

## *Original Paper*

# Experiential Teaching is more Conducive to Student Learning than Traditional Teaching

Tian Wang<sup>1\*</sup> & Jiahui Wen<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

\* These authors contributed equally to this work and should be considered co-first author.

Received: February 13, 2023

Accepted: February 24, 2023

Online Published: March 2, 2023

doi:10.22158/jecs.v7n1p100

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v7n1p100>

### **Abstract**

*Some drawbacks of traditional teacher-centred teaching have gradually become apparent and have led to a growing interest in experiential teaching. Students and teachers are prominent participants in the teaching process, and their behavioural performance largely determines the learning outcomes. Likewise, a harmonious teacher-student relationship is essential to students' learning experience. In this paper, we have analysed the impact of experiential teaching on three aspects: student engagement, teacher-teaching innovation and teacher-student collaboration, to show that experiential has clear advantages for student learning. However, some argue that the design and practice of experiential teaching are challenging for teachers and that the student-centred approach is not conducive to managing classroom order. This, therefore, suggests new elements for teacher education and schoolteacher training to avoid the gap between instructional design and practice. And further research is needed by educational researchers on how to manage classroom order in experiential teaching and to make students learn effectively.*

### **Keywords**

*traditional teaching, experiential teaching, initiative, teaching adaptation, teacher-student collaboration*

## **1. Introduction and Context**

For many years, the traditional teacher-centred approach to teaching has been rooted in the education system. This way of teaching was seen as advantageous to the transmission of core knowledge and a cost-effective way to teach in groups (Oderinu et al., 2019). However, now that the drawbacks of this approach to teaching have become apparent, there is a growing interest in student-centred experiential teaching.

### *1.1 Traditional versus Experiential Teaching*

Traditional teaching methods tend to have professional educators making decisions and imparting knowledge to students through lectures. On the other hand, students receive information passively and follow the rules of the letter (Garrett, 2008; Breunig, 2017; Long & Gummelt, 2019). However, this approach only focuses on the subjective role of the teacher and neglects the importance of inspiration and participation in the learning process for students (Dewey, 1986; Pedrosa de Jesus et al., 2006). In addition, research has shown that teacher-centred approaches to teaching can make students fearful of learning and teachers (Garrett, 2008; Henry & Thorsen, 2021). Therefore, traditional methods to education are not conducive to students' motivation to learn, and experiential teaching can avoid these problems.

Experiential teaching is a method of teaching in which the teacher creates the environment and students actively construct their understanding of knowledge during the experience (Garrett, 2008; Kolb, 2015; Breunig, 2017; Fenwick, 2022). Specific ones include a variety of teaching methods, such as outdoor experiences and games that have inspired teachers to adapt their teaching (Menguiano-Rodríguez & del Mar del Pozo-Andrés, 2021). In contrast to traditional teaching, experiential teaching is student-centred, involves understanding and applying knowledge during the experience, and empowers students (Garrett, 2008; Manolis et al., 2013). Among the relevant theories, the most widely used is the experiential learning model proposed by Kolb (2015), who argues that experience-based learning is a continuous cycle. It is a circular structure consisting of four stages: (a) experience gained through practice (b) reflection on experience (c) theory drawn from experience (d) theory guiding action. And he argues that the learner can start at any stage. This allows the learner to apply the knowledge acquired to a new scenario, thus gaining a deeper understanding, and so on (Radović, Hummel, & Vermeulen, 2021).

### *1.2 Some Arguments about Experiential Teaching*

Roberts (2016) questions both the quality of teaching and the limited reach of experiential learning. However, Breunig (2017) argues that education should be a productive facilitator of collaboration and creativity rather than merely using memorisation skills as a measure of knowledge acquisition. Many applications of experiential teaching play an important role in the overall achievement of students in school, such as collaborative assignments and projects and global learning (Kuh, 2008). Furthermore, Lindsey and Berger (2009) suggest that experiential learning is not only applicable at different levels of education, from primary to tertiary. It also supports the application of experiential learning in a variety of fields, such as sports management and design (Frontczak, Loveland, & Daughtrey, 2015, pp. 41-48). However, it is also the case that different levels and domains may require new and specific pedagogical frameworks. This poses new challenges for the design of pedagogical frameworks and instruction (Reigeluth & Carr-Chellman, 2009). In addition to this, limited funding for teaching equipment is an obstacle to the implementation of experiential learning (Hadjikou, 2021).

### *1.3 Remaining Structure of the Article*

The rest of this paper will have the following four parts. As the two main actors in student learning, the actions and relationships between teachers and students have a significant impact on student learning. Therefore, the next three sections will compare and contrast the impact of traditional teaching and experiential teaching on student learning from the perspectives of student initiative, teacher-teaching methods and teacher-student collaboration. The final section will conclude with a summary and outlook on the advantages and debates of experiential teaching.

## **2. Claim 1: Experiential Teaching Requires Students to Take Their Initiative, which is more Conducive to Student Learning**

Experiential teaching allows students to become leaders in their learning process rather than just listeners in traditional teaching. Students are required to make relevant decisions and explore the generation of knowledge through their experiential processes. This facilitates students to take full ownership of the learning process and promotes active participation.

### *2.1 Experiential Teaching Requires Students to Make Their Own Decisions and Contributes to Student Subjective Motivation (Ponticorvo, Dell'Aquila, & Di Fuccio, 2022)*

Unlike traditional teaching, where decisions are made entirely by the teacher, experiential teaching requires students to take responsibility for the learning process and outcomes themselves. And in the learning process, only the situation and the objectives are defined, not as in traditional teaching, where there are fixed patterns and steps that only need to be followed at the same pace as the teacher. So in the experiential learning process, students inevitably have to make judgements and choices about situations (Morris, 2020), such as the choice of approach, whether to work alone or in a team. In these processes, students will use their initiative to make what they feel is the right choice, considering the specific situation.

However, related researchers have questioned the decision-making position of students. Buck and Akerson (2016) argue that although experiential education has always emphasised the need to be student-centred, the teacher is still involved in decision-making. They fail to recognise that the guiding and supervisory functions of the teacher remain in experiential learning (Hadjikou, 2021). The teacher needs to be responsible for the overall quality of teaching (Garrett, 2008; Morris, 2020). When some students appear deviating from the learning objectives, timely guidance and correction are provided. However, this process still depends on the teacher's control of his or her role and mastering the balance between guidance and decision-making. When students take a leading role in exploring their learning, they develop a sense of ownership. This will allow them to be more proactive in identifying problems and solving them.

### *2.2 Experiential Teaching Allows Students to Discover Knowledge on Their Own and Further Promotes Active Participation (Hadjikou, 2021)*

In traditional teaching, teachers tend to keep students on the receiving end of knowledge and reciting it

through lectures and exercises. On the other hand, experiential learning is more focused on allowing students to explore knowledge production through some games or practical processes. This student-centred approach is more conducive to motivating students to take the initiative and actively participate. In a study of 56 secondary school students who participated in an outdoor experiential learning environmental study (James & Williams, 2017), most students reported that it allowed them to learn about the specific process of data collection through hands-on practice, rather than just seeing completed data tables from a worksheet or textbook. In this way of learning, knowledge is discovered by the students themselves through exploration and research rather than through reciting boring word combinations from textbooks or hearing jargon from the teacher's mouth, as in traditional teaching. This makes students feel more engaged in the learning process and have a greater sense of achievement when completing the task. Furthermore, James and Williams' (2017) experiment found that some students who expressed little interest in learning in the classroom were actively engaged and focused on observing and investigating things during practical learning. These students often lacked the skills necessary in the traditional classroom, such as patience and sitting. They are, therefore, more likely to be actively engaged in exploratory learning outside the control of the teacher. Experiential teaching is therefore more motivating and makes learning more effective.

### **3. Claim 2: Experiential Teaching Requires Teachers to Adapt Their Teaching Methods, which is more Conducive to Student Learning**

Experiential teaching allows the teacher to change from being the decision-maker in traditional teaching to being the guide. Unlike the utilitarian approach of traditional teaching, experiential teaching requires the teacher to focus more on the students themselves in the teaching process. Teaching methods are adapted from students' interests, abilities and development to enhance their interest in learning while promoting their understanding of knowledge.

#### *3.1 Experiential Teaching Requires Teachers to Change the Classroom Routine (Lindsey & Berger, 2009) to Increase Students' Interest in Learning*

Experiential teaching allows teachers to experiment with popular teaching methods, such as digital games, outdoor experiences, etc., to increase students' interest in learning with contextualised activities. In the traditional classroom, the teacher's priorities are disciplinary and utilitarian (Menguiano-Rodríguez & del Mar del Pozo-Andrés, 2021). For the teacher, the ultimate goals are good class order and excellent results. As a result, teachers tend to teach repetitive lectures and exercises without paying attention to innovation, which also leads to students' feelings of difficulty and disinterest in learning. In contrast, experiential teaching facilitates teachers to replace rote learning with flexible and varied teaching techniques, thus reducing students' fear and boredom with learning.

However, Radović et al. (2021) question this. They argue that this is a massive challenge for teachers because any gaps between instructional design and practice can impact teaching effectiveness. However, they fail to note that teaching effectiveness can often be biased because educators do not focus on

students' different interests, abilities and starting points (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Therefore, teachers must design instruction according to the many factors of their students. This, of course, places demand on teacher training in schools. Teachers need to be trained to design instruction with clear objectives in mind and, more importantly, to anticipate and select activities that students are interested in and capable of completing. If the teacher provides experiences beyond what the students can absorb, then the most significant effect will be far from being achieved. It is, therefore, important that teachers adapt and design their teaching methods, which have a direct impact on student learning outcomes.

### *3.2 Experiential Teaching Requires Teachers to Help Students to Reflect on Their Learning Afterwards, which Helps to Deepen Their Understanding*

Post-practice reflection is a crucial stage in the experiential learning process. Unlike traditional teaching, after completing the teaching task, the teacher must provide ample time for students to reflect by setting open-ended questions and brainstorming. Students are allowed to deepen their understanding of the process of reflection. The traditional teaching style is too passive, relying on the teacher's information delivery and lacking the students' own reflection session, which is not conducive to understanding knowledge. As can be seen from Kolb's (2015) four-stage model, students come to the reflection stage when learning becomes active and is applied in context. Students' understanding of knowledge is further deepened with reflection (Barlow, 2015). They will find that some concepts are less difficult to remember after reflection and that memories are retained for a more extended period.

In an experiential task focusing on deepening their understanding of sustainable eating habits in which 143 food nutrition students participated, Maher and Burkhart (2017) found that upon completing the experiential task, students demonstrated adequate self-understanding and problem-solving skills in response to both reflective questions and suggestions for natural barriers. These are difficult to generate in an education where information is received passively. Reflection in the experiential learning process promotes higher-order process reasoning and holistic thinking by learners to achieve stated goals (Leary & Sherlock, 2020). In this process, students continually review the experience and how they think about the goal until they succeed. Therefore, post-practice reflection helps students move from knowing the what to understanding the why.

### **4. Claim 3: Experiential Teaching Requires Teachers and Students to Collaborate, which is more Conducive to Student Learning**

In experiential teaching, knowledge is gained by the teacher and students' collaboration rather than being passed on by the teacher in a one-way manner, as in traditional teaching. The teacher is committed to providing relevant learning situations for the students, while students interact and communicate with the teacher during their learning process to facilitate the achievement of learning objectives. Good teacher-student collaboration not only brings teachers and students closer together but also increases communication between them. This helps to create a harmonious and democratic learning environment for students, thus facilitating their learning.

#### *4.1 Experiential Teaching Brings Teachers and Students Closer to each other and Helps to Promote Teacher-student Interaction*

In traditional teaching, the teacher's position of authority is inviolable, and students are completely subservient to the teacher's control. This results in students having a respectful but fearful attitude towards the teacher. This teaching mode makes it more difficult for the teacher to interact with students and is not conducive to student learning and thinking. In contrast, experiential teaching teachers encourage students to explore knowledge with guidance and work collaboratively with them to achieve learning objectives. Experiential teaching makes the teacher less inaccessible and more like an older relative and wiser sibling (Fifolt, Morgan, & Burgess, 2017). This works well to reduce the psychological distance between the teacher and the students and helps to further facilitate teacher-student interaction during the teaching process, thus promoting student learning outcomes.

In a study of preschool teachers' beliefs about child-centred education and research (Sak, Erden, & Morrison, 2015), the teacher who adopted experiential teaching showed a change in his relationship with his students. In the student's mind, he can be a teacher, a mother, and a peer, and they also engage in intimate behaviour such as hugs and kisses. Meanwhile, another study exploring the effects of teacher self-representation on student motivation (Henry & Thorsen, 2021) found that teachers who developed positive teacher-student relationships had classrooms filled with more intense teacher-student interactions. These two examples show that experiential learning makes students feel less distant from their teachers and that this more intimate teacher-student relationship makes students more willing to express their ideas to their teachers. Experiential learning allows the teacher and students to become more like peers, exchanging ideas and even arguing about issues, which is an excellent way to promote intellectual understanding and engagement in learning.

#### *4.2 Experiential Teaching Increases Communication between Teachers and Students (Isaak et al., 2017) and Helps Students' Feelings to be Noticed*

Experiential teaching empowers students, and class rules can be set by the teacher and students after communication, which facilitates the democratic nature of the teaching process. In traditional classroom learning, the teacher has absolute control and decision-making power. Both the content and the class rules are decided unilaterally by the teacher. In Sun's (2012) study on the transformation of teacher-student relationships in ESL (English as a Second Language), he found that 93.7% of the responses to the question on teacher-student relationship preferences chose "understanding, respect, trust, democracy ". This is good evidence of students' desire to communicate and interact with their teachers, to be listened to and understood rather than questioned and passively obeyed.

However, Garrett (2008), in a study of three teachers' classroom management in a student-centred teaching model, found that some teachers felt that listening to students was not necessary and that direct management of the classroom by the teacher was more effective. However, they should also give some trust to students, and classroom management promotes student self-management by establishing a shared contract with students through communication. There is no direct evidence that communication

positively impacts classroom management. However, when students are allowed to gain power over their identity transformation from a communicative environment, the positive impact of their motivation on the learning process follows (Henry & Thorsen, 2021). That is, when students feel that their opinions are being adopted, this has the potential to promote self-discipline and, thus classroom management. Therefore, communication between teachers and students is essential in experiential teaching, which makes the relationship between teachers and students more democratic which is more conducive to facilitating student learning.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study found that experiential learning has clear advantages in facilitating students' learning development. Experiential learning can mobilize student initiative and engagement by allowing students to make their own decisions and explore on their own. Moreover, this approach is conducive to allowing educators to focus more on changes to the regular classroom and student reflection after the experience, thus further improving the overall effectiveness of student learning. More importantly, experiential learning fosters a good relationship between teachers and students working together, enhancing teacher-student interaction while allowing students' feelings to be noticed and respected. In contrast, traditional teaching lacks an emphasis on student initiative and engagement, to the detriment of student motivation. Moreover, this teacher-centered approach to teaching is monotonous and not only tends to make students feel difficult and uninterested, but it is also not conducive to building a positive teacher-student relationship.

In the discussion of teacher-student collaboration, although this paper examines that communication between teachers and students positively affects student motivation, this has the potential to indirectly facilitate a smooth experiential learning process. It has not been fully demonstrated that experiential learning facilitates teacher-student communication and thus effective classroom maintenance. Further research could be conducted in the future regarding how experiential learning is managed in the classroom. At the same time, as this paper mainly emphasizes the positive impact of experiential learning on students' learning, this also limits the ability to explain in detail the impact of this teaching style on other aspects of students' relationship management, skills, and so on.

Overall, experiential teaching is more conducive to student learning than traditional teaching. However, more needs to be done by schools and the government in terms of experiential teaching and learning implementation. Schools should conduct some teacher training on experiential teaching and learning design to help teachers adapt to the change in status while developing relevant instructional skills. At the same time, the government should consider increasing funding for experiential learning to address the challenge of limited funding for infrastructure. And publicize the benefits of experiential learning to help schools secure some additional investment.

## References

- Barlow, G. (2015). The essential benefits of outdoor education: Gareth Barlow on how UWC South East Asia continues to take learning outdoors. *IS International School*, 17(3), 53-56.
- Breunig, M. (2017). Experientially Learning and Teaching in a Student-Directed Classroom. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 40(3), 213-230. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917690870>
- Buck, G. A., & Akerson, V. L. (2016). *Enhancing Professional Knowledge of Pre-Service Science Teacher Education by Self-Study Research Turning a Critical Eye on Our Practice*. Cham Springer International Publishing.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). *Powerful Teacher Education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Dewey, J. (1986). Experience and Education. *The Educational Forum*, 50(3), 241-252. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00131728609335764>
- Fenwick, T. J. (2022). *Experiential Learning: A Theoretical Critique from Five Perspectives*. Information Series No. 385. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED454418>
- Fifolt, M., Morgan, A. F., & Burgess, Z. R. (2017). Promoting School Connectedness Among Minority Youth Through Experience-Based Urban Farming. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 41(2), 187-203. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917736332>
- Frontczak, N. T., Loveland, K. A., & Daughtrey, C. L. (2015). *Designing Retail Shopping Experiences: An Application of Experiential Learning Theory. New Meanings for Marketing in a New Millennium* (pp. 41-48). Springer, Cham. [http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-11927-4\\_11](http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-11927-4_11)
- Garrett, T. (2008). Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered Classroom Management: A Case Study of Three Elementary Teachers. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 43(1).
- Hadjikou, C. (2021). Experiential learning in music education: investigating the Cypriot context. *Music Education Research*, 23(4), 1-13. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2021.1874328>
- Henry, A., & Thorsen, C. (2021). Teachers' self-disclosures and influences on students' motivation: A relational perspective. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(1), 1-15. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1441261>
- Isaak, J., Devine, M., Gervich, C., & Gottschall, R. (2017). Are We Experienced? Reflections on the SUNY Experiential Learning Mandate. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 41(1), 23-38. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917740377>
- James, J. K., & Williams, T. (2017). School-Based Experiential Outdoor Education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 40(1), 58-71. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1053825916676190>
- Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, 14(3).



- Leary, M. P., & Sherlock, L. A. (2020). Service-Learning or Internship: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation of Experiential Learning Pedagogies. *Education Research International*, 2020(7), 1-9. <http://doi.org/10.1155/2020/1683270>
- Lindsey, L., & Berger, N. (2009). Experiential Approach to Instruction. In *Instructional-Design Theories and Models, Volume III* (pp.129-154). Routledge. <http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203872130-14>
- Long, E. M., & Gummelt, G. (2019). Experiential service learning: Building skills and sensitivity with Kolb's learning theory. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 41(2), 1-14. <http://doi.org/10.1080/02701960.2019.1673386>
- Maher, J., & Burkhart, S. (2017). Experiential learning for engaging nutrition undergraduates with sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 18(7), 1108-1122. <http://doi.org/10.1108/ijshe-01-2016-0010>
- Manolis, C., Burns, D. J., Assudani, R., & Chinta, R. (2013). Assessing experiential learning styles: A methodological reconstruction and validation of the Kolb Learning Style Inventory. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 23(1), 44-52. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2012.10.009>
- Menguiano-Rodríguez, C., & del Mar del Pozo-Andrés, M. (2021). Appropriating the New: Progressive Education and its (re)constructions by Spanish schoolteachers. *Paedagogica Historica*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1-20. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2021.1915346>
- Morris, T. H. (2020). Creativity through self-directed learning: three distinct dimensions of teacher support. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 39(2), 168-178. <http://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2020.1727577>
- Oderinu, O. H., Adegbulugbe, I. C., Orenuga, Omolola, O., & Butali, A. (2019). Comparison of students' perception of problem-based learning and traditional teaching method in a Nigerian dental school. *European Journal of Dental Education*, 24(2), 207-212. <http://doi.org/10.1111/eje.12486>
- Pedrosa de Jesus, H. T., Albergaria Almeida, P., Joaquim Teixeira-Dias, J., & Watts, M. (2006). Students' questions: building a bridge between Kolb's learning styles and approaches to learning. *Education + Training*, 48(2/3), 97-111. <http://doi.org/10.1108/00400910610651746>
- Ponticorvo, M., Dell'Aquila, E., & Di Fuccio, R. (2022). Hyper-Activity Books and Serious Games: How to Promote Experiential Learning beyond Distance. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17), 11132. <http://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191711132>
- Radović, S., Hummel, H. G. K., & Vermeulen, M. (2021). The Challenge of Designing 'More' Experiential Learning in Higher Education Programs in the Field of Teacher Education: A Systematic Review Study. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 40(5-6), 1-16. <http://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2021.1994664>
- Reigeluth, C. M., & Carr-Chellman, A. A. (2009). *Instructional-design theories and models. Vol. 3, Building a common knowledge base*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Roberts, J. W. (2016). *Experiential education in the college context: what it is, how it works, and why it matters*. New York: Routledge.

- Sak, R., Erden, F. T., & Morrison, G. S. (2015). Child-centred education: preschool teachers' beliefs and self-reported practices. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(8), 1185-1202. <http://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1081185>
- Sun, Z. (2012). An Empirical Study on New Teacher-student Relationship and Questioning Strategies in ESL Classroom. *English Language Teaching*, 5(7). <http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n7p175>