

***Encountering and Embracing Differences through Experiential Learning:
Business Classroom Design for Perspectives Broadening***

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Abstract

In this current disruptive, diverse world of digital economy and globalisation, classroom design for students in business management field to prepare them to face and embrace the dynamic world full of differences could be challenging. Through experiential classroom design, students could have the possibility to encounter different worldview from fieldwork, which could eventually broaden their perspectives, preparing them for the diversified environment of the real business world. This study aimed to explore the experiential learning techniques used in an undergraduate business management course in Thailand to broaden students' perspectives. The classroom was designed for students to directly encounter and interact with business entrepreneurs, to learn from their experiences on business techniques used through economic challenges. Qualitative methods of participant observation and in-depth interview were used in data collecting and analysis. It was found in this study that the experiential classroom design could provide students opportunity to gain different perspectives, broadening their understanding on real-world business management.

Keywords: Embracing, Encountering, Differences, Perspectives, Worldview, Business Management, Classroom Design, Experiential Learning

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Introduction

In this current disruptive, diverse world of digital economy and globalisation, classroom design for students in business management field to prepare them to face and embrace the dynamic world full of differences could be challenging. Through experiential classroom design, students could have the possibility to encounter different worldview from fieldwork, which could eventually broaden their perspectives, preparing them for the diversified environment of the real business world.

Objective

This study aims to explore the experiential learning techniques used in an undergraduate business management course in Thailand to broaden students' perspectives.

Methodology

Qualitative methods of participant observation and in-depth interview were used in data collecting and analysis.

The classroom studied was designed for students to directly encounter and interact with business entrepreneurs, to learn from their experiences on business techniques used through economic challenges.

Key informants were chosen by purposive samplings.

Conceptual Basis

Through Experiential Learning model's four processes of learning, with awareness of real-world business context, a business management classroom design could help preparing students to embrace different views and broaden their perspectives.

The conceptual basis of this study could be shown as in the following diagram:

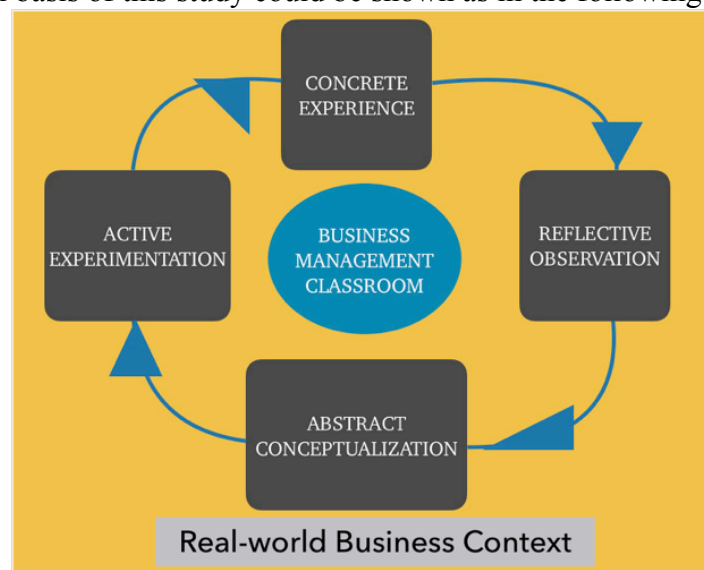


Figure 1: Conceptual Basis

Literature Review

Experiential Learning Theory

From the Experiential Learning Model (ELM) of David Kolb , the cycle of Experiential Learning Model is consisted of 4 learning processes:

1. Concrete Experience: the first learning process of experimental practice.
2. Reflective Observation: the process when learners start to reflect. This would need learners 'own initiation.
3. Abstract Conceptualization: the process when the learners would try to conceptualize what they have learnt for future practice/experiment application.
4. Active Experimentation: the process when the learners would try to experience the practice again, in order to prove their own learning and understanding.

Learners could truly learn through experiences, which include emotional reaction and reflection over such experiences (Moon, 2004).

Learners, in experiential learning process, are encouraged to initiate their own learning and reflection. Learners take initiation by posing questions or inquiring to develop solution. (Blumenfeld et al., 1991)

Learners learning through these processes of experiential learning could acquire new skills and new judgement, which could lead to new direction of judgement making (Chickering, 1977).

Results

Case Study 1 : Traditional Noodle Shop

The classroom studied was a business management class for undergraduate students. The students were assigned to plan their own individual business plan. Then they were asked to go as a small group for participant observation of a business store of their own choices. After discussion with classmates in the group, each student could get to reflect upon real-life understanding of business management. Then they were asked to bring the new understanding to adjust the business plan designed prior to field visit.

The student, Patcharin Malay, with a group of classmates, spent times observing and participating in the management of a traditional noodle shop in Amphawa, a touristic town of Thailand.

This experiential learning had given her the new perspectives on how to plan the management of her business model designed prior to field visit.

“...I would apply some successful techniques in shop management from this traditional noodle shop to my own future business plan: the uniqueness of recipe. However, I would also improve some aspects: seating and shop appearance design, wide varieties of choice in the menu, and impressive service...” (P. Malay, May 20, 2020)

Case Study 2 : Traditional Beverage Shop

The student, Kanjana Glaharn, with a group of classmates, spent times observing and participating in the management of a traditional beverage shop in Amphawa, a touristic town of Thailand.

This experiential learning had given her the new perspectives on how to plan the management of her business model designed prior to field visit.

“... I would apply some successful strategy of this beverage shop to my future business plan of barbecue shop, especially, the competitive pricing. I would also adopt the technique of paying attention to daily cost calculation and daily raw materials stocking. This could greatly reduce loss and create more benefits. Giving attention to detailed taste preference of each customer could also attract them to come back...I would improve the appearance of the shop to be more stylish though. Customers nowadays prefer shops where they could take nice photos to share on social media...”
(K. Glaharn, May 20, 2020).

Discussions and Conclusion

From study results, students, being directly exposed to real-life experience of business management, could develop understanding and insight through reflective observation and conceptualization of what was going on and what to do in the future.

It was found in this study that the experiential classroom design could provide students opportunity to gain different perspectives, broadening their understanding on real-world business management.

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