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Original Research

Exploring the Understanding of *Experiential Learning* Among the Faculty Members of a Higher Education Institution in Nepal

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to understand the perception about experiential learning (EL) among the faculty members of a higher education institution in Nepal, its application in their teaching, research and community engagement initiatives, and factors enabling/constraining the implementation of EL practices in management and entrepreneurship education. Through this qualitative and exploratory research, we found that: (i) EL was most commonly defined in the form of 'learning by doing through projects that are based on "real" problems', (ii) faculty members' understanding and application of EL can be explained by the rate in which they apply, reflect, re-configure and re-apply EL (being experiential themselves), and (iii) early adopters of EL attributed its application to the institutional strategy of developing "community-based" entrepreneurship education and the 'evolved' institutional culture that supported EL practices. Our findings also outline various individual, institutional, and structural factors enabling and/or constraining faculty member's implementation of EL practices. Although this exploratory research lays out unique facets of EL practices in the context of a business school in Nepal, we strongly believe that it adds to the already evolving discourse of making higher

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education more relevant, effective, and efficient in addressing local challenges in countries like Nepal.

Keywords: experiential learning, management education, Nepal, entrepreneurship education

Introduction

In its relatively young history of around 100 years, higher education in Nepal has grown into a complex system of universities, constituent campuses (both community and private) and private colleges spread across the country that offer a wide range of undergraduate and graduate level programs affiliated to local as well as foreign universities. While this growth has contributed in the massification of higher education, concerns related to access, relevance, education quality, governance, appropriate financing, and capacity for innovation within Nepali Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) persist (Asian Development Bank, 2015). As Upadhyay (2018), in their descriptive-analytical study of different stakeholders associated with Nepali HEIs concluded, the effectiveness of higher education could be termed satisfactory, but the need for improvement in terms of adaptation, flexibility, and responsiveness toward socio-political, and cultural needs is lacking and is highly recommended. Scholars have also called out universities and colleges for their traditional approach to teaching and learning and lack of innovation in academic practices (Simkhada & Van Teijlingen, 2010). As Mathema (2007) commented:

> University classes mostly consist of lectures, and learning is simply the passive absorption of facts rather than any active intellectual discourse, participation, or research. Seminars and discussions rarely take place and reading assignments, drafting term-papers, project work, and case studies are unheard of. (p. 54)

While Mathema's comment reflected on academic practices within a specific university almost fifteen years ago, its relevance – in different levels and intensities – transcends to other HEIs even today. And while anecdotal references connect evolving scholarly activities (like research), integration of technology (like the use of PowerPoints and other digital tools or online learning via Zoom), teacher training (like workshops), involvement of pracademics (or professors of practice) and inclusion of off-campus activities (like internships and field work) to pedagogical innovations, most

of the teaching is still one dimensional: a teacher comes to the class, narrates facts to the students to cover a syllabi, and students learn the facts to pass an exam at the end of their term. This essentially limits learning, restrict practice, and disconnects students from the realities they are studying about.

Some HEIs have adopted innovative pedagogical practices – like experiential learning (EL), project-based learning, flipped classroom, cooperative learning, and design thinking – into their teaching and learning practices. However, as Robson and Wihlborg (2019) caution only catching up on the ideas from elsewhere does not guarantee effective teaching-learning. In recent times, EL has garnered considerable attention due to its potential for enhancing practical, hands-on learning experiences (Jackson et al., 2023). Scholars have explored the relevance of experiential learning in connecting the classroom with the community and the market (Chaudhari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, there appears to be a noticeable gap in evidence-based research regarding EL and a clear understanding of how it can be effectively implemented. Some research that has been conducted are either from the students' or from the secondary schools' point of view (Bhattarai, 2021; Dhital et al., 2015). The exploration of understanding from the faculty, both the teaching and non-teaching staff on EL is missing but is important for the effective designing and delivery of EL as they play a significant role in the process.

While majority of the scholars have identified the advantages of using experiential education or EL in management education, they are also skeptical and wary about the right and wrong use of EL, and favorable/unfavorable conditions for implementing EL. For example, in their study of perception and use of EL among teachers across various U.S.-based institutions, Wurdinger and Allison (2017) found that despite high level of awareness about EL, its integration in the teaching learning process is very limited as lectures continue to be a dominant approach in academics given the limited class-time, classroom structure and large classroom size. This validates the nagging paradox identified by Moore (2013) regarding lack of EL mainstreaming within HEIs despite its popularity and students' preference. In this paper, we seek to explore the understanding of the faculty, how to they integrate EL and what they consider as the factors affecting their implementation of EL.

In this research, we are considering both the teaching and the non-teaching staff as the faculty of HEI. Both of them play a crucial role in the smooth operation of the educational institution, especially by providing teachers with the resources and constructive environment to focus on EL. Their collaborative efforts enable students to find relevant resources, and also help them enhance their understanding of the concepts to help develop critical thinking and problem-solving. This collaborative effort is even more vital in EL due to the need for integrative resources, technological assistance, reflection facilitation, and emotional support to nurture a highly effective and immersive learning environment for students, especially when we are considering the factors that nurture or hinder the environment that supports EL (Kolb, 1984). An institutional environment is shaped by both the teaching and non-teaching staff. However, the role of non-teaching staff in the teaching learning process has often been underemphasized in the educational research despite their significant contributions to the overall educational experience.

As such, the paper tries to understand the understanding of both the teaching and non-teaching staff, working in a HEI that has been advocating for EL in Nepal, thereby, discussing the intricacies of defining, applying, and nurturing EL practices, while understanding its limitations and challenges with their individual, institutional, and structural contexts. The study is guided by three major research questions: 1) How do the faculty in a Nepali HEI understand and define experiential learning? 2) How is the HEI integrating experiential learning into its curriculum, teaching (learning), research and community engagement initiatives? And 3) What are favorable and/unfavorable circumstances supporting or constraining EL initiatives at the HEI. As we answer these questions, we build on existing scholarly work on EL in management education to contribute to a pluralistic and contextual understanding of EL from the standpoints of the stakeholders who are at the center of creating, reflecting, theorizing, and applying those experiences – the teachers and non-teaching staff. The answers will help both the faculty and the students develop a local perspective and prepare them to navigate in an interconnected world.

Theoretical Standpoint

The theoretical basis of our research is deeply rooted in the foundational work of Dewey (1938), who suggested an educational experience where the learners are not

only passively receiving the information but are actively participating in the process that involves both thinking and doing. He emphasized that in the process, the learners are encouraged to identify the problems, plan the solution, test the plan in the actual context, and reflect on it. This aligns with the broader viewpoint of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), popularized by Kolb (1984). ELT views learning as a process of involving cyclical stages of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Essentially, the experiential learning theory (ELT) integrates six propositions made by EL theorists/scholars over time: i) "learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes", ii) "all learning is re-learning", iii) "learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world", iv) "learning is holistic process of adaptation", v) "learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment", and vi) "learning is the process of creating knowledge" (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 43-44).

In its most basic form, in this research, we understand EL is learning from experiences. Keeton and Tate's (1978) understanding of EL suggested "learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied...contrasted with the learner who only reads about, hears about, talks about or writes about these realities but never comes into contact with them as part of the learning process" (as cited in Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p.14). For Morris (2019), EL happens through hands-on participation where the learners are to collaborate, situate themselves in a context that combines time and place, and think of more than one possible solution to the problems through inquiry and co-construction of meaning that asks the learner to get out of their comfort zone. These theoretical understandings have guided our research.

Since we have based our research on one business school that advocates EL, we have also taken the support of Carpenter's (2014) work which provides four-level of EL engagement in terms of an institution adopting EL; i) Level 1: studying an organization (or something else) but not interacting with them, ii) Level 2: studying an organization and interacting with them in some manner (example: interview), iii) Level 3: studying, interacting and presenting the findings to the organizations, and iv) Level 4: studying, interacting, presenting and working collaboratively (applying) the findings on the organizations. Moreover, our research is informed by Tierney's (1988) theory on institutional culture which states that the culture of an institution significantly shapes its

approach to innovation and change. According to Tierney, institutional culture can either support or hinder initiatives like EL, depending on the values, norms, and practices that are embedded within the institution.

Methodology

In this qualitative exploratory research, we follow a constructivist paradigm and an interpretive worldview to understand the meaning of EL for teaching and non-teaching staffs of a business school in Nepal. Following Crotty's (1998) discussion about research paradigms, we assume that meanings about certain objects or things are socially constructed by humans as they engage in the world based on their contexts and these meanings are subjective (as cited in Creswell, 2003). Therefore, we refrained from deriving to an objective truth about EL that is applicable to universal contexts. Rather, we derive meanings from the standpoints of those who experience EL. We used a purposive sampling method in a business school to recruit participants based on their disciplinary backgrounds (courses they taught), roles within the institution (teaching only vs. teaching and administrative vs. administrative only), time in the institution (new vs. old staff), and their contract status (full-time vs. part-time). The business school where we conducted the study offerred undergraduate and graduate-level programs in business administration (including different specializations) and information technology and was affiliated with a private university in the United States of America. The main purpose of selecting this institution was because it had been claiming to integrate EL as its method of teaching and learning in Nepal. The school had been in operation for almost two decades and had around 500 students. The school claimed that realizing the disconnect between academia and society, the school had been redesigning its approach to co-create, adopt, adapt, and transfer knowledge through active collaboration between academia, industry, state, and the community, in teaching, research and community engagement initiatives. The school had actively advocated for experiential learning and envisions transforming society by fostering an entrepreneurial mindset.

In answering our research questions, we conducted in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions with teaching and non-teaching staffs. Four department heads were interviewed while seven teachers and six non-teaching staff joined the seperate focus group discussion. Each interview and focus group discussion lasted between 40-

60 minutes. The interaction consisted of some open-ended questions that required teaching and non-teaching staffs to share their perceived definition of EL, how they integrated it into their work and what they considered the favourable environment for implementing EL approaches. The interviews and discussions were conducted in a mix of English and Nepali language. Some interviews were conducted online using Zoom while some of them were taken in-person based on the availability of the participants. We followed Guba and Lincoln's framework to ensure trustworthiness in our approach emphasizing on four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2023). To enhance credibility, we followed the techniques of prolonged engagement, and triangulation through different sources like notes, and audio recordings and by holding regular meetings to discuss emerging patterns. Notes taken during the interview and focus-group discussions were triangulated with audio/video recordings of the interviews. We were also mindful of transferability and thus had regular discussions around contexts. While our focus was on specific participants who were part of our research, the themes we have generated provide a basis for transferability to similar populations in similar contexts. To ensure dependability, we maintained a research notebook and followed consistent procedures throughout data collection and analysis by conducting a fortnightly meeting among the researchers. Then to achieve confirmability, we documented all decisions by documenting all decisions in the process so that we can minimize our biases.

Findings and Discussion

Regarding the first research question, the HEI faculty understood EL often as 'learning by doing' where the students could be a part of hands-on activities. For them, though there are several ways they integrate EL in their teaching-learning activities, they consider and use Project Based Learning (PBL) as their key method to integrate EL, which was the answer to our second research question. Furthermore, EL can be categorized based on the level of experiential engagement, especially into less experiential approach, moderate experiential approach and more experiential approach. Similarly, regarding the third research question, we found out that there are individual-level factors, institutional-level factors and structure-level factors that support or constrain EL initiatives at the HEI.

EL as "Learning by Doing" and Reflecting on It!

"The learning experience is complex, contingent, and multidimensional" (Blunsdon et al., 2003, p. 14). Interest of the learners, their learning, and the outcomes are tied in. Experiential learning helps facilitate the process of knowledge creation, meaning-making, and knowledge transfer. It refers to making meaning from direct experience which in itself is challenging (Mughal & Zafar, 2011). The business school argues that they have identified the gaps and are entrepreneurially working on innovative solutions to cater to the growing need for quality and relevance in Nepali HEIs through EL. In defining EL, Brookfield (1983) viewed it as: i) the application of knowledge, skills, and feelings in immediate relevant settings, and/or ii) the creation of an environment by the facilitating institution where the students can directly participate in the events of life. Majority of the participants in this study perceived and defined EL as connecting the course content with the real issues (Participant 3, IDI, May 4, 2022). As such, they resonated to Dewey's (1897) definition of EL as *"learning by doing"* (p. 79). For example, a teacher teaching Sociology discussed EL as the use of real and existing issues of the community to evaluate theoretical aspects of everyday community practice thereby calling it as:

> *…the process and not the content…in EL, we need to pick a theme and the community we want to cover and have to understand how that course links with that theme and the community and that's how [where] the process of learning can start…*

Participants from both focus group discussions connected "learning by doing" and "contextual learning" with "reflection", thereby asserting that learning happens when learners do something by themselves and reflect on it. They defined experiential learning as reflection induced repetition of an experience:

> *If the learners do any activity better than how they have done previously, based on their reflection from the previous experience, then that is EL.* (FGD, June 28, 2022)

Early adopters of EL within the institution, also connected it to the experiential learning cycle as they introduced the Experience-Reflect-Theorize-Act (ERTA) cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2009) and defined EL as:

> *Experience is the first part and reflection the second part where we build our knowledge. Then, we can theorize the knowledge. The completion of the cycle is*

done by the application of the knowledge which in itself is a different experience. This cycle helps refine one's knowledge… (FGD, June 28, 2022)

This definition illustrated the theoretical clarity of some of the early adopters of EL – who had been in the institution for a while and shared about their journey of learning about EL, applying it, reflecting on it, adjusting, and reapplying it again, experientially - as it was directly connected to Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

As ironical as it may sound, majority of the participants reflected on various facets of the EL theory, by theorizing about the irrelevance of theories to the extent that some even "demonized" theories categorically. The following quotes illustrate the teachers' perceptions (FGD, May 4) about EL being more "practical", "hand-on", "applied" and "less theoretical".

Experiential learning is more about hands-on activity and being reflective on current activities and learnings rather than going after theories.

EL is non-theoretical learning…I got to know about it when I joined this college…the institutions that I studied at previously were theoretical and bookish…we used to practice in notebooks…EL here means learning a few things hands-on via a project or an activity other than mere reading and writing…

One teacher also connected EL to advancing existing knowledge, discussing EL as:

...building on past knowledge and reflecting on it…for example, the four Ps [referring to Price, Product, Place and Promotion in marketing mix] of marketing is already available. We don't need to go back and rediscover it. But building on it is a better application of EL as I see it. Reflecting on the experience of the application of 4Ps gives a better idea based on concrete ideas and experiences. (FGD, May 4, 2022)

Another teacher, who also serves in a leadership position, connected EL with entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial mindset, to discuss the similarities while emphasizing the role of "community" context in EL learning:

Something that I find fascinating is [that] both entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial learning are doing and learning…[in academia] we [often follow] reading and writing culture, and that is how assessments are done. The missing part is the doing. And experiential learning focuses on that. [On the other hand] entrepreneurship is

> *looking at a real-life problem and planning solutions for it. Both of them are absolutely in sync. Both of them require creativity.* (FGD, May 4, 2022)

To sum up, the aforementioned definitions are consistent with existing definitions about EL. At its core, teachers at the business school defined EL as integrating applied, hands-on, contextually relevant experiences into teaching and learning, while engaging in active experimentation and reflection.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) as Key Medium of Integrating EL in the Curriculum

We inquired about various approaches in which teachers applied EL in their curriculum, pedagogy, teaching and learning practices and other academic initiatives. As the participants provided examples of EL (see Table 1), majority of them connected it to project-based learning (PBL) – a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem or challenge. For example, a teacher recalled engaging students in service-learning initiatives like cleaning the nearby river to help them understand their immediate surrounding and reflect on civic issues. Another teacher shared about sending students to the field to collect real data and use it for their analysis as opposed to using a third-party data set in research methodology course. Likewise, another teacher shared that despite teaching one of the basic courses in a business degree program, it requires the learners to come up with projects that in some ways gives them the feel of running a business, prepare their profit and loss statements, and share their discounting schemes and their receivables. They added that, "*through projects they [learners/students] get to experience what is required in starting a new business*" (FGD, April 26, 2022).

Dunlap et al. (2008) argue that one of the challenges faced by higher education is integrating experiential learning is to create structured, scaffolded learning experiences by integrating it into the existing curriculum and teaching. The participants shared the role of institutional commitment in devising (and modifying) curriculums that has mandated teacher members to develop (occasionally) and follow a curriculum that culminates each course in a term project that is experiential in nature. The school has been ensuring that their students have to engage in experiential projects in all of their courses. These projects motivate teachers to integrate EL into their pedagogy as they shift their focus on inspiring and guiding students to apply their learnings towards

solving real-issues and delivering some kind of solution. These solutions range from writing case reports, developing dashboards and plans to building protypes that not only engage the learners in the learning process but also showcase their understanding of the issue at hand and their ability to apply their learnings to solve real problems (FGD 2, May 1, 2022). These projects benefit the teaching learning process as the learners feel challenged and pushed to come up with real solutions and tangible products (IDI, May 3, 2022).

Beyond independent courses, the teacher also reflected on other requirements like service-learning, internship, and consulting (among others) as avenues to integrate EL in their graduate and undergraduate programs. For example, a teacher shared about MBA Nonprofit students raising funds for a post-COVID relief project in a rural indigenous community of Nepal as their service-learning initiative which allowed them to implement their learnings from various courses within the program to an urgent need (FGD, May 4, 2022). Another participant, who is also a program director, shared:

> *Our graduation requirements include community service, board governance, and consulting…[where]…the learners need to apply their learning within the structures and processes within the community. We are conscious that rather than suggesting project ideas, they come up with the ideas themselves and we as facilitators support them.* (IDI, May 4, 2022)

It aligned with Efstratia's (2014) argument that the major idea of PBL is that the learners' interest motivates them towards learning through real-world problems and a serious introspection associated to it while they are thinking about their solutions. And that the teacher only plays the role of the facilitator and asks guiding questions, helps them structure meaningful tasks, and coaches them both inside and outside the classroom for the learners' knowledge and skill development.

Over the years, the business school has also developed academic practices and processes to support project based EL initiatives. For example, it's research department focuses on engaging the students in applied research projects that support PBL like developing academic cases that can contextualize the course materials for local problems. Similarly, the school has nurtured programs and centers that support experiential and project-based learning. For example, the participants of both focus group discussions referred to their departments/centers *DoLab* and *Student*

Development Center as centers focused on promoting experiential learning through PBL. Through the *DoLab*, the business school has been developing and offering short- and long-term courses for their learners where they have to work on prototypes as a part of the solution for the identified problems of the community. On the other hand, the Student Development Center conducts multiple programs that require students to be a part of some kind of projects during their undergraduate/graduate degree. The non-teaching staffs shared an example of a module (short-term course) where the learners were learning about goal setting by going to the local community and working along with the local government bodies to find the problems that are there and come up with potential solutions (FGD, June 28, 2022).

Table 1

Forms/Approaches of EL Implemented in the Business School Based on the Level of Experience

"Less Experiential"	**"Moderately Experiential"**	**"More Experiential"**
Share/reflect your experience, review content around guiding questions (YouTube, Podcast), listen to a guest lecture and engage reflectively, discuss solutions to hypothetical scenarios, discuss in-depth written case studies about real organizations (both local and international), etc.	Interview people with real experiences, visit an organization, episodic, field visits, one-off community interactions, etc.	Internships, consulting assignments, center-led industry/community engagement modules/projects, develop solutions, implement solutions for clients, develop products, prototype, market placement of prototypes/products, program-specific credit/non-credit graduation requirements (like service-learning and board service), etc.

(Source: Authors' analyses of IDI, FGD responses and review of institutional records.)

Factors That Enable or Constrain the Implementation of EL Practices

In this study, we asked the teacher to share their perspectives on factors that enabled and/or constrained the implementation of EL practices in their teaching and learning processes, research, and community engagement initiatives. Their thoughts have been thematically categorized in the form of *individual-level factors* (factors related to teacher, staff and students as individuals involved in the learning process), *institution-level factors* (factors related to the business school), and *structure-level factors* (factors

related to the wider society and are outside of the institution's purview). We have summarized the findings in Table 2, while elaborating on the relevant discussions below.

Individual-Level Factors

Individual-level factors are related to the general circumstances, aptitude and attitude - related to individuals like staff, teachers and students - towards EL practices and their reflexive application of EL into teaching and learning, research, community engagement initiatives and other academic/administrative duties. Collegiality and cooperation between colleagues in co-learning, unlearning, and relearning about EL was identified as a key factor enabling the implementation of EL practices. While some of this cooperation is an outcome of institutional mechanisms placed by the business school – discussed later – some of it comes from the teacher's attitude towards each other. Similarly, teachers and staff identified an enhanced belief towards the virtues of EL as an enabling factor. As they applied EL into their day-to-day operations, teachers and staff reflected on their academic and administrative duties and used these reflections to change their actions. As they saw the outcomes of EL in their work, they wanted to learn about it and advocate for it.

Table 2

Individual, Institutional, and Structural Factors Enabling and/or Constraining EL Practices at the Business School

	Enabling factors (favorable factors that support EL)	***Constraining factors (unfavorable factors that constrain EL)***
Individual-Level Factors	▯ Collegiality and cooperation ▯ Enhanced belief towards EL ▯ Multidisciplinary student factor	- Student accountability/mindset - Student composition - Fatigue/exhaustion - New teacher's adaptation to the EL way takes time

Institution-Level Factors	▯ *EL as an institutional culture!* (see Table 3) ▯ Leadership's buy-in/belief ▯ Intentional and deliberate community building ▯ Vision integration ▯ Institutional memory ▯ Academic processes ▯ Recruitment and other HR processes ▯ Existing Institutional resources ▯ Multidisciplinary setting	- Difficulty in assessing and measuring student learning outcomes - Lack of clear guideline - Lack of freedom in designing and re-designing curriculum - Strict curriculum. - Resource constraint
Structure-Level	▯ External partnerships/collaboration	- Lack of degree-awarding rights - Educational Ecosystem

(Source: Author's analyses of interview notes, transcripts, and audio.)

While most of our participants identified the functional role of multidisciplinary in enabling PBL-based EL practices within entrepreneurship and management education, they also discussed the issues around student accountability like double dipping/redundancy in projects and students bailing out as potential constraints. To which, a participant shared (FGD, June 28, 2022):

> *There are obstacles preventing the full implementation of EL as it needs certain amount of dedication and a mindset that sees challenges as opportunities. Unfortunately, there are some students who are not willing to do so, and they simply take it as a means to fulfil their grade requirements rather than as a chance to truly engage in the learning process.*

Some of the accountability issues are associated with the student composition as the majority of the students are working full-time during the day and engaging in learning activities only during the mornings or the evening, resulting into EL being framed as a "formality". For example, a participant shared:

> *On the students' part, this should be a mindset. Many have failed to or didn't want to take on this opportunity. I talked to a few students and they see them as a formality. But the group is often like this and one has to work individually. So, we need to work on changing this mindset [individually] because the impacts guaranteed are*

> *considerable…I usually meet with students that are struggling with grades…meeting students individually and pushing and complimenting them is something we can do [to enable EL].*

Connecting it to difficulty in measuring student learning outcomes associated to EL, another participant shared that it is difficult to make the students realize how the project that they are a part of now can have better outcomes in their life after some years, which can be demotivating for both students and teachers (Responder 3, Personal Communication, May 4, 2022). Thus, in cases like these, students [often] struggle with the overall process and even drop out in the middle of the process without completing it (Personal communication, May 3, 2022). Some of these participants discussed the role of institutional practices in supporting them, yet, the challenges associated with measuring the subjectivity, complexity, and contextuality of EL, as well as the time and resources associated with measuring [and communicating] its long-term impact is difficult (Liao & Breslow, 2017). And that shifting from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction is in itself difficult and to adjust oneself to the new form of autonomy and self-direction can be another added task for the learners (Kim et al.'s, 2017).

To foster EL, a considerable amount of time and energy needs to be ensured by the teachers. Reflecting on themselves, teachers who implemented EL discussed the fatigue resulting from continuously designing, redesigning, leading and executing "time-consuming" EL initiatives. While lack of session breaks to reset and other institutional factors also contribute to the story (discussed later), they identified the adverse impact of exhaustion on the continuous implementation of EL practices. Similarly, lack of clear understanding and time taken to adopt and adapt to EL practices, especially for new teachers, stood out as other constraining factor. Some teachers shared the need for teachers to unlearn the 'traditional' teaching methods which they might have been incorporating in their teaching, the time it might take to develop this mindset, might be "*difficult, boring and exhausting*" for some teachers "which drains them" (Personal Communication, May 3, 2022). Though higher number of teachers are being interested in and are capable of moderating their classrooms and courses based on EL, it still is a problem as not all the teachers have time and energy to be a part of the whole process.

Institution-Level Factors

Institutionally, the establishment of EL as an institutional culture enabled EL practices! As modern higher education institutions displace (traditional) linear and formalized decision-making arrangements to flatter and collaborative structures they "encourage diversity, intrinsic motivation, and autonomy" offering nurturing environments for the cultivation of innovative ideas (Tierney & Lanford, 2016; Tierney & Lanford, 2018, p. 2). Participants in this research identified their institution's culture - "the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization" (Peterson & Spencer, 1990, p. 142) – as a favorable factor motivating their adoption, adaptation, and implementation of EL practices. They identified with the institution's shared values of aggressively challenging the "traditional" and "hierarchical" nature of education by embedding "contemporary" and "innovative" approaches like project-based learning, applied research, design thinking, community-based curriculum, and student-centered learning, institutionally. Early adopters and continued advocates of EL within the institution emphasized on various elements of the institutional culture that enabled them to implement EL in their pedagogical methods and academic initiatives. This institutional standpoint seemed to be consistent with the framework proposed by Tierney (1988) that viewed an institution's culture as a mix of six components: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy and leadership. These components illustrate the socially constructed nature of institutional culture (Tierney & Lanford, 2018) at the business school and its role in promoting EL initiatives. Table 3 summarizes the findings alongside relevant quotes from the participants.

As such, institutional culture includes a variety of factors. For example, the institution's orientation towards EL in itself played an important role in whether the teachers are focused on EL, as participants mentioned that all teachers, including the teaching assistants and the administrative staffs are focused on helping each other on how to ensure that the experience of learners come in the forefront of the learning process (FGD 2, May 1, 2022). One of the participants in the same FGD shared:

> *Since I have been working at [the business school] for a few years now, I naturally tend to design my lesson plans and even facilitate the sessions in such a way that the reflection of the experiences of the learners are at the center.*

We found that this deliberate and intentional community building around EL, was also empowered by the availability and investment of institutional resources (e.g. availability of external/in-house experts, external network including industry partnerships, development of centers that prioritize EL, PBL and other community/industry engagement initiatives), institutional memory (e.g. success/failure stories, learning communities within the institution), academic processes (e.g. mandating PBL in all courses, encouraging EL trainings for staff and teachers), human resource processes (e.g., hiring teachers who believe in EL and have experiences implementing it, onboarding and orientation process, teacher trainings and workshops on EL), multidisciplinary setting where diverse students, staff and teachers explore projects, and overall leadership buy-in. EL's integration as a fundamental pedagogical tool in the institution's vision of establishing a Communiversity, that uses 'community as a curriculum' to advance social change via the promotion of entrepreneurial practice, has further strengthened these institutional factors.

On the other hand, participants identified institutional factors that constrained the implementation of EL practices within the institution. One of the core ideas identified were associated with the lack of academic freedom in designing and redesigning curriculum and the strictness in following it on a fast-paced eight-week structure. The business school is currently affiliated to an international private university. It is legally bound to implement the academic policies, practices and curriculum established by the affiliating university. As a result, proposing, defending, adapting, or adopting curricular changes is either too rigorous and time-consuming, or requires significant institutional effort. This lack of freedom (or limited freedom) makes implementation of EL practices into the curriculum challenging. Further, the current academic structure is designed in such a way that each term is eight week's long and with very short gaps between term. As terms come-by in quick successions, students and teachers find it challenging to authentically engage with EL practices while it contributes toward fatigue.Another institutional factor that constrained EL initiatives was related to resource dependency, whereby, lack of public funding, institution's need to develop its own resources and expensive nature EL projects were identified as potential constraints that limited (if not inhibited) EL practices. This resourced-perspective might also explain the reasons why teachers might consider EL as a formality (as discussed in the individual factors) (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). Teachers and administrators shared that financial constraints

have been a huge challenge even for the implementation of EL at the business school (FGD, May 1, 2022).

Structure-Level Factors

Although the focus of this research was on institutional context of EL, participants shed lights on external and structure-level factors that enabled or constrained the implementation of EL practices with the institution. One of core ideas discussed relates to the increasing trust and belief in collaboration and partnerships between academia and industry on EL initiatives due to success stories of past initiatives as well as changing attitudes of limited but important partners/collaborators. As they trusted the process, it supports EL initiatives. On the other hand, participants identified the restrictions around degree awarding rights as a major hindrance to their adoption, adaptation, modification, and implementation of EL initiatives within their undergraduate and graduate programs. Likewise, participants discussed the general educational ecosystem's lack inventiveness and lack of appreciation for progressive education as a factor constraining the proposal and defense of EL practices at large and its impact on both institutional and individual factors.

Table 3

Author's Analyses of Interviewees' Perspectives on the Role of Institutional Culture in Propagating Experiential Learning Initiatives Within the Institution Using Tierney's 1988) Components of Institution Culture

	Findings	***Example Quotes***
Mission	Participants expressed the school's mission as a key component informing its approach in planning, organizing, leading, and maintaining their programs including the propagation of EL initiatives like *Demola,* and *Communiversity Program.* The school's vision/mission revolved around nurturing entrepreneurial mindset by engaging students in real experiences in their communities which they call 'community as curriculum' approach.	"Under the school's initiative, we have been learning about EL Every course and curriculum are looked into from EL's perspective, which helps us continuously think about it."

Environment	On one hand, the school's unique placement in the society as a progressive school that is vocally critical of 'traditional' education demands nurturing innovative practices like EL. On the other hand, innovation requires non-hierarchical collaborative environment that provide collegial and supportive environment (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). Participants expressed ideas like collegiality, interdisciplinarity, open-mindedness, resources, and support from the leadership as key elements of the environment supporting EL initiatives.	"Everyone in the school has this mindset of learning by doing but we have time constrainst and only having morning classes does not help. The financial resources has been the major constarint so far."
Socialization	Participants consistently discussed the role of the school's socialization process in supporting EL initiatives, discussing ideas like practicing EL in their work (experimenting, reflecting, theorizing, and applying), celebrating and reflecting on failures, orientations/reorientation around EL, collaborative team structures, among others as key process in establishing the EL mindset within the school.	"in our job, we practice this [EL] daily. We process them intuitively…more faculties are practicing learning-by-doing and conducting activities that help students learn…"
Information	EL initiative at the school builds on to 10+ years of experience in designing and implementing such programs. Interviewees expressed the role of institutional memories in inspiring EL initiatives. They identified the role of centers like the teacher empowerment center, access to knowledge/expertise of local/international educational experts, in-house knowledge sharing platforms, and experimentation of various	"I learned from my colleague's presentation where he shared his learning about the community and the kind of communication he had to use and make amendments in his curriculum for that"

	experiential initiatives as crucial elements favoring EL initiatives.	
Strategy	The community as curriculum inspired 'university project' is at the core of the school's strategic focus in developing people, programs, and processes. Participants understood its role in the school's culture towards EL. School's partnership with the industry and the community, shifting towards integrating experiential projects mandatorily in all courses, development of critical workforce required for EL, and experimenting initiatives like summer programs as evidence of the school's strategic focus in promoting EL.	"We had Impact Week, via Do Lab, design thinking workshops, in which we took sessions on EL. We work with students in community-based projects to make learning experintial."
Leadership	Participants in this study (unanimously) expressed the role of the current leadership in nurturing EL initiatives. They identified the leader's passion towards progressive education, desire to learn, dedication of resources, and strategic investment in EL initiatives as being crucial to the propagation of EL initiatives.	"What we also are working on along with EL is to making our courses fun, challengeing and engaging, and the school advocates for it. It's also because of the leader of the school who is passionate about it, the disscusion is going on." "

Conclusion

This research delves into a nuanced understanding of EL within the context of a Nepali HEI. By exploring the standpoints of faculty members; both teaching and non-teaching, we explore the intricacies involved in defining, applying, and fostering EL practices within the institution. Through this qualitative and exploratory research, we found that EL was most commonly defined in the form of learning by doing through projects that are based on "real" problems. We also present a typology of the institution's current EL approaches and classify them according to the nature of the experience ranging from less experiential (e.g. case study, guest lecture) to more

experiential (e.g. developing solutions for industry/community clients) (see Table 1). These definitions and listing of approaches provide some clarity on the what's and how's of EL for other HEIs operating in similar contexts within Nepal and beyond. Further, the context of the EL around the institution's evolving strategic pivot of integrating "community as curriculum" provides a unique standpoint for EL.

Similarly, we found that faculty members' understanding, theoretical clarity, and application of EL can be explained by the rate at which they apply, reflect, re-configure, and re-apply EL – becoming experiential learners themselves – in their teaching, research, industry/community engagement initiatives and other academic/administrative duties. And theoretical clarity is necessary to witness the true virtues of EL in entrepreneurship, management, and business education. We also found that the early adopters of EL attributed its application to the institutional strategy of developing "community-based" entrepreneurship education and the 'evolved' institutional culture that supported EL practices. In addition, we outline individual-level, institution-level, and structure-level factors that enabled or constrained the effective application of EL practices within the institution. Overall, institutional commitment towards EL emerged as a crucial factor in enabling EL practices. These findings provide valuable strategic and operational insights for higher education leaders, faculty members, and staff that are implementing similar innovative and "non-traditional" approaches in teaching, research, and community-/industry-engagement initiatives.

The qualitative exploration of EL utilizes the constructivist paradigm and interpretive worldview, which implies the subjective understanding of EL, acknowledging social construction and context-dependent understanding of the meanings, which in itself is a limitation. We refrain from claiming an objective truth universally applicable to all HEIs. The research's focus on faculty members within a specific business school in Nepal can raise concerns about generalizability to broader educational contexts. Likewise, the methods used, i.e. in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, while valuable for depth and richness of data, have potential biases in responses as participants might have provided socially desirable answers, especially in the context that the school has been advocating EL for a long time. They might have also held back due to the research setting where some of the data collection happened inside the premises of the school. Likewise, considering that the interviews were taken

in Nepali and English, we recognize the possibility of translation errors. Additionally, the purposive sampling method, though well-considered, may have limited the diversity of the perspectives, particularly in a context where hierarchical structures and power dynamics exist among the faculty and administrators. Nonetheless, it provides nuanced, contextual, and intricate details about defining, applying, and fostering EL practices in an empirically underexplored context.

We believe that our research would be strongly complemented by a wider study about the standpoints of faculty, staff, and students in other Nepali HEIs, be it within the field of management/business education or beyond, and a mapping of existing EL practices. We recognize that students' perspectives matter as it is about their learning and that they should define the effectiveness of a learning methodology. Therefore, this multi-standpoint exploration of EL would be a valuable discussion. Likewise, our research primarily focused on individual and institutional factors enabling/constraining EL practices. Empirical exploration around structural factors (e.g. political, socio-cultural, economic, etc.) on the institution and the individual promoting EL practices would greatly complement our study.

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