

Experiential education as a pedagogical innovative classroom philosophy

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Abstract

Nigeria's teacher-preparation courses still follow a traditional, instructor-dominated format that stifles creativity and leaves future teachers unable to translate pedagogical theory into interactive classroom practice. Because programmes prioritize syllabus coverage, tests and credentials over genuine learning, earlier research has debated abstract ideas such as "teacher quality" without embracing experiential, student-focused philosophies. This study therefore examines experiential education learning forged through direct encounters. Following Dewey and Kolb, it portrays such learning as a cycle of engaged experience, reflective observation, conceptual generalization and purposeful application in which both teacher and student actively construct meaning. Grounded in this framework, the paper recommends that curriculum designers and administrators re-engineer teacher education around field- and classroom-based experiential tasks so that educators cultivate the inventiveness society demands.

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the task of preparing of teachers who would be empowered with both professional and academic skills and training required to be transformative intellectuals, Efforts were made in this paper to review some educational and philosophical ideas related to teacher education, Experiential education which is the theme of the study. The success of an educational enterprise particularly in terms of quality depends to a large extent on the regular supply of teachers in adequate quantity and quality. The National Policy on Education 2004 Revised Edition asserts that no nation can achieve economic, social and technological progress and self-sufficiency without a good system of education to sustain its achievement. Fafunwa one of the foremost educationists in Nigeria supported the stand of National Policy on Education when he stressed the dependency of manpower training and development on teachers. He argued that teacher education should be basically related to every phase of development in Nigeria, f be it economic, political or social spheres of activities, one is faced with the ever-reoccurring problemn of training manpower needs but no adequate training can take place without competent teachers to handle the programme. For adequate training of competent teachers to handle the various manpower programmnes and education in general, Paulo Freire the Brazilian educator and philosopher of education is one of the great men of our time that discussed more on the quality and competence of a teacher and teaching techniques to produce reflective, critical and active citizens for democratic society. In his epoch-making book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" he reflected more about education for self-consciousness that the people become educated as opposed to trained in so far as they achieve a grasped of critical principles, ability and passion to choose, organize and shape their own ideas, and living beliefs by means of conscientisation (Freire, 1993). Freire said it is a process of autonomously deciding what is and what is not true and false. It calls for self-motivation, action, our mental nature, and a participation in the form of our character. It is a process in which we learn to open our mind, correct and refine it and enable it to learn rationality, thereby empowering to analyse, digest, master and rate its own knowledge (Freire, 1993).

As against the banking (traditional) method of teaching, of which is only an endless amassing of facts which were fed to the students through classroom rote learning and internet browsing, who gave them back and soon forget them (Kincheloe, 2005). Freire described this form of education as

fundamentally narrative in character with the teacher as the subject (the active participant) and the students as passive objects. Education is thus seen as a process of depositing knowledge into passive students. Teachers are epistemological authority in this System; students' pre-existing knowledge is not considered with what was expected to be deposited into them. Freire also referred to a "banking paradigm" as an assumption of students as adaptable, manageable beings ... The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the banking" concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves Knowledgeable on those whom they consider to know nothing ... The teacher presents himself to the students as their necessary opposite by considering their ignorance, absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students are alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence, but unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher, which experiential education aims at achieving. The key concept of Freire's learner centered education innovation is that of conscientisation which consists of a liberating process on the part of the dominated conscience to get rid of the influence exercised by the dominating consciousness (the teachers). The role of education from learner centered pedagogy should be seen from the view point of the masses in the construction of democratic society or an open society. Such a society to Nyirenda cannot be constructed by the elites in Africa since they are incapable of providing the bases for political and social reforms. This society can only be the result of the struggle of the masses who are the only ones who can make such change.

The general crisis that has overtaken the modern world everywhere and in almost every sphere of life manifests itself differently in each country, involving different areas and taking on different forms. There is speculation that with conceptions, the present and future generations in Africa will live in an African World that is radically different from the African of the year before 2000. Several internal and external pressures for positive change will prompt the transformation of the continent and Nigeria in particular from a fledgling state to an emerging continent and country respectively (Obanya, 2004). One of the major needs of Africa today is that of social transformation which result from the various socio-economic and political crises confronting the continent/country such as insecurity, violent crimes, kidnapping, insensitivity of political leaders in managing labour crisis which has led to incessant strikes in academic institutions, high rate of poverty, youth and graduate, unemployment, over dependence on foreign goods and technology, low economic growth and development among others, Twenty-first (21st century also came with globalisation and innovation but all the above problems and challenges still persist. For any group of people to live successfully in the postmodern world, such a group must have a very stable and strong innovative ideal and built by an existing viable educational system, as education is seen as instrument par excellence for human and social transformation.

2. John Dewey's Postulates on Experiential Education

John Dewey was one of the foremost proponents of experiential education, he expressed his ideas in the book *Experience and Education* (1938), expressed his ideas about curriculum theory in the content of historical debates about school organization and the need to have experience as central in the educational process; hence, experiential education is referred to as a philosophy. Dewey's fame during that period rested on relentlessly critiquing public education and pointing out that the authoritarian, strict, pre-ordained knowledge approach of modern traditional education was the concerned with the delivery of knowledge and not enough with understanding students' experience (Dewey, 2005). Dewey saw weaknesses in both the traditional and progressive styles of education. He did not believe that they met the goals of education, which he defined as obtaining freedom of thought (Dewey, 1989). Dewey advocated that education be based upon the quality of experience, for an experience to be educational, Dewey believed that certain parameters had to be met, the most important of which is that the experience has continuity and interaction. Continuity is the idea that the experience comes from and leads to other experiences, in essence propelling the person to learn more. Interaction is when the experience meets the internal needs or goals of a person. In addition to the notions raised by Dewey, recent research has shown that experiential learning does not replace traditional methods of learning. Instead, experiential learning is designed to improve one understanding by giving one the freedom to explore and find the learning path that is most suitable for him or her. For experiential education to become efficient pedagogy, physical experience must be combined with reflection.

Adding reflective practice, allows for personal introspection of challenges and key learning. That is, physical challenges provide a gateway in which we can observe qualities about ourselves, and those whom we are working with. Further, for the efficiency of experiential education, experience must be separated, giving the learner sufficient time to process the information. To Dewey a learning experience does not just happen; it is a planned event with meaning and with experiential education, the meaning is reaffirmed by the learners. Dewey also provided the theory of learning by doing which he supported that there should be a link between the classroom and the future work for which the classroom is supposedly preparing the learner. There is a need to translate abstract ideas of academia into the concrete practical realities of the people's life. This link gave Kolb his own learning model which is called Kolb's learning model. Kolb and other experiential educators say that experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies, in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct and focused experience in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities. Kolb explicitly addressed the links between school and work, and between contemporary learning and competency testing. Kolb is most well-known for his experiential learning model developed in 1975 (Katula, 1999). The four main sections of the model are often depicted in a circle, though the learning cycle was first described as a spiral.

Typically, the circle begins with a concrete experience, and then moves through observation and reflection, forming abstract concepts and testing in new situation (situations) or experimentation. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience (concrete and reflection). For Kolb, learning actually begins with experience. An application of the approach is our used of shared students' experience in field trips, service learning, cooperative learning etc. Kolb's experiential learning model pursues a framework for examining and strengthening the critical linkages among education, work, and personal development. It offers a system of competencies for describing job demands and corresponding educational objectives and emphasises the critical linkages that can be developed between the classroom and the "real world" with experiential learning method. It pictures the workplace as a learning environment that can enhance and supplement formal education and can foster personal development through meaningful work and career development opportunities. Having gone through the historical and philosophical roots of experiential education.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis of Experiential Education

To strategic Transformation Group on Employability, Carleton University, Experiential education is the application of theory and academic content to real-world experiences, either within the classroom, within community, or within the workplace, which advances programme or course-based learning outcomes that are specifically focused on employability skills. Experiential learning requires the students to not only engage in the experience activity, but also requires them to reflect upon their learning and how their skills learned through their academic studies can be applied beyond the classroom. Workplace experiences such as co-operative and internships placements are only one form of experiential learning opportunities that can be provided to students. Such opportunities are typically divided into three categories- course focused, community focused, and works focused - giving students hands-on experiences not only in the classroom, but also in the community and the workplace.

3.1. Implementation of Experiential Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

As discussed earlier it is found out that educators and learners engaged in real life experiences or lived experiences as chosen by both the educators and the learners. Regardless of the content of the experiences, learners are free to choose their personal and communal experiences to be studied, guided by the previous experiences of the educators to direct the learning of the learners. The following sequences are necessary to make learning and knowledge concrete and permanent:

- a. Concrete Experience: The learner encounters a new experience or engages in a reinterpretation process of an existing experience.
- b. Reflective Observation: The learner reviews and reflects on the new experience and identifies any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.

- c. Abstract Conceptualization: Through the reflective process, the learner creates a new ideal concept or modifies an existing abstract concept analyzing the concepts and forming conclusions and generalisations.
- d. Active Experimentation: The learner plans and tries out what was learned and is able to apply the new knowledge to other situations. Conclusions and generalisations are used to test hypothesis and thus the learner engages in new experiences.

It is possible for the learner to enter at any of these four stages and follow them through their sequence to acquire new knowledge. What is highlighted is that for effective learning to occur the learner should complete all four stages of the model and no one stage can stand alone as a learning procedure.

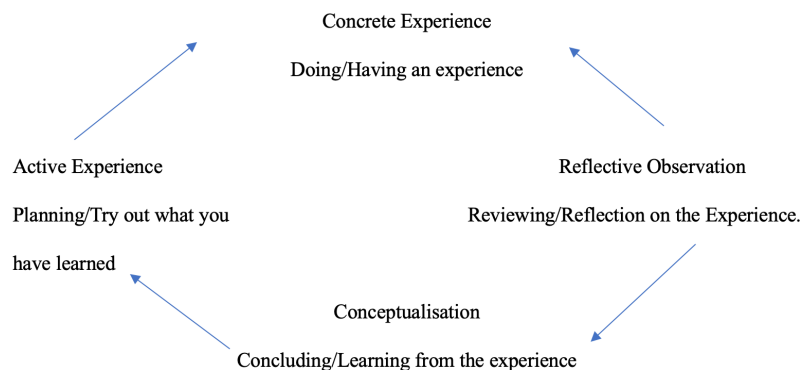


Figure 1. Experiential Learning Cycle Model by David Kolb

3.2. Experiential Education Strategies

Experiential Education can enhance students' learning through a range of strategies. These strategies can be organised into a spectrum, from strategies implemented within the classroom to strategies that take place in the community and those that take place in the work environment.

- a. Reflective/Classroom Strategies: Reflective learning activities
- b. Community focused: Community Based Learning and Community Based Research e.g. volunteer Experiences, service learning and cooperative studies.
- c. Work focused: Placements, Internship, Practicum, Fellowship, apprenticeship experience and Cooperative Education.

3.3. Roles of the Educators and the Learners

In Experiential Education the educator, or instructor guides rather than directs the education process where students are naturally interested in the educative process. The instructor assumes the role of facilitator and is guided by a number of steps crucial to experiential education

- a. Planning
- b. Preparation
- c. Facilitation
- d. Evaluation

3.4. Learners/Students Role

- a. Students will be involved in problems which are practical, social and personal.
- b. Students will be allowed freedom in the classroom as long as they make head way in teaching and learning process.

- c. Students often will need to be involved with difficult and challenging situations while discovering.
- d. Students will self-evaluate their own progression or success in the learning process which become the primary means of assessment.

3.5. Prospects of the Implementation of Experiential Education

3.5.1. Experiential Education

- a. Combines direct experience with focused reflection;
- b. Builds on past knowledge and experiences;
- c. Requires active involvement in meaning construction;
- d. Encourages collaboration and exchange of ideas and perspectives;
- e. Can be course focused or in-class, community focused or work focused. Experiential Education is recommended and recognized as innovative pedagogy because of the followings:
- f. Experiential Education makes learning relatable to students: Students build on what they already know and are provided with opportunities make connections between new concepts and existing ones.
- g. It increases the effectiveness of learning; students engage in critical thinking, acquire problem solving skills and engage in decision making.
- h. It links theory to practice: Students have the chance to engage in the experience and practice what they have learned, see the application of the theoretical concepts in practice, process that application and make generalization.
- i. Increases students' engagement by encouraging collaboration and scaffolding between learners.
- j. It assists in memory retention, by building strong relationships between feelings and thinking processes. Students have the capacity to learn successfully when the information is associated with values and feelings.
- k. Leads to development of skills for lifelong learning, by assisting in the acquisition of essential skills and encouraging students to reflect, conceptualise, and plan for next steps.

3.5.2. Challenges to the Usage of Experiential Education in Nigeria

The curriculum design in experiential education depends on a number of factors which include:

- a. Course learning objectives
- b. Experience of the instructor with the pedagogy of experiential education. The type of engaged learning experiences (wider consideration).
- c. The number of students expected to enroll in the class.
- d. The classroom structure (i.e. traditional, online, hybrid large lecture).

4. Recommendations

Mandatory Experiential Education Certification for Teacher Educators: To address the challenge of instructor inexperience with experiential pedagogy, the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) must require all teacher educators to complete intensive training in facilitation techniques (not lecturing), including certification in Kolb's learning cycle application and Freirean

dialogical methods. Without transforming those who train teachers, the banking model perpetuates itself.

Institutionalization of Community-University Partnerships: Each College of Education and Education Faculty must establish legally-binding partnerships with Local Government Education Authorities to create Community-Based Research sites. These partnerships allow trainees to engage with concrete experiences (Kolb's first stage) while addressing community-identified needs, satisfying Dewey's interaction principle by connecting educational processes to external social realities.

5. Conclusion

Transformative teacher education in Nigeria requires abandoning the banking paradigm in favor of an experiential model that produces critical, reflective practitioners capable of navigating and transforming the nation's educational crises. By systematically applying Freire's conscientization, Dewey's criteria for educative experience, and Kolb's learning cycle, tertiary institutions can prepare teachers who function not as dispensers of pre-packaged knowledge, but as intellectuals who understand that teaching is a form of social transformation. The feasibility of this model depends on specific, structural investments in faculty development, community partnership, and assessment reform investments that align financial resources with the philosophical commitment to education as the practice of freedom.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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