



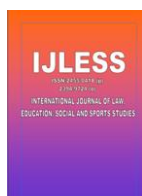
From experience to competence: Meta-analytic insights into life skills development through experiential learning

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Abstract

This paper examines the efficacy of Experiential learning as a pedagogical approach for fostering life skills across diverse learner populations. Through a meta-analytic review of empirical studies conducted between 2014 and 2025, it identifies recurring themes, evaluates effect sizes, and synthesizes findings related to the enhancement of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and vocational skills. Data from a range of educational contexts—including secondary schools, higher education, and special education—reveal consistent positive outcomes in skill acquisition, self-efficacy, and adaptability. The analysis underscores the significance of program design, learner engagement, and contextual relevance in maximizing experiential learning outcomes. By distilling insights from over a decade of research, this paper contributes to a nuanced understanding of how structured experiences translate into measurable competence. Recommendations are offered for educators and policymakers to optimize experiential learning environments for holistic development in youth.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Life Skills Development, Youth Education, Intrapersonal Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Vocational Training

Introduction

Life skills, defined as adaptive and positive behaviours enabling individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, have garnered significant attention in educational policy and pedagogy. In a rapidly changing world marked by technological advancement, global interconnectedness, and social complexity, the need to equip learners with practical competencies—beyond academic knowledge—is more pressing than ever. Experiential learning, rooted in the theories of Dewey, Kolb, and Piaget, offers a dynamic framework wherein learners acquire skills through direct experience, reflection, and active application.

This paper explores the influence of between experiential learning and life skills development through a meta-analytic synthesis of contemporary research. It aims to identify key outcomes, methodological

patterns, and pedagogical implications from studies published between 2014 and 2025. It reflects that experiential learning, when implemented with intentionality and contextual sensitivity, serves as a potent medium for cultivating life skills essential for personal and professional success.

Methodology

This meta-analysis draws upon empirical studies retrieved from databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) studies published between 2014 and 2025, (b) peer-reviewed journal articles, (c) inclusion of experiential learning interventions aimed at life skills development, and (d) reporting of measurable outcomes. A total of nine studies meeting these criteria were selected, encompassing diverse contexts such as secondary education, vocational training, special education, and higher education. This has been displayed in Table No 1.

Effect sizes were calculated where available, and qualitative findings were thematically analysed. Parameters considered included the type of experiential intervention (e.g., project-based learning, adventure-based programs, simulations), target population (e.g., secondary students, students with disabilities, adult learners), and the specific life skills addressed (e.g., communication, problem-solving, adaptability).

Table No 1: Article with highest Citation

Sl.No	Title and Author(s) (Year)	Source	Citations
1	Effectiveness of Experiential Life Skills Coaching for Youth with a Disability Sarah Keenan, Gillian King, C. J. Curran, Amy McPherson (2014)	Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics	23
2	Life Skills Through Activities Among Secondary School Students: A Study Wiwik Widajati, Siti Mahmudah, Diah Ekasari, Danis Ade Dwirisananda, Devina Rahmadiani (2015)	Innovative Higher Education	241
3	From Tech Skills to Life Skills: Google Online Marketing Challenge and Experiential Learning Jo-Anne V. Croes, Melina M. Visser (2015)	Journal of Information Systems Education	14
4	The Relationship Between the Effect of Sports on Life Skills of Secondary School Students and Students' Attitudes Towards Extracurricular Activities Tebessüm Ayyıldız Durhan (2021)	International Journal of Eurasian Education and Culture	8
5	Learning Life Skills Through Challenging and Negative Experiences Tarkington J. Newman, Fernando Santos, Sandra Black, Kendra Bostick (2022)	Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal	9
6	Blended Learning to Improve Vocational Life Skills in Making Batik for Disabilities W. Widajati, S. Mahmudah (2023)	Jurnal Pedagogi dan Pembelajaran	1
7	Development of an Experiential Learning Management Model to Develop Career Skills	Journal of Education and Learning (ERIC)	1

	for Primary School Students P. Khaewphuang (2024)		
8	Enhancing Graduate Employability: Exploring the Influence of Experiential Simulation Learning on Life Skill Development Florian Scheuring, Jamie Thompson (2025)	Journal of Higher Education (Taylor & Francis)	4
9	Impact of One-Day Adventure-Based Experiential Learning (AEL) Programme on Life Effectiveness Skills of Adult Learners (2016)	South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation	22

Table No 1 provides information on the authors and citation counts of frequently cited publications in the Goggle scholar, Scopus & ERIC database from 2014 to 2025 in the field of study. According to the data, the publication by Wiwik Widajati¹, Siti Mahmudah², Diah Ekasari (2015) had the highest number of citations.

Findings and Thematic Synthesis

1. Consistent Improvement Across Contexts

Across all reviewed studies, experiential learning showed a positive effect on life skills acquisition. For instance, Widajati et al. (2015, 2023) reported substantial improvements in vocational life skills among secondary school students with disabilities following activity-based and blended experiential learning modules. Similarly, Khaewphuang (2024) found that primary students demonstrated statistically significant gains in career-related competencies post-intervention.

2. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skill Enhancement

Croes and Visser (2015) documented gains in both interpersonal (e.g., collaboration, communication) and intrapersonal skills (e.g., self-awareness, reflection) through participation in a real-world digital marketing challenge. This dual impact was mirrored in studies employing sports and extracurricular activities (Durhan, 2021) and adventure-based programs (2016), which highlighted improved self-efficacy, team skills, and emotional regulation.

3. Relevance of Context and Learner Engagement

The success of experiential learning was closely tied to the relevance of the experience and the degree of learner engagement. Newman et al. (2022) emphasized that even negative or challenging experiences, when scaffolded properly, fostered resilience and personal growth. Scheuring and Thompson (2025) stressed the need for realistic simulations in higher education to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world practice.

4. Special Populations and Inclusive Pedagogy

Studies involving students with disabilities (Keenan et al., 2014; Widajati et al., 2023) highlighted the adaptability of experiential learning methods to support diverse learner needs. Goal-directed and community-based interventions were particularly effective in promoting independence and social integration.

5. Design and Implementation Factors

Program design elements such as duration, facilitator training, reflection components, and integration with curricular goals significantly influenced outcomes. One-day interventions (2016) demonstrated

short-term efficacy, while sustained programs (Khaewphuang, 2024) yielded deeper, more lasting impacts.

Discussion

The meta-analysis confirms that experiential learning is a robust vehicle for life skills development. Its strength lies in its flexibility, learner-centred approach, and capacity to simulate real-life challenges. The findings align with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which emphasizes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

However, variability in outcomes suggests the importance of thoughtful program design and contextual adaptation. For example, programs tailored to vocational skills in specific cultural or socio-economic settings yielded more relevant and transferable competencies. Furthermore, the integration of structured reflection was a critical factor in transforming experience into learning.

The evidence also indicates that experiential learning is particularly beneficial for learners who may not thrive in traditional academic settings, including those with disabilities or those in alternative education tracks. This reinforces the need for inclusive pedagogies that recognize diverse learning styles and capacities.

Implications for Practice and Policy

1. **Curriculum Integration:** Educational institutions should embed experiential learning modules within mainstream curricula, particularly in areas related to civic education, career readiness, and health.
2. **Facilitator Training:** Teachers and educators require specialized training to design and facilitate effective experiential learning environments, including skills in scaffolding, debriefing, and assessment.
3. **Assessment Tools:** Development of reliable and valid tools to measure life skills acquisition is essential for evaluating program impact and guiding iterative improvements.
4. **Equity and Access:** Policymakers should ensure that experiential learning opportunities are equitably distributed, with targeted support for marginalized groups.
5. **Research and Innovation:** Continued research is needed to explore innovative experiential models, including digital simulations and community partnerships, to address emerging life skills demands.

Conclusion

From vocational competence to emotional intelligence, experiential learning offers a transformative pathway to life skills development. The studies reviewed in this meta-analysis demonstrate that well-structured experiential interventions can yield measurable improvements across a range of competencies and learner populations. As education systems worldwide grapple with preparing youth for complex futures, the insights from this analysis offer a compelling case for embedding experiential learning at the heart of educational reform.

Reference

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