

High Impact Experiential Learning Methods in Building Employability Skills

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Abstract : Current job market demands an higher order employability skills from students . In this context the findings of India skill report (2018) is alarming. Report mentions that around 60 percent recruiters feel that the right candidates are not available as many of them don't meet the required skills and there is a decrease in employability rate of management students compared to previous year. As such, in facilitating skill building in students, experiential learning has been emerging as a new paradigm of learning. Literature on topic reveal that though some studies made an attempt to study the role of experiential learning methods in management Education , very limited number did focus from the Indian context and none of them have attempted to examine the experience of students from autonomous colleges. The present study intends to fill this research gap with specific focus on knowing high impact experiential learning methods in building students' employability skills. Reflections of students were also captured in this study.

Index Terms - Employability Skills; Experiential Learning Methods; Management Education

I. INTRODUCTION

The present section provides a glimpse on skills demanded in job market and significance of experiential learning with regard to building employability skills.

Skills demanded in Job Market

India skill report (2018), one of the most referred report on India's talent landscape brings insights on employability factor of youth across the country every year. This report is a joint initiation by Association of Indian Universities , Confederation of Indian Industry , All India Council for Technical Education and United Nations Development Programme , covering more than 5,00,000 students and 130 corporate from 15 Industries. One of its key observations with regard to skills demand in job market is: requirement for higher order problem solving skills, communication skills, cognitive ability such as creativity, logical reasoning and problem sensitivity, team working skills, interpersonal skills (social skills), flexibility and adaptability in the graduates with the changing nature of work and workplaces.

Experiential learning in building skills

Experiential learning(EL) has begun as new paradigm of learning in early nineties and got its prominence from the works of social scientists like William James, John Dewey, Mary Parker, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Carl Jung and Carl Rogers(Kolb,1984). It contrasts with 'teacher centric' learning approach that focus significantly on the 'knowledge transfer' from an expert(teacher) to learner(students) where learner tends to play a passive role. EL is a 'student centric' learning approach that calls for active involvement of learner to 'construct knowledge' by their own. In this approach, it is 'reflecting up on the experiences', that play a key role in enabling the learner to construct knowledge by his own and thus facilitates students in acquiring employability skills (Reynolds & Vince, 2007; Moon,2004) .

As such, educational institutions, as knowledge disseminating organizations, are with a prime responsibility to build employability skills in students. However, it appears that, many of the institutions are not successful in accomplishing this prime responsibility, with the result, majority of students are observed as unprepared for the job market (India Skill Report, 2018). Therefore, educational institutions have a need for shifting their approach to a student centric learning from current approach (teacher-centric learning), wherein the experiential learning is apt tool for building employability skills in students .

Research on Experiential Learning in Management Education

The use of experiential learning is widely practiced in different fields of education, in particular in management education, medicine, nursing, law and psychology(Kolb,2015). As such the authors were able to get access to the studies on experiential learning in management education. Meta-analysis of Shahanaz (2018) and a study of Cheney(2001) found the use of case study, topic discussions, fieldtrips and role play in management education ; study of Ruhi and Ghatrenabi (2015) observed the use of projected experiential pedagogical methods such as seminars and case discussion to improve the design and delivery of enterprise resource planning education in business schools; study of Cecilia et.al. (2015) noticed the impact of group discussions, live case analysis and role play in promoting critical thinking in students ; Liu Zhang-mei,(2012) study recommends case teaching, marketing research clubs, interaction with industrialists and holding competitions to teach the 'marketing' subject practically ; Study by Mathews et.al ., (2012) found the long-term impact on student learning with the use of feature films in management education ; studies of Wongtada and Chaisuwan, (2011) and Helms et al., (2003) found the benefit of tradeshows and eBay trading in

facilitating an understanding on business practices and studies of Inks and Avila,(2008) and Meredith and Burkle,(2008) suggest project work as a means to acquaint students to the professional world.

The foregone discussions revealed nine Experiential Learning Methods(ELMs) in management education which include seminars , group discussions , case studies, role plays, movie/video based learning, project work, student clubs ,industrial visits and interaction and tradeshows. Apart from these, there are other ELMs which are widely practiced in India, that include business quiz, management meets and mock interviews.

The section follows dwell on the methodology adopted for this paper.

II. METHODOLOGY

The section provides a brief picture on the need for the study, objectives , context of study, sampling procedure , data collection tools and data analyzing techniques.

Need for study

Literature on experiential learning reveal that none of the studies is from the context of Indian educational scenario or with a focus on autonomous colleges that offer management program, therefore a need for this study. The study attempts to identify high impact ELMs and their effect in building employability skills.

Objectives

Specific objectives of study are :

- To explore the students participation in experiential learning methods.
- To identify high impact ELMs for building students employability skills.
- To analyse the effect of high impact ELMs on students employability skills

Context of Study

Study chooses final year students of management (MBA) from nine autonomous engineering colleges under Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU) Anantapur, (India), spread across four districts in Andhra Pradesh namely Chittoor, Kadapa, Nellore and Kurnool. Autonomous colleges are chosen purposefully as they have freedom in introducing innovations in the teaching-learning, unlike other affiliated colleges of university. All the colleges have completed 10 years of existence, therefore could have experience of adopting innovative teaching – learning technologies such as experiential learning methodologies.

Sampling

Judgment and convenience sampling methods were used in drawing sample for studying objectives. Study follows judgment sampling method as it chooses only autonomous colleges of JNTU Anantapur that have 10 years of existence; chooses final year students of management programe with an intention to have right sample for studying topic. Study follows convenience sampling method as it gathers information from as many students as possible to cover large number of sample (451 students) covering around 40% of total population (1138 final year students) , with a purpose to minimize the sampling error.

Data Collection

The survey was carried between October 2018 and January 2019.Data were collected by administering structured questionnaire to students that consists of both close and open-ended questions. The structure of student questionnaire is as follows-Question number one to nine collects demographic details of students. Question number 10 inquires about their participation in experiential learning methods as "During your tenure in management programme, indicate your frequency of participation(often, sometimes, never) in each of the experiential learning methods listed" . Question number 11 asks them to "Choose five ELMs and rank them on an order of 1 to 5 based on their effect in improving your overall employability skills listed below." This item intends to find the top five ELMs endorsed by students that enhanced their employability skills(the list of skills and their brief description is given for students). Question number 12 asks "Share your thoughts / learning's / feelings experienced by you during your participation in experiential learning methods." Here student reflections are captured with regard to the impact of ELMs on their skills.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to study students' participation in ELMs. Weighted mean was calculated to find high and low participated ELMs. While Garrett's ranking technique was applied to determine high impact experiential learning methods. Further, content analysis was done to study student perceptions on ELMs.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

High Participated Experiential Learning Methods

Student participation in 12 ELMs is captured on a three point scale: never, sometimes, often, which are coded as 0, 1 and 2 respectively. To study the trend of student participation, weighted mean is obtained for each ELM to further categorize them as High participated' and Low participated' ELMs. Methods with weighted mean >1 as high participated and the methods with mean ≤ 1 as low participated ELMs.

For instance, out of 451 respondents, 91 admit they 'never' participated, 225 said they participate 'sometimes' and 135 admit they often participate. Therefore weighted mean of role play is 1.09 (arrived as $91*0 + 225*1 + 135*2/451=1.09$). Likewise for all 12 ELMs weighted mean is calculated (table 1).

Table 1 High and Low participated ELMs

Experiential learning methods	Mean	High/Low
Seminars	1.55	High
Group discussions	1.30	High
Case study	1.22	High
Movie based learning	1.10	High
Role play	1.09	High
Business Quiz	1.06	High
Management meets	1.01	High
Mock interviews	.99	Low
Project Work	.89	Low
Industrial visits	.89	Low
Student Club	.83	Low
Tradeshows	.54	Low

Source: Field Survey

Data in table 1 depict that the high participated ELMs by students are seminars, group discussions, case study, movie based learning, role play and business quiz while the low participated ELMs are tradeshows, student clubs, industrial visits, project work, mock interviews and management meets. It is to be noticed that ELMs that provide practical experience and knowledge to students on industry know how's like project work, tradeshows, industrial visits and mock interviews are the Low participated ELMs.

High Impact Experiential Learning Interventions

Students were asked to choose any five ELMs that impacted their employability skills and were asked to rank in an order of 1 to 5, based on its impact on their skills. The ranking preferences of respondents for each ELM can be observed in table 2(i) ,(ii) (iii) . For instance, with reference to role play method, below table depict that, 42 students have ranked role play as one , 31 as rank 2, 33 as rank 3, 23 as rank 4 and so on...

Table 2(i): Ranking preferences by respondents

Experiential Learning	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Role play	42	31	33	23	35
Case study	37	29	22	31	40
Group discussions	118	98	41	41	27
Mock interviews	27	47	44	43	38
Business Quiz	44	48	51	26	21
Student clubs	1	7	14	21	15
Movie/Video based learning	36	25	18	12	20
Trade shows	5	3	5	9	7
Management meets	6	17	27	22	20
Seminars	68	65	56	56	30
Industrial Visits	15	16	29	37	38
Project Work	8	11	32	46	48

Source: Field Survey

To find the top five ELMs endorsed by students Garrett's ranking technique was used. This method converts the frequency of ranks obtained under each ranking category into a Garrett value and ranks the factors accordingly. To convert the rank frequencies into Garrett values, first the percent position of ranks is to be determined by using the formula: $\text{Percent position} = \frac{100(R - 0.5)}{N}$, where R = Rank, N = Number of variables.

Later, the percent score is obtained from the Garrett table. Table 3 presents the percent position obtained for each rank position and their percentage scores respectively.

Table 2(ii) : Percent position and score

Rank	Percent position	Percentage score
1	10	75
2	30	60
3	50	50
4	70	40
5	90	25

At last, the frequencies at each rank position (rank 1 through rank 5) are multiplied with their respective percentage score to obtain the total Garrett score of each ELM and ranks are assigned accordingly (refer table 2(ii)).

Table 2(iii) : Ranking of ELMs

Experiential Learning	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	Total Garrett score	Ranking
Group discussions	8850	5880	2050	1640	675	19095	1
Seminars	5100	3900	2800	2240	750	14790	2
Business Quiz	3300	2880	2550	1040	525	10295	3
Mock interviews	2025	2820	2200	1720	950	9715	4
Role play	3150	1860	1650	920	875	8455	5
Case study	2775	1740	1100	1240	1000	7855	6
Movie/Video based learning	2700	1500	900	480	500	6080	7
Industrial Visits	1125	960	1450	1480	950	5965	8
Project Work	600	660	1600	1840	1200	5900	9
Management meets	450	1020	1350	880	500	4200	10
Student clubs	75	420	700	840	375	2410	11
Trade shows	375	180	250	360	175	1340	12

Source: Field Survey

Results from table 2(iii) reveal that Group discussions, Seminars, Business Quiz, Mock interviews and Role plays are the high impact ELMs (top five only) which impacted student's employability skills.

The section follows discusses reflections of student on high impact ELMs (top five only) that help in enhancing students' employability skills.

High Impact ELMs vis-à-vis Employable skills-Student Reflections

Reflections of students were obtained on the effect of ELMs on employability skills through an open-ended question. However, the section focuses on reflections of students on high impact ELMs (top five only). Table 3 reveals the skills that were endorsed by students to be impacted due to their participation in high impact ELMs.

Table 3 Effect of High Impact ELMs on Employability skills

Experiential Learning	Employability skills of students			
Group discussions	Interpersonal skills	Self Confidence	Communication skill	Logical thinking
Seminars	Interpersonal skills	Self confidence	Communication skill	ICT

Role play	Interpersonal skills Team work	Self confidence		Creative thinking
Mock Interviews		Self Confidence	Communication	
Business Quiz	Teamwork	Self confidence		

Source: Field Survey

Communication skill and ICT - Students reflections

Communication skill and ICT are highly essential skills for students to get placed (India Skill Report ,2017; Pettine et.al ,2011; Wellman,2010 ; Raybould & Sheedy,2005; Bailey,2004; Porterfield,1999; Ferketich, 1998; Williams,1998). Present study prove that such skills can be acquired with the help of a few high impacted ELMs such as group discussion, seminars, and mock interviews (table 2 (iii)). The perceptions are also reflected in the opinion statements of students. On the use of effect of group discussions for instance students reflect that: "Before participating in group discussion, I was not aware on how to hold group conversations in formal meetings and how to interact with others. After participation, I have started showing interest to participate again and again and my communication skills got better" and some opine "We tend to speak in our mother tongue and are not used to speaking in English unless we are placed in a situation . I feel that group discussion makes us to speak in English. In the process, our fluency in English has improved ". As such on the use of seminars, many students opine: "Basically I am a very shy person. When I had to take part in seminars I used to be very nervous. Faced difficulty to communicate in English at initial stages. But after giving few seminars I started enjoying them. It improved my communication skills". On the effect of seminars on building skills in ICT, the students opine: "For the first time I had to independently work on the computer for my presentation. Though attended computer labs before I didn't pay much attention. But this time I had to work on computers solely to prepare for my assignment. As I started working on word documents, excels and PPTs, I got well versed with the computer usage.". As such, students also mention the effect of mock interviews, where they express their feelings: "It gave an opportunity to work on my non-verbal communications. Could get feedback on my postures and gestures. I understood how to present myself before others. This really helped me to keep an eye on my nonverbal communications" and "At my first trial, I was very bad. Received lot of comments on the way I communicate. It made me to work on improving my communication skills".

Interpersonal skills and team work- Students reflections

Now a day's business activities are been delivered through a network of teams. It implies interpersonal and team working skills are highly demanded employability skills in work place. On the other hand students reflections reveal high impacted ELMs such as group discussion, seminars, role play and business quiz are proved to be effective in developing these skills. For instance, on the use of group discussions , students reflected that:"I got to know the different mentalities and their opinions. Learnt to manage others by explaining and convincing them with my views" and "It gave me an exposure on how to present one's thoughts before group and how to hold group conversations in formal meetings " ; As such on the use of seminars students opine that "The seminars reduced fear in me to interact with others. Now I can address the questions posed at ease and convince them with my answers" and on the use of business quiz they mention that ; "I was part of the team that was made in charge to conduct this event. Coordinated with my team mates for the successful conduction of this event. It was a team work" and while on use of role plays many students opine "It made us to understand that individual differences exists and we have to learn to cope up with them and move forward ". The ELMs: group discussion, seminars, role play and business quiz are also identified as high participated ELMs (vide table 1). Therefore the autonomous colleges can think of practicing them in enhancing interpersonal and team working skills.

Creative thinking and Logical thinking - Students reflections

Creative thinking, Logical thinking and Leadership qualities are the most required skills for students to get placed and sustain on the job (British Council,2018; Damm,2017; Mandilas et.al,2014; Pettine ,2011; Wellman,2010; Bailey,2004; Williams ,1998; Porterfield,1999). Present study prove that such skills can be acquired with the help of a few high impacted ELMs such as group discussion and role play (table 2 iii) . The perceptions are also reflected in the opinion statements of students. Many students reflect opinions such as : "Learnt how to defend others (answer them) point of view logically" and "It prompted us to analyze the given situation and convey our views about it ". Similarly they mention the use of role play in building creative thinking: "We were given a business scenario where we had to act and suggest a solution to the problem. There was lot of brainstorming happening and everyone have come up with ideas and it fosters creative thinking in students."

Self-confidence - Students reflections

Self-confidence is one of the most desired quality (Wesley et.al ,2017; Mandilas et.al ,2014; Jackson & Chapman,2012; Pettine et.al ,2011; Wellman,2010; Raybould& Sheedy ,2005; Porterfield,1999), in students which could be acquired with the help of high impacted ELMs such as group discussion, seminars, role play and business quiz . For instance, the students reflections endorse this opinion. Many students reflect opinions:"When I participated for first time I was hesitating to speak.

Later, I was told about the way discussions had to be carried . Gradually my anxiety to speak before others has reduced" ; "Basically I am a very shy person. But I made effort to interact with others and speak out. I learnt being expressive. Felt good "; and "I have overcome my fear to speak before others in formal discussions" noting the benefit of use of group discussions. As such, students reflect opinions : "First few minutes of seminar it was difficult and I was really nervous. But after some time I was ok and confident at the end. Could maintain my eye contact and interact with others easily." They also mention the use of role play in their statements : "I have never participated in role plays before. Initially I was really tensed. But when the skit came to an end everyone appreciated my performance. It was a proud moment for me " and "It helps to overcome stage fear and build confidence on one self. " Similarly they mention that use of business quiz in building self confidence : "They are useful to know current affairs and gain business knowledge. Got to know about business firms, CEO's, logos and various things that I was un aware. After taking part felt confident on myself."

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the foregone discussions on data results, following conclusions are drawn :

- Students of management in select sample colleges widely participate in seminars, group discussions, case study, movie based learning, role play and business quiz (in the order of high to low).It may be noted that the students participation is low in certain ELMs such as tradeshows, student clubs, industrial visits, project work, mock interviews and management meets (in the order of low to high) .
- High impact ELMs (top five only) in building employability skills are : group discussions, seminars, business quiz ,mock interviews and role play (in the order of high to low).
- Among the high impact ELMs, group discussions ELM stood apart from others in building more students employable skills such as interpersonal skills, communication skill, self confidence, logical thinking .
- Student employability skills that got impacted from high impact (top five only) ELMs (as in above para are): interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication skills, creativity, logical thinking and self-confidence
- Skill wise ELMs reveal that : Interpersonal skills and team work are achieved with the help of group discussion, seminars, role play and business quiz ; Communication skill and ICT are acquired with the help of group discussion, seminars, and mock interviews; Creative thinking and Logical thinking are acquired with the help of a few high impacted ELMs such as group discussion and role play; Self-confidence is acquired with the help of high impacted ELMs such as group discussion, seminars, role play and business quiz (table 3).

V. IMPLICATIONS

Foreseeing the positive outcomes of experiential learning methods, with regard to enhancement of employability skills, the educational institutions (Universities/Colleges) should need to incorporate more ELMs in the curricula, encourage their faculties to imbibe ELMs in their teaching learning processes and motivate students to take active part in ELMs.

VI. LIMITATIONS

The study findings are purely based on students' perceptions. However perceptions may vary based on a student's take towards ELM, the extent of college management support to conduct ELMs and faculty exposure and training in conducting the ELMs. The study surveyed the opinions of final year MBA students only as they might be exposed to maximum ELMs compared to the first year students.

VII. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is restricted to select autonomous engineering colleges offering MBA programme under JNTU Anantapur. Therefore, the future scholars can enlarge the coverage of sample institutions to make study broader to have meaningful conclusions. The scholars can have different groups of institutions like private business schools and autonomous colleges as sample to have comparative analyses.

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