

Comparing Traditional Teaching Method and Experiential Teaching Method using Experimental Research

Farhan Uddin Raja

Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Pakistan
farhan.raja@szabist.edu.pk

Dr. Najmonnisa

Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Pakistan
najmunnisa7@hotmail.com

Abstract

The modern time is shaping a world of opportunities that has glorified the role and functions of multinational organizations across the globe. An individual has become a global citizen, who explores employment opportunities in different countries of the world. This has signified the importance of interpersonal skills that allow individuals to connect with people from different cultures. As a result, the role of business communication instructors has become vital because they impart the skills of communication among their students. For this, instructors' sensitivity towards the teaching methods used in classrooms are of prime significance. These methods determine the interest level and motivation of students towards learning and acquisition of communication skills. Therefore, this study aims to compare experiential learning method and traditional learning method to explore which method inculcates and improves the communication skills of business administration students of a private sector university. The study was conducted in a quantitative paradigm using an experimental research design. The sample size comprised 60 BBA students from two different sections of business communication courses. The data were collected using a pretest and posttest. For the pretest, communication skills were imparted to both the groups using the traditional teaching method that heavily employed lecturing. For the posttest, the controlled group was taught using the same traditional teaching method while the treatment group was taught using the experiential learning method. Mean scores 20.46 & 19.90 with a significant value of 0.375 for the pretest established identical nature of both groups. Mean scores 27.80 & 30.36 with a significant value of .002 of posttest showed that the two

groups under study had different identities in scores, which proved that experiential learning method improves students' communication skills better than traditional communication skills.

Keywords: business communication, experiential learning, experimental research, traditional learning

Introduction

The present world has turned into a global village, which has resulted in the union of people across cultures and races. It has also reshaped the dynamics of modern day business and the number of multinational organizations have grown across the world at an unbelievable speed. This has signified the importance of communication skills, which allow individuals to connect with people from different cultures. As a result, the role of business communication instructors has become vital because they impart the skills of communication among their students. According to Nauman and Hussain (2017), "Written communication is indispensable in any organization to run everyday business" (p. 44). Similarly, Raja (2012) asserts that it is important that teachers design such activities that help students improve their skills. For this, instructors' sensitivity towards the teaching methods used in classrooms are of prime significance. The methods used in classrooms determine the interest level and motivation of the students towards the learning and acquisition of communication skills. According to Sampath and Zalipour (2010), business communication needs have been realized on a large scale over the past three decades. As a result, more and more business communication books and teaching materials are thriving and undergraduate students in all business schools across the globe study business communication as a core component of their curriculum. Similarly, Morreale, Osborn and Pearson (2000) suggest that provision of business communication to students of business schools has become essential not only for the professional growth of these students but also for the entire business fraternity.

Andrews and Higson (2008) state that as soon as students complete their bachelor's degree in the business program, they endeavor to join the workforce and face problems related to communication to coordinate with subordinates and bosses. According to Raja (2013), "Communication has become one of the markers of social solidarity, social ranking and professional capabilities and most of the

components of the language are learnt through this medium” (p. 154). The business graduates come across many communications related challenges as they endeavor to seek cooperation with colleagues being team members, or as they get their subordinates to implement the plans that they devise for them. Moreover, they have to correspond with the clients for obtaining orders. If the clients belong to different countries, then the linguistic and cultural differences are to be understood properly, so that miscommunication can be avoided. According to Raja (2014), a language is considered as a source of power and connectivity. As a result, business graduates require appropriate communication skills.

The teaching of business communication has rapidly developed and progressed in recent decades. It has facilitated novel methodologies for the teaching of business communication. Conventionally, students who were the major stakeholders of teaching learning environment, were the most passive participants. Traditional methods that were adopted to instill the learning of business communication in students, depended on text books and lectures. According to Papert (1993), traditional methods of teaching business communication consider learning to be a saving bank where knowledge is dumped for impending usage. Students fail to use this knowledge when they require, even in problem solving scenarios. Hasselbring et al (1994) explain students’ knowledge will not be useful unless they understand that it is vital to realize why, when and how various skills and concepts are relevant. They further assert that critical thinking is an essential need of students and they must learn to think independently. Teaching instructions can be effectively used in transforming students into independent thinkers through the provision of problem solving environments. Hasselbring et al suggest that examples of problem solving include scenarios, case studies and simulations.

This study focused on students’ learning and the acquisition of communication skills using an experimental research design through exposing them to two different teaching methodologies. The sample size for this study comprised 60 students who were equally divided into two subsets of 30 students each. These students had not taken the business communication course before and neither had they been exposed to professional work environment. Their learning and understanding of formal and professional communication skills were developed through this business communication course. Both groups were taught using traditional teaching method and their skills remained theoretical. Resultantly, they lacked professional expertise

that was required to join and effectively function as part of workforce. Therefore, an intervention was used and after the midterm exam that was used as a pretest, the treatment group was taught using experiential learning method. It exposed them to the real workplace like situations where they applied their conceptual knowledge.

According to Kennedy (2017), simulation is a sub-tool of experiential learning method that is used to offer students a real life-like scenario to practice their theoretical knowledge of business communication. Similarly, Levant, Coulmont and Sandu (2016) emphasize that “business simulations facilitate enhanced self-knowledge and self-assessment because they allow the students to make mistakes on their own or as part of a group and then to understand and learn from these mistakes” (384). The traditional learning method differs from experiential learning method where the former focuses on a didactic teaching style, which centers on lecture based teaching and learning and the latter allows students to learn through applications and actions. In experiential learning, students get to feel the same anxiety, pressures and other feelings that they will have to face once they join the workforce. Hence, it prepares them better for their future challenges. Jarošova, Bakić-Tomić and Šikić (2007) also explain that communication skills that are taught to students using lecturing do not inbuilt teamwork and interpersonal skills among future managers. Whereas, communication skills that are taught to students using the experiential learning method promote active participation of students in the learning process. Consequently, it helps develop interpersonal, teamwork and conflict resolution skills that are crucial elements of managerial competence.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to compare experiential learning method and traditional learning method to explore which method inculcates and improves the communication skills of business administration students. The findings of the study will be useful for teachers of business communication and academia. The teachers will get insights into the results of using the two teaching methodologies and the recommendations will suggest as to which methodology being discussed in this study improve students’ communications skills more.

Literature Review

Teaching of business communication skills has gained significance over the last few decades and it has become a vital part of business school curriculum. Curtis,

Winsor, and Stephens (1989) conducted a study and explored that communication skills were the top-most rated skills that students required initially for acquisition of job after college, and later for effective job performance. However, Louhiala-Salminen (1996) asserts that there are not enough books on communication skills at the tertiary level which could fulfil the requirements of the novel skills sought by the corporate sector. The teaching of communication skills in the current times require teachers to have knowledge, understanding and practices of all modern techniques of teaching. A vast amount of research is being carried out on the teaching of communication skills. New ways are being discovered to bring effectiveness in students' communication skills, and to eliminate barriers to effective communication.

According to Qazi and Simon (2012), students in Pakistani classrooms do not get enough experience of the practical application of business communication skills. The teachers choose to teach students using readily available power point presentations and material which restricts students learning to the theoretical realm only. Some teachers still teach through traditional learning method and they do not make an active effort to incorporate modern methods of teaching to their teaching style. Broughton, Brumpit, Pincas and Wilde (2002) claim that the traditional learning method heavily relies on teacher instruction and it does not offer adequate opportunities to the students for participation. Adding to this, Kuzu (2007) asserts that it is grounded in how education is viewed conventionally.

Experiential learning is another teaching learning method that is being emphasized upon here. It has been labeled using different terms. Dewey (1938) discussed it as 'learning by doing', while Wolfe and Byrne (1975) used the term 'experienced-based learning'. Lewis and Williams (1994) suggest that it can take many forms, namely; simulations, case studies and group work activities. They further suggest that it will allow students to apply their theoretical and conceptual knowledge through activities that will develop among them skills or new ways of thinking. Experiential learning will establish and reinforce the professional skills that they will need later in their careers as members of a professional workforce. Daultova (2016) asserts that a real life like professional working environment prompts students to practice their business communication skills more effectively. Similarly, Wurdinger (2005) states that experiential learning method constructs multidisciplinary learning experience that replicates real world learning. Jarošova, Bakić-Tomić and Šikić (2007) assert that experiential learning inspires students with

the help of activities that are based on role-playing or simulations and it in-builds among them key business skills like decision making, problem solving and team-building. In their study, Whetten and Cameron (2002) concluded that “exposure to a traditional, cognitive-based curriculum without exposure to management skills, development does not correlate with improvements of emotional intelligence, management skills or career success” (p.11).

Chang, Lee, Ng and Moon (2003) conducted a study using experiential learning and noted that students found simulations helpful in developing team-building, decision making, planning and managerial skills. In another study, Scalzo and Turner (2014) found that the blend of experiential learning method with managerial skills resulted in provision of practical knowledge for the students that they later required in their practical lives.

To sum up, the methods employed for teaching of business communication skills have undergone many transitional periods. From traditional to experiential learning methods have been used in order to cater to the needs and demands of the corporate world, so that the required skills could be inculcated among the students. Therefore, teachers should make an attempt to explore which methods best suit the learning needs of their students.

Hypothesis

H₀1 There is no significant difference in the scores of students taught using the experiential learning method and the students taught using the traditional learning method.

Research Site

The students of the business school under study are offered 03 English courses. Each course is a pre-requisite to the next one and students cannot register for the next courses unless they pass the pre-requisite course. The title of the three courses each having three credit hours are proficiency development, speech communication and business communication. The business communication course targets the basic conceptual and theoretical knowledge of communication skills at the start and the later part of the course focusses on practical aspects of communication skills, for example, interviews, meetings, group discussions and negotiation skills.

Methodology

Quantitative research design was used for this study to compare the effectiveness of two teaching methods used for the business communication course at a private sector business school. According to Creswell (1994), numerical data is collected in quantitative research that is later analyzed with the help of mathematically based methods. Pre-test and post-test results were used as a primary data collection tool.

Research Design

Experimental research design was used to compare effectiveness of the experiential learning method and the traditional learning method for the teaching of business communication course to business undergraduates. According to McLeod (2007), the most common way to design an experiment is to divide the participants into two groups: the first one is the experimental group and the second is the control group. An innovative idea is introduced for the experimental group and not to the control group. The data were collected using a pretest and posttest. For the pretest, communication skills were imparted to both the groups using the traditional teaching method till midterm exams, which heavily employed lecturing followed by task sheet that students completed. The mean scores of both group were compared and significant value was checked to establish that both groups had identical entity. For the posttest, the control group was taught using the same traditional teaching method, while the treatment group was taught using the experiential learning method till the final exams. The mean score of both groups were again compared and significant value was checked.

Sample

The sample size for this study comprised of 60 Business Administration undergraduates of a reputable private business school. The sample was equally divided into two sections of business communication course. The researcher taught both the groups; therefore, convenience sampling was used. According to Abrams (2010), in the convenience sampling method, “respondents are selected by convenience due to their proximity, availability, accessibility or through any other way that researcher decides” (p. 536).

Data Analysis

The data were collected using a pretest and a posttest. The pretest test was conducted to establish the identical nature of the controlled group and treatment group. While the data were analyzed using sample testing for mean, standard deviation and variance through the data analysis tool pack of MS Excel.

Findings

Pretest Results

60 business undergraduates were split into 2 equal groups and both the groups were taught using the traditional learning method till the mid-term exams. Students were taught using lectures with the help of PowerPoint presentations that were followed by task sheets. Their mid-term exam scores were used as a pretest. Their scores were compared using mean value and significant difference.

Table 1

Mean Scores (Pre-Test) for Controlled and Treatment Groups

	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Std. Error
Controlled Group	20.467	30	2.3154	.4227
Treatment Group	9.900	30	2.3976	.4377

Table 2

T-Test Statistics for Pre-Test

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Controlled Group - Treatment Group	.5667	3.3185	.6059	-.6725	1.8058	.935	29	.357

The mean scores 20.46 & 19.90 with significant value of 0.375 for the pretest indicates that there is no significant difference between the results of each group. This validates the identical nature of the participants that will go through the investigation. As the test is statistically insignificant at 95% confidence interval, it indicates that on average there is no significant mean difference between the two groups.

Post test Result

After the mid-term exams, the control group was taught using the traditional learning method, whereas the treatment group was taught using the experiential learning method which focused on simulation of various business scenarios. Students were engaged in tasks that required them to use communication skills taught in real life like; interviewing, meetings, problem solving and professional socializing. The final exam scores were used as the posttest results.

Table 3

Mean Scores (Post-Test) for Controlled and Treatment Groups

	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Std. Error
Controlled Group	27.800	30	3.2313	0.5900
Treatment Group	30.367	30	3.3986	0.6205

Table 4

T-Test Statistics for Post-Test

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
			Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Controlled Group - Treatment Group	-2.5667	4.0995	.7485	-4.0974	-1.0359	-3.429	29	.002

The mean scores 27.80 and 30.36 with a significant value of .002 of the posttest of both the groups indicate that there is a significant difference between the results of each group. This validates that the treatment group has a different identity in scores in comparison to the controlled group; while mean scores have clearly indicated a positive difference in the scores of the group taught using experiential learning method. On an average, the mean scores of the control group are less than 2.5 units than the group taught using experiential learning method; therefore, the results are highly statistically significant as indicated by p-value, which is less than .05 at 95% confidence interval.

Discussion

The study aimed to find out if the experiential learning method or the traditional learning method is more effective for the teaching of business communication courses to the business undergraduates of a business school. Qazi and Simon (2012) emphasized that students in Pakistani classrooms do not get enough experience of the practical application of business communication skills because many teachers choose to teach students using readily available power point presentations and materials, which restricts students learning to the theoretical realm only. Such teachers still teach through traditional learning method and they do not make an active effort to incorporate modern methods of teaching to their teaching styles. Similarly, Wurdinger (2005) asserts that experiential learning method constructs multidisciplinary learning experience that replicates real world learning. Jarošova, Bakić-Tomić and Šikić (2007) and Coulmont and Sandu (2016) also assert that experiential learning inspires students with the help of activities that are based on role-playing or simulations and it inbuilt among them key business skills like decision making, problem solving and teambuilding.

The data analysis of the study reflects that both groups were identical since their mean scores were 20.46 and 19.90 with significant value of 0.375 until both were taught using the traditional method. However, the group of students (control group), who were taught using the traditional learning method scored less in the posttest which indicates that these students learnt less and showed inconsistent performance than the group of students (treatment group), who were taught using experiential learning style. Findings are congruent with On the other hand, data analysis of the treatment group reflects more output and consistent performance. The results show difference of impact of the two teaching methodologies adopted for teaching business communication. It also shows that students who were taught using the experiential learning method demonstrated better knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework. The findings coincide with other research studies (Chang, Lee, Ng & Moon, 2003; Scalzo & Turner, 2014). Although both the groups were tested using the same assessment in the final exam (posttest), the change in the teaching methodology became a contributing factor in students' understanding. McHann and Frost (2010) assert that business schools must incorporate more experiential learning into business courses. They explain that the true and core purpose of business school education is to prepare graduates for the profession of leading and managing real world organizations. Nauman and Hussain (2017),

also verified that written communication ensures the smooth running of day to day business of any organization.

According to the researchers, modern teaching tools such as use of ICT, facilitates students to increase their participation and encourage them to practice what they have learnt in simulated environment (Dauletova, 2016). Whereas, the traditional methods are largely theoretical and do not engage the students personally or professionally in learning by doing. Therefore, avoiding experiential learning method is simply not an option.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was conducted to explore whether experiential learning method or traditional learning method is more effective for the teaching of business communication courses to the business undergraduates of a business school. The data analysis and findings clearly prove that experiential learning method improves business undergraduates' communication skills better. Literature was also reviewed to find and fill the gaps in the existing literature, which further validated the study. The findings will assist teachers and school administration to encourage the use of experiential learning in the classrooms.

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