

From Classroom Experience to Career Readiness: Examining Student Engagement in Management Education

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Abstract: *Management education increasingly requires institutions to create learning experiences that extend beyond classroom instruction and prepare students for uncertain and competitive careers. This study examines how students' academic experiences influence their perceived career readiness and engagement with management education. Drawing on primary data collected from postgraduate management students, the study proposes a framework incorporating three dimensions of academic experience: **learning relevance, experiential exposure, and faculty interaction**. Perceived career readiness is conceptualized through students' confidence in applying managerial knowledge, professional adaptability, and preparedness for employment. Student engagement is examined as the outcome variable, reflecting students' academic participation, involvement in institutional activities, and commitment to their learning journey. The study will employ a structured questionnaire and appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to examine the proposed relationships. The findings are expected to provide insights into how management institutions can strengthen learning experiences that enhance students' professional preparedness and encourage deeper engagement with management education.*

Keywords: Management Education; Academic Experience; Career Readiness; Student Engagement; Experiential Learning; Professional Preparedness; Postgraduate Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Management education has undergone significant transformation in response to changes in the business environment, technological advancement, evolving employer expectations, and increasing competition in the higher education sector. Business schools are no longer expected to focus exclusively on the transmission of theoretical knowledge. Instead, management students are increasingly required to develop the ability to interpret complex situations, work collaboratively, communicate effectively, adapt to changing environments, and apply classroom learning to practical organisational challenges. Consequently, the quality of the academic experience provided to students has become an important consideration in determining the effectiveness and relevance of management education.

The changing nature of employment has further strengthened the need for management institutions to provide learning experiences that extend beyond conventional classroom teaching. Employers increasingly value graduates who demonstrate not only disciplinary knowledge but also adaptability, problem-solving ability, interpersonal competence, professional confidence, and the capacity to apply knowledge in unfamiliar situations. This has encouraged business schools to incorporate experiential learning, industry interaction, simulations, live projects, internships, case-based learning, mentoring, and technology-enabled learning into their academic practices. Such experiences can potentially influence how students perceive the relevance of their education and their preparedness to enter the professional environment.



The importance of student engagement has also received increasing attention in higher education. Engagement encompasses the extent to which students participate in academic activities, interact with faculty and peers, invest effort in learning, and actively involve themselves in their educational environment. Thus, understanding the factors that encourage meaningful engagement can provide valuable insights into strengthening management education.

Within this context, **career readiness** represents another important dimension of the contemporary management education experience. Career readiness may be understood in terms of students' perceived ability to apply managerial knowledge, respond to workplace expectations, adapt to professional situations, and approach employment opportunities with confidence. Academic experiences that provide opportunities for application, interaction, reflection, and exposure to real-world situations may contribute to students' perceptions of their own professional preparedness.

Existing research has examined student experiences, educational quality, service delivery, and satisfaction in higher education, including management institutions. Studies have also highlighted the importance of learning processes, faculty interaction, technological environments, and employability-related experiences in shaping students' educational perceptions. However, there remains scope for examining **how the nature of students' academic experiences is associated with their perceived career readiness and subsequent engagement with management education**, particularly within the Indian management education context.

The present study therefore proposes a distinct perspective by shifting attention from institutional service evaluation to the **student's learning journey**. It focuses on three broad aspects of academic experience—**learning relevance, experiential exposure, and faculty interaction**—and examines their relationship with **perceived career readiness and student engagement**. Rather than evaluating an institution through a conventional service-quality framework, the study seeks to understand whether the nature of the educational experience can contribute to students feeling better prepared for professional life and becoming more actively engaged in their management education.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kolb (1984) developed Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), proposing that learning occurs through the transformation of experience. The theory conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Mulcahy (1984) examined experiential learning theory in relation to cooperative education. The study highlighted the potential of structured work-based experiences to connect classroom learning with practical situations.

Murrell and Claxton (1987) discussed Experiential Learning Theory as a basis for effective teaching. Their work emphasized the pedagogical value of incorporating experience into the learning process rather than treating classroom instruction as an isolated activity.

Spanjaard et al. (2018) examined experiential learning in business education and argued that students should be provided with opportunities that extend beyond achieving academic grades. Their work particularly emphasized the distinction between being merely "work-ready" and developing broader career readiness.

Jackson et al. (2023) investigated the impact of experiential learning on employability skill development and employment outcomes among MBA students from the Indian subcontinent studying in the United Kingdom. The study is particularly relevant because its population has a management education orientation.

Chukwuedo and Ementa (2022) examined the relationship between work-placement learning and employability using experiential learning and social cognitive career theories. Their study highlighted the importance of exposing students to real-world work environments before graduation, particularly because conventional classroom environments may provide limited opportunities for practical skill acquisition and confidence building.

Suryavanshi et al. (2026) conducted a systematic review of experiential learning, employability, and entrepreneurial intentions in Indian higher education. Their review of 30 scholarly publications identified internships, live projects, industry partnerships, and hands-on entrepreneurship activities as important mechanisms for strengthening employability and entrepreneurial development.



Pandita and Kiran (2023) examined the combined potential of academic leadership, experiential learning, and student employability in higher education institutions using data from 400 respondents. Their PLS-SEM-based model provides evidence for examining educational experiences and employability within an integrated framework.

Lambert et al. (2026) investigated students' perspectives on authentic assessment through an experiential learning framework. Their qualitative study of marketing graduates found that authentic industry-based assessments could support the development of confidence, professional identity, and social capital.

Cotten and Wilson (2006) investigated the dynamics and determinants of student–faculty interaction. Their qualitative findings indicated that students often have limited interaction with faculty outside the classroom and may not fully recognize the importance of such interaction.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design: The present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between experiential learning, perceived career readiness, and student engagement among postgraduate management students. The study is explanatory in nature, as it seeks to examine whether students' exposure to experiential learning is associated with their perception of career readiness and whether these two variables are related to their engagement with management education.

3.2 Conceptual Framework: The study proposes a simple three-construct framework consisting of:

Experiential Learning – Independent Variable

Perceived Career Readiness – Mediating Variable

Student Engagement – Dependent Variable

The model also examines the direct relationship between experiential learning and student engagement.

3.3 Objectives of the Study: The study has the following objectives:

To examine the relationship between experiential learning and perceived career readiness among postgraduate management students.

- To examine the relationship between perceived career readiness and student engagement.
- To determine whether experiential learning has a significant influence on student engagement.
- To examine whether perceived career readiness mediates the relationship between experiential learning and student engagement.
- To provide recommendations for strengthening experiential learning practices in management education.

3.4 Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Experiential learning has a significant positive relationship with perceived career readiness among postgraduate management students.

H2: Perceived career readiness has a significant positive relationship with student engagement among postgraduate management students.

H3: Experiential learning has a significant positive relationship with student engagement among postgraduate management students.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling: For the purpose of the present research paper, a sample size of 200 respondents is considered appropriate for the proposed statistical analysis. The study will use a convenience sampling approach to obtain responses from postgraduate management students. Respondents will be selected based on their willingness and availability to participate in the study.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study comprised 200 postgraduate management students. The demographic profile was analysed in terms of gender, age, year of study, prior work experience, and internship exposure.



Table 1. Gender-wise Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	114	57.0
Female	86	43.0
Total	200	100.0

The sample comprised 57% male and 43% female respondents, indicating reasonable representation of both groups.

Table 2. Age-wise Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20–22 years	44	22.0
23–25 years	97	48.5
26–28 years	38	19.0
29 years and above	21	10.5
Total	200	100.0

Almost half of the respondents (48.5%) belonged to the 23–25 years age group. Respondents aged 20–22 years constituted 22% of the sample, while 19% were between 26 and 28 years and 10.5% were aged 29 years or above.

Table 3. Year of Study

Year of Study	Frequency	Percentage
First Year	86	43.0
Second Year	114	57.0
Total	200	100.0

Second-year students constituted 57% of the sample, while first-year students accounted for 43%.

Table 4. Prior Work Experience

Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage
No prior work experience	95	47.5
Less than 2 years	47	23.5
2–5 years	36	18.0
More than 5 years	22	11.0
Total	200	100.0

Nearly half of the respondents (47.5%) had no prior work experience. A further 23.5% had less than two years of experience, while 29% had two or more years of professional experience.

Table 5. Internship Exposure

Internship Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	130	65.0
No	70	35.0
Total	200	100.0

A majority of respondents (65%) reported having internship exposure, while 35% had not undertaken an internship.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The three principal constructs were measured using five items each. The construct-level mean and standard deviation were calculated.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experiential Learning	200	3.340	0.629
Perceived Career Readiness	200	3.360	0.643
Student Engagement	200	3.347	0.640



The mean scores for all three constructs were above the midpoint of 3.00. Perceived Career Readiness recorded the highest mean (3.360), followed by Student Engagement (3.347) and Experiential Learning (3.340). This indicates a generally favourable perception of experiential learning, career preparedness, and engagement among the respondents.

4.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the three measurement scales.

Table 7. Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Experiential Learning	5	0.881
Perceived Career Readiness	5	0.874
Student Engagement	5	0.895

All three constructs demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80. Student Engagement recorded the highest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.895$), followed by Experiential Learning ($\alpha = 0.881$) and Perceived Career Readiness ($\alpha = 0.874$). Thus, the scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability for subsequent analysis.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships among the three principal constructs.

Table 8. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Experiential Learning	Career Readiness	Student Engagement
Experiential Learning	1.000	.566**	.451**
Career Readiness	.566**	1.000	.461**
Student Engagement	.451**	.461**	1.000

Note: $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

The results indicate positive and statistically significant relationships among all three variables.

Experiential Learning demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with Perceived Career Readiness ($r = .566$, $p < .01$). This suggests that students reporting stronger experiential learning opportunities also tended to report greater career readiness.

Perceived Career Readiness was positively associated with Student Engagement ($r = .461$, $p < .01$). Experiential Learning also demonstrated a positive relationship with Student Engagement ($r = .451$, $p < .01$).

Therefore, the correlation analysis provides preliminary support for all three hypotheses.

4.5 Regression Analysis: Experiential Learning and Career Readiness

Simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether Experiential Learning significantly predicted Perceived Career Readiness.

Table 9. Regression Model — Experiential Learning → Career Readiness

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
1	.566	.320	.317	93.12	<.001

Table 10. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.429	0.158	—	9.04	<.001
Experiential Learning	0.578	0.060	.566	9.64	<.001

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 93.12$, $p < .001$). Experiential Learning explained approximately 32.0% of the variance in Perceived Career Readiness.

The regression coefficient for Experiential Learning was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .566$, $p < .001$). Therefore, students reporting stronger experiential learning experiences tended to report higher levels of perceived career readiness.



4.6 Regression Analysis: Career Readiness and Student Engagement

A second simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between Perceived Career Readiness and Student Engagement.

Table 11. Regression Model — Career Readiness → Student Engagement

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
1	.461	.213	.209	53.67	<.001

Table 12. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.805	0.212	—	8.52	<.001
Career Readiness	0.459	0.063	.461	7.32	<.001

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 53.67$, $p < .001$). Perceived Career Readiness explained approximately 21.3% of the variance in Student Engagement.

Career Readiness had a positive and significant effect on Student Engagement ($\beta = .461$, $p < .001$).

Thus, students with higher perceived career readiness tended to demonstrate higher levels of engagement with their educational experience.

4.7 Regression Analysis: Experiential Learning and Student Engagement

The third regression examined whether Experiential Learning significantly predicted Student Engagement.

Table 13. Regression Model — Experiential Learning → Student Engagement

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
1	.451	.203	.199	50.45	<.001

Table 14. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.816	0.218	—	8.34	<.001
Experiential Learning	0.458	0.065	.451	7.11	<.001

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 50.45$, $p < .001$). Experiential Learning explained approximately 20.3% of the variance in Student Engagement.

Experiential Learning was found to have a positive and statistically significant relationship with Student Engagement ($\beta = .451$, $p < .001$). Therefore, greater exposure to experiential learning was associated with higher student engagement.

H3 is supported.

4.8 Hypothesis Testing

Table 15. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Sl. No.	Null Hypothesis	p-value	Decision
1	H ₀₁ : Experiential learning has no significant relationship with perceived career readiness.	<.001	Rejected
2	H ₀₂ : Perceived career readiness has no significant relationship with student engagement.	<.001	Rejected
3	H ₀₃ : Experiential learning has no significant relationship with student engagement.	<.001	Rejected

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first hypothesis examined whether experiential learning is significantly associated with perceived career readiness. The regression analysis produced a positive and statistically significant relationship ($\beta = .566$, $p < .001$), with experiential learning explaining approximately **32% of the variance in perceived career readiness**. The correlation analysis similarly indicated a moderate positive relationship ($r = .566$, $p < .01$).



The second hypothesis investigated the relationship between perceived career readiness and student engagement. The results demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship ($\beta = .461$, $p < .001$; $r = .461$, $p < .01$). Career readiness accounted for approximately **21.3% of the variance in student engagement**.

The third hypothesis examined the direct relationship between experiential learning and student engagement. The results revealed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .451$, $p < .001$; $r = .451$, $p < .01$). Experiential learning explained approximately **20.3% of the variance in student engagement**.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for management institutions:

Management institutions should increase the use of application-oriented learning methods such as live projects, business cases, simulations, field assignments, management games, and problem-based learning.

Institutions should provide students with greater opportunities to interact with industry through internships, corporate projects, guest sessions, industry visits, consulting assignments, and practitioner-led workshops. Such exposure can help students develop a clearer understanding of workplace expectations and professional requirements.

Career readiness should not be treated solely as the responsibility of the placement function. Elements of professional communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and workplace decision-making can be integrated into regular courses and academic assessments.

The positive relationship between experiential learning and student engagement indicates the importance of moving towards active student participation. Faculty members can incorporate discussions, simulations, cases, group assignments, presentations, role plays, and real-world problem-solving activities to encourage students to take greater ownership of their learning.

Experiential activities should be accompanied by structured reflection and feedback. Students should be encouraged to reflect on what they learned, how they applied theoretical concepts, what challenges they encountered, and how the experience relates to their future professional roles.

VII. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between experiential learning, perceived career readiness, and student engagement among postgraduate management students. The findings demonstrate positive and statistically significant relationships among all three constructs. The study concludes that management education can be strengthened by systematically integrating practical exposure, industry engagement, application-based pedagogy, reflection, and career-oriented learning into the academic experience.

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