



MANAGING EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES AT A PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOL IN HANOI, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

The 2018 General Education Program requires experiential learning in order to increase students' exposure to active learning, support them in applying their skills to real-world problem-solving, and foster their flexibility and adaptability. However, there are several restrictions and challenges when putting this new program into practice. This article investigates the current state of implementing and managing experiential activities at a private primary school in Hanoi, Vietnam; hence, it suggests solutions to improve the management of experiential activities.

Keywords: experiential activities, private primary school, managing and organizing

1. Introduction

The investment in education has always been one of the leading concerns of all nations' developing programs. Vietnam is implementing Resolution 29-NQ/TW to reform intensive and extensive educational programs in accordance with the demands of the employment market. The Resolution has pointed out the necessity of alternating education from equipping students with the knowledge to improving the overall abilities and competences of students. Therefore, schools and educational institutions need to focus more on each subject, as well as extracurricular activities and experiential activities for students. It is mentioned in the 2018 General Education Program that education must ensure the development of student's abilities and skills; through content with knowledge, basic, fundamental and modern skills while focusing on practice, applying learnt knowledge and skills in solving problems; applying the teaching techniques and approaches that are student-centred; and having the suitable assessment to match that aim.

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Experiential activities have been made compulsory in the 2018 General Education Program to promote students' experience in active learning, help them utilize their ability and capacity to solve real-life situations, and develop their adaptability and flexibility. Experiential activities are claimed to have multiple purposes in developing student's abilities and competences and are of great concern to all educators and educational managers. However, implementing such a new program struggles with certain limitations and difficulties. Since many studies have been conducted to investigate experiential activities in secondary and high school, there is a gap in the literature on experiential activities in primary schools, especially at private schools. This article aims to help gain insight into the current state of implementing and managing experiential activities at a private primary school in Hanoi, Vietnam. This can be a reference for further research on the topic.

2. Literature Review

Experiential activities have been implemented in many educational programs worldwide. John Dewey (2008) started the "*learning by doing*" theory, which stresses the importance of education through experiencing, gaining skills and techniques by assigning students to work to do instead of things to learn. Japanese educational programs are designed based on this theory, which matches learning with experiential activities in all subjects: science, morals, and society. Kolb's theory states that learning is a cognitive process that entails ongoing environmental adaptation and cooperative interaction. People learn through experience and instruction, which aid in developing their knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). "*Hands-on*" learning is one of the most significant trends in higher education today, and Austin and Rust (2015) state that it is considered one of the most important advancements in college or university education (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2021; Zha, 2021).

Activities for experiential learning are arranged as a required course with planning assistance for Vietnamese primary, secondary, and high school students. Experiential learning activities are intended to address learner-oriented, society-oriented, nature-oriented, and career-oriented problems, according to general education programs launched in 2018.

3. Methods

In this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate the management of experiential learning at a private primary school in Hanoi. The research began with a thorough review of the literature to establish a foundational understanding of current practices and theoretical approaches in experiential learning. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to a carefully selected group of teachers and administrators, with the exact number determined by the school's staff size and the study's scope. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key personnel involved in the experiential learning programs to provide qualitative insights

into the intricacies of managing such activities. Classroom observations were also conducted to directly observe interaction patterns and engagement levels. Data analysis was performed using appropriate statistical and qualitative analysis tools, ensuring a comprehensive synthesis of findings. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained, with all participants providing informed consent, supplemented by parental consent for any data involving minors, and the study received approval from the relevant institutional review board.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Current state of managing and implementing experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School

In order to have experiential activities, the Board of the school works with teachers and invites other experts to design the experiential activities. Planning the educational program for a school year for all grades requires analyzing the experiential activities in the program distribution that the teacher group has discussed, identifying the topics according to the experiential activities, and identifying the number of periods, time and places, the resources used in each topic. Once the outline of the experiential activities is completed, the school then identify the detailed plan for experiential activities under each topic. Each plan specifies the aim (objectives, students' traits, educational environment, the ability and capacity that students gain after each topic); the contents (theoretical background, the logic and fullness of the contents and the focus of the lessons); design the experiential activities (designing activities in accordance with the aim and contents, designing the clear, suitable aim of each activity, developing the contents logically, describing the steps of activities in details, choosing suitable resources and materials); planning the suitable assessment (choosing the assessment instrument and the plan of assessment).

Teachers are required to design activities that provoke thinking, experiencing, contemplating, and other high-order cognitive abilities for students to be exposed to and learn by doing. One of the most critical aspects when crafting any material for educational use is the presentation and organization of the contents. The presentation should be engaging, interesting, understandable, and logical, with a smooth flow of ideas that target learners' experience and understanding. Teachers are supposed to work in specialized groups to come up with lesson plans, materials, content, and games for students. These plans and materials will be sent to a primary school educational expert to cross-check and validate if they are suitable to be utilized at school concerning the curriculum of the 2018 Educational Program.

While implementing the experiential activities, the school still works with teachers and experts to manage them. Teachers are the ones who directly organize methods of experiential activities for students. They transfer dynamic experiential tasks spontaneously and attractively for students to be motivated and they encourage students to actively participate in the experiential activities. By identifying the objectives and duties involved in setting up experiential learning opportunities for students, instructors

can better prepare their students to facilitate the organization of such activities. The precise content of exercises in experiential learning is determined by a number of factors. In order to plan experiential learning opportunities, they must determine the essential tactics and processes. It might be challenging to determine which organizational structure is best for activities involving experiential learning. Putting a plan into action by planning experiential learning activities, estimating financial requirements, mobilizing and coordinating human resources, and handling any unforeseen circumstances that arise as a result of planning experiential learning activities are all examples of organizational tasks. Teachers directly monitor the experiential activities in class and promptly detect students' difficulties. Teachers also synthesize, analyze and evaluate students' performance results and flexibly adjust activities in response to changes in practical conditions. The school monitors teachers' activities in implementing, synthesize and analyze the results of teachers' and students' activities.

The school also coordinate with other educational forces while implementing experiential activities. The Board of the school handles the discussion with relevant educational forces about plants to organize experiential activities (goals, contents, methods). The school will listen and respond positively to the opinions of experts and other educational forces about the experiential activities. The Board of the school even sought human and resources support, negotiated and convinced the educational forces to agree with some support proposals. The school utilizes educational resources and media to implement experiential activities. Teachers use educational materials, means, and media according to the plan and to bring pedagogical effectiveness. The school helps handle situations that arise during the use of materials and educational means. The experiential activities integrated into the lessons are prepared carefully, and the results (the projects and works of students) are publicly shown on Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School's social media, such as the Facebook page, and sent to parents of students through the LMNX application and Zalo group. These means of media are utilized to spread the efficacy and effectiveness of implementing experiential activities.

The School develops and deploys tools to test and evaluate educational results (testing tools, collecting data, instructing students and stakeholders to use clear self-assessment and peer-assessment tools); analyzes test and evaluation results (systematic retrieval and synthesis of student activity products, analyzing the manifestations of qualities and abilities, comments about the level of quality and ability of each student); applies test and evaluation results (provide feedback and direction for students to practice, adjust and improve the quality of experiential activities, record comments and synthesize educational results for students).

The experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School are organized in various forms. The two main experiential activity forms are integrated lessons and discrete experiential activity segments. Each type is well-organized by the collaboration of all stakeholders within and outside the school.

a. Integrated experiential activities and lessons

The experiential activities are integrated into each subject and each lesson. In this way, students are always expected to be curious, to raise questions on the topic, to solve real-life problems and hence gain the knowledge and skills related to the subject. Lessons integrated with experiential and supplemental game activities were accepted by the Board of the School and then shown to instruction and curriculum experts and science teachers for corrections, face, and content validity. Then, further revisions were done based on the chosen experts' comments and suggestions to improve the lessons' content and format. The revised lessons were afterwards shown to teachers in Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School for evaluation and implementation. They are also allowed to give their comments and suggestions after rating the lessons.

Teachers can promote the usage of pedagogical approaches like Project-Based Learning and encourage students to collaborate with one another by combining many topics. In addition to using the necessary hands-on activities and materials, teachers collaborate with their colleagues and effectively utilize the resources at their disposal. Collaboration among educators from various disciplines has already been shown to increase self-efficacy. Enhancing student learning and engagement through subject integration is possible, particularly when students are exposed to two related disciplines in addition to one.

b. Discrete experiential activities segment

Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School often organizes field trips as a discrete experiential activity, one for each grade every semester. Field trip is a way to push study beyond the normal classroom, making students enjoy learning in a new engaging environment expose students to different problems and tasks to join and solve. The field trip is regarded as a type of short-term experiential learning that allows the student to gain real-world experience over the course of one or more days. Any excursion planned for educational reasons and supported by the school could be referred to as a field trip. By offering actual experiences, boosting learning interest, building cognitive skills, improving motivation, and creating social networks, field trips can help kids acquire realistic values. Field trips have been proven to have a good correlation with students' knowledge, attitudes toward the subject, and social skills. Pre-, during-, and post-trip phases are all included in field trips. Pre-trip activities include a variety of planning tasks, like choosing the location for the field trip, setting up a reasonable time for the school and business, thinking about transportation, exchanging schedules in detail, and creating assessment instruments to gauge student participation. The functions of lecturers are highlighted during the tour. There are several strategies for maintaining pupils' interest. Making participants care about their own work is the first strategy; group projects that require students to observe, discuss, and report their findings are the second. Students are required to write reflections following the trip in order to let the school organizers know about their interests and the trip's principles. Field trips that are well-planned can prevent the "zoo phenomenon," which is when learning objectives are not met or when participants are not assisted in deriving personally meaningful meaning from the

experience. Participants' post-trip comments can offer suggestions for how to make the next excursions better.

5. Recommendations

Experiential activities involve hands-on learning and are meant to engage students in activities that are educational in nature. These activities are designed to help students gain knowledge and skills through direct experience. While these activities have been proven to be beneficial to students, there is always room for improvement when it comes to their management. Concerning the current state of implementing experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School, some suggestions for improvement are proposed as follows.

First, it is important to ensure that the activities are properly planned and managed. This includes selecting activities that are appropriate for the age and ability of the students, as well as making sure that the activity has a specific educational purpose. In addition, it is important to plan out the activity ahead of time, including details such as the necessary supplies, the amount of time needed, and the desired outcome.

Second, the school should establish clearer objectives and expectations for all stakeholders, especially parents of students. Objectives and expectations for experiential activities need to be set before implementation. This will ensure that all involved are on the same page and that the activity is conducted in an efficient and effective manner. The understanding and support from students' parents will be of great use to the school when organizing experiential activities. Experiential activities can be challenging, so providing adequate guidance and supervision to participants throughout the activity is important. This could include providing resources or assistance when needed. The school needs to monitor the experiential activities carefully to detect any difficulties and problems arising, and to give support even when teachers have not asked for it yet. The school should have a teacher or facilitator present during the activity to provide instruction and assistance. Additionally, it is important to have an appropriate safety plan in place to ensure the safety of all involved.

It is important to provide appropriate feedback and evaluation to the students after the experiential activity. This should include both positive and constructive feedback, as well as a discussion of the educational goals and objectives of the activity. This feedback can help the students understand the importance and value of the experience and can help to improve their performance in the future. The school should encourage feedback from participants, including teachers and students, in order to gain insight into the effectiveness of the activity and to ensure that it is meeting the goals set out at the start. The students' opinions on their experiential activities should not be neglected as they are part of the learning and experiencing journey, and the perspectives of students will also be an indicator of the success of experiential activities. After the experiential activities have been completed, it is also important to evaluate them. This will allow for any lessons learned to be applied to future activities and for the activity to be improved upon.

It is also important to ensure that the experiential activity is properly documented. This includes taking photographs or videos of the activity, as well as keeping records of the activity's results. This documentation can help demonstrate the effectiveness of the activity and can be used to evaluate its success in the future.

By following these aforementioned suggestions, it is possible to improve the management of experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School and ensure that they are successful and beneficial for all involved.

6. Conclusion

Learning is a cognitive process that involves constant environment adaption and cooperative engagement. Through the process of learning, people gain experience, which leads to the acquisition of knowledge. Considered as one of the most important advancements in higher education, experiential learning—also referred to as "hands-on" learning—is gaining popularity. This paper has investigated the current state of managing and implementing experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School. The results show that there is a strict collaboration between the Board of the school and all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents and other educational forces. The planning, designing and organizing of the experiential activities at the school is well-prepared with the involvement of many stakeholders.

Several suggestions were proposed in order to improve the management of experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School. Experiential learning activities need to be implemented more effectively. This includes figuring out the tasks and objectives, as well as the particular contents, methods, and techniques. It also involves figuring out the best organizational structure for the activities, mobilizing and coordinating human resources, and estimating costs. It is important to support and educate students in order to help them grow as professionals and gain more useful experience in the event planning industry. Experiential activities should be properly planned and managed prior to commencement. Clearer objectives and expectations should be made to ensure that all are discussed and aware of the plans so that the activity is conducted efficiently and effectively. Adequate guidance and supervision should be provided to participants throughout the implementation of the activity. Appropriate feedback and evaluation should be given to the students and vice versa. The school should collect feedback and comments from both teachers and students to design future experiential activities.

This paper has gained insights into the practice of organizing experiential activities at Lomonosov My Dinh Primary School and suggests some ways to improve the practice. The paper hopes to be a reference for further research on the topic of experiential activities for primary students, especially at other private schools in Hanoi.

Conflict of Interest Statement

I declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Thiều Thị Thu Hà is the Principal of a primary school, holding a Master's degree in Educational Management from Southern New Hampshire University. Her research and publications focus on innovative strategies in education leadership. As a member of various educational organizations, she actively contributes to advancing progressive educational practices.

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