

**Experience Matters: Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and Its
Application In Higher Education**

Dr. Marium Din

Department of Education

National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

Abstract

Experiential learning is the learning that is based upon experience. Individual's life experiences have a great influence on his/her learning. His/her background, personal experiences, interest, personality, and learning preferences have a great effect on learning. Experiential learning is student-centered learning. It ensures that students are part and parcel of learning process. Experiential learning is the learning that is of the students, by the students and for the students. Experiential learning is based upon the premises that that every individual constructs its own learning. This article is aimed at highlighting the concept, nature, different propositions and tenets of experiential learning. This article is based upon the extensive literature review on the theme of experiential learning in the context of higher education. David, A Kolb's experiential learning model is discussed in some detail. A valuable part of the article is about application of experiential learning in higher education by discussing learning spaces, experiential pedagogies and institutional development.

Key Words: Experiential learning; Learning style;

1. Introduction

Experiential learning is a term that is in vogue in the educational setups. Many people and institutions of higher education are emphasizing on inclusion and promotion of experiential learning approach to education. Experiential learning focuses heavily on the engagement of students or learners in the teaching-learning process. Experience is the heart of experiential learning. It contains experience, reflection and action as the important components. Kolb's Experiential learning model is the most studied, researched and applied model of experiential learning. This is the model that is applied with great success in almost all fields of higher education including vocational and technical education, teacher education, business education, nursing education, medical education, and engineering education etc.

Before going in detail about the use of experiential learning in higher education it is essential to have view the meaning and nature of experiential learning, and propositions of experiential learning.

2. Literature Review

Experiential learning is commonly used in two different senses. Firstly, it is used to describe prior learning that is brought to a new situation arising from life experience of learner. This prior learning provides base for any learning that follows. Secondly, it refers to learning processes in which experience of the learner is used a prime source and stimulus for learning.(English, 2005, and Brookfield, 1983) .

Experiential learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984:41). It is “the insight gained through the conscious or unconscious internalization of our own or observed instructions, which is built upon our past experiences and knowledge (Beard, 2002).

Experiential learning demands full engagement of a person in the learning experience physically, emotionally and intellectually. It is the matter of insight that is gained through the internal processing of observed instructions, that is based on our past and present experiences. One has to involve in learning internally as well as externally.

2.1 Nature of Experiential Learning

There are diverse perspectives of experiential learning that can be divided in four “tribes” of experiential learning. These tribes as located in different “villages”, had different cultures and points of reference. **Village 1** which is related to assessment and accreditation of prior

experiential learning. For the supporters of village 1 only thing that matters is *what* has been learnt than where, why, and how learning is achieved. Portfolios and autobiographies are also used for assessing and accreditation of prior experiential learning. **Village two** considers experiential learning as Catalyzing change in education through participative pedagogies. This village focuses on *what, where and how* to learn and encourages use of role plays, exercises, field trips, visits, and field research. **Village three** focuses on social change. Learning from experience as the core of education for consciousness -rising, community action and social change. **Village four** focuses on personal growth and development to increase self- awareness and group effectiveness. (Weil and McGill, 1989). This village focuses on personal and interpersonal experiencing. The experiences should be neutral. This village has therapeutic goals and it demands the individual to know himself in relation to other persons. This village also considers role playing as an effective mean for therapy. This village is supported by many humanistic psychologists.

No matter one advocating which village of experiential learning, all the proponents of experiential learning emphasize on the experience whether it is the past experience or the current experience. The experiential learning focuses on making the education relevant to the background, environment past experiences, present day society and more realistically meaningful for the learner (Din, 2009).

2.2 Experiential Learning Theory Propositions

Kolb's asserts that learning can be taken as a process and not just an outcome. Learning is not the end product it is much more than that. It is there for the very start of the learning process and it is accompanied through all steps. It is worthwhile in terms of process as one acquires an enormous amount of knowledge on various steps that are involved in it. In other words learning is to be studied and to be seen at various points. Learning is relearning. It is not a static or unchangeable phenomenon. One constantly modifies his or her learning in the light of new experiences. Learning is subjected to new situations which introduces new things or reduces some old elements. It is not a piece-meal approach. It is a holistic process that helps in better adjustment in the world and surroundings (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Its elements are very much interlinked with environment. Man is nothing from environment and environment needs individuals. There is reciprocity in both of them. If individuals demand something from environment, the environment also needs something from individual. This unique interaction gives birth to learning. Knowledge is constantly created in the process of learning; this knowledge creation is done through the processes of grasping and processing information.

Experiential learning is a client-focused approach (Beard, & Wilson, 2002). It is a supported approach to individuals, groups and organizational development.

2.3 Tenets of Experiential Learning

Jarvis also supports the point of view of Kolb when he describes tenets of experiential learning. He also affirms the pivotal role of experience in learning. He believes that it is prerequisite for learning. Without experience no learning can occur it works as stimulator for learning. He also supports the point of view of Kolb again as he says that it is the process of constructing the knowledge by the learner himself. Learning is not what is imposed by the teacher or the system on the learner; it is the process of creating or constructing experience in the light of personal experiences and personality dimensions. He also supports Kolb in the way that he also encourages the learner to have active contact with his environment and learning that is socially and culturally constructed it is much better than that learning that is ad hocked or adopted from outside of the environment. Learning cannot be free from the influence of socio-economic conditions in which it has occurred. It has a strong influence on learning. The propositions of experiential learning proposed by Kolb, and tenets of experiential learning proposed by Jarvis are very much similar in their essence. Both believe that experiential learning is not like traditional learning imposed by teacher on student, or it is not that type of learning which is totally out of control to learner. It is a learning that is totally in control of learner.

2.4 Experiential Learning Models.

There are different experiential learning models. James (2010) has overviewed experiential learning models. These models are different and similar to each other in some ways or many ways. All of them focus on experience as the necessary element for experiential learning. **The one-stage model** (experience) is having only the experience as a key to learning .It does not include any other element in it. It encourages the involvement and participation of the learner. Experience is very much important for those who favor this model. **The second-stage** (Experience-Reflection) model has reflection with experience. The combination of experience and reflection paves the path for learning. Any experience must be gone through the process of reflection. It should be studied deeply that what has happened, and why has happened. The school or educational institutions should arrange those activities for learners which provide time for reflection as well. **Three –stage models** are (do-review-plan) model and (observation of surrounding conditions- knowledge obtained by recollection- judgment) model. “Do-review-plan” model asserts that after any action there must be a review of that action. It should be studied that what has been done, and after the review there must be planning. This model believes that review or reflection must not be an end in itself it must lead the learner to plan something in the light of that review. The second three stage model “observation of surrounding conditions- knowledge obtained by recollection- judgment” proclaims that observation is the first

element of experiential learning. The proponents of this model believes that firstly there should be observation of the surrounding environment, then there must be recollection of knowledge that is obtained

from the observation and in the last there must be judgment that must be based on that knowledge that is obtained by recollection of observations. The fifth model is **four- stage model** proposed by David, A Kolb is combination of experience, reflection, abstraction, and experimentation. There are three five-stage models. The first one is “focus-action-support-feedback-debriefing” model. This model suggests that experiential learning starts with the focus, when one individual focuses on something this leads to act. Action needs some support that is necessary, and after that support some feedback is needed and then the element of debriefing occurs. The elements of this model are somehow unique and new in their terminology. The second five stage model is similar to the previous model of five-stages, but employs new terminologies as well. This model has the following elements. Encounter-(dis)confirmation-revision-anticipation -investment. Encounter can be taken as combination of focus and action. Then this encounter leads to confirmation or disconfirmation of that particular experience. After this, some revision is done it is analyzed by the learner himself. After this revision anticipation is made that is some sort of generalization as suggested by Kolb. In the last investment is done on the basis of that anticipation. Pfeiffer and Jones suggest another model five -stage model. This initiates with experiencing, that leads the publishing. Then some processing is done in the light of publishing and after the processing a generalization is made that is applied further. This model is somehow similar to Kolb’s model as it emphasizes on experiencing as the first step of experiential learning it is different from that of Kolb’s model in the sense that it has given the concept of publishing and processing instead of reflective observation. But again it correlates with Kolb’s model in the next two steps of generalizing and applying. This model has used the term of applying instead of active experimentation. The last model of experiential learning is six-stage model. That has the following elements the first one is experience, second is induce, third is generalize, fourth is deduce, fifth is apply, and sixth is evaluate. This model also correlates with Kolb’s model on the first step, third step, and fifth step. This model suggests that first of all there is experience which paves the path for further experiential learning; this experience helps in inducing something that is to derive some principles in the light of that experience.

2.5 Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model and Learning Styles

Learning styles have a great significance in teaching-learning process. Every person has a different learning style. Learning styles offer an opportunity to apply variety of teaching methods in a better way; they create an interest in learning and reduce monotony (Maqbool, 2015).

The persons having the ability of concrete experience (CE) and reflective observation (RO) have diverging learning style. The divergers are those people who are social, creative, and like to work with people. The second learning style is of assimilator. Their greatest strength lies in the ability to create theoretical models. They excel in inductive reasoning.

Third types of learners are convergers. They are unemotional, and they are good in physical sciences they work through hypothetical-deductive reasoning. The doctors and the engineers are convergers.

Fourth types of learners are called accommodators. They can easily carry out plans. They are often called risk-takers. They can adapt themselves to different situations in a very well manner. These people are good in business, and marketing and sales. They are good in management, and they work on their gut feelings. They are action oriented people.

2.6 Principles for the Enhancement of Experiential Learning in Higher Education by Introducing the Concept of Learning Spaces.

Experiential learning also introduces the concept of learning spaces. This suggests a framework for understanding the interface between student-learning styles and the educational learning environment based on Lewin's concept of life space. Following principles may be applied in order to create experiential learning spaces.

1. Respect for learners and their experience
2. Begin learning with the learner's experience of the subject matter
3. Creating and holding a hospitable space for learning
4. Making space for conversational learning
5. Making space for development of expertise
6. Making spaces for feeling and thinking
7. Making spaces for acting and reflecting
8. Making space for inside-out learning
9. Making space for learners to take charge of their own learning

Such concept of learning space calls for a climate that is inclusive, adaptable, creative and participatory. Experiential learning model views cultural norms, interpersonal interactions, respect for each other, hospitable environment essential for learning. Such a climate encourages collaborative decision-making, motivation and learning. It also handles the conflicts in a positive manner and takes them as a base for learning.

2.5 Promoting Experiential Learning in Higher Education through Institutional Development

Effective learning calls for institutional development. Now –a –days there is much focus on research that is related to teaching-learning process in higher education. People have a grave concern for the improvement of learning in higher education. Teaching in higher education has for some time been the focus of worldwide attention in research and other programs (Mouraz, et.al., 2013). The experiential learning calls for the holistic program of institutional development. Kolb and Kolb (2005) says that there is the dire need to develop curricula on the basis of

experiential learning where the objectives, content, instructional activities and evaluation techniques are based on the principles of experiential learning. The curriculum of experiential learning must be iterative, integrative intentional and engaging.

Experiential learning if put into practice in its real zeal requires the sound faculty development initiatives that are in accordance with the curriculum development. Researches have proved that

if a teacher uses multiple instructional strategies, the students better equip them with those styles which are not even their own dominant styles.

As a paradigm shift is to be introduced, it calls for the student development also. He /she have to be trained to learn about their own learning style and go for such initiatives which enhance learning.

This demands appropriate administrative development may be arranged so that the maximum benefits of experiential learning may be attained.

The whole investment on curriculum development, faculty development, student development, administrative and staff development will go in ruin if resources are not developed. Therefore resource development is an integral part of institutional development.

Institutional development programs are very much essential for fully appreciating the fruits of experiential learning.

3. Conclusions

Experiential learning is the need of the time. The traditional teacher-led instructional systems that only transmit knowledge from the mind of the instructor to the learners are no more valid. The technological advancement, like internet social media demands a paradigm shift in the education system. This calls for such type of education that gives centrality to the experience of the learner; incorporates its requirements; interests; demands; and considers students' experience as an only measure of a successful education.

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