



Qualitative Analysis of Diffusing ERE cycle in Teaching at Higher Education: Experiential Learning Practices in Pakistan

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Abstract- Numerous studies have revealed the concerns over scarcity of effective communication skills among fresh graduates. A serious discussion is around to devise the analysis of ERE cycle involving business students at higher education. After treatment of one semester, the reflections and focus group interviews were conducted strategies to improve necessary skills among the students rather producing a high number of graduates. Experiential Learning is one of those effective and established strategy that is helping academia in enhancing life skills in the students. In the local context, an ERE cycle was developed which was based on experiential learning models and strategies to cater the needs of the students at higher education. This study was aimed to extract the qualitative to seek the impact of ERE cycle. The participants provided an insight how they experienced a uniformed model of experiential learning and how effective this could prove in teaching at higher education. Generally, they recorded positive views in favor of ERE cycle and endorsed using this model which helped them in improving the required skills in the courses they were taught. The study strongly recommends this model to be utilized as an andragogy and further researches should be conducted to modify and improve this method in the local context of Pakistan.

Keywords: communication skills, ERE cycle, experiential learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication skills have become a fundamental tool to succeed as an employee which ultimately puts a greater share in the success of any organization. According to Murphy, Hildebrandt and Thomas (1997); Guffy (2006) and Guffy and Loewy (2012) the success of any organization depends upon the effective communication skills of their employees. If any organization fails to inculcate these skills among its members, that will result a failure for the organization. Many other studies on the topic have further endorsed the fact that better communication skills have become a necessity to succeed at work place (Plutsky, 1996; Cappel, 2002). Similarly, the works of Stowers and White (1999); Chandler (1995); Locker (1999) concluded that modern day recruiters and employers expect higher standards of both written and oral communication skills among their future employees. The findings of above mentioned researchers demonstrated that during a recruitments process and interviews, graduates were not selected for only having required qualification but they were required to have sufficient skills to be hired for the jobs.

The magnitude of having excellent communication skills has interested many scholars and researchers to investigate these phenomena and provide more insight to the organizations and educational institutes, which will help to develop these skills among business students effectively. According to Zhao, Alexander and Truell (2004); Pittenger, Miller and Allison (2006) curriculum of business communication will help a great deal to prepare the students for the workplace and its effective implication would help to inculcate effective skills among business students.

The necessity of having good communication skills has also been acknowledged by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and included sufficient number of courses at different business management programs. The AACSB guidelines (AACSB, 2013) clearly advocate the role of using experiential learning in business school curriculum to meet the learning needs of business students by firstly actively involving them in the educational experience and secondly ensuring that experience leads to a set of meaningful outcomes. According to NBEAC (2018) there are more than two hundred business school campuses in Pakistan and around 140 of them have applied for NBEAC accreditation. The body has stressed on the importance of excellent written and oral communication skills among business students and has demanded the business schools to raise the standards of learning process that would help in fostering these skills in the learners.

Since the corporate sector expects the employees to possess excellent communication skills, the pedagogical aspects to achieve the desired objectives in learning cannot be neglected. To explore and experiment a contemporary effective method and replace the ongoing traditional teaching methods, it is important to examine other existing teaching methods. Although there have been a variety of other methods which are being used worldwide in teaching, the demand to cater essential communication skills requires to test some

widely used successful pedagogies. Throughout the past century and in the contemporary world the Experiential Learning (EL) method is being used effectively in many fields of education. Experiential Learning mainly involves the experiment and reflection based learning which has been applied using experiential activities. To acquire effective communication skills an experiment based learning may prove very encouraging. According to the EL theory of Kolb (1984; 2014), learners learn best from their experiences. The use of EL strategies in teaching has revolutionized the teaching practices and it is taken for granted to use these strategies in business education. Miettinen (2000) has claimed that EL based method has become an established approach. When it comes to adult education, the focus of the business education has shifted towards EL theory to meet the desired standards demanded by the industry.

Datar, Garvin and Cullen (2010), using interviews with the heads of business schools in United States of America, Europe and some parts of Asia indicated a decline in the trends of getting enrolled in business education because of wide gap between required and acquired skills. The study recommended bridging the gap between the desired competencies and skills by the business sector and the academic practices at business schools. EL theory has been considered to link the actual practices of the business world with the academic practices because the theory is established on the model of learning through personal experiences, experiments and reflections. In many European, American and Australian educational institutes, EL theory has become an important approach and its theoretical frameworks are being used in higher and adult education (Weil & McGill, 1989; Boud, 1985; Boud & Miller, 1996). Miettinen (2000) has found that EL theory has two major concepts without any doubt and they are characterized as experience and reflection which bring learning on the top.

Akhtar & Hussain (2019) and Akhtar (2020a) discussed various experiential models and tried to explore the potentials of EL based learning to enhance students skills. The studies concluded that EL based activities would prove a game changer in Pakistani educational system to move away from outdated and ineffective pedagogies by involving the learners actively in the learning process. To extract the better results from effective EL models, Akhtar (2020b) developed an EL based ERE cycle to cater the needs of the Pakistani students. This study was an attempt to perform qualitative analysis of ERE cycle and to further explore the experiences of the learners.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the impact of ERE cycle on the professional growth of student at higher education in Pakistan.
2. To explore the learning experiences of students of ERE cycle at higher education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of EL has been widely considered over the last few decades and the shift of learning methods from teacher centred has become the prime issue of many researchers. Traditional teaching methodologies have left students disengaged and unmotivated due to teacher's highly transmissive attitude. The need to learn from one another's cooperation and from real world experiences has been immensely felt among students. Owing to this fact the work of several notable 20th century scholars have been put together who considered experience a prime approach in their theories of human development and learning.

The emergence of EL theories has assisted the work of numerous eminent scholars - markedly Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, Carl Rogers, Jean Piaget and many others to cultivate a holistic model (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning serves a comprehensive and holistic approach to a learning process. It assists the learners to utilize their abilities to get hold of the learning situation. The learners thus become much creative and more experienced and they become able to cope up with the needs of the subject and put forth their understanding and critical analysis on the subject matter. It is based on the notion of how experience enhances learning, growth and adaptation of an individual, where students are not restricted with subjective experience in the learning process rather they gain experience through their own understanding and interpretation of new information and teacher serves as a facilitator and makes learning adaptable through continuous reconstruction of experiences. It discourages the rote learning process and gives way to active learning. It inculcates in student the confidence to deal with various problems in infinite ways which eventually foster the situational skills that does not get developed through using the traditional didactic approach. Here learner is not just a recipient of knowledge in a passive mode rather acts as an active participant who observes, analyses, evaluates and synthesises the information; consequently enabling the student to have the better grip of the topic with sheer understanding of the concept. In this way, EL distinguishes itself from other learning theories and applicable not only in the formal education system but in all the decorum of life (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Experiential Learning Cycles

Many EL theorists have provided EL cycles which have proved very effective in many courses of business education. Kolb's (1984) EL cycle has been used in a majority of experience based learning; however, other EL cycles are also discussed and referred by many scholars and are closely related to one another. The essence of EL based learning and prominent EL cycle revolves around learning by doing where a learner reflects on his activities and experiments whatever he learns in the process. According to Ord (2012) EL based learning follows three major assumptions; 1. People learn best when they are involved in personal learning experience, 2. The knowledge develops and it is discovered by the self-efforts of the learners, 3. A person can learn the best when he sets his own objectives of learning. He developed these assumptions after thorough study of the works and cycles presented by EL practitioners especially Dewey and Kolb. Many EL scholars developed their own models of learning process which fit in the context of specific learning environment. These cycles closely relate one another and are based on the works of other leading EL theorists. In this study, the researcher also developed a learning cycle which is based on Kolb's (1984) EL cycle. Among some eminent cycles which are being used by the organizations, institutes and researchers, the researcher studied most of them for his understanding and discussed and included some selected cycles and theories. Lewin (1951); Dewey (1983); Kelly (1955); Pfeiffer and Jones (1985); Juch (1983); Kolb (1984); presented EL theories and also provided EL cycles of learning. Moreover, in many other works done by these scholars they have defined the perspectives and function of EL theories. Lewin (1951) presented his EL cycle in the mid-20th century which was also referred by Kolb (1984) for developing his own four staged cycle (Ord, 2012). Other researchers as Smith (1988); Jeffs and Smith (2005); Blacker (2001); and Young (2006) followed and referred the EL cycle of Kolb. Kolb (1984) discussed Lewin's theory on EL and has referred his works in many of his research articles and books and admired how they have laid the foundation for experiential learning. According to Kolb (1984), Lewin's cycle highlights the elementary conflict between concrete experience and abstract concepts and the conflict between observation and action.

Another frequently used five staged EL cycle was presented by Pfeiffer and Jones (1985) which is being followed in many universities who follow EL learning patterns. This model was developed from the EL cycle of Kolb (1984) and provided further explanation how EL based learning can prove effective. The first phase of this cycle is to Explore and perform by putting self-efforts that does not involve any assistance from a teacher or facilitator. According to this phase, the learner may perform some individual activities or group works which can help to learn a topic or skills with personal works. In the second phase the learner share his experiences and observations of the first phase of learning. Then in the next phase the learner processes learning by discussing, analysing and reflecting on the whole experience. The cycle moves on to generalizing the learning where the learner connects the experiences with real world examples. The final phase of their learning process was termed application where the learner applies the knowledge in different situation and ensures the effectiveness of his learning. This learning cycle is being used in many of the universities effectively and is serving as a model to EL practitioner. In Pakistan Akhtar (2020) developed an ERE cycle which was extracted from other EL cycles around the world to facilitate Pakistani teachers and learners. Study of these cycles suggested that the process of learning in an EL model remains the same which involved the learner's involvement in which he learns the best by doing, reflecting and experimenting. However, the researcher discussed in detail the EL concept of Dewey and Kolb who are the pillars of EL based learning.

Business Communication Teaching Practices in Pakistan

The worldwide increasing demand for effective business communication skills has increased significantly. Pakistan is a multilingual country with more than seventy living languages where methods and medium of teaching change from place to place. The faculty members in Pakistan are not trained and they do not attain any teaching certificate that could help them to understand the learning and teaching process. They usually follow the traditional methods as there is a huge scarcity of research and experimentation. The absence of uniformed pattern or set pedagogy, the business schools in Pakistan are failing to help students develop desired communication skills and competencies. Therefore, implementing purposeful and practical techniques into contemporary business communication teaching are the requirement of the time that can prove to be very useful and effective, if adapted into learning and teaching culture of Pakistan. It is apparent that instantaneous changes cannot be brought about for the betterment of desired future but gradual implementation of new and advanced methods of learning may improve teaching practices in Pakistan.

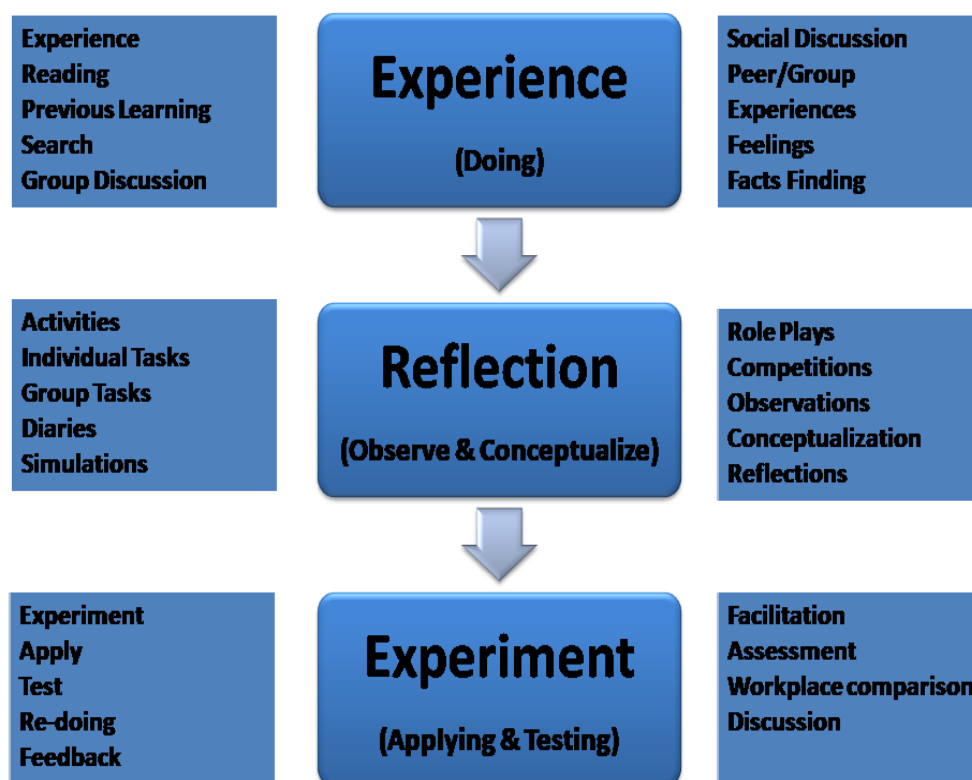
Today, the business scholars in Pakistan within their own power and at their own level tend to facilitate students with activities like in-group and individual presentations. But, on the contrary, a virtuous teacher knows that apart from this strategy in learning business communications, the experts would have to do a greater work in this field and they need to understand the importance of practicality in their classroom. In the past few years some studies have been conducted by Pakistani researchers to help out academia to bring in EL strategies in education (Akhtar & Hussain, 2019; Akhtar, 2020a; Akhtar 2020b; Javed; 2015)

III. METHODOLOGY

This study involved qualitative research methods to analyze the reflections and in-depth interview from the learners who participated in this study. Three classes of graduate and undergraduate programs participated in this study which comprised 26 students of oral communication class and 45 students from written communication classes. These all students were part of the learning process and their reflections were used in forming the themes using qualitative research method. Furthermore, focused group in-depth interviews were conducted at the end of the treatment. A total of fifteen students, five students from each of the three treatment groups, participated in these interviews. Students were informed with the purpose of the interviews and they were ensured that their real names and identities will not be revealed. The data showed a consistency in responses collected through interviews and the participants shared similar kind of understanding and experience. Cooper, Fleischer and Fatima (2012) have recommended that qualitative research is an important implication to understand the students learning experiences for the development of curriculum, improving learning strategies and pedagogies. The qualitative method helped to analyze and answer the research objectives which were decided on for this study.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

This study extracted the data from reflections of each learning activity and in-depth interviews at the end of the study. The purpose of this data was to explore the effectiveness of EL based ERE cycle and the learning experiences of the participants. ERE cycle has already been tested and it had a positive impact on the grades of the students (Akhtar & Hussain, 2019).



There appeared many positive and a few negative themes on using ERE cycle in learning oral and written courses. These themes helped the researcher in discussion and recommendation from this study. In most of the cases the participants welcomed this method and recommended it as one of the best teaching methods they had ever come across. A few participants also raised some questions on its implementation in the local context. They had doubts whether the existing mindset of the students and the requirement of the universities will allow this model to be implemented. From these interesting themes the researcher has selected commonly shared and repeated positive and negative themes for analysis and discussion.

An Effective Learning Method

Kolb (1984) suggested that there are many learning methods around the world, but EL method can be

considered as one of the most important and effective learning methods. Most of the participants in this study declared EL based ERE cycle in teaching proved an effective learning method. Saima expressed:

“During many years of studies, we have studied from many teachers and they used very effective methods of teaching, but this method proved the most effective one because it helped us to learn by doing and we participated in many activities which gave us confidence to learn at our own.”

The participants agreed that other teaching methods also helped them in learning, but in most of the cases they were limited to memorization or a little work few days before exam helped them to pass the exam. In many cases, after the exam, students had a little information of the topics they had covered during the semester. In ERE cycle, they felt confident that the learning was significant and that would be useful after they have completed the course. Arsalan shared his views on ERE method in the following words:

“We were to actively participate in each of the activities. We could not help but to prepare because in all the activities everyone was responsible or doing something....obviously there was a little pressure of the grades in the beginning but later on we realized that if we participate and learn by doing it will automatically give us good grades and that was what happened at the end....most of us were agreed that the method was the most effective method.”

Other participants had the similar views about the learning experience they had, using ERE cycle. Although there were concerns among the students regarding better application but there was no confusion or other opinion on the effectiveness of the method. Kolb (1984), and Kolb and Kolb (2012) have experimented EL theory for more than 44 years and they have been great advocator of effectiveness of EL theory in teaching. The method involved such attractive activities and made its targets very clear to the participants that helped them to achieve the learning objectives. The participant found this ERE cycle an innovative and interesting method which practically helped them to learn effectively. This method was also declared an effective method because it did not put any burden on the participants to prepare and appear in exam. The method had already developed their skills and they had gone through numerous activities which had prepared them to appear in any kind of exam. These all reasons students unfolded and on the basis of its unique, effective and practical pattern they declared it as the most effective learning method.

It also seemed through the interviews of the students that EL method had provided a new and effective method of learning. This method made the learning process intentional and overt in order to develop effective skills in learners. This ERE cycle was not confined learning to textbook studies and assessments. The value and significance of experience exists in the progression of events and relationship among them as learning experience requires connection between how we put through things and what are the outcomes or consequences of it (Dewey, 1936).

Skill Development

Experiential learning broadly focuses on the development of skills of the learners. According to Dewey (1938) there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education. Most of the participants expressed that this method of teaching has not only helped them to learn a course but it practically developed their skills in writing and speaking. Skill development was one of the major objectives of developing ERE cycle. The activities were designed in such a way that students could practically learn various contents of the courses. The three phases of the process proved very helpful in developing students' skills. The participants endorsed that the three phased learning strategy, well designed activities, and the role of teacher as a guide, were pivotal in the development of their skills. When asked about how this method helped him to develop his skills in speech, Awais summed up:

“I was always afraid of speaking in front of others. I had a belief that I can speak well, but always there was a doubt and fear in me that I can't speak in front of the audience. If you remember my first class when you called me for introduction for one minute and I had no words to speak but when I sit back I was unhappy that I can speak well...When I delivered the speech in auditorium before a large crowd, my all fears and doubts disappeared and from then onwards I could speak at any place at any topic with confidence and style....obviously the best thing about this course was skill development. I did not read how to speak neither I was taught but I did it developed a great skill which is the result of this method.”

It was observed in the study of Aspegren (1999), while reviewing communication skills training, that the techniques and strategies that are being applied in teaching EL method were more useful as compare to the other conventional and instructional methods. Lane and Rollnick (2007); Hargie et al. (2010) and many

other researchers have also concluded that contemporary teaching methods have started to apply EL methods which are proving fruitful in the field of business communication. Koponen et al. (2012) has indicated the use of experiential method including theatre techniques in teaching BC courses being applied in education. Jackson and Lombard (1993) has explained the theatre techniques as utilizing the elements of traditional theatre, simulation and educational drama and bringing the selected topics into practice. In this study the similar kind of techniques were applied that helped the students to develop their skills. As Salman viewed that he had already studied a course by the name of business communication and he was doing a job but many of my concepts regarding letter writing were incorrect and once he was exploring letters for pre-class activities he came across numerous details which proved really effective and helpful in his professional life. He expressed:

"I was confident before taking this course that this course will be very easy for me and I will score very good marks because in my professional life I have been working on letter writing but when I went through numerous professional letters and studied myself the guidelines from the book of Guffy, I realized how many mistakes I was committing and there were many things in letter which were not known to many professionals..... When I drafted a letter following the guidelines my boss appreciated me..... I feel that I have developed a great skill and definitely credit goes to the teacher and method he applied in this course."

The statement showed that ERE cycle was effective in developing the skills of the students and the participants also expressed that the process helped them in learning and skill development. As the aim of the learning through EL method is to learn by doing it ultimately meant to develop the skill of the participants. Different phases in this study, the activities and active participation of the participants made it easier for them to develop effective communication skills. It was quite evidential, when one sample t-tests was applied that there was significant and positive difference in the scores of treatment groups as compare to the population mean which reflected that how effectively students applied their skills. According to a famous quote of Confucius (450 B.C.), *"I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand."* Owing to the fact of what Confucius proclaimed, a contemporary description about experiential learning is given in the AACSB memorandum (Carter et al., 1986 cited in Gentry, 1988) as follow: "Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I'll remember. Involve me and I'll understand." A learner cannot learn things until he or she tries it practically. Experiential learning entails learner to conceive meaning from direct experiences (Dewey 1933). This learning drives learners to apply their acquired knowledge and skills in absolute and appropriate situations (Smith, 2001).

Exciting Experiential Activities

The activities play a very vital role in success of an experiential learning process. The researcher spent a lot of time in reading various books, articles and guidelines on EL activities. In this regard, researcher joined international association on experiential education and discussed with other experiential scholars around the world on how to conduct and design experiential activities for communication courses. Moreover, the universities and institutes around the world who follow EL model in their teaching were also contacted and their designs of experiential teaching were analyzed before drafting experiential activities in local context. There were many works on EL activities and researches which suggested the importance of including activities in any experiential process. For this purpose a study is illustrated by Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2005) in which they examine classroom activities including website development, role play, guest speaker session, class project including negotiation and showing videos comprehensible for students in resolving issues of international business. Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2008) also carried out an exploratory research in which their aim was to examine the role of EL Method in teaching business management courses. This study introduced some EL techniques that were reinforced through classroom activities. It includes role play, bringing up issues related to business that requires negotiation by creating a conversational setting etc.

Experiential learning innovative practices are being administered in most of the well-known business schools of Europe, US and many parts of the Asia. These classroom activities and projects have been playing an essential role in facilitating business education. These activities are reinforced through enactment games and role play. The purpose of this role play is to make participants act in a real life business situations. The game has been played in a competitive environment with rigid rules. It creates a learning environment where participants are not burdened with the fear of losing grades and restricted to take any action for it helps them in decision making, solving managerial problems and self-organizing themselves.

With reference to these studies, the researcher in the present study has also improvised many experiential activities that resulted in effective classroom participation and learning. The participants enjoyed these activities and they declared these activities as the leading force of ERE cycle. Raza expressed his experience

of taking part in EL activities:

"I think the best thing in ERE or experiential method was the use of very interesting activities. In each class it was mystery that something new would happen which would not only engage us in learning but it would also create a very active and interesting environment. We were never to wait for the class to end, the time went so quickly while involved in these activities that in most of the classes we were to spend extra few minutes to conclude the things....quiz competition among the groups in the class was the most interesting, excited and learning activities. We worked so hard to compete and prepare that really helped us learning."

Other participants also shared their valuable experiences how they learned and enjoyed from these activities. These activities developed a great interest in classroom participation and the desired objectives were achieved through deep involvement and welcoming gestures of the students. The activities were blend of real life experiences embedded inside classroom activities, reflections on participants' experiences, presentations of the knowledge they had and the learning that took place during the process, peer and group competitions and general formal and informal discussions. Ahmed admitted that these activities were something they had never come across in learning, he expressed:

"It was a new thing because we all had a concept that teaching is lecturing and teacher will show a slide or he will use white board to explain different concepts. In this class everything was different and interesting although in the beginning we were a little confused and worried because this was something new and we were worried about grades and exams but once we got involved in EL activities the whole dimension changed. Again it was difficult to be ready for each and every class but because it was a great learning we were ready and we enjoyed a lot.....definitely, I would say that the activities were the best thing in this ERE cycle."

Most of the participants expressed that EL activities inside the classroom were the best thing in ERE cycle. Kolb and Kolb (2009) rightly expressed that deeper interpretative learning can be enhanced by the addition of activities to stimulate reflection. EL method always demands that skill based learning takes place when students are engaged in doing, by performing or involving themselves in such activities which give them real life experiences. ERE cycle followed the roadmap of major EL theories and involved the participants by engaging them in activities. Jackson (2002) also concluded that dynamic nature of team activities has great appeal in that it gives all team members a more equal opportunity to contribute and a more equal opportunity to be valued.

Learning Process by Doing

According to the EL theory, learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984). Expressed by many participants of this study this course and ERE cycle enabled them to learn by self-efforts. Learning by doing was the concept which was implemented and the participants had to apply their previous experiences with self-learning model. Before classroom discussion and learning, students were engaged in pre-class activities, which were designed to involve the learners in self-learning process. The experience phase included participants' previous learning and on-hand study on the given topics from the recommended books, articles and research papers. Pre-class briefing and constructive discussion which included students own experiences and reading on the topics was very helpful for the students to come into the class well prepared and with some experience. The students learnt by their own effort and by the help of their group mates they got engaged in classroom EL activities. The whole process had minimized the role of the teacher, and learners had autonomy to learn by putting self-efforts. Maria believed that the best way of learning is anything which depends upon the freedom in learning and self-doing:

"Initially it was weird when we were told that no formal teaching will take place in the class, however it was communicated that we will have self-learning environment throughout this course. By the passage of time it became interesting and stress free, though we always had a lot of work to do. Sometimes we were worried for the grades but in discussion we were certain that we were learning a lot. When we compared this course we studied in our bachelor program using traditional lecture method, we concluded that the best learning takes place only when a person is involved in the learning process and does the things himself."

Her statement indicated that the process in learning and involvement of the learners is essential characteristic in learning which allows learning by doing. In this way, experiential learning has introduced a new approach - learning by doing and conceiving meaning through direct experiences. Learning that can

be acquired through self-experiences must be termed as nature's way of learning that occurs with spontaneous reflection in the series of events (Howle, 1980 as cited by Smith, 2001). The learning through self-experiences led the participants to organize and formulate direct experiences that could result in absolute, meaningful, effective and long lasting process of learning. This learning requires reflective and preparatory exercises and can be attributed to scholars like Kolb (1984), Lewin (1951), Dewey (1933), and Piaget (1952).

Leadership Development

Leadership style tends to be related to learning style but is most effective when it moves through the learning cycle and is adaptive to task demands (Robinson 2005, Carlsson, Keane & Martin 1976). All of these processes are enhanced when the full cycle of learning is followed. For example Corbett (2007) found that in the opportunity identification phase of the entrepreneurial process an abstract orientation is helpful in addition to an active orientation

Due to the growing trend of experiential learning and the shift of focus from traditional lecture based pedagogy, an approach to leadership development has been introduced and widely considered among business schools, for it prepares students for a successful career within their respective field. Present study has demonstrated that experiential learning proved as a dynamic process to develop higher cognitive and leadership skills. It provided the validity to the mode of instruction for leadership development in students. Ever since EL based pedagogies have come into education, its imperative role in the field of business education has increased. Ahmed stated:

"The best part of these leadership activities are acting as a leader and receiving constant feedback even in the small group setting. These classes are very interactive. Here, we are not supposed to sit and listen to our teachers rather it makes us engage and perform the task assigned by our instructors."

Hence, the present study revealed that EL method helped the student to develop their leadership skills through their experiences that lead them to encounter analytical situation, self-discover and explore real world problems. However, these tasks hold challenges in terms of putting effort and dealing with substantial time investment required by transition courses that better serve experiential learning approach. Moreover, Warnick, Schmidt, and Bowden (1995) executed their research on the use of an EL approach that promoted development of leadership skills among engineering and technology students. Likewise in the present research many of the participants declared that better communication skills endear their leadership skills. Once they were able to speak effectively and developed self-confidence, there was an impact in their personal life and they were able to act better as a leader. A number of studies have examined the theory of functional role leadership using the ELT framework (Fernandez 1986, 1988, McMurray 1998, Gardner and Korth 1999). Park and Bang (2002) studied the performance of 52 Korean industrial work teams using the Belbin team role model, which is conceptually linked to ELT (Jackson, 2002). They found that the best-performing teams were those whose members adopted at a high level all nine of Belbin's roles covering all stages of the learning cycle. They also found that teams with roles that matched the particular stage of a team's work/learning process performed best.

EL based ERE cycle provided every team member an opportunity to act as a leader while they were performing different activities. It is observed that learners learn better when they are not lead by a single leader and every team member is handed over the responsibility to lead his team. This feature not only enhanced learners' leadership qualities but it provided a great opportunity to many students who in their previous learning experiences had never lead any team. Sobia was excited for getting leadership responsibilities and expressed,

"I was very excited when I learnt that I am a group leader in one of the in-class activities. I had already worked in many group activities and had performed as a team member but this was very first time that I had to lead my group. This gave me a lot of confidence and I put a lot of efforts to learn how to be a good leader. I applied my hidden skills effectively and all the team members appreciated my efforts and encouraged me a lot. I was grateful to this method of learning which helped me to bring out my talent and leadership skills."

The leadership roles played significant role in the learning process. Especially, when every student got opportunity to act and express as a leader, this brought excitement among them and they were eager to perform well. Many researches show that under a single leader, a group usually cannot bring out their best and they heavily depend upon how the leader instructs and leads. Lingham (2005) in a study of the conversational space norms of 49 educational and work teams found that teams performed more poorly with members who were less satisfied and who felt more psychologically unsafe when the team had a single leader as opposed to sharing leadership.

Collaborative Learning

Ever since EL has become the considerable subject of contemporary global context, it has brought about a massive variation in students learning styles which are more technological yet less traditional. The experiential approach to learning in teams has a long and rich history dating back to the 1940s and Kurt Lewin's research on group dynamics. In the present study, the researcher acquired diversity in learning style as it undergoes innovative teaching strategies, momentary access of information in a shorter span of time and introduction of courses that are rather interactive, collaborative and co-operative than traditional lecture based learning approach. This study demonstrated how co-operative learning elevated student's collaboration and prioritized active learning over passive learning paradigm. After being part of this research, Palwasha expressed her views:

"This study cultivated a sense of doing something in us through co-operation and collaboration. In this learning process we had to do variety of interesting tasks we were assigned for. We were experiencing real life scenarios through these activities that made our understanding profound and meaningful. Our classroom was divided into teams that altogether transformed into different organizations who were rivals against each other. We were drawn into a scenario our company was facing and had to suggest a way out through co-operation and collaboration. In order to attain organization's desired outcome, this activity drove us to comprehend, achieve and reproduce objectives in a better way. The imperative part of co-operative learning was to gain a meaningful comprehension of learning through our actions where we were entailed to support, relate, explain and convince others."

The statement reflected that ERE process was very exciting and engaging and it helped to bring in co-operative and collaborative learning among the participants. Kolb and Kolb (2009) developed three features from Kurt Lewin's work on collaborative learning and one of them was that EL provides an ample opportunity to learn in teams. The other responses demonstrated that it involved all the students to extensively participate in all the activities collaboratively that were mainly used in ERE approach. Some games were also employed that best manoeuvred co-operative learning. These games and tasks aimed to enhance student's retention of knowledge and engage them in co-operative and collaborative teamwork as it involves interaction, participation, interest and learning. Barl and Tagg (1995) claimed that in contemporary learning techniques students' active participation and interactive class atmosphere where students can discuss, solve problem and reflect upon what they have learned is mandatory.

The incorporation of EL approach in the curriculum of the business college can prove to be very beneficial. The results documented many benefits of executing EL practices through using collaborative and co-operative strategies. Asma expressed her experience:

"Cooperative learning has improved our concepts and self-confidence and facilitated our social skills. It has enhanced our professional understanding and skills and elevated job opportunities. This learning has elucidated our concept of how organization works, made us enable to take initiatives, and developed communication skills. It fostered to work in collaboration that is a key characteristic in professional life."

Similarly, Hamid asserted that:

"Cooperative learning also gave us the opportunity to be directly placed in to the professional career without going through the job criteria fulfilment. Through this course it could be viewed the real world work experiences and these opportunities enabled us to attain dignified and bright career ahead of us. In my opinion, comparatively, any fresh candidate who has practiced his/her learning in an open environment and is self-taught through his own experience, while having reflected upon the concepts he has learned and practically experienced, rather than simply relying on knowledge acquisition, can bring about a better and meaningful outcome. This is on the contrary to candidates who have been nurtured through a teacher centred approach and apply this learning to a firm or organization after graduating, without practical, realistic and personal experience."

Dewey (1938) suggested that collaborative work helps the students to understand others perspectives which allow us to reflect our experiences. Hence, co-operative learning was student centred as learning was promoted by each student's decision, choices and experiences. The cooperative learning also helps the students to develop mutual respect among the group members and to encourage the learning process. Baker, Jansen and Kolb (2012) concluded that in a collaborative learning members should learn to respect each other's similar and opposing point of views which leads them towards effective team building and learning. These activities in this learning escalated participants' deeper understanding and increased their level of involvement which was difficult in acquiring learning through teacher centred approach.

Team Learning

Over the last few decades experiential approach to team learning has become prevalent in many contemporary education sectors and work place. In the present study, there was laid a profound emphasis on developing student's learning skills through team work shared efforts. When a team member reflects upon his or her personal experiences through participation, it beholds a great impression on its team. Mills (1967) described team learning as a tool that allows team members to respond efficaciously to the tasks and challenges and shape themselves according to the environment. EL layout shows a proper framework of how team works upon their experiences and develops a profound understanding among team members regarding the norms and principles for managing team learning. Team learning has been considered substantially beneficial in organizations, for it depends on a member's shared effort to get their work done. Teams are of various types which include; management team, temporary project team, advising team, hiring employs teams etc and most of the organization comprises of these teams. Moreover in order to facilitate student's learning, team learning has played a considerable role in most of the education sectors and the results are highly effective.

However, there were a few students who were unhappy of working with team as they complained about the wastage of time due to the recruitment and face reluctance and repercussions in carrying out a task. Student also expressed their dissatisfaction about being compelled to work with those students who did not voluntarily put their efforts in a group work. This dependability sometime resulted in poor performance and scoring low grades that affected the entire group. Researches carried out in a small scale identified numerous factors that affected team performance and member's collaboration. These factors included over-adhesion to goals, over dependence on a dominant leader, social inactivity, diffusion of responsibility and some member's disagreement upon which others hold their stand to perform action that resulted in chaos and member's dissatisfaction. Lewin, Kolb and Kolb and Kolb have discussed various learning styles which demonstrate that sometimes a kind of learners do not feel comfortable working in team and prefers to work independently. However, EL based learning helps the students with this style to work and experience in teams which is a major factor to progress in their professional careers.

The endeavour of present study was to prepare the groups to learn from each other's experiences and to overcome the factors that negatively impacted team learning and team performance. When a team intentionally took initiatives towards learning process, it inevitably enhanced team effectiveness and developed their skill of working in a team. As expressed by one of the students on his experience over team learning. Sajid states that:

"The concept of team learning through experiential learning approach was a fresh and interesting method of learning for us. Previously our learning methodologies were confined to traditional lecture based methods where there was a limited co-operation and collaboration among students and we were given individual assignments and every individual was responsible of his own learning. We always waited for our lecturer to dismiss the class early as they were quite boring. However, the concept of team learning created a conversational environment in order to learn from each other's experiences effectively. Although this participation and interactive and discussion based environment instigated differences in opinion, conflicts and disagreement but the involvement of a facilitator or trainer switched the whole circumstances into active dialogue participation. In this process experiential learning played a significant role because it focused on active dialogues about differences in opinion, observations and interpretations by the participants and active behavioural events."

Moreover, team learning was reinforced through hand-on experiments. The overview of one of the students exemplified that:

"These experiments raised excitement and reduced anxiety and distress among the participants. We along with our facilitator got the chance of actively engaging ourselves in these experiments, incorporate new behaviour, process real life scenarios and receive feedback in a safe environment... These hand-on experiments were very interesting yet very insightful. They were directly related to our lecture and theoretical material. These hand-on activities were students centred. Moreover, the projects given to us were more meaningful than tests because it didn't cease our learning, but continued our thinking process throughout the entire experience. Here we were able to solve our problems and design our own activities."

The above statements confirmed that ERE model helped to overcome the barriers among the students who were reluctant to work in teams. The importance of team learning cannot be avoided considering the demands of the corporate sector to provide them the graduates who can effectively communicate and work in teams. The professional environment does not let an employee to be secluded at work place and rather

be able to work as a whole to achieve the desired objectives. EL based activities, specifically, are designed to foster this quality among the learners and help them to enhance their team learning skills. Benne and Sheats (1948) shared in his study that when learners tended to choose roles based on their personality dispositions, they also were able to adopt more unfamiliar roles for the good of the group. Kolb and Kolb (2009) also stressed on the importance of team learning which would help them to reflect on their experience and to perform well in their forthcoming tasks.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Critical thinking and problem solving techniques are considered as one of the key characteristic in the contemporary learning styles. These skills allow the learners to analyse, argue, accept or refute to any given argument. Dawkins (2006) recommended teaching the children how to think for themselves, how to evaluate the evidence and how to disagree. Kayes, Kayes, Kolb & Kolb (2004) in Kolb's team learning experiences endorsed that team members effectively learn the functions of a team when they are engaged in a learning process, reflection, critical thinking, and action taking. EL based ERE cycle provided this opportunity to the students to evaluate the learning process and come up with their own understanding. In the present study it was observed that students made a plan to solve the problems, gave it a reality check and then implemented what they had learned to find out a favourable solution. When a student practiced hand-on experiments, they often came across the methods that could be employed better than others. They cast aside the methods that do not seem appropriate to them. In this way, the act of experimenting something and then disregarding it, facilitate student's comprehension. In this way ERE process promoted to learn from mistakes and became a valuable part of the learning process. Hence, students valued mistakes instead of fearing them. Rabia stated:

“Critical thinking and problem solving fostered a lot of confidence in us. We were to face challenges in each of the activity and it was up to us how we tackle it. Especially, when we were engaged preparing quizzes we had to go through a detailed and critical reading to give our best and win from the situation. EL proved a very good method as every teacher talked on the importance of critical thinking and ERE granted us an opportunity to experience and practice it.”

The statement reflected that how EL based ERE cycle provided to develop an ability among the learners to think and critically and solve the problems at their own in any given situation. Previously, Dyer & Schumann (1993) carried out a study and developed a laboratory based classroom in teaching marketing courses and concluded that at the end of the study the participants testified in them an improved level of critical thinking abilities and capacity to apply and connect theoretical knowledge with real-life business application. Critical thinking and problem solving abilities is an undeniable quality which is required to become a good manager or a professional employee. Shazia, who was a professional student and was working as an assistant manager in a multinational company stated:

“I am working as an assistant manager and often in the meetings the CEO stresses upon enhancing employees' critical thinking and problem solving abilities. For this purpose, we hold some workshops too. In this course, however; I faced a lot of situations as a leader and co-worker to get the solutions and devise different business strategies. The ERE activities did a great deal not only to enhance my own critical thinking and problem solving capabilities but allowed me to understand how EL based activities can foster these skills in a person. I felt great when I shared these activities with my seniors and with their permission, experimented some of those ERE activities to develop these attributes among my staff. I was encouraged to see that people who were very passive and always acted on the instruction of their seniors were able to initiate and share their opinions on different affairs in the organization.”

Along with above stated response, most of the participants agreed that usually in a traditional learning process, learners get a very few opportunities to express and submit their thoughts. The role of a leader or facilitator controls the situation which allows the students or co-workers to remain inactive and act upon the instructions. However, the ERE activities did not spare them to be passive as the roles of all the participants interchanged during the learning process and every participant faced an opportunity to think, plan and solve the problems. The impact was clearly seen among the participants and they were excited to face these challenges which ultimately develop in them effective problem solving and critical thinking skills. Many studies demonstrate that how important these skills are in any business management process. Kolb and Kolb (2009) have cited many researchers who advocate problem solving and critical thinking, primary and core skills among a business professional. Kolb and Kolb (2009) also concluded in their study that Learning is not just the result of cognition but involves the integrated functioning of the total

person....encompasses other specialized models of adaptation from the scientific method to problems solving, decision making and creativity.

Engagement and Empowerment

Experiential learning programs are being fostered in numerous universities and colleges around the world and have embodied many forms such as internship, co-operative and collaborative learning, service learning etc. Most of these programs have been employed on the basis of fundamental, philosophical and profound principles of Dewey (1938) that, experience holds imperative values. Pertaining to this fact, the present study revealed that meaningful learning of the individual enhanced when abstract concepts that were being administered in the classroom were associated with student's explicit and concrete experiences outside the classroom.

Experiential learning methods are constituted to demonstrate the practical approach gained through theory. Kayes (2002) stated that learning can become more meaningful and powerful if knowledge cultivates within the personal and environmental framework. This framework would have greater significance when the attainment of organizational goals depends on student's contribution. According to Kolb (1984) theory-practice correlation can be attained productively if a learner forges ahead by following the pattern of experiences, concept, reflection and action. This pattern can become more meaningful and effective when student comes across the concepts and issues they are lectured in readings and class discussion. Moreover, student empowerment refers to the belief that student's intellectual education and personal development nourishes when one has the ability to perform efficaciously and directs one's own learning experience. Sara asserted:

"Engagement and empowerment in carrying out a task and undertaking experiential leaning practices created positive changes among us. We started believing in ourselves by setting our goals and finding a way to its progress and achievement. In my opinion, experiential learning served a way to the direct applicability of the abstract ideas into concrete form and considered as an ideal framework that forged us ahead in attaining the tenets of empowering education."

Therefore, EL method attempted to promote student's empowerment and engagement through direct hand-on experiments, whether implicitly averted or explicitly affirmed. The endeavour of this method was to empower students to gain confidence and build a sense of self-assessment and effectiveness. Kolb and Kolb (2009) reviewed the works of Mills (1967) and concluded that EL and engagement in the learning cycle offer the machineries by which students can switch from lower to higher developmental stages. Thus, innovative classroom strategies and effective program design helped in achieving the productive outcome of EL method in teaching communication courses.

Competition

Over the past few decades, business educators have been strongly criticised due to their reluctance in not preparing students for competitive and challenging situations to deal with the real business world problems even after acquiring a significant amount of knowledge (Stevens, 2006). However business schools have initiated incorporating EL techniques long before it has been introduced in educational and psychological literature. This issue was taken into account in the present study, where the researcher manifested the significantly embraced variety of EL techniques in order to facilitate students with modern oral and written communication skills. It enhanced their long term retention about job market and increased level of motivation, built confidence in writing and speaking and inclined them towards overtaking competitive and challenging situations. As Talal said:

"According to me, Traditional lectures, interpretation of facts and terms and daily memorization are considered very boring and tedious as they are not magnified with innovative learning strategies that made learning profound and fruitful. Previously, in a formal classroom setting there were a very few competitive tasks, activities and real business world simulation in comparison to what we experienced in these classes. Learning was very linear and limited to lectures and tests. We had always required a teacher to be facilitated through various teaching techniques. However EL based classes motivated us to get involved in a learning process. It gave us an opportunity to practice theory to real life situations, where anxiety, ambiguity and risk existed, where we got a chance of building our confidence, demonstrating our competitive nature and gaining motivation to put through a challenging task."

The above statement showed that in competitive environment students work better and they develop competitive skills. The ERE cycle included inter group competitions that helped them to be ready for their professional life which demand competitive abilities. Another participant stated that:

"I think the best thing in experiential learning was studying through a competitive format. In this course we had to go through two kinds of competitions. At the first there was one on one writing competitions where we were supposed to write business letters and memos to one another. We were to find out the mistakes according to formal business format and it helped us a great deal in understanding the correct format of writing. The excitement to be declared as a winner motivated us to read and understand. The second competition was greater one where there was a championship among the groups. The groups had to prepare the questions from the whole course and compete with each other. This was the most exciting element of my learning career."

These competitions proved very exciting and added a success element in the execution of ERE cycle. The participants expressed that they enjoyed these activities and the process of learning which enabled them to be competitive in professional life.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be extracted from this study;

1. Since experiential learning is widely used in the top notch business of the world, it should highly be considered in Pakistan's business schools as well.
2. A wide variety of researches should be carried out that could promote experiential learning practices and encourage students to learn by doing and reflecting upon it, instead of relying on traditional teacher centered approach.
3. Teachers and facilitators should take initiatives in order to promote experiential learning in every educational field and make the learning environment favorable for the students.
4. Educationist should discourage ineffective approaches and introduce new teaching methodologies and effective learning strategies, make the learning environment friendly and promote conversational setting where students' written and oral communication skills are noticeably focused and enhanced and they can easily engage themselves in active participation.

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