EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AS A PATH TO BUSINESS LEADERSHIP "ROLE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS"

Dr. Mallika Kumar* & Radhika Jha*

Abstract

This paper aims to determine the effectiveness of business schools' experiential learning programs in facilitating the development of entrepreneurial skills among their students. There is a growing consensus that to develop strong entrepreneurship skills, the education and training of the students should be in the actual workplace or simulated environments. While most business schools recognize this need, not all of them can successfully replace their functional approach and pedagogy with modern experiential learning techniques.

This paper provides an innovative approach towards determining the extent of experiential Learning in business schools. The study identified seven experiential learning indicators: case studies, capstone project, internship, incubator/accelerator, consulting, business competitions, and simulations. Further, it selected a sample of 50 small business schools in the U.S. and India and extensively researched their curriculum and website to determine experiential Learning provided by these schools. In further research, this study aims to create an innovative index: Composite Experiential Ranking Index (CERI). This experiential ranking index would rank the business schools based on their adoption and implementation of the seven indicators of experiential Learning. The key findings of this research show that many of the small

* Associate Prof.& Coordinator, Office of International Programmes (OIP) Sri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi University, India.

* Associate Dean & Director of Graduate & Undergraduate Programs School for Business, Metropolitan College of New York, USA

business schools still lack an effective pedagogical approach to entrepreneurship education. It also identifies the challenges small business schools face in implementing experiential Learning and provides suggestions to overcome those challenges.

The research in this paper was presented in the Annual Conference of Accreditation Council of Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) and was selected as the International Best of Regions Presentations.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, business schools, higher education, MBA.

Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing focus to teach entrepreneurship at business schools as it is essential for the economic growth and prosperity of the country. Most business schools claim that they are 'breeding grounds for the future generation of entrepreneurs' fostering innovation and encouraging business leadership. However, many of these schools still lack an effective pedagogical approach to entrepreneurship education. The truth is that except for a few elite business schools, the majority of other institutions are still using the functional or traditional approach focusing on the theoretical and lengthy analytical process rather than an active pedagogy that accomplishes learning through action and practice.

There are three levels of teaching pedagogy in business education in the different business schools around the world. The first is the conventional or the theoretical level, which are lecture and discussion-based. The second level is the modern or the practical level, which mainly involves case-based teaching and team projects. The third and most desirable level is the unconventional or experiential level which enables students to have an immersive and structured experience in implementing the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom the so called 'Learning by Doing' or experiential learning.

Background and Literature

As the name suggests, 'Experiential Learning' is learning through experience, which involves the application of theory to a concrete, practical experience and exposure to real-life situations. American educational theorist David Kolb's theory of experiential Learning emphasizes that Learning occurs through active participation. Business schools worldwide have recognized the need to transform their teaching pedagogy to incorporate more real-life experiences. In business education across the globe, recently, there has been a gradual shift from a teacher-centered approach towards experiential Learning. Simply put, experiential Learning is defined as Learning by doing and making meaning from direct experiences (Javed and Ayub, 2017)

In experiential learning, students practice skills and tools learned in the classroom on real-life projects. In business education, these real-life projects experience is critical because a classroom cannot capture the complexities of the real business world. Internships have been a well-known approach traditionally to provide real business experience to the students. While internships have traditionally been used as the primary method to provide hands-on learning experiences for students in business schools, their effective implementation imposes stringent demands on faculty, curriculum, and program resources (Kosnik et al., 2013). Business schools also rely on Case Studies increasingly to provide concrete exposure to real-life business situations. While they are very effective as they spark effective conversations and help students develop problem-solving and decision-making skills, they are still largely theoretical. The purpose of business education is to prepare professionals for successful performance in businesses. However, unlike the preparation of medical doctors and many other professionals, the education in most business schools remains more theoretical than experiential in the andragogy employed. Even the typical case study, like many instructional techniques used in business schools, is still relatively "theoretical" in that it is not a business experience in which the student is personally involved (McHann and Frost, 2010). However, in the modern-day world with advanced digital technology same experience can be provided with simulations and software.

Indicators of Experiential Learning in Business Schools

To determine the amount of experiential Learning provided by the business schools, this study identified seven indicators or components of experiential Learning: Case Studies, Capstone Projects, Business Incubators and Accelerators, Business Simulations, Business Pitch Competitions, Business Consulting, and Internships. All of these components, whether it is internship, incubator program, business simulation, or any other component mentioned above, help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice. More of these tools a business school integrates into business education more effectively is the quality of business education.

A sample study of Curriculum of Small Business Schools in the U.S.

With this backdrop of the experiential framework, this study evaluated the implementation of experiential Learning by extensively studying the curriculum of the small business schools in the U.S. and India. The study focused on small business schools as the majority of the graduate's turnover is from these schools, and unlike the elite and big schools, the small schools face many resource constraints and challenges in providing experiential learning opportunities.

The study selected a sample of 50 small business schools across all the U.S States. The criteria for selecting the sample were tuition equal to or lower than $45,000 and the size of school around 1000 students. The study's goal was to determine the amount of experiential content in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs of the sample. Extensive research of the curriculum of these business programs was done as a part of the study. The curriculum was searched to find keywords indicating the seven components of experiential Learning identified by this study. A 'Yes' was entered if an indicator was found in the curriculum and a 'No' if the indicator was not found. The 'yes' and 'no' were then converted into binary 1 and 0 to compute the percentages for each indicator.

Results of the Study

The data collected in the research showed that most of these business schools are using the conventional form of experiential Learning by relying mainly on the capstone team projects (82%) and the case studies (46%), as shown in figure 1.1 and table 1.1 below.

- 22% of the business schools in the sample study include internship opportunities as a part of their curriculum
- 18% of the business schools use the much need business competitions in the MBA program curriculum.
- 16% of the business schools in the sample study include business consulting and business simulations as part of the experiential exposure in the curriculum.
- And only 4% of the business schools use the most innovative Accelerators and Incubators for entrepreneurship and business leadership.

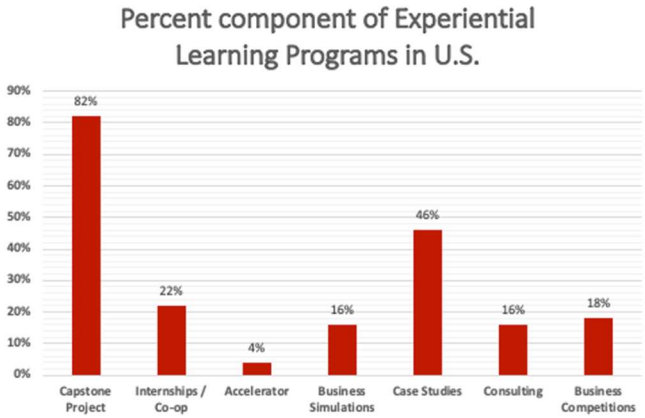

Figure 1.1.

Experiential Program Component	Percent
Capstone Project	82%
Internships / Co-op	22%
Accelerator	4%
Business Simulations	16%
Case Studies	46%
Consulting	16%
Business Competitions	18%

Table 1.1.

A sample study of Curriculum of Small Business Schools in India

The study concurrently evaluated the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) curriculum of fifty small business schools in India. The criteria for selecting the sample was a tuition fee equal to or less than 15 lakh Rupees ($ 20,000). The study's goal was to determine the amount of experiential content in the Master of Business Administration programs of the sample. Extensive research of the curriculum was done as a part of the study.

Results of the study

An analysis of the study results shows that, like the U.S small business schools, the business schools in India offer conventional experiential learning opportunities in their curriculum. The data collected in the study are summarized in figure 1.2 and table 1.2 below.

- The data collected in the research shows that the most popular tool used for experiential Learning in Business Schools in India is Internship (82%)

- The business simulations and competitions are provided by 40% of the business schools.

- Case studies as a means of experiential Learning are also popular at 44% adoption.
- The concept of 'real client consulting' and 'accelerator' has reached only 20%.
- The capstone projects are used by only 22% of the business schools.

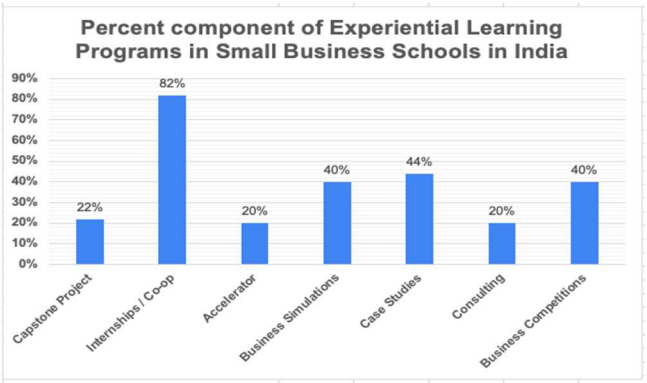

Figure 1.2.

Experiential Program Component	Percent
Capstone Project	22%
Internships / Co-op	82%
Accelerator	20%
Business Simulations	40%
Case Studies	44%
Consulting	20%
Business Competitions	40%

Table 1.2.

Statistical Analysis of the data

The study further analyzed the data by using cluster analysis to group colleges having similar data. The study used scipy cluster hierarchy Dendrogram function for clustering the data. The dendrogram for U.S colleges (figure 1.3) shows that there is a lot of variation in the adoption of experiential techniques by the colleges. This clustering technique can be used to group the colleges into the desired number of clusters. This can help, identify the programs that can impact the colleges with similar exposure to experiential Learning if implemented. The cluster analysis for MBA colleges in India (figure1.4) shows even more variability. There is a diverse set of components used by these schools, which results in the formation of so many clusters.

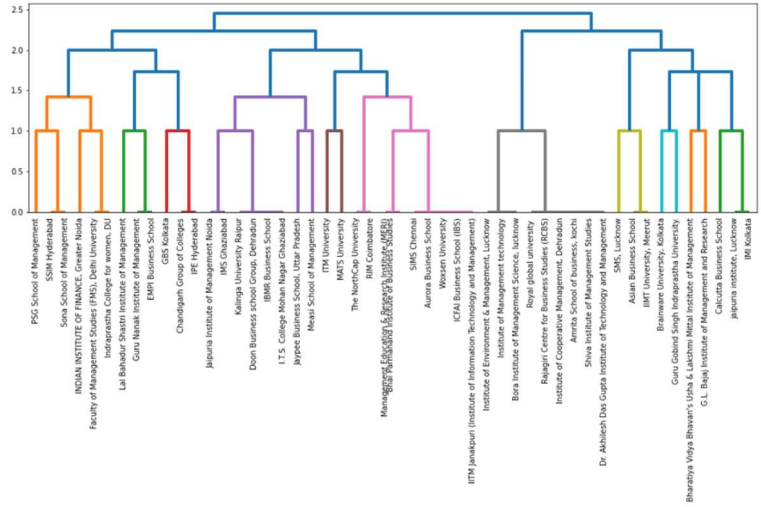

Figure 1.3 Dendrogram of Clusters of U.S Colleges

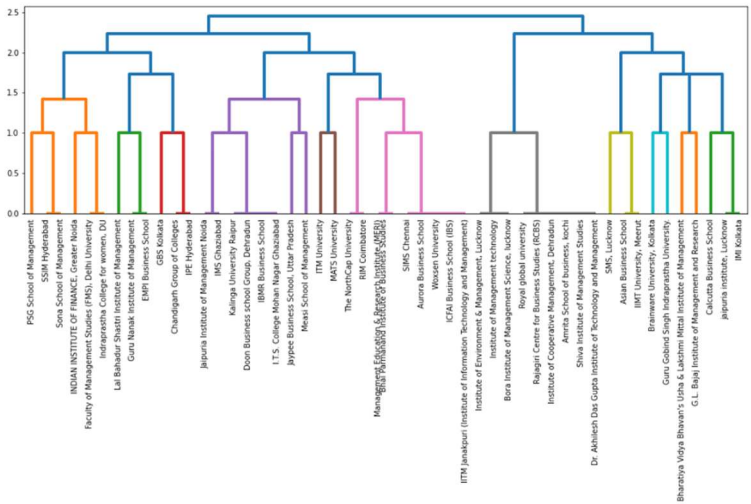

Figure 1.4. Dendrogram of Clusters of India Colleges

Distribution of Experiential Learning components within the clusters

The distribution graph (figure 1.5.), which displays the integration of experiential learning components within the clusters, show 82% of the small business schools in the U.S at least use capstone projects. The biggest cluster of twelve colleges used only capstone projects. There are six colleges which use capstone plus case studies. And the second biggest cluster of seven colleges does not use any of the experiential learning components. For the sample of business schools in India, the biggest cluster is made up of six colleges that are not using any experiential learning component. The second biggest cluster is of five colleges which use internships plus case studies. There is a cluster of four colleges which use at least internships to provide experiential learning. The data is varied as there are many small clusters ranging between one to three. The cluster analysis results also show that most popular experiential learning tools adopted by small business schools, whether it is India or U.S., are capstone projects, case studies, and internships. The more specific tools

like business simulations, incubators and accelerators, business consulting, and business pitch competitions have not been made mainstream the experiential Learning for the business schools. The study identified many challenges that small business schools face in adopting these experiential learning techniques and provided recommendations to meet those challenges.

CollegeName (Clusters = 18)	Belmont University (Massey) (TN)	Touro College of Business , NYC	Colorado State University	University at Buffalo - School of Manage	University of South Florida	Texas A&M University - Mays Business S	Ohio University	Metropolitan College of New York	Zicklin school of Business , CUNY	Alfred Lerner College of Business and Ec	Willamette University (Atkinson) (OR)	Baylor University (Hankamer) (TX)	Stony brook university College of Busines	Northern Arizona University (Franke)	Suffolk University (Sawyer) (MA)	Syracuse University (Whitman) (NY)	Johnson Graduate School of Manageme	Daniels College of Business DU	
	7	4	12	1	2	2	1	6	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	
Capstone Project	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	82%
Internship/ Coops	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	22%
Accelerator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	4%
Business Simultions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	16%
Case Studies	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	46%
Consulting	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	16%
Business Competitions	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	18%
CERI* Index	0	2	1	2	3	4	2	2	3	2	3	5	3	4	5	6	4	2	

*Composite Experiential Ranking Index

Figure 1.5.

CollegeName (Clusters = 27)	PSG School of Management	SSIM Hyderabad	INDIAN INSTITUTE OF FINANCE, Greater	Faculty of Management Studies (FMS), I	Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Manager	Guru Nanak Institute of Management	GBS Kolkata	Chandigarh Group of Colleges	Jaipuria Institute of Management Noida	Kalinga University Raipur	Jaypee Business School, Uttar Pradesh	Measi School of Management	ITM University	MATS University	The NorthCap University	Management Education & Research Inst	SIMS Chennai	Institute of Environment & Management	Royal global university	SMS, Lucknow	Asian Business School	Brainware University, Kolkata	Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha Univers	Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Usha & Lakshn	G.L. Bajaj Institute of Management and	Calcutta Business School	Jaipuria Institute, Lucknow	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	4	1	1	1	1	2	2	5	3	6	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	
Capstone Project	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	22%
Internship/ Coops	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	82%
Accelerator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	20%
Business Simultions	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	40%
Case Studies	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	44%
Consulting	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	20%
Business Competitions	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	40%
CERI* Index	6	5	5	4	5	4	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	3	4	2	3	1	0	5	4	2	3	3	4	3	2	

*Composite Experiential Ranking Index

Figure 1.6.

Challenges small business schools face in implementing Experiential Learning

This study revealed that small business schools, whether they are located in the U.S or India are primarily at the second level of pedagogical approach, which was mentioned earlier in the paper, the modern or practical approach where they impart experiential learning opportunities mainly through case-based teaching and team projects. Most of them have yet to reach the most desirable unconventional experiential level in the real sense of the term.

These small business schools face many resource restrictions and challenges in implementing the experiential-based Learning. One of the biggest challenges for the small school is lack of resources and finance to fund experiential projects, including investment in business simulations and business plan competitions. Internship opportunities and real business consulting activities need a robust network and relationships with the corporate world, which sometimes small business schools lack.

Implementation of experiential Learning also involves massive commitment of time and efforts by the faculty and school administrators. Since projects are time-consuming and involved, many times, there is faculty hesitance and resistance to adopt experiential techniques. At other times faculty resistance is also because of technological barriers. Experiential learning tools like business simulations and analytics require digital and technical skills and therefore deter faculty to adopt such tools in their curriculum. Additionally, in small business schools, the classroom structure is many times traditional, which is not apt for implementing experiential-based Learning.

Suggestions

The growing needs of the market and business today are changing the educational landscape of business schools and necessitating the adoption of experiential instructional pedagogy aligned with the real world and complex business problems. However, as we see in this research study, adopting and

implementing experiential learning techniques is a big challenge for small business schools. However, small business schools can use the limited resources to create an *'entrepreneurial ecosystem'* connecting the students, alumni, faculty, and support. The entrepreneurial ecosystem can work in multiple ways to foster entrepreneurship with entrepreneurship education combined with mentorship and resources needed for business incubation and acceleration. The relatively new notion of an entrepreneurial ecosystem can be viewed as "the union of localized cultural networks, investment capital, universities, and active economic policies that create environments supportive of innovation-based ventures" (Spigel, 2017).

Business schools can tap the alumni network, the biggest resource for schools and arrange networking sessions for the current students. Experiential Learning isn't only about students getting industry experience but also creating opportunities for them to network, an important skill to succeed as a business leader.

To identify funding for experiential programs, business schools can also reach out to corporate and governmental funding. There are many corporate-sponsored business plan pitch competitions which is a good resource to fund small business ideas.

Finally, the challenge of faculty hesitance and resistance can be met by providing training workshops and support to the faculty. The school can encourage the faculty to join the 'experiential Learning for educators' workshops which can train the faculty on integrating experiential techniques in their curriculum.

Conclusion

The key findings of this research show that many of the small business schools still need to have an effective pedagogical approach to entrepreneurship education. The challenges discussed in this study talk about the obstacles that come in the way of schools and educators adopting experiential pedagogy.

However, it is imperative that the business school curriculum reflect the experiential approach to meet the changing needs of business today and prepare our students for an ever-evolving business and market climate.

Discussion and Limitation

The data collected in this study is based on observable information from the colleges' websites. The data is not verified by the colleges. There is a possibility of sample and selection bias in the study. Also, this is not a conclusive study and only highlights the probable deficiencies in the current pedagogical approach of experiential education in small business schools.

Further Research: CERI (Composite Experiential Ranking Index)

In further research and Analysis, this study will create a composite ranking index CERI which would rank the business schools based on the seven indicators of experiential Learning identified in this research. The composition of the index is a work in progress where each indicator of experiential Learning will be assigned a weight and based on individual weights of the indicator, and a college's adoption of as many indicators in its curriculum will determine the composite score of experiential Learning for each college and rank colleges based on this composite score. This ranking information will be beneficial for researchers, prospective students, faculty and school administration.

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