

**THE USE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING STRATEGIES IN MANAGEMENT STUDIES:
PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**

Authors:

Jissah Cudjoe Sefenu

Department of Business and Social Sciences Education

University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

sjissah@gmail.com

+233500025774

Nicholas Andoh

Department of Business and Social Sciences Education

University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

nicholas.andoh@yahoo.com

+233268121742

Abstract

The use of appropriate learning strategies in institutions of higher learning has become a growing interest across employers in several industries. Experiential learning strategies in management studies to enhance the acquisition of employable skills by students is one that has received an immense attention. This study therefore focused on assessing students' perception of experiential learning strategies used by their lecturers in the classroom. A quantitative research approach was adopted using descriptive survey research design. Simple random sampling was used to sample 108 final year management students. Data were collected using a questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the study. The study found that although experiential learning strategies were not fully adopted, there was an average use of the experiential learning strategies.

Key words: Experiential learning strategies, Management studies, Employable skills

Introduction

The primary objective of any organization is to develop, bring into existence and supply goods or provide services that meet the needs of society. To foster this, employers have required business graduates to possess competencies such as skills relating to problem solving, communication and ICT. These requirements have placed an obligation on business schools to equip students with the requisite skills, knowledge and abilities desired by employers.

A number of employers are interested in recruiting graduates who possess the attribute of being proactive, can employ greater degree abilities such as the ability to analyse, criticize and to

engage in multi layered communication to promote revolutionary teamwork that results in positive change in their organization. However, a wide range of graduates from business schools end up in assorted work areas and begin to stare at the lacking relationship between their education and expectations at work. These inclinations have been highlighted in literature as inability to communicate appropriately, incapacity to work in groups, inability to apply principles to situations in the real world and misunderstanding of the necessities of employers (Subramanian, 2017).

In earlier years, Mintzberg (2003) indicated that the problem that goes with the teaching and learning of management is that it is just management schooling, and does not give a holistic apprehension and view of management as a function. He further argued that management activities require a need to harmonize a good deal of craft with an adequate level of art and science and the teaching and learning of management that overemphasizes the science does not create a balance between management theories and practice. This assertion suggests that even before recent times, there has been a discussion regarding the decreasing ability of business schools to equip students with necessary skills needed in business industry.

Higher education institutions ought to put certain factors in place to enhance students' acquisition of employable skills. Some of these factors include industrial training, extra-curricular activities, self- concept and career development activities (Reddy, 2019; Jovinia, Ab Rahim, Shmsiah, 2014) and other appropriate teaching methods as propagated by experiential learning theorists (Dewey 1897; Kolb, 1970) who assert that the teaching and learning of business programmes require certain teaching methods such as discussion, role playing and simulation rather than the traditional lecture methods which is often used in the teaching of management. Managers of some surveyed firms in Ghana claimed that inappropriate learning strategies as well as insufficient exposure may be the causes for poor quality of education and skills training among management graduates (Baah-Boateng & Twum, 2020). The call for the use of appropriate learning strategies to foster stronger cohesion between management studies and industry in Ghana (Damoah, Peprah & Obrefo, 2021; Wongnaa & Boachie, 2018) has given rise to the need to find out the learning strategies adopted by lecturers in the classroom.

Literature review

Management Studies

Management studies has been described as that aspect of education that provides students with knowledge, skills and abilities expedient to carry out functions of management successfully in the business world as a producer or consumer of goods and services (Abdullahi, 2002). As the years go by, the definition of management studies continues to experience change. This implies that management studies is flexible and ought to meet the present day needs. According to Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Tuke (2015), management educators have come to the consensus that, change is a factor of life. From the days of the typewriter to the computer age, the curriculum of management studies has continually reformed itself to meet the contemporary needs of today's business world. Thus, the benefits of the study of management rest on its ability to identify and keep up with the demands of employers. This poses a challenge to both the instructors and learners. Nonetheless, it is

incumbent on instructors of management studies to adjust to these ever-changing challenges to ensure that the programme meets the needs of society.

The notion that management creates an especially essential connection among individual's performance at the organizational level, organizational effectiveness and economic development is everyday belief. With this commonly believed notion, managers ought to play an extra great function in the improvement and success of corporations and the nation as a whole (Analoui & Hosseini, 2001). Management studies therefore is about helping the students to strengthen job-related behaviours that will enable them enhance performance at the individual and corporate level (Krishman, 2008). The nature of skills needed by employers varies in relation to the type of job needed to be performed in an organization. According to Damoah, Pephrah & Obrefo (2021), in Ghana, there are still gaps between what higher education is offering its students and what industry requires from graduates at the entry-level. They further attributed these gaps to the poor usage of experiential learning strategies by the instructors. This assertion was noted earlier by Baah-Boateng and Twum, (2020) who also claimed that inappropriate learning strategies as well as insufficient exposure may be the causes for poor quality of education and skills training among management graduates.

Experiential Learning Strategies in Management Studies

There have been immense efforts toward improving higher education in recent times. This has led to a focus on improving the process of learning in the field of education through research application from what has been called "the new science of learning" (Branford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Experiential learning theory is based on the work of some renowned scholars in the 20th century. These scholars emphasized the pivotal role of experience in the theories regarding human learning and development. Some of these scholars were John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and William James.

Experiential learning has been one of the important aspects upon which this research is centered on. However, there have been misconceptions about it. Often times it has been misunderstood as a set of techniques used to provide learners with experiences they can learn from. Others have described the term as a learning technique that is mind-less recording of experience. Experiential learning however is a philosophy of education based on what Dewey (1938) referred to as "theory of experience". The strategies involved in experiential learning include case based analyses, role playing and internships. These are some methods of teaching that have been advocated for the teaching of business programmes (Henry, Hill & Leitch, 2005). Dewey argued that a sound theory of experience is needed to guide the new experiential approach to education.

The theory of experiential learning was built on six propositions held in common by the scholars:

1. Learning is not just an outcome but also a process and therefore to improve the effectiveness of learning in institutions of higher learning, there need to be an emphasis on engaging students in a process that best facilitates learning. This process should include the opportunity to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the learning effort (Dewey 1897).

2. All learning is relearning. To better facilitate learning, there should be a process that discovers the beliefs and ideas of students regarding a particular topic. This enables the students accept new ideas that they can easily imbibe and on which they can be examined.
3. The process of learning involves the ability to mentally resolve opposing ideas. The process of learning is more effectively driven through differences and disagreements.
4. The process of learning is geared towards developing a person holistically and not just in terms of cognition. Its goal is to integrate the total functioning of a person.
5. Learning emanates from the synergy between a person and the environment. The interaction between a person and his/her environment creates opportunity for personalized learning.
6. Knowledge is created through learning. Unlike the current trend of passing on preexisting ideas to learners, learning ought to provide opportunity for the creation of social knowledge and then integrated personally into the learner's knowledge.

According to Kolb and Kolb (2009), the manner in which the process of education is conducted in management schools, as they observed, revealed some insight into the learning nature in some learning regions. The scientific basis for which the curriculum of management was developed in 1959 by an influential Carnegie Foundation report was due to the need to improve the intellectual respectability of management studies. This was done by underpinning it in three scientific disciplines: economics, mathematics, and behavioral science. However, management studies or education is primarily discursive, with each topic covered in a linear sequence with little recursive repetition. Management studies focuses on telling and tends to emphasize theory. Again, according to Kolb and Kolb (2009), learning hours in management classes are often spent on lecture method where students only become passive participants in the classroom. Also, management education is often organized into large classes and does not pay attention to individual students.

Most students arrive at institutions of higher education preconditioned by experiences they had in previous education as passive recipients of what they were taught. Re-conditioning the minds of students to take maximum charge of their learning can greatly facilitate their opportunity to learn through experience. By developing their effectiveness as learners, students can be empowered to take responsibility for their own learning by understanding how they learn best and the skills necessary to learn in regions that are uncomfortable for them (Keeton, Sheckley, & Griggs, 2002)

Wongnaa and Boachie (2018) conducted a study on perception and adoption of competency-based training (CBT) by academics in Ghana. The researchers asserted that the rise in graduate unemployment and the poor linkage between university education and industry is gaining popularity in Ghana's universities. These education institutions are being tasked to produce business-oriented and well-grounded graduates for industry who are ready to make use of knowledge acquired in university education to establish businesses that will help reduce unemployment in the country as well as working effectively in the nation's industry and service sectors. The study used cross-sectional data collected from 300 faculty members of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana (KNUST) using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, 5-point Likert scale, perception index, and the logit model were the methods of analysis employed. The results of the survey showed that the overall perception index was 0.49, indicating that generally faculty members of KNUST agreed and had a positive perception of the potential of CBT in instilling

employable skills in students. The researchers concluded that provision of appropriate teaching and learning resources that complement adoption of CBT, incentives, and competency-based education training for academics by university authorities and stakeholders in Ghana's tertiary education will enhance the adoption of CBT methodologies.

According to Merrifield (2013), the employers and teachers identified skills such as business awareness, communication, organisational skills, problem solving, teamwork, planning, presentation skills, technology and time management to be important for university graduates. The teachers also indicated that certain strategies were adopted to incorporate employable skills into the curriculum. These included group work, discussions, leading a presentation, debates and individual investigative work. These teaching strategies were in line with experiential learning strategies which were found to be effective in equipping students with employable skills.

Reddy (2019) also examined the problems and perspectives of employability in higher education. The study discussed the concept of employability, status of employability of students, the need for employability of students and pre-requisites for employability of students. The paper also identified the problems that face the employability of students. The researcher indicated that to secure employment, the students must develop among others communication skills, self-confidence/high aspirations, be involved in extra-curricular activities and develop career related experiences. Reddy further stated that these factors are more likely to influence students' acquisition of employable skills and that higher education institutions have a responsibility to ensure the employability of their students

Research Methods

The study applied the quantitative approach to research and adopted descriptive survey design to help describe the perceptions of students at a point in time regarding the existence of some phenomenon. The study organization was University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The target population for this study was final year management students of the School of Business. The level 400 management students were chosen for the study because they had acquired enough educational experience and were preparing to enter the job market. The total number of the target population was 136. Random sampling technique was used to sample the students. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a population of 136, a sample size of 103 is adequate. A sample size of 108 was used for the study.

Questionnaire was used to collect the data because it takes less time to administer and also ensures the anonymity of respondents (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000; Muijs, 2004). The questionnaire was a 5-point Likert scale which measured the degree to which students perceived a number of teaching methods were applied by their lecturers ranging from 1 (never applied) to 5 (fully applied). The data was organized, coded and inputted into Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 22 program for analysis. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The mean was used to determine the degree to which the teaching methods were applied by the lecturers. The standard deviation provided information on the congruence of the responses given by the students. A mean value below 3.00 indicated the students perceived a low level of application of the teaching method.

Results and discussion

This section presents the results of the data that was collected and also presents the discussion of the results in relation to determining the learning strategies that students perceived were employed by their lecturers in the classroom. The results are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: *Learning strategies students perceive are applied by their lecturers*

Rank	Learning Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Group work	108	3.94	1.186
2	Lecture method	108	3.82	1.040
3	Individual presentation	108	3.76	1.191
4	Case studies	108	3.51	1.063
5	Business simulation	108	3.26	.941
6	Internship	108	3.21	1.094
	Mean of means/Average standard deviation of experiential learning strategies		3.53	1.095

Source: Field data (2020)

From the results in Table 1, the students indicated that the most applied teaching strategy was group work where students were encouraged to work in groups ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.186$). This teaching strategy was followed by the traditional lecture method ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.040$) where students were more of recipients of presentation by lecturers. The third most applied teaching method was individual presentations by students ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.191$) followed by the use of case studies ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.063$), business simulation with computers ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .941$) where students were encouraged to have a hands-on, interactive learning experiences in the classroom with the aid of computers. The least applied teaching strategy was internship experiences ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.094$). The mean of means and average standard deviation of experiential learning strategies were 3.53 and 1.095 respectively. Branford, Brown and Cocking (2000) postulated that in recent times, higher education has directed focus on enhancing the learning process in education through “the new science of learning”. One major aspect of the new science of learning is experiential learning. Experiential learning strategies include internships, management simulation, role-playing, structured experiential and case analyses and these are the approaches that advocate for the teaching of business courses (Henry, Hill & Leitch, 2005). Consensus theory does not hold universities responsible for merely including employable skills in the curricula but also for introducing strategic pedagogical techniques to enhance the development of those skills among students (Selvadurai, Choy, & Maros, 2012).

Pedagogical strategies most probably appropriate for developing widespread skills may include learning that is situated, problem based or one that involves active discovery. Learning that is situated involves aiding students to develop an active process of learning and not being just a passive recipient of knowledge whereas learning that is problem based entails helping students acquire knowledge from practical experiences as well as generating solutions to challenging problems that are likely to occur (Wongnaa & Boachie, 2018). From the results in Table 1, the

students indicated that excluding students being encouraged to work in groups which was ranked the highest, the traditional lecture method was more applied than any of the other experiential learning strategies. The mean scores of the results as shown in the Table 1 also indicated that the experiential learning strategies were not fully applied however, they were slightly above average as indicated by the mean of means score of 3.53. This affirms the assertion by Kolb and Kolb (2009) that in most cases, teaching hours in management classes were spent more on just conveying information by the lecturer to the students and relatively little time spent on more effective teaching strategies. By this, the students become inactive in the classroom rather than active participants. The continuous practice of ineffective learning strategies has the tendency of eventually widening further the gap between employer expectation and the skill sets of management graduates.

Conclusion

The study found that experiential learning strategies that enhanced acquisition of employable skills by students were not fully applied by the lecturers. Students were mostly passive participants in class as the lecturers applied more of the traditional lecture method in teaching. Lecturers in the department of management studies should employ various appropriate teaching methods needed to facilitate students' acquisition of each relevant employable skill. The training of students to develop employable skills has been proven to be more effective by using teaching methods such business simulation, case-base instructions and graded industrial training.

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