Experiential Learning in Hospitality and Tourism Education over the Last Decade: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis

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Abstract: Experiential learning has been widely applied in the teaching practices of hospitality and tourism education. Despite of its wide application, the systematic review of its research progress and trends has not been conducted, thereby this study employs qualitative meta-analysis methods to examine research articles related to experiential learning in hospitality and tourism education published over the past decade. Drawing from the OECD educational ecosystem, our analytical framework constitutes of influencing factors, learning processes and methods, and learning outcomes of experiential learning. At the macro level, technological changes are identified as the primary influencing factor, while at the meso level, industry support and the business environment play crucial roles. At the micro level, student-related factors such as motivation, learning styles, individual characteristics, and accessibility, along with course design by educators, significantly affect experiential learning. A variety of learning processes and methods are observed, each with distinct advantages—ranging from classroom learning and practical learning to virtual and blended learning approaches. Learning outcomes encompass the development of students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. This study points out that future technological advancements will further influence the processes and methods of experiential learning. The focus of experiential learning outcomes will continue to shift from fostering single-discipline knowledge to nurturing individuals with broader interdisciplinary foundations and more comprehensive personal development

Keywords: Hospitality and Tourism Education; Experiential Learning; Analytical Framework; Qualitative Meta-Analysis

1. Introduction

Experiential learning has been recognized as a necessary in both hospitality and tourism education studies. In the field of hospitality education, literature on experiential learning focuses on student outcomes, skill development, and career impact [1]. Lee (2008) highlighted seven advantages of experiential learning for hospitality management students, such as: a deeper comprehension of how organizations function, a more realistic perspective on career expectations, broader professional networks, increased proactivity, better adaptability to change, enhanced leadership abilities, and stronger financial management skills [2]. Meanwhile, tourism education studies have also shown that experiential learning can increase students' interest in tourism as a discipline [3], provide deeper insights into tourism destinations [4], and improve students' teamwork abilities and sense of social responsibility [5], among other benefits.

Previous research has mainly examined the advantages, methods, and outcomes of experiential learning, focusing on specific course objectives and individual teaching applications [6]. Despite of its wide application, no study thus far has conducted systematic review on the research progress and trends of experiential learning, which could futher hinds of practical develolopment. To address this research gap and developing a more holistic understanding of experiential learning, this study employs qualitative meta-analysis methods to examine research papers on experiential learning in hospitality and tourism education since the past decade. The study aims to construct an analytical framework addressing the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of experiential learning based on the OECD's educational ecosystem, while

proposing future trends that offer insights and reflections for both hospitality and tourism education and the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Experiential Learning

American philosopher and educator—John Dewey was the first to describe experiential learning as "learning by doing". Kolb (1984)later defined it as a form of learning derived from life experiences, describing it as " Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" [7].Experiential learning integrates meaningful, direct experiences for students with guided reflection and analysis, creating a challenging, active, and student-centered process [8].

Kolb (1984) creatively proposed the four-stage experiential learning cycle model—concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation [7]. Concrete experience involves gaining direct experience through real and tangible perception. Abstract conceptualization is the cognitive process of internalizing these experiences and interpreting them using concepts or symbolic descriptions. Through dialectical processing, including internal transformation and external application, experiential learning enables the transfer of learning [9]. These four stages are interconnected, and learners progress through them to effectively transform experiences into new knowledge.

2.2 Construction of the Analytical Framework

The learner-centered educational ecosystem is influenced by both internal and external factors, which in turn drive changes in teaching, learning processes, and outcomes [10]. According to the report of "The Future of Education and Skills 2030": Curriculum Analysis, the educational ecosystem is composed of a nested system with students at its core [11]. This system is shaped by micro, meso, and macro-level factors, which primarily influence the learning environment, flexible curriculum design, and autonomous learning strategies [12]. This education system layers, born out of ecological systems theory, was introduced to high education to reflect reciprocal influences of students and their environments [13]. Thus, this study has developed an analytical framework grounded in the educational ecosystem concept: (1) influencing factors (antecedents); (2) learning processes and methods (processes); and (3) learning outcomes (results), as shown in Figure 1.

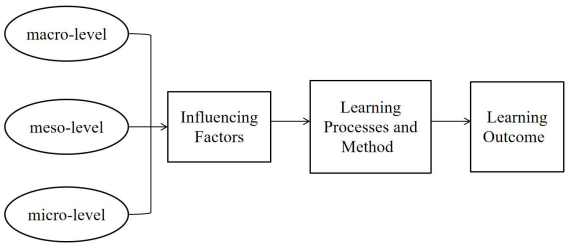

Figure 1. Qualitative Meta-analysis Framework

2.2.1 Influencing factors

The educational ecosystem is a complex hierarchical system. At the macro-level, education is influenced by national or governmental policies, culture, economic conditions, and technological environments, which provide direct or indirect support to education. The meso- level includes formal or informal networks between schools, industries, and teacher associations, which create opportunities for collaboration in curriculum development. The micro-level focuses on interactions between teaching and learning, centered on the student, encompassing factors such as teachers' understanding of classroom dynamics and student engagement. This study therefore analyses influencing factors across the macro, meso, and micro levels.

2.2.2 Learning processes and methods

Askren & James (2021) highlighted several experiential learning methods employed by universities in Canada and the United States, including applied research, campus entrepreneurship/incubators, internships, cooperative education, apprenticeships, service learning, field experiences, clinical placements, performative learning, on-campus teaching laboratories, project design, interactive simulations, and industry/community-sponsored research projects [14]. However, experiential learning also presents challenges, such as mismatches between content and learning objectives, ineffective skill acquisition, and low teaching efficiency [15]. To overcome these drawbacks, teachers must carefully design structures that effectively integrate experiential learning with academic disciplines [16]. Thus, this paper analyses the learning processes and methods utilized in experiential learning within hospitality and tourism studies over the past

decade.

2.2.3 Learning outcomes

The OECD in its The Future of Education and Skills 2030 report poses the question: What kinds of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values do students need to shape their world? Looking ahead, education must reconsider what kinds of knowledge, abilities, and competencies students should acquire [11]. Teachers must understand students' learning objectives and assess them effectively. Therefore, this study examines the learning outcomes that experiential learning provides to students.In conclusion, this paper specifically addresses three key areas—influencing factors, learning processes and methods, and learning outcomes. It further breaks down these dimensions into secondary indicators to construct a coding framework for experiential learning, providing a theoretical foundation for the qualitative analysis presented in this study.

3. Research Process

3.1 Research Methodology

The qualitative meta-analysis method, also known as meta-ethnography or qualitative meta-synthesis, was first introduced by Noblit & Hare in their paper Meta-Analysis [17]. Qualitative meta-analysis involves a deep comparison and analysis of existing research literature, reconstructing dispersed findings through a coherent cognitive framework [18]. The steps for conducting qualitative meta-analysis include: (1) identifying potential research questions; (2) searching and selecting relevant literature, assessing its quality; (3) repeatedly reading the literature to extract key concepts; (4) discussing the relationships between key concepts; (5) examining the similarities in research findings; (6) developing a conceptual framework; and (7) presenting the research findings [19]. This paper follows these seven steps to search, read, analyse, and code the literature.

3.2 Literature Search and Selection

To ensure the representativeness and convenience of the selected sample, this study follows several criteria for literature search and selection: (1) the search is restricted to three specialized international journals in tourism education, namely Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism , Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education, and Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education; (2) the research methods used in the articles are either qualitative or mixed-methods; (3) the timeframe is limited to 2014–2024. Using the Scopus database, a search was conducted with "Experiential Learning" as the title, abstract, or keyword, resulting in 78 articles. After a thorough review of the literature, 41 articles were ultimately selected for analysis, based on this study's analytical framework.

3.3 Coding Process

In accordance with the analytical framework, the selected articles were read in detail, identifying recurring or similar themes. For example, themes such as "employment skills and adaptability," "job readiness," and "employability" were grouped under the category of "employability", which was then classified into the secondary dimension of "ability" within the broader category of "learning outcomes". Through a three-tiered coding process, an experiential learning framework was constructed, resulting in 26 axials codes and 10 selective codes (see Table 1).

Table 1. An Example of Qualitative Meta-Analysis Coding Process

Analytical framework	Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding
Influencing Factors	Macro-Level	Technological transformation	Virtual field trips, personal mobile devices, artificial intelligence tools
	Meso-Level	Industry support	Interactions with industry partners, full immersion in the business environment
		Conducive business environment	Supervisions of teachers and industry partners, productive learning autonomous，real commercial environment
	Micro-Level	Course design	Well-designed curricula，"real" business operation
		Learning motivation	Self-challenge, curiosity about other cultures, broadening perspectives and worldviews, personal interests
		Learning styles	Learning styles preference，auditory and visual learning style，auditory learners，virtual learners，kinesthetic learners，tactile

			learners，interactive learners
		Individual characteristics	Millennial students, Z generation, technology mastering ability, prior academic knowledge, industry experience, and travel experiences
		Accessibility	Financial costs, travel expenses, convenience, and perceived risks
Learning Processes and Methods	Classroom Learning	Role-playing	Staffing process role play
		Learning approaches	Decision-making skills embedded consulting approach, design thinking approach, industry-focused experiential problem-based learning
	Practical Learning	Internships	Hotel internships, international internships
		Service learning	Community project service，ecotourism service-learning course，hospitality management and operations service-learning subject, real conference organization task
		Field trips	Fieldwork, international sustainable tourism, short study tours abroad、educational Travel
	Virtual Learning	Virtualinternships	Virtual internships in tourism, events, and hospitality Education
		Virtual platform	Virtual field trip platform, virtual island
	Blended Learning	Interdisciplinary experiential learning	Interdisciplinary learning in hospitality and tourism and sport management
		Online and offline instruction	Service online interactive, blended course designed
Learning outcomes	Knowledge	Disciplinary knowledge	General industry knowledge, the latest news and events in the industry, entrepreneurial mindset, preparation process for sporting events, preparation and implementation of conference events, plan and operate a smooth F&B operation
		Interdisciplinary knowledge	Broadening learners' existing understanding with information from different perspectives，theories, concepts, and methods from other fields
		Dynamic knowledge system	Effectiveness of knowledge and skills acquired, learning new local knowledge and culture, exposure to new things, impressions of new perspectives
	Skills	Professional competence	Planning and execution of catering operations, financial management abilities, meeting planning, event organizing ability, employability
		Universal capability	Interpersonal skills, interpersonal communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills
		Innovation criticism ability	Critical thinking ability, critical analysis and understanding of the external world, innovation ability, reflection ability
	Attitudes and values	Cognitive development	;Change of the world view, broaden the world view, shift in worldview and perspective, cross-cultural development, cultural awareness, cultural experience, cultural identity,
		Emotional development	Belonging and building friendships, interpersonal attitudes, positive emotions, compassion, emotional experiences, emotional learning, increasing enthusiasm for international education and learning
		Personal development	Increased self-awareness, more independence and confidence, self-confidence, self-esteem, social awareness, sense of responsibility and participation, raising environmental awareness; attitude towards life and expectations for future career

4. Research Findings

4.1 Influencing Factors

Various influencing factors are reported in the literature, which can be categorized into three different levels: macro, meso, and micro levels. Macro-level factors refer to large-scale changes that affect the whole society or industry, meso-level factors indicate changes that affect organizations or communities, and micro-level factors influence individuals, such as students or teachers.

4.1.1 Macro level

At the macro level, technological transformation has increasingly impacted tourism education.

Technological progress has introduced new opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills through virtual field trips [20]. In educational field trips, such as overseas study programs, the use of personal mobile devices can provide enjoyment, create memories, foster academic innovation, and promote interaction and functionality [21]. As artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT are integrated into higher education, educators can utilize ChatGPT to support event management courses through planning course content, which previously is a time-consuming task[22].

4.1.2 Meso level

At the meso level, the successful implementation of experiential learning relies on industry support and the creation of a conducive business environment. Many learning outcomes depend on interactions with industry partners or full immersion in the business environment [16]. For example, in a food production course, professional chefs teach classes, industry experts are invited to share insights, and students are given opportunities to visit farms, supplier warehouses, resorts, and restaurants [23]. Through this approach, multiple industry partners are engaged in university teaching, allowing the courses to closely align with industry standards. Fieldtrips to hotels, internships, and other forms of industry immersion shape students' familiarity with real commercial environment[24].

4.1.3 Micro level

At the micro level, experiential learning is typically designed and facilitated directly by educators. The design of the curriculum, learners' cognition, and pedagogical interaction are reflected in dimensions such as curriculum design, learning motivation, learning styles, individual characteristics, and accessibility.

Educators' course design is equally crucial in attracting students and creating successful learning experiences. Well-designed curricula that connect with industry professionalism and educational content built on design thinking and Kolb's four-stage experiential learning model provide valuable reference points [25]. Teachers need to think about how to design experiential learning to achieve curriculum goals and how to create a real-world environment so that students can benefit from experiential learning. Providing students with a "real" business is one potential solution.

Intrinsic, extrinsic, or a combination of motivations are fundamental conditions for learning. A few of scholars researches found some common motivation in choosing a bachelor's degree in hospitality and tourism, such as self-actualization, job opportunities, scholastic achievement, foreign experience. But recently there were some changes in experiential learning motivations. Primary learning motivations include self-challenge, curiosity about other cultures, broadening perspectives and worldviews, and personal interests [26].

Learning style preferences refer to students preferred sensory channels for learning. A qualitative study on Chinese hospitality management students clustered sixteen experiential learning activities into five dimensions of learning style: auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile, and interactive, and showed that most hotel schools in China preferred auditory and visual learning style [27].This study connected Kolb's experiential learning theory with Fleming's VARK model, from which we can see learning style preferences are not a single issue.

Individual student characteristics also influence the effectiveness of experiential learning. Millennial and Generation Z students are naturally adept with technology and prefer non-traditional teaching methods, such as learner-centred approaches [28]. They also favor experiential learning environments that are technology-based and highly interactive, which desire for frequent interactions with both educators and peers. Some students' understanding of experiential learning is shaped by prior academic knowledge, industry experience, and travel experiences [26].

4.2 Learning Processes and Methods

Experiential learning in hospitality and tourism education encompasses a variety of methods, with field trips, simulation games, role-playing, case studies, and service learning being the most prevalent [29]. Through coding, this study categorises the learning processes and methods into four types: classroom learning, practical learning, virtual learning, and blended learning.

4.2.1 Classroom learning

Experiential learning in classroom provide more risk-free environment, where knowledge retention is higher [23]. Traditionally, experiential activities conducted within the classroom have commonly taken the form of role-playing, games, simulations, or case studies.

Students' participation in role play can improve knowledge retention. In a staffing process, students selected active role or passive role to develop their employability skill, the result proved that role playing in recruitment programs could enhance students' confidence in finding a job [30].

Within recent decades, scholars have started to explore and apply three additional experiential learning approaches that were not frequently employed. The first is a consulting model embedded in the development of decision-making skills [1], where students collaborate with business organizations, act as consultants, and engage with real-world business situations, scenarios, and decisions. This model focuses on developing students' decision-making skills across four stages: situation assessment, understanding the environment and organisational priorities, action planning, and analysis of outcomes and impacts.

The second approach is design thinking-based classroom instruction [25], which includes stages of "problem identification", "empathy and definition", "ideation" and "prototyping". These activities encourage tourism students to think creatively and proactively, enhancing their communication skills, teamwork abilities, decision-making skills, and empathy.

The third approach is industry-focused experiential problem-based learning, which aims to address real-world challenges faced by companies [23]. This method strikes a significant balance between in-class learning environments and out-of-class immersive teaching.

4.2.2 Practical learning

The experiential learning approaches within practical teaching are primarily divided into three categories: internships, service learning, and field trips, with each category exhibiting different forms based on specific professional fields and curricula.

Internships provide students with valuable opportunities to become acquainted with the latest industry news and events while acquiring knowledge and skills that meet industry standards [31]. Additionally, international internships offer students the chance to enhance their cultural sensitivity and explore global career options [32].

The second category, service learning, combines academic study with community service, addressing community needs while simultaneously fostering students' competencies and sense of civic responsibility [5]. Research on service learning in hospitality and tourism education has addressed topics such as ecotourism, hotel management and operations in developing regions, and event organisation[16]. Service-learning offers students learning opportunities that traditional classrooms cannot offer, and develops student teamwork and leadership [16].

The third category, field trips, is the most common form of experiential learning in hospitality and tourism education. Field trips provide students with learning opportunities through real-world social contexts, enabling them to closely perceive the industry or destination. In tourism education, field trips stimulate students' motivation and learning through travel, enjoyment, and novelty [29].

4.2.3 Virtual learning

Virtual learnings are an emerging experiential learning approach that supplements traditional learning through educational technologies, primarily divided into virtual internship assessments and virtual platforms. Virtual internship initially arose in response to changes in internship environments due to the COVID-19 crisis. As a result of the pandemic, internships shifted to remote formats, necessitating students to utilise various platforms and tools, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, GoToMeeting, email, online chat, and phone to maintain contact with internship supervisors and colleagues. The content of these internships increasingly centred on remote tasks such as event planning and coordination and social media marketing [33]. Feedback from students indicates that those with higher levels of technological proficiency experienced better outcomes in virtual internships. Virtual platforms offer greater flexibility, providing online courses regardless of whether teaching occurs during the pandemic or in normal circumstances.

4.2.4 Blended learning

Blended learning manifests in two aspects: interdisciplinary integration and a hybrid of online and offline instruction. Students in hospitality and tourism and sport management classes perceive interdisciplinary learning as offering four primary benefits: (1) opportunities to learn from diverse perspectives; (2) making learning more engaging; (3) providing novel experiences; and (4) enhancing employment opportunities [26]. Interdisciplinary learning not

only reinforced students major-specific concepts, but also enhanced both areas k foundational knowledge to gain.

In order to overcome the difficulties of offline service learning during the epidemic period, the course design was adjusted, adopting on-site visits, group information sharing and online lectures of enterprises, and more online interactive platforms and methods to fulfill service-learning objectives. A course designed around leadership and team performance has been implemented as a blended course, with students expressing a preference for this mixed experiential learning course design and delivery over traditional classroom instruction, showing improved knowledge and skill acquisition [24].

4.3 Learning Outcomes

Experiential learning brings numerous values, and this section analyzes its outcomes based on a framework centered around the core question: "Looking to the future, how must education rethink what knowledge, skills, and competencies to cultivate in students?" The analysis is structured around three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and competencies.

4.3.1 Knowledge

The knowledge cultivated through experiential learning encompasses disciplinary knowledge, interdisciplinary knowledge, and a dynamic knowledge system. Disciplinary knowledge refers to the insights students gain into the latest industry practices through specific experiential activities, acquiring relevant expertise in areas such as catering, event management, hotel services, and sustainable tourism [31]. Besides, experiential learning encourages students' entrepreneurial mindset development [26], and raise them recognitions of the latest news and events in the industry [31]. In a form of student-operated restaurants, a conventional content analysis was conducted which found out a lot of learning outcomes experienced by students, such as how to plan and operate a smooth F&B operation.

Interdisciplinary experiential learning develops new insights and skills by integrating knowledge from various fields, broadening learners' existing understanding of tourism industry [26]. The third aspect is the establishment of a dynamic knowledge system. Experiential learning places a greater emphasis on lifelong learning, enhancing the effectiveness of knowledge and skills through exposure to new ideas and cultures [1].

4.3.2 Skills

Experiential learning can cultivate key skills necessary for students to thrive in the hospitality and tourism industries [1]. Students are required to develop professional skills, general skills , and innovative and critical skills. The current dynamic socio-economic, technological, physical and political environment makes these knowledge, skills important for tourism professionals at all levels, students need to master data analysis skills due to technology advancement [34].

4.3.3 Attitudes and values

In terms of attitudes and values, experiential learning significantly impacts cognitive, emotional, and personal development. Cognitive development primarily refers to how students perceive the world and understand cultures. Many scholars argue that experiential learning contributes to changing and broadening worldviews, enhancing cultural awareness and experience, particularly through international field trips that develop cross-cultural understanding and reidentify cultural identity of the nation [35].

Emotional development relates to the development of social and emotional self, manifesting in feelings of belonging, empathy, interpersonal relationships, and positive emotions. Some experience learning method, such as education tourism and service learing not only reframe their own identity or shift interpersonal attitudes, but also begin to negotiate a sense of global community belonging, while positive group discussions and activities resulted in a sense of belonging and establishing friendships [36].

Personal development is a broad concept encompassing self-awareness, social responsibility, life attitudes, and career expectations. Personal development includes six key themes: self-motivation, self-confidence, self-awareness, self-esteem, leadership, and maturity [36]. Service learning approaches, which involve students providing service to the community, have shown improvements in social responsibility and teamwork. Interactions with local individuals also influence students' life attitudes and future career expectations [5].

Based on the qualitative meta-analysis above, a analytical framework is constructed including influencing factors, learning processes and methods, and learning outcomes (see Figure 2).

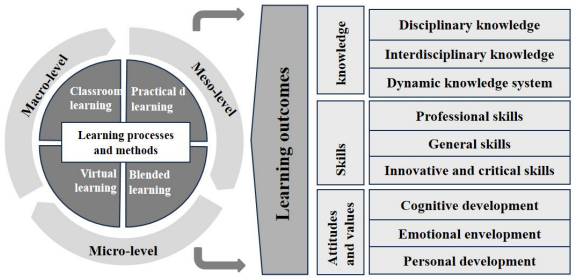

Figure 2. A Analytical Framework of Experiential Learning

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Conclusions

This review provided an analytical framework integrating influencing factors, learning processes and methods, and learning outcomes of experiential learning to capture topic and trends in hospitality and tourism education. It was found that the influencing factors of experiential learning are mainly manifested as technological changes at the macro level, industry support and business environment construction at the meso level, and the motivation, learning styles, individual characteristics, accessibility of student subjects, as well as the curriculum design of teacher subjects at the micro level.The manifestations of experiential learning processes and methods are diverse, encompassing classroom learning, practical learning, virtual learning, and blended learning. Each approach has its unique advantages, catering to different learning preferences and contexts.The outcomes of experiential learning reflect the cultivation of students' knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The interconnections between influencing factors, learning modes, and outcomes underscore the complexity of the experiential learning process.

5.2 Implications

The findings from this research have several implications for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders:

For educators, there is a need to design and implement curricula that integrate technology and experiential learning opportunities effectively. Digital transformation provides flexible and diverse learning methods, which change the physical space, technical means, and learning resources of experiential learning of traditional classes. Technology offers students opportunities from active participation to active creation. Encouraging student engagement through diverse teaching methods can enhance learning outcomes, especially higher-level skills.

For policymakers, supporting the development of partnerships between educational institutions and industry can facilitate better alignment of curricula with industry needs, ultimately benefiting students in their future careers. Experiential teaching has shown the advantages of bridging the gap between theory and practice, but the dynamic environment of the hotel and tourism industry also put forward higher requirements for hospitality and tourism degree students. Review shows students development has changed from a single structural set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to a board one. It is still a worth discussing issue that policymakers need to collaborate with industry and others to provide valuable experiential learning opportunities across various disciplines.

For industry stakeholders, engaging with educational institutions can provide valuable insights into student learning processes, enabling a more skilled workforce that meets industry demands. How well they fit in the curriculum and learning process can let better embed students' experience into their career life.

Overall, the research highlights the importance of a collaborative approach to experiential learning, where educators, students, and industry partners work together to create meaningful and effective learning experiences.

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