



## Perceptions of Higher Education Teachers Concerning Experiential Learning: An Exploratory Inquiry

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### ABSTRACT

Experiential learning leads to intense and profound learning by involving students in any task. Employers prefer graduates who have learnt through various forms of experiential learning. However, in current academic scenario in higher education, experiential learning in higher education institutions is still restricted. Therefore, the major aim of the current work was to explore insights of university teachers regarding experiential learning in terms of their awareness of experiential learning, classroom practices and challenges to implement in classroom. This study polled teachers across the general public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan via thirteen questions based survey involving 208 teachers. The study concluded that collaborative learning is widely used strategy in the classroom as compared to other approaches of experiential learning. Classroom structure, such as overcrowded class, inadequate time, challenge to complete the syllabus, and teachers' own reluctant attitude, were found to be the most significant barriers to utilize experiential techniques in classroom. Therefore, the study recommends to divide a large number of students in groups for better implementation of various form of experiential learning like project-based learning. Science departments be provided sufficient funding to involve students in project-based learning. Students be provided hands-on experiences in classroom and labs.



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## INTRODUCTION

Humans learned via direct experience prior to the development of printed material (books) and the introduction of formal education. Before starting formal schooling, young children are similar in that they attempt numerous times unless they solve a problem. Humans have polished their ability to learn via trial and error. John Dewey devoted

his whole life studying this sort of learning. He published a number of publications about the need of hands-on learning in the education system. Dewey was considered a reformer educationist who wrote on the necessity of incorporating instructive experiences into the learning process in the late 1800s and early 1900s. How we think (1910), Democracy and education (1916), and Experience and education (1917) are some of his scholastic works (1938a). Dewey (1938b) believed that learning entailed a combination of think and do, and he described his learning theory, known as the "pattern of inquiry," in great detail, which includes an undefined set of circumstances or scenario, creation a plan of action, try out the plan that compared against pre-defined criteria of effectiveness, and the reflection upon its worth.

Regrettably, his views were misunderstood. According to Philips (2014) Dewey established the lab school in university of Chicago in 1894. After that, lab schools were springing up all over the country. In these lab schools, teachers frequently thought that they provide learning experiences to their students in such a way, after leaving classrooms students would be able to explore the world. David Kolb is another contemporary pioneer of experiential learning to John Dewey. Kolb (1984) published extensively on this field, developed a learning theory that differed slightly from Dewey. According to his idea, the learning cycle begins with concrete experience, which is followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (1984, p. 38). Outside of the classroom, concrete encounters are common, but they are not required for learning to take place. What's required is that you go through an experience, think on it, and derive concepts from it that you may apply to future encounters. Reflecting on experience, according to Kolb's theory, helps one to create connections between practical experience and conceptual theories, which may then be used to make better and refine comparable future situations. When you go through an event without reflecting on it, you're leaving learning to impact, and Kolb's theory of learning is intentional.

Now a days, researchers have adapted Dewey and Kolb's theories and concepts to a variety of learning contexts. For instance, five teaching techniques identified by Wurdinger and Carlson (2009) that enhance student involvement in the classroom: active learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, service learning, and place-based learning. Experiential learning, they say, is guided by specific concepts, including encouraging student engagement with one another and with the curriculum, participating in first hand experiences, and make use of various topics to improve interdisciplinary learning. All of these methods allow students to participate in a learning cycle that involves planning, assessment, and reflection. Experiential learning, is a cognitive process that combines Dewey's pattern of inquiry of planning, testing, and reflecting in a single learning event. When teachers utilize pedagogical methods like problem-based learning, project-based learning, service learning, and place-based learning, the learning cycle begins.

In the global context of higher education, experiential learning tends to be underutilized. In view of Rosenstein, Sweeney and Gupta (2012) stereotyped fields of study are unwilling to adopt experiential learning in their curricula, and many do not embrace it in real spirit at all. Teachers may intuitively recognize the effectiveness of this approach, yet according to Faculty survey of Higher Education Research Institute (2011) over half of all faculty utilize lecture method as their major teaching style. Workloads, restrictions regarding time, and size of classes have been cited as reasons for its lack of utilization (Remmen & Froyland, 2014). Even though Hake (1998) demonstrated that interactive techniques are much superior to lectures in terms of enhancing academic achievement in a study over 6500 students, experiential learning continues to be underutilized.

The same situation is faced by higher education institutes in Pakistan. According to Ilyas, Kashif and Iqbal (2020) experiential learning in higher education is currently facing numerous defies and hurdles, including students' inferior academic background and a lack of prior experiences as they have not been taught before at any level through experiential learning, poor curricula that is not properly aligned with the practical application of the

concerned field in which students are enrolled ultimately going down towards transferring bookish knowledge with scarce inclination of teachers for opting hands-on experiences. Students have least opportunity to have experiential learning platforms in their institutes. Other constraints include overcrowded classrooms, time constraints, management priorities for low resource allocation, lack of technical resources, and most importantly, a discrepancy between cumulative grades point averages (CGPA) and employability in the absence of tangible Memorandums of Understanding between industry and academia. In a recent study by Prastawa, Akhyar and Suharno (2020) it is claimed that EL is proven in enhancing the entrepreneurial capability of vocational high school students which highlights the long lasting of experience-based learning.

Experiential learning (EL) refers to be involved in productive experiences by the students in their classroom is based on C. Roger's (1969) idea of "learning to do" (Rogers, 1969). Experiential learning is a type of active learning that allows students to use and analyze their previous experiences in order to learn. In EL, pupils are at the center of the learning process, and the efficacy of learning is determined by "how to learn" and "how to think." Wurdinger and Allison (2017) identified these five teaching approaches that come under EL.

**Collaborative learning** is a teaching and learning approach in which a group of students is involved in a joint venture to resolve a problem, accomplish a task, and ultimately come up with an innovative product or idea for a challenge (Laal, & Laal, 2012).

**Project-based learning** is a teaching technique in which students work on skills by responding to an authentic, novel, a social, economic, technical or physical issue, problem, over an extended period of time (Sumarni & Kadarwati, 2020).

**Place based learning** enhances environmental, social, and economic life as well as student success. In summary, place-based education teaches students to care for the planet by helping them understand where they live and taking action in their local neighborhoods and communities. For example, oral history projects in which students gather the tales of community members, historical parks or structures, or learning about urban agriculture and community gardening in major cities with food deserts are all examples of urban place-based teaching (Klippel,Zhao, Sajjadi, Wallgrün, Bagher & Oprean, 2020).

**Service Learning** is a type of EL in which students apply their academic knowledge and critical thinking abilities to real-world problems. Service-learning is a teaching and learning approach. It stimulates civic sense in students and transforms learning into useful community service. Its critical component is a rigorous and relevant curriculum that prepares students for success in 21st-century skills (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).Service-learning is defined as an experiential teaching technique in which students are personally indulged themselves in accomplishing human and community needs. It designs and provides structured learning opportunities to foster learning and social development (Ahmad, Deebea & Raza, 2023).

### **Problem based learning**

Problem-Based learning is a teaching approach in which challenging real-world issues are presented before students as the vehicle to nurture concept learning (Ahdhianto, Marsigit, & Nurfauzi,2020).Students' active participation stimulates them and develops their cognitive and social abilities, which are required for self-directed learning and constructive problem-solving (Wudinger,2005).Students participate actively, cognitively, emotionally, and socially during the educational process during experiential teaching (Kokkos, 1999) and manage to comprehend the barriers that arise during their learning and life skills development (Courau, 2000).

Keeping in view the above stated scenario, the study was carried out to explore perceptions of higher education teachers about experiential learning in terms of their awareness about its concept and approaches, their classroom practices on the basis of various approaches of experiential learning and barriers to implement experiential learning if teachers are willing to implement it

### **Objectives of the study**

- To explore the perceptions of teachers concerning experiential learning in the context of higher education

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study was conducted with the purpose of exploring the perceptions of teachers about experiential learning. For this purpose, thirteen question web based survey tool (qualtrics) was adapted to collect data about teachers' perceptions for the usage of EL. Wurdinger and Allison (2017) identified teaching approaches that were used by researchers including collaborative learning, project based learning, place based learning, service learning, problem based learning that provide basis and conceptual framework for drafting and adapting the questions of survey for experiential learning. However, Wurdinger and Allison (2017) used a newer term collaborative learning that reflects same concepts as of active learning (Barkley, Major & Cross, 2014) which was used by Wurdinger and Carlson (2009) in their teaching approaches. Among these five approaches of teaching another approach student presentation was also included in the survey. Participants were asked in survey to identify which teaching approaches among these six approaches they use in their classrooms and what percentage of time they spend in using of each teaching approach in their classes. In addition to that other questions mainly focus on out of class experiences either they provide their students and what barriers they face in implementing the experiential learning. All the questions were close ended except 1 and 13 that asks from participants to define and explore their concepts about experiential learning and in question 13 option of other was given.

Approval from faculty members was obtained for survey by using assistance from higher education commission (HEC) website to obtain Email addresses of faculty members of teaching in universities of Punjab. To maximize the sample pool, total 35 public sector general universities were included in the study. Total 509 surveys were sent out, 208 were returned back which was equal to forty percent. Percentages were used for interpretation of data to infer results.

Question 1 asked respondents to define and elaborate their understanding about the concepts of experiential learning. Overall, 35% participants defined it learning through one's personal and practical experiences 41% defined it learning through observation and through everyday life experience and 24% defined it as learning by doing.

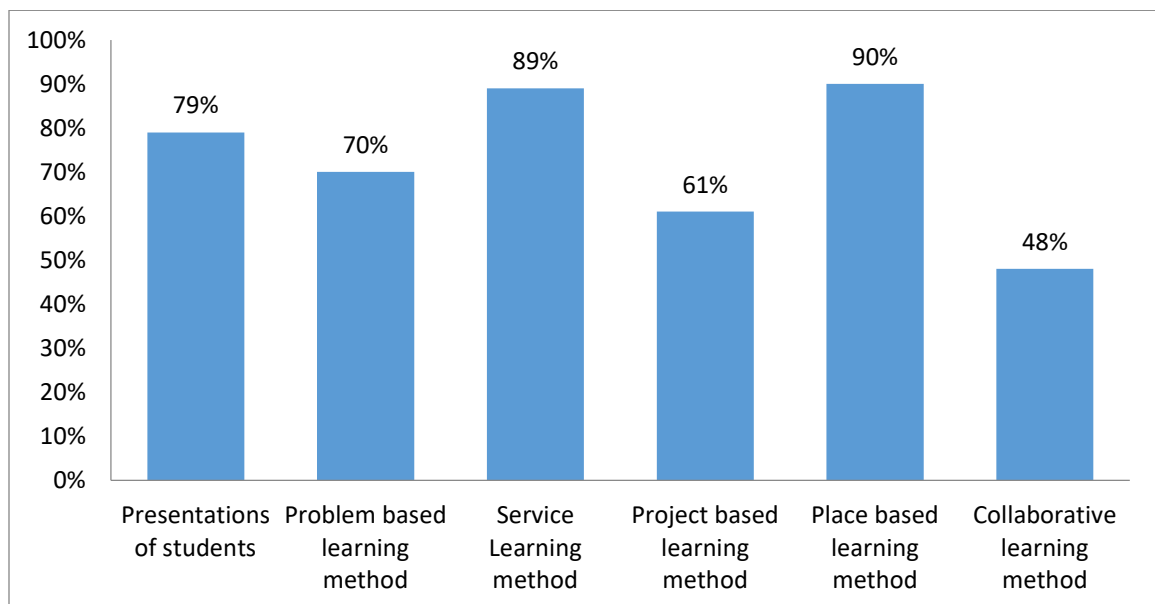
In question 2 of survey, on the whole, 62 % respondents mentioned that they widely used experiential learning and seventy nine percent participants considered it beneficial for students in their life in response to question 3.

Question 4 requested respondents to choose those teaching techniques they utilize in the classroom among given choices; 93 percent use lecture methods, while just 23 percent use place-based learning the least one among given teaching methods.

**Table 1.** Percentages of teachers' perceptions using common teaching methods in their classrooms.

Methods of Teaching	Teachers' percentages
Lecture Method	93%
Presentations of students	87%
Problem based learning method	71%
Service Learning method	33%
Project based learning method	76%
Place based learning method	23%
Collaborative learning method	88%

Question 5-10 participants were asked how much time they spend in using these approaches in less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  th % of time in their classes. Figures 1 demonstrate that 79% used student presentation, whereas 48% used collaborative learning. Higher the percentages of respondents shows least time was given to those teaching approaches ,such as place based learning and service learning methods about them mostly respondents believed least time they used.



**Fig 1.** Percentages of teachers' perception using teaching methods in their classrooms less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  th % of time column (the least given time)

Respondents to Question 11 were asked if they share out-of-class experiences with their students. Sixty-three percent of respondents replied yes, while twenty-seven percent replied no.

Question 12 inquired what types of out of class experiences are shared by them for students. Most of the respondents, sixty one percent (61%) were in the favor of observation while 42% respondents considered field work as out of class learning approach they use. Thirty two percent participants use field trips, thirty percent preferred to use interviews; eight percent do not apply any kind of out of class experiences in their learning.

*Table 2. Teachers' Response Percentage regarding out of class experiences they provide to students*

<b>Out of class experiences</b>	<b>Faculty response percentage</b>
Observation	61%
Field work	42%
Field trips	32%
Interviews	30%
Not any	8%

Question 13 asked what hurdles they face for the implementation of experiential learning in their classrooms. Seventy two percent claimed shortage of time, 43% claimed shortage of funds, 27% indicated lack of evaluation techniques for various approaches of experiential learning and 19% indicated lack of interest of university management and 9% agreed at institutional policies.

*Table 3. Teachers' response percentage regarding obstacles to implement experiential learning.*

<b>Implementation Hurdles</b>	<b>Faculty response percentage</b>
Shortage of time	72%
Shortage of money	43%
Evaluation techniques	27%
University management	19%
Institutional policies	9%
Others	17%

Among other reasons in question 13 that make experiential learning difficult to implement. Most dominant reasons were considered structure of classroom, size of classes, due to lengthy course outlines and teachers' resistive behavior.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Results of the study demonstrate that lecturing is still the most common way for faculty to teach their students, in spite of this, it also reveals that some faculty members are at least practicing with presentations of students, collaborative learning technique, and method of project-based learning in their teaching. Despite the fact that lecturing is the most common method, instructors are increasingly using alternative approaches, which is very encouraging. The extent to which teachers understand the ideas and practices behind each of these approaches is unknown. Collaborative learning, for example, entails students working in groups to finish a task, with each group member having an equal amount of work to perform (Barkley, Major & Cross, 2014). Collaborative learning does not mean just working together where only one student accomplishes the entire given task; nonetheless, this is a widespread misconception about the approach.

However, service learning and place based learning are the least popular, most likely because these take a long time for planning and implementation in the local context of students and worldwide organizations. Even while percentages represented that student presentations, problem-based learning, and project-based learning had somewhat higher implementation rates than place-based learning and service learning, they still lacked implementation. These findings are consistent with Hou and Wilder (2015) according to them the majority of the teachers surveyed were ignorant of the usage of service learning, which is a common experiential learning approach. One reason is that many people are unaware of this strategy that is why the lecture format may be more widely employed than other approaches. Collaborative learning was the one strategy that was used more frequently than other approaches (48 % of teachers utilize it less than 25% of the time), thus it appears that this method is gaining attraction.

Because these experiences require time and commitment to administer these approaches, faculty must be dedicated to the ideals and advantages of these approaches. What faculty may not realize, however, is that after they spend some time in planning the projects, activities, and experiences, the learning process starts and improves on its own, enabling teachers to step back and function as mentors. Classrooms may look chaotic at first when utilizing these techniques, but this state of great uncertainty serves as an aim later. Despite the fact that teachers use experiential learning rarely in their lectures, even then other sorts of out-of-class events are being incorporated into their courses. The most common method for out of class experience was observation (61 percent), followed by fieldwork (42 percent), field excursions, and interviews (30 percent each). However, there are two possible problems with these experiences that the study did not account for in the survey.

One problem is that it is unknown how frequently and for how long teachers used these approaches. Second, these activities might be unassisted. Learners may be involving in observations or participating in a field experience, but learning may not occur if the teacher does not guide the event without clarification of students about goal and reflection on its significance by students. Several barriers were cited that prevent use of experiential learning by the teachers. The main issue was a lack of time to put the approach into practice. Other issues were a lack of funds, the need to meet needed curriculum quantities, large size of class, organization of classrooms, and staff opposition. These all challenges, however, may be overcome if teachers really have firm belief in real philosophy of experiential learning. Instructors can, for example, split students into small groups for debate and discussion of topics in a fifty-minute lecture class. Structured group work outside of the classroom can be included in

assignments, and somehow as basic as setting chairs into circular mode can help to create a conducive environment for discussion.

Among other barriers teachers' reluctance can be a crucial challenge, but professional enhancement programs that introduce advantages of experiential learning to faculty may encourage trying out of these few approaches. Instructors can overcome these apparent barriers with a little creative thinking and can develop interest of students in learning.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of study finding, it is recommended that teachers be trained in new and innovative teaching techniques especially approaches of experiential learning. However, few of its approaches demand sufficient funding especially in the field of Natural Sciences. So, ample funding be provided to departments to be utilized by teachers to involve their students in projects. Teachers are encouraged to maximize provision of hands-on experiences to learners in classroom and labs.

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