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Simulation-Based Experiential Learning, Skill Development, and Employability Readiness among MBA Students in India

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A narrative review and proposed comparative study

Abstract

Purpose. This research paper examines how business simulations might connect classroom learning with managerial skill development and perceived work readiness among MBA students in India. It distinguishes engagement during instruction, demonstrated skill on a new task, perceived preparedness for work, and actual employment.

Approach. To see how business simulations actually build workplace skills and help graduates get hired, I pulled together key studies from across the field. I reviewed research in Indian management schools alongside broader reviews of simulation tools and other hands-on teaching methods. Using Kolb's experiential learning theory as a starting point, these findings shape the plan for a new multisite study. We will test students before and after the simulations, comparing their progress against an active control group to see what truly works.

Synthesis. Research shows that simulations give students a good space to practice complex skills, though how much they learn depends heavily on instructor guidance and what alternative activity they are compared against. In Indian management classrooms, the data clearly points to higher student engagement. However, far less evidence shows that these skills transfer outside the classroom or prepare graduates for the workplace. While studies on live projects, residential programs, and skills surveys add useful context to this readiness question, they measure very different learning experiences and outcomes.

Implications. The proposed study uses an individual managerial decision task and a separate self-report measure of perceived work readiness. Six objectives, three hypotheses and a prespecified analysis framework describe how the distinction could be tested. This article reports a literature synthesis and proposes a study. It contains no original participant results.

Keywords. Management education, managerial judgement, active learning, structured debriefing, skill transfer, perceived work readiness.

1. Introduction

In an MBA program, students must blend ideas from different business fields to make decisions when priorities clash. Knowing how to explain a pricing or capacity model is one thing. Figuring out which assumptions matter when demand, cash flow, and service targets all change at the same time is much harder. Lectures teach the core concepts, and case studies get students talking through the logic. Business simulations add something different—the chance to act, watch the results unfold, and rethink the strategy. What we still need to know is whether this trial-and-error process improves how students reason through unfamiliar problems, and whether those gains tie back to how job-ready they feel.

Simulations help college students learn in several ways, yet those gains are never automatic. How much students actually pick up depends heavily on how teachers guide the exercise and what other classroom activity the simulation is compared against (Chernikova et al., 2020; Faisal et al., 2022; Sitzmann, 2011). Co-teaching and hands-on facilitation changes do boost student engagement in Indian management classrooms (Kulkarni & Sivaraman, 2022; Lexman et al., 2025). Employers hiring Indian MBA graduates, however, look for specific abilities like communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Bhatnagar, 2020). Researchers studying these two areas rarely measure the same outcomes. Liking a simulation makes students show up and participate—it does not mean they are ready for a real job, which demands broader skills that one short module cannot teach on its own.

The research problem is therefore one of transfer and measurement. When an MBA module uses a simulation, do students show better managerial decision-making on a task that both groups can complete, do they report greater work readiness, and are those two outcomes associated? The gap is bounded to the literature reviewed here. The most directly relevant Indian simulation studies emphasise engagement or perceptions. The studies that examine employability often use broader experiential activities, different student populations or designs that do not isolate a simulation component. This article clarifies those differences and sets out a comparative design that can estimate distinct associations in participating MBA programmes.

2. Narrative review approach

The review began with a 12-item bibliography on simulations, experiential pedagogy and employability supplied as background. Targeted title and DOI searches were used to verify the records. Additional targeted searches identified scholarship on experiential learning theory, simulation syntheses, employability measurement and pretest–posttest analysis. Sources were selected for their relevance to the proposed exposure, study population, outcomes or methods. Publisher and institutional records were preferred. Where only an abstract or publication record was accessible, the synthesis uses claims supported at that level.

The synthesis compares study setting, exposure, design, comparator and measured outcome. It gives the greatest contextual weight to Indian management-education studies and uses work from other disciplines or countries to inform mechanisms and measurement. It does not estimate a pooled effect because the studies address different questions and report different outcomes. As a targeted narrative review, it cannot establish how frequently particular designs or results occur across the entire literature.

3. Literature review and evidence synthesis

3.1 Experiential learning and business simulations

Kolb (1984) describes learning as the transformation of experience through reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation. A simulation can provide repeated opportunities to go through these processes within a course. For example, a team can commit to a production plan, review the implications for inventory and cash, identify which assumptions failed, and revise its plan. A debrief makes students explain what they inferred from the feedback, including why the same decision might produce a different result under different assumptions. The revised plan then gives them an opportunity to apply that explanation.

A simulated business can reward exploration and collaboration, but its score can also reflect familiarity with the platform, a teammate's contribution or the rules of its market model. Gosen and Washbush (2004) identify

recurring challenges in assessing experiential learning. Those challenges matter when the desired outcome is individual reasoning. A team's sales or profit rank can help structure a debrief. A separate, unfamiliar decision task is better suited to examining whether individual students can transfer the reasoning they practised.

3.2 Engagement and the instructional comparison

Sitzmann's (2011) meta-analysis indicates that the instructional value of computer-based simulation games depends in part on what learners do in the comparison condition. This matters for MBA curricula that already use cases, discussion and feedback. A comparison with passive instruction estimates a different contrast from a comparison with an active case exercise. Chernikova et al. (2020) likewise find that simulation-based learning can support complex skills across higher education and identify instructional scaffolding as relevant to learning. Those pooled figures draw from too many different fields to serve as an expected baseline for Indian MBA cohorts. In a separate review of business simulation games, Faisal et al. (2022) noted solid improvements in both thinking and peer interaction, even as they pointed out wide differences in how researchers measure student performance.

Inside Indian business schools, Kulkarni and Sivaraman (2022) document how combining co-teaching with a broader course redesign drove up engagement in a large simulation class. That case gives helpful pointers for classroom delivery. Still, because multiple changes were bundled together, we cannot credit the simulation alone for the results. More recently, Lexman et al. (2025) ran a simulation experiment with 280 Indian PGDM students to see how task difficulty and facilitator support work together. They found that the interplay between the two shapes both engagement and enjoyment. Yet since their experiment compared different versions of the simulation itself, it mainly informs task and facilitation design—and its PGDM sample and engagement focus differ from an MBA job-readiness study.

3.3 What counts as skill development

Decision-making sits at the heart of the proposed study because we can test it through a standalone task and grade it against a clear, shared rubric. In this task, each student has to spot the core problem, make sense of both numbers and qualitative details, weigh different options, defend their final choice, and explain when that decision should be re-evaluated. Together, these steps show how well a student reasons and solves problems inside a focused managerial scenario. They do not, however, prove broader leadership ability. While teamwork and communication certainly play a big part in running simulations, measuring how much an individual grows in those areas would require separate tests built specifically for them.

Drawing this line keeps us from stretching related research too far. De and Bakhshi (2023) tested experiential role-play to see if it could make Indian management students more assertive. Designing an exercise around one clear interpersonal behavior works well, as their results show, yet a broad business simulation does not automatically build assertiveness on its own. Tamhankar (2022) took a different route, running a simulation with third-year commerce students to test how well they applied business concepts. Useful as that setup is for classroom teaching, undergraduate students and basic concept application do not tell us much about Indian MBA cohorts.

3.4 Work readiness, employability and employment

Employability concerns capabilities and circumstances that help people obtain and succeed in work (Yorke, 2006). Work readiness is a narrower construct concerned with preparedness for workplace demands. A readiness questionnaire records how prepared students say they are. The Work Readiness Scale developed by Caballero et al. (2011), for example, addresses domains including work competence and organisational acumen. Rothwell et al. (2008) assess a related construct, self-perceived employability, with items reflecting perceptions of the labour market and institutional reputation as well as personal capability. A study using that instrument should label its outcome self-perceived employability. Placement, job offers and sustained employment require separate follow-up and are influenced by recruitment access, prior experience and labour demand.

Arora and Gupta (2022) report an association between skills developed through live projects and sustainable employability in India. Live projects may include client relationships, deadlines and external accountability that a classroom simulation does not reproduce. Jackson et al. (2023) examine a UK-based experiential residential involving MBA students from the Indian subcontinent. Their survey links skill development to subsequent employment in that setting. The educational activity, institutional context and labour market differ from those

in the proposed study. Both articles justify examining how an experiential activity may relate to readiness or employment, while leaving the specific simulation comparison open.

3.5 What the evidence establishes in India

Looking at Indian MBA employability, Bhatnagar (2020) points to a mix of technical and interpersonal skills across existing studies. In a more recent survey, Tilve et al. (2026) mapped out the professional skills of MBA students across several districts in Maharashtra. What neither paper does, however, is measure how much of that skill growth comes directly from business simulations. On a wider scale, Suryavanshi et al. (2026) examined hands-on learning across Indian higher education—covering everything from internships to entrepreneurship programs. While their review sheds light on how universities connect with industry, it still leaves us without a clear measure of how simulations translate into workplace readiness for MBA graduates.

The selected studies leave three linked questions open. First, stronger engagement during a simulation may or may not correspond to independently scored skill performance afterward. Second, gains on a task may be narrower than changes in perceived preparedness for work. Third, an association between skill and perceived readiness may partly reflect prior work experience or programme context. Table 1 shows why results from different studies cannot answer these questions interchangeably.

Table 1. Selected published evidence and its relevance to the proposed study

Source and setting	Design and outcome	What the evidence supports
Chernikova et al. (2020), higher education across disciplines	Meta-analysis of 145 studies. Reported overall g = 0.85, 95% CI [0.69, 1.02] for complex skill learning.	A quantitative benchmark from a broader literature. Applicability to Indian MBA programmes and work readiness remains untested by this estimate.
Kulkarni & Sivaraman (2022), Indian management classroom	Teaching case on a co-taught simulation and changes to course delivery and assessment.	A practical account of engagement-oriented design. Several course changes occurred together.
Lexman et al. (2025), Indian PGDM programme	Experiment with 280 students varying difficulty and facilitator support. Outcomes were engagement and enjoyment.	Evidence about instructional features within a simulation. The outcomes do not assess skill transfer or readiness.
Arora & Gupta (2022), India	Study of live projects with 454 students. Reports associations with sustainable employability.	Adjacent evidence on experiential activity and employability. The exposure is a live project.
Jackson et al. (2023), UK MBA residential	Survey of 182 international MBA students from the Indian subcontinent, examining skill development and employment.	Context for relating perceived gains to employment. The residential and labour market differ from those of an Indian MBA classroom study.
Tilve et al. (2026), selected districts in Maharashtra	Survey of 163 MBA students on professional and employability skills.	Indian MBA context for skill selection. The survey does not compare instructional conditions.

Sample sizes and the effect estimate in Table 1 are reported by the cited studies. The rows are selected for comparison and may not be combined into a total sample or an overall effect.

4. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Everything starts with making repeated choices and unpacking them through structured debriefings. Framed through Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, committing to a decision gives students a concrete experience, while the debriefing prompts them to step back and reflect. From there, guided explanation ties those results back to business concepts, setting up the next round for active experimentation. Of course, we still have to track how involved students actually are in this loop. Metrics like class attendance, finished decision rounds, and reflection logs show that someone showed up and took part—not that they truly learned anything. Any link between high participation and better grades could just as easily stem from a student's existing drive or who they happened to get paired with on a team.

Transfer is assessed when students apply their reasoning to a new case. A stronger performance could inform a student's perception of preparedness if they recognise how the task connects to workplace demands. Conversely, a demanding task may reveal gaps and lower a student's initial confidence even if their performance improves. These possibilities justify separate measures. Figure 1 shows the proposed sequence and the contrasts the study would estimate. The sequence is a theoretical explanation. The analysis will not estimate indirect effects or infer causal ordering between skill and readiness measured at the same follow-up.

Figure 1. Proposed learning process and empirical comparisons

H1 and H2 compare instructional groups at follow-up with baseline adjustment. H3 evaluates the adjusted association between individual decision performance and perceived readiness. Engagement and debriefing are process constructs.

5. Proposed research objectives and questions

1. Check whether participating MBA sections actually run the simulation as designed by logging completed decision rounds, held debriefs, and student attendance across classes.
2. Map out the starting profile of participating MBA sections, covering student demographics, past simulation experience, initial decision-making scores, and baseline work readiness.
3. Compare post-course individual decision-making scores between the simulation group and the active comparison group, adjusting for baseline differences.
4. Measure whether perceived work readiness differs between the same two teaching groups after accounting for baseline levels.
5. Test how strongly follow-up decision-making performance relates to perceived work readiness once baseline scores and instructional group are accounted for.
6. Break down student performance across specific skill areas: framing the problem, using evidence, weighing alternatives, and justifying or revising decisions.

RQ1. How is the simulation delivered, and to what extent do participating students complete its activities?
RQ2. How do the instructional groups differ in individual managerial decision-making performance at follow-up after accounting for baseline performance?
RQ3. How do the groups differ in perceived work readiness at follow-up after accounting for baseline readiness?
RQ4. How strongly is decision performance associated with perceived work readiness at follow-up, and where do domain scores suggest strengths or gaps in decision performance?

5.1 Hypotheses for the proposed study

H1, primary. Students in sections receiving the simulation module will have higher post-module managerial decision-making scores than students in active comparison sections, after adjustment for baseline decision-making scores. Repeated practice with feedback provides the theoretical basis for this expectation (Chernikova et al., 2020; Kolb, 1984).
H2, secondary. After adjusting for baseline readiness, students in simulation sections will feel more prepared for the workplace after completing the module than those in the standard active-learning groups. Instead of just memorising syllabus material, running multi-round pricing and resource decisions requires students to apply business concepts directly (Arora & Gupta, 2022; Jackson et al., 2023).
H3 (Secondary): Even after factoring in instructional group, starting decision-making scores, and initial readiness, students who score higher on post-module decision-making will also report higher perceived work readiness. Strong decision-making is just one piece of feeling ready for a job, though a positive link here could still stem from shared background factors like a student's prior work experience.

6. Proposed methodology

6.1 Design, setting and recruitment

This study follows existing MBA classes across multiple business schools, measuring students' progress before and after the course. We apply a specific teaching method to an entire class section at once, then assess how much each individual student learns and how ready they feel for the workplace. Ideally, each participating

institution will run both the simulation and the active comparison sections, with the same instructors teaching across both formats—or balanced evenly between them. If one school or faculty member only ever teaches a single condition, we would have no way to separate instructor or campus effects from the simulation itself. Any conclusions drawn from the data will apply specifically to these participating MBA sections and similar management programs.

Recruit students from participating MBA sections taking the same or closely comparable module. Define eligibility before recruitment, document the assignment or scheduling rule, and collect baseline data before exposure. Record programme year, prior work or internships, prior simulation experience and available indicators of academic preparation. Report invited, consenting and analysed counts, dates, exclusions and attrition by group. Determine the recruitment target from the smallest educationally important difference on the primary scale, expected variance, baseline–follow-up correlation, section size, intraclass correlation and attrition. Evaluate plausible scenarios and prioritise an adequate number of independent sections.

6.2 Instructional conditions and fidelity

Simulation sections would make sequential team decisions, receive scenario-generated feedback and debrief the decisions against course concepts. Comparison sections would analyse cases addressing the same learning objectives, with equivalent contact time, discussion and feedback. The contrast concerns the simulation package relative to active case instruction. Specify the platform, scenario, number and duration of rounds, facilitator prompts, debrief timing and access requirements before fieldwork. Record attendance, completed rounds, debriefs, deviations and crossover. Both groups should complete the same outcome assessments at equivalent intervals.

6.3 Construct measurement and scoring

Table 2. Proposed measures and verification

Construct	Proposed operational definition	Documentation or quality check
Instructional condition	Section-level indicator for simulation versus active case instruction.	Assignment records, contact hours and implementation logs.
Participation and fidelity	Attendance, completed rounds and debriefs delivered in simulation sections.	Completion criteria, denominators and deviations.
Decision-making	Individual score on parallel unfamiliar business cases before and after instruction.	Common rubric, case comparability, rater calibration and agreement.
Perceived work readiness	Prespecified context-appropriate self-report score at baseline and follow-up.	Item wording, response anchors, scoring rules and evidence for score interpretation.

We will create comparable versions of the case studies and grade them using a shared rubric that evaluates framing, evidence use, alternatives, justification, and revision. To ensure fairness, we will pilot or rotate these versions and track which one each student receives. Where possible, independent trained raters—who won't know which group a student belongs to or when the test was taken—will do the grading. To confirm grading consistency, we will report rater agreement (using intraclass correlation and confidence intervals) and specify whether scores reflect a single rater or an average. We will also define scoring weights and how grading disagreements are resolved ahead of time. Finally, while team game performance will show how students learn along the way, the individual case will measure their final skill level.

We are considering the Work Readiness Scale (Caballero et al., 2011) as a potential survey, though we have not yet selected the final tool. Our plan is to have students, professors, and employers review the questions for relevance, get proper permissions, and test the wording in a pilot run. We will set rules for scoring and handling skipped questions in advance. We will also check that the survey measures things reliably and consistently across different student groups and time points. If a single overall score doesn't hold up well statistically, we will focus on individual valid sub-categories instead and pause testing H2. Additionally, we will make sure that similar questions across different sections don't blur the results for H3..

6.4 Ethics and data management

We will obtain all necessary ethics clearances and campus permissions before recruiting any students. Participation will be completely voluntary with clear consent steps, and opting out will have zero impact on students' academic grades. To protect privacy while tracking progress over time, we will use anonymous study

IDs, store the matching key in a separate secure location, and be transparent about data usage and storage timelines. Ethics clearance, informed consent, and secure data collection form the required foundation of this study.

7. Proposed statistical analysis

7.1 Data preparation and description

Prespecify the codebook, scoring, exclusions and model covariates before inspecting outcomes. Check duplicate identifiers, admissible values, time-point matching and section assignments. Summarise participant flow, item and wave missingness, demographics and prior experience by group. Use counts and percentages for categorical variables and means with standard deviations or medians with interquartile ranges as appropriate. Present baseline standardised differences and common support. Describe rubric domain scores in original units and report completion and fidelity with explicit denominators.

7.2 Hypothesis tests and sensitivity analyses

For H1, regress the post-module decision score on section condition, baseline decision score and a short prespecified set of pre-exposure covariates, such as prior work and simulation experience. Use site effects when the design provides within-site comparison. For H2, use perceived readiness at follow-up as the outcome and adjust for baseline readiness. A baseline-adjusted model estimates a follow-up contrast at comparable baseline values (Vickers & Altman, 2001). In a nonrandomised comparison, adjustment cannot remove unmeasured confounding.

For H3, regress follow-up readiness on follow-up decision score, instructional condition, both baseline scores and the prespecified pre-exposure covariates. Report the readiness slope per meaningful decision-score increment. The slope describes a concurrent association. Engagement and rounds completed occur after the exposure and are excluded from the primary adjustment set. Comparisons by participation level are exploratory.

Table 3. Hypotheses and planned estimates

Hypothesis	**Target estimate**	**Required reporting**
H1, primary	Adjusted group difference in individual decision-making.	Student and section counts, adjusted mean difference, 95% CI and two-sided p-value.
H2, secondary	Adjusted group difference in perceived work readiness.	Counts, adjusted mean difference, 95% CI and raw and Holm-adjusted p-values.
H3, secondary	Adjusted association of follow-up decision performance with readiness.	Counts, readiness-score slope, 95% CI and raw and Holm-adjusted p-values.

Account for within-section dependence with cluster-robust inference and an appropriate small-sample correction when section counts support it. If too few independent sections permit credible inference, report the estimates descriptively. Assess baseline overlap, functional form, group-specific baseline slopes, residual patterns and influential sections. If slopes differ, estimate the contrast standardised over a prespecified common baseline distribution. Report effects in scale units and optionally a standardised H1 effect with the denominator defined. Use a two-sided 0.05 threshold for H1 and adjust the two secondary p-values using Holm's procedure. Label confidence intervals as pointwise.

Report follow-up attrition by condition and compare observed baseline characteristics of students with and without matched outcomes. If missingness is material and a missing-at-random assumption is plausible, consider prespecified multiple imputation reflecting group, site and clustering. Compare against complete-case estimates and check sensitivity to departures from the missingness assumption where feasible. Examine sensitivity to case version and influential sections. If group overlap is poor or condition is inseparable from site, qualify or withhold the adjusted group contrast.

8. Results of the literature synthesis

The selected literature offers stronger evidence on engagement and opportunities to practise skills than on transfer and perceived readiness in Indian MBA settings. Chernikova et al. (2020) report a positive cross-disciplinary estimate for complex skill learning. Kulkarni and Sivaraman (2022) and Lexman et al. (2025)

address implementation and engagement more directly in Indian management education. Arora and Gupta (2022) and Jackson et al. (2023) address outcomes closer to employability, using different experiential activities. Table 1 documents the design and outcome differences underlying that interpretation.

The review provides no original estimate of baseline skill, readiness, group differences or the association between the two outcomes in the proposed sample. H1–H3 remain untested. No participant statistics, reliability coefficients, confidence intervals or p-values were computed.

9. Discussion

A simulation gives students an opportunity to make a decision, examine its consequences and apply feedback. Kolb's framework suggests why the debrief and the opportunity to try again matter for transfer. The proposed active case comparison recognises that case instruction also provides opportunities for reasoning and discussion. Any estimated difference would concern the added value of the simulation package in the participating settings. The proposed endpoints may move differently. Improved task performance with little change in readiness could indicate a gain concentrated in one skill. Higher readiness with little difference in performance could reflect changes in confidence or perceived relevance. A small or imprecise group contrast would require examination of fidelity, comparator activities and the interval around the estimate. These interpretations are conditional. A positive H3 estimate could also reflect prior experience, internship opportunities or other shared determinants.

10. Implications

10.1 Theoretical implications

The framework specifies iterative practice and reflection as learning processes, with separate endpoints for transfer and perceived readiness. It gives a future study a way to determine where the predicted relationships hold and where the proposed explanation requires revision.

10.2 Educational implications

A structured debrief can ask students to explain what assumption changed and how they weighed competing options. An unfamiliar case can then sample whether individual students apply similar reasoning after the game. These activities provide different evidence for formative feedback and assessment.

10.3 Industry implications

Employer input can improve the relevance of decision tasks by identifying realistic constraints and acceptable justifications. Internship supervisor ratings and employment records would be needed to study whether the assessed behaviours correspond to workplace performance or hiring.

11. Limitations and future research

The narrative review relies on targeted source selection and some abstract-level records. It cannot establish the completeness of the literature or an average local effect. The proposed comparison remains vulnerable to selection, instructor differences, contamination and attrition. The readiness measure is self-reported and a short follow-up has limited relevance to retention and employment.

Where feasible, later studies could randomise an adequate number of sections within institutions, include a delayed parallel case and gather supervisor ratings of the same decision behaviours during internships. Separate follow-up could track job offers or placements using explicit definitions, dates and records of recruitment access.

12. Conclusion

Business simulations offer structured opportunities to practise managerial decision-making. The evidence reviewed here leaves open whether the simulation package adds to active case instruction in Indian MBA programmes and whether any difference extends to perceived work readiness. An independently scored case and a separate readiness measure provide a way to address those questions without conflating engagement, skill transfer and employment.

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