Analytical Study *of Experiential Learning: Experiential* Learning Theory in Learning Activities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to describe *experiential learning* in learning activities. David A. Kolb's Learning Theory highlights four keys stages: experience, reflection, abstract concepts, and active experimentation. This research is a library research or literature review, primarily focus on collecting and reviewing various previous studies on Kolb's learning theory. The findings indicate that the four stages of *experiential learning* models can enhance student engagement, deepen understanding of subject matter better, develop critical and creative skills to face future challenges, and foster collaborative work, and it can be effectively implemented at all levels of education. It can be concluded that learning activities using the *experiential learning* model can encourage student involvement to achieve maximum learning outcomes, and can be used at all levels of education while still paying attention to elements of relevance of the material and learning environment. However, there are still several shortcomings and challenges in applying this theory, particularly in terms of resource readiness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the foundation for both individuals and societal progress, making it important for educators (teachers) to continually reflect on the use of learning methods that align with the needs of students or learners. However, several problems remain, for instance, some students are less enthusiastic in participating in learning activities due to teachers often apply monotonous teaching methods (Julinda *et al.,* 2022). In addition, students continue to struggle with understanding the subject matter, leaving them unable to provide further explanations about the subject covered. In addition, current learning activities are not fully optimized for the development of basic skills and students often face difficulty finding solutions to the problems posed by teachers (Susanti *et al.,* 2022). These issues show that learning activities that foster thinking skills, particularly critical thinking, have not been maximized. This fact confirms the results of previous scientific observations, which show that critical thinking skills among Indonesian students remain in the low

category (Pradana *et al.,* 2020) and critical thinking skills are not taught specifically within educational activities, resulting in these skills not being fully achieved (Fitriani *et al.,* 2018). In fact, the ability to think is as important as the ability to read and write (Yefang *et al.,* 2024)

Based on the description above, the three components that are interrelated in learning activities are teachers, students and the learning environment. Teachers (Educators), the learning environment, and each student are the main factors that influence each other in the development of students' critical thinking skills (Yang et al., 2021; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021; Wu *et al.,* 2024). The learning environment, apart from being a *locus*, can also be used as a learning object. As a *locus*, the environment plays a role in providing consideration to teachers so that the methods and subject matter are relevant to the culture and characteristics of students. The environment as a learning object is the real experience of students who are carried out either individually or in groups in acquiring knowledge (Immaniar *et al.,* 2019) In this context, navigating the development of critical skills as one of the achievements of learning outcomes requires to use learning methods or approaches aligned with the context of students and learning content.

 Learning methods continue to evolve alongside the need to improve the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process (Zambrano et al., 2023). One approach that is receiving growing attention is *Experiential Learning* (EL) or experiential learning. This method was first introduced by David A. Kolb in 1984 and has since become one of the most influential learning models in contemporary education. Through the implementation of experiential learning theories, educators at all levels of future education can apply a deeper understanding of new knowledge that is always relevant to real-life practice (Eisenberg *et al.,* 2024).

Experiential Learning emphasizes the importance of direct experience in the learning process. This model consists of four main stages: *Concrete Experience*, *Reflective Observation*, *Abstract Conceptualization, and* Active Experimentation (Ratih, 2020). This approach aims to integrate theory with practice, enabling students not only to understand the concepts theoretically, but also to apply them in real-life situations. Each of these stages is interconnected and forming a continuous learning cycle (Holmes & Hwang, 2016; Ridwan, 2019; Uppor et al., 2024)). Another opinion is that experiential learning is *bottom-up* and student-centered in the development of systematic thinking, normative and collaborative competencies in sustainability (Coleman *et al.,* 2024). A strong educational experience can provide a new perspective on what is considered ordinary in everyday life and in the learning process (Hensley, 2019)

The implementation of *experiential learning* in learning activities has shown various benefits, including increased student engagement, development of critical skills, creative thinking and the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations (Latif et al., 2024; Wu *et al.,* 2024; Amalia & Hariyono, 2022; Ismail & Saiful, 2022; Pinasti, 2023; Yefang *et al.,* 2024) In addition, previous research has shown effectiveness from experiential learning. Research using interview, observation, and documentation methods in lecture activities shows that *experiential learning* can increase students' enthusiasm in participating in lecture activities, and the experiential learning model aligns with student needs, making it suitable for all courses as long as it is relevant to the situation and resources. By using *the Experiential Learning* (EL) model, it can minimize the gap in knowledge and experience between students (Graeff, 2010)

At the high school level, experiential learning has a positive impact on student participation. The results of the research of Immaniar *et al.,* (2019) on Senior High School (SMA) students using the *Quasi experiment* method show that the experimental and control classes have differences in classroom management and learning models. The Experiential Learning model successfully create a better environment driven by student participation compared to the control class. This result aligns with the research of Susanti *et al.,* (2022) which found that *the Experiential Learning* Model significantly influenced the critical thinking ability of students of SMA Negeri 11 Muaro Jambi.

The benefits of experiential learning are not limited to learning in universities and high schools, but also positively impact learning in junior high school, elementary and early childhood education.

The research of Setyarini & Mulyono (2020) on junior high school students with an experimental method shows that *the experiential learning model* is highly effective in improving poetry writing skills in junior high school, which also improve learning outcomes (Nurdiah *et al.,* 2024) The research by Julinda *et al.,* (2022)) on elementary school students, using interview and test methods, found that the application of *the Experiential Learning model* had a positive impact on improving learning outcomes, which was characterized by an improvements in student learning achievements in each learning cycle. The implementation of *the experiential learning* model in elementary school students can increase students' active participation and involvement in activities connecting theory with real-life practices, with a priority on direct experience, collaboration, and reflection, leading the students to become more involved and understand concepts better (Febrian *et al.,* 2024)

In Early Childhood Education (PAUD), experiential learning has shown that each experiential learning cycle can be well-implemented in Early Childhood Education (Yetra *et al.,* 2020). Dewi *et al.,* (2023) using quantitative descriptive analysis methods, also showed that *the experiential learning model* improved the social-emotional skills of group B children at PAUD Adnyani. Previous research indicates that experiential learning can be applied at every level of education, making it an effective method in various educational contexts, from primary education to higher education, and across various disciplines (Sagusman, 2016; Egan et al, 2023; Yefang *et al.,* 2024; Coleman *et al.,* 2024). However, further research is needed. Therefore, the gap between this study and previous research lies in the research methods and locus.

This study uses a literature review to describe theoretically *experiential learning* in learning activities. In addition, previous studies have focused more on spesific levels of education. Hence, this research seeks to bridge this gap by providing a theoretical overview of *experiential learning* in learning activities. The theoretical overview described in this article is not limited by the level of education. Accordingly, the title of this article is "An Analytical Study *of Experiential Learning: Experiential* Learning Theory in Learning Activities"

The purpose of this study is to analyze the theory of *experiential learning* in learning activities. By descriptively exploring the basic concepts of *experiential learning* in learning activities, it is hoped to provide a deeper understanding of *experiential learning,* thereby addressing various challenges such as the need for resources and the educators' readiness to adopt more flexible and dynamic approach.

2. METHOD

The type of research is library *research* or literature review to examine various studies related to the application of Kolb's learning theory in learning activities. The primary data sources in this study are journal articles published within the last five years, while the secondary data sources are books and journals with published within the last ten years. Data collection techniques or research data are sourced from the google scholar database, ERIC *Institute of Education Sciences* (eric.ed.gov), and others, which are online based. The strategy for determining journal articles is selected based on (1) published by reputable and/or accredited journals, (2) there are no restrictions on the scope of publication, article authors and research locations, whether domestic and international, (3) there are no restrictions on the use of research methods

The data analysis technique used is qualitative data analysis with the steps (1) the researcher analyzes journal articles as primary data to describe experiential learning theory and its implementation in learning activities; (2) the research findings from the primary data are combined with the expert opinions; this step is carried out to describe the suitability of the theory with the empirical evidence that has been carried out by previous researchers, and (3) conclusions are drawn to answer the research objectives.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Experiential Learning Model (ELM) was developed by David A. Kolb and Ron Fry in the early 1970s, emphasizing the relationship of ideas or theories from John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Kurt Lewin,

and others regarding the paradigm of learning experiences (Pinasti, 2023). *Experiential Learning* is a learning process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. According to Kolb, learning is a process that involves four main stages that are interconnected and continuous. This method combines elements of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism, making it a holistic approach in education. *The Association for Experiential Education* (AEE) defines *experiential learning* as a philosophy and methodology that involves educators directly involves to motivate students in reflective activities focused on increasing knowledge and developing skills (Anggreni, 2020). Through *the Experiential Learning Model* (ELM) it helps and encourages students in learning, understanding, appreciating and practicing the important values of each subject in real life (Apriliana et al., 2022). Answering the significance of the Kolb model, students need to engage with contextual concrete experiences, contextual-specific abstract conceptualization, and pragmatic active experiments (Morris, 2020). This process can accelerate the achievement of outcomes at every stage of learning (Froehlich et al., 2015; Jeyaraj, 2019)

David A. Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory* (ELT) consists of four interrelated cycles, namely *Concrete Experience* (CE), *Reflective Observation* (RO), *Abstract Conceptualization* (AO), and *Active Experimentation*(AE). Each of these stages is interrelated and forms a continuous learning cycle (Uppor, 2024) (Kolb, 1984)

According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that repeatedly continued by involving creative thinking process across four modes of learning and four stages that navigates each other to increase the involvement of the participant in a concrete experience (CE), considering various perspectives while reflecting on the experience (RO), integrating ideas into working theory (AC), and experimenting in the use of These theories are while problem-solving or decision-making (AE). The four experiential learning cycles described by David A. Kolb can be seen in the figure in this.
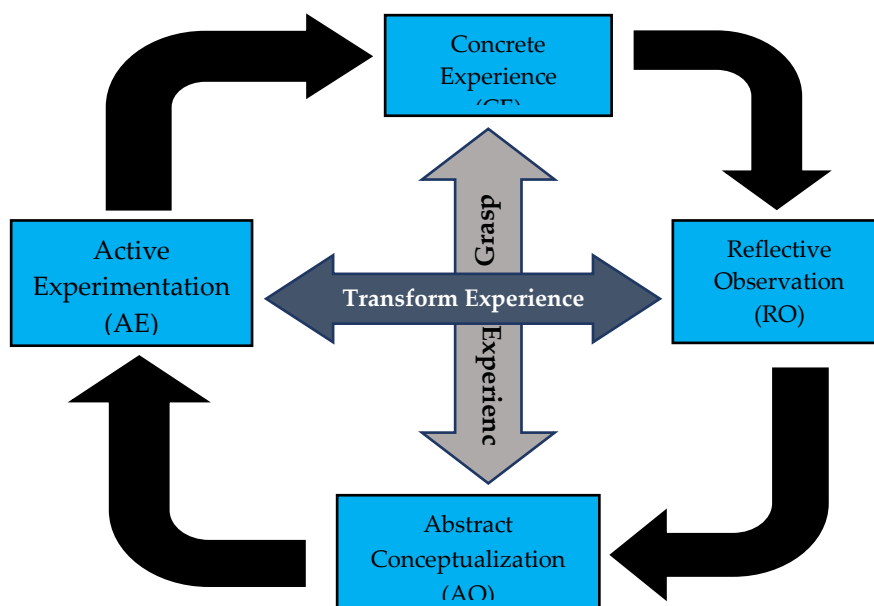
Source: Egan et al, 2023
Experiential learning cycle by David A. Kolb
(Egan et al, 2023 adapted from Kolb & Kolb, 2009)

1. **Concrete** *Experience*

At this stage, students directly experience new situations or events. Concrete experiences can be in the form of practical activities, simulations, or experiments that allow students to be actively involved (Pinasti, 2023). In addition, concrete experiences include interaction with actual experiences or specific events and include what is seen, heard, and felt (Uppor et al., 2024)

The role of concrete experience in experiential learning plays an important role in the learning process because: (a) Active Engagement: Learners not only hear or read about concepts, but also experience them firsthand. This increases engagement and motivation to learn. (b) Practical Skills Development: Through hands-on experience, learners can develop practical skills that are relevant to real-life contexts. (c) Deep Reflection and Understanding: Concrete Experience provides the foundation for critical reflection, which is the next stage in the Kolb learning cycle. This reflection helps students to understand their experiences more deeply and relate them to theoretical concepts. A key emphasis at this stage is that learners must be open to new experiences and actively participate and be closely engaged with the content, and real experiences serve as the foundation of learning (Hursen, 2021; Uppor *et al.*, 2024)

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that concrete experience is a crucial stage in the *Experiential Learning (EL)* cycle developed by David A. Kolb. This stage allows learners to actively engage in the learning process, develop practical skills, and build a foundation for deeper reflection and understanding. Concrete experiences not only enrich the learning process but also prepare learners to face real-world challenges.

2. *Reflective Observation*

At this stage, students reflect on the experiences they had. This reflection helps learners understand the experience from various perspectives to determine what they learn from real experiences through critical thinking (Froehlich et al., 2015; Uppor *et al.*, 2024)

At this stage, learners reflect and observe the experiences they have just experienced. This process involves critical analysis and reflection on what has happened, allowing students to understand the experience in more depth. **The Role of Observational Reflection in Learning** plays an important role in the learning process because: (a) **Deep Understanding**: Through reflection, learners can analyze their experiences and identify important aspects that may not be visible at the time the experience occurs. (b) **Analytical Skills Development**: This stage helps learners develop analytical skills by reflecting on different perspectives and connecting experiences with theoretical concepts. (c) **Knowledge Gap Identification**: Observational reflection allows learners to identify gaps in their knowledge and plan steps to fill those gaps.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that observational reflection is a crucial stage in the *experiential learning* cycle developed by David A. Kolb. This stage allows learners to reflect on and analyze experiences, develop analytical skills, and identify knowledge gaps. Thus, observational reflection not only enriches the learning process but also prepares students to face real-world challenges.

3. *Abstract Conceptualization*

This stage involves developing a concept or theory based on reflection from concrete experience. Abstract conceptualization uses analytical skills to synthesize ideas and concepts learned in the previous stage through rigorous and logical reasoning to understand experiences and relate them to broader concepts (Egan *et al.*, 2023). Students develop theories that predict what will happen in a given situation. This understanding of a situation provides a foundation of knowledge that is the basis for individuals to make rational and important decisions (Uppor *et al.*, 2024)

In the abstract conceptualization stage, individuals begin to develop ideas and theories based on reflections from the student's own experiences. It involves analytical and logical thinking to

understand experiences and relate them to broader concepts. Abstract conceptualization allows individuals to make generalizations and predict the outcome of similar future situations.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that abstract conceptualization in David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is an important component that aids individuals in developing a deeper and theoretical understanding of the experiences of each participant in the study. In practice, this stage helps students and professionals or educators to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and apply it in real-life situations.

4. *Active Experimentation*

At this stage, students apply concepts or theories that have been developed in real-life situation. This stage involves practical actions and experimentation to test hypotheses and validate concepts that have been studied, with active experimentation allowing individuals to test theories in real-world contexts and observe the results firsthand (Lehane, 2020)

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that Active Experiment in David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is an important component that helps individuals develop practical skills and apply knowledge in real-life situations.

Kolb also identified four different learning styles based on individual preferences in undergoing this learning cycle (Moon, 2013), namely:

1) *Diverging:* This learning style prioritizes concrete experience and observational reflection. Individuals with this style tend to be creative and able to see situations from different perspectives.
2) *Assimilating:* This style emphasizes observational reflection and abstract conceptualization. Individuals with this style prefer todeeply understand concepts and theories.
3) *Converging:* This style prioritizes abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Individuals with this style tend to prefer solving problems and applying ideas in practice.
4) *Accommodating:* This style prioritizes concrete experiences and active experimentation. Individuals with this style prefer to learn through hands-on experience and try new things.

Research shows that the application of experiential learning theory can increase student engagement, deepen understanding of concepts, and develop critical and creative skills (Eisenberg *et al.,* 2024; Pinasti, 2023; Yefang *et al.,* 2024; Sagusman, 2016; Coleman *et al.,* 2024). However, there are several challenges in its implementation, such as the need for adequate resources and educators training.

Overall, the experiential learning theory developed by David A. Kolb offers a holistic and dynamic approach to the learning process. By integrating hands-on experience, reflection, concepts, and experiments, this method can help learners to better understand and apply the concepts learned in real-life situations. Despite criticism of this model, Kolb's contribution to education remains significant and relevant across various of learning contexts. Some critics argue that this model is too linear and does not consider the complexity of learning in different contexts. Some researchers have tried to revise and expand this model to include lifelong learning and episodic experiences (Egan et al, 2023)

Discussion: *Experiential Learning* **Implementation in Learning Activities**

According to David A. Kolb, the learning process is a creative activity that provides everyone with the opportunity to develop and grow. Therefore, Kolb suggests "Let Experience Be a Source of Learning and Development", Kolb is convinced that "the learning process is not passive, but requires students to actively experience" each learning process (Wu *et al.,* 2024). Greene (2001) even believes that powerful educational experiences can open up the world to students, offering new perspectives on ordinary things (Hensley, 2019)

The application of Kolb's experiential learning theory is evident when education translates each student's experience into the Kolb experiential learning cycle as a best-practice approach to achieve

learning outcomes (Eisenberg *et al.,* 2024; Pinasti, 2023; Yefang *et al.,* 2024; Sagusman, 2016; Coleman *et al.,* 2024).

1. **Concrete Experience in Learning Activities**

     At this stage, educators design activities that allow students to experience the learning material firsthand. This is in line with the Independent Curriculum that provides opportunities for students to be directly involved in various real-life learning activities through various approaches which involved students. This concrete experience helps students to understand the subject matter better through hands-on engagement.

     Some examples of Concrete Experience in the context of education e.g., (1) Laboratory practicum: Students conduct hands-on experiments in the laboratory to understand scientific concepts. (2) Simulation and *Role-Playing*. Students participate in simulations or role-playing games that mimic real-world situations. This method helps students understand concepts better through hands-on experience and reflection. (3) Project-based *learning* and field trips Field Projects: Field activities that allow students to collect data and observe phenomena directly. In addition, these activities allow students to apply the concepts they have learned in real-life situations, develop problem-solving skills, and work collaboratively. (4) Problem-Based *Learning*: Students are presented with complex problems that must be solved using the knowledge and skills they have acquired. This method encourages students to think critically, work together, and apply knowledge in relevant contexts (Wu *et al.,* 2024; Eisenberg *et al.,* 2024)

2. **Observational Reflection in Learning Activities**

     The insight is that motivation, when balanced with student involvement in the classroom, can be one of the determining factors for educational success (Friedman & Goldbaum, 2016; Fariha, 2020; Kong, 2021). Through observational reflection activities in learning activities, students are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences through discussions and reflective journals. This reflection is important to help students understand personal experiences from various perspectives and relate them to relevant theories. Furthermore, it can develop social skills and positive attitudes in students (Voukelatou, 2019)

     Some examples of Observational Reflection in an educational context include: (1) Reflective Journal: Students write journals about their experiences and reflect on what they have learned. (2) Group Discussion: Students discuss in small groups to reflect on their experiences and share perspectives. (3) Case Analysis: Students analyze case studies and reflect on how theoretical concepts are applied in real-life situations. Regardless of type of activity in this cycle, the goal needs to be oriented towards preparing students for lifelong learning independently, being able to face challenges in real life with self-confidence, and being able to adapt to various changes (Umkabu & Lestari, 2023). It is because learning is a continuous process that is tested by the contextual experience of students (Mohd Noor et al., 2020)

3. **Abstract Conceptualization in Learning Activities**

     In this stage, students develop concepts or theories based on reflection. The learning activities in this cycle encourage students to think critically and creatively in developing their understanding of the subject matter. Reflection and Discussion Activities: Students are invited to reflect on their learning experiences and discuss what they have learned. This reflection helps students internalize knowledge and develop a deeper understanding.

4. **Active Experiment in Learning Activities**

     Students apply concepts or theories they have developed in new situations through experiments or projects. This stage allows students to test and validate their understanding in different contexts.

Regardless of the type of activities conducted by teachers and students in this cycle, it is important to note that all previous cycles should be oriented to help students consolidate the learning experience through verbal and written reflection, as well as determine the actions that can be taken. Formulating concrete actions is important to encourage each student to validate the understanding gained from the previous cyclus in real life (Uppor *et al.,* 2024; Wu *et al.,* 2024; Eisenberg *et al.,* 2024). Therefore, in experiential learning, students have to undergo relevant and direct experience, followed by reflection and practical implementation in the learning process, which result and impact the development of deep understanding, practical skills, and increased implementation of positive attitudes towards each student (Umkabu & Lestari, 2023)

Based on the findings and discussions above, the *experiential learning* model emphasizes the importance of direct experience, reflection, and practical application in the learning process. Through real-life experiences that are relevant to real life, students can develop a deep understanding, practical skills, and a positive attitude towards learning. This model prepares students to become lifelong learners who are independent, creative, and ready to face future challenges with confidence. In an ever-changing and complex world, the ability to learn from experience, adapt to change, and overcome challenges becomes an invaluable skill.

The Advantages and Disadvantages *of Experiential Learning* are as follows. *First*; Advantages: The advantages of the implementation of *Experiential Learning* are (1) Increasing the in-depth understanding and relevance of the material. (2) Developing practical skills and critical thinking skills, and (3) Increasing student motivation and engagement. *Second*; Disadvantages: The disadvantages of implementing *Experiential Learning* are (1) Requires more time and resources. (2) Not all materials can be taught through direct experience, (3) Requires good facilitation skills from teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

Experiential learning *theory* is a learning model that fully engages students in learning activities, with all learning activities are student-centered, and student learning experiences. Based on a literature review, this study concludes that *experiential learning* has an impact on increasing student involvement in learning, helping students in relating learning materials to real life. Therefore, with these real experiences, students can remember and understand the information obtained in education, thereby improving the quality of education.

Experiential learning is a learning theory that emphasizes direct experience, involvement, and reflection. Learning activities through a continuous cycle of investigation, reflection, analysis, and synthesis can encourage students to think critically and creatively. This learning is designed and implemented based on the students' own experience in completing tasks and work, and related to the common ways of learning.

The experiential learning *model,* consisting of four cycles, can encourage the involvement of students to achieve optimal learning outcomes, and can be applied at all levels of education while still paying attention to the elements of material relevance and learning environment. This method not only helps students better understand the subject matter, but also develops critical and creative skills that are essential for facing future challenges. However, some shortcomings and challenges remain in the application of this theory. One of them is the readiness of resources. The application of this theory in formal education requires support from various stakeholders, including teachers, schools, and parents. Teachers need to be trained to implement experiential learning methods, while schools need to provide adequate resources. In addition, parents can also support by providing opportunities for their children to learn through experiences outside of school.

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