



Relevance of Experiential Learning in School and Higher Education

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Abstract

Education functions as a transformative mechanism that equips individuals to contribute meaningfully to national development. In this context, experiential learning (EL) has emerged as a pedagogical paradigm that integrates cognitive, emotional, and environmental dimensions of learning to foster holistic development. Grounded in the philosophical traditions of Aristotle and Buddha and further theorized by Dewey, Piaget, Kolb, and others, EL emphasizes “learning by doing,” enabling learners to bridge theoretical concepts with real-world applications. The objectives include: (1) distinguishing between field visits and excursions, (2) identifying the need to integrate EL into curricula in alignment with NEP 2020, (3) analysing perceptions of students, teachers, and guardians regarding the acceptance and effectiveness of EL, and (4) recommending strategies to balance traditional classroom instruction with experiential activities to promote holistic growth. Employing a mixed-method design, the study combines extensive literature reviews and primary survey is conducted via Google Forms. Findings indicate a strong positive perception toward EL, highlighting its role in enhancing creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and socio-emotional competencies. The analysis also identifies potential challenges, emphasizing the crucial role of teachers as facilitators. The study advocates for a revival of India’s traditional experiential frameworks, such as the Gurukul system, complemented by contemporary pedagogical strategies. This integration can enable a transformative shift in Indian education, fostering lifelong learning and comprehensive human development.

Keywords: *Experiential learning, multi-disciplinary approach, social-emotional learning, flexible curriculum, emotional well-being, holistic development.*

Introduction

“If we want our children to move mountains, we first have to get them out of their chairs.”

~ Nicolette Sowder

Education and the learning procedure construct an individual to contribute in making a progressive and developing nation where the nature and quality of the education rendered serves as catalyst to the process. As the primary knowledge repertoire, schools followed by colleges and universities of the country take up the utmost responsibility of imparting and contributing towards holistic educational approach for each of the disciplines and sub-disciplines. Holistic education focusses on wholeness, philosophical orientations and pedagogical practices. It is concerned with life experiences, relates different aspects of individual rather than restricting itself with ‘narrowly defined basic skills’ (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

Learning from and through experience is not something new rather roots from early times of Aristotle and Buddha. Theories of philosophical pragmatism (John Dewey), social psychology (Kurt Lewin), learning



during the process of learning (Carl Rogers), Montessori method (Maria Montessori), cognitive theory (Jean Piaget) emphasizes on experiential learning (Rani Komal, 2022). Piaget's concept (1973) supported the fact that, an individual's experience is transformed through an energetic process that enhances knowledge of events and development of the individual's creative abilities. Kolb (1984) again stated learning is "the process whereby knowledge is formed through the transformation of experience" (Rani Komal, 2022). The primary goal of site visit is to help students connect with process of science and arts in field ecology through relating classroom learnings with their observations in real space (Burt et al., 2012).

According to the UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, experiential learning (EL) refers to the idea that knowledge develops through our continuous interaction and involvement with the world, making learning a natural outcome of experience. Unlike cognitive and behavioural theories, this approach is more holistic, as it recognises that learning is influenced by the entirety of our experiences, including our thoughts, emotions, and the surrounding environment. (UNESCO-UNIVOC, 2023).

National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 has made recommendations regarding various aspects of school and higher education levels in its reports, made lots of recommendations emphasizing on reconstruction of pedagogy and curriculum of the Indian system of education to meet the societal expectations of the 21st century. School education (Grade 1-12) must be enjoyable, holistic, and integrated in all sense and should be focussing on policy recommendations of pedagogical reforms to refrain from the prevalent culture of rote learning (Rani Komal, 2022).

It becomes necessary to understand ways to implement the recommendations as per NEP 2020 and also the problems that might be encountered. Perception about the acceptance and realisation of effectiveness of experiential learning amongst students enduring school and higher education should be taken into consideration. The impact can be analysed when an estimate on the number of educational institutes incorporating EL and their progress can be known.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is:

1. To understand the difference between field visits and excursions.
2. To identify the need for inclusion of EL (as per NEP 2020) into school curriculum and higher-level education with a multi-disciplinary approach.
3. To show a perception study regarding the acceptance and relevance of the EL approach amongst the students, teachers (school, college, university levels) and guardians.
4. To recommend ways to balance classroom studies and EL activities fostering holistic development approach.

Review of Literature

International literature reviews

WG Whitford (1923) in his work 'Brief History of Art Education in the United States' remarks in the post-war era the emphasis is rather on the practical than ever before and that the old method of learning was only wasting time on formal exercises without any objectives. These courses should be implemented with mental training, art thinking and judgement and art appreciation. Art work, construction, design, etc. are not special subjects instead very much integral to a well-organized curriculum in the public schools. "...A modern program of art education for the elementary school comprises a background of art appreciation...which will



equip him to meet the art problems of everyday life, and appreciate the beauties of nature to the fullest..." (Whitford, 1923).

Pat Hutchings tries to focus on the connection of experience and knowledge gain. He remarks, "...It is our contention that learning-- at the very least the kind of learning we expect in, college is active and involved and that, therefore, knowing and doing (or experience) must work together..." He asserts that knowing and doing must go hand-in-hand if learning has to occur mentioning Donald Schon's concept of the "reflective practitioner" or David Kolb's model of the "learning cycle" (Hutchings, 1935).

T.H. Broad explains the necessity of experience-centred curriculum that concerns individual. He argues that the generation is stuck in a 'paradoxical situation' where the need is to cater individual needs but teaching procedures are ultimately oriented towards group needs. Again, he mentions every individual learns through experience and it greatly matters - each child's overall set of experiences shaped by the school is unique, even though some of their learning may overlap with that of others. He also emphasizes on student interest where stress is put upon the importance of teaching methods in arousing interest of individual students as with a dearth of interest there is little learning (Broad, 1949).

N.L. Bossing's presentation on the trend towards the idea of core-curriculum reveals that this notion gained momentum via the emphasis of the to-be school curriculum by the Educational Policies Commission (1944). Here, experiential learning was stressed upon and curriculum was believed to centre experiences needed intending towards necessary behaviour competencies. With the aim of "learning experiences deemed necessary for all youth" an all-inclusive course, 'Common Learnings' (Core) was decided (Bossing & Bellack, 1956).

Hobgood explains the different modes of teaching as informational, practical, interpretative and critical and asserting that learning through experience is somewhat similar to the critical mode of teaching but claims it as the singular most efficient channel of instruction -the intention was not to introduce radical innovations, but to explore possibilities with a mindset focused on gradual and thoughtful reform rather than revolutionary change. It is identified as a 'learn by doing' approach where the student discovers oneself in a specific field on exposure to different stimuli leading to the offered understanding and can face 'sympathetic criticism' of the teacher (Hobgood, 1970).

Coleman (1977) has also supported experiential learning takes advantage of intrinsic motivation compared to information assimilation, Experiential learning features substantiation to abstract concepts, immediacy of application, exploitation of intrinsic motivation when compared to classroom learnings. Alongside, the development approach by Dewey and Piaget deals with the interaction of the person and nature and the resulting organisation of both cognitive and emotional patterns (Hamilton, 1980).

The necessity of outdoor experiences for educational purposes had been a matter of debate and characterises a rich history. The benefits of outdoor experience for the developing a healthy body and thereby, a healthy soul was advocated by Plato (1920). Arnold (1970) argues that children living in urban settings seldom have the opportunity to truly connect with the natural world. Instead, their sensory and emotional development is largely shaped through the objects and structures that surround them. Rhoades (1972) suggests that engagement with the natural environment can foster important qualities such as cooperation, clear thinking, planning, observation, resourcefulness, persistence, and adaptability. However, these qualities do not arise simply from the environment itself, but from the way educational programmes structure and encourage students' interaction with it. (Hattie et al., 1997).



National literature reviews

Post independent India had aimed at universalisation of education, to enable the right to education to every stratum of the society. Therefore, the main challenge of education system shifted to expansion of educational facilities which eventually led to a fall in the standards of the education system. To explain the nature of curriculum development that happened in the post-independent India, "...Curriculum in India at the school stage in general and the primary stage in particular is narrowly conceived and mechanically administered... The curriculum emphasises bookish knowledge, rote memory, cultivation of bits of information and is dominated by a stifling examination system both internal and external..." (Chaurasia & Kaul, 1967).

The reconstruction of the Indian education system undertook various recommendations, amongst which two important educational elements were mentioned. The first is the recreational and cultural interest of the youth (15-25 years) and secondly, their willingness, eagerness to participate in meaningful programs of nation building and social service (Naik, 1975).

The value of experience was emphasised in various fields of education, be it science, technology, geography, history, and many others. In context of medical education in India, Balachandra Adkoli remarks that in the traditional curricula, stress was put on acquisition of knowledge over development of skills. He advocated the importance of integrated education and similar concept of PBL (Problem-Based Learning). This approach aims at 'learning how to learn' and focus on self-directed learning as the central and pervasive objective of the teaching-learning process (Sood & Adkoli, 2000).

The concept of holistic education was emphasised by schools and colleges. Holistic education focusses on wholeness, philosophical orientations and pedagogical practices. It is concerned with life experiences, relates different aspects of individual rather than restricting itself with 'narrowly defined basic skills' (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

It is important to trace the nature of learning and education system that has prevailed in India through ages. Practical wisdom was rooted in the Indian Spiritual tradition of Vedic learning. However, the influence of colonisation and increasing industrial and economic development of the country has removed the elements of spirituality from the contemporary education system. Vedic wisdom was viewed to foster ideas of integrating ethics, awareness, responsible behaviour through experiential learning, mentoring, spiritual discipline, cognitive learning, observation and reflection. The concept of transformational learning has been inherent to India and needs a revitalisation to bring practical wisdom to the Indian management education. Also, it was proposed amongst other that teaching environment could be both in and outside the classroom (Nandram, 2014).

Mention worthy, National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 has made recommendations regarding various aspects of school-level and higher education in its reports. School education (Grade 1-12) must be enjoyable, holistic, and integrated in all sense and should be focussing on policy recommendations of pedagogical reforms to refrain from the prevalent culture of rote learning (Rani Komal, 2022).

However, a change in the education system was remarkably noticed in the Medieval and British India. Medieval India education system mainly featured the ideals set up by the Mughal rulers and traditions, institutes (madrasa) were set up to impart values of Sufism and appreciate art in various forms. This was followed by the British rule in India where missionaries were set up throughout the country to impart education in English and prepare the upper strata of the society for administrative purposes useful for the British government (Taj, 2023).



Prof. Kamlesh Misra remarks that the now idea of experiential learning was initially introduced in the West and traced its way to universities worldwide, including India. But he claims this system was already in vogue in ancient India, the very familiar Gurukul system which was based on experiential learning and subjects like astronomy, philosophy, medicine, yoga, defence and many more were taught. Once the Guru decided that the student is capable of going to the real world and implement the knowledge, was allowed to go whereas relatively slow learners were retained and given time to learn (Misra, 2024).

Methodology

Based on the objectives chosen for the study, the information collected are both from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources mainly include a general survey via circulation of google forms amongst the participants and receiving relevant feedbacks. The third objective of the research is mainly addressed by this approach. The first, second and fourth objectives mainly are addressed by referring secondary sources of information like relevant information from over internet, books, articles, journals, etc. Also, the fourth (last) objective incorporates suggestions and opinion of the researcher. While addressing second, third and last objectives sometimes reference of opinions and perception of the participants might be referred as well (if required). The final chapter of conclusion will be based on an overall analysis of the separate findings or discussions of the objectives from the previous chapters. Software of Word Art has been used for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Objective 1: To understand the difference between field visits and excursions

“An excursion is a trip by a group of people, in this case for educational purposes. As a teaching format, it provides alternative learning strategies for students, adding variety that is necessary for both students and teachers...” (Excursion, n.d.).

Field trips are not merely a break from the routine of school; they play a vital role in a child’s overall education. Such outings give students a valuable opportunity to experience and understand the world beyond the confines of textbooks and classrooms contributing to learning and personal growth in ways that conventional teaching cannot fully achieve. By sparking curiosity, increasing awareness of their surroundings, and teaching important life skills, field trips contribute meaningfully to a child’s development. (How To Help Your Child Prepare For A Field Trip?, 2023).

The common grounds of both field visit and excursion are that they involve a shift from classroom environment to real-world setting. The learner learns to keep parity and draw connections between classroom rote knowledge base and that they observe during their visit. Duration of field trips and excursion may vary from a day to several days depending on the purpose and location of the visit. These involve certain important components of EL.

Although the concepts of excursion and field trips are used interchangeably very often, there exists a distinction between them. Field trips form the bigger domain of excursion. Field trips require more planning, preparedness and delve into more elaborate observation and hands-on experience as compared to excursion. Excursions may be field-based or may not like excursions to parks, museums, factory sites, etc. let learners experience and observe, sometimes require hands-on activities but not necessarily. But for field visits, the applicability of the theoretical knowledge base is more prominent, effective and hands-on activities are always a must for field activities. It involves spontaneous movements of the body, collecting relevant information, use of instruments (if any).



Objective 2: To identify the need for inclusion of EL (as per NEP 2020) into school curriculum and higher education with a multi-disciplinary approach

The traditional knowledge system leads to compartmentalization into various disciplines which leads to single disciplinary approach. This approach in the 21st century is inflicted with criticisms being ineffective and lacking potential to propose solutions to any domains of studies. This major drawback has paved the way and demand for a collaborative learning approach targeting holistic development of the learners of all ages and levels.

The New Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 has given importance to such approaches in higher and school education system where the main thrust area is liberal education with holistic and multidisciplinary approach. This is mainly intended to

- a) overcome learning difficulties,
- b) interconnect all sources of knowledge,
- c) Inquiry-based learning
- d) Flexible curriculum
- e) Credit-based courses
- f) community engagement
- g) environmental education
- h) Value-based education
- i) Multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach

Coming to the importance of such multidisciplinary approach, it makes the learner approach a perceived problem or issue from varied perspectives with respect to a bunch of allied disciplines, providing a holistic approach to the issue.

To understand certain complex issues like the Mullaperiyar Dam dispute between Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it is necessary to examine them from multiple perspectives—historical, political, sociological, technological, and geographical. Similarly, studying a river requires an interdisciplinary approach - its geographical features, historical background, biological life, and representation in literature. (Exploring Disciplinary Approaches in NEP 2020: Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Models in HEIs, 2022).

Objective 3: To show a perception study about the acceptance and relevance of the EL approach amongst students and teachers (school, college, university levels) and guardians

Perception is regarded as a fuzzy concept, especially in psychological research. Traditionally, it refers to immediate products of sensory experience, via taste, hear, touch, etc. (Gleitman & Gross, 2010). In social psychology, the meaning shifts slightly, as perception refers to the later-stage process of forming and engaging with mental constructs of people (Phillips et al., 2014).



It is important not only lay recommendations on implementation of EL but also assess its acceptance amongst the common masses. Perception study via circulating google forms has been performed. Here, as seen in Fig.1, majority of respondents belong to the postgraduate level (60%) followed by people into professions (20%) and others (20%). Hence perception of mainly people engaged with higher levels of education and research are

emphasized here.

From the gender proportions of the participants in Fig.2, perception of females (90%) will have to be prioritized as compared to only 10% of male respondents.

80% of the respondents were familiar with the concept of EL (Fig.3) and almost 95% considered inclusion of EL into school and higher educational curriculum (Fig.4) with almost 90% definitely considers EL contributes to a learner's development (Fig.5).Majority of the participants (75%) considered EL results into holistic development of the learners (fig.6).Hence, a positive acceptance of inclusion of EL into the curriculum of education is observed among the participants.

Fig 1: Profession of respondents

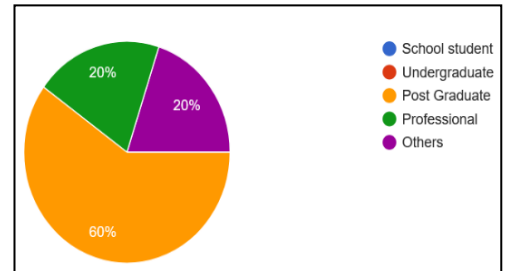


Fig 2: Gender of respondents

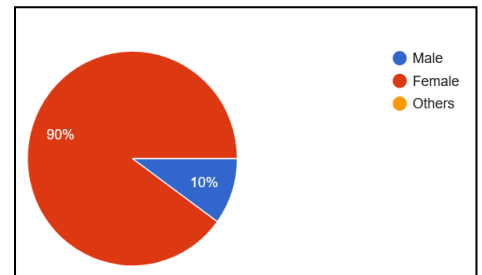
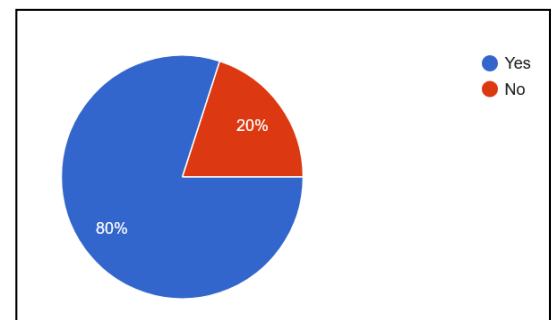


Fig 3: Familiarity with concept of



Source: Based on primary data (02/01/2025)

Fig 4: Consideration of inclusion of EL is essential in school/ higher educational curriculum

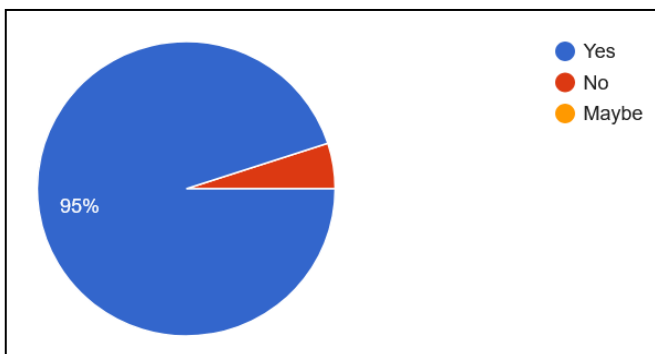


Fig 5: Perception of EL contributing to students' development

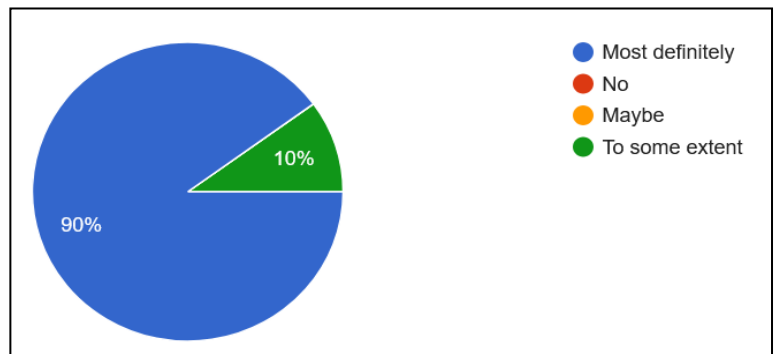
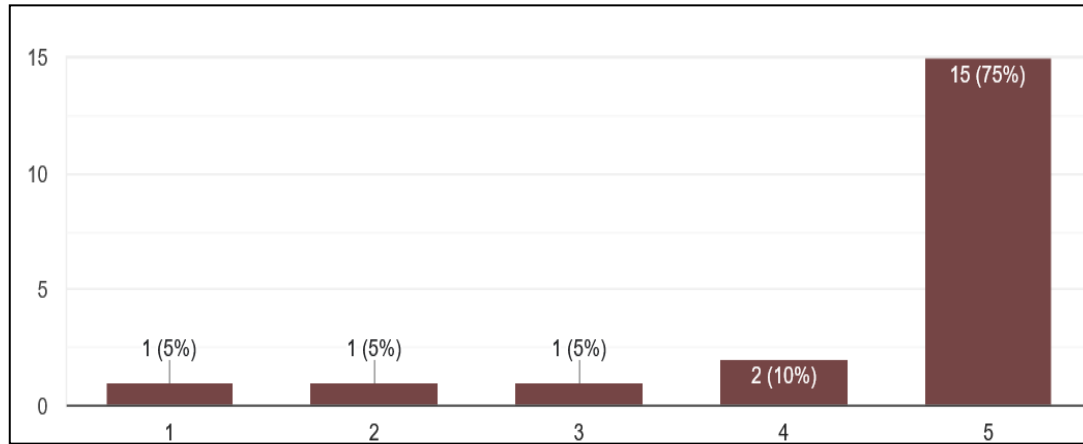




Fig 6: Perception of EL towards holistic development of learners



Source: Based on primary data
(02/01/2025)

Perception about the positives of EL: Positive aspects of EL have are found amongst the assertive remarks of the participants, like-

1. '...Creativity, experience, critical thinking, confidence, teamwork.'
2. '...Practical application. Relevance of what is being studied. Better retention of content...'
3. '...Establish a relationship between theoretical studies and hands on experience...'
4. '...Instils motivation to perform good...'
5. '...Helps in exploring new interests which open up future employment opportunities
6. '...Increases awareness about surrounding (social, environmental etc) ...'
7. '...Experimental learning provides students with hands-on experience, developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. It fosters collaboration, builds confidence, and helps application of crude knowledge to real-world problems, preparing them for the workforce and lifelong learning...'
8. '...Relatability, Interest, Cooperation, Collaboration, Brainstorming...'
9. 'Confidence, public speaking' and 'self-interest about subject matter, Professional skill development...' and many more.

Perception study on EL leading to emotional, social, intellectual, physical development: The word cloud below has been prepared which clearly mentions the major thrust points perceived under the domains of contribution of EL on emotional, social, intellectual, and physical development of the learners.

Fig 7: Perception study on EL leading to (a) Emotional, (b) Social, (c) Intellectual, (d) Physical



Perception about inclusion of EL should start at the school levels: The researcher has been identified

Students should be familiarised with real world problems and it's solutions from an early age
Students will find more interest in the school curriculum.
Children are fast learners and inculcating EL activities from school help them to diversify their attention.
Yes, I think implementation and inclusion of Experiential Learning (EL) should start at the school levels. This allows students to develop essential skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, from an early age.
Experiential Learning if taught from school will be useful for students at higher levels of studies and over all in life. Whether you study or you work, your idea of experiential learning will help you in all obstacles
It must be included in the curriculum
since class can become monotonous at times hence implementing experiential learninh like lab work even will boos their energy, as young children love to participate in anything out of box experience thatcan also become learning.
Yes, Especially when students enter adolescence because they have mental ability, curious about new things and learn from the experience, they have strong memory. They can start critical thinking at this stage.
Supports all student regardless of their abilities, disabilities or learning style. EL involves hands-on-activities and reflection to help students connect classroom knowledge to real world situation.
Should start basics from the very initial stages of learning.
Kids learn easily. Cultural acceptance and application of knowledge is better grasped at a younger age
Learning though experience if starts from early childhood leads to in-depth understanding of concepts also infuse values required for the later years of life.
The implementation and inclusion of EL should start at school level because the students should be able to understand the topics from the grassroot level and this will increase their inquisitiveness of knowledge

producing assertive remarks like- and many more...

EL vs Rote Learning: Rote learning restricts the openness of learning and the joyfulness of the process with lack of lucidity and expression which is reciprocated by the virtues of EL as also seen from the perception study. The plus points of EL over rote learning is expressed via the word cloud (Fig.8).

Despite the virtues of EL as perceived by the participants, the researcher finds there might be some risk and uncertainties present concerning EL which has led to the conclusion as discussed below.

Risk Factor of EL: An analysis of perception regarding the possibility of risk factor involved around 70% of respondents perceiving chances of risk definitely for sure or occasionally and the rest 30% supporting zero to some chances of risk involved. The reason for risk affirmation involve opinions as shown via the word cloud (Fig. 9(b)).

Fig 8: Perception of EL vs Rote learning



Source: Based on primary data
 (02/01/2025)

Fig 9(a): Perception of EL involving risk for learners

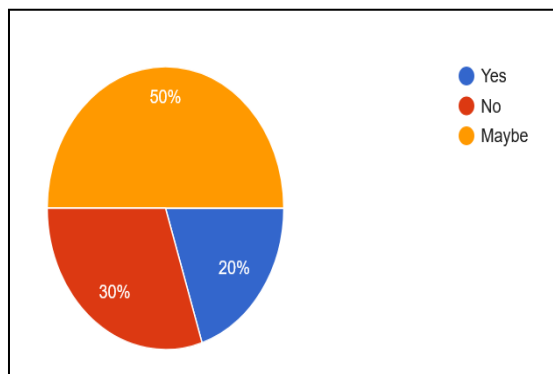
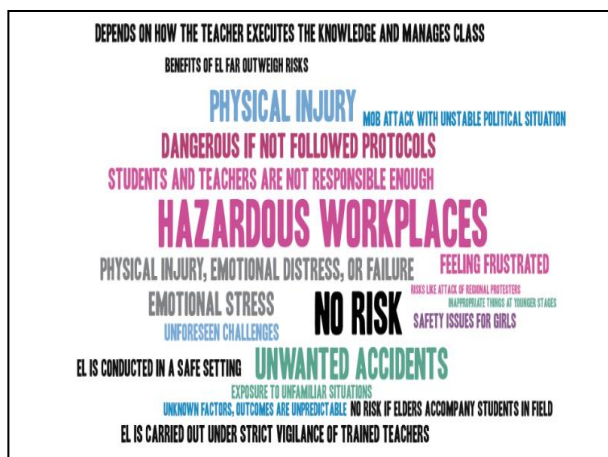


Fig 9(b): Perception of EL involving risk for learners



Role of teachers in facilitating EL: The probabilities of the risks perceived do provide basis for the importance of the role of teachers as facilitators and they can definitely contribute in the ways as perceived and proposed by the participants, shown hereby.

Fig 10: Perception regarding role of teachers





Objective 4: To recommend ways to balance classroom studies and EL activities fostering holistic development approach

Devangana Thakuria, while discussing holistic development, uses a simple analogy: if one concentrates only on perfecting the main course and ignore the side dishes and dessert, the meal may be good, but it will still feel incomplete and less satisfying. In the same way, when education prioritises only academic success, it tends to neglect emotional, social, and physical growth. Consequently, students may perform well in studies but lack essential life skills needed for overall development (Thakuria, 2024).

Considering a heterogenous classroom situation where learners with different capacities of learning gather, it is essential to incorporate classroom rote learning with co-curricular activities and infuse the elements of EL into the system. Students often face anxiety issues and psychological and intellectual as well as social hurdles during their preliminary years of growing, hence it pertains to the duty of a teacher to ensure holistic development of the child. Therefore, a balance needs to be implemented and can be observed in the following ways:

- a) Spiritual development of learners with incorporation of meditation, yoga classes, music therapy sessions, art therapy sessions, learning new instruments, counselling, etc. not only diverts the learners from rote learning situation but allows self-enrichment and fosters self-healing.
- b) Physical development can happen through participation in games like various sports, table tennis, swimming clubs, physical education/training etc. Also, additional courses like martial arts as skill enhancement programs must be ensured for the students which focus on their discipline, enhance self-esteem, concentration and sense of surroundings.
- c) Emotional development via conducting community service programs, participating in environmental and youth campaigns, is almost a practical implementation of their learnings from value education classes.
- d) Intellectual development happens through observation of debate sessions, inter-school competitions, brainstorming for global issues, or through skills like chess, learning abacus, machine language and basic coding.
- e) Creative arts session like painting, crafts, story-telling sessions, etc, also engages students to express creativity and experiences.
- f) Field visits, excursions to museums, parks fosters learning of theoretical knowledge about events and practicalizing them as real-world phenomena.
- g) Sense of responsibility comes with observance of social service weeks which not only promises values of compassion, visit to disability centres like schools for blind children and the disabled incorporates virtues of empathy but also modesty and humility.

Conclusion

The concept of Experiential Learning even though has been emphasized in the recent times, is not new to the Indian system of education as it traces back its roots to the ancient Gurukul system of education. When hands-on experiences complement classroom teaching, they promote social-emotional learning (SEL), which helps students understand and manage their emotions, develop empathy, and build healthy relationships.

Recommendations

Series of colonisation has severed the link to our enriched traditional system of learning and have established the concept of rigid learning system and unhealthy 'rat race' of the Indian education system. This modification needs ready attention, however will not be reverted back to its former glory unless strict implementation of regulations and policies and collective effort of the stakeholders of the education system –



be it the teachers, students or guardians. Virtues of experiential learning therefore will definitely help the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual nourishment required to feed the young minds of the nation.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

~ Swami Vivekananda

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