

Need Analysis of Business Students' Preferences: A Holistic approach to Experiential Learning

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Abstract

The study conducts a need analysis for business students' preference with regards to experiential learning. Two parallel questionnaires were administered to business students (N=125): i) Original version of Course Experience Questionnaire (Ramsden1991) and ii) Experiential Learning Orientation Questionnaire (ELOQ)- developed by employing Miller and Seller's (1985) frameworks of transaction and transformative to experiential learning. CEQ measured good teaching; clear goal setting; appropriate workload, appropriate assessment and generic skills development, in conjunction with ELOQ designed to measure five facets of experiential learning. The preferential needs of the learners were identified by applying Pearson Product Moment Correlation that revealed strong positive correlation between the two scales, $r= 0.826$. The findings of the study suggested active involvement of business students with regards to need analysis. The results offered a sound basis for considering business students' preferences in determining the nature of tasks and activities in the curriculum by providing them multiple experiential learning opportunities. Limitations of and recommendations for future research are also discussed in the study.

Keywords: *Experiential Learning; Perception; Assessment*

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning theory by Kolb (1984) describes learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping ideas and transforming experience”. According to the four dimensions of the model presented by Kolb, “Concrete experience” identifies students' unique participation in an event/activity. The second dimension “Reflective Observation” explains the reflective process relative to the experience. The third dimension “Abstract Conceptualization” highlights the knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through the reflective process. “Active Experimentation” explains the active involvement of the learner to test the model/ theory (Ibid). Prior to this, In 1971 Kolb designed “The Learning Style Inventory” (LSI), which is a simple self-description test, based on experiential learning theory, which measures and identifies the

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strengths and weaknesses of individual learning styles (Kolb, 1971).

Ever since Kolb's contribution which has assimilated the nature of experiential learning while focusing on learners' style in the process, learning has evolved in several ways to serve the need of the current age: from vocational education and training (Collier & McManus, 2005), to work placement (Gibson & Busby, 2009); from work-integrated learning (WIL) (McCurdy & Zegwaard, 2009) to work-based learning (Burke, Marks-Maran, Ooms, Webb & Cooper, 2009); from career and technical education (Lambeth, Elliot & Joeger, 2009) to project-based learning (Danford, 2006); and from community engagement to civic learning (Driscoll, 2008). Apart from the stated view, several other forms of learning have emerged on the educational horizon to combat the challenges of the modern age to the extent of leading towards blended learning.

Almost all of these manifestations of learning derive their major inspiration from experiential learning theory which has been widely accepted by all educational programmes. Guide for Employers (2012) has further strengthened the rationale of EL in pedagogic and professional development. EL means learning from "experience or learning by doing" (Ibid). On the contrary Vaughan (2008) claims it as, "just doing the job" rather than learning the major focus of activities designed for EL. In view of these claims Internships are increasingly assumed to provide culminating experiential learning experience for students in academic programs. Kiser (2000) asserts that, "Student/s often needs to learn how to learn most effectively from experience".

Beard (2010) describes experiential learning as:

A sense making process involving significant experiences that, to varying degrees, act as the source of learning. These experiences actively immerse and reflectively engage the inner world of the learner, as a whole person (including physical-bodily, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually) with their intricate 'outer world' of the learning environment (including belonging and doing – in places, spaces, within social, cultural, political context etc) to create memorable, rich and effective experiences for and of learning.

(Cited in Beard & Wilson, 2013)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the three orientations of Miller and Seller (1985) and EL with regards to the role of academia, collaboration between academia, need analysis and industry and finally the validity and reliability of the assessment tools for quality enhancement.

Miller and Seller (1985) demonstrated three frameworks for assessing students' attitudes about learning in general: (a) the transmission orientation (related to the methodologies of imparting knowledge to the students); (b) the transaction orientation (relates to the dialogical exchange of knowledge between the students and everyday business of life), and (c) the transformation orientation (related to the social change as a result of the academic efforts).

Rethinking the Role of Academia

According to Pratt (1980) a curriculum is, “an organized set of formal educational intentions”. The inter-relatedness of the three orientations of Miller and Seller (1985) essentially highlights the curriculum at different phases of its implementation and completion. The Instructional design serves as is the key factor in comprehending EL. Lewis and Williams (1994) demonstrated that, “experiential learning enhances the experience of the learner and encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking”. The Business Accreditation Standards emphasizes, “In addition to time on task related to readings, course participation, knowledge development, projects, and assignments, students engage in experiential and active learning designed to improve skills and the application of knowledge in practice is expected” (AACSB, 2016). In support of such views, for the successful implementation of EL, the overhauling of instructional design, planning, and implementation and assessment tools is desired. Miller and Seller (1985) further emphasised that the transmission orientation needs to be aligned with the current decades since EL does not take place in isolation.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY

Kramer and Usher (2011) explored seven different types of institutionally structured work experiences which provide learning opportunities suitable for WIL. EL universally is affiliated with all types of programs that include a work-based or practice-based component; the term has been also employed by universities around the globe to identify programs that add a practical employment-based learning component to academic learning. Workplace experience facilitates the acquisition of generalizations and principles of the practical world which are somewhat absent from the course content offered at universities eventually leading towards a wider gulf between these domains of an individual’s life. Workplace learning offers opportunities to the learners to test and apply the acquired knowledge and skills in new situations. Dick (2002) bifurcates EL into four facets: Learning by doing; pooling experience; applying the principles; and applying the principles in practice.

Post Graduate Programmes in Management at ISB- the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP) allows students to work on real-world business issues so instead of simulating a real life situation, students have to deal with real-life problems and find a solution for them. A guide for employers (2012) acknowledges that as, “Work experience works”.

NEED ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS PREFERENCES

Dewey (1916) argues that the conventional educational system is more concerned with the retention of knowledge than its application. Furthermore, learners’ needs are not taken into consideration; Need analysis is a procedure for collecting information about learners and classroom activities to design a syllabus (Nunan, 1988). Traditional educational system regards students somewhat as empty vessels (Freire, 1998). Furthermore, Bringle & Hatcher (2003) concede that traditional instructional methods, in particular, are relatively less significant to the current emphasis laid on learners’ learning styles. Experiential Learning learners styles are markedly different but can be effectively accommodated with the help of instructional design.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) describe needs analysis as a process of identifying the “target needs” of the learners in a target situation. In view of the Palacios Martínez (1994) demonstrates that questionnaires, surveys, interviews, intelligence tests, language tests, job analyses, content analyses, attitude scales, statistical analyses, observation, data collection, or informal consultation with sponsors and learners are instrumental in providing a clear a holistic picture of learners’ needs.

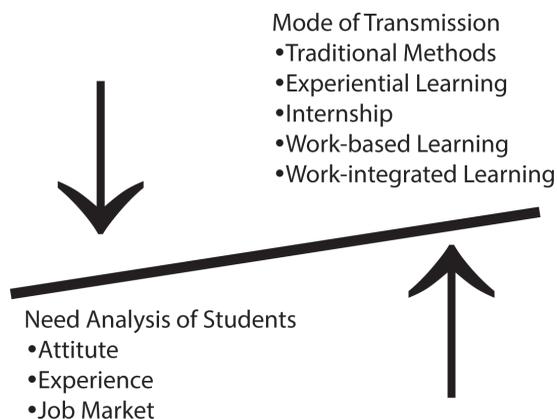
The consolidation of the three orientations is increasingly contingent upon the assessment process as well; it is instrumental in assessing learning and ensures students’ involvement (Knight & Yorke, 2006; Ramsden, 2003). Furthermore, it upholds merit which eventually facilitates job placement for students and assists the future employers to select the most eligible employees. There are several influential approaches of needs analysis: systemic approach (Richterich & Chancerel, 1977), learning-centered approach (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), learner-centered approaches (Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989) and a task-based approach (Long, 2005a,b).

Each of these approaches is focused on facilitating the needs of the learners; the role of students is considered to be crucial in experiential learning because it is eventually the estimation of his/her learning experience that determines the overall success of any program. Educational institutions transmit the facts and knowledge to the students, whereby on the basis of their rationality and intelligence, they are able to use academic knowledge to deal with the everyday life. EL assumes that; when students learn to manage their own learning, the curriculum may not be rigidly identified. In such a case the students have to get engaged to identify the knowledge they require and then acquire it themselves, reflecting on their learning as they go along. The third orientation –Transformation– is about the students creating harmony with the environment at large. The application of these skills entails that “intelligence is developed through the individual’s interaction with the social environment, particularly through solving problems” (Cited in Miller & Seller, 1985).

Assessment an indicator for Quality Enhancement

In the wake of ever increasing diversity in the domain of EL, one of the major challenges for the academia and industry is, probably, how to measure the acquired skills as the necessity of identifying learning objectives creates difficulties in assessing learning (Anderson & Lawton, 1997). Students’ mastery of course content is aligned with the learning objectives in comparison to performance of skills which certainly requires an altogether way of assessment. In view of this issue the uniformity of tool to assess such performance need to be reliable. One means of assessing learning is to evaluate the extent to which the student mastered the learning objectives devised by the instructor.

Quality assurance (QA) is the means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced. Thus based on the crucial role played by the stakeholders for ensuring QA a model of assessment has been proposed which intends to address issue of the credibility of EL.



DISCUSSION

In the absence of unanimously agreed upon definition and practice of EL, it is crucial to define the broader framework of EL.

- 1 Operational definition of EL
- 2 Challenges for teachers and educators
- 3 How to make learning experiences meaningful for students (Need analysis)
- 4 Mode of Transmission
- 5 Assessment techniques of experiential learning

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