A Literature Review On Experiential Learning Applied To College Students' Quality Improvement Projects

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Abstract - **Experiential learning is a popular learning method in many countries in recent years. In order to cater to the development of high-quality and highly-skilled talents, many colleges and universities focus on improving the comprehensive quality of students through experiential learning courses or projects. Experiential learning caters for the preferences and needs of adult students. Interesting and rich classroom activities, positive classroom atmosphere, emphasizing the enrichment of students' emotions and practical experience, etc., experiential learning not only effectively improve students' classroom participation, but also improve students' comprehensive quality and ability. This study searched and analyzed the existing relevant literature. After analysis, four main themes of experiential learning applied to college students' quality improvement project were identified: enhancing students' sense of social responsibility, enhancing resilience and willpower, enhancing teamwork ability, and enhancing interpersonal communication skills. The results show that there are still many problems in practical application of experiential learning projects as a bridge connecting classroom and practice in colleges and universities. For example, the classroom environment and atmosphere of experiential learning created by teachers, the control ability of classroom activity design and classroom management will all have an impact on the effect of students' experience of students. Lack of effective guidance from teachers lead students to focus on the experience of activities, while ignoring the meaning behind the activities. This research review provides certain references for research on the application of experiential learning and the improvement of students' quality in colleges and universities. It can also provide opportunity for teachers to better reflect on teaching actions and teaching design.**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The literature on experiential learning has grown rapidly in recent years. At the same time, experiential learning in European and American countries has gradually moved from the level of social outdoor survival training to colleges and universities. Experiential learning is a new learning method that has become popular in many countries in recent years. Katula & Threnhauser (1999) identified experiential learning as one of the most notable trends in higher education during the past thirty years (Austin&Rust,2015). Besides, Canadian post-secondary institutions are increasingly incorporating experiential learning (EL) into their strategic planning to enhance student learning, particularly given EL's benefits in heightening student engagement (Kuh, 2008).

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), more than half of surveyed college seniors reported engaging in experience-based activities in their college career (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2010).

Research has shown adults aged over 21 years learn differently than their younger counterparts, preferring to learn through experience (Kolb,2014). The use of participatory and experiential teaching techniques in adult education is of major importance because it greatly affects parameters such as the activation of learners, the creation of a positive learning environment, the achievement of learning objectives and ultimately the successful outcome of a learning process (Brookfield, 2013; Courau, 2000).

EL is a teaching philosophy which seeks to "engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities"

(Association of Experiential Education,2012). In recent years, higher education has incorporated EL as a way to develop students' abilities to problem solve from a real world perspective (Tarrant, 2010).

Through literature review, it can be seen that in college education, EL is widely promoted mainly because it caters to the preferences and needs of adult students, and interesting activities and a positive classroom atmosphere can increase the participation rate in the classroom. The effective combination of theoretical courses and practical application is very attractive to college students. Experiential learning practices have been identified by Kuh (2008) as high-impact educational practices that have been shown through research to increase student retention and engagement.

Its learning characteristic is that in a specific continuous course cycle, in the teaching activities carefully designed by teachers, students act through experience, connection, observation, reflection, and specifically, apply the theory of reflection to the new society. Through the experience, the whole process has spiraled upward and become self-contained.

In colleges, EL primarily serve as a bridge between the classroom and practice. A large number of literatures show that experiential learning can improve college students' abilities such as quality skills, innovation and entrepreneurship, communication skills, teamwork skills, and emotional personality shaping. At the same time, it stimulates the enthusiasm and initiative of learning and enhances the participation in the classroom.

At the same time, through intentional teaching design and practice, it helps students to establish a good attitude, improve various qualities such as teamwork ability, interpersonal communication ability, increase their knowledge, and enhance their sense of social responsibility, so as to become active citizens who contribute to society. The quality improvement projects of colleges and universities mainly focus on experiential learning and take various forms.Mainly include: outdoor quality development activities, psychodrama performances, corporate and museum visits, movie viewing, etc.

II. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND COLLEGE STUDENTS' QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Enhance students' sense of social responsibility

Individual social responsibility (ISR) is motivated by the desire to do good and help others (Droms et. al.,2015).

As the public attaches great importance to the sense of social responsibility of college students, some colleges and universities have incorporated the sense of social responsibility into the core curriculum. Such courses are increasingly interdisciplinary, and the learning location is not limited to the classroom, but also the community. In educational literature, learning occurring outside of the classroom frequently meets the definition of experiential learning（Caulfield &Woods,2013).

How to help students develop into socially responsible citizens is the focus of experiential learning. Caulfield &Woods (2013), suggested that utilizing EL with a focus on social issues can have a direct impact on students socially responsible behavior, increasing the likelihood the students will become a proactive of their community. Employing a qualitative longitudinal research design involving 25 graduate students as participants, this study explored the issue. The findings indicated that 94.7% of participants who reported a high impact learning experience when participating in experiential learning while enrolled in a graduate class also reported engaging in socially responsible behavior because of that learning experience. In some instances, the socially responsible behavior continued for as long as three years after the class had ended.

Droms et. al. (2015) used quantitative analysis methods to analyze the collected data. ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the effects of the ICR, Gender, and Age on each of the dimensions of ISR since the three factors are categorical variables. To examine the relationships between the ISR and CSR dimensions, regression analysis was applied, including Gender and Age of the respondents. In general, the results indicate that implementing this type of curricular program is beneficial to the students but affects students differently based on their gender and age. Specifically, the results show that female students generally have a higher level of individual social responsibility than their male counterparts.

Overall, there is still little literature on the effectiveness of incorporating social responsibility courses into college

curricula, as well as the impact on students and on students and the society. Future research should explore how experiential learning programs can help students take on social responsibility. At the same time, the cooperation between universities and the community will be closer, the issues involved in research will be more complex, and the interdisciplinary integration will be stronger.

Enhance resilience

Resilience is defined as a person s ability to overcome hardships and setbacks in their life (Brooks, 2006). Resilience is defined as an individual s characteristics and capacities that mitigate the factors that threaten an individual's health and well-being (Kaplan, 2002). These facets of character have been directly linked to academic, career, and life success and are therefore, important facets of an individual s character composition (Tough, 2013).

The shaping of character or values is often formed naturally by students in family life.Educators explore how to enrich students' emotional experience and shape their character through the college classroom. There is a lot of literature on the role of experiential education in shaping students' character. Teachers create situations according to specific emotional goals and students' actuality, and with the help of the intuition and imagery of the situation, stimulate students' senses and arouse the corresponding emotional experience, so that students can unconsciously touch motivation and achieve development.

Okur-Berberoglu (2017) evaluated the impact of an outdoor experiential environmental education program on the affective domain of adult participants. Data collection methods such as: psychodrama, non-participant observation, open-ended questions and content analysis were applied in this qualitative case study. Both indoor and outdoor experiential programs were designed in accordance with Kolb's theory on experiential teaching. The results of the study show that students gradually develop empathy and resonance with the natural environment after participating in the outdoor environment experience education course.

On the other hand, Davidson (2016) chooses two character traits of grief and resilience as important variables to study the impact of outdoor quality development education on students' character more comprehensively. For

the purpose of this study, Outward Bound (OB) was utilized as the data collection site. This study is also a valuable addition to the existing evidence that resilience can be enhanced through participation in AE program, a concept which is not yet validated with younger populations.

Shamsulariffin Samsudin(2021) investigated the effect of outdoor education camp programs on the levels of resilience among Physical Education students from two selected universities in Malaysia. A questionnaire was utilized as the primary research tool in this study to assess the participants' perceptions and knowledge acquisition as well as their level of resilience toward the outdoor education camp programs. The findings indicated a positive effect towards resilience upon completion of the 14-day outdoor education camp program.

As mentioned above, resilience, as one of students' psychological capital, is a hot issue for experiential learning to shape students' character. In general, the current research gives less focus on college students in higher vocational colleges, and the impact on poor college students is clearly not ventured yet. There are problems such as weak pertinence and lack of systematic research. Simultaneously, youth from the ages 12 to 22 years-old have received far less attention in the current literature (Beightol, 2012). Generally, the majority of research in this area has been in the personal growth arena, including issues of self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-concept, and the relationship with academic success, including success at learning languages (Neill (2003).

In addition, according to Neill current literature claims that AE programming can enhance personal growth, but there is little evidence to show if it enhances academic achievement, much less success in an academic environment, especially in terms of issues such as graduation rates.

Teamwork ability

Team quality development, as one of the common ways of experiential learning, is an important way to cultivate students' team consciousness and spirit. As the public attaches great importance to the teamwork ability of college students, a large number of quality development centers have appeared in the commercial market. It is not uncommon to build student quality development centers on college campuses. According to news reports, in 2013, a

university in Jiangxi, China, in order to improve students' potential and enhance their teamwork ability, built an expansion center of more than 2,000 square meters and it is well favored by students.

The connotation of team spirit is very rich, it includes the spirit of unity and cooperation, the spirit of coordination and cooperation, the spirit of communication and trust and so on. Team quality development takes physical activity as the carrier and games as the form to improve the education model of personality. The influence of outdoor quality development activities on college students' teamwork ability. A growing body of literature affirms teamwork as a valuable teaching strategy. Wang (2013) through the exhibition training, enables students to control the internal and technological methods of the team, the role and strength of the team, the strength of the team, and the emphasis on the team and the team's service of the team and the team, so as to achieve the purpose of the consciousness of the students and team teams. Through the investigation, Wang passed nearly seven years of practice and exploration. We believe that outreach training is the most effective method and approach to strengthen the team building of higher vocational students. At the same time, after investigation, more than 98% of them think that outreach training is helpful to the cultivation of team spirit.

Liu et.al. (2009) conducted the analysis of data carried out through experimental method, questionnaire survey method, mathematical statistics method and other research methods, and found that after outdoor quality development activities, about 81.25% of the students believed that their quality in all aspects had significantly improved. 12.5% of the students think that there is a certain degree of improvement, and 6.25% of the students think that the improvement effect is not obvious. Judging from the statistical results and the performance of the students after the training, the extended training undoubtedly played a key role. The improvement of communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork ability and spirit was the most significant (85.60%), the ability to analyze and solve problems, and leadership potential are the next (76.8%), and the improvement of innovation and vision thinking is the least obvious. In terms of gender, outreach training has a deeper impact on female college students. Outward Bound training is helpful for the development of extroversion and the healthy growth of individuals. Judging from the

inspirational experiential learning program for impoverished students in higher vocational colleges in China, the duration of the current course cycle ranges from one week to half a year, and teamwork ability is regarded as one of the teaching focuses of experiential learning. To achieve this teaching focus, teachers often work in small groups to help students form teamwork and cohesion.

Regarding the question of how long the duration of the experiential learning course cycle can help the student group form a strong team cohesion, the researchers believe that after a team group is formed, it should be maintained for an appropriate amount of time to form teamwork cohesion.

In Fulford's Team Based Learning experience students learn the content as well as how to use it. This methodology has shown that students continue learning even after the course is complete. The model requires that groups are properly formed; remain intact long enough to become cohesive teams; and, are repeatedly given challenging tasks with reflective prompts and clear feedback (Fulford, 2013).

At the same time, the teaching effect of team quality development varies from person to person. In teaching, there are many things that are not conducive to team building. From the perspective of students, taking poor college students in higher vocational colleges in China as an example, Wang (2013) directly pointed out that under the influence of the family atmosphere, the only child and the children of migrant workers in the current higher vocational student group are "me-centered". Consciousness is particularly strong. Ideas such as individualism and self-reliance seriously hinder team building. At the same time, poor vocational students have a sense of inferiority due to their poor family conditions, but they are hard working in their study to get better grades. But many poor college students prefer to study alone rather than cooperate with others. In their opinion, it is more efficient to complete the course tasks alone. There are also students who think that teamwork is a challenging task, and they are afraid and resistant. In order to complete this course project, students need to select team members within the first two weeks of class. Students openly or privately complained that working on a team can be overly challenging. Many commented they would prefer to work independently. There is a perception that working on a team can decrease their ability to be productive Kathleen & David, 2014).

From the teacher's point of view, without the effective

guidance of teachers, students cannot really acquire the ability of teamwork in teamwork projects. Although teachers are also very much looking forward to students' ability to work as a team in the course, at the same time, students also complete the course activities according to the teacher's requirements. However, about what skills the teamwork ability includes, how to do it, how to gradually acquire the teamwork ability, etc., the students obviously did not get the corresponding guidance from the teachers.

Snyder (2009) found that student preparation to work collaboratively or other lessons related to teaching students about how to engage in teamwork were vastly overlooked. Without instructional or experiential preparation in teamwork or collaborative processes, team members may be driven by the task, but not achieve optimal results (West (2000).

Therefore, in the process of implementing the team quality development course, teachers should pay attention to exploring ways and means to strengthen team building. Among others, these strategies should be implemented:

1. Generate the core of the team through activities. However, the way to identify the core of team leadership should be jointly selected by all students after completing activities carefully designed by teachers to reflect students' leadership skills.
2. Form a team culture through discussions.
3. Accomplish team goals through actions.
4. Sublime team spirit through experience.

In addition, some researchers believe that during this period, experienced teachers can keenly observe and monitor students' psychological, emotional and psychological changes for these are key indicators for success. In the course, teachers need to encourage them to overcome psychological barriers and actively participate in activities. Only with active participation, their core competencies are gradually and continuously developed.

Interpersonal communication skills

In order to make students succeed in the fierce competition for jobs, colleges and universities attach importance to students' interpersonal communication skills and integrate them into experiential learning courses.

Curtis et. al. (1989) conducted a study and suggested that communication skills were the top-most high rated skills

that students must possess in order to get job after graduation, and later it is important for effective job performance. In this regard, Skinner et.al. (2016) describes the implementation of an experiential small group learning approach in an undergraduate physiotherapy program. Specifically, it looks at the potential value of PBL as a tool to assist students develop interpersonal and communication skills. Implications for practice are that: experientially based small group learning with opportunities for practice, reflection, self-evaluation and feedback, can improve students' confidence and interpersonal skills; consistent and scaffolded participation in experiential learning opportunities and assessment of this participation across the program is key to this approach.

Many literatures hold a positive attitude towards the improvement of college students' interpersonal communication ability through experiential learning. However, there are still issues that need attention in terms of practical application, particular the needs to be paid to its potential effects.

Firstly, the theory of interpersonal communication skills should be closely combined with practice. Skinner et al. (2016) found that effective interpersonal skills are both difficult to learn and to teach because it involves development, practice and evaluation, both in educational and clinical settings. In addition, Wloszczak-Szubzda & Jarosz (2013) indicated that when education about communication is based on theoretical knowledge alone, with no alignment to practical applications, the transfer of that knowledge to the clinical setting seldom happens. Because, learning should be a constructive, self-directed, collaborative and contextual process.

As to whether experiential learning or traditional teaching methods can improve students' interpersonal communication skills, researchers have different opinions.

Farhan Uddin Raja & Najmonnisa (2018) compare experiential learning method and traditional learning method to explore which method inculcates and improves the communication skills of business administration students of a private sector university. The study was conducted in a quantitative paradigm using an experimental research design. The data were collected using a pretest and posttest. For the pretest, communication skills were imparted to both the groups using the traditional teaching method that heavily comprises of lectures. For the posttest,

the controlled group was taught using the same traditional teaching method while the treatment group was taught using the experiential learning method. The result shows that experiential learning method improves students' communication skills better than traditional communication skills.

According to Qazi & Simon (2012), students in Pakistani classrooms do not get enough experience of the practical application of business communication skills. The teachers choose to teach students using readily available power point presentations and material which restricts students learning to the theoretical basis of the skills. To improve the situation, Lewis & Williams (1994) suggest that it can take many forms namely, simulations, case studies and group work activities. They further suggest that allow students to apply their theoretical and conceptual knowledge through activities that can develop skills among them or new ways of thinking.

However, when teachers use experiential learning methods, if they lack clear teaching objectives, fail to improve students' participation and enthusiasm, and fail to stimulate college students' learning interest and motivation to improve interpersonal communication skills, experiential learning methods cannot even match the learning effects of traditional teaching methods. The literature suggests that, for some students, more explicitly articulating the requirements, goals, skills and knowledge of PBL and relevance of these to professional competence are crucial to their engagement with PBL. We have some anecdotal evidence to suggest that whilst the PBL approach to learning and scaffolding of interpersonal skills benefits many students, those students who do not engage with the process may be less successful than they may have been with the traditional approach. This requires further exploration in terms of how accurate and prevalent these perceptions are, and specifically which of the strategies used may enhance student engagement and motivation. It is interesting to note that although the PBL cohort felt more prepared for practice in terms of their interpersonal skills than did the traditional cohort, but this was still the domain with the lowest ratings. Based on the feedback from employers after students graduated or from a teaching perspective, the experiential small group approach has been more effective than the traditional approach, however there are rooms for improvement (Skinner et al., 2016).

However, some researchers have raised some questions with experiential learning and teaching for experiential learning needs the guidance of teachers to enable students to undergo the process. Dorgu (2015) found that even active adult learners need instructional guidance in experiential learning techniques, the classroom environment and atmosphere directly affect the impact of students' learning. This is one of the factors that teachers must consider. A positive classroom atmosphere is conducive to students' active participation and enhances the willingness and ability of students to unite and cooperate.

On the contrary, if not properly addressed, it can hinder or prevent students from participating in an EL activity or deprive them from their fullest potential, regardless of how well they activity was planned. Among these, the first considerations are the classroom climate. When students perceive the classroom climate as physically and emotionally safe, they can feel free to participate in experiential learning experiences even though they may face difficult and unfamiliar challenges (Shukla et al., 2016). At the same time, in the course of classroom design or during the course of classroom activities, teachers may have the problem of expressing their experience but lacking in in-depth thinking. For example, excessive design of student activities such as various kinds of sketches and games, but lacking in effective guidance, is not going to facilitate the learning process. The students only experience classroom activities mainly focused on sketches or games, without the meaning and thoughts behind the activities.

III. METHODOLOGY

The definition of experiential learning in this paper adopts Kolb's experiential learning theory. Regarding the definition of EL, Kolb argues that learning is the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience and knowledge resulting from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984).

Today's experiential learning approach is based on Kolb programmatic and scientific experiential learning theory. Kolb also complement EL with Piaget's theory of cognitive development which emphasize that intelligence is formed in experience, and that individual knowledge originates from sensory experience. Through systematic scenario design, learners are introduced into the learning situation, allowing

them to experience learning "on the spot", such as touching with hands, discerning with eyes, listening with ears, smelling with nose and generating with brains. The process provide a more specific, clearer and moving understanding about something that is experienced. Taking into account the contradiction between rationalism and empiricism, Kolb creatively proposed the concept of "experience learning circle". Guided by the intellectual traditions of social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology, he seeks to construct a framework that strengthens the important relationship between education, work, and personal development through a system of competencies (Klob, 2008).

When the connections are salient, experiential learning guides students to comprehend their concrete personal experiences within a more abstract theoretical framework; this can result in increased motivation and personal development (Jarvis ,1987; Kolb, 1984).

This paper studies the application of experiential learning theory on college students during their *Comprehensive Quality Improvement Courses* from January 2022 to April 2022. The types of literature collected include books, journal articles, news reports, dissertations, etc. mainly from the following academic databases: VIP Chinese Journal Service Platform, Wanfang Data, ERIC, Scopus, etc. Literature sources have high credibility and authority. The main search keywords are experiential learning, experiential learning applied to teamwork ability, interpersonal communication skills, outdoor quality development, emotional experience, resilience, etc. Then using induction, read and code the article to identify the topic. Determining the context of literature writing from the literature: the definition of experiential learning, the current situation of experiential learning projects in universities around the world, the role and impact of experiential learning on the improvement of college students' quality, teachers' use of experiential learning teaching strategies in courses, the current problems and challenges, etc.

IV. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Whether it is for colleges or university students, it is not easy to improve comprehensive quality through experiential learning. The success of experiential learning programs in colleges and universities is affected by many factors. In addition to the above-mentioned need for a good teaching atmosphere and environment, teachers' teaching design ability and teaching implementation ability; resource and financial allocation and support from government and universities; human and material resources; and, the status of students' emotional cognition level. In particular, students' motivation to learn plays a very important role. In this regard, the currently applied experiential learning method seems not applicable to all college students. This is especially true for special group of students in colleges and universities, such as poor students, and students with physical and mental disabilities because their needs and facilities are not available yet at the present time.

The limitation of this literature review is mainly due to the author's time and limited skill in search ability. Naturally, there are a lot of valuable literature are missing from the collection. In addition, the author's ability to analyze the literature is also limited and the depth of the analysis of the literature is not intensive enough. However, this literature review, to a certain extend could contribute to the development of research on the application of experiential learning to college students quality improvement programs.

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