

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN NEP-2020: A SIMPLE WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE IDEA

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Abstract: The NEP-2020 emphasizes the necessity of moving away from memorization toward experiential learning, making it an essential pillar in holistic learning and development. The following chapter presents the concept of experiential learning through its phases of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Some of the main features of experiential learning are activities that involve practical learning, dealing with real-life problems, engaging in cross-curricular learning experiences, and reflection throughout the whole process. Students and teachers become partners in the process of creating new knowledge, where the latter act as facilitators and co-designers of meaningful learning environments. Although there are still difficulties associated with implementing the model, including lack of proper teacher training, assessment methods, facilities, and reluctance toward change in pedagogical methods, experiential learning can be of significant importance in the modern educational landscape due to its ability to develop essential skills for future life and work.

Introduction

Education in the 21st century is moving away from rote memorization and focusing more on student centred learning methods. These methods encourage creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. In India, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by the Ministry of Education has created a transformative framework that gives importance to experiential learning. NEP 2020 imagines education as holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, and rooted in Indian culture and traditions, while also preparing students for global challenges. NEP 2020 acknowledges that conventional approaches in the education sector largely revolve around reading from textbooks and writing examinations, with no scope for creative thinking and hands-on experience. As such, this education reform policy calls for learner centred and activity-based teaching approaches. The Ministry of Education states that pedagogy should be more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry driven, discovery oriented, learner centred, discussion based, flexible, and joyful. Critical thinking and problem solving are among the primary objectives of experiential learning in the context of NEP 2020.

Conceptual Understanding of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is a process through which students gain knowledge, skills, and values through direct experience and thoughtful reflection. This theory became popular through the work of educators such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and David Kolb. This approach involves activities such as experiment, project work, field trips, storytelling, role-playing, internship, arts-integrated learning, sports-integrated learning, and vocational training. In experiential learning, learners take part in the learning process actively rather than listening to lectures passively. NEP 2020 places a lot of emphasis on this approach throughout the education system. Experiential learning mainly involves actively interacting with the environment to acquire information, and skills, and comprehend difficult ideas (Lone and Kour, 2024). It promotes practical and personal experiences of individuals, develop new knowledge, skills, values, concepts, and attitudes. In Experiential learning learner get opportunities to learn with self-pace and get authentic knowledge that a relate with their real-life experiences (Singh et al., 2025). In contrast, India has historically given weightage to close ended examinations and textbook-based instruction. The National Education Policy 2020, proposed a paradigm shift towards experiential and skill-based learning approaches for India (Kumar and Sawhney, 2025). NEP 2020 recommends a hands-on experiential learning technique for conceptual and practical

knowledge, which frequently encourages learners to investigate issues for holistic learning and understanding across all disciplines (interdisciplinary approach) (Sharma and Lajwanti, 2025). The policy aims to transition education from memorization to grasping concepts, fostering creativity, enhancing critical thinking and applying knowledge in practical ways. As a result, experiential learning is viewed as a crucial method for cultivating skilled, self-assured and socially responsible individuals in the 21 st century.

3. Characteristics of Experiential Learning

1	Learning by doing	Experiential learning involves learning through actions and practical experience rather than from textbooks or lectures. In this case, the learners acquire information through participation in activities, experiments, field trips, role playing, project work, or any other kind of real-life activity. It enables learners to retain knowledge for a long time since it involves the learner experiencing the process of learning.
2	Active participation	As mentioned earlier, learning through experiences entails a lot of activity on the side of the learner. The learner becomes an active participant in classroom discussion, team building, presentations, surveys, practical work among other things. This makes learning interesting, motivating and encourages the learner to take responsibility for his or her own learning.
3	Reflection	It refers to thinking deeply about something one has experienced. Through reflection, learners reflect on what they have learned, the challenges they encountered during the process and ways in which they can improve.
4	Application in real life	Experiential learning involves making connections between education and real life. Students learn how theoretical concepts can be used in daily living, in society, and even in future professions. It enables them to use the acquired knowledge in the right manner. For instance, in learning environmental sciences, students engage in tree plantation exercises.
5	Problem-solving approach	In this teaching approach, the learners are taught problem-solving skills. They have to identify the problems, analyze the situation, and offer a solution to the same. This enhances their decision-making skills. Some of the activities in which learners are engaged include experiments, simulation, case studies, and other group work.
6	Learner-centered approach	Unlike traditional methods, experiential learning is learner-based where the interests of the learners are given priority. The learners' abilities, experiences, learning styles, and interests are taken into account during learning processes. The teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator in guiding learners through the process.
7	Skill and value development	Apart from offering academic knowledge to the learners, experiential learning also helps develop some skills and values in them. These skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, creativity, adaptability, self-confidence, and time management skills.
8	Continuous learning cycle	The learning cycle that characterizes this form of education is continuous. It begins with students gaining an experience, reflecting on it, comprehending the idea, and finally applying the learning in new environments. This continuous process allows learners to continuously enhance their knowledge and skills. It promotes the lifelong learning and personal development of the individual.

9	Collaborative learning	Collaboration and cooperation characterize experiential learning. This means that students come together, exchange ideas, and assist one another to finish their assignments. It helps learners develop communication skills, interpersonal skills, and social skills. They get used to working with individuals who have diverse perspectives.
10	Holistic learning	Experiential learning fosters holistic development in learners. It develops the intellectual ability of students along with their emotional, social, moral, and practical skills. Learners grow into knowledgeable, responsible, innovative, and socially conscious individuals. The main purpose of experiential learning is to prepare learners not only for exams but also life.

Role of Students and Teachers in the Implementation of Experiential Learning in Education

- ❖ **Actively participating in activities:** The learners participate actively in discussions, projects, experiments, field trips, and other forms of practical learning. The learners do not just listen but actively participate in the entire learning process.
- ❖ **Self-directed learning:** Self-directedness is one of the aspects that students display in the process of experiential learning. The learners come up with questions, look for information, analyze ideas, and make conclusions based on personal experiences and observations.
- ❖ **Reflecting on experiences:** The learners reflect on their activities and experiences to be able to evaluate what they have gained from the experience and how they can improve future performance.
- ❖ **Collaborative learning:** Learning in groups is one of the aspects of experiential learning. Group learning involves sharing thoughts, respecting the opinion of others, among others.
- ❖ **Life skills development:** With experience learning, learners gain life skills like communication abilities, leadership skills, self-confidence, adaptability, and social responsibility

Role of Teachers in Implementing Experiential Learning in Education

- ❖ **Learning facilitator:** Under experience learning, the teacher becomes a facilitator instead of being merely a lecturer. The teacher creates an atmosphere where learning can take place through activities and experiences.
- ❖ **Critical thinking and problem solving:** Critical thinking and problem solving are the two important elements that students must use when dealing with real-life situations
- ❖ **Giving guidance and support:** The teacher guides and supports the learners while they engage in various activities but does not provide all the necessary information or solutions to learners.
- ❖ **Evaluating learning:** Assessment of students' performances is not only limited to examination but also projects, presentation, practical, class participation, and problem solving.
- ❖ **Linking learning to reality:** It is the responsibility of teachers to connect classroom knowledge with reality so that its value may be increased.

Challenges in the Implementation of Experiential Learning in Education

1. **Insufficient availability of resources:** There might not be enough availability of laboratories, technology, teaching aids, and funds in many schools and colleges to arrange practical experiential learning activities.
2. **Large number of students in classrooms:** With a larger number of students in a class, it becomes difficult for teachers to pay attention individually or conduct practical lessons in class.
3. **Insufficient training of teachers:** Some teachers do not receive adequate training on how to implement practical teaching techniques in class. As a result, they may fail to conduct experiential learning activities.
4. **Inadequate time:** Activities involved in practical teaching are time-consuming compared to traditional classroom lessons. It is challenging to cover the entire syllabus in limited time through experiential learning activities
5. **Marks-based educational system:** An educational system based on marks and traditional teaching techniques gives less value to practical learning in class.

6. Lack of infrastructure facilities: The infrastructure facilities in rural or underdeveloped schools make it difficult to conduct experiential teaching activities like projects, debates, and discussions.

7. Assessment difficulty: The process of assessing the experiential mode of learning is difficult because it encompasses practical skills, participation, creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving, and it cannot be assessed using normal tests and exams.

8. Inactive student participation: Students may not be involved in any of the activities related to experiential learning owing to lack of motivation, interest, or knowledge of how this process works.

9. Lack of funds: The activities associated with this type of learning need extra financial support, which may not be available in many institutions.

10. Unequal participation: There might be an unequal distribution of opportunities to engage in the practice owing to differences among students socially and economically.

6. Significance of Experiential Learning in Present Education System

1	Accelerates learning:	Rote Learning has been long supplanted by Learning by Doing. The Experiential Learning approach makes use of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making to provide a training module. It has developed into a well-established way of Accelerates Learning.
2	A safe learning environment:	Simulations are an aspect of Experiential Learning and they can even use realistic scenarios that illustrate various challenges that will be encountered by the participant in the future. It is only natural that mistakes are made in the process of learning, but with simulation-based training, the mistake-free environment can be created, similar to going to a playground with children in order for them to learn and play around without hurting themselves.
3	Bridging theory and practice:	With the transition from theoretical lessons to practical doing, the learner receives firsthand experience of how to use knowledge gained before. This becomes a vital step for retention of ideas.
4	Highly effective for retention:	Experiential learning is personal and effective. It is capable of having an influence not only on knowledge and skills but also on feelings and emotions. It surpasses classroom learning and ensures high levels of retention.
5	Facilitates personalized learning:	To facilitate personalized learning, it is important for every program to include three phases in particular assessment phase, teaching and learning strategy phase, and curriculum phase. The experiential learning approach helps to achieve all these objectives and enables personalized learning. It is completely opposite to the traditional approach to learning as it extends the learning process outside the classroom. The participant determines his/her pace of learning, which led to the emergence of flipped classrooms concept
6	Enhances engagement levels:	Due to its high emphasis on teamwork and learning from others, the method helps engage the participant. Additionally, since the learner is actively participating in the problem-solving task, there is high ownership of results.

Conclusion

Experiential learning acknowledges that the learning through experience supports students in formulating and solving problems in different ways in unpredictable situation (Chopra, 2023). According to National Education Policy 2020, experiential learning is essential for transforming Indian education from rote-based learning to competency-based education. It helps students gain practical knowledge, life skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, preparing them for higher education, employment, and responsible citizenship. The successful implementation of experiential learning depends on the active involvement of both students and teachers. Through students focused encounters that

underline doing, finding, reflecting, and applying, students improve their relational abilities, support fearlessness, and foster capable critical thinking skills (Sachdeva and Latesh 2023). Students learn through participation, reflection, and practical application, while teachers guide, support, and create meaningful learning experiences. Together, they make education more engaging, effective, and connected to real life. Although experiential learning makes education more practical, engaging, and meaningful, its implementation faces several challenges related to resources, training, infrastructure, assessment, and traditional educational practices. Since the 21st century is a time of learner-centered education and teachers play a supporting role in the educational process overall, experiential learning is the greatest approach for 21st-century learning (Singh et al., 2025). Proper planning, teacher training, institutional support, and policy implementation are necessary to overcome these challenges and make experiential learning successful.

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