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# **Analysing Student Experience in Classroom Environment**

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ABSTRACT The study aims to analyse student experience in Dewey's traditional and progressive education. The sample consisted of 39 (n=39) first-year students of the undergraduate program of sociology. A one-group quasi-experimental design was used to measure if any difference exists in the student experience in traditional and progressive education. Data collected was examined using a t-test through SPSS19.0. The investigation revealed progressive education comprising of continuity and interaction of an experience showed an upward trend as its counterpart. Moreover, different aspects of experience such as (1) knowledge construction, (2) subjectively interpreting new knowledge, (3) relatedness with the real world, and (4) conversion of experience into an educational one; seem to differ significantly based on the classroom environment, implying classroom environment plays a major role to play in creating better learning experiences for students.

#### INTRODUCTION

In his book "Experience and Education" (1997), John Dewey not only compares and contrasts "traditional" and "progressive" education, but also provides a clear and succinct philosophical explanation of the impact of school environment on our lives. Moving away from idealism towards pragmatism and naturalism, Dewey began to develop a theory of knowledge in favor of a naturalistic approach, and viewed knowledge as arising from an active adaption of humans to its environment. He believed that reality must be experienced and education should be practical and related to political, social, economic, and educational problems of daily life.

To that end, he asserted that the environment of traditional pedagogy, which consists of desks in straight rows, a teacher presenting some topics in the front of the room, and bored students taking notes is not an ideal learning environment for a young learner. The teacher, in such an environment, is the dominant figure, providing information to the student, while the students are merely passively participating. The control and the direction of learning, both in terms of what is considered as important knowledge or how to translate that knowledge onto the students is also further decided by the teachers. The students are, thereby, only presented with "well-structured" situa-

tions with definitive answers that don't alter much over time and context (Collins et al. 2011). However, Dewey as an alternative to this introduced progressive education as a new way of teaching and learning that was different from the established norms of his time. Progressive education represented real-life situations, allowing the learner to participate in activities in a variety of social settings (Dewey 1997). This kind of education guided the learner towards socially constructing an understanding of the subject matter. Contrary to traditional pedagogy, it valued experience over learning facts, as one of Dewey's main concerns was the disparity between the experiences of the learner and the imposition of facts upon him. He believed that the imposition curbed the gap between a learner's natural curiosity and abilities as it forces them to follow a set pattern.

Dewey's philosophy of education gave primary importance to experience and environment of the classroom, and their influence on each other. Any new education, according to Dewey (2001), must be based on some type of empirical and experimental philosophy. Therefore, to comprehend the concept of empiricism, one must first comprehend what experience is.

In his opinion, an experience is an educational device that consciously and actively uses the potential embedded within an individual's social and physical environment to enhance specific education purposes by constructing and deconstructing an individual's knowledge and understanding (Gross and Rutland 2017). And as experience is a personal phenomenon, its subjective interpretation has a life-long learning. However, the challenge for an educator is to provide quality experiences to the learners that will result in growth in their subsequent experiences. He suggests students in traditional classrooms do have experiences. The trouble is not the absence of experience, but their standpoint in education. To ensure the growth of an experience, he introduces two principles, first is *continuity* of experience or the *experi*ential continuum. The continuity, here, suggests that how experiences, both past and future ones, influence the present (Dewey 1987; Vanderstraeten 2002).

Every experience absorbs something from the ones that came before it and alters the quality of the ones that follow in some manner. The second concept is that the objective condition and the learner's internal conditions interact. Objects, people, and ideas make up an individual's objective condition. An experience becomes what it is as a result of this interaction between the individual's internal and external environments. And this interaction internally creates a new experience that impacts the future physical environment, making it a two-way alteration. Learning from experience entails making a backward and forward link between what we do to objects and what we enjoy or endure as a result (Dewey 1939: 140). Therefore, continuity and interaction in the environment should be built in such a way that demonstrates awareness of determining the path of an experience and ensures its progress (Dewey 1939). As a result, experiences that hinders or distorts the growth of further experience is not an educative experience (Seaman 2019; Shusterman 1994).

An experience is influenced by the physical environment in a classroom, where experiences are used as an instrument to form continuity, and molded through interaction. An interaction appropriate environment allows students to become change agents, act responsibly, empathetically, work in a team in collaboration with others, as all these are useful and essential skills for the future. An environment such as of traditional classroom is an imposition from above and from outside (Powell 2001). To firmly establish the importance of the social

environment in growth-related experiences, he presents three characteristics of an educational environment in *Democracy and Education* (Dewey 1939) which even though talking about the school environment, we believe can be placed in the context of a higher education environment as well (Hansen 2002). First, a "simplified" environment "which is fairly fundamental and capable of being responded by the young" (p. 22). A simplified environment blends the students into the concept, rather than focusing on abstract lectures. Second, the "purified" environment calls out "to eliminate, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes" (p. 22). It draws out students' open-mindedness rather than stubbornness, while also weeding out what is undesirable to make for a better society. Third, a "balanced" environment provides stability to the student by providing opportunities outside his social environment. Thus, combing a simplified, purified, and balanced environment (Gross and Rutland 2017) will assist the student to intermingle with each other by providing a homogenous classroom environment to work together. More so, in presence of a friendly environment, a student can indirectly relate their present with the experiences of the past and future. A classroom environment should engage students based upon their interests, capacities, and previous experience, as it helps the student to multiple their learning (1939) and learn through "direct living" (Sullivan and Pratt 1996). The groupbased, social experience assists students in experiencing something personally significant through interaction in their classroom environment.

According to him, the main goal of education was letting students construct their knowledge (Hopkins 2017) and creating an educational environment that sponsors students to look beyond the "society" he was born into providing them with a broader view of life. And it is the primary responsibility of the educator to shape the actual experience and that leads to growth. He points that the educators should be aware of the principle of moulding an experience, and also to be able to acknowledge that experience must lead to growth (Choi 2014; Mooney and Edwards 2001).

The instructor (facilitator) is in charge of offering learning opportunities, assisting students in utilising these chances, developing an educational experience, establishing learning objectives, giving relevant information, and facilitating learnSTUDENT EXPERIENCE 93

ing. Using Dewey's definition of experience and environment as a starting point, dynamic pedagogical concerns about the meaning of the real educational environment and its impact on student experience are raised (Muhit 2013; Sikanar 2015).

It calls attention to whether students' genuine experience influence learning in a hands-on environment or its opposite. Based on this, we (as educators) try to examine his concept of experience and classroom environment by quantifiably measuring student experience in two different, traditional and progressive classroom environments. In particular, the research highlights whether two different classroom (traditional and progressive) environments influence students experience in higher education.

The researchers intend to make a "clarifying statement," as Timothy Fuller (1989) puts it, about the educational classroom environment and its influence on undergraduate students of sociology in Indian universities. The researchers are curious to understand whether the experiences of students in a progressive environment led to growth in the Indian context. Or does it not influence students' experience at all? Or the experiences remain the same irrespective of the classroom environment in Indian higher education, in particular.

# Objectives of the Study

The study aims to understand the relevance of Dewey's traditional versus progressive environments on the experience of first-year undergraduate students. Further, the researchers intend to acknowledge whether different aspects of experience such as (1) knowledge construction, (2) subjectively interpreting new knowledge, (3) relatedness with the real world, and (4) conversion of experience into an educational one differs in two varied classroom environments.

# **Null Hypothesis**

As the purpose of the paper is to understand the relevance of traditional and progressive environments on the experience of first-year undergraduate students, the researchers presume student experience as a dependent variable, while traditional and progressive educational environments are independent variables. Following this, four null hypotheses are proposed to acknowledge the relevance of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

- There is no significant difference between the rating of the co-construction of knowledge in traditional and progressive education.
- There is no significant difference between the rating of the subjectively interpreting new knowledge in traditional and progressive education.
- There is no significant difference between the rating of the relatedness of the subject-matter in traditional and progressive education.
- There is no significant difference between the rating of the conversion of experience into education in traditional and progressive education.

# **Instrument Development**

### **Questionnaire**

The objective of reshaping student experiences into a questionnaire is to maintain the student's focus solely on the experiences being rated. The student after experiencing both the environments will be requested to reflect on the experiences, they were able to identify with. Consequently, the questionnaire includes (in the same order)-

- 1. Rate the level of knowledge construction.
- Rate the level of subjectively interpreting new knowledge.
- 3. Rate the level of relatedness to the real world.
- 4. Rate the level of conversion of experience into growth.

### **Measuring Scale**

Five points Likert scale was used to measure the student experiences in traditional and progressive education. The criteria under which the respondents were asked to rate the Outcome Measures on a 5-point scale (5 = extremely good, 4 = good, 3 = neutral, 2 = not good, 1 = bad). With the help of the Likert scale, the authors were able to reject or accept the null hypothesis.

# METHODOLOGY

An essential aspect of education is that meaningful and worthwhile experiences are felt by the students. To explore the type of environment that

is best suited to initiate the growth of students' experience, we surveyed students to gauge their experience in traditional and progressive education (Table 1).

Table 1: Sociology of deviance curriculum course contents/syllabus

Module

Descriptors/Topics - Deviance: Meaning and nature, theories of deviance: Social learning approach, Marxist Perspective, control theory and Interactionist Approach Module 2

Descriptors/Topics - Delinquency, sexual deviance, organized crimes, crimes against women and children, cybercrimes, corruption, crimes against lower caste and minorities in India

### **About the Survey**

A total of 39 students enrolled in first year undergraduate sociology courses responded to the survey (Sociology of Deviance). It was anonymous and given out in class at the start of the semester. The timeline reduces the significance of a change in environmental strategy on the consequence; instead, students were encouraged to reflect to their experiences while only assessing this course and the two classroom environments.

All 39 students were undergoing two different modules with two different educational techniques. A quasi-experimental one-group design was devised and carried out. Both methods of instruction were taken in six classes respectively – one class each day – after concluding one method of instruction, on the sixth day all the students were given 15 minutes to fill in a questionnaire. The fact that module one and module two weretaught through traditional and progressive educational environment respectively was not advertised to the students.

Traditional education consists mostly of lecture-based techniques. The classroom structure and method of instruction offered little room for active engagement. For student reference, books and reading were provided to them consisting of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out (Dewey 1939: 17-18). The subject matter consisted of module 1 from the prescribed university curriculum (Table 1). In traditional teaching, the value of subject matter is emphasized over and against the learner's own experience in the classroom. The goal is to create a universe of truth, law,

and process of controlling on the subject matter (Tan 2016; Talebi 2015).

By contrast, progressive education is comprised of active, participatory learning opportunities. Hawtrey (2007) states letting students choose their topic along with the method, is the most important part of the intervention, as students feel part of the event. It creates a sense of community and belongingness as everyone will participate. The progressive technique requires peer interaction and group work to introduce educative experiences by providing the necessary space and support to the student to build their knowledge. Students, for this social environment, were requested to divide themselves into six groups, as the sample size consists of 39 first-year students, group four, group five, and group six consisted of seven instead of six students in each group. Accordingly, a battery of techniques was made available to the students to choose for stimulating creative involvement within the confines of the progressive classroom for research purposes (Sobal 1981; Hawtrey 2007). The six activities designed are as follows-

# 1. Roleplaying

The application of role-playing introduces students to the concept of interpersonal competence, and gives students an insight into the dynamics of interaction, and improves spontaneity (Moreno as quoted by Mann 1959; Shipman 1964; Lippitt 1953).

### 2. Case-study

Case studies provides in-depth exploration that may synergize the creating and implementation of more systematic, large scale, and rigorous evaluations of efficacy since they are experienced as one-on-one interactions. Hawtrey (2007) and Kunselman and Johnson (2004) applied the case-study technique to enhance student learning.

### 3. Participant Observation

The goal of participant observation is to develop practical and theoretical facts about human life that are based on the reality of everyday living (Jorgensen 2003) Though traditionally, this activity is not considered interactional in nature, as a student only visits the group/area to be investigated, and doesn't interact. Yet, they do experience interaction with the objects as well as the physical setting of the investigated area, that is to

say, interaction with an objective setting also influences an experience. Wright (2000) uses participant observation as a tool, and reports 82 percent of students wrote that their stereotypes decreased and their level of knowledge increased.

#### 4. Debate

As an activity, it offers an excellent opportunity for the student to engage in critical thinking (Jackson 1973; Evan and Gibson 1994). Hawtrey (2007) uses debate with a general discussion with the student for incorporating active learning.

### 5. Documentary

A documentary film is a non-fictional picture intended for learning and is a new art form. Smith as quoted by (Sobal 1981) uses film showcasing considering their value as a tool for promoting learning and holding student interest.

### 6. Survey Method

It can be defined as collecting information or data from a pre-defined group of respondents (Sieber 1973). It provides collaborative learning opportunities for students through frequent interaction with the population and the environment that emphasizes critical inquiry, intellectual, and development of skills. The method also pushes the students towards real learning as they are visiting the area of the survey method taking place. Along with the topic (Table 2), the students were also encouraged to choose from the six situational activities in a progressive environment to encourage ownership of their learning.

Group one decided on crimes against lower caste and minorities in India through role-playing methods. The second group chooses the survey method to understand the rate of crimes against women and children within the university area. Group three preferred debating as a technique to experience a fruitful discussion. While group four selected the participant observation method of delinquent by visiting an orphanage, the orphanage provided shelter to petty young offenders. Group five opted for the documentary method on cyber-crime. While group six decided on using the case-study method as a method to understand the reasons behind sexual deviance. After teaching in a traditional and progressive classroom environment, students were requested to rate their experiences with the questionnaire provided.

### RESULTS

For evaluation, SPSS 19.0 software was used to administer the t-test analysis. The concept of the t-test is used to determine if a significant difference exists within the student experience (dependent variable) in traditional and progressive education (independent variable). Individually, all four parts of student experiences were analyzed to accept or reject the respective null hypothesis.

Preliminary analyses of the data provided descriptive statistics of means, standard deviation, and standard error mean. As indicated in Table 3, the overall mean of progressive educational environment is higher than the traditional education across all the four student experiences, highlighting the fact Dewey's claim that the classroom environment is relevant (Hawtrey 2007). The mean difference supports the integration of the influence an environment has on the student experience. The findings are consistent with various studies that indicate activities are beneficial for students' experience to bridge the gap and incubate growth such as kinaesthetic orientation of learning through ex-

Table 2: Group topics, experience-based situations and number of members each group has in phase two of the research

Group number	Group topic	Experiential techniques	No. of members (n=39)	
1	Crimes against lower caste and minorities in India	Role-playing		
2	Crimes against women and children	Survey	6	
3	Corruption	Debate	6	
4	Delinquency	Participant observation	7	
5	Cyber crime	Documentary	7	
6	Sexual deviance	Case study	7	

Table 3: Paired sample statistics of all 5 pairs with the feedback forms from both the methodology

Outcome measures	Environment	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std . error mean
Knowledge Construction	Traditional	1.87	39	0.732	0.117
<u> </u>	Progressive	4.49	39	0.601	0.096
Subjectively Interpreting	Progressive	4.26	39	0.785	0.126
Relatedness with the Real World	Traditional	1.92	39	1.061	0.17
	Progressive	4.31	39	0.922	0.148
Conversion of Experience into	Traditional	1.97	39	0.843	0.135
An Educational One	Progressive	4.26	39	0.938	0.15

perience creates a particularly friendly, creative, and pleasant environment for the students, which enhances the learning process (Chen 2010; Mc-Main and Gunnewig 2012). Additionally, the difference in mean suggests benefits of the progressive environment that learning is a social phenomenon. Learning becomes more fascinating and enjoyable when students participate in it and take ownership of it. The environment is aimed to assist students in developing a knowledge of phenomena, events, human nature, and other topics by encouraging them to consider how their previous experiences have influenced their current experience (for example, what happened to them, how they felt, how they reacted, what resulted, what they observed). Finally, the higher mean in a progressive setting provides a mechanism for linking past experiences to future prospects by assisting students in developing habits, memories, abilities, and information that will be valuable in the future.

To address the null hypothesis (Table 5), the ttest statistical criterion was administered. The analysis tested that the feedback score differed significantly across the traditional and progressive environment such as (1) knowledge construction (t=10.062), (2) subjectively interpreting new knowledge (t=10.509), (3) relatedness to the real world (t=13.108), (4) experience being educative (t=11.966). All the four null hypotheses were introduced stating the dependent variable (student experience) will not change during independent variables (traditional and progressive education) are rejected. With degrees of freedom (df) at 38 and p at 0.05, the critical value of t is 2.03, which indicates that there exists a significant difference between the four types of student experience between traditional and progressive educational environments (Table 5). Further, Table 4 also shows, the confidence interval of difference is taken at 95 percent for a 2 tailed significance test. The p-value is equal to .00 or nearly approximately equal to 0, the researchers reject all the null hypotheses (t at df=38, p=0.05). That is to say, there is a significant difference in student experience between traditional and progressive educational environments.

The rejection encourages Dewey's thinking of traditional environment, that it fails to ignite student's curiosity, and encourages passive receivers of information and learning for joy of knowing. On the contrary, the activities used highlight interaction with a variety of settings, such as environment, objects (participant observation, documentary, and survey), and people (role-playing, casestudy, and debate) provide the student with the ownership to interact and interpret their exclusive phenomena into a subjective meaning. The re-

Table 4: Paired samples correlations

Outcome measures	Classroom environment	N	Correlation	Significance 0.093	
Knowledge Construction	Traditional	39	-0.273		
	Progressive	39			
Subjectively Interpreting	Traditional	39	0.069	0.677	
New Knowledge	Progressive	39			
Relatedness with the Real World	Traditional	39	-0.11	0.506	
	Progressive	39			
Conversion of Experience into	Traditional	39	0.108	0.511	
An Educational One	Progressive	39			

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Table 5: Test results of paired sample t-test, with mean difference, t values, degree of freedom and two-tailed significance

	Classroom	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
Outcome measures					Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Knowledge	Traditional	-2.615	1.067	0.171	-2.961	-2.27	-15.313	38	.00
Construction Subjectively Interpreting New Knowledge	Progressive Traditional Progressive	-2.385	1.48	0.237	-2.864	-1.905	-10.062	38	.00
Relatedness with the Real World	Traditional Progressive	-2.179	1.295	0.207	-2.599	-1.76	-10.509	38	.00
Conversion of Experience into An Educational One	Progressive Traditional Progressive	-2.282	1.191	0.191	-2.668	-1.896	-11.966	38	.00

searchers believe it is, of course, subjective meaning of experiences that have the potential to provide the student with insight into the subject matter especially sociology of deviance and turn it into a life-long experience. Hence, it is essential to keep in mind that the environment provided to students to interact, discuss and debate, in different ways, helps in grasping knowledge, and keeps the interpretation subjective for greater analysis. The interaction within the classroom settings helps the students to capitalize on their past experiences, while accordingly forming new ones based on their objective setting. Therefore, objective setting does play a significant role in contributing to building experiences. It focuses on the interaction between the internal and external environment. Even though the traditional environment fails to recognize interaction and situation as aspects influencing a student, in reality, it does influence students.

# DISCUSSION

The aim was to analyze student experiences in Dewey's traditional and progressive education. The research suggests progressive education, which consists of continuity and interaction of an experience, has shown an upward tendency. Furthermore, different aspects of experience, such as (1) knowledge construction; (2) subjectively interpreting new knowledge; (3) relatedness to the real world; (4) conversion of experience into education one, appear to differ significantly based on the classroom environment, that is, traditional versus progressive classroom environment. This result is consistent with other studies (see Lloyd 2005; Mohamed 2018; Lackeus et al. 2016). The researchers would like to point out that progressive classroom environment is not limited to the use of various activities such as roleplaying, case-study, participant observation, debate, documentary, and survey method, but solely wish to promote active learning and engagement in classroom environment. There are various methods like blended, flipped, activity-based classroom<sup>1</sup> environment which are based on a similar foundation, that is, are able to provide continuity and interaction to students (see Weller and Saam 2019; Valiente-Riedl et al. 2021; Chang and Huang 2022).

The idea of the study was to re-establish Dewey's idea of a progressive education which advocates for learning involving a direct experience, and an environment which provides an opportunity to students to participate in their learning process (Lloyd 2005). Unlike traditional environment, wherein students find it harder to kindle with their experience in a classroom, progressive education-

al environment does not lack freedom or space provided to explore. The method used here can be changed or modified according to the various social aspects of the classroom. However, the classroom environment should create an atmosphere of cooperation and cohesiveness, instead of promoting competition. Students appreciated engagement, involvement, engrossment as immediate aims of education. If the environment stimulates thinking (in any form) whether it is debating the relevance of an event, role-playing a character, or interpreting a text, students' experience becomes worth-while and meaningful. An educative environment should constitute the intermediary, the medium, the means of interactive influence. It should generate curiosity, open-mindedness, ultimately leading to student growth. Meanwhile, if the environment is marginalized by the subjectmatter as opposed to "freedom, individuality, play, interest, growth, and capacity", the experience is not able to provide any growth or learning for the student. Therefore, teaching through traditional methods and beliefs promotes close-mindedness and lack of self-confidence among students as the authority usually rests with the teacher (Dewey 1939; Almulla 2020; Belisle et al. 2020). It is an environment which offers students to have more trust and liaison among each other, work together in a team, appreciate and respect each other. This is compatible with other studies. (see Kinnaman 2021; Claes et al. 2021; Kaya-Sayari et al. 2021).

Learning can be more personalised, in an environment which encourage ownership among students. These kinds of methods inspire to students to go beyond classroom learning. (see Kinnaman 2021; Claes et al. 2021; Kaya-Sayari et al. 2021). Therefore, it is believed that a healthy classroom environment should typically be framed in a manner to provide a bridge between theoretical and practical learning unlike traditional classroom setting. True correlation of sociology of deviance occurred for students during activities in the space provided to them. The ownership helped in reflection and interacting with others, leading to a better learning outcome. The importance of progressive learning is substantiated (see Belisle et al. 2020; Almulla 2020) suggesting learning must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience, making the process and the goal as one.

It has become certain that classroom environment does make an impact on student learning. Traditional education's emphasis on the classical subject-matters, in this case, teaching theories of sociology of deviance through black-board method, was not taught in relation to real life. Such empirically-based theorizing discussions promise to deepen and extend disciplinary debates regarding the role of experience in our education system. Particularly in contracting times, when the world is experiencing a pandemic, pushing educators to revisit the methods of instruction and the importance of experience in a students' life is necessary. It is important to reflect and recognize the preeminent feature of any method of instruction that can add value and significance to students' experience and learning.

# CONCLUSION

In this paper, the researchers began by developing an understanding of the classroom environment on students' experience. Significant difference between progressive and traditional environments on all four aspects of experience was not expected. Contrary to the expectations, the researchers found that the kind of classroom environment can determine students' co-construction of knowledge, subjective interpretation, the relatedness of real-world and lastly growth of the experience. Additionally, the researchers determined through two principles of experience as interaction and continuity are influenced by the classroom environment. Interaction influences experience through a discussion-based environment, wherein a student can form an interpretation of his/her experiences based on talking to others, while continuity can experience when an environment is designed in a way that it can form a link between past and future experiences. In a cohesive environment, which is discussion-based and allows the student to explore their experiences, such as that of progressive one, students were able to coconstruct knowledge with their peers, subjectively interpret experiences based on their past experiences, form connectivity with the real world based on practical field-work. The students were challenged to reflect on their experiences in traditional and progressive classroom environments, and then rate them based on their presence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The classroom setting, according to Dewey, is largely founded on faith in human capabilities. As a result, in India, teacher education should integrate

Dewey's compelling viewpoint with other readings and activities that can assist instructors. These views can provide a teacher with essential elements required to enhance student understanding and viewpoint, and also in turn be an educative experience for the teachers.

### LIMITATIONS

It's important to note that this study has a number of flaws. First, the researchers gathered information from a small group of undergraduate students enrolled in a sociology honours course. As a result, there is no way of knowing if unmeasured selection bias influenced the findings. Therefore, the evaluation result should be taken with a grain of salt. Second, the evaluation only enables one to analyse quantitative likeness or dislike-ness towards a particular environment. Third, the researchers don't know if these outcomes will vary for other aspects of experience and/or might vary based on different techniques in progressive education. Fourth, the researchers work under the preview of progressive education branches out into various kinds of pedagogy namely experiential learning, inquiry-based approach, activity-based approach, and so on.

#### NOTE

 Blended, activity-based and flipped learning environment usually boost student's ownership in their learning process. These environments are based on Dewey's progressive education which focuses on active learning, and link their real lives with the subject matter.

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