengths lie in inductive reasoning and ability to create theoretical models (McCarthy, 2016). The assimilators are more interested in ideas and abstract concepts than on people. And fourthly, conversers are the people who have this particular style of learning, approach knowledge through Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and process it through Active Experimentation (AE). They are more interested in technical tasks and problem solving than with social and interpersonal issues. They are also good in decision making and putting ideas into practice.

Need for Experiential Learning in Classroom Teaching

- **Promotes Student-centric Learning Environment**: Experiential Learning theory emphasizes that students are capable of constructing their own knowledge based on their experiences and reflecting on those experiences. It moves away from the traditional classrooms which were teacher centric and provides the learner control over what he learns and how he learns. The teaching learning process is designed in a way which caters to the needs of the learner.
- **Let Students have Control on their Learning**: Learners occupy a central role around which all the teaching-learning process takes place. The learner takes decisions on what, why and how knowledge is to be acquired. The experiences of the learner are an integrated part of the curriculum. The learner also takes control of the methods of acquiring knowledge depending on their individual learning styles.
- **Enable Students to think Critically, Evaluate, Make decisions and Construct Knowledge**: The ELT encourages the learners to draw conclusions or generalizations or develop a theory only after due process of observing, reflecting, testing the information, applying it to practical use, making changes to the pre-existing knowledge and engaging in continuous process of experimentation. Thus, by immersing oneself in this systematic process of learning, individuals acquire critical thinking skills, rational decision making, ability to question pre-existing beliefs and notions and establish new knowledge.
- **Make Learning Experience Cooperative, Collaborative and Independent:** Experiential Learning Approach encourages interaction between peers, teachers, experts etc. for the purpose of exchanging information and converting it into knowledge through dialogue. A healthy dialogue would entail discussion, agreement, disagreement, respect for difference in opinion and a collaborative effort to come to consensus. While this approach recognises independent learning and self-reflection, it also promotes teamwork and collective activities.
- **Bridge Gap between Theory and Practice**: One of the important components of this theory is that the creation of knowledge is looked at from a continuous point of view where the theory learnt is put into

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practice and rigorously tested to make generalisations. This is a cyclical process where the generalisation made at a particular time could be tested again and replaced or updated with a new idea.

- **Change in mindset of the learners**: In the existing system of education, the learners are bound to perform well in examinations and get good grades to demonstrate their intelligence. This sort of approach only promotes rote learning and memorisation in order to reproduce information at the time of examination. Experiential Learning Approach helps the students to realise the real purpose of learning and attaining knowledge which is to understand the concepts through different dimensions, critically evaluate it and apply it in their daily lives.
- **To Promote Retention**: Since Experiential Learning is inclusive of the daily experiences of the learner and this makes it easier for the learner to relate to what is being taught in the classroom. When the curriculum is related to the experiences of the students, the child feels motivated to explore more about the particular concept. The students fully immerse in the process of learning and do not feel aloof or alien to the course content. This helps in retaining the school in the schooling system and reduce the number of dropouts amongst learners.
- **To facilitate Learning beyond the Classroom**: A major problem in today's teaching-learning process is that we are heavily dependent on textbooks as a source of information used in a classroom setup. This has resulted in a narrow perception amongst students and teachers that authentic information can only be derived from the textbooks. However, the learner can acquire knowledge from a variety of sources: environment, society, markets, movies, interaction with others etc. Experiential Learning acknowledges that there are no limits for a learner to acquire knowledge. Thus, it encourages learning through discovery, experimentation, play method, joyful learning etc. Students are pushed to move beyond the classroom and explore on their own to seek answers to their questions and arrive at solutions.

Review of Literature

Experiential Learning is not a new concept and hence there is no dearth of literature on the effects of Experiential Learning Approaches as a pedagogical practice. Various studies have been conducted since the development of the Kolb model in 1984, exploring its potential as a pedagogical technique. Experiential learning techniques have been employed by educators in school as well as higher education. Experiential Learning practices have been identified by Kuh (2008) as high impact educational practices that have been shown through research to increase student retention and engagement. In this top 10 list of high impact educational practices, four are directly connected to Experiential Learning: diversity/global learning (which often is accompanied by study abroad or other experiential learning in the community), internships, undergraduate research and service learning/community-based learning. He additionally provides data that shows service learning and study abroad both are perceived by students to be of high impact in terms of deep, general, personal and practical learning.

In the context of school education, studies (Voukelatou, 2019) have highlighted that use of Experiential Learning drastically enhanced the learning achievement of students. Majority of these studies suggested that employing Experiential Learning techniques in the pedagogy made the learning experience more creative and engaging for students. Fulford (2013), in his article on learning readiness, pointed out that 75% of knowledge was mastered through Experiential Learning, while only 5% was learned through conventional

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learning. Manon LeBlanc et.al (2015) have conducted case studies on the application of Experiential Learning and recommended that teachers and administrators should try to involve parents in a concrete and more meaningful way, prepare lesson plans with regard to active student involvement in the learning process, include opportunities for reflective observation in connection with the conveyed concepts hence students must be encouraged to have experiment, and make predictions in relevant contexts, thus leading to more meaningful learning. Similarly, Chesimet M.C (2016) employed ELA to teach Mathematics and concluded that the post-test mean score of different groups suggested that ELA had positive effects on students' mathematical creativity. In her study, Sachdeva (2017) emphasised the importance of Experiential Learning, which promotes discourse, involves students, and requires them to engage and participate. The investigation focused on how pupils in Indian classrooms feel when they are taught through Experiential Learning.

It has been observed that Experiential Learning is more widely used in higher education. Scarce (1997) suggested that carefully planned field trips can be an effective tool to help students and educators concretely experience social phenomena in everyday settings. The author concluded that application of Experiential Learning in the form of field trips provides for a highly intensive and rewarding pedagogical technique. Another study conducted among university students of Geography showed that experiential based learning significantly improved the spatial thinking abilities and agreed that the class was more enjoyable compared to lecture based methods (Flynn, 2018). Similarly, Bedawy (2017) found positive response from Business Education students on the effectiveness of Experiential Learning Approach.

Rationale

In the current context, the aims and expectations from education and ways of learning are constantly undergoing changes due to the changes in policy frameworks and socio-economic and cultural factors. The requirement of today's students/learners seems to be changing; teachers and students are now more focused on the practical skills required to succeed in life. Therefore, there is a need to promote learning based on a learner-centred approach. The idea of experiential learning provides a meaningful learning experience among the students. The above literature clearly highlights the effectiveness of experiential learning in classroom teaching at the school level as well as higher education. It emphasises that experiential learning approach enables the learner to engage, participate and reflect on the classroom teaching rather than being passive recipients of knowledge. There were several gaps that were noticed in the above literature, especially in the context of learners situated in the Indian social and geographical set up. While most of the studies were conducted to test the effectiveness of the learners' achievement through ELA, none of the studies examine the perception of teachers' towards ELA. This study tries to fill this gap in the existing literature and aims to provide new insights on teacher perception towards experiential learning in school education.

Research Methodology

The objectives of the study are:

To understand the perception of school teachers towards Experiential Learning Approach.

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To examine the gender wise perception of teachers towards experiential learning.

To examine the perception of teachers according to the designation in school.

To examine the perception of teachers in relation with the subjects taught in school.

Method

For the purpose of the study, a survey method was used to collect primary data. Sample of 100 Secondary school teachers was selected through random sampling technique for the purpose of this investigation. The sample population of school teachers consisted of Primary teachers (PRTs), Trained Graduate Teachers (TGTs) and Post Graduate Teachers (PGTs). A questionnaire consisting of 20 questions was developed to check the perception of secondary school teachers towards ELA in Delhi Government schools. The questionnaire aimed at capturing the perception of teachers towards different aspects about Experiential Learning. The respondents were presented with certain statements related to ELA. Each question was provided with five options -Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Statistical Techniques: The data obtained through questionnaires were carefully analysed with the help of Statistical Package For The Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis and explanation of the primary data obtained from school teachers. Table 1 shows the gender wise perception of school teachers towards Experiential Learning Approach. The data suggests that female teachers strongly agree with Experiential Learning Approach as a curriculum as compared to male teachers in school. Around 76.1 percent of teachers agree that Experiential Learning Approach would be beneficial in initiating permanent learning among students. While only 23.9 percent male teachers agreed on the same.

Table 1 **Gender wise analysis of perception of school teachers**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	27	23.9	23.9	23.9
	Female	86	76.1	76.1	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 analysed the perception of teachers according to their designation as PRT, TGT, PGT and others. The data highlighted that a majority of Primary Teachers (PRTs) agree with the effectiveness of Experiential Learning in improving the learning achievement of students. Around 61.9 percent of Primary Teachers perceived that Experiential Learning has positive effects in improving learning outcomes. Similarly, Trained Graduate Teachers (TGT) got 15 percent and Post Graduate Teachers (PGT) scored 10.6 percent. The category of other got 14 percent.

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Table 2 Designation wise analysis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Others	14	12.4	12.4	12.4
	PGT	12	10.6	10.6	23.0
	PRT	70	61.9	61.9	85.0
	TGT	17	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 depicts the relation between the perceptions of teachers with the subjects taught in school. The data points out that a majority of language teachers agree that Experiential Learning is beneficial in teaching students at school level. Around 31 percent of teachers who agreed on the positive effects of Experiential Learning taught various languages in school. This was followed by Social Science teachers (12 percent), Mathematics teachers (10.6 percent), and Science Teachers (9.7 percent).

Table 3 Subject (Teaching)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		8	7.1	7.1	7.1
	Language	35	31.0	31.0	38.1
	Maths	13	11.5	11.5	49.6
	others	34	30.1	30.1	79.6
	Sciences	11	9.7	9.7	89.4
	Social Sciences	12	10.6	10.6	100.0
	Total	113	100.0	100.0	

Discussion and Conclusion

This study brings to light the perception of teachers towards Experiential Learning as a pedagogical approach. The study found that more female teachers as compared to male teachers felt that Experiential Learning is an effective technique to facilitate permanent learning among students. It was also found that teachers at the primary level held a positive perception towards Experiential Learning. Lastly, a majority of language teachers perceived that Experiential Learning would enable the child to learn better, based on the constructivist approach. The detailed review of literature establishes the fact that Experiential Learning has had a positive impact on students' learning not only in school education but also in higher education. The results from this study align with the existing literature to suggest that overall teachers share positive perceptions towards Experiential Learning. In the light of the National Education Policy (2020) and emerging practices related

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to pedagogy, we can use the outcomes from this study to inform training and professional development programmes for teachers to support them in adopting learner-centered practices.

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