The Role of Experiential Learning and Proactive Personality in Enhancing Students’ Learning Satisfaction: The Case of Exchange Students in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Brenda ChiehYun Yang and Jose WengChou Wong
Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Macau University of Science and Technology, Taipa, Macau
*Corresponding author

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Abstract. This paper aims to improve the understanding of experiential learning among students in the hospitality and tourism industry. Based on existing literatures, this paper identifies four key factors, including experiential learning, proactive personality, employability skills, self-efficacy, and attempts to examine the relationships between the four factors and student learning satisfaction. The proposed hypothetical model is suggested and it would facilitate further research of experiential learning, especially quantitative studies on experiential learning are limited. Also, this paper provides suggestions of the next steps for further research based on the proposed model.

Introduction

Experiential learning becomes one of the important topics in education research [1]. In the last few decades, many studies are performed on the field of experiential learning in order to develop a theoretical framework of experiential learning, or explore what elements are influencing the outcome of the experiential learning. Although the conception of experiential learning is quite well established, some of the questions are remained unanswered. For instance, many researchers follow the theory of David Kolb’s four-stage model in their studies of experiential learning [2], some critiques also show that the theory of experience learning is not enough to explain the whole learning process of the experiential learning [3]. Furthermore, many studies of experiential learning focus on the qualitative research; quantitative studies are limited. Hence, this article aims to examine the existing literature of the experiential learning, and attempts to propose a comprehensive model, to explain the relationships between experiential learning, student’s personality and the students’ learning satisfaction. Especially, the exchange students in the hospitality and tourism faculty will be testified as the students in this faculty have more chances to participate in the experiential learning, and many of the courses are more practical.

Experiential is a relatively new concept emerged in the education field during this few decades, and the needs for academic research in the hospitality and tourism industry are threefold. First, within the hospitality and tourism domain, not many studies are performed to build students’ learning satisfaction, while some of the studies regard tourism is one of the forms of experiential learning, studies focusing on tourism students are limited [4]. Second, the quantitative research of experiential learning is limited. Many of the studies are conceptual paper in developing, or enriching the theory of experiential learning; and other studies attempt to explore the students, or teachers, based on a qualitative analysis, such as following a group of experiential learning students in one program, or interviewing some teachers using the experiential learning techniques [5]. Third, due to the nature of the hospitality and tourism studies, many hospitality and tourism institutions are looking for the way to develop or revise their course settings by adding experiential learning elements. This article provides an insight into the field of experience learning and examines how we can finally enhance students’ satisfaction through experiential learning.
Literature Review

Experiential Learning

In the Kolb’s study [6], experiential learning is defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; and knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience.” Based on the theory of experiential learning theory, Zull (2002) suggests a learning cycle of the experiential learning; it is from the structure of the brain and includes four elements: Concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract hypothesis and active testing [7]. Within the learning cycle, it is suggested that experiential learning can be achieved by creating more learning spaces to enhance growth for experiences of learners; and respect the learner’s own experiences during the process. What’s more, making spaces for conversations between the teacher and learners is also necessary [1].

Employability Skills

Employability skills is the core part of most of the hospitality and tourism programs, as those programs are often practical and the purpose of the study is to cultivate students to perform well in the industry [8]. To build up their employability skills, a wide range of experiential learning is added to the courses, such as field trip, shading, or internship, in order to develop their abilities of communication, presentation, planning, problem solving, social interaction, and so on [6][9]. In the study of Crossman and Clarke [10], it is addressed that stakeholders, including employers, agree that experiential learning improves employability skills and make them ready for the challenges in their first jobs, especially stakeholders suggest students to join international exchange programs, as it is beneficial to the broaden their insights, become more confident and easier to adapt to international companies under the trend of globalization. Based on the literature review, the hypothesis 1 is proposed as follow:

Hypothesis 1. Experiential Learning will be positively influence employability skills.

Proactive Personality

The concept of proactive personality is commonly used in the field of organizational behaviors, and it is a tendency to initiate and maintain employee actions that influence the working environment [11]. Under a daily high pressure in the hospitality and tourism industry, it is suggested employees with high proactive personality are one of the key factors to success, and organization can consider more employees with higher proactive personality in the stage of recruitment. On the other hand, managers should provide training and coaching to the employees if they are identified to have a low proactive personality in the workplace [12].

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to one’s beliefs of his/her own capabilities in executing particular tasks [13]. When facing difficulties, students with high self-efficacy tend to expend greater efforts and become more patient to the tasks, while students will suspect themselves and avoid the tasks directly if they hold low self-efficacy [14]. And also, teachers should set appropriate goals to students in the class, because when the task is too hard, it will affect the student’s self-efficacy. On the other hand, students may feel bored if the task is too easy. Previous studies indicate that students with high proactive personality may have a stronger intention to learn, and hence may result in a higher self-efficacy [15]. Since the proactive personality and self-efficacy are both important factors in the study of hospitality and tourism industry, based on the literature above, the hypothesis 2 is proposed.

Hypothesis 2. Proactive personality will be positively influence self-efficacy.

Student Learning Satisfaction

In many studies, student learning satisfaction is one of the indicators to reveal the outcome of the experiential learning and it can influence many other factors such as the working performance, word-of-mouth, and so on [16]. Following Yang, Cheung and Song’s study [17], it is suggested that
employability skills are positively associated with student learning satisfaction. Hence, the hypothesis 3 is drawn as follow:

**Hypothesis 3. Employability skills will be positively influence Student learning satisfaction.**
Furthermore, the previous studies show that the better career outcome, including learning satisfaction, may also come from higher self-efficacy [18]. Inspired by the studies of Parker, Bindl & Strauss [18] and Lu & Kuo [19], the hypothesis 4 is developed as follow:

**Hypothesis 4. Self-efficacy will be positively influence Student learning satisfaction.**

**Proposed Hypothetical Model**

After reviewing the literature of Experiential Learning (EL), Employability Skills (ES), Proactive Personality (PP), Self-efficacy (SE) and Student learning satisfaction (SLS), four hypotheses have been developed in the last sections. The model implies that the student learning satisfaction is affected by two mainstreams. One is from the study of the experiential learning. Through the experiential learning, students will gain a higher level of employability skills, and hence generate their satisfaction in the learning. Another stream is from the individual personality. The students with high level of proactive personality will result in higher level of self-efficacy, and higher self-efficacy will lead to a higher learning satisfaction. The proposed relationships among these five elements are shown in the figure 1 below.

![Proposed Model Diagram](image)

**Figure 1.** The proposed hypothetical model.

**Discussion**

This paper examines the theoretical concepts of experiential learning, employability skills, proactive personality, self-efficacy and student learning satisfaction among exchange students in the hospitality and tourism faculty. The proposed hypothetical model is developed and will be used for further research on universities in Macao. Universities provide a variety of exchange programs for students and students from different backgrounds in the hospitality and tourism faculty have chances to study in other countries and experience the special culture aboard. In this paper, the literatures of key elements in the field of experiential learning have been reviewed, and at the discussion part we summarize one proposed model based on our hypotheses. This proposed model is still under developing and needs to be enriched. In order to revise this model and develop measurement items for this model, further qualitative and quantitative method will be performed to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The next step of the research is to perform in-depth interviews among stakeholders such as teachers and students who are involved in the experiential learning, in order to generate measurement items for those constructs in this model. Then modifying the items based on existing literatures or adding necessary items for each factor is also crucial. Although this model main focuses on students in the field of hospitality and tourism, further study may also consider adding some multilevel factors, such as evaluation from teachers, into the model. In conclusion, this article identifies four primary factors including student learning satisfaction, suggests a proposed hypothetical model based on literatures and it helps develop a foundation for further qualitative and qualitative research in the field of experiential learning among students.
Reference


