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Experiential Learning Approaches in Primary Schools: A Study

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Abstract-*The present study examines experiential learning approaches in primary schools of rural Dhule district. The objectives are to study its effectiveness, compare it with traditional teaching, analyze student engagement, and identify teacher challenges. The study follows a descriptive and analytical design with a sample of 60 students and 7 teachers selected from two schools. Data were collected through achievement tests, questionnaires, observation checklist, and informal discussion. Statistical tools like percentage and t-test were used for analysis. The findings show that students taught through experiential learning perform better and show higher engagement than those taught through traditional methods. The t-test confirms a significant difference between both methods. However, teachers face challenges such as multi-class teaching, lack of training, and shortage of materials. The study concludes that experiential learning is more effective but needs proper support for successful implementation in rural schools.*

Key words: Experiential teaching, Traditional teaching, Primary schools, Academic Achievement, Students' engagement.

Introduction:

Primary education is the base stage of schooling where children develop basic skills of reading, writing, counting, and also social behaviour. In the Indian context, this stage is very important because it shapes the future learning of the child. As Kothari Commission (1966) highlighted, the quality of elementary education decides the overall development of the nation. In rural areas like Dhule district, primary schools also play a social role, as many children come from first-generation learner families. Studies by Govinda R. (2002) show that access has improved, but quality of classroom processes still needs attention. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine not only enrolment but also how teaching and learning actually happen in classrooms.

Experiential learning means learning through doing, feeling, and reflecting on real-life activities. This idea is not new. John Dewey (1938) explained that education should connect with the life of the child, and learning should come from experience. Later, David A. Kolb (1984) presented experiential learning as a cycle including experience, reflection, and application. In the Indian context, Rabindranath Tagore also supported activity-based and nature-based learning. For rural primary students, this approach becomes more meaningful because they can connect school learning with their daily life, such as farming, local environment, and community practices.

Experiential pedagogy is becoming more relevant in today's classrooms because traditional lecture methods are often not effective for young learners. Reports like NCERT (2005) National Curriculum Framework clearly suggest that children learn better when they are actively involved in the learning process. Research by Anita Rampal (2015) also indicates that activity-based learning increases participation and understanding, especially in government schools. In rural areas, where resources may be limited, experiential methods like group work, local materials, and simple activities can make learning more meaningful without high cost.

However, there is still a gap between traditional teaching and experiential methods in many primary schools. Many classrooms still follow rote learning, textbook reading, and teacher-centered instruction. As discussed by Krishna Kumar (2000), the system often focuses on memorization rather than understanding. In rural areas like Dhule district, challenges such as large class size, limited teacher training, and lack of support make it difficult to use experiential methods regularly. This creates a problem where children may attend school but do not fully understand what they learn. Therefore, it is important to critically study how experiential learning approaches are being used and what impact they have on students' learning in such contexts.

Purpose of the Study:

In many primary schools, especially in rural areas like Dhule district, there is a clear gap between traditional teaching methods and experiential learning approaches. Classrooms still depend more on textbook reading, memorization, and teacher explanation, where students remain passive learners. As noted by Krishna Kumar (2000), such practices limit children's thinking and understanding. On the other

side, policy documents like NCERT (2005) recommend activity-based and child-centered learning, but actual classroom practice often does not match these ideas. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how experiential learning approaches are used in primary schools and to understand their effect on students' learning, especially in rural settings.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its focus on improving classroom practices for better learning outcomes. In rural contexts, where students may have limited academic support at home, meaningful and activity-based learning becomes more important. Anita Rampal (2015) further also suggests that experiential methods can improve participation and understanding among young learners. This study can help teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and adopt simple experiential strategies using local resources. It may also support school authorities and policymakers in planning training and curriculum changes that are more suitable for rural primary education.

Review of Literature:

A study by **Bajaj (2021)** in NCERT journal observed primary classrooms in MCD schools using classroom observation as tool and qualitative method. It found that activity-based (experiential) learning increased student voice, participation, and understanding, while traditional teaching kept students passive.

Mathur and Singh (2023) conducted an experimental study on 40 primary students in Delhi NCR using pre-test and post-test and t-test analysis. The study found that students taught through experiential learning performed better and showed deeper understanding compared to traditional method.

Thote and Gowri (2022) used experimental method with students (school level) and achievement test as tool to compare experiential and conventional teaching. The findings showed that experiential learning improved conceptual understanding and learning outcomes more than traditional methods.

Kumari and Mittal (2026) studied 150 primary students using mixed method (questionnaire and classroom observation). The study found that inquiry-based experiential learning improved engagement (83%), motivation, and confidence among learners. The study offers strategic educational implications and recommendations for classroom implementation and policy formulation.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the effectiveness of experiential learning in primary schools
2. To analyze its impact on student engagement and understanding
3. To compare experiential learning with traditional teaching methods
4. To identify challenges faced by teachers in implementation

Hypothesis:

H_1. Experiential learning has no scientific effect on students' academic performance.

Methodology:

This study uses a descriptive and analytical research design to understand experiential learning approaches in primary schools of rural Dhule district. The study is conducted in two primary schools selected through simple random sampling. The total population includes 167 students and 7 teachers from both schools. Thus, a sample of 60 students is selected using proportionate stratified random sampling, and all 7 teachers are included in the study because the number is small.

For collecting data from the teachers, a structured questionnaire was designed to understand their teaching practices and opinions regarding experiential learning. Study also used achievement-based test for students in order to compare their learning outcomes. A checklist for observation of real teaching in both traditional and experiential methods was prepared. Informal discussion with parents and students took place to understand their learning practices. Collected data treated using statistic stools like percentage and t-scores.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table one

Academic achievement of students taught through traditional and experiential methods

Methods	N	Mean	SD
Traditional	30	21.39	4.09
Experiential	30	27.81	3.57

Data from the above table refers comparison of academic performances of students learning in different methods. The means score of student learning through traditional methods is 21.39, while the means score learning through experiential teaching is 27.81. This clearly shows that students learning through

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experiential method perform better than students learning through traditional teaching method. The comparison between the two groups shows that experiential learning helps students to understand concept in a better way and helps to improve their learning also.

Table two

Testing hypothesis

H_1. Experiential learning has no scientific effect on students' academic performance.

Methods	Mean	t-value	Significant level	Result
Traditional vs Experiential	6.43	5.11	0.05	Reject

The t-test was applied to check whether the difference between the two groups is significant or not. The calculated t-value is 5.11, which is higher than the table value at 0.05 level of significance. This means that the difference between traditional and experiential learning is statistically significant.

Therefore, the null hypothesis "Experiential learning has no scientific effect on students' academic performance" is rejected. It proves that experiential learning has a significant positive effect on students' academic achievement in primary schools.

Table three

Students' Engagement in Learning

Level of Engagement	Traditional Teaching	Experiential Teaching
High	33%	69%
Moderate	39%	19%
Low	28%	12%

Data presented in above table shows the level engagements of students in both teaching pedagogies. In traditional teaching method 33% students show high engagement in the class activities, while in experiential learning, this engagement is 69% also low engagement of students in traditional method is higher than the experiential teaching method. As low engagement is higher in traditional teaching classroom compare to experiential (12%), this shows that students in experiential learning classroom are more active and participate maximum.

Table four

Challenges faced by teachers while implementing Experiential Method

Challenges faced by teachers	N	Percentage
Lack of proper training	6	85.70%
Multi-class teaching	7	100%
Lack of instructional material	5	71.40%
Weightage on covering syllabus	4	57.10%
Classroom Management problems	4	57.10%

The above table shows the challenges faced by teachers while using experiential learning in primary schools. The most common problem is multi-class teaching, where all 7 teachers (100%) reported that they have to teach more than one class at the same time. This makes it very difficult to plan and conduct activity-based learning properly because teachers cannot give equal attention to all students.

Another major challenge is lack of proper training, reported by 6 teachers (85.7%). This shows that most teachers do not have enough training or guidance to use experiential methods effectively in classrooms. Because of this, they find it difficult to design activities and manage learning through experience.

Also, 5 teachers (71.4%) reported lack of instructional materials, which means schools do not have enough teaching aids like charts, models, or activity-based resources. This limits hands-on learning in classrooms. In addition, 4 teachers (57.1%) said that there is pressure to complete the syllabus, which forces them to focus more on textbook teaching instead of activities.

Finally, 4 teachers (57.1%) also mentioned classroom management problems. They feel that students become more active during experiential activities, which sometimes becomes difficult to control in large rural classrooms. Overall, the data shows that although experiential learning is useful, teachers face many practical problems in implementing it effectively in rural primary schools.

Findings of the Study:

1. The academic achievement of students taught through experiential learning is higher than those taught through traditional teaching method.

2. The t-test result shows that there is a significant difference between traditional and experiential learning. So, experiential learning has a positive effect on students' performance.
3. Students in experiential learning classrooms show higher engagement, interest, and participation compared to traditional classrooms.
4. Traditional classrooms show more low and moderate engagement, which means students are less active in learning.
5. Teachers face many challenges while using experiential learning in primary schools of rural Dhule district.
6. Even though teachers accept that experiential learning is useful, they are not able to apply it fully in real classroom situations due to practical difficulties.

Conclusion:

The present study concludes that experiential learning is more effective than traditional teaching in primary schools of rural Dhule district. The results show that students taught through experiential methods perform better in academic achievement and also show higher engagement and interest in classroom activities. The t-test result also confirms that there is a significant difference between both teaching methods, which clearly supports the effectiveness of experiential learning in improving learning outcomes.
However, the study also concludes that teachers face several practical challenges in implementing experiential learning. Problems such as multi-class teaching, lack of training, shortage of teaching materials, syllabus pressure, and classroom management difficulties limit its regular use in schools. Therefore, it can be concluded that although experiential learning is highly beneficial for primary students, proper training, support, and resources are necessary for its successful implementation in rural school settings.

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