



Teachers' Perceptions of Experiential Learning: A Comparative Study of Understanding, Practices, Challenges, and Impact in Private and Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study was of a qualitative nature that aimed to reveal and compare the perception of experiential learning of private and public secondary school teachers in District Malakand, Pakistan. The primary purposes were to explore teachers' conceptions and use of experiential learning, their attitudes towards its value, student involvement, problems encountered, and how experiential learning was perceived to affect their students' learning outcomes. Written interviews were used to collect data

from 30 secondary school teachers (15 from private and 15 from government schools), which was then analysed thematically. The findings showed that teachers had positive perceptions about experiential learning and acknowledged its significance in the development of practical skills, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and application of real-life knowledge and retention of long-term knowledge. Experiential methods were reported to increase students' interest and participation. Most teachers, however, had a limited understanding of the concept, many of them associate it with basic hands-on activities or lab experiments. Experiential learning was still not widely and consistently put into practice in both sectors. The scarcity, time constraints, large size of classes, pressure on syllabus, and lack of trained teachers emerged as significant constraints, especially in government schools. The researcher found that there is a big discrepancy between positive attitude of teachers and their actual practices. It suggests having comprehensive teacher professional development programmers, curriculum and examination changes and provision of resources for the broader and better implementation of experiential learning in Pakistani schools.

Keywords: Experiential learning, teacher's perception, private school, public school, qualitative research, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning has proved to be a successful pedagogical technique, which focuses on learning through real-life experiences, reflection and active participation, rather than on the passive acquisition of knowledge. The idea has firm foundations in the writings of John Dewey who emphasized “learning by doing” and the need for education to be related to real experiences for meaningful learning (Dewey, 1938). This philosophy has been formalized by David Kolb in his Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which models learning as a cycle of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). Experiential learning is extensively acknowledged in modern learning for its capability to boost pupil engagement, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and long memory. Empirical research has revealed that students who have been taught experientially tend to have better academic performance, motivation, and 21st-century skills than those who are taught by means of a traditional rote-learning approach (Kong, 2021; Răduci, 2019).

While these benefits have been well established, the extent to which experiential learning is embodied in practice is different in private schools than in public. Private schools usually have more resources, smaller classes and more flexibility within the curriculum. In the case of public (government) schools, however, they are often constrained by various factors such as large class sizes, less infrastructure, lack of teacher training, and examination-oriented systems which strive for traditional teacher-centred learning methods (Khanum, 2020). This dichotomy between public and private education sector is more pronounced in the

context of Pakistan. In terms of resource use and pressures, the public schools are funded by most students but often are forced to employ rote-learning techniques simply because of the limitations of resources, and the private schools are more generally open to innovative pedagogies, although there are also problems of implementation of consistency. The significance of teachers' perception, attitude and experience of the successful implementation of experiential learning is of paramount importance because it directly influences classroom practice and decision making. However, there is hardly any comparative research done in the context of conceptualization, application, student involvement, challenges faced, and impact of experiential learning in private and public schools in Pakistan.

The present study aims to fill this gap by examining and contrasting the perception of private and public-school teachers about experiential learning in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is based on the progressive educational philosophy of John Dewey who believed in “learning by doing” and advocated that education should relate to students' real-life experiences (Dewey, 1938). According to Dewey, learning is an ongoing process in which the learner interacts with his environment. Later this concept was formalised by David Kolb (2015) in the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Kolb suggested four stages, the first two of which are concrete experience and reflective observation, followed by abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Effective learning takes place when students participate in all four phases of the Kolb cycle, Kolb said. This theory has since evolved into one of the most important theories in contemporary education, especially for the teaching of active, student-centred learning environments (Morris, 2020).

Benefits and Impact of Experiential Learning

There is a wealth of research that has shown that experiential learning has a positive effect on student outcomes. It improves pupil engagement, motivation, critical thinking, problem solving skills and retention of knowledge (Kong 2021). Sometimes, experiential learning methods are more effective than traditional rote-learning methods in terms of pupils' academic outcomes. For example, in New York public schools, Mohan (2015) was able to show that students in experiential learning classrooms performed better on science standardized tests than students in traditional classrooms. Likewise, Răduci (2019) found that the learning outcomes were achieved better in the experiential approach, which was explained by deeper processing of the material in the mind of the learner and the personal relevance of the material.

Teachers' Perceptions and Implementation of Experiential Learning

The role of teachers' perception is a very important factor affecting the implementation and effectiveness of experiential learning. Research shows that many teachers know of its value but not all of them are consistent in using it in their classrooms and some factors have been found to create barriers for its implementation

in the classroom. Bano (2024) conducted a study on the application of higher education teachers in public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan, and identified that collaborative learning was the most popular experiential strategy among the teachers. Some of the major constraints in the use of experiential strategies were identified as overcrowded classrooms, lack of time, pressure to complete the syllabus, and teachers' reluctance. Experiential learning is generally enjoyed by teachers, but they also point out that it is hard to implement in practice due to resource limitations, large class sizes, inflexible curricula, and a lack of teacher training (Reshmad'sa, 2017). Successful implementation must involve both conceptual understanding and support systems and professional development.

Private versus Public Schools: A Comparative Perspective

There are important distinctions between private and public-school perspectives of and approaches to experiential learning. Private schools generally have smaller class sizes, more curricular flexibility and better facilities so that they can provide more innovative teaching. Traditional teacher-centered approaches, on the other hand, are typically more likely to be the norm in public schools, where limited resources and exam pressures can result in a heavier reliance on traditional teaching styles. Research in different settings indicates that the feasibility and experiences of teachers in private schools are generally more positive than those in public schools when it comes to student-centered approaches. The concept of experiential learning within the context of Pakistan. Experiential Learning in Pakistan. The educational system in Pakistan is divided into public and private sectors in a sharp division. Public school teachers most students but mainly use rote memorization and traditional teaching methods, as it is constrained by infrastructure and examination-based systems. While relatively well resourced, gaps between policy intentions and practice are found in private schools as well. There is little comparative study to date on teachers' perceptions of experiential learning in these two sectors. Previously, some research in Pakistan has identified the issues of large classes, inadequate materials, teacher training, and the preference for traditional teaching methods in Pakistan (Bano, 2024). These challenges are greater in public schools.

Experiential Learning in the Pakistani Context

While there is abundant literature available internationally about EL, few studies have been conducted on a comparative basis to investigate teachers' attitudes towards EL conceptualization, use, student involvement, difficulties, and impacts on student learning outcomes in the Pakistani context of public and private schools. This study is designed to address this gap by offering empirical information on teachers' perceptions and experiences of experiential learning in both sectors.

Research Gap

While there is abundant literature available internationally about EL, few studies have been conducted on a comparative basis to investigate teachers' attitudes towards EL conceptualization, use, student involvement, difficulties, and impacts on student learning outcomes in the Pakistani context of public and private schools. This study is designed to address this gap by offering empirical information on teachers'

perceptions and experiences of experiential learning in both sectors.

Objectives of the Study

This current study attempts to understand and contrast the perceptions of private and public-school teachers towards experiential learning. In particular, the study will seek to:

- Analyze teacher's understanding, concepts and application of experiential learning in public and private schools.
- Investigate teachers' perceptions about students' engagement, difficulties and significance of experiential learning in the teaching learning process.
- Evaluate teachers' attitudes towards the contribution of experiential learning towards students' learning outcomes and learning outcomes.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. Explain what private application of experiential learning is?
2. How do teachers think about students' participation, the role of experiential learning in the teaching-learning process, and challenges they encounter in the implementation of experiential learning?
3. What is the perception of private and public-school teachers about the contribution of experiential learning on students' learning accomplishments and overall learning outcomes?

Nature of Study

The research method used in this study was qualitative research. Qualitative design was considered best suited since it would enable an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions, experiences and views on experiential learning. The main data collection technique was written interviews which allowed respondents to give their thoughts freely and in detail at their own speed. This approach was found to be more appropriate for getting a whole picture of teachers' conceptual understanding, implementation, problems, and teachers' perceptions of the effect of experiential learning on students.

Population

All private and government secondary school teachers of District Malakand Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan were the population of this study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In the District Malakand, 30 secondary school teachers including 15 government and 15 private schools' teachers were the sample for the study. The selection of the participants was done using the purposive and convenient sampling method. Teachers with experience of more than three years of teaching were purposively selected as they were believed to be able to provide an informed opinion about experiential learning.

Research Instrument

A written interview guide was developed as a tool for collecting data. The interview guide comprised unstructured questions to elicit ideas from teachers about their views on experiential learning. The questions addressed the conceptual

understanding of teachers, the practical aspects of implementing experiential learning in the classroom, student participation, challenges encountered, strategies adopted, and perceived impact of the experiential learning on the students' learning achievements.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher travelled in person to each of the selected schools and used the written interview guide to interview the participants. The personal administration was competent, with high response quality and where needed, there was possibility for clarification. Data collection was systematic to get 100 per cent response from the selected sample.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This included taking careful readings and re-readings of the interview texts, looking for “patterns” and “meanings” in the answers and developing the themes that were relevant. Once the themes were detected, detailed discussion was provided regarding the research objectives and questions. Thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate approach to data analysis for this research as it is flexible and commonly used in qualitative research to interpret data in education.

Findings

The present study aimed to examine the perception of teachers from private and public secondary schools regarding experiential learning, thus, 30 teachers (15 from each sector) were selected from District Malakand, Pakistan and were interviewed in writing. The data were thematically analysed to uncover the following main themes related to the research objectives.

Teachers' Understanding and Practical Application of Experiential Learning

The general attitude and understanding of teachers on experiential learning was positive but limited. Most of the participants said it was “learning by doing” or “learning through experiments.” For instance, one teacher stated:

“Experiential learning in my opinion, is learning through doing and experiments.”
(Participant 3)

Another participant explained: *“Hands-on learning that involves the learner in practical tasks.”* (Participant 12)

Some teachers had a larger scope of interpretation that related it to observation, reflection, and a connection with the real world while most teachers perceived it as laboratory work or teacher demonstrations.

Practical Application Most teachers used experiential learning a couple of times or in small amounts. Common activities provided project tasks and easy jobs in the classroom. Some participants reported trying but not being able to do it, because of time constraints and syllabus pressure. Overall, the implementation of experiential learning was low in both sectors and not consistent and systematic.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Experiential Learning on Students

Overall, teachers' beliefs about students' learning outcomes from experiential learning were positive. Three main sub-themes were found:

- **Development of Practical Skills:** Participants felt that applying theory in practice, gaining practical skills, and facing real-life scenarios were enhanced through experiential learning.
- **Real-World Connection:** Teachers reported that the approach helps students to make the connection between classroom instruction and real-world contexts which resulted in conceptual understanding.
- **Improved Long-term Retention:** Several teachers reported that learning from first-hand experiences is more permanent. “Students learn by doing and end up with greater understanding and enhanced long-term learning.” (Participant 19)

Overall, teachers felt experiential learning was a positive experience to improve students' learning outcomes.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Importance, Student Participation, and Challenges Importance in the Teaching-Learning Process

Teachers believed experiment learning was important in developing the 21st century skills. They especially highlighted its contribution towards critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and decision-making skills. One teacher commented: “Experiential learning enriches the teaching-learning process by making it active, relevant and engaging to develop problem solving skills. (Participant 11)

Teachers were aware of the potential advantages, but there were several major barriers that they identified:

- The lack of resources and materials is an important factor
- The challenge of completing the syllabus in such a short period of time creates a lot of time pressure and severe time constraints.
- Large class sizes
- Inadequate administrative support and teachers' preparation

The teachers in government schools reported more often the following challenges than the teachers in private schools.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that secondary school teachers in District Malakand generally have positive perceptions towards experiential learning, but have limited and superficial understanding about the concept of EL. In general, the teachers related experiential learning to “learning by doing” and laboratory experiments and had little knowledge of its reflective and cyclical aspect as presented by Kolb (2015). This partial understanding is like the findings of past studies done in the developing countries where the teachers generally see experiential learning as a mere hands-on activity but not as a pedagogical approach (Bano, 2024; Reshmad’sa, 2017). The teachers felt that experiential learning was advantageous in the students' skill development, application of skills in real life, retention of skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The perceptions align with international literature, which emphasizes the benefits of experiential learning on student engagement, achievement, and student-centered learning, relative to traditional rote learning approaches (Kong, 2021; Răduci, 2019). They also reported much positive student

feedback, highlighting increased student engagement and interest in the experiential activities. Although teachers recognized its value and advantages, most teachers reported that they did not have much experiential learning in their classrooms. The resource, time pressure, large class size, and lack of training were identified as major barriers, which were more severe in government schools than in private schools. The results of this study corroborate with previous studies conducted in Pakistan that identified infrastructural and systemic limitations as the major challenges of student-centered and experiential pedagogies (Khanum, 2020; Bano, 2024). This study shows that there is a clear gap between teachers' positive attitude belief towards experiential learning and their application of the experiential learning in the classroom. The findings indicate the need for comprehensive teacher professional development programs that help teachers to develop an understanding of the concepts and provide them with practical techniques for implementing experiential learning in the school context of Pakistan, which is lacking in resources.

CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at investigating and contrasting private and public secondary school teachers' perception of experiential learning in District Malakand of Pakistan. The results showed that teachers have positive attitudes towards experiential learning and recognize its role in the teaching process. They felt it was a good way to get students to learn about the real-world, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking, and to help them retain the knowledge gained. The teachers further said that experiential methods are found to be of greater interest and active involvement to the students. But the study shows a huge disparity between teachers' positive perceptions and praxis in the classroom. Most teachers had a very limited understanding of experiential learning; they were mainly implementing hands-on teaching activities or laboratory experiments and limited awareness of the reflective and cyclical aspects of experiential learning. Very little and inconsistent implementation occurred, mainly because of resource limitation, time constraint, size of classes, pressure of the syllabus, and inadequate teacher training. These challenges were more evident in government schools compared to private schools. The results of this study highlight the gap between policy formulation and its implementation in the classroom in Pakistan. There is a strong need for good quality, ongoing teacher training courses, aimed at improving teachers' understanding of concepts and their practical application of experiential learning. Additionally, policy and practice should tackle systematic obstacles, including ensuring adequate provision and lowering examination pressure, and establishing a positive climate for new approaches to working with students. Finally, the experiential learning has great potential to revolutionize the education system in Pakistan in a way which will bring meaning and effectiveness in learning. Such potential can only be realized when all teachers, school leaders and school authorities begin to break this cycle and adopt an experiential approach towards teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Based on this study the following important recommendations have been made:

1. Comprehensive professional development programs for private and public-school teachers should be designed and implemented to enhance teachers' conceptual understanding and pedagogical skills. Such programs need to be creative in deepening teachers' grasp of the concept of experiential learning beyond “learning by doing” and in providing them with real-world approaches to the successful use of experiential learning in their classrooms, such as Kolb's experiential learning cycle.
2. Mitigate the key systemic barriers by ensuring that the educational system offers sufficient teaching-learning resources, streamlines the exam system to alleviate syllabus pressure and allows for enough time for experiential activities in the school timetables, educational authorities and school administrators. These barriers are more pervasive, in government schools and should receive special attention.
3. Support and Work Together Schools need to create a supportive environment for teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and have their administrative leaders support innovative teaching. The proactive role of head teachers in motivating and monitoring the use of the experiential learning method in their schools is expected.

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