

An Empirical Study on Experiential Learning on Skill Development as a Catalyst for Enhancing Employability Skills and Career Readiness Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z has grown up in a digitally connected environment and is increasingly familiar with flexible, interactive, and technology-enabled learning approaches. As the contemporary workplace becomes increasingly dynamic and characterised by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA), conventional classroom-based education may not adequately develop the competencies required for successful employment. Experiential learning provides a practical approach by enabling students to connect theoretical concepts with real-world situations through active participation, reflection, and application. This approach can strengthen practical knowledge while developing adaptability, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and career-readiness skills. Generation Z's preference for learning by doing makes experiential learning particularly relevant to their academic and professional development. This study investigates the contribution of experiential learning to skill development and its role in enhancing employability and career readiness among Generation Z. The study considers experiential learning practices, including internships, live projects, case studies, industry interactions, fieldwork, simulations, and project-based learning, which provide opportunities for students to gain practical exposure and understand workplace expectations. It further examines the gap between academic learning and the practical requirements of the modern workplace, particularly the challenges of translating acquired knowledge and competencies into professional settings. Effective learning transfer may be influenced by student motivation, authentic performance-based assessment, industry engagement, and the integration of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), and Virtual Reality (VR). The study emphasises experiential learning as a means of strengthening employability competencies and supporting Generation Z's transition from higher education to professional careers.

Keywords:-Experiential Learning, Skill Development, Career Readiness, Employability, Learning Transfer

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational systems across the globe are adapting to technological advancements, globalization, and the swift transformation of employment needs. Traditional education, which typically prioritizes lectures, examination, and rote memorization, may fall short in cultivating the practical skills needed in today's modern workplaces. Consequently, higher education must place greater emphasis on transferable skills such as critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving abilities.

Although graduate numbers continue to rise, many students may enter employment without adequate practical preparation. Employers increasingly expect individuals to work effectively in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, where adaptability and resilience are essential. A further challenge is the transfer of learning, as knowledge gained in academic settings may not automatically translate into effective workplace performance.

Experiential learning can help address these challenges by connecting theoretical concepts with practical application.

Through projects, simulations, workplace activities, problem-solving tasks, and other hands-on experiences, students can actively apply what they learn. Integrating skill-based evaluation with real-world learning scenarios can improve knowledge transfer and help learners in acquiring skills that will be beneficial in long-term work environments.

The increasing demand for career-ready graduates has encouraged universities and employers to place greater value on experiential learning. This method aids students in developing the abilities necessary for success in the job and making the connection between academic ideas and real-world workplace demands. Traditional internships are still a great method to get firsthand experience in the business, but career-focused experiential learning gives students more chances to get ready for the employment. Experiential learning is a student-centred educational approach that involves active participation through practical projects, industry interaction, mentoring, simulations, research, and skill-development activities. According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), effective learning follows a continuous cycle

involving direct experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and experimentation. This process enables students to learn from practical situations and apply their knowledge in new contexts.

Organisations such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) have highlighted the value of experiential learning in business education. Integrating such activities into academic programmes can strengthen students' professional skills, industry awareness, confidence, and career preparation. Immersive internships place students directly in professional environments, where they work alongside industry practitioners and undertake workplace responsibilities. Experiential learning, however, has a broader scope and can include classroom projects, case studies, simulations, digital portfolios, mentoring programmes, and research-based activities. These alternatives can be particularly useful for students who face financial, geographical, or scheduling barriers to conventional internships. By incorporating career-oriented experiential activities into courses, universities can create flexible and scalable opportunities for students to gain practical knowledge and professional exposure. Such learning experiences can help bridge the gap between higher education and employment while supporting students' overall professional development.

Literature Review

Chauhan Mansi, Gaur Mamta (2026) stated that the growing mismatch between conventional lecture-based education and the practical competencies required in the contemporary VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) work environment. According to their study, traditional approaches to teaching and learning often contribute to employability gaps and difficulties in transferring acquired knowledge and skills from academic settings to workplace contexts. In contrast, experiential learning models have been found to enhance learners' industry readiness by providing opportunities for practical engagement, problem-solving, and application of knowledge in authentic contexts. The effective transfer of these competencies to the workplace, however, is influenced by several factors, including learner motivation, authentic performance-based assessment, and the integration of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Augmented/Virtual Reality (AR/VR). They further emphasized that skill-based, vocational, and experiential learning approaches are grounded in established theoretical perspectives, particularly constructivism, experiential learning theory, and human capital theory. These approaches facilitate the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby contributing to the development of employable and adaptable graduates. The authors also identified the need for greater collaboration among educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers to overcome implementation challenges and establish effective skill-development ecosystems. In this context, skill-based education in higher education can be viewed as an important mechanism for developing a competent, self-reliant, and future-ready workforce and for addressing emerging socio-economic and employment-related demands.

Rashmi & Singh Harishankar (2026) state that Experiential learning, defined as learning through direct engagement, reflection, and problem-solving, offers a promising mechanism to bridge this skill-employment gap. Empirical evidence from programs. They examine how experiential learning, through models like internships, apprenticeships, and work-integrated education, enhances employability and skill development across diverse Indian contexts. It further evaluates policy frameworks, institutional practices, and sectoral outcomes to assess their role in generating employment and promoting inclusive economic growth. Suggested that embedding experiential learning within national education and vocational training systems is essential for realizing India's vision of a skilled, self-reliant workforce aligned with Atmanirbhar Bharat. They examine the critical role of experiential learning: learning by doing, reflecting, and applying knowledge in bridging the persistent gap between education and employability. Experiential learning transforms learning into an engine of employment generation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive growth, positioning India to become a global leader in human capital development and innovation-driven competitiveness.

Santoso Haychel Alexander and Sugiarti Yenny (2025) stated that Generation Z has perceptions of experiential learning and its relevance to workplace preparation. They indicate that Generation Z students generally prefer practical and experience-based learning over purely theoretical approaches, particularly when learning involves internships, case studies, presentations, and collaborative activities. Participants highlighted that direct exposure to workplace situations improved their understanding, practical knowledge, and professional skills. However, the study also emphasised that theoretical knowledge remains important as a foundation for applying concepts effectively in practical settings. Their study further revealed that Generation Z learners tend to respond positively to diverse and challenging tasks but may lose interest when internship responsibilities become repetitive or monotonous. Varied job assignments and opportunities to participate in different activities were therefore perceived as important for sustaining students' engagement and learning. Experiential learning was found to extend learning beyond the traditional classroom by allowing students to apply academic knowledge to real-world situations. The internship experience also contributed to the development of both hard and soft skills, including professional knowledge, practical competencies, and interpersonal abilities. Participants reported gaining new insights and knowledge through workplace assignments that were not previously covered in their academic learning. Overall, they suggest that experiential learning can strengthen students' competencies, enhance their understanding of the workplace, and support their preparedness for future employment.

Boyte-Chadwick et al. (2025) stated that Experiential Learning is a student-centric approach that bridges the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge for career growth. They examined experiential learning as an innovative course enhancement or alternative to

traditional internships, equipping students with industry knowledge, professional networks, and job-ready competencies. They suggested that, through structured experiences such as mentorship programs, digital portfolio development, and industry-recognised certifications, students gain practical skills and career insights that enhance their employability. As universities and businesses increasingly emphasize workforce preparedness, integrating experiential learning models into higher education curricula is critical to aligning academic training with industry expectations. They highlight the benefits of experiential learning for career growth. From a comparative perspective, they stated that Experiential learning requires more resources, whereas traditional learning approaches, such as lecturing and testing, require significantly fewer resources. Addressing resource constraints is necessary for academic institutions to successfully implement an experiential learning program.

Objectives

1. To understand the importance of Experiential learning as a tool for career development among Gen Z Students
2. To determine the relationship between experiential learning and employability skills among Generation Z students.
3. To examine the mediating role of skill development and employability skills in the relationship between experiential learning and career readiness among Generation Z.

LIMITATION

This study is limited to the impact of Experiential learning on employability and career development among Gen Z.

Scope of the Study

This research examines how experiential learning contributes to skill development, employability, and career preparedness among Generation Z students in higher education. It considers learning methods such as internships, industry projects, simulations, field activities, case studies, mentoring, collaborative tasks, and direct interaction with professionals.

The study focuses on important workplace competencies, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, leadership, adaptability, decision-making, and digital skills. It also explores whether practical learning experiences strengthen students' confidence, professional awareness, workplace behaviour, and ability to transfer classroom knowledge into real-life situations. The research further investigates students' experiences and perceptions of experiential learning and may incorporate viewpoints from educators and industry representatives. It seeks to understand the association between participation in experiential learning and perceived employability and career readiness.

The findings are expected to provide useful insights for universities, educators, and industry partners in designing effective learning experiences that better prepare Generation Z graduates for changing employment demands and a successful transition into the workplace.

Research Methodology

This research paper is based on secondary data collected from diverse sources, including published research papers, articles, books, e-journals, and websites and reliable online databases. By analysing existing literature and insights, the research highlights the effectiveness of Experiential Learning in Skill Development as a Catalyst for Enhancing Employability Skills and Career Readiness among Generation Z, thereby contributing to improved motivation, performance, and the achievement of better careers.

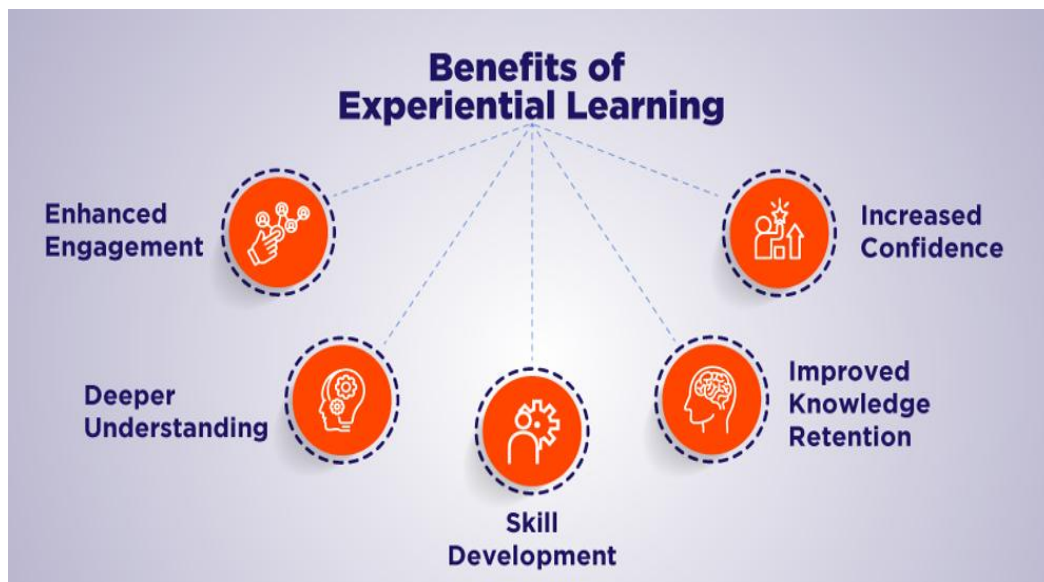
Advantages of Experience-Based Learning

In the modern world, change is taking place faster than ever. Therefore, students need more than textbook knowledge to succeed in their personal and professional lives. They must develop practical abilities that help them handle real-world situations. This is where experience-based learning becomes important.

Experiential learning is an educational approach in which students gain knowledge through direct involvement and practical experiences. Instead of simply memorising information, learners participate in activities that help them understand how concepts work in real-world situations. This makes learning more meaningful, engaging, and easier to remember. One of the key benefits of this approach is the development of problem-solving and decision-making abilities. When students work on projects, conduct experiments, participate in field activities, or solve practical problems, they learn how to deal with challenges independently. Such experiences also encourage creativity, curiosity, confidence, and critical thinking.

Experience-based learning can also strengthen communication and social skills. Group projects, discussions, role-playing, and collaborative activities teach students how to express their ideas, listen to others, cooperate with teammates, and take responsibility. Importantly, students can learn from mistakes and use those experiences to improve their future performance. This method also creates a connection between classroom lessons and everyday life. Students are more likely to understand and retain information when they can see its practical value. As a result, experiential learning moves education beyond memorization and repetition. It equips learners with useful skills, a deeper understanding, and greater confidence to face future challenges. There are lots of benefits of experiential learning, which give benefits for the Gen Z. Some major benefits are as follows: -

- ☐ Real-World Problem Solving
- ☐ Bridging Theory and Practice
- ☐ Boosted Confidence and Self-Discovery
- ☐ Promotes Active Engagement
- ☐ Enhance Retention and Memory
- ☐ Cultivates Real-Life Skills
- ☐ Encourages Creativity and Innovation
- ☐ Builds Confidence and Self-Awareness
- ☐ Connects Learning to Everyday Life
- ☐ Enables Emotion and Social Development
- ☐ Prepares Students for the Future with practical knowledge
- ☐ Merging of Theory and Practice
- ☐ Increases Team Work
- ☐ Assessing Learning Is Easier and Accurate.



(Top Benefits of Experiential Learning for Students: Engagement & Skill Development)

Experiential learning offers numerous benefits for students, making it an effective approach to education that goes beyond traditional classroom teaching.

Best Experiential Learning Methods



Experiential learning encompasses a variety of methods that actively engage students in the learning process, encouraging them to explore, experiment, and reflect on their experiences.

For schools, now is the time to explore the potential of experiential learning methods and their impact on students' academic and personal development. NEP 2020's focus on holistic, multidimensional education provides the perfect framework for incorporating experiential learning into curricula. To ensure successful implementation, schools can turn to LEAD Group, a leader in innovative educational solutions. LEAD Group's programs are designed to seamlessly integrate experiential learning into school curriculums, offering tailored support and resources to make learning more interactive and impactful.

Key Stages & Experiential Learning Benefits

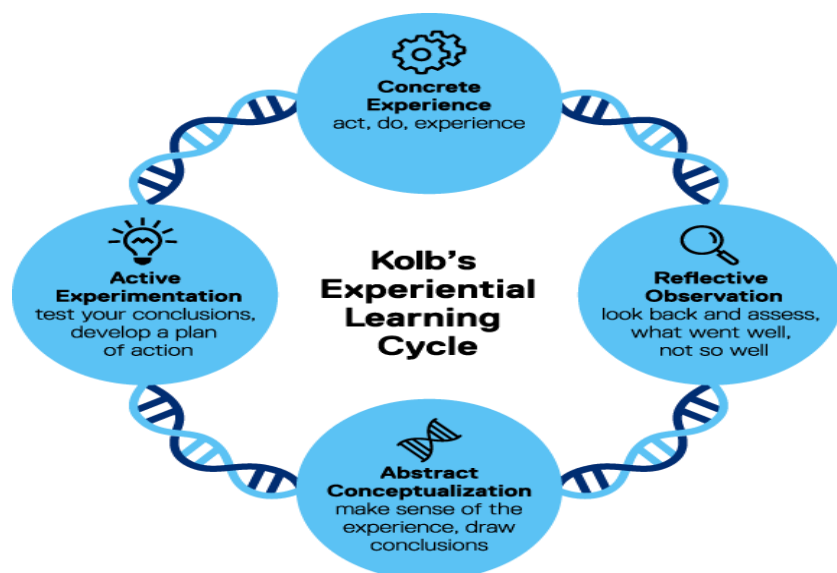
Experiential learning involves four key stages: experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising, and applying. Students first engage in a practical activity, reflect on what they learned, connect their experience with concepts, and

apply their knowledge in new situations. This process develops critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, confidence, collaboration, and a deeper understanding.

The experiential learning cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Students first participate in an activity, then reflect on their experience, develop ideas or concepts from it, and finally apply their learning to new situations. This continuous process promotes deeper understanding and practical learning.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle explains how people learn through experience. It includes four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Learners first experience something, reflect on it, develop ideas or concepts, and then apply those ideas in new situations. This continuous cycle helps individuals improve their understanding, skills, problem-solving abilities, and practical knowledge.



Source: <https://www.torontomu.ca/experiential-learning/faculty-staff/kolbs-el-cycle/>

Kolb's Experiential Learning Stage and Definition

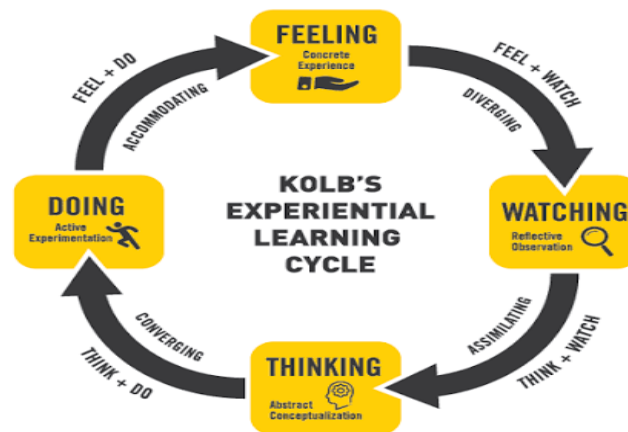
Stage	Definition
Concrete Experience (CE)	The educator is a facilitator. Immediate or concrete experiences occur and form the basis for observations and reflections.
Reflective Observation (RO)	The educator is the subject-matter expert, leading the reflection by making relevant texts and lectures available and creating space and a framework for systematic analysis through reflective practice.
Abstract Conceptualization (AC)	Reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. The teacher is the standard-setter and evaluator, helping learners master the application of knowledge and skills to meet performance requirements.
Active Experimentation (AE)	These implications can be actively tested and guide learners in creating new experiences during AE. Here, the educator is a coach who helps learners apply their knowledge to achieve their goals within their learning context.

The foundation of experiential learning lies in the work of educational theorist David Kolb, who outlined the Experiential Learning Cycle. This cycle includes four stages that guide the learning process:

- **Concrete Experience:** This stage involves direct involvement in an activity. It could be anything from conducting a science experiment, participating in a role-play, or working on a project. The key is to immerse the learner in a task that requires active participation.
- **Reflective Observation:** Students reflect on what happened after engaging in the experience. This stage involves thinking about the activity, discussing it with peers, and considering what was learned.
- **Abstract Conceptualisation:** In this stage, students analyse their reflections and draw conclusions. They begin to form theories or models based on their experiences, developing a deeper understanding of the concepts involved.

- **Active Experimentation:** Finally, students apply their newfound understanding in new situations. This stage involves trying the concepts in different contexts, further reinforcing their learning.

The image illustrates Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, a model that explains how people learn through experience. It consists of four stages: Feeling, Watching, Thinking, and Doing. Feeling represents concrete experiences in which learners encounter something directly. Watching involves reflective observation and examining what happened. Thinking involves abstract conceptualisation, in which learners develop ideas, principles, or explanations. Doing represents active experimentation, where learners apply their ideas in practice. The circular arrows show that learning is continuous, with each stage leading to the next. The model emphasises learning through experience, reflection, understanding, and the application of knowledge to new situations and challenges



Source:- <https://www.uwindsor.ca/careercentre/1533/what-experiential-learning>

Importance of Experiential Learning in NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places strong emphasis on experiential learning as an effective approach to make education more practical, engaging, and student-centred. It encourages learners to develop a deeper understanding of concepts through hands-on activities, experiments, projects, field visits, discussions, and real-life situations instead of relying mainly on rote memorization. This establishes a meaningful connection between classroom learning and their everyday experiences and understand how learning can be applied in real world problems to strengthen the practical application aspect of experiential learning.

Experiential learning also contributes to the development of essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and decision-making. NEP 2020 promotes interactive and participatory learning that encourages students to explore, question, experiment, and learn from their experiences. The policy also supports vocational education and practical activities from an early stage. By integrating experiential learning into education, NEP 2020 aims to create a holistic and flexible learning environment. It helps students develop a deeper understanding, confidence, practical skills, and the ability to face real-world challenges effectively.

Challenges and Solutions

Experiential learning transforms education by allowing students to gain knowledge through practical experiences rather than relying solely on traditional classroom instruction. Influenced by educational thinkers such as John Dewey and David Kolb, this approach encourages learners to actively engage with real-world situations, reflect on their experiences, and apply concepts in meaningful ways. Such active participation can improve understanding, critical thinking, knowledge retention, and overall engagement. However, introducing experiential learning into conventional educational systems can be challenging. Limited resources, time constraints, curriculum requirements, teacher preparedness, and difficulties in assessing practical learning may create obstacles. Addressing these issues requires thoughtful

planning, appropriate teacher training, flexible teaching strategies, and effective assessment methods. By overcoming these barriers, institutions can create more engaging, practical, and learner-centred educational experiences.

Challenges.

There are many challenges to implement the Experiential learning. 2 important factors are as follows: -

Lack of Resources: - Implementing experiential learning often requires resources beyond those used in conventional teaching. Schools and colleges may need practical equipment, digital tools, learning materials, suitable spaces, transportation, and funding for field-based activities. Institutions with limited budgets may struggle to provide these facilities. Large class sizes can also make it difficult for teachers to offer meaningful hands-on experiences to every learner. Careful budgeting, partnerships with local organizations, and the creative use of existing resources can help reduce these limitations.

Resistance to Change: -Teachers, students, and administrators may be hesitant to move away from familiar teaching practices. Traditional lectures and textbook-based assessments are often easier to organise and evaluate. Experiential learning requires greater flexibility, planning, collaboration, and active participation. Providing professional development, demonstrating successful practices, and gradually introducing activity-based methods can help build confidence and encourage wider acceptance.

Solutions to Overcome These Challenges

1. Educate the Stakeholders

Successful implementation begins with helping stakeholders understand the value of experiential learning. A practical way to achieve this is to allow decision-makers to participate in a brief learning activity themselves. Sharing relevant case studies, research findings, and examples of successful implementation can further strengthen their confidence in the approach. Evidence showing improvements in employee performance, decision-making, engagement, or productivity can make the benefits easier to understand and support.

2. Connect Activities with Organisational Objectives

Experiential activities should be designed around clearly identified organizational needs. When an organization wants to strengthen communication between departments, activities can recreate situations that require participants to cooperate and exchange information effectively. Similarly, leadership simulations can expose participants to realistic decision-making situations. Connecting activities with practical workplace challenges makes learning more meaningful and encourages participants to apply their new knowledge in real situations.

3. Conduct Pre- and Post-Learning Assessments

Assessment provides a useful way to determine whether experiential learning has achieved its intended purpose. Participants can complete questionnaires or self-evaluations before and after an activity to identify changes in confidence, knowledge, or skills. Peer evaluations and facilitator observations can also provide valuable feedback about improvements in communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving. Comparing results from different stages helps demonstrate progress and provides evidence of the program's effectiveness.

4. Provide Continuous Reinforcement

Experiential learning should continue beyond the completion of a workshop or activity. Follow-up discussions, mentoring, coaching, reflection exercises, and periodic practice sessions can help participants remember and apply what they have learned. Regular check-ins also provide opportunities to discuss challenges, review progress, and exchange experiences. Continuous reinforcement helps transform newly acquired knowledge into practical habits and supports long-term behavioural improvement.

5. Simplify the Program Design

An effective experiential learning program does not necessarily require complicated activities or expensive resources. Simple exercises can produce meaningful learning when they have clear objectives and are appropriate for the participants. Focusing on the desired learning outcomes rather than unnecessary complexity makes program development easier, affordable, and more effective.

Future of Experiential Learning

The future of experiential learning appears promising as education increasingly focuses on practical knowledge, active participation, and real-world problem-solving. Unlike approaches that depend mainly on lectures and textbooks, experiential learning allows students to connect academic concepts with practical situations. This can strengthen understanding, improve problem-solving abilities, encourage creativity, and develop skills that are valuable in both professional and everyday settings.

However, successful implementation requires institutions to address several challenges. Limited funding, insufficient learning facilities, lack of teacher preparation, and difficulties in evaluating practical activities can restrict its effectiveness. Providing professional development for educators, investing in suitable resources, and designing appropriate assessment techniques can help institutions overcome these barriers. Technological advancement is also expected to expand the possibilities of experiential education. Virtual reality, simulations, interactive applications, and online learning

environments can create realistic experiences without requiring students to be physically present at a particular location. These technologies can make practical learning more flexible and accessible.

In the coming years, combining innovative technology with well-designed teaching strategies may make experiential learning an increasingly important part of education. By creating supportive environments and encouraging continuous experimentation, educational institutions can prepare learners with practical knowledge and adaptable skills for a rapidly changing world.

Finding of the Study

Experiential learning plays an important role in preparing Generation Z students for future careers by connecting academic knowledge with practical workplace experiences. Participation in internships, live projects, simulations, case studies, mentoring, fieldwork, and industry-based activities helps students develop essential employability skills, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, decision-making, and leadership. Such experiences also improve students' understanding of professional expectations, workplace responsibilities, and industry practices. Active involvement enables learners to apply theoretical concepts to real-world challenges, thereby strengthening confidence and practical competence. Skill development and employability skills are closely linked to experiential learning and career readiness. Industry interaction further enhances professional awareness and exposure to career opportunities. Overall, integrating experiential learning with reflection, feedback, and skill-based assessment can reduce the gap between academic education and workplace requirements while supporting students' holistic professional development and successful transition into employment.

Suggestions

Educational Institutions and the Universities should embed structured experiential learning within curricula, strengthen industry partnerships through internships and live projects, provide regular feedback and reflection, adopt skill-based assessments, and offer accessible virtual projects and simulations to ensure inclusive career preparation for all students for their development and build up the Gen Z for their bright future and career.

Conclusion

Experiential and skill-based education is becoming an important component of contemporary higher education because it connects academic learning with practical experience and workplace requirements. This approach encourages students to develop practical competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, adaptability, teamwork, and professional confidence. The principles of experiential learning and human capital development provide a strong foundation for this educational transformation, while India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further emphasises vocational education, multidisciplinary learning, practical skills, and competency development. However, achieving these objectives requires effective implementation at the institutional level. Educational institutions, government bodies, industries, educators, and

local communities need to collaborate to create learning environments that are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to changing social and employment needs. Academic syllabi should incorporate hands-on projects, skill-development activities, experiential learning opportunities and encourage sustainable practices. Teachers also need continuous training and professional development to effectively design, deliver, supervise, and evaluate practical learning activities. Greater cooperation between educational institutions and industries can provide students with meaningful exposure through internships, apprenticeships, field projects, cooperative learning, and community engagement. At the same time, assessment practices should move beyond examinations that rely mainly on memorisation and include practical demonstrations, projects, portfolios, presentations, performance-based tasks, and reflective activities that

assess how effectively students apply their knowledge. Flexible and modular learning opportunities can further encourage graduates and professionals to update their skills throughout their careers. Overall, integrating experiential and competency-based education can strengthen employability, stimulate innovation, improve productivity, and prepare learners to respond confidently to evolving workplace expectations. By linking education more closely to real-world applications, higher education institutions can develop a capable workforce and contribute to economic progress, social development, and sustainable national growth while ensuring that educational investment yields meaningful, measurable outcomes

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