Beyond the Textbook: Experiential Learning in Teacher Education in the Nep 2020 Era

Aayesha Shervani[1] , Prof Shivaraj Kumar[2]

[1]Research Scholar M.J.P. Rohilkhand University, Bareilly

[2]Head, Department of Teacher Education N.M.S.N. Dass P.G. College, Budaun

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.102000066

Received: 19 October 2026; Accepted: 24 October 2026; Published: 20 November 2026

ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 favours experiential, student-centred, and multi-disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. In teacher education, these preferences highlight the necessity to connect theoretical knowledge with practical classroom experiences. This study aims to explore student-teachers' perceptions of experiential learning, its perceived contribution to professional preparation, and the upcoming challenges with its implementation. A qualitative descriptive design is proposed, using semi-structured interviews with 8–12 student-teachers from teacher education institutions in Greater Noida. The analysis of is done thematically using Braun and Clarke's approach (2006), with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) providing the principal theoretical framework. It focuses on the relationship between theory and practice, teaching confidence, reflective learning, and institutional challenges. This proposed research may provide context-specific insights for improving practical learning experiences in teacher education. It's findings may also help teacher educators consider the support of school-based activities, mentoring, and reflection on educational vision of NEP 2020.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Teacher Education, NEP 2020, Student-Teachers, Reflective Practice, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education consists of more than merely gaining theoretical knowledge of educational principles and teaching methods. Pupil-teachers are also expected to acquire skills on how to handle classrooms, address the diverse needs of the learners, lesson planning, and assessment of learning. These professional competencies need to have a chance to tie together theory and real teaching-situations.

The frequent old school classroom teachings offer valuable theoretical backgrounds. But this theoretical knowledge alone may not completely prepare student-teachers for the intricacies and complexities of classroom practices. "Potential opportunities to implement and investigate pedagogical knowledge could occur through activities like school internships, observation in classrooms, microteaching, and planning lessons, as well as reflective journals.

According to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, conceptual understandings, critical thinking, practical learning, and holistic development are prioritized. These priorities are directly related and befitting the present case situation in teacher education as they foster both constructive engagement with practice in teaching as opposed to relying on textbook-curricula based teaching.

Kolb (1984) describes the Experiential Learning Theory which describes learning in terms of experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and experimentation. This underlying framework provides a helpful platform to consider the ways in which pupil-teachers learn on the basis of the practical activities and apply the experiences to teach better.

Taking this background, the present study seeks to understand student-teachers' experiences of experiential learning, its perceived contribution to their professional preparation, and the challenges that may hinder its effectiveness.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Dewey (1938) emphasized the educational significance of experience and argued that experiences become meaningful when they contribute to continued learning and development. This perspective suggests that practical activities should be planned to promote understanding rather than treated merely as programme requirements.

Kolb (1984) conceptualized experiential learning as a process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In teacher education, student-teachers may experience this cycle when they conduct a lesson, reflect on learner responses, connect their observations with pedagogical concepts, and modify their subsequent teaching.

Donald Schön was a deeply original thinker working on change, education, design, and learning. He is perhaps best known for his work on the reflective practitioner, in which he formulated a new epistemology of practice founded on knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action, a theory which has had considerable impact. (Ramage 2017)

Schön (1983) put emphasis on the importance of reflective practices in professional developments. Educators often face situations requiring judgement and adaptation. Reflection can help student-teachers examine their decisions and consider alternative approaches.

NEP 2020 provides a policy context for strengthening practical and learner-centred approaches in education.

However, the effectiveness of experiential learning depends on the way practical activities are organised, the guidance provided by mentors, as well as the opportunities available for reflection and further practice.

Although these perspectives establish the importance of experience and consideration, a context-specific study is needed to understand how student-teachers perceive practical learning in their own teacher education setting. This issue has been addressed in the study through qualitative interviews.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To explore student-teachers' perceptions and experiences of experiential learning.
2. To understand how practical activities help connect theoretical knowledge with classroom practice.
3. To examine student-teachers' perceptions of the contribution of experiential learning to teaching confidence and reflective practice.
4. To identify challenges associated with experiential learning in teacher education.

4. Research Questions

1. How do student-teachers experience experiential learning during their teacher education programme?
2. How do practical activities help them connect theory with classroom practice?
3. What benefits do they perceive in relation to teaching confidence and reflection?
4. What challenges affect their participation in practical learning activities?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative descriptive research design. This approach is appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions in their own words.

5.2 Participants and Sampling

Approximately 8–12 student-teachers enrolled in a B.Ed. programme were selected to participate through purposive sampling.

5.3 Data Collection

Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews using the questions provided in Appendix. Interviews were conducted face to face. Each interview took 15–20 minutes.

5.4 Data Analysis

The interview data was analysed thematically, drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory guide interpretation.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the intended use of their responses.

6. Findings and Discussion

This section was completed after the interviews have been conducted and analysed.

6.1 Connecting Theory with Practice

Maximum pupil-teachers considered experiential learning essential for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical classroom environment. It was reported that activities like microteaching and school internships helped them in applying pedagogical concepts learned in coursework to real student interactions.

6.2 Teaching Confidence and Reflective Learning

Participants felt increased confidence after hands-on teaching experiences. They highlighted that feedback from mentors and peers, and personal observation, helped them identify their strengths and areas where they can improve.

Pupil-teachers recognised and accepted that exposure to real classrooms taught them about learner diversity, i.e their own abilities, interests, and behavioural patterns, which were different from each other and not always covered in theoretical lessons.

6.3 Challenges in Experiential Learning

Participants reported several challenges that affected the quality of experiential learning:

- Limited time allocated for internships and observations
- Lack of sufficient resources

- Lack of access to well-functioning schools for practice
- Pressure of completing practical tasks rather than deeper learning

7. Educational Implications

The research provides realistic suggestions for improving experiential learning in teacher education in terms of strengthening the connection between theoretical course and school-based practice, providing regular mentor feedback, and encouraging structured reflection after lessons by the institutions. It also favours opportunities to revise and re-teach lessons so that student-teachers apply what they learn. Coordination between teacher-education institutions and partner-schools may also improve the organization of internships and classroom observation.

8. Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on a small group of student-teachers purposively selected from one institution. Its findings provide contextual insights rather than statistically generalizable results. The research relies primarily on participants' self-reported experiences and doesnot independently measure changes in teaching competence or learner achievement.

CONCLUSION

The value of the experiential approach is established and more applicable in the competitive and intricate learning society. The practice will assist in encouraging students as well as teachers to address the diversity within the classrooms. This learning provides an effective way of bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and hand on teaching-experiences. Classroom observation, teaching practice, mentoring and reflection are in the context of NEP 2020, a appropriate way in which pupil-teachers can explore and build upon their professional knowledge.

Experiential Learning Theory by Kolb is a perspective of the way experience, reflections, conceptual interpretation, and additional experimentation can be used to facilitate learning." Nevertheless, a mere involvement would not be sufficient in terms of meaningful development. The mentoring quality, reflection opportunities, and institutional support are also to be taken into consideration.

The current study, being qualitative, relies on the insightful interviews with student-teachers in order to produce context-dependent information about the worth and difficulties of experiential learning.

REFERENCES

1. Ajani, O. (2023). The Role of Experiential Learning in Teachers' Professional Development for Enhanced Classroom Practices. Journal of Curriculum and Teaching. 12(4).143. https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v12n4p143
2. Akella, D. (2015). Learning together: Kolb's experiential theory and its application. Journal of Management & Organization. 16. 100-112. https://doi.org/10.5172/jmo.16.1.100
3. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
4. Lone, Dr & Kour, Simeran. (2024). Vivification of Experiential Learning with Reference to NEP 2020. International Journal of Indian Psychology. 12. 1636-1640. https://doi.org/10.25215/1201.151
5. Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). National education policy 2020. Government of India. https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/userfiles/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
6. Ramage, M. (2017). Learning and Change in the Work of Donald Schön: Reflection on Theory and Theory on Reflection. The Palgrave Handbook of Organizational Change Thinkers 1159-1172. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52878-6_57

7. Reddy, Y.S.&Kommidi, D.R.(2026). The National Education Policy (Nep) 2020 And Teacher Education in India: Transformations, Challenges, And Prospects. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR). 8(3). 1-7. https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2026.v08i03.78196