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Experiential Learning Approach, Students' Critical Thnking Skill and Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between experiential learning approach, students' critical thinking skills, and academic performance among 256 student-respondents in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) of Panay Island for the year 2025. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson product-moment correlation.

Findings revealed that students had a high level of exposure to experiential learning activities, a high level of critical thinking skills, and a high level of academic performance. Significant differences were found in experiential learning exposure when grouped according to year level, while no significant differences were observed according to sex and program. Furthermore, significant positive relationships were found among experiential learning approach, critical thinking skills, and academic performance.

The study concluded that experiential learning plays a vital role in enhancing students' critical thinking skills and academic performance. The findings suggest that strengthening experiential learning strategies in higher education can improve student outcomes and promote the development of essential 21st-century skills.

KEYWORDS: Experiential learning approach, critical thinking skills, academic performance, higher education, SUCs, student learning outcomes, active learning, Panay Island, instructional strategies, 21st-century skills

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning has become an essential instructional approach in higher education as institutions increasingly shift toward learner-centered and outcomes-based education. Rooted in the theory of learning by doing, experiential learning emphasizes direct engagement, reflection, and application of knowledge in real-world contexts. In the Philippine higher education setting, particularly in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), this approach is widely promoted to strengthen students' academic performance and develop higher-order thinking skills (Kolb, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Critical thinking skill, which refers to the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make reasoned decisions, is considered a vital 21st-century competency that higher education must develop among students (Facione, 2016).

Research shows that experiential learning significantly contributes to the development of students' critical thinking skills by allowing them to actively engage in problem-solving, reflection, and application of concepts in authentic situations (Moon, 2017). Through activities such as internships, laboratory work, field exposure, and project-based learning, students are given opportunities to connect theory with practice, thereby improving comprehension and analytical abilities (Beard & Wilson, 2018). Studies also indicate that students exposed to experiential learning environments demonstrate higher academic

performance compared to those taught using traditional lecture-based methods, as active engagement promotes deeper understanding and retention of knowledge (Yardley et al., 2017).

Furthermore, experiential learning enhances not only cognitive skills but also students' motivation, collaboration, and self-directed learning abilities. When students actively participate in meaningful learning experiences, they become more engaged and develop stronger problem-solving and decision-making skills (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). In addition, reflective practice—an important component of experiential learning—helps students evaluate their learning processes and improve their academic performance over time (Dewey, 2016; Kolb, 2015). These developments are particularly important in higher education institutions where graduates are expected to meet the demands of a rapidly changing labor market.

In the context of the SUCs of Panay Island, experiential learning is increasingly integrated into various academic programs to enhance students' critical thinking skills and academic performance. However, the extent of its effectiveness and implementation remains an area for further investigation, particularly across diverse disciplines and institutions. Understanding how experiential learning influences students' critical thinking and performance is essential for improving instructional strategies and academic outcomes in higher education.

Anchored on these perspectives, this study titled "Experiential Learning Approach, Students' Critical Thinking Skill and Performance" focuses on 256 respondents from State Universities and Colleges in the SUCs of Panay Island for the year 2025. The study aims to examine the relationship between experiential learning practices, students' critical thinking skills, and their academic performance, providing empirical evidence that may serve as a basis for instructional enhancement and curriculum development in higher education.

This study aimed to determine the relationship between experiential learning approach, students' critical thinking skills, and academic performance among 256 respondents in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) of Panay Island for the year 2025. Specifically, it sought to describe the profile of the respondents in terms of relevant demographic variables, assess the extent of implementation of the experiential learning approach as perceived by students, determine the level of students' critical thinking skills, and evaluate their academic performance. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify whether there are significant differences in experiential learning exposure, critical thinking skills, and performance when respondents are grouped according to selected profile variables. It also sought to determine the significant relationships among experiential learning approach, critical thinking skills, and academic performance. The findings of the study served as the basis for instructional enhancement and program development to strengthen experiential learning practices in higher education institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship between experiential learning approach, students' critical thinking skills, and academic performance among students in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) of Panay Island for the year 2025. The descriptive method was used to describe the extent of implementation of experiential learning and the level of students' critical thinking skills and academic performance, while the correlational approach was utilized to determine the relationships among the variables under investigation.

The respondents of the study were 256 students randomly selected from various SUCs in Panay Island. The selection ensured representation from different programs and year levels. The respondents were cho-

sen using a random sampling technique to avoid bias and ensure equal opportunity of participation.

A researcher-made questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument. It consisted of three parts: the experiential learning approach as implemented in the classroom, students' critical thinking skills, and academic performance indicators. The instrument was validated by experts in education and research methodology to ensure content validity, and a pilot test was conducted to determine its reliability. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed during data collection.

The data gathered were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools. Frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to describe the respondents' profile and the level of variables. To determine significant differences among groups, t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used. Meanwhile, Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to identify the significant relationships among experiential learning approach, critical thinking skills, and academic performance at a 0.05 level of significance. The results of the analysis served as the basis for conclusions and recommendations for improving experiential learning practices in higher education.

RESULTS

The results of the study revealed that the 256 student-respondents from the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) of Panay Island demonstrated a high level of exposure to the experiential learning approach, with an overall mean of 4.21 (SD = 0.56). This indicates that students frequently engaged in hands-on activities, reflective learning, internships, laboratory work, and project-based tasks. These findings align with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through experience and reflection (Kolb, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

In terms of students' critical thinking skills, the overall mean was 4.18 (SD = 0.54), interpreted as "High." Students demonstrated strong abilities in analyzing information, evaluating arguments, and making reasoned decisions. The highest-rated indicator was the ability to analyze problems critically (M = 4.25). These findings support Facione (2016), who identified critical thinking as a key competency strengthened through active learning.

Regarding academic performance, the respondents obtained a mean of 4.12 (SD = 0.58), interpreted as "High." This suggests satisfactory academic outcomes in both theoretical and practical tasks. Students exposed to experiential learning tended to perform better academically, consistent with Beard and Wilson (2018) and Yardley et al. (2017).

Inferential statistics revealed a significant difference in experiential learning exposure when respondents were grouped according to year level ($F = 4.67$, $p < 0.05$). However, no significant differences were found according to sex and program ($p > 0.05$).

Furthermore, significant positive relationships were found among the variables. Experiential learning was significantly correlated with critical thinking skills ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) and academic performance ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$), while critical thinking skills had a strong relationship with academic performance ($r = 0.75$, $p < 0.01$).

FINDINGS

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of engagement in experiential learning activities such as laboratory work, internships, field exposure, and project-based tasks.

Students also exhibited high levels of critical thinking skills, particularly in analyzing and evaluating inf-

ormation and solving problems logically.
Academic performance was also rated high, indicating satisfactory outcomes influenced by active learning experiences.
Significant differences were found in experiential learning exposure when grouped according to year level, while no differences were found according to sex and program.
Significant positive relationships were identified among experiential learning, critical thinking skills, and academic performance.

SUMMARY

This study examined experiential learning approach, students' critical thinking skills, and academic performance among 256 respondents in SUCs of Panay Island for 2025. Findings revealed high levels across all variables and significant positive relationships among them. A significant difference was found in experiential learning exposure when grouped by year level, while no differences were found by sex and program.

CONCLUSION

Experiential learning plays a significant role in enhancing students' critical thinking skills and academic performance in higher education. Active engagement in real-world and reflective learning experiences contributes to improved analytical thinking and better academic outcomes. Strengthening experiential learning practices is essential for developing 21st-century skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Faculty members in SUCs are encouraged to strengthen experiential learning strategies through hands-on activities, field exposure, and project-based instruction. Institutions should provide adequate resources and support systems. Students should be encouraged to actively engage in experiential learning opportunities. Continuous faculty training should be implemented to improve instructional delivery. Future researchers may expand the study by including additional variables such as motivation and learning environment.

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