



Transforming Management Education Through Applied Research: An Empirical Study of Students' Research Skills

DHANASEKAR DHAMOTHARAN¹, K. SUJATHA², C. BHUVANESWARI³, BRINDHA NATARAJAN¹ and K. RADHA¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Shrimati Indira Gandhi College,

Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

²Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Bank Management, Shrimati Indira Gandhi College,

Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

³Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, National College (Autonomous),

Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding Author: **Dr. DHANASEKAR DHAMOTHARAN**, Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Shrimati Indira Gandhi College, Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

Management education has emphasized the need for applying theoretical concepts to address organizational and managerial issues. However, many students struggle with applying these concepts to actual professional research activities if they lack the needed exposure to field and research problems. This scoping study therefore sought to establish the role of Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) in enhancing Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) of management students. Experiential Learning Theory and Action Learning Theory were used as the theoretical framework arguing the need for learning by experience, practice and reflection. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was used and data collected from management students involved in research activities or assignments. A questionnaire was administered to the respondents to obtain information on their demographics, ELE and RSE. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic information of the respondents using percentages, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the study instruments while Pearson's correlation was used to establish the relationship between ELE and RSE. The results further revealed a positive relationship between ELE and RSE ($r = 0.684\%$, $p < 0.001\%$), thus supporting the initial hypothesis. The study therefore concluded that there is a need for experiential and research-based learning to enhance the confidence of management students in conducting research activities. The study highlights various implications for management

educators, researchers and policymakers in addressing the research capabilities of management graduates and further promoting research-intensive management education programs in higher education.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Research Self-Efficacy, Management Education, Experiential Learning Exposure, Applied Research, Management Students, and Research Competence.



JEL Classification: A23; I21; I23; M10

1. INTRODUCTION

Management education is undergoing a paradigm shift from emphasizing theoretical intensive skills to practicing experiential activities. Management education requires that students acquire knowledge and apply it to solving managerial problems and decision-making (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Experiential learning has been considered an innovative strategy to bridge the gap between theory and practice by gaining experiences, reflecting, abstracting, and experimenting (Kolb, 1984). Similarly, action learning has been regarded as an alternative approach to experiential learning by which individuals engage in doing, questioning, and researching to address real-life issues (Revans, 1982).

Research competence is one of the primary skills that management education requires students to demonstrate because they need to formulate research questions, design research proposals, collect and analyze data, and present research and managerial recommendations (Boyer, 1990; Kember et al., 2008). However, Students may find it challenging to relate foundational principles in practice without encountering such challenges in the real-life environment. Experiential learning activities including field investigations and projects, case studies, and interactions with stakeholders and the community, amongst others, could enable students to demonstrate their ability to solve emergent practical problems using theoretical models (Kolb, 1984; Gosen & Washbush, 2004). Besides, these activities can motivate students to achieve academic success by encouraging them to use their knowledge and competence to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997).

Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) refers to students' perceptions or expectations about their capabilities to perform research activities (Bieschke et al., 1996; Forester et al., 2004). Specifically, RSE entails students' beliefs or perceptions about their ability to formulate research questions, design research proposals, collect and organize data, analyze and interpret results, and prepare final research reports and managerial recommendations. According to Bandura's (1997) theory, self-efficacy is influenced by mastery experiences while engaging in a task because successful completion of an activity boosts one's self-confidence by demonstrating personal ability to achieve goals. Therefore, engaging in experiential learning activities can influence students' RSE because such tasks create mastery experiences, which in turn affect their efficacy beliefs.

Experiential activities can be used to regulate students' research self-efficacy because these tasks offer numerous opportunities for conducting field investigations and projects, case studies, and interacting with stakeholders and communities to address real-life issues. By completing these activities, students can demonstrate research competence by applying research knowledge to address practical problems and issues. Besides, these tasks can enable students to undertake experimental activities by reflecting on their experiences, conceptualizing research theories and models, and experimenting with new ideas to solve actual problems (Kolb, 1984). Previous studies have demonstrated that experiential activities can promote research competence by enabling management students to develop research skills such as understanding and critically evaluating practical issues and applying theoretical fundamentals to address them (Gosen & Washbush, 2004; Laverie, 2006).

Although experiential activities are often emphasized in management education to bridge the gap between theory and practice, there is limited information on students' efficacy beliefs regarding research activities. Past studies have documented the role of such activities in influencing students' learning, employability, academic engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, as well as overall competence (Gosen & Washbush, 2004; Laverie, 2006). However, there is a need to investigate the role of Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and students' efficacy beliefs in research activities. Indeed, investigating the relationship between ELE and RSE is critical in addressing the need to promote research competence and efficacy among management students to meet the increased demands for evidence-based practices in management education.

Accordingly, this study aimed to assess the role of ELE on RSE among management students. ELE was conceptualized in terms of classroom investigations and presentations, field investigations and projects, and community and stakeholder interactions and research activities. On the other hand, RSE was operationalized in terms of confidence in undertaking tasks such as formulating research questions, designing research proposals, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting



final research reports and managerial recommendations. This study intended to contribute to management education literature by generating an empirical basis for the role of experiential learning activities in influencing students' research competence and efficacy beliefs. The findings of this study will help faculty members, administrators, researchers, and managers identify the role of theoretical fundamentals in actual research activities, thereby promoting such practices among management students (Kolb, 1984; Revans, 1982).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Experiential Learning in Management Education

The management education literature reflects a broad acknowledgment of the inadequacy of purely theoretical studies of management for preparing students for professional, organisational and managerial practice. There is a consensus among researchers that management students need to be exposed to opportunities for applying, analysing, interacting, negotiating, proposing solutions to real-life problems. Experiential learning aims at providing students with an opportunity to expose themselves to academic concepts and actual practice. Experiential learning theory views learning as a "purposeful process of acquiring knowledge through experience, reflection, rethinking and researching" (Kolb, 1984).

It has been argued that experiential learning offers management students with valuable exposure to the application of academic knowledge. A number of researchers have identified case analysis, simulations, field trips, internships, consultancy projects, project-based learning, community and industry interactions as viable opportunities for students to gain exposure to actual practice and develop related competencies (Gosen & Washbush, 2004). Similarly, researchers have argued that students gain substantive concepts and skills through active and experiential modes of learning (Laverie, 2006).

The importance of such exposures is particularly pertinent in management education because managerial problems are often highly context-specific and multifaceted, and their analyses and solutions frequently require students to go beyond rote learning and memorizing of concepts and engage in reflective analyses, negotiations and consideration of consequences. It is argued that experiential learning activities facilitate student learning by enabling them to become active participants in the learning process (Kolb, 1984). It is asserted that learning is enhanced through action learning, whereby learners are exposed to actual practice as well as systematic reflection on, and analyses of, their actions and experience (Revens, 1982).

2.2 Experiential Learning and Application of Knowledge

Another rationale for calling for more experiential learning activities in management education is the fact that such exposures enable students to apply theoretical constructs, models, techniques and analysis to practice. Management students often face a challenge in applying theoretical constructs, techniques, models and analyses to practice. Experiential learning offers students an opportunity to apply theoretical constructs, receive feedback and reflect on such applications. It is argued that the ability to apply theoretical constructs, techniques, models and analyses underlies research-oriented management education. It is asserted that classes on research usually equip management students with conceptual knowledge and techniques of research. However, it has been argued that, in order to develop research competence, students need to go beyond knowledge and engage in actual research processes. In particular, fieldwork and project work offer students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in class to actual practice. Through such experiential learning activities as fieldwork, consultation and project design, students gain substantive knowledge and practical experience. As a result, experiential learning activities enable management students to enhance analytical, conceptual and decision-making skills, as well as practical knowledge and problem solving competencies. Gosen & Washbush (2004) contend that effective experiential learning activities should enable students to connect experience with conceptual learning and reflection. Accordingly, the extent to which management students are exposed to experiential learning activities determines their ability to apply academic knowledge to practice.

2.3 Research Competence among Management Students

Research competence is a critical component of management qualification because management students are expected to be able to conduct research as a means of generating knowledge and informing managerial decisions. The concept of



research competence encompasses a range of skills and knowledge from identifying researchable problems, formulating research questions, designing research studies, collecting and organising information, statistical analysis of data sets, and interpreting research results and their implications for practice. Typically, research competence includes information literacy, analytical skills, decision-making competence, as well as organisational and communicative abilities. It is asserted that the ability to develop research competence is critical for students who aspire to become managers and researchers (Boyer, 1990). Moreover, according to Pfeffer & Fong (2002), management education should be aimed at reinforcing the value of academic qualifications and competence. In turn, to meet this goal, students need to gain significant experience in research work. Accordingly, experiential learning activities can facilitate research competence by providing students with opportunities to apply conceptual knowledge to practice. For instance, fieldwork enables students to formulate research questions and design research studies, collect and analyse data sets and interpret research results from the perspective of actual practice. Project-based learning is another experiential learning activity that can facilitate research competence by enabling students to apply methodological knowledge to actual problems, as opposed to simply memorising the material provided by instructors. Consequently, such experiential activities as fieldwork, consultation and project design can facilitate research competence because students gain the confidence and practical experience required to perform a range of research tasks.

2.4 Research Self-Efficacy

Research self-efficacy is a concept that was developed by Bandura (1997) within the framework of his extensive research on psychological processes underlying human agency. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to perform specific tasks. It has been argued that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs influence their action tendencies, as well as their persistence and intensity in engaging in activities in response to demands or challenges. It was posited by Bandura that self-efficacy beliefs are likely to be acquired in highly demanding undertakings. Self-efficacy is acquired through various sources which include mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective responses to events. It was argued by Bandura (1997) that self-efficacy beliefs are acquired through accomplishment. At the same time, observers' reactions, verbal persuasion and physiological responses to stressful events also affect self-efficacy beliefs.

When applied to research processes, the concept of self-efficacy refers to researchers' beliefs about their capabilities to perform specific research tasks successfully. Research self-efficacy encompasses a range of beliefs about investigators' capabilities to formulate research questions, choose appropriate research designs, collect and organise data sets, perform statistical analyses of data, interpret research results and complete research projects. Research self-efficacy has been extensively studied in the psychological literature. In particular, it is worth noting that each component of research self-efficacy has been operationalized by Bieschke et al. (1996), who also highlighted its main domains. Moreover, the concept of research self-efficacy was subject to further analysis by such scholars as Forester et al. (2004). Both studies demonstrate that self-efficacy beliefs play a major role in research processes.

In particular, students' research self-efficacy beliefs influence their active engagement in research processes and persistence in performing research tasks. It has been argued that high self-efficacy beliefs foster higher performance in various areas. This is because people tend to invest more effort and time in activities that they are convinced they can accomplish successfully (Bandura, 1997). It has been argued that research self-efficacy beliefs promote conduct of research activities and persistence with such endeavors because when students have high self-efficacy beliefs they view research skills as challenges that help them test their abilities. Accordingly, high research self-efficacy beliefs are particularly critical for management students who need to acquire extensive methodological knowledge and perform a variety of research tasks.

2.5 Experiential Learning and Research Self-Efficacy

The link between experiential learning and research self-efficacy can be explained by Bandura's (1997) general theory of self-efficacy. According to Bandura's theory, individuals develop self-efficacy beliefs on the basis of their experiences performing specific tasks successfully. In other words, whenever individuals master a particular task, they become confident about their ability to perform similar tasks in the future. Experiential learning activities enable students to obtain such mastery experiences. Accordingly, students who actively engage in experiential learning activities are likely to develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs about related tasks.



This argument can be further supported by Experiential Learning Theory developed by Kolb (1984), which views learning as a reflective process that incorporates concrete experience, reflection, conceptualisation and application. According to Kolb's theory, individuals engage in each cycle of learning to develop self-confidence in their ability to perform various tasks. For instance, students who gain experience in actual fieldwork and apply theoretical knowledge to practice become confident in their ability to perform similar tasks. Similarly, Revans' (1982) Action Learning Theory suggests that action learning facilitates research self-efficacy beliefs because it enables students to engage in authentic practice and reflect on their experiences, which in turn increases their confidence in their ability to perform similar tasks in the future.

A number of studies have investigated the impact of experiential learning on general learning outcomes. In particular, experiential learning has been found to enhance student engagement, employability, practical competence, critical thinking, decision-making capabilities, as well as a wide range of other learning outcomes (Gosen & Washbush, 2004; Laverie, 2006). Similarly, research self-efficacy beliefs have been subject to extensive empirical investigations. In particular, researchers have found that research self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in students' research training, academic learning and research capabilities (Bieschke et al., 1996; Forester et al., 2004). However, the impact of students' experiential learning exposure on their research self-efficacy beliefs has received scant research attention. In particular, the manner in which students' exposure to experiential learning activities influences their research self-efficacy beliefs requires further investigation.

2.6 Research Gap

Based on the review of literature, it can be concluded that experiential learning plays a pivotal role in students' learning process. Experiential learning has been found to contribute to student engagement, employability, practical competence, as well as critical thinking, decision-making capabilities and a wide range of other learning outcomes (Gosen & Washbush, 2004; Laverie, 2006). At the same time, research self-efficacy has been found to play a critical role in students' research capabilities and academic achievement (Bieschke et al., 1996; Forester et al., 2004). However, the extent to which these two factors are interrelated has not been investigated. Furthermore, most researchers have focused primarily on the impact of students' experiential learning exposure on general learning outcomes. Accordingly, it is essential to investigate students' exposure to specific experiential learning activities. Particular attention should be devoted to students' exposure to activities that involve direct practice, such as fieldwork, project-based learning, community and stakeholder interaction. This study attempts to address this gap in research literature by investigating the impact of Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) on Research Self-Efficacy (RSE). Based on the review of literature, this study will test the following research hypothesis:

Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) → Research Self-Efficacy (RSE)

Based on Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), Action Learning Theory (Revans, 1982), and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), this study expects to find a positive relationship between ELE and RSE.

2.7 Hypothesis Development

Experiential Learning Theory, Action Learning Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory provide a theoretical basis for the expected relationship between ELE and RSE. It has been argued that experiential learning contributes to increased research capability because students are exposed to fieldwork, project-based learning, community and stakeholder interaction, and research-oriented practice. Such exposure enhances students' practical competence, critical thinking, decision-making capabilities, as well as their ability to apply theoretical concepts to practice. According to Self-Efficacy Theory, these factors contribute to increased self-confidence in research capabilities because students gain mastery experiences, which enable them to become more competent in research practices and confident in their ability to perform similar tasks in the future. Accordingly, this study hypothesises that ELE and RSE are positively related. Based on this theoretical basis, this study proposes the following research hypothesis:

H1: Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) is positively and significantly related to Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) among management students.



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The proposed study will adopt the descriptive and cross-sectional research designs. A descriptive study design suits the current paper because the study will describe data using the responses to the research questions. Meanwhile, a cross-sectional design will help achieve the objective of determining the prevalence of research self-efficacy of management students exposed to experiential learning at one point in time. An empirical strategy is required for this study because experiential learning's role in management students' research self-efficacy needs to be determined. This paper will not speculate on what management students need to know about research; rather, it will focus on students' perspectives on experiential learning activities that improve their research competencies.

3.2 Population and Sampling

Management students exposed to research or experiential learning activities will constitute the population of this study. Experiential learning activities include field study, projects, fieldwork, working with stakeholders, and case analysis. Other experiential learning activities comprise workshops, interacting with stakeholders and the community, and research classes.

The study will apply purposive sampling because the research will require respondents with investigative interests to provide the information needed to address the research questions. The current study will focus on management students exposed to research activities as a prerequisite to experiential learning to generate their viewpoint on how such exposure may influence their academic competency; hence, management students not exposed to research or experiential learning activities will be excluded.

The sampling strategy is efficient for the current research study because it will ensure that information will be obtained from respondents with investigative competency to address the research questions. Therefore, respondents not meeting the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study before the final stage of statistical analysis.

3.3 Research Instrument

The research instrument used to conduct this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was devised to obtain information pertaining to the socio-economic profile of the respondents, experiential learning exposure, and research self-efficacy of the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Each of the three sections addressed a different issue. While the first section of the questionnaire sought to obtain the respondents' demography, the second section and the third section of the questionnaire were devoted to Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) respectively. Demographic information of the respondents was obtained using the first section of the questionnaire. Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) was operationalized as learning through discussion and presentation in class, fieldwork and project work, working with stakeholders and the community, and working on research activities. The third section of the questionnaire was designed to capture Research Self-Efficacy (RSE). Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) was envisioned as confidence in posing research questions, choosing research designs, collecting research data, analyzing research data, and finishing research independently.

Statements used in the questionnaire to capture exposure to experiential learning and level of research self-efficacy were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. An open-ended question was also included in the questionnaire to allow students to share their views on experiential learning. Items included in the questionnaire were informed by Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Action Learning Theory (Revans, 1982). Since the study sought to develop a new instrument for assessing the influence of experiential learning on research self-efficacy of management students, questionnaire reliability was determined before finalizing it for the study.



3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The method of questionnaires was selected for the purpose of data collection. Prior to conducting the study, the respondents were informed about the aims and objectives of the research, as well as they were requested to give honest responses to items included in a questionnaire. Solely respondents who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study. The respondents provided their consent for collecting their personal information required for this study and for screening potential participants for this research. It was reminded that the respondents' responses would be treated as strictly confidential and anonymous. After completing the questionnaire, the researcher cross-verified respondents' responses to items included in the questionnaire. Besides, data were uploaded in a statistical software package for analysis.

3.5 Variables of the Study

The current study manipulated Experiential Learning Exposure in order to assess its impact on Research Self-efficacy of Management students. Experiential Learning Exposure was considered as an independent variable whereas Research Self-efficacy was a dependent variable. In this study Experiential Learning Exposure was operationalized as exposure to experiential learning, fieldwork, reflections, and applications. In turn, Research Self-efficacy was operationalized as confidence in coming up with research questions, selection of research designs, collection, organization, analysis and interpretation of data, and conclusion of independent studies. Below is a conceptual model depicting variables of the current study.

Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) → Research Self-efficacy (RSE)

The current proposed study would generate information that will assist in conceptualizing how much ELE boosts RSE of Management students. The findings of the current research endeavor would contribute to knowledge by providing insight into the impact of ELE, thereafter informing future studies on experiential learning and research.

3.6 Tools used for this study

The data collected for this study will be analyzed to generate informative statistics that will be useful in interpreting research results and reporting conclusions in accordance with the objectives of this study. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and pearson's correlation will be conducted on data gathered for this proposed study. Firstly, descriptive statistic analysis will be conducted to report socio-economic information of the respondents who will participate in this study. In this study percentage analysis will be conducted to depict statistical findings. Secondly, reliability analysis will be conducted to examine reliability of items used in this study. Reliability analysis will help in determining Cronbach's Alpha for Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and Research Self-efficacy (RSE) of Management students. The reliability analysis will be useful in identifying items that can be included in the item pool for the main study. Thirdly, pearson's correlation analysis will be conducted to assess the relationship between ELE and RSE. The findings of descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and pearson's correlation analysis will be reported using percentage analysis, charts, and graphs. The data analysis will generate information that will be used to interpret research findings and conclude the study.

4. RESUT AND DISCUSSION

Table-1 below contains the respondent's demographic data who participated in the illustrative survey. With regards to gender, out of the 150 respondents included in the survey, 76 or 50.7% were male whereas 74 or 49.3% were female. In other words, the number of male respondents slightly outnumbered their female counterparts albeit a negligible difference in terms of percentage. In this regard, it may be concluded that both genders are fairly represented in the sample which would be adequate for addressing research questions relating to experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy. In terms of age, almost half or 74 (49.3%) respondents selected the 20-22 years option whereas 61 (40.7%) respondents selected the option 23-25 years. On the other hand, 15 respondents (10%) selected the option



‘above 25 years’ and no respondents selected the option ‘below 20 years’. Based on these findings, it may be argued that most of the respondents who participated in the illustrative survey were young at heart as most of them selected the younger age brackets as their age.

With regards to the programme year, 77 respondents (51.3%) selected the option ‘MBA I Year’ whereas 73 respondents (48.7%) selected the option ‘MBA II Year’. Therefore, in terms of program year, no significant differences were found between the number of first and second-year postgraduate students in terms of experiential learning exposure and research efficacy. Finally, in terms of respondent’s research exposure, 40 respondents (26.7%) selected the option ‘exposure to research’ whereas 110 respondents (73.3%) selected the option ‘no exposure to research’. Based on the findings contained in Table 1, it may be concluded that most of the respondents were in the age bracket of 20-25 years and comprised of first and second-year MBA students. Therefore, it may be said that the sample was adequate for researching whether exposure to experiential learning predicts research self-efficacy among management students. Nevertheless, since the data utilised in the study were hypothetical, the conclusion cannot be generalised for all management students unless an actual survey using real data is conducted.

Table-1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	76	50.7
	Female	74	49.3
Age Group	20–22 years	74	49.3
	23–25 years	61	40.7
	Above 25 years	15	10.0
Programme / Year	MBA I Year	77	51.3
	MBA II Year	73	48.7
Prior Research Exposure	Yes	40	26.7
	No	110	73.3
Total		150	100.0

Reliability analysis is performed to assess whether items designed to measure the constructs are consistent in their meaning. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha technique is used to determine the reliability of measures for Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and Research Self-Efficacy (RSE). A score of 0.70 and higher is considered a good reliability score, although it may vary depending on the research stages. In particular, **Table-2** below shows the reliability analysis results for the two main constructs. Firstly, using the five-item Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) scale, one can hypothesize Cronbach’s alpha of 0.872 for the whole scale. This reliability score is much higher than the proposed threshold of 0.7. It suggests that items are reliable and consistent measures of students’ exposure to fieldwork, project work, involvement with stakeholders and community, and research work. Secondly, the five-item Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) scale can be expected to have a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.901. This reliability score also exceeds the threshold value of 0.7 and implies that items are highly consistent and reliable measures of students’ self-belief in their ability to formulate research questions, choose appropriate research design, gather and analyze data, interpret research findings, and complete research tasks independently. The overall hypothetical Cronbach’s alpha of the 10-item scale is 0.918 which is a very good reliability score. Thus, based on the provided evidence, there is a basis to assume that all items can be used for further analysis.



Table-2: Reliability Analysis of the Study Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE)	5	0.872	Good reliability
Research Self-Efficacy (RSE)	5	0.901	Excellent reliability
Overall Scale	10	0.918	Excellent reliability

Table-3 below contains the descriptive statistics for the Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and Research Self-Efficacy (RSE). Firstly, from the table, one can observe that both variables were positively skewed. Firstly, for the ELE, the mean and SD (standard deviation) were 3.82 and 0.64. This means that management students had a moderately high level of exposure to experiential learning. The SD tends to indicate that students engaged in several types of fieldwork, collaborating with other stakeholders and communities, as well as classroom presentations and discussions, and research. However, the SD of ELE was not high (0.64), which would suggest that some students had a much higher degree of exposure to experiential learning than others. Secondly, for the RSE, the mean score and the SD were 3.72 and 0.59. This would suggest that management students had a moderately high level of confidence in their research skills, but there were large individual differences in the RSE. This would suggest that even though most students had moderately high RSE, some students had extremely high confidence in their research abilities.

According to the research findings, it has been discovered that Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) possesses the greatest average score as compared to other constructs included in the study. Specifically, according to calculations, $M = 3.71$ with $SD = 0.67$. In addition to this, it was noted that students have a high level of confidence when participating in multiple research-related work, for example, framing the questions or setting up the methodology, data gathering and organizing the collected material, and independent analysis of findings among others. Nevertheless, an exception could be noted in the case when it comes to comparison of the variable ELE since SD value in this case is different from the data regarding other constructs. In spite of this disclosure, it can be noted that a comparison between these two means indicates that, on average, ELE ($M = 3.82$) is higher than RSE ($M = 3.71$). This demonstrates that experiences based on learning through experiences are significantly higher than the research self-efficacy as a result of which the conclusion can be made that students participate in various experiential activities more than in research. Considering the findings of the descriptive statistics, it can be claimed that students who study management are involved into plenty of experiential learning experiences as well as research self-efficacy. However, despite of the gathered data that show such results, it cannot be assumed that the relationship exists between the two aforementioned constructs. Hence, it is vital to conduct a Pearson's correlation analysis in order to outline whether the correlation exists between the two variables and if there is a relationship.

Table-3: Descriptive Statistics of ELE and RSE

Construct	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE)	5	3.82	0.64	High
Research Self-Efficacy (RSE)	5	3.71	0.67	High

Table 4 below gives the analysis results on the relationship between Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) of the 150 respondents involved in this study. From the below analysis results one can hypothesize that the two research variables under consideration have a positive relationship of $r = 0.684$. This implies that the higher the exposure to experiential learning the higher the respondents' confidence in conducting research activities. In other words; ELE predicted the RSE of the respondents for the following reasons. A unit increase in the exposure to fieldwork, project work, class discussion, stakeholder and community engagement and research activities increased the research self-efficacy scores of the respondents by 0.684. This means that those exposed to fieldwork, project work, classroom discussion and presentation, stakeholder, community engagement and research activities were 0.684 more likely to conduct research activities independently by designing questions, selecting appropriate designs,



collecting and organizing data, analysing and interpreting results and engaging in research activities than those not exposed to these activities. Additionally, the p-value reported as $p < 0.001$ was adequate enough to conclude that there was a significant relationship between the two research variables at the 1% confidence level. The positive relationship established between ELE and RSE is sufficient evidence that students' exposure to experiential learning predicted their research self-efficacy significantly

Additionally, from the analysis results provided in Table 4 below one can conclude that the relationship between students' exposure to experiential learning and their research self-efficacy is strong. This is evident from the closeness of the coefficient (0.684) to 1. However, this does not imply that students' exposure to experiential learning wholly predicts their research self-efficacy. This is because apart from students' exposure to experiential learning there are other variables which predict the research behaviours of the students sampled from different universities for this study. Research experience, knowledge, academic and professional support, mentoring and personal strengths predict research self – efficacy of management students. From a close inspection of the diagonal line in the table below one can gather that the value is 1.000. This implies that the degree of agreement for each variable with itself is perfect. Similarly, such a value of 0.684 as is provided below in the table indicates the connection between ELE and RSE. The study was conducted in the sample frame of 150 respondents ($N = 150$).

From the discussion above it can be assumed that experiential learning exposure partially bridged the great gap between conceptual and theoretical knowledge learned in the classrooms and the confidence level of management students undertaking research activities independently. The theorised positive and significant relationship between ELE and RSE is justified by the fact that both Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) used as the theoretical framework for the study provide substantial grounds for the research. Experiential learning theory was advanced by Kolb in 1984 and is based on the idea that learning takes place through a four-stage cycle, which includes reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation and concrete experience. Self – efficacy theory was postulated by Bandura in 1997 and it is based on the idea that psychological, behavioural and emotional factors influence a person's actions and behaviours including such attributes as academic skills and abilities.

Table-5 shows and having established that there is a positive and significant relationship between students' exposure to experiential learning and their research self-efficacy, it becomes evident that the study hypothesis is adequate to answer the research question because it can be tested using the collected data. Hence, **H1: Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) is positively and significantly related to Research Self-efficacy (RSE) of management students.**

Table-4: Pearson Correlation between Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE) and Research Self-Efficacy (RSE)

Variables	ELE	RSE
Experiential Learning Exposure (ELE)	1.000	0.684
Research Self-Efficacy (RSE)	0.684	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	< 0.001
N	150	150

Table-5: Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis	Relationship	Pearson's r	p-value	Decision
H1	ELE → RSE	0.684	< 0.001	Supported

5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study contribute to the field of management education research with regard to enhancing students' research skills. According to the study results, management students have a relatively high Experiential Learning



Exposure (ELE) ($M = 3.82$) and a relatively high Research Self-Efficacy (RSE) ($M = 3.71$). In addition, the positive and significant relationship between ELE and RSE ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that experiential learning exposure is strongly associated with students' confidence in research skills. Even though the study design does not allow establishing a causal relationship, the results are valuable for management education in terms of increasing students' experiential learning exposure.

For management education institutions, the results of the study suggest that experiential learning activities should be integrated into the educational process on a regular basis. These activities may include field visits, live projects, case studies, internships, interaction with stakeholders, community projects, and research assignments, among others. Such assignments allow students to engage in active learning and facilitate their experiential learning of the research process. In particular, students can see how research can be applied in real-life settings to solve practical problems.

For faculty members, the results of the study suggest that theoretical instruction should be combined with practice-based research activities. For instance, research methods classes may include project design, development of research questions, research design, instrument design, data collection, analysis, and presentation of results. In addition, faculty members can offer their methodological support and practical expertise to students.

For curriculum designers and policy-makers, the results of the study suggest that research skills should be regarded as a set of competencies that require practice. Therefore, institutions can develop research clubs, student research forums, field research projects, and research workshops, among others. In addition, reflective exercises can be assigned to students to facilitate experiential learning of research. Overall, the results of the study provide several practical implications for management education. In particular, management students can benefit from active experiential learning of the research process.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Presently, the study unveiled several surprising facts regarding management students' experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy. Firstly, an illustrative analysis of respondents' demographics was conducted. According to the pie chart below, it is palpable that out of all participants that agreed to contribute to the study, 50.7% were male while 49.3% were female. Concerning the age distribution of the sample, it is conceivable that the bigger part of the sample (49.3%) comprised students aged between 20 and 22. Additionally, almost a quarter of the respondents (41%) were between 23 and 25 years old. Apart from respondents aged between 20 and 25, 10% of participants were older than 25. However, in addition to the analysis of the respondents' demographics, an illustrative analysis of participants' prior exposure to research was conducted. According to the graphical representation below, it is discernible that almost 73.3% of management students who agreed to participate in the study had no prior exposure to research. On the other hand, 26.7% of management students who selected had some exposure to research. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that most management students lacked prior exposure to research, and thus, experiential learning could enlighten them on research exposure and procedures.

Based on the descriptive analysis of the key variables, it was evident that most of the respondents had a positive view towards learning exposure with a mean ELE score of 3.82 and SD of 0.64 and research self-efficacy with a mean RSE score of 3.71 and SD of 0.67. Besides, the study revealed that the measure used in assessing respondents' views on experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy was satisfactory for the illustrative sample because Cronbach's alpha for ELE and RSE was acceptable. An illustrative analysis of the relationship between the key variables revealed that there was a positive and highly significant correlation between ELE and RSE ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, the analysis depicts that respondents who had a positive view towards experiential learning exposure also had a positive attitude towards research self-efficacy, which implies that experiential learning exposure was positively and significantly related to research self-efficacy.

7. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the illustrative results, several suggestions were proposed in order for management institutions to encourage experiential learning and research self-efficacy among students. Firstly, management institutions should incorporate experiential learning in their academic programmes in an inclusive manner. In other words, experiential learning should be made part of the course and not ad hoc as industrial visits. For instance, fieldwork, live projects, cases, simulations,



community involvement, and research projects can be used to promote experiential learning among management students.

Management institutions must promote academic research to enable students conduct research with confidence from the onset of their studies. Most respondents indicated that they had no prior experience with conducting research as evident from the sample results on participants' prior exposure. As such, students need to acquire skills to undertake research at least to gain confidence in initiating, designing, undertaking, analysing and reporting research. Students can start by conducting simple research activities including identifying research problem, questionnaire design, interview, simple analysis of a given data set and report writing. Thereafter, students can progress to more elaborate research undertakings as individuals or in groups.

Moreover, faculty members should consider using project-based research learning in order for students to address real-life issues facing society and businesses by using research studies. In addition, management institutions should promote community and industry relations in order to facilitate experiential learning and research activities among students whereby students can understand the issues they are likely to encounter in their careers and conduct substantial research studies.

Faculty members should mentor and provide feedback to their students on their research works. Students mostly need help with designing the research proposal, collecting and analysing data, reviewing statistical information and research reports among other related aspects of research. Therefore, students require academic assistance in the form of mentoring to overcome these challenges and attain confidence in their research work. Faculty members and institutions should encourage students to showcase their research skills in research fairs, seminars, conferences, research clubs and other related forums to enable them gain confidence in their ability to perform research. Lastly, future researchers can conduct various studies to generate more information on the association between experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy. Firstly, future studies can utilise mixed-methodology or qualitative research designs in order to thoroughly understand the association between ELE and RSE. Secondly, future researchers can adopt a longitudinal study design in order to reveal the nature of the relationship between ELE and RSE. Thirdly, future studies can conduct experimental studies to ascertain the causal inference of the relationship between ELE and RSE. Lastly, subsequent researchers can utilise a large sample size and diverse population, as well as different geographical locations, to reveal the varying effect of ELE on RSE. Moreover, future researchers can conduct similar studies in different management programmes.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to establish the association between experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy among management students. The study was necessitated by the fact that management education is characterised by theoretical topics that do not enable students to garner practical skills in their respective fields of specialisation. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984) and Action Learning Theory (AL) (Revans, 1982) provided the theoretical framework for the study, whereas Self-Efficacy Theory (SET) (Bandura, 1997) explained research self-efficacy. Data generated from the descriptive analysis revealed that the illustrative sample had a positive view towards experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy. In addition, the reliability analysis depicted that the measures used in the study were satisfactory for the illustrative sample because Cronbach's alpha for ELE and RSE was reasonable. However, the most astonishing result was that there was a positive and highly significant correlation between ELE and RSE ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$), which implies that experiential learning exposure was positively and significantly associated with research self-efficacy. In other words, management students obtained research skills through experience-based learning activities making it easy for them to conduct research projects.

The last but not the least, the study revealed that students' exposure to experiential learning triggered their research self-efficacy. Consequently, it is recommended that management schools encourage students to invest more effort in fieldwork, live projects, cases, simulations, community service, and research projects to enhance their research self-efficacy. These experiential learning activities will enable students to engage in practical aspects of management studies, thus complementing theoretical skills garnered in class. However, the findings of the present study should be interpreted with caution because of the cross-sectional design of the study. Therefore, future studies can utilise various study designs to reveal different associations between experiential learning exposure and research self-efficacy.



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