

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION: ATTITUDE OF TEACHER TRAINEES AND CHALLENGES FACED

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ABSTRACT

Experiential learning, simply denoting learning from experience accompanied by reflection, is not a new concept, prominent scholars like John Dewey, Carl Rogers and Jean Piaget focused on experiential learning in their works and writings. In India, experiential learning has its roots in the ancient Gurukula system as well as Gandhiji's Basic education. For the last few decades thinkers and practioners like David Kolb and John P. Wilson, different experiential learning organizations like Association for Experiential Education (AEE) and National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) have been working for popularizing and developing experiential learning. Because of the various benefits of experiential learning, its demand has been increasing. Experiential learning has been recommended by UNESCO in 2010, as one of the teaching strategies for 21st century (Teaching and Learning for a sustainable future, UNESCO 2010). To develop skilful human resources who are capable of applying their theoretical knowledge in the real world of 21st century, some changes in the teaching-learning must be brought. To implement experiential learning approach in a greater level and to make it successful, the teacher education programs must follow experiential learning approach. The teachers must be trained properly so that they are equipped with both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Teacher preparation must consider experiential learning as one of the important aspects, because until and unless teachers do not have positive attitude, interest knowledge and experience in experiential learning approach, they cannot use it in their teaching career. The present paper studied the attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach and the issues and challenges of using Experiential Learning Approach. The study used descriptive survey method. The sample of the study is 113 pre-service teacher trainees who have done internship in the schools. The study found majority of the teacher trainees had moderate to highly favorable attitude towards Experiential Learning approach. It is also found that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach in respect to their gender.

KEYWORDS: *Experiential learning, Pre-service teacher trainees, Experience, Reflection, Teaching strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Quality teacher education prepares competent teachers with proper content and pedagogical knowledge and these teachers contribute to ensure quality education of a nation. To achieve quality in education, the teachers must be given quality training. There has been lot of

development and innovation in the field of education in India, in terms the ways in which education is imparted. Still the problem of rote learning practice is prevalent in most of the educational institutions. Practicing unattractive teaching-learning approach results in unsatisfactory learning outcome, non-

involvement of students in teaching-learning, lack of practical knowledge and necessary skills, and inability to relate classroom learning with real life. To address these problems there is an urgent need to create an experiential environment in every educational institution, where students can be taught in an experiential way instead of traditional rote learning. Simply experiential learning means learning by doing, where at the end of the activity the students reflect on their experience and works. The first theories of Experiential Learning arose in the mid-nineteenth century as attempts to move away from traditional formal education, where teachers simply presented students with abstract concepts, and toward an immersive method of instruction. Students would “learn by doing”, applying knowledge to experience in order to develop skills or new ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 6).

The theories of experiential learning can be seen in the works of prominent scholars like John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget and Carl Rogers. Later on, thinkers and practitioners like Donald Schön, Colin Beard, John P. Wilson and David Kolb worked for the expansion and development of Experiential learning in modern context. Experiential learning refers to the experiences both inside and outside the classroom. According to Lewis and Williams, “In its simplest form experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing, experiential education first immerses learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking.”

In the words of John Dewey, “Experiential Learning takes place when a person involved in an activity looks back and evaluates it, determines what was useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity.”

In experiential learning the learners’ active physical, mental, emotional and social engagement is crucial. The focus of experiential learning is to increase knowledge, practicability of the knowledge, develop skills and values by eliminating the loopholes of conventional style of learning as far as possible. Personalized teaching-learning is

also possible through experiential learning as learners and teachers are engaged in different activities such as discussions, field trips and tours, internships, role-play, case study etc.

David Kolb, the famous experiential education practitioner and thinker also provided experiential learning models and exercises. Kolb also founded the organization called “Experience Based Learning Systems (EBLS)” in 1980, which work for the advancement of research and practice on experiential learning worldwide. With the growing importance of experience-based education and concern for bridging the gap between theory and practice, the 21st century the education system in all over the world is giving much importance in providing experiential learning to the students. Experiential learning can help in addressing pedagogical issues across various disciplines. In 2010 Experiential learning was recommended by UNESCO as one of the teaching strategies for 21st century. (Teaching and Learning for a sustainable future, UNESCO 2010). Because of the growing demand and importance of experiential learning, different organizations such as, Experience Based Learning Systems (EBLS), Association for Experiential Education (AEE), World Learning, Independent Schools Experiential Education Network (ISEEN), National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) and Institute for Experiential Learning (IFEL) and many more are working for the expansion and development of experiential learning. In India also, the government and different organizations such as CIEEL INDIA – Centre for International Educational Experiential Learning and Disha India Education Foundation are working to make learning experiential and to increase the learning outcome.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 as well as the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has also given much stress on experiential learning by providing guidelines on use of innovative practices and teaching learning strategies such as field trips, discussions, Projects, role play and game-based activities etc.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Lee, F. K. J. (2019) conducted a study on experiential teacher education – preparing pre-

service teachers to teach English grammar through an experiential learning project. The aim of the study was to solve the challenge of teaching grammar through community project where a group of prospective teachers participated. The project attempted address dearth of knowledge as to the impact of experiential grammar learning on pre-service teachers. The project also aimed to develop grammar teaching resources for school teachers. The study found that through the experiential learning cycle, the prospective teachers learned to see textbooks as learning tools only, not as their masters. They understood that to achieve more compatibility between the learning goals and the need of the children; adaptation of grammar textbooks and development of their own materials is necessary. The findings of the study suggested that there is an immense value of experiential learning programme in teacher education.

Girvan, C., Conneely, C. and Tangney, B. (2016) conducted a study on extending experiential learning in teacher professional development. The paper introduced the use of experiential learning during the early stages of teacher professional development. The study explored the implementation of experiential learning approach with teachers in Irish second level schools who are being asked to make significant pedagogic changes as part of a major curriculum reform. The researchers developed a three-phase programme of teacher professional development founded on experiential learning and explored the experiences and outcomes of teachers who participated in the first full year of the programme, through their own reflective accounts. The study found that the teachers changed their professional practices and could see the benefits for their learners.

Yu, Yong & Hunt, Jean Ann (2016) conducted a study on connected space for early experiential learning in teacher education. This case study examined Project CONNECT (PC), an after-school program designed to create early experiential learning opportunities for pre-service teachers (PSTs) by bringing together different aspects of expertise from the schools, communities, and universities. Pre-service teachers in this study worked with children one afternoon a week in school-based sites during their sophomore and

junior years. The research studied the impact on the professional growth of pre-service teachers, and what characteristics contributed to the impact. The study found that the program had positive impact on the transformation of pre-service teachers' professional identity, skills and disposition.

Abu-Assab, N. A. (2015) studied the effect of experiential learning on improving the performance of EFL students as perceived by teachers of English in the Northern Governorates of Palestine. The aim of the study was (i) to investigate the effect of experiential learning on improving the performance of EFL students as perceived by the teachers of English in the Northern Governorates of Palestine. (ii) To examine the role of gender, academic qualification, years of experience and type of schools on teachers' perspective. The sample of the study was 429 EFL teachers.

The study found that there was a positive effect of experiential learning on improving the performance of EFL students as perceived by the teachers. Majority of teachers (82.4%) agreed that experiential learning is useful in improving students' cognitive skills, social skills, high thinking skills, students' scores in exam, and attitude towards material and also useful in longer retention of the students' learning. Teachers also accepted that experiential learning can increase students' motivation for material and interest as well as active involvement with the material. 83.4% teachers agreed that students enjoy Experiential learning more than the traditional learning methods.

The study also found that there were significant differences in teachers' perspective due to their academic qualifications. However, there were no significant differences in teachers' perspective due to their gender, years of experience and type of school.

Xuesong Gao (2015) in his report on promoting experiential learning in pre-service teacher education, discussed the experiential learning initiative at a major university in Hong Kong that prepares pre-service teachers with experience of engaging with social and cultural issues in teaching. It invites teacher educators in different contexts to work

together on similar initiatives that help pre-service teachers grow professionally through designing, developing, managing and promoting their experiential learning projects to enhance human development and improve human conditions.

Pittman, T. R. & Dorel, G.T. (2014) conducted a study on experiential learning and literacy: pre-service teachers' perspectives. The objective of the study was to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions about participating in an experiential learning literacy program. The sample of the study was 86 pre-service teachers who participated in two hours of training and then tutored elementary students for a total of eight hours. At the end of the participating semester, the pre-service teachers completed a survey regarding their experience with the community-based tutoring program. The study found that the pre-service teachers perceived the community-based tutoring program as an overall positive tutoring experience and they were able to use the alignment of the course concepts, in conjunction with the community-based tutoring program curriculum, to better assist struggling readers. Pre-service teachers also felt that the community-based tutoring program experience had a positive impact on the students.

Thaba, K. L. & Kanjere, M. M. (2014) conducted a study on experiential learning in initial teacher education: do schools have mentoring capacity? The focus of the paper was on experiential learning of student teachers and perceived capacity of mentoring schools. The study discussed Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification (MRTEQ) policy of South Africa which was gazetted on 15 July 2011 has given preference to experiential learning and the importance of functional mentoring schools. The study pointed out that the mentoring schools with necessary experiential learning capacity, environment and mentor teacher must be able to provide practicing teachers with the required experiential learning skills and abilities.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The necessity of shifting from traditional theory-based teaching-learning approach to more innovative and constructivist teaching-

learning gave rise to the popularity of experiential learning. Ensuring quality of education requires quality in teaching-learning and quality teacher education. Proper preparation of teachers ensures quality education in all levels to a great extent. To provide pre-service teachers all the necessary knowledge and skills which will prepare them for 21st century classroom teaching-learning, it is important to make them familiar with experiential learning. The significance of experiential learning in ensuring quality teacher education and preparing quality teachers has been advocated by many researchers and educators worldwide. Meiners, Schiller and Orchard (2004) reported from their research that their pre-service teachers learned more when they were actively and physically participating in learning experiences, rather than passively observing or reading about the activities (Russell-Bowie, D. 2013). Practical hands-on activities offered during the teacher education course are one method of motivating students (Welch 1995; Russell-Bowie, D. 2013). Teachers who use experiential education "are explorers of ideas and concepts which hold progressive value for education and society" (Sakofs 1995, p. 442; Legge, M. F., & Smith, W. (2014). Recently, the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) has also mandated Experiential Learning as the pedagogy for schools and the annual theme for training (CBSE, 2019), to make learning more experiential and effective for 21st century. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) also released the Curriculum on Experiential Learning-Gandhiji's NaiTalim in 13 languages of India in September, 2018, with an aim of providing Experiential learning to all levels of education including all states and stakeholders. To make all these efforts and vision successful the teachers must have positive attitude towards experiential learning and must practice it regularly.

Abu-Assab, N. A. (2015) his study found that majority of teachers (82.4%) agreed that experiential learning is useful in improving students' cognitive skills, social skills, high thinking skills, students' scores in exam, and attitude towards material and also useful in longer retention of the students' learning. Teachers also accepted that experiential learning can increase students' motivation for

material and interest as well as active involvement with the material. 83.4% teachers agreed that students enjoy Experiential learning more than the traditional learning methods.

Hence, the researcher studied the attitude of pre-service teachers towards experiential learning and the challenges and issues of using experiential learning.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach.
2. To compare the attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach in respect to their gender.
3. To study the issues and challenges of using experiential learning approach.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀ There is no significant difference between attitudes of pre-service teachers in respect to their gender.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted using Descriptive survey method.

SAMPLE

The sample of the present study is 122 Pre-service teacher trainees of Tezpur University and College of Teacher Education, Tezpur, Assam.

TOOL USED

The researcher used a self-made 5-point Likert scale named Pre-service Teachers Attitude Scale towards Experiential Learning to study the attitude of pre-service teachers towards experiential learning. The researcher also used a checklist to study the challenges and issues of using experiential learning in classroom.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Objective 1: *To study the attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach.*

Table 1: Attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach.

S.L No	Level of Teachers Attitude	Number of teachers	Percentage of teachers
1	Highly Favorable	45	39.82
2	Favorable	36	31.86
3	Moderate	32	28.32
4	Unfavorable	0	0
5	Highly Unfavorable	0	0
Total		113	100

Table No. 1 depicts the attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach. It was found that 39.82% teacher trainees had Highly Favorable Attitude towards Experiential learning Approach, 31.86% teacher trainees had Favorable attitude and 28.32% teacher trainees had Moderate attitude towards Experiential Learning Approach. None of the teacher trainees had Unfavorable and highly Unfavorable Attitude. Majority of the teacher trainees are having Moderate to Highly Favorable attitude towards Experiential Learning Approach which can be considered as a good sign for successful implementation of experiential learning in

educational institutions. Positive attitude is must for proper use and implementation of any innovative teaching-learning practices and it is also same for experiential learning. If the teachers have positive attitude towards experiential learning, then there are great chances of using it by them in and outside classroom.

Objective 2: *To compare the attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach in respect to their gender*

N₀: *There is no significant difference between attitudes of pre-service teachers in respect to their gender.*

Table 2: z-value of attitude of pre-service male and female teachers towards Experiential Learning Approach

Groups	Attitude of pre-service teachers toward Experiential Learning Approach	
	Male	Female
N (Total)	55	58
Mean	114.78	112.34
S.D.	15.04	6.58
z-value	-1.12	
Level of Significance at 0.05	Not Significant	

Above Table no.2 states that there is no significance of difference in mean scores of attitude of pre-service teacher trainees towards Experiential Learning Approach in respect to their gender. The z- value is -1.12, which is less than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance.

In the light of the result, it can be interpreted that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of pre-service teacher trainees

towards Experiential Learning Approach in respect to their gender. One of the reasons for the similarity in attitudes could be the similar exposure to the experiential learning and its benefits.

Objective 3: *To study the issues and challenges of using Experiential Learning Approach.*

Table 3: Checklist of issues and challenges of using Experiential Learning Approach

S.L No	Statements	No of respondents					
		Yes		No		Not Sure	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Experiential learning activities requires more time, effort and cost	55	48.67	35	30.97	23	20.35
2	Lack of proper infrastructure facilities, proper experiential curriculum, trained teachers, teachers' interest, resource teacher and technicians, lack of cooperation from the school management and limited class time hinders experiential learning approach	74	65.49	21	18.58	18	15.93
3	Experiential learning activities can be difficult to perform with special children	69	61.06	18	15.93	26	23.01
4	Evaluation of Experiential learning activities can be complicated	53	46.90	33	29.20	27	23.89
5	Not all students show much interest in doing activities	46	40.71	56	49.56	11	9.73
6	Introvert students do not actively engage in experiential learning activities	59	52.21	46	40.71	8	7.08
7	Use of Experiential learning approach cannot complete the syllabus on time provided	62	54.87	47	41.59	4	3.54
8	Experiential learning activities sometimes leads to indiscipline among students	39	34.51	65	57.52	9	7.96

Results from the Table no. 3

1. It is observed that 48.67% teacher trainees agreed that experiential learning activities requires more time, effort and cost, 30.97% teacher trainees did not agree that experiential learning activities requires more time, effort and cost and 20.35% teacher trainees were not sure about it.
2. It also reveals that 65.49% teacher trainees agreed that lack of proper infrastructure facilities, proper experiential curriculum, lack of trained teacher, resource teacher and technicians, lack of teachers' interest and cooperation from the school management, and also limited class time hinders experiential learning approach. 18.58% teacher trainees did not agree the same while 15.93% teacher trainees were not sure about it.
3. It also shows that 61.06 % teacher trainees agreed that Experiential learning activities can be difficult to perform with special children, 15.93 % teacher trainees did not agree the same while 23.01% teacher trainees were not sure about it.
4. It also reveals that 46.90 % teacher trainees agreed that evaluation of experiential learning activities can be complicated, while 29.20 % teacher trainees did not agree the same and 23.89 % teacher trainees were not sure about it.
5. It is also observed that 40.71% teacher trainees agreed that not all students show much interest in doing activities, 49.56 % teacher trainees did not agree the same, while 9.73% teacher trainees were not sure about it.
6. It also shows that 52.21% teacher trainees agreed that introvert students do not actively engage in experiential learning activities, 40.71 % teacher trainees did not agree the same and 7.08% teacher trainees were not sure about it.
7. 54.87 % teacher trainees agreed that use of experiential learning approach cannot complete the syllabus on time provided, 41.59% teacher trainees did not agree the same and 3.54% teacher trainees were not sure about it.
8. 34.51% teacher trainees agreed that experiential learning activities sometimes leads to indiscipline among students, 57.52% teacher trainees did not agree the same, while 7.96% teacher trainees were not sure about it.

CONCLUSION

Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. In the words of John Dewey, "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance." (Experience and Education 1938, John Dewey). Meaningful and educative experiences play a significant role in learning process and longer retention and application of things which have been learnt in or outside the classroom. To make learning more retentive and practical, it should not be just exam or marks oriented or only rote learning and factual knowledge based but it must encourage application of it in the practical field. The focus of experiential learning is to increase knowledge, practicability of the knowledge, develop skills and values by eliminating the loopholes of conventional style of learning as far as possible. Thus, experiential learning can solve the problem of theoretical and rote learning which is still prevalent in the present education system.

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