Experiential Learning in Action: A Study among Secondary School Students of Ganjam District

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Abstract

An important factor in determining students' overall growth is experiential learning, which is distinguished by its learner-centered and active engagement methodology. This study investigates the obstacles, efficacy, and integration of experiential learning techniques among secondary school students in Odisha's Ganjam district. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys, interviews, and observations, the study finds that although experiential learning greatly improves understanding, motivation, and life skills, a number of pedagogical and infrastructure barriers prevent its widespread use. Strategies for growing experiential practices in line with regional educational realities are suggested in the article.

Keywords: Experiential learning, secondary education, Ganjam district, active learning, educational practices

1. Introduction

Innovative pedagogical approaches that transcend conventional chalk-and-talk methods are necessary given the changing nature of education in the twenty-first century. One of the most effective methods for developing students' critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities is experiential learning. Reflection on doing is the basis of experiential learning, which has its roots in the theories of David Kolb, Jean Piaget, and John Dewey. By emphasizing students' direct participation in real-world projects, it makes learning more applicable and significant.

International educational initiatives, such as India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which calls for a move away from rote memorization and toward competency-based, hands-on, and inquiry-driven education, are beginning to acknowledge experiential learning.

With its mix of rural, semi-urban, and metropolitan areas, Ganjam region provides a special environment for comprehending the practicalities of putting experiential learning into practice. Numerous educational obstacles confront the district, such as inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified educators, and socioeconomic inequalities among pupils. It also boasts a thriving secondary school network that is working to update its teaching methods. Investigating experiential learning in this setting offers important insights into the advantages and disadvantages of this method in actual classroom settings.

The purpose of this study is to find out how Ganjam district secondary school pupils perceive and react to experiential learning techniques. It also assesses the barriers and facilitators that educators encounter while implementing these strategies. The study aims to add to the larger conversation on educational innovation and reform at the local level by examining the viewpoints of both teachers and students.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is based on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which states that learning is a process in which knowledge is formed through the transformation of experience. Kolb (1984) describes experiential learning as a four-stage cycle:

1. Concrete encounter - Participating in a fresh encounter or circumstance.
2. Reflective Observation entails witnessing and reflecting on the event.
3. Abstract conceptualization involves making inferences and developing theories.
4. Active Experimentation entails implementing new knowledge in the real world.

In Ganjam district secondary education, these levels correspond to classroom practices such as field trips, group projects, role-playing, and science experiments. The study also draws on Constructivist Learning Theory, namely Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural resources in knowledge construction.

Thus, experiential learning is viewed not just as a process of doing but also as a cycle of reflection, abstraction, and application that is enriched by interactions with peers, teachers, and the community. This theoretical framework informs the study's analysis of how kids learn and how contextual elements (such as infrastructure, pedagogy, and resources) influence that experience.

Sahoo and Mohanty (2023) investigated the significance of experiential learning in rural Odisha classrooms and demonstrated how pedagogical revolution has occurred in recent years. Their study, which included districts similar to Ganjam, discovered that experiential learning greatly improves student engagement, motivation, and conceptual understanding. However, they discovered significant obstacles such as poor infrastructure, limited access to materials, and a lack of ongoing teacher professional development. Their findings are consistent with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, particularly the stage of active exploration, which is frequently lacking in resource-poor institutions. The report advocates for district-level policy assistance to help institutionalize experiential techniques.

Mishra and Behera (2022) conducted a study on activity-based teaching strategies across secondary schools in Eastern India, focusing particularly on science and social science subjects. The study found that students exposed to hands-on learning activities such as role-playing, experiments, and collaborative projects showed improved comprehension and performance. The authors emphasize the importance of teacher enthusiasm and contextual relevance in the successful adoption of experiential strategies. Their research suggests that when teachers integrate real-life scenarios into lessons, student interest and classroom participation substantially increase. The authors recommend school-level innovation grants to support experiential pedagogy.

Singh and Kaur (2021) investigated teachers' opinions of experiential learning in Indian classrooms using a mixed-methods approach with 120 secondary school teachers. Their findings show a strong consensus on the benefits of experiential learning in developing critical thinking, creativity, and interpersonal skills. Teachers raised worries about time limits, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient institutional assistance. The study discovered that, while most educators theoretically agree with experiential approaches, they lack the practical skills to properly implement them. The authors underline the importance of systematic in-service training and curriculum flexibility.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the extent of experiential learning practices in secondary schools of Ganjam district.
2. To analyze students' and teachers' perceptions of experiential learning.

3. To identify challenges and propose solutions for effective implementation.

3. Methodology

Method-A descriptive survey design was used.

Sampling Design -Data were collected from 15 secondary schools in Ganjam district, both rural and urban, with 150 pupils and 30 teachers. Structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations were used as assessment tools. Quantitative data were evaluated using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Frequency of Experiential Activities

Experiential learning activities such as group projects, science experiments, field visits, and role-plays were observed to varying degrees across school types.

Table 1: Frequency of Experiential Activities by School Type

| Type of School	Frequent Activities (%)	Occasional Activities (%)	Rarely/Never (%)
Government (Rural)	45	35	20
Government (Urban)	60	30	10
Private (Urban)	75	20	5

Urban and private schools demonstrated a higher frequency of activity-based learning due to better infrastructure and teacher training.

4.2 Teachers' Perception of Benefits

Teachers largely affirmed the benefits of experiential learning. The chart below summarizes their responses:

Chart 1: Teachers' Perception of Experiential Learning Benefits

As depicted, a significant majority of teachers believe experiential learning improves understanding (83%), enhances engagement (78%), develops life skills (65%), and promotes collaboration (72%).
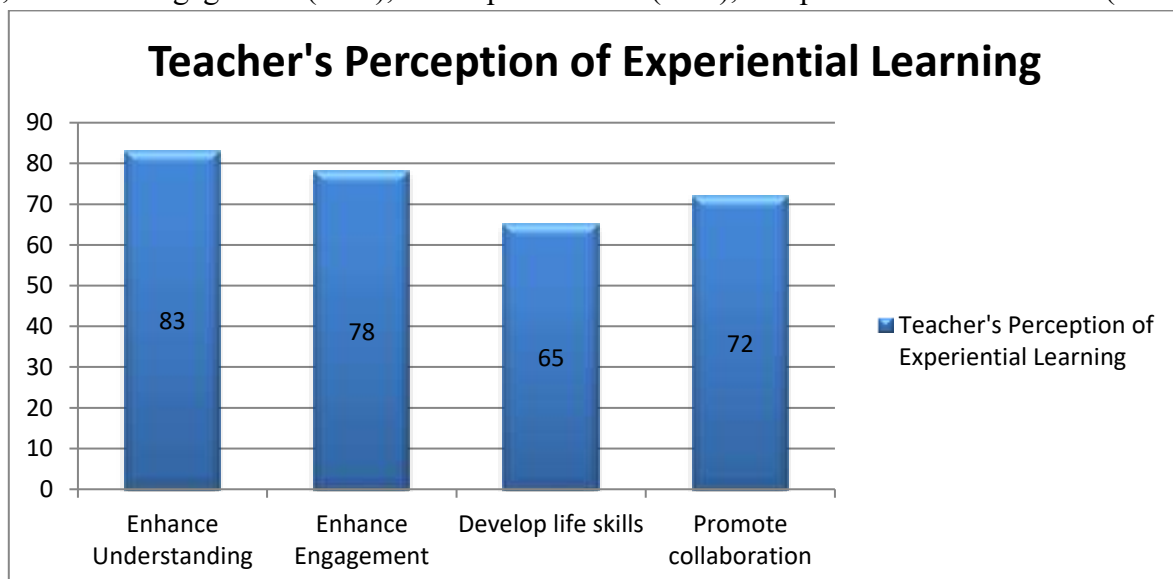
4.3 Students' Perception of Experiential Learning

To understand how students perceive experiential learning, responses from 150 secondary students were analyzed across five key dimensions: engagement, understanding, enjoyment, real-life connection, and peer collaboration.

Table 2: Students' Perception of Experiential Learning (n = 150)

Perception Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Experiential activities make learning more engaging	48	35	10	5	2
I understand concepts better through hands-on methods	52	30	10	6	2
I enjoy classes more when they include activities	56	28	8	5	3
Activities help me relate lessons to real life	50	32	9	6	3
Group projects improve my teamwork skills	42	36	12	6	4

- **High Engagement and Understanding:** Over 80% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that experiential learning made their classes more engaging and helped them understand concepts better. This aligns with the findings from teachers' perceptions, confirming the value of active learning.
- **Positive Emotional Response:** 84% of students expressed enjoyment during activity-based learning, indicating that such methods increase emotional investment and reduce monotony.
- **Real-Life Application:** A significant number of students (82%) acknowledged that experiential learning helps them connect academic content to real-world scenarios, reinforcing the practical relevance of education.
- **Teamwork Development:** A majority also recognized the importance of collaborative learning, with 78% agreeing that group projects enhanced their teamwork and communication skills.

4.4 Challenges in Implementation

Several barriers were noted in the adoption of experiential learning.

Table 3: Challenges Faced in Implementation of Experiential Learning

Challenges	Percentage of Teachers Reporting (%)
Lack of Materials	70
Time Constraints	58
Large Class Size	50
Lack of Training	62

These findings reveal that infrastructural deficits and insufficient training hinder effective implementation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study clearly shows that experiential learning has a transforming impact on secondary education, particularly in terms of increasing students' understanding, engagement, and connection to real-world applications. Students in the Ganjam district responded strongly to hands-on, activity-based methods, demonstrating increased motivation and comprehension when exposed to experiential learning strategies.

Teachers also acknowledged the success of such approaches, citing benefits such as improved student participation, life skill development, and peer collaboration.

Despite these encouraging results, the incorporation of experiential learning remains uneven among schools, particularly in rural government institutions. Key issues include a lack of proper instructional resources, time constraints, big classrooms, and insufficient professional training for educators. These limitations highlight the need for institutional adjustments and targeted support to enable equitable access to experiential learning throughout the district.

Furthermore, the implementation gap between private and public schools demonstrates the importance of infrastructure and administration. This emphasizes the need of governmental measures, capacity building, and community engagement in democratizing high-quality learning opportunities.

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