

Activity based learning in commerce and tourism education

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Abstract

The commerce and tourism industry are vibrant and the changes in them are so radical that a series of new concepts and techniques are fast coming into being and the earlier and traditional ones are becoming outdated. Educators and policymakers have increasingly sought strategies to improve academic achievement and preparation for college and career success. The purpose of this study is two folded. Firstly, it focuses on the crucial role of activity-based learning techniques in commerce and tourism education to bridge the gap between industry and academia. Secondly, the study aims to identifying the difference between industry and academia and at the same time offers some useful teaching techniques in commerce and tourism education to overcome the difference. The article is conceptual in orientation and is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources include discussion and interview with teachers of commerce and tourism courses as well as students. The secondary sources include review of previous studies, magazines and reports and so on. The result of the study indicate that positive attitude towards activity based learning teaching is evident in a marked improvement in academic performance as well as career prospects of a students and make them compatible with the changing business scenario.

Keywords: Educator, policymaker, prospects, activity based learning (ABL), Scenario.

INTRODUCTION

Betts and Liow (1993) called for a shift from traditional 'chalk & talk' teaching method to 'active learning' for students. This change appears to have been largely unheeded in education. They stated that academics were focused on the present but students were focused on only future and thus failed to engage with course material in a meaningful way.

Some researchers suggest that teaching strategies should move to a more student centred approach (Smith et al, 2005). These approaches are based on a constructive view of learning which suggest that each person construct their own learning process with others. Learning activities that are based on 'real life' experiences are claimed to help students transform information or fact into personal

knowledge which can then be applied in a variety of situations (Edward, 20001)

During the past few decades commerce and tourism education has emerged with favourable study programmes. These two areas were responsible for much economic growth, balance of payments, employment opportunity growth and regional balance in India. They are also significant to society and culture and in ways they improve the general atmosphere for tourists. Many industries and tourism and hospitality establishments, and the government are paying closer attention the future of commerce and tourism sector and what is taught and how it is taught.

This article focuses on Activity Based Learning so as to seek to minimize the differences between industry and the academic world in terms of what is taught and how it is taught in commerce and tourism education.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The debate on imparting activity based learning in commerce and tourism education often takes a too narrow approach, without focusing on the real issues in any depth. It is narrow, since the debate is not focused on the level of activity based learning. Commerce and tourism education often incorporate more theoretical learning without imparting the practical knowledge and skills that are required for different stakeholders, in particular in the tourism industry.

The post liberalization era saw a drastic change in the educational system globally. A graduate in an educational institution in India has to compete with another graduate coming out of a university or institution in another country for an employment opportunity. Thereby the quality of manpower produced by a country is evaluated globally. So it is important the educational system should result in producing graduates with certain skills and expertise (Siraj & Pillai, 2012). Both commerce and the tourism sector require manpower with practical exposure rather than theoretical knowledge. Inspired by this many education institutions as well as universities have introduced on the job training projects/aspects (work integrated learning) in their courses to make students more industry savvy and thus more effective in what they do in the workplace.

The purpose behind University education as explained by McIntyre, et al (1999) is “about acquiring and appreciating theoretical, disciplinary formal foundational and generalizable knowledge in learning environment that is independent of the demands of the economy or the workplace”. Another view proposed by McIntyre et al (1999) who noted that the objective of university education should be to prepare graduates in response to the demands of the workplace, and as a cornerstone of economic growth. It is argued by Hager, et al (2002) that universities have always had a commitment to ensure graduates develop broad based, generic skills such as “critical thinking”, “problem solving”, “analytic capacity” and so forth. The skills and

capability that a graduate require is often benchmarked with the industry expectation. Hence commerce and tourism education should be the focus point while defining and revising programs and aligning it with activity based learning.

Now the debate should concentrate on whether university educationists should focus their education offering on the expectations and demands of the industry at large. Often, industry complains that the graduates coming out of university education do not normally fit into their positions with ease and thus fail to meet expectations. The curriculum and programs are generally designed by academicians without any feedback from industry. At present, various accreditation bodies in commerce and tourism education stress the need to integrate what industry needs with what universities produce. The conflict between a university's goals while imparting education and the industry's requirements while recruiting graduates is often prevalent in many economies. Students are also confused as to what the course/program provides for their future career prospects. The debate on activity based learning in commerce and tourism education should thus start with a requisite focus on graduate attributes and the ways in which it can be imparted for use as effective commerce education.

Commerce and tourism, like other professional courses, are careers which require more practical expertise. Organizations require professionals at different levels, requiring different levels of expertise. An accountant is expected to serve the company in day-to-day commerce issues and for example, prepare statements of accountants. A travel agent is expected to develop tourism packages and services according to tourism requirements. The educational system is expected to inculcate a course delivery which best suits the generation of graduates with industry expectations.

Commerce and tourism education in the modern era is relevant not only because of the ever-increasing needs of the nation, but also because the fields occupy a pivotal

position in industry. Thus, it is essential to incorporate commerce and tourism programs in such a way that best suits the industry requirements. The activity based learning in commerce and tourism should be a continuous effort to assess program offered in commerce and tourism education. This should be done through continuous feedback system from the various stakeholders.

The researcher, consequently undertook this study to try to develop and promote the paradigm of activity based learning so as to limit the differences between industry and academia in terms of commerce and tourism education.

INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA DIFFERENCES

Commerce and tourism are the industries uniquely dealing in dreams. The positive output of both can be maximized only if the industries and academia work together in a very positive manner. There is serious need to promote industry-academia compatibility. But in developing countries like India, this positive pairing is missed always. Both industry and academia are having their own arguments and both are having genuine reason behind these arguments.

Academia has its own arguments such as:

- We prepare for life
 - We impart knowledge
 - We impart skills and aptitude
 - System is too lengthy that updating of courses at required level is not possible
 - Universities cannot teach learning required before joining university courses
- In the same manner, industry is also having their own arguments like:
- Give us readily employable manpower with hands on experience
 - Update learning inputs continuously
 - Maximum of manpower is not relevant according to the requirement
 - Maximum of the manpower is not having spirit to serve in this service oriented industry
 - Manpower is not having customer focused philosophy

ABL AS SOLUTIONS FOR INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA DIFFERENCES

Industry is very dynamic and it itself decides its pace for movement. We can't change commerce and tourism industry but it is academia which can move according to the industry. There are many ways in which we can use ABL and include it in curricula so as to prepare students to serve according to the requirements of industry. Active learning is an umbrella term that refers to several models of instruction that focus on the accountability of learning with students. "Active Learning" is, in short, whatsoever that students do in a classroom other than merely passively listening to a teacher's often boring speech. This comprises each and everything from listening practices which help the students to absorb whatever they perceive, to small script exercises in which students react to lecture material, to multifaceted cluster exercises in which students apply course material to "real life" situations and/or to new problems (Singh, 2013).

The Activity Based Learning (ABL) programme is an innovative, interesting and corroborative in the classroom transactional programme. It is a successful teaching model in the field of different subjects and it has recently found its way to business schools. This approach provides a way to integrate learning within students' knowledge, and, by exposing them to a variety of activities for harnessing their skills. Due to the high degree of interaction in ABL, essential instructor skills involved are facilitating, motivating, enabling and coaching rather than simply presenting facts and figures didactically. The various studies have proved that language and learning are deeply intertwined. As learning as a social activity, ABL creates more opportunity of connection between learner and learning out comes (Bansal & Kumar, 2012). In contrast, the success of ABL is to make students feel responsible for their learning and to support their own individual development. Its applications can be found in medicine, science and engineering and more recently, also in management course

(e.g., Kanet & Barut, 2003). In a similar way it can be applicable to most commerce and tourism education.

Understanding its importance, the Harvard Business School has formed a committee on activity-based learning, aimed at integrating students' extracurricular activities with their academic experiences in the classroom. The objective is to how to enhance learners' management knowledge, skills, and problem-solving abilities (Bansal & Barut, 2003).

In this paper an attempt has thus far been made to assess Activity Based Learning which comprises of various methods which concentrate on student understanding and retention of material and can enhance the students skills as required for working in industry. There are many active learning techniques that we can used in the classroom and can give students that attitude which is required in commerce and tourism education and some of them are:

Seminar: In commerce and tourism education seminar is generally used to refer structural group discussion that may precede or follow a formal lecture, often in the form of an essay or paper presentation. Individual students also set up papers or reports and presents before the group of peer. The audiences critically evaluate the papers and discuss the findings of the papers. This approach is suitable when the level of group is relatively high and subject-matter needs analytical treatment.

Symposium: Symposium is a discussion by different specialist or speakers on the same topic, emphasizing or dealing with different aspects of the similar theme. Nominated presenters' present organized lectures. The chairperson co-ordinates the different speakers' presentation.

Team Teaching: Team teaching activities are supportive forecasting, substitution of instructors, collective convention for lecture, film shows, projects and other joint activities for execution and evaluation of learning experiences of the students.

Project approach: A project is a unit of activity or task set as an educational exercise which requires students to do investigation or research and present the result. Project is very appropriate in higher education as it grants a higher degree of autonomy to the learner. This method is very effective in increasing the involvement, knowledge, personal development and skill for independent work, group work and effective communication in tourism.

Modern Gadgets and Technology assisted instruction: The most striking innovation in the field of educational technology is the use of modern gadgets and technology like Radio, Computers, Mobiles, I phones, Internet, Internet radio, Internet Protocol Television etc. The development in information and communication technology has enhanced the scope for active participation of students in the learning process according to their individual need.

Internships: Internship activities provide a designed shift from the classroom to the job, and build a natural bridge between institution and the tourism industry. Specifically, internships are generally coordinated activities and agreements that allow students to work in a work place for a significant period of time. Internships are mostly used in higher level of education.

Community Service Program or Service Learning: Community service or service learning programs are an approach to teaching and learning that actively engages students in community service which is directly connected to academic course content. Service-learning experiences had a significant effect on the impact of the practice, counting individual growth, relational development, citizenship, problem solving, learning and application, tolerance and closeness to faculty.

Field Trip: A field trip is a structured activity that occurs outside the lecture hall. It can be a brief observational activity or a longer more sustained investigation or project. Field trips offer an opportunity for students to get exposure to "real" people and events and the opportunity to make acquaintances

with others. Students during their field trips visit persons and places that they are not normally exposed to. Especially for tourism management students, field trip is playing miraculous role.

Industrial Tour: The industrial visit also provides an insight on how travel agencies work and also useful information related to the practical aspects of the course which cannot be visualized in lectures. Most often the purpose is to provide student a perspective of the actual work situation and to enable them to understand how the theory put into practice. It is a bridging point between the education and tourism industry.

Class discussion: A class discussion may be held in person or in a related situation. Deliberations can be accompanied with every class strength, though it is usually more effective in smaller group settings. As learners are expected to discuss material constructively and perceptively, a conversation is a worthy follow-up activity provided the unit has been sufficiently covered already.

Think-pair-share: A think-pair-share activity is when learners take a minute to ponder the earlier experience, later to converse it through individual or more of their aristocrats, lastly to stake it with the class as portion of a formal discussion. However students need a background in the subject matter to converse in a meaningful way. A "think-pair-share" exercise is useful in situations where learners can identify and relate what they already know to others.

Learning cell: A learning cell is an effective way for a pair of students to study and acquire knowledge collectively. A learning cell is a procedure of learning where two students alternate asking and answering questions on commonly read ingredients. To ready for the assignment, the learner will recite the assignment and write down questions that they have about the reading. At the subsequent lecture meeting, the instructor will randomly arrange the students in groups. The procedure initiates by describing one student from each group

to begin by asking one of their questions to the one. By the time students talking about any issue, the students will probing each other and they will alternate accordingly. The teacher is observing the entire class, giving feedback and replying to the queries of the students. This technique is also stated to as a student dyad.

Collaborative learning group: A collaborative learning group is a successful way to learn different material for various classes. This is somewhere you disperse learners in groups of 3-6 people and they are given an assignment or task to work collectively. This assignment could be either to answer a question to present to the entire class or a project. The students in the group choose a leader and a note-taker to keep them on track with the process.

Student debate: A student debate is an active way for students to learn because they allow students the chance to take a position and gather information to support their views and explain this to others. Such kind of debates provide the student a chance to participate in a fun activity but it also lets them gain some experience with giving a verbal presentation.

Reaction to a video: A reaction to a video is also an example of active learning because most students like to experience videos. Such kinds of teaching aid facilitate the students to understand what they are learning at the time in an alternative presentation mode. We have to be sure that the video relates to the topic that they are studying at the moment.

Muddiest (or clearest) Point: This is a variation on the one-minute paper, though the student may be given slightly longer time period to answer the question. At the end of a class period, or at a natural break in the lecture. "What was the "muddiest point" in today's lecture?"

Affective Response: Again, this is similar to the above activities of drills, but now you are enquiring students to state their reactions to some facet of the study material i.e., to offer an affecting or

considerable response to the material. Evidently, this kind of practice is restricted to subject areas in which such questions are appropriate.

Daily Journal: In this we may set aside class time for students to complete their journal entries, or give it as assignment. The merely drawback to this approach is that the feedback will not be as "instant" as with the one-minute paper and other assignments which are to collect at the day of the relevant lecture.

Reading Quiz: Clearly, this is one way to coerce students to read given study material. Active learning depends upon students coming to class well prepared. The reading quiz can also be utilized as an efficient measure of student comprehension of the readings.

Clarification Pauses: This is a simple technique aimed at fostering students to become "active listener". During a lecture, generally subsequent to stating an important point or defining a vital conception, stop, let it descend in, and then after waiting a bit, it is to ask if anyone needs to have it clarified. Students who would never ask a question in front of the whole class will ask questions during a clarification pause as the teacher moves about the room.

Response to a demonstration or other teacher centred activity: The students are asked to write a paragraph that begins with: "I was surprised that" "I learned that", "I astounded about". This makes the learners to reveal on whatever they really obtained from the teacher's lecture or speech. This also enables pupils to understand the technique was structured for something more than just enjoyment.

Waiting-Time: Rather than choosing the student who will answer the question presented, this difference is that the instructor is now waiting before calling on someone to answer a question. The wait time will generally be short but it may seem interminable in the classroom. It is significant to persist that nobody move up

his hand or shout out the answer before the teacher give the OK, in order to discourage the typical scenario. Waiting forces every student to think about the problem, rather than inactively relying on those students who are fastest out of the gate to answer every question.

Student Summary of another Student's Answer:

In order to promote lively listening, after one student has volunteered an answer to question, the teacher asks another student to summarize the first student's answer. Other students listen slight of what their classmates have to say, waiting instead for the teacher to either correct or repeat the answer.

Quiz/Test Questions: Here students are asked to become actively involved in creating quizzes and tests by constructing some or all of the questions for the examinations. This practice may be given for assignments and be self-evaluated. Students might be asked to discuss several aspects of two different questions on the same material including degree of complexity, efficiency in measuring their erudition, appropriate scope of putting queries, and so forth.

Finger Signals: This method provides instructors with a means of testing student comprehension without the waiting period or the grading time required for written quizzes. Students are asked questions and initiated to signal their answers by holding up the appropriate number of fingers immediately in front of their torsos.

Quotations: This is a particularly useful method of testing student understanding when they are learning to read texts and identify an author's viewpoint and wiles. After students have read a delegate advocate of each of several opposing theories or schools of thinking, and the related notions have been described and talked in class, put on the overhead projector a quotation by an author whom they have not read in the assigned materials, and ask them to shape out what situation that person advocates.

The Pre-Theoretic Intuitions Quiz: In order to avoid such queries, and to find students involved in a subject matter before lecture start, an teacher can give a question intended at attaining students to both identify and to assess their own views. After students have responded to the questions independently, have them evaluate responses in groups and discuss the ones on which they disagree.

Group Discussion: A discussion indicates an exchange of ideas accompanied by active learning with all the members of the group participating in it. In small group instruction, group discussion form the core of all the strategies used. Students are asked to pair off and to respond to a question either in turn or as a pair. Generally, this works best when students are given explicit directions, such as "Tell each other why you chose the answer you did".

Role Playing: Here students are asked to "act out" a part. In doing this, they get a healthier idea of the concepts and theories being discussed. Role-playing movements can vary from the simple to the multifaceted. Difficult role playing might take the type of a play depending on time and resources.

Panel Discussions: Panel discussions are especially useful when students are asked to give class presentation or reports as a way of including the entire class in the lecture. Groups of students are dispersed a theme to explore and asked to prepare. Each panellist is then expected to make a very short lecture, earlier than the ground is opened to queries from "the addressees". The solution to victory is to select subject matter cautiously and to give students sufficient direction to ensure that they are well-prepared for their presentations.

Team Debates: The formal debates provide an efficient structure for class presentations when the subject matter easily divides into opposing views. Students are assigned to groups or teams, provided a situation to support, and then asked to present opinions in support of their position at time of presentation. The opposite side

should be given a chance to rebut the arguments and if occasion allow, the original presenters asked to react to the rebuttal.

CONCLUSION

The world we live in is dynamic where time determines everything. The geo-political boundaries are shrinking rapidly and opportunities are expanding rapidly with competition as the key driver. The growing high-tech environment, changing consumer behaviour, economic trends, importance of customer service-based differentiation strategies are making it necessary that a student should be able enough to deal with all possible circumstances. So students and teachers have to remain ahead of their game, communicate well, and acquire and equip themselves with all the fundamentals and broad concepts of the tourism industry requirements and the business arena in general. It is important that the teachers and learners of commerce and tourism programmes prepare themselves to respond to the enormous challenges of the knowledge era. These growing industry requirements can be fulfilled by adopting activities as outlined above in the curricula in a full-fledged manner. Activity based learning is the only solution at the present time which bridges the gap between industry and academia and between commerce and tourism per se.

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