

Research Paper

Experiential Learning: A Framework for Effective Pedagogy in NCF 2023

Sarla Mehra^{1*}, Prof. Meenu Singh²

ABSTRACT

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 highlights the importance of experiential learning to enhance the quality and effectiveness of school education in India. School education is crucial in establishing the foundation for lifelong learning and equipping students to deal with complex real-world issues. Experiential learning helps learners better understand and navigate abstract concepts. The main objective of this qualitative study is to explore experiential learning strategies that teachers should incorporate in school education as an effective pedagogical approach. This exploration reviews existing literature in the field of study, shifting the focus from conventional rote memorization to practical activities that equip students to face real-world challenges. Various strategies for educators are outlined to facilitate the effective implementation of experiential learning as an innovative pedagogical practice. This approach aims to make education more interactive and experiential, focusing on practical applications rather than theoretical knowledge, aligning with NEP 2020's goals. The findings indicate that teachers should use diverse experiential learning strategies to enhance their teaching. Additionally, school administration should create a flexible environment that supports the implementation of experiential learning strategies both inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: *Experiential learning-based pedagogy, Competency-based education, Sustainable education, 21st century skills*

Education plays a central role in the development of any nation. The upliftment of a country depends on its competent young people who form the backbone of society. Every student with access to quality education has the potential to become a skilled contributor to the nation. However, the holistic development of students is not possible without a sound sustainable education system. A sustainable education system, supported by effective teaching methods, helps students achieve their goals. It is essential to provide students with lasting knowledge that equips them for future success. According to NEP 2020, the education system is structured into four stages: the Foundational Stage, which comprises three years of pre-schooling followed by two years of Grades 1 and 2; the Preparatory Stage, encompassing Grades 3 to 5; the Middle Stage, which includes Grades 6 to 8; and the Secondary Stage, covering Grades 9 to 12. It is vital to integrate experiential

¹Junior Research Fellow, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, UP

²Associate Professor, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, UP

*Corresponding Author

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learning methodologies throughout all stages of education to ensure that the teaching and learning process is both meaningful and effective.

Schools have traditionally been seen as places where education is delivered primarily through conventional methods such as lectures and rote memorization. However, parents are becoming increasingly aware of their children's educational needs within the evolving education system. Even families from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also striving to provide quality education. Today, education is not just about rote memorization but also encompasses essential 21st-century skills like critical thinking, creativity, information literacy, initiative, etc. So, to foster and develop these skills, experiential learning-based pedagogy is becoming more valuable in the teaching and learning process as it helps to cultivate these skills among students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning-based pedagogy is not a new concept. It has been discussed by notable figures such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Carl Rogers, etc. Educationists and psychologists have provided several definitions and interpretations of experiential learning in different contexts. A significant contribution to this field is attributed to David Allen Kolb. Experiential learning is the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experiences (Kolb, 1984). The learners can achieve effective and efficient learning by utilizing the rich resources available in their surroundings and by engaging with their peers (Colin, 2023). While experiential learning is often associated with “learning by doing”. In addition, it is best understood as learning through reflection on experiences.

In a wider sense, it is the application of academic theories to real-world experiences and the application of these theoretical concepts may be within the classroom or outside the classroom. It is a process to cultivate skills, and values and develop knowledge from hands-on experiences and reflection on it. Hands-on learning along with reflection on their knowledge by the students comes under experiential learning but only hands-on learning is not considered as experiential learning. Therefore, experiential learning often referred to as learning by action, or learning through discovery and exploration, emphasizes immersion in a specific experience followed by reflection. In a nutshell, it involves immersing learners in a particular experience followed by reflection. This process allows learners to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In essence, it can be defined as “learning by reflection” or learning gained through experience.

Experiential learning can be implemented using various models, with Kolb’s experiential learning model being particularly noteworthy. This model consists of four stages, which can begin at any point. It comprises concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation that guide learners. Together, they guide through a continuous process of acquiring knowledge and skills. The learner experiences concrete experiences that provide a foundation for reflection.

In the first stage, concrete experiences, learners engage in hands-on real-world activities such as field trips, projects, or simulations. This provides the foundation for reflection. Next, in the reflective observation stage, learners observe and think about concrete experiences, considering what they have seen, felt, and learned. In the abstract conceptualization stage, learners develop new ideas or modify their existing concepts to enhance their understanding. Finally, in the active experimentation stage, learners apply the knowledge they have gained to new situations (Kolb, 1984).

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In India, various policies and frameworks have focused on integrating innovative teaching pedagogies to achieve optimal learning outcomes. Educational policies in the Indian context have emphasized the inclusion of experiential learning in education, such as the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005), the Right to Education (RTE, 2009), and the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2023) has recently suggested incorporating a range of experiential learning-based instructional strategies. These strategies are designed to make learning more engaging and assist students in internalizing conceptual knowledge, ultimately promoting competency-based education.

In the past, experiential learning was confined to a narrow range of instructional strategies. However, recent educational policies have broadened this concept and introduced a variety of instructional strategies based on experiential learning. The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) emphasizes the adoption of experiential learning at all stages of education, including hands-on learning, art integration, sports integration, and storytelling-based pedagogy. Technology can also play a vital role in facilitating experiential learning, especially in situations with limited resources (NCF, 2023).

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 and the National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 highlight that experiential learning should be implemented as an effective and efficient pedagogical approach for every subject at all educational stages, while also exploring relations among different subjects. Several initiatives have been launched by both state and central governments in India to incorporate experiential learning into the education system, emphasizing the importance of learning by doing and reflecting on those experiences (CBSE, 2019).

Despite many efforts by the Indian government to ensure the effective implementation of experiential learning activities in school education, various challenges such as unavailability of basic requirements like insufficient time and inadequate resources continue to pose barriers to the adoption of innovative pedagogical practices (Rani & Tyagi, 2022).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Uyen et al. (2022) conducted a study titled “The Effectiveness of Experiential Learning in Teaching Arithmetic and Geometry in Sixth Grade”. The findings indicated that experiential learning activities had a positive impact on student’s attitudes toward math and their academic progress. Mamatha (2021) emphasized that experiential learning fosters personalized, accelerated, and diverse learning while promoting reflective practices. In addition, it also gives career guidance and prepares students for real-life scenarios. For educational institutions, it enhances student engagement and strengthens relationships with industry and community. Gohil (2020) revealed that experiential learning instructional program based on 5E’s constructivist approach to science enhances the learner’s autonomy. A study by Kumar & Indu (2020) demonstrated a significant increase in students’ cognitive skills through experiential learning. Gavillet (2018) explained that experiential learning opportunities can be found both inside and outside the classroom. The findings from several studies indicate that students who learn a specific subject through experiential learning tend to achieve significantly higher than those taught using conventional methods. However, many educators face several challenges in ensuring students fully comprehend the content. Numerous studies highlight the importance of providing teachers with specialized and adequate training. A Lack of teacher knowledge regarding the latest skills, devices, innovations, and techniques for practical tasks, field visits, and any other experiential

activities poses a significant barrier to using experiential learning (Nooghabi et al., 2011; Rani & Shivani, 2021).

A review of existing literature demonstrates that strategies based on experiential learning in school education are valuable for enhancing learning outcomes, cognitive skills, and learners' autonomy. Furthermore, integrating technology with experiential learning makes concepts more engaging and helps students retain information longer.

These studies highlight the importance of various teaching methods to meet students' diverse needs. They present multiple strategies based on experiential learning, including simulations, internships, group activities, and vicarious experiences. Additionally, the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) in 2019 outlined several strategies such as field trips, role-playing, games, puzzles, peer tutoring, group learning, art-based activities, portfolios, guest speakers, video projects, films, and documentation. NEP 2020 mentioned experiential learning through hands-on activities, storytelling, and integration of art and sports.

DISCUSSION

Recently, NCF 2023 also emphasized the significance of experiential learning at all stages of education. This underscores the need for the concerned authorities to focus on the effective and efficient implementation of experiential learning in Indian classrooms to achieve competency-based outcomes. There is a need to raise awareness among teachers about multi-sensory pedagogical experiences to develop 21st-century skills and competencies in their students.

Workshops focused on experiential learning should be conducted more frequently, and all teachers should receive training on various experiential learning strategies. The curriculum for teacher education programs should be revised to ensure that student teachers gain knowledge of several instructional strategies based on experiential learning. Both pre-service and in-service teachers should undergo practical training in various experiential learning strategies related to their subject.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework 2023 emphasize the importance of providing experiential learning-based education to students during their school years. This approach aims to promote conceptual understanding rather than rote memorization. However, several barriers within the Indian educational system make implementing experiential learning challenging. Some of these common challenges include insufficient time, inadequate resources, lack of quality teachers, and varying levels of interest among students. Experiential learning can be integrated into all phases of education in various ways. It is particularly beneficial for teachers, as it helps them become more reflective practitioners. This process enhances their teaching skills and enables them to better understand their students' strengths and weaknesses through reflection on their experiences. Therefore, it is essential to address these challenges to incorporate high-quality experiential learning opportunities effectively. Additionally, school administrations should create a flexible environment that facilitates the implementation of experiential learning strategies both inside and outside the classroom.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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