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The Effects of Experiential Learning on Teaching Perception and Learning Approaches among Public Relations Students

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ABSTRACT

The public relations practice in Malaysia has received criticism for not reaching the level of sophistication and development of its overseas counterparts. In view of this, higher education institutions that offer public relations courses in Malaysia have continuously been involved in efforts to improve the occupational standing and prestige of the public relations industry. This study aims to examine the effects of experiential learning practices on teaching perception and learning approaches among public relations students. The current study implemented an action research with a causal-comparative research design. Two cohorts of public relations students with 36 students for 2014 and 58 students for 2015 Bachelor's degrees were selected to investigate the effects of experiential learning teaching design on students' perception of teaching and their approaches to learning. The findings of the study indicated that experiential learning has positive impacts on both the teaching perceptions and the learning approaches selected by the students. Overall, students who were exposed to the experiential learning teaching approach had a greater tendency to apply a deep approach in their learning compared with those who learn in the context of the traditional lecture-plus-discussion classroom. In addition, the students showed more interest, were more engaged, and demonstrated more willingness to learn in the experiential learning classroom. The findings of the study suggest that experiential learning could be embedded into the curricula of public relations courses. Students' learning can ultimately be enhanced by incorporating a suitable assessment approach and teaching strategies that highlight experiential learning.

Keywords: experiential learning; teaching approaches; student approaches to learning; public relations

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1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for public relations (PR) practitioners has continuously increased with the growth of local and multinational firms. The rapid changes in economic, social and political factors further challenge the ability of PR practitioners to handle PR-related issues (Sriramesh & Duhe, 2009). In addition, Deming (2017) found that the labor market demanded more social skills in the 2000s compared to the mid-1980s and 1990s. Undoubtedly, social skills are one of the most important qualities required among PR practitioners. In Malaysia, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) and the Public Relations Consultants' Association of Malaysia (PRCA) are the two organizations that promote and maintain the positive development of the PR industry in the country (Jamilah, 2010; Tengku Adrian & Jamilah, 2015). In addition, the involvement of local universities and colleges by offering PR courses help to improve the occupational standing and prestige of the PR industry in Malaysia through education (Jamilah, 2010).

However, the PR practice in Malaysia has been criticized for the inadequate skills of the professionals in the field, and because the field has still not reached the level of sophistication and development of its overseas counterparts (Leong, Krishnan & Lee, 2012; Liana et al., 2012; Zulhamri & Threadgold, 2008). Zulhamri and Threadgold (2008) opine that the public relations profession has not yet achieved professional status in the eyes of society. Furthermore, most students choose PR courses because they think it will be an easy major to study with few career challenges (Bowen, 2003). According to Bowen (2003), the misperceptions of PR courses that only technical skills will be studied may affect the type and quality of students attracted by the discipline. The students who enroll in PR courses who know little about the actual functions of PR and assume PR is not a profession or that PR does not require intellectual knowledge lower the quality of PR practices and subsequently degrade the PR profession. Hence, the PR Education in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) plays a pivotal role in reshaping public stereotypes by producing quality and qualified PR graduates for the profession (Jamilah, 2010).

Much has been written about Asian and South East Asian students being "surface" learners because they tend to rely much on the syllabus and are more teacher-directed in classroom discussions (Kember, 2000; Leung, Wang & Chan, 2007; Tani, 2005). This teaching and learning tradition is not effective in fostering qualities such as the ability to question, developing a clear position, problem-solving, creativity, thoughtfulness, the ability to communicate effectively, or encouraging independent thought among PR graduates (Fitch & Surma, 2006). Employers of new graduates in the PR industry seek these qualities (Deming, 2017). Therefore, the challenge for public relations educators is to foster critical inquiry and evaluative skills rather than focus on a superficial understanding of information as knowledge (Fitch & Surma, 2006). Fitch and Surma (2006) further argue that one way to foster a 'deeper' learning style in students is through classroom practices and assessments.

A typical classroom practice of teaching technique in HEIs is to deliver a lecture followed by a discussion. Wong and Schoech (2010) define this technique as the lecture-plus-discussion approach (L + D), and it has been widely applied in most of the social science disciplines. Beard and Wilson (2006) argued that the traditional form of learning, with the teacher imparting facts and figures while the pupils passively receive the information without deeper involvement, is very ineffective. According to Tinto and Goodsell (1993), traditional teaching approaches with large classes, combined with a lecture style of teaching, will create an atmosphere of alienation, distance, and detachment. Students behave in a variety of ways, from sitting passively in a classroom to skipping classes. Students may use a variety of means for obtaining information – asking classmates for notes, photocopying notes, and reading a textbook (Tinto & Goodsell, 1993).

A much more effective form of learning is achieved by engaging with students in such a way as to create a meaningful learning experience (Beard & Wilson, 2006; Woods, 2011). In this study, an experiential learning pedagogy is tested to examine the relationship between experiential learning pedagogy and PR students' perception of teaching and learning. According to Beard and Wilson (2006), "[e]xperiential learning is the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment".

This study aims to investigate the application of experiential learning pedagogy on PR education and how this approach may affect the teaching and learning approach of a selected subject. It is the researchers' hope that the study's findings will benefit HEI administrators, educators, and students of PR programs in their understanding of how EL activities can expose learners to authentic communication experiences that are more likely to transform them into more skillful PR practitioners.

To be more specific, the following two objectives have been formulated to guide the subsequent report and discussion.

(1) The effect of experiential learning on students' perception of teaching.

(2) The effect of experiential learning on students' approaches to learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines the theories about experiential learning (EL), as well as related teaching and learning approaches. The review of the literature in this section also includes an overview of the previous research concerning the relationship between teaching and learning approaches. Based on the discussion, relevant hypotheses are then derived from past studies.

2.1 Experiential Learning (EL)

Experiential learning (EL) is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.41). Unlike cognitive learning theories, which focus more on cognition, or behavioral learning theories, which emphasize overt behavior, EL tends to combine both with perception and experience (McCarthy, 2010). Experiential learning (EL) theory has its roots in Dewey's work, and

it is best understood as an educational philosophy that can be implemented differently or even in conjunction with traditional teaching methods (Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Marlow & McLain, 2011). According to Sharlanova (2004), EL can help students to realize themselves, helping teachers to become reflective educators, identifying students' learning styles, and nurturing teacher's skills. This research paper focuses more on the application of EL to the teacher's role.

The EL model was described by McCarthy (2010), who based his discussion on Kolb (1984). According to McCarthy (2010), the EL model has four stages that come in a cyclical process (see Figure 1). The four stages can be connected as concrete experience (CE) (doing), reflective observation (RO) (observing), abstract conceptualization (AC) (thinking), and active experimentation (AE) (planning). The learner can enter the cycle at any point. However, the stages must be followed consecutively (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010; Sharlanova, 2004).

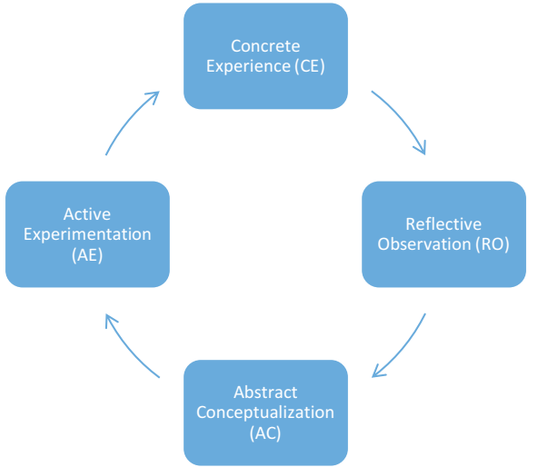


Figure 1. The Experiential Learning Cycle

Concrete experience (CE) or "doing" is a stage at which the learner is an active participant (Sharlanova, 2004). Wong (2007) suggested some of the tools that are typically used during this stage of teaching and learning, specifically, observing interviews, observing role-play exercises, observing reality-play exercises, asking questions and playing video games. In the reflective observation (RO) or observing stage, learners recall, review and reflect on what has been done and attempted (Sharlanova, 2004). Wong (2007) suggested that activities such as giving feedback, discussion, or interaction between faculty and students are appropriate. The third stage in the EL cycle is abstract conceptualization (AC) or thinking. During this stage, the understanding and explanation related to theories and concepts will occur. Suitable teaching and learning activities include lecturing, researching, reading and performing

typical educational tasks (Wong, 2007). The fourth stage is active experimentation (AE) or planning, whereby the learner carries out an actual hands-on experiment. Participation in role-play exercises, reality-play exercises and playing video games are some of the suggested tools at this stage (Wong, 2007). The pedagogical design of this research paper is based on the EL cycle and the suggested teaching methods proposed in the previous research.

2.2 Experiential Learning in Public Relations Education

Public relations (PR) practitioners must have knowledge and skills with respect to abstract concepts and a contextual knowledge of communication to facilitate beneficial relationships among various stakeholders (Benecke, 2004; Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011; Liana et al., 2012). Experiential learning (EL) is believed to be better suited for assisting learners in achieving critical inquiry and evaluative skills compared with traditional teaching and learning approaches (Benecke, 2004; Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011).

Benecke and Bezuidenhout (2011) studied the EL activities in PR education and concluded that the most familiar activities in South Africa's public and private institutions are practical assignments, experiential exercises, and simulations. Practical assignments are tasks assigned by the lecturer for learners to conduct research on a specific issue. Experiential exercises refer to organizing events and campus publications. Simulations include the discussion of case studies and problem-solving by learners (Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011). Other EL activities identified in PR education include group discussion, seminars, workshops, field trips, industry cooperation, and public talks (Benecke, 2004; Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011).

This study will embed the EL cycle in the curriculum design of one of the selected subjects. The purpose of the research is to examine whether EL can be used as an effective teaching technique in this field of study.

2.3 Approaches to Teaching

Approaches to teaching refer to "the teacher's pervasive behavior and media used during interaction with learners" (Leung, Wang & Olomolaiye, 2008, p. 52). Fox (1983) developed four basic teaching theories based on the answers given by teachers when asked, "[w]hat do you mean by teaching?" The four theories are as follows: transferring theory, shaping theory, traveling theory and growing theory.

Transfer theory asserts that the teaching process is when knowledge is transferred from teachers to students. Students are treated as an empty container to be filled when they enter the classroom (Fox, 1983). Teachers who apply this theory will tend to focus more on the "knowledge" before it is transferred and the act of transferring; however, they are not concerned with what happens to the knowledge after the transfer. Shaping theory treats teaching as a molding and shaping process in which students are comparable to clay and wood waiting to be shaped according to a desired pattern (Fox, 1983). Successful learning in this case is when students manage to exactly demonstrate the qualities that are demonstrated or shown by the teachers.

Traveling theory regards teachers as expert guides or partners in leading students to explore the new world, which is knowledge or experience (Fox, 1983). The learning process is a journey with the exploration of challenging and interesting areas along the way. In other words, students are not merely "knowledge receivers," but they are also involved in the "knowledge building" with their guides (teachers). Lastly, growing theory focuses more on the intellectual and emotional growth of students. A teacher can be compared to an expert gardener who grows plants according to students' character and environment, which refers to the minds of students (Fox, 1983). In addition, students (the garden itself) will determine the types of plant that may be retained and continue to grow despite the intervention from different gardeners. In other words, while different gardeners (teachers) may intend to grow various plants in the garden (the student's mind) based on their specialty, the garden itself will contribute to the pace, process, type (direction) and harvest (results) of these efforts (Fox, 1983).

Fox (1983) further categorized transferring theory and shaping theory as simple theories, which consider the simple relationship between teaching and learning by transferring knowledge and shaping the students, whereas the developed theories consisted of travelling theory and growing theory, in which the student is a fellow traveler who has particular experiences, abilities, motives, and objectives in the learning process. For the purposes of the current research, we used the term teacher-focused (TF) to represent the meaning equivalent to simple theories and student-focused (SF) to represent developed theories.

There have been arguments stating that EL is a pedagogical philosophy, in contrast to traditional didactic teaching or teacher-focused (TF) teaching (Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Marlow & McLain, 2011). Nevertheless, a majority of scholars agree that EL gives more voice to learners, facilitates more reflection on behalf of educators, transforms the traditional practice of education and gives it a more student-focused (SF) teaching approach (Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Sharlanova, 2004). Hence, this study aims to investigate the impacts of the EL learning cycle on the teaching approach of lecturers, which is also the first objective of this research. With the assumption that EL aligns more with the student-focused (SF) teaching approach (Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Sharlanova, 2004), the study's researchers' hypothesized in $H_1 - H_4$ that students in an EL classroom will perceive the teaching approach as more student-focused (SF) than teacher-focused (TF).

2.4 Students' Approaches to Learning

The development of student approaches to learning can be traced to the 1970s, to the phenomenography studies conducted by Marton and Saljo (1976). They revealed that students use "two levels of processing" to approach their reading tasks, to which they referred as surface and deep approaches to learning.

The motive for the surface approach (SA) is extrinsic. An individual who performs a task using this approach is generally afraid of failure, has no intention to excel in his work and simply wants to complete the task requirements (Biggs & Moore, 1993; Entwistle, 1987). The surface approach's (SA) strategies refer to students obtaining information in a random pattern for short-term recall, never challenging the validity of the information, and deploying a rote memorization strategy (Jewels & Ford, 2004; Rashmat, 2009). Furthermore, they concentrate more on the text (not the meaning conveyed by the text); and, when reading academic texts, their main intention is to memorize and reproduce them (Biggs & Moore, 1993).

Meanwhile, the motivation behind the deep approach (DA) is intrinsic, and the intention is to understand the content of the texts being read (Entwistle, 1987). Learners who apply this approach assume that learning is a personal commitment, which means that they seek knowledge with interest and curiosity. Various strategies are used in the deep approach (DA), such as possessing a wide knowledge related to content, combining a variety of resources, discussing ideas with others, reflecting metacognitively on their studies, enjoying the process, being prepared to invest time and effort, and applying knowledge in real world situations (Biggs & Moore, 1993; Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008). Students who adopt the deep approach (DA) tend to focus on the writer's intention, and their main aim is to develop an understanding of what they are reading.

Various factors influence students to adopt a particular approach to learning, such as course content, assessment method, workload, teaching method, students' perception of the relevance and interest in a course, studying year, and the students' age (Kember, 1997). This study focuses on the implementation of the EL approach and how it may affect student approaches to learning. With the assumption that EL aligns more with the student-focused (SF) teaching approach (Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Sharlanova, 2004), the researchers' hypothesized in $H_5 - H_8$ that students in an EL classroom will be more likely to exhibit a deep approach (DA) to learning rather than a surface approach.

3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the research objectives, in the current study an action research design was applied. However, according to Tripp (2005), "A dissertation cannot be achieved through performing action research, but through completing a case study of the action research performed (p. 15)". Tripp (2005) stated that two methodologies are required in the describing and justifying of an action research study: specifically action research functions as an intervention and another research method is required to describe the action research project. Hence, the researchers employed a causal-comparative method to further explain this action research process.

The action research was designed to allow educators to reflect, collect, analyze data and implement changes to improve teaching and learning approaches (Creswell, 2012). As educators, there is always an ambition to engage students in the learning process, as well as to provide students with experiences that live on fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences (Dewey, 1997). Therefore, it is always worthwhile to seek better pedagogical philosophies to enhance the effectiveness of classroom

activities. Furthermore, the researchers also applied a causal-comparative research design in this study for the following reasons. First, the researchers aim to investigate the cause-and-effect relationships between EL and students' perception of teaching and learning; however, the randomization of variables is not permitted (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Second, for a 2015 cohort, two groups that differ in their pedagogical approaches were compared to determine the differences in students' perceptions of teaching and learning; thus, a causal-comparative research design is suitable in this context (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012).

The researchers in this study intended to apply the EL approach to a PR communication subject. This represented an attempt to depart from the traditional lecture-plus-discussion approach (L + D) and include more experiential elements during the session. Two cohorts of students (2014 and 2015) participated by selecting the subject, and the EL approach was applied with some modification of the course syllabus. After the completion of the action research process with the first cohort (2014), the researchers adjusted the EL approach to refine the teaching methods for the second cohort (2015) (see Figure 2). For the second cohort of the action research, a control group with an L + D approach was used to compare the perception of the students of the teaching and learning approaches. The data were collected during each of the interventions as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the EL approach on the subject.

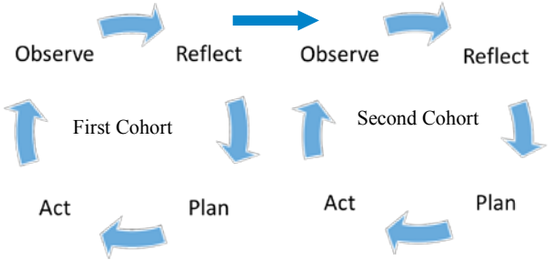


Figure 2. Action Research Process

3.1 Hypotheses

3.1.1 Hypotheses of Students' Perception of the Teaching Approach

The researchers in this study worked on an EL teaching method approach, and the students' perception of the teaching approach was evaluated with the following hypotheses in mind.

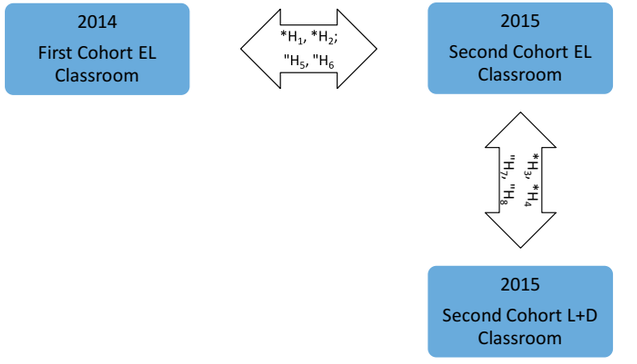
H_1: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly higher with a student-focused (SF) teaching approach compared to the first cohort EL classroom students.
H_2: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly lower with a teacher-focused (TF) teaching approach compared to the first cohort EL classroom students.
H_3: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly higher with a student-focused (SF) teaching approach compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students.
H_4: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly lower with a teacher-focused (TF) teaching approach compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students.

3.1.2 Hypotheses of Students' Approaches to Learning

The four hypotheses used to examine the effect of the EL teaching approach on learning are stated as follows:

H_5: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly higher with a deep approach (DA) compared to the first cohort EL classroom students.
H_6: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly lower with a surface approach (SA) compared to the first cohort EL classroom students.
H_7: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly higher with a deep approach (DA) compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students.
H_8: The second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly lower with the surface approach (SA) compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students.

Figure 3 depicts the relationship between the hypotheses and cohorts of study.



* hypotheses related to students' perception of the teaching approach
" hypotheses related to students' approaches to learning

Figure 3. Research Hypotheses and Cohort of Study

3.2 Participants

The second year bachelor degree PR undergraduates who selected the identified subject were involved in this private HEI. They were 2014 (first cohort) and 2015 (second cohort) PR students and were informed that the course syllabus design followed the EL approach. A comparison group of 2015 PR students who elected a normal L + D approach writing class was also evaluated with respect to their perception of teaching and learning approaches. For the 2015 cohort, as these two subjects were offered as elective papers, and the students were allowed to choose the course freely, randomization on grouping was not permitted. However, as the entry qualification for all bachelor degree students for the PR program is strictly maintained, the participants shared a very high homogeneity in academic achievements.

The selected communication subject was a new course offered to PR students. Its aim is to familiarize students with the communication behaviors relevant to targeting potential publics of PR campaigns, in addition to the principles of human psychology and social behaviors that are essential for public opinion and publicity initiatives. As communication plays a pivotal role in maintaining relationships with the public as well as media relations efforts, the knowledge and grasp of communication expertise is a core competency for the PR profession. The lack of understanding about relationships has been emphasized as one of four main challenges facing PR professionals (Bowen, 2003). In addition, based on the course structure of the PR program in this selected HEI, fifteen (15) out of the 32 core courses offered in this PR bachelor degree program are related to knowledge and skills of communication. The importance of communication expertise in PR education has also been emphasized by existing PR scholars and practitioners. Undoubtedly, one of the contributions of tertiary education in improving PR quality is related to enhancing students' communication skills (Jamilah, 2010).

This course covered the principles of psychology, and the application of these concepts to the authentic PR work world was purposely designed into the course through the integration of the EL approach. The expected learning outcomes for this course are to analyze the various theories of psychology in communication, to evaluate the relationship between psychology and communication at various levels and to assess the application of the psychological approaches used in various types of communication. The participant sample was made up of 94 students (2014 cohort: 36 students; 2015 cohort: 23 students in EL group and 35 students in L + D groups (comparison group). The majority of them were female (n = 74), and the age ranged from 19–21 years. The details of the breakdown according to the group of study and gender are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants Information

2014 (first cohort) EL Group		Year: 2015 (second cohort) EL Group	Year: 2015 (second cohort) L + D Group	
Gender	Male	9	5	5
	Female	27	18	30
	Total	36	23	35

Note: EL = Experiential Learning Approach; L + D = Lecture plus Discussion Approach

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The independent variables (IVs) in this study were the EL approach and the lecture-plus-discussion (L + D) approach. The dependent variables (DVs) were the students' perception of approaches to teaching and the students' approaches to learning.

The teaching approaches were defined as either an EL approach or an L + D approach. The EL approach was adopted based on the EL cycle, and it was implemented with two cohorts of PR students. During the second cohort of study, a control group with the L + D approach was evaluated to examine the differences in the EL classroom practices.

The approaches to teaching were defined according to whether the students perceived the classroom teaching techniques to be student-focused (SF) or teacher-focused (TF). The *Approaches to Teaching Inventory* (ATI) designed by Trigwell, Prosser, and Ginns (2005) was modified for the students' perception version, and it was used to measure the student-focused (SF) and teacher-focused (TF) constructs in this study.

The students were asked to give responses to a four-point Likert-type inventory with 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree. Subsequently, the scores for each response were added to obtain summed scores for student-focused (SF) and teacher-focused (TF) approaches. For the purpose of the data description, the obtained scores were categorized into high (3.01–4.00), moderate (2.01–3.00) and low (1.00–2.00) levels of student-focused (SF) and teacher-focused (TF) teaching approaches, based on the students' perceptions.

In addition, and based on the principle that triangulation is important in action research (Ary et al., 2010), the students' feedback and evaluations of the teaching approach were collected for the second cohort of the EL group. They were asked using a survey form and open-ended questions to provide more information about their perception of the employed teaching strategies.

The students' approaches to learning were defined according to the surface approach (SA) and the deep approach (DA). To measure these constructs, the researchers adapted the indicators used in the original *Study Processes Questionnaire* (SPQ) designed by Biggs (1987) and the revised version of the Study Processes Questionnaire

(R-SPQ) with two factors established by Biggs, Kember, and Leung (2001). Identical to the approaches to teaching (AT), the scores for the surface Approach (SA) and the deep Approach (DA) were added to obtain summed scores.

Descriptive statistics, such as percentage, mean and standard deviation, were used to provide an overview of the variables of the students' perception of approaches to teaching and learning as well as for the students' feedback on approaches to teaching. Descriptive statistics were used to measure the levels of the teacher-focused (TF), student-focused (SF) approaches, as well as for the surface approach (SA) and the deep approach (DA). Furthermore, to investigate the students' feedback on teaching approach, descriptive statistics were applied to illustrate the distribution.

In addition, inferential statistics were used to generalize the findings of this study. The researchers applied inferential statistics to differentiate and relate the variables. The information for this study was obtained through the administration of a questionnaire. The data collection method is appropriate because it helps to obtain information on the current status of the learning environment in a local HEI (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012).

The inferential statistics used in this study are an independent t-test and a bivariate correlation (Pearson's *r*). The independent t-test allows the researchers to compare two means from different groups (Field, 2005). In this study, the different groups were based on cohort (2014 and 2015) and pedagogy (EL and L + D classroom). With the independent t-test, the researchers can answer all of the hypotheses (H_1 – H_8) and expect to learn the extent to which the students' approaches to teaching and learning in this study are related to cohort and pedagogy used. A bivariate correlation allows the researchers to assess the relationship between the variables. The findings from the correlational analysis provide evidence that further supports the relationship between students' perceptions of teaching and learning approaches.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

As the instruments applied in this study were based on existing and well-established questionnaires, specifically the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) and the Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ), the validation of the instruments was performed by the researchers with the consultation of a few experts. The content of these instruments was finalized after several discussions with the experts.

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the instruments used in the current study. A total of 40 second-year students enrolled in the PR course in this private HEI were chosen to answer the research questionnaire. After obtaining permission from the lecturer, the questionnaire was distributed to the students during class. They were asked to return the questionnaire the following day. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each instrument. In this pilot study, the results of the reliability test, shown in Table 2, indicated Cronbach's values from .60 to .72, which are within an acceptable range. Therefore, these instruments were reliable for the data collection in this study.

Table 2. Cronbach's' alpha for the Instruments

Instruments	Items	Alpha value
		Pilot test
ATI		
Teacher-focused (TF)	7	.72
Student-focused (SF)	7	.60
SPQ		
Surface Approach (SA)	8	.71
Deep Approach (DA)	9	.69

Notes: ATI=Student's Perception of Approaches to Teaching Inventory, SPQ=Study Process Questionnaire.

3.5 Procedure

There were 12 intervention sessions, and a survey was conducted for each 14-week semester in 2014 (first cohort) and 2015 (second cohort). The subject contents were the same for the two cohorts of participants, and the researchers instructed the subjects themselves. According to Creswell (2012, p.586), "When action researchers engage in a study, they are interested in examining their own practices rather than studying someone else's practices." The researchers in this study aimed to examine the implementation of EL pedagogy as an action plan to improve the quality of classroom teaching. This is also part of a self-development measurement to encourage lecturers to be continuous learners and knowledge seekers (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012).

The researchers designed the subject contents into four phases with different emphasis. Minus the first and last lessons, which were used for the introduction of the course structure and course work discussion, the remaining 12 lessons were divided into three lessons each to accommodate the four different phases of intervention. The four phases of intervention can be categorized into EL for self-communication, EL for interpersonal communication, EL for organizational communication, and EL for mass communication.

The process of each intervention in the EL classroom engaged the following four-step procedure:

(1) Abstract conceptualization (AC) stage – The participants were required to attend a two-hour lecture that exposed them to the theories, concepts, and principles of related communication patterns.

(2) Active experimentation (AE) stage – During the lecture, the participants were required to be involved in a discussion among peers or with the lecturer regarding the case study, a question and answer session, video observation and various communication tests. This stage was emphasized in the second cohort after the researchers reflected on the shortcomings of this stage in the first cohort.

(3) Concrete experience (CE) – Classroom-based hands-on activities were

assigned to the participants during the two-hour tutorial. The participants were tasked with different activities for different phases of the intervention. For example, self-communication activities, such as identifying personal weaknesses and strengths through name-card design and role-play, interpersonal activities such as observing communication barriers using a specific inventory, organization communication activities such as team building, and mass communication activities such as the presentation of an idea or product to persuade the audience.

(4) Reflective observation (RO) – In the first cohort, the participants were required to share what they observed and experienced during the activities. However, the researchers embedded a writing reflection as part of the assessment of the subject in the second cohort. The participants were required to produce a short reflection in writing and submit it the following week as part of the assessment requirement.

For the traditional L + D class, the applied teaching approach was a common two-hour lecture that focused on knowledge delivery using a power-point presentation. This was followed by a two-hour tutorial in which the participants were required to discuss the content using the guidelines given. Therefore, with the application of EL pedagogy in the classroom teaching, the traditional teacher-focused (TF) approach was changed into a student-focused (SF) teaching approach. In an EL classroom, there is no longer a typical lecture and tutorial. The students must play an active role in an EL classroom compared with a traditional L + D classroom. In the EL classroom, the lecturer is a mere facilitator to guide the students throughout the learning processes such as group discussion, case studies, presentation, self-reflection, role-play, and various personal and group activities. The students are required to read and comprehend the lecture notes and reading materials before attending the lecture or tutorial. Whereas in an L + D classroom, the teacher-focused (TF) teaching approach still applies. Most of the time allocation during the lecture and tutorial period is for lecturing, explanation and comprehension. The students' involvement during the lecture and tutorial is not fully optimized.

The procedure of the research with hypotheses examination is depicted in the following diagram.

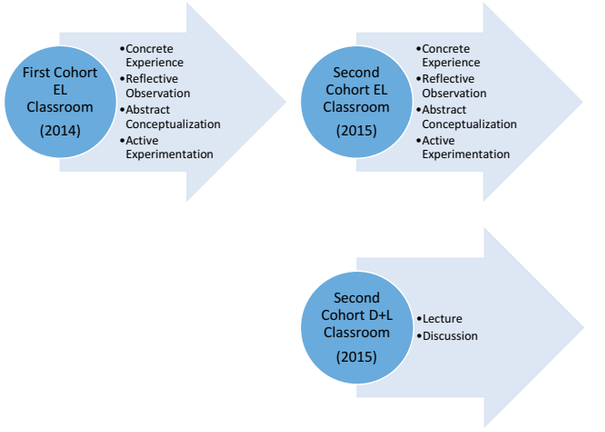


Figure 4. Research Procedure

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the survey and students' feedback was analyzed to test the hypotheses stated above.

4.1 Students' perception of approaches to teaching

Based on the four-point scale used, the mean score for the students' perception of approaches to teaching rating in various teaching groups is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean score of students' perception of teaching approaches

		Year		
		2014 (first cohort) EL Group	**2015 (second cohort) EL Group**	**2015 (second cohort) L + D Group**
TF	Mean	2.27	1.93	2.76
	Std. Deviation	.35	.52	.17
SF	Mean	3.21	3.38	2.76
	Std. Deviation	.27	.33	.22

Notes: TF=Teacher-focused teaching approach; SF=Student-focused teaching approach

These findings indicate that the second cohort of EL group's students perceived that their lecturers applied a low level of teacher-focused (TF) (M=1.93, SD= .52). Meanwhile, for first cohort EL group, the teacher-focused (TF) was perceived as moderate (M=2.27, SD= .35), which was also the case for the second cohort L + D group (M=2.76, SD= .17). In contrast, the second cohort EL group's students perceived their lecturers as having applied a high level of student-focused (SF) (M=3.38, SD= .33). Followed by first cohort EL group's students (M=3.21, SD= .27) and the second cohort L + D group (M=2.76, SD= .22).

A further examination to compare the mean score of approaches to teaching was conducted using an independent sample t-test.

4.1.1 The students perceived there to be a more student-focused (SF) teaching approach in the second cohort EL group

To address H_1 which states that *students in the second cohort EL classroom will score significantly higher with a student-focused (SF) teaching approach compared to the first cohort EL classroom students*, an independent t-test was conducted. Table 4 presents the results of the analysis for hypothesis 1.

Table 4. Independent sample t-test analysis for approaches to teaching (AT) between first cohort EL group and second cohort EL group.

					t-test for Equality of Means		
		N	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
SF	1st cohort EL group	36	3.21	.27	-2.195	57	.032
	2nd cohort EL group	23	3.38	.33			
TF	1st cohort EL group	36	2.27	.35	2.752	34.474	.009
	2nd cohort EL group	23	1.93	.52			

Notes: TF=Teacher-focused teaching approach; SF=Student-focused teaching approach

The findings show that there was a significant difference in the mean student-focused (SF) scores between the first cohort EL group (M=3.21, SD= .27) and the second cohort EL group [M=3.38, SD= .33; t (57) = -2.195, p = .032]. Therefore, H_1 is supported.

For H_2: *Students in the second cohort EL classroom will score significantly lower with a Teacher-focused (TF) teaching approach compared to the first cohort EL classroom students*. The findings presented in Table 4 show that there was a significant difference in the mean teacher-focused (TF) scores between first cohort EL group (M=2.27, SD= .35) and the second cohort EL group [M=1.93, SD= .52; t (34.474) = 2.752, p = .009]. Therefore, the perception of the second cohort EL group's students with respect to a teacher-focused (TF) approach is significantly lower than the first cohort EL group.

To determine whether there is any significant difference in the mean score of the approaches to teaching between the second cohort EL group and the second cohort L + D group, two hypotheses were formulated. An independent t-test was applied to examine the differences between these two groups. For H_3: *Students in the second cohort EL classroom will score significantly higher with a student-focused (SF) teaching approach compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students*. The results for H_3 are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Independent sample t-test analysis for approaches to teaching (AT) between second cohort EL group and second cohort D + L group.

					t-test for Equality of Means		
		N	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
SF	2nd cohort EL group	23	3.38	.33	8.578	56	.0001
	2nd cohort L + D group	35	2.76	.22			
TF	2nd cohort EL group	23	1.93	.52	-7.385	25.035	.0001
	2nd cohort L + D group	35	2.76	.17			

Notes: TF=Teacher-focused teaching approach; SF=Student-focused teaching approach

The findings show that there was a significant difference in the mean student-focused (SF) scores between the second cohort EL group (M=3.38, SD= .33) and the second cohort L + D group [M=2.76, SD= .22; t (56) = 8.578, p = .0001]. Therefore, H_3 is supported. In contrast, a comparison between these two groups with respect to the teacher-focused (TF) scores demonstrated that the second cohort EL group (M=1.93, SD= .52) perceived there to be a significantly lower teacher-focused (TF) approach compared with the second cohort L + D group [M=2.76, SD= .17; t (25.035) = -7.385, p = .0001]. This result supports the prediction in hypothesis 4, specifically *the second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly lower with a teacher-focused (TF) teaching approach compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students*.

The feedback by the second cohort EL group provides further evidence to support the implementation of EL teaching strategies. The finding with respect to the students' feedback is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Mean score and distribution of students' feedback on approaches to teaching

	Items	SD	D	A	SA	N	mean
1.	The course learning outcomes meet my expectation.	0	0	34.8	56.5	8.7	3.61
2.	The depth of coverage for the course matched my ability.	0	4.3	43.5	43.5	8.7	3.33
3.	The course has helped me develop my knowledge of the subject.	0	0	39.1	52.2	8.7	3.57
4.	The course has enabled me to develop my skills in this field.	0	4.3	34.8	52.2	8.7	3.43
5.	The course is well organized.	0	0	34.8	56.5	8.7	3.61
6.	The lecturer stimulates my interest in the course.	0	4.3	26.1	60.9	8.7	3.53
7.	The lecturer provides good and practical guidance on coursework.	0	0	39.1	52.2	8.7	3.57
8.	The lecturer gives sufficient feedback on returned assignments/reports	0	0	39.1	52.2	8.7	3.57

Notes: SD=Strongly disagree; D=Disagree; A=Agree; SA; Strongly agree; N=No reply

The students rated averagely more than a 3.5 mean score on the evaluation of teaching strategies used in this subject. There were 21 (91.3%) students who agreed that the course had helped them to develop their knowledge of the subject. One of the students said that "conducting activities during classes did indeed help in enhancing our understanding of the particular topic." Another student commented that the "more practical the teaching approach, [had made it] the easier for us to absorb the knowledge than the usual teaching style." In addition, 20 (87%) students agreed that the course had enabled them to develop their skills in communication. The students also agreed that the teaching approach had stimulated their interest in the subject (87%). They commented: "The teaching approach used has stimulated our interest of learning on this subject", which made the "student able and happy to learn things through activity", and "the teaching approach is attractive and interesting, it makes it easier for me to remember the content."

Overall, the implementation of EL has a high association with students' perception of the student-focused (SF) teaching approach. The difference shown between the first and second cohort EL groups can be attributed to the adjustment made during the second cohort EL teaching implementation. In the second cohort EL group, the researchers adjusted the approach used in the active experimentation (AE) and reflective observation (RO) stages. Case studies, question and answer sessions, video observation, and various tests were embedded in the lecture processes. In addition, the

students were required to produce a writing reflection after each session of concrete experience (CE). According to Sharlanova (2004), a correct learning tempo is very important. He also suggested that the time for the learning cycle must be balanced. This principle was applied in the second cohort EL group.

Furthermore, the findings in this study are also in agreement with the opinion that EL is a pedagogical philosophy in contrast to traditional didactic teaching (Marlow & McLain, 2011). Most scholars agree that EL can transform the tradition of education and give it a more student-focused (SF) approach to teaching (Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Sharlanova, 2004). The findings clearly show that the application of the EL approach affected the students' perception of teaching approaches.

4.2 Students' perception of students approaches to learning

Identical to the analysis with respect to approaches to teaching (AT), the four-point scale was used in the analysis of the students' approaches to learning distribution. The mean score for the students' approaches to learning is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Mean score of students' approaches to learning

		Year		
		2014 (first cohort)	2015 (second cohort)	2015 (second cohort)
		EL Group	EL Group	L + D Group
DA	Mean	2.80	2.83	2.57
	Std. Deviation	.27	.40	.25
SA	Mean	2.39	2.26	2.79
	Std. Deviation	.43	.39	.24

Notes: SA=Surface Approach; DA=Deep Approach

The findings indicate that the second cohort EL group's students had a moderate adoption of the surface approach (SA) (M=2.26, SD= .39). Meanwhile, the first cohort EL group and the second cohort L + D group both also adopted a moderate level of the surface approach (SA) (M=2.39, SD= .43; M=2.79, SD= .24), which was slightly higher than the second cohort EL group. However, the second cohort EL group's students applied a moderate level of deep approach (DA) (M=2.83, SD= .40). This was followed by the first cohort EL group (M=2.80, SD= .27) and the second cohort L + D group's students (M=2.57, SD= .25). Both groups obtained a moderate score on the deep approach (DA) to learning.

A further investigation to examine the mean score of the Students' Approaches to Learning (SAL) was conducted using an independent sample t-test.

4.2.1 *To a greater extent the students adopted the deep approach (DA) to learning with the second cohort EL group*

With respect to H_5 – *students in the second cohort EL classroom will score significantly higher with the deep approach (DA) compared to the first cohort EL classroom students* – an independent t-test was conducted. Table 8 presents the results of the analysis for hypothesis 5.

Table 8. Independent sample t-test analysis for student approaches to learning (SAL) between first cohort EL group and second cohort EL group.

					t-test for Equality of Means		
		N	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
DA	1st cohort EL group	36	2.80	.27	- .280	34.884	.781
	2nd cohort EL group	23	2.83	.40			
SA	1st cohort EL group	36	2.39	.43	1.197	57	.236
	2nd cohort EL group	23	2.25	.39			

Notes: DA=Deep Approach; SA=Surface Approach

The findings show that there was no significant difference in the mean deep-approach (DA) scores between the first cohort EL group (M=2.39, SD= .43) and the second cohort EL group [M=2.25, SD= .39; t (57) = 1.197, p = .236]. Therefore, H_5 is rejected.

H_6 stated that *students in the second cohort EL classroom will score significantly lower with the surface approach (SA) compared to the first cohort EL classroom students*. The findings presented in Table 8 show that there was no significant difference in the mean surface approach (SA) score between the first cohort EL group (M=2.80, SD= .27) and the second cohort EL group [M=2.83, SD= .40; t (34.884) =- .280, p = .781]. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of both EL groups' students with respect to the surface approach (SA).

Furthermore, to determine whether there was any significant difference in the mean scores of student approaches to learning between the second cohort EL group and the second cohort L + D group, an independent t-test was applied. H_7 stated the following: *Students in the second cohort EL classroom will score significantly higher with the deep approach (DA) compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students*. The results for H_7 are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Independent sample t-test analysis for student approaches to learning (SAL) between second cohort EL group and second cohort D + L group.

					t-test for Equality of Means		
		N	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
DA	2nd cohort EL group	23	2.83	.40	2.777	33.392	.009
	2nd cohort L + D group	35	2.57	.25			
SA	2nd cohort EL group	23	2.26	.39	-6.550	56	.0001
	2nd cohort L + D group	35	2.79	.24			

Notes: DA=Deep Approach; SA=Surface Approach

The findings show that there was a significant difference in the mean deep approach (DA) score between the second cohort EL group (M=2.83, SD= .40) and the second cohort L + D group [M=2.57, SD= .25; t (33.392) = 2.777, p = .009]. Therefore, H_7 is supported. In contrast, a comparison between these two groups' surface approach (SA) demonstrate that the second cohort group (M=2.26, SD= .39) scored significantly lower on surface approach (SA) compared with second cohort L + D group [M=2.79, SD= .24; t (56) = -6.550, p = .0001]. This result supports the prediction in hypothesis 8, specifically *the second cohort EL classroom students will score significantly lower with the surface approach (SA) compared to the second cohort D + L classroom students*.

A further investigation revealed that there was a significant relationship between the students' perception of the teaching and learning approaches that were adopted in the study. Table 10 shows significant correlations between most teaching and learning approaches. This study reconfirms the previous studies that identified that there is a relationship between educators' teaching approaches and students' learning approaches (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Ramsden, 2003, Trigwell, 2002). In this study, a student-focused (SF) leads to a deep approach (DA) (.49 at a significance level of 0.0001); however, it is negatively related to a surface approach (SA) (-.35, at a significance level of 0.001). A teacher-focused (TF) is strongly related to a surface approach (SA) (.58 at a significance level of 0.0001). However, there is no significant relationship between a teacher-focused (TF) and a deep approach (DA).

Table 10. Correlation between TF, SF, SA, and DA

Variables	SA	DA	TF	SF
SA	-			
DA	-.33** (.0001)	-		
TF	.58** (.0001)	-.05 (.66)	-	
SF	-.35** (.001)	.49** (.0001)	-.42** (.0001)	-

Notes: DA=Deep Approach, SA=Surface Approach, TF=Teacher-focused, SF=Student-focused; significant at $p < .01$.

Apparently, EL has a direct positive effect on the deep approach (DA) to learning. Previous studies have mentioned that EL can produce positive learning outcomes (Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011; Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Wong & Schoech, 2010). The findings in this study have further proven that EL can induce a greater deep approach (DA), which is equivalent to obtaining a higher quality of learning.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In this section, the researchers draw conclusions about the findings of this research. The implications and suggestions that emerge from this study will also be presented.

5.1 Conclusion

It is concluded that the two research objectives studied in this report were proven. All four hypotheses that aimed to investigate the effects of EL on students' perception of teaching are supported. EL has a significant positive impact on students' perception of the teaching approach being student-focused (SF) compared with the L + D teaching approach. The students who were exposed to the EL approach perceived their lecturer as having placed a greater emphasis on the students' needs rather than the completion of the syllabus.

In addition, two out of four hypotheses related to the effects of EL on students' approach to learning were also supported. Overall, the students who were exposed to the EL teaching approach had a greater tendency to apply a deep approach (DA) to their learning compared with those who studied in the context of the traditional L + D classroom. The students showed more interest, engagement, and willingness to develop their understanding in the EL classroom.

5.2 Implications

This research has several implications with regard to educational theories as well as classroom practice.

5.2.1 Experiential learning (EL) is highly associated with a student-focused (SF) teaching approach

In the EL process, the educator is required to design learning such that it includes the four stages cycle, specifically, concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). This process necessitates a student-focused (SF) teaching approach in which students can internalize the learned experience and subsequently become better PR practitioners in the future (Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011; Kolb, 1984). This action research provides findings confirming that embedding EL into a PR course module can help learners to apply their abstract concepts to real-time activities.

Adediwura and Tayo (2007) provided an explanation for the implication of perceived behavior and actual reaction. They argued that perception is the way in which individuals (students) evaluate people (lecturer) with whom they are familiar in everyday life. They further elaborated two implications that can be deduced from the act of perception. First, perception is highly associated with the background information about the person being evaluated. Therefore, a student's mind is already influenced by memories and feedback related to the situations identified in the questionnaire. Second, the information that comes into the student's mind will connect to experiences, attitudes and predispositions of that individual and finally produce what we call a reaction.

Adediwura's explanation supports the argument of Prosser and Trigwell (1999) in which they said that students' previous experience pertaining to course design, teaching methods, and assessment has an impact on their perception of teaching and learning context (e.g., good teaching, clear goals). Prosser and Trigwell (1999) believe that the main issue in the teaching process is not how well a lecturer has prepared his or her lesson, but how his or her students perceive the lesson. According to Leung, Wang and Olomolaiye (2008), a lecturer's teaching belief and/or orientation does not necessarily correlate with his or her observable teaching approach. However, there is always a relationship between the observed teaching approaches and the actual teaching orientation. In other words, lecturers must always try to understand the way in which students perceive their lessons. This argument also provides the rationale for students' perception of approaches to teaching in this study.

5.2.2 Experiential learning (EL) enhances deep approaches (DA) to learning

The positive relationship between the EL and deep approach (DA) provides insights into how classroom learning can affect the learning approaches of learners. Learning should aim at conceptual change (deep approach, DA) and not merely at acquiring information (surface approach, SA). This study has proven that EL can play a role in bringing about a deep approach (DA). Therefore, effective teaching must always

engage learners' experiences.

Most of the previous studies have indicated that the deep approach (DA) is the desired learning approach and that it will induce positive outcomes or grades (Kek, Darmawan, & Chen, 2007; Swanberg & Martinsen, 2010). Lecturers are always encouraged to practice their teaching sessions with elements that can induce deep learning. This study has confirmed that EL is related to the undergraduates' selection of learning approaches. The results of the current study show that the students who perceive their lecturers to be employing a high level of student-focused (SF) approach to a greater extent possessed a deep approach (DA) in their learning experience. Meanwhile, the students who perceived their lecturers as having a high level of teacher-focused (TF) approach to a greater extent possessed a surface approach (SA) in their studies.

Clearly, the EL approach induces a deep approach (DA) to learning, which is very much desired in the learning processes. The deep approach (DA) results in increased deep learning and is related to high educational quality and outcomes (Kek et al., 2007). Therefore, the EL teaching approach is preferable for producing more engaged and better quality PR undergraduates.

5.3 Suggestions

It is essential that administrators and educators understand the applicability and practicality of incorporating EL into PR courses. The implementation of EL in PR courses depends on aspects such as curriculum design, course structure, and teaching strategies.

5.3.1 Curriculum Design

According to Benecke and Bezuidenhout (2011), there are two educational aspects that must be highlighted when embedding EL into curriculum design. First, a variety of EL activities must be taken into consideration to ensure the integration and effectiveness of the pedagogy applied. Second, the assessment approach must align with EL learning activities.

Benecke and Bezuidenhout (2011) provided a simple formula that can be used while designing assessments, specifically, the designer should evaluate each step in the EL learning cycle. For instance, in this study, the researchers requested that the learners participate in a case study discussion and quiz during the active experimentation (AE) stage, presentation and role-play during the concrete experience (CE) stage, and reflective writing during the reflective observation (RO) stage. If the application of EL learning activities further expands to different subjects, it will be necessary to standardize the assessment strategies to guarantee that the implementation is consistent.

With regard to the alignment of the EL classroom with other variables in this study such as the deep approach (DA) and the surface approach (SA), Biggs and Catherine Tang (2007) proposed that lecturers should integrate the teaching and learning processes and consider effective teaching such as encouraging students to apply the most efficient

learning approach to obtain the desired learning outcomes. Biggs and Catherine Tang (2007) called this process "constructive alignment", i.e., the learning activities in the intended outcomes are activated in the teaching process and in the assessment task to verify that the outcome has in fact been achieved. Since the application of EL strategies in the classroom is designed to foster the qualities of questioning, developing a clear position, problem-solving, creativity, thoughtfulness, communicate effectively, and encouraging independent thought among PR graduates (Fitch & Surma, 2006), the assessment must be modified according to these requirements to ensure the alignment of the course structure. More formative assessment methods should be designed to replace the traditional summative assessment methods. By doing this, the students will be informed of their involvement in the learning cycle, which will contribute to their final grading.

The alignment of the course structure is important to suggest that the grades obtained by the undergraduates actually reflect their learning ability or engagement level in the learning experience. This alignment is necessary to assess that the learning outcomes of the syllabus has been achieved. At the same time, it is necessary to avoid students who graduate with higher grades but do less (Kuh, 1998) or achieve good marks with limited contribution (Leung et al., 2007) in the learning processes.

5.3.2 Embedded experiential learning (EL) in teaching processes

This study has proven that approaches to teaching, specifically EL learning activities, have a direct effect on student learning approaches. Therefore, lectures are an essential part of EL learning activities. Lecturers should make greater effort to obtain students' learning experiences that require students to take greater responsibility for their learning. This recommendation is about the effective delivery of academic programs by diversifying teaching styles (National Institute of Education, 1984, p. 27). Lecturers should reflect on the use of various teaching methods that are more student-focused (SF) than teacher-focused (TF). As a good lecturer, one should not just do well in teaching, but one must be able to be effective with regard to pedagogical skills, classroom management, and an understanding of the characteristics of learners. Most importantly, a good lecturer should always be prepared to listen to students to diagnose their learning progression.

One-way teaching is no longer suitable for the net-geners. It is recommended that lecturers increase their use of a multi-way teaching approach through group discussions, practical training, project-based or problem-based learning, as well as hands-on activities to promote students' study interest (Leung et al., 2007). EL learning activities have been proven to bring benefits, advantages and efficiency to the teaching and learning process (Cronin & Lowes, 2016).

However, this does not mean that EL learning is an anti-traditional form of instruction such as the L + D teaching approach in this study. The EL approach can even be practised in conjunction with traditional teaching methods (Cronin & Lowes,

2016). Hence, it is of utmost importance for the educator to thoroughly understand the concept and idea of EL. The institution has the responsibility to ensure that educators are equipped with the necessary resources and are able to practise on the implementation of EL (Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011).

5.3.3 Fostering more deep learning in PR courses

The main issue of this study was stimulated by the phenomena of inadequate critical inquiry and evaluative skills among PR practitioners. Therefore, the students must be invited to engage more in their learning process. It was proven in this study that EL learning activities, which involve learning by doing, can serve this purpose (Beard & Wilson, 2006). EL helps learners to integrate contextual world experience with knowledge, and this aligns with the interpretation of deep learning. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate EL into the teaching and learning process of PR courses (Benecke, 2011).

The perception of teaching approaches, which underlies students' approaches to learning, will improve learning outcomes as each of the concepts adds to the others. The students' perception of teaching approaches is essential because it reflects the conception of learning, prior experience, and students' perceptions of their learning situation (Biggs & Moore, 1993; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). As Prosser and Trigwell (1999) mentioned, "students do not live in an 'objective' world but an 'experienced' world (p. 59)". They explained this statement by further stating the following:

The learning and teaching issue is not that of how university teachers have designed and constructed their subjects and course, but rather how their students perceive and understand the way they have designed and structured them.

Ostensibly, students hold the key to the way in which they approach a course. A smart student perceives his or her learning situations, including the lecturer's teaching approach, from a positive perspective; conversely, a poor performing student perceives everything from a negative viewpoint. In other words, a successful student will always find ways to improve his or her learning qualities instead of blaming external factors.

A student-focused (SF) teaching approach will trigger learners to adopt a deep approach (DA) and subsequently obtain more experience in the learning process. A student who is engaged in such study will possess a great volume of relevant knowledge, operate at a high or abstract level of conceptualization, is skillful in applying metacognitive strategies, enjoys the learning process and is prepared to invest time and effort in his or her studies (Biggs & Moore, 1993). As one of the elements in the deep approach (DA) is to be prepared to invest time and effort in one's studies, the extension of this characteristic is engagement with the learning experience. Therefore, the mastering of the deep learning approach is important in PR courses.

It is important to highlight for students that learning is an on-going process and that they must understand their world as well as develop their attitudes, values, and skills on a continuing basis (Dewey, 1997). After the students master the cyclic process of reflection, innovation, experimentation and conclusion, this ability will continue to help them pursue knowledge, and it will become a life-long process. This value

should be central in PR courses because obtaining a balance between the interests of stakeholders and the public is the greatest challenge for the PR profession (Zulhamri & Threadgold, 2008).

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