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Perception of agricultural students towards experiential learning programme (ELP)

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ABSTRACT

Experiential Learning Programme (ELP) provides agricultural students with opportunities to bridge classroom learning with practical and real-life agricultural experiences. The present study was conducted to assess the role of ELP for developing professional competencies among agricultural students. The study was conducted in four agricultural colleges of Kolhapur district under Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, with a sample of 150 students who had undergone ELP. An ex-post facto research design was used and data were collected through a structured interview schedule. The perception of students was assessed across seven dimensions, namely skill development, knowledge gain, hands-on expertise in core agricultural practices, creativity development, management orientation, leadership qualities and decision-making ability. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents (44.67%) had a medium level of overall perception towards ELP, followed by low (25.33%) and high (20.67%) levels. The results indicated that students generally perceived ELP as useful for enhancing practical knowledge, technical skills, creativity, management abilities, leadership qualities and decision-making skills. The study highlights the potential of ELP as an important component of agricultural education for strengthening professional competencies through practical and experiential learning.

Keywords: Experiential Learning Programme, Agricultural students, Perception, Skill development, Hands-on learning, Agricultural education

Introduction

Agricultural education was primarily concerned with teaching theoretical knowledge through classroom instruction (Ayesh, 2020) [1]. However, the pace of technological development, changing farming systems and increasing market competition has highlighted the importance of experiential learning. Modern agricultural graduates are expected not only to understand scientific concepts but also to apply them effectively under field conditions, manage agricultural enterprises, adopt innovative technologies and contribute to sustainable rural development (Kakadiya, Gaikwad). Recognizing these changing requirements, agricultural universities have increasingly integrated practical learning with conventional teaching to ensure that students develop the competencies required for professional success (Sanjeev and Gowda, 2024; Vijayan *et al.*, 2025; Sonawane; Verma) [2, 3]. Accordingly, the study entitled "Perception of Agricultural Students towards Experiential Learning Programme (ELP)" was undertaken to assess students perceptions regarding different dimensions of the programme, including skill development, knowledge enhancement, practical exposure, creativity, management orientation, leadership qualities and decision-making ability (Lekang). The findings of the study are expected to provide useful insights for teachers, university administrators, curriculum planners and policymakers for further strengthening experiential learning in agricultural education.

Materials and Methods

The research study was carried out in four agricultural colleges of Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, located in Kolhapur district, Maharashtra. A total of 150 agricultural students who had completed the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP) were selected as respondents using the proportional random sampling method and personally interviewed with the help of a structured interview schedule. The study focused on selected personal, academic, socio-economic and psychological characteristics of the respondents and their perception towards ELP (ICAR). The perception was assessed across seven dimensions, namely skill development, knowledge gain, hands-on expertise in core agricultural practices, creativity development, management orientation, leadership qualities and decision-making ability. Appropriate scales and statistical tools such as frequency, percentage and range method were used for analysis of the data.

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Result and Discussion

The seven dimensions considered in the study represent different but complementary components of professional knowledge, skills and abilities. The dimension-wise findings are presented below.

Skill development

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards skill development.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (n = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 23)	44	29.33
2	Medium (24 to 28)	65	43.33
3	High (above 28)	41	27.33
Total		150	100.00

The findings revealed that 43.33 per cent of respondents had a medium level of perception regarding skill development, followed by 29.33 per cent with low and 27.33 per cent with high perception.

Thus, the largest proportion of students perceived ELP as moderately effective in developing practical and professional skills.

1. Perception towards skill development						
Sr. No.	Statements	SA(5)	A(4)	UD(3)	DA(2)	SDA(1)
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1	ELP helped me develop leadership qualities while managing group activities.	28 (18.67)	68 (45.33)	38 (25.33)	16 (10.67)	0 (00.00)
2	My communication and presentation skills improved through ELP.	18 (12.00)	63 (42.00)	44 (29.33)	17 (11.33)	8 (5.33)
3	I gained confidence in dealing with farmers, entrepreneurs and buyers during ELP.	58 (38.67)	52 (34.67)	24 (16.00)	13 (8.67)	3 (2.00)
4	ELP improved my ability to manage financial and production records.	40 (26.67)	64 (42.67)	34 (22.67)	12 (8.00)	0 (00.00)
5	I learned to plan, organize and execute agricultural enterprise activities effectively.	23 (15.33)	56 (37.33)	43 (28.67)	20 (13.33)	8 (5.33)
6	Marketing and sales activities in ELP enhanced my entrepreneurial orientation.	37 (24.67)	64 (42.67)	31 (20.67)	17 (11.33)	1 (0.67)
7	ELP improved my decision-making and problem-solving skills.	21 (14.00)	48 (32.00)	49 (32.67)	18 (12.00)	14 (9.67)

The statement-wise responses provide further support to this finding. About 64.00 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that ELP helped them develop leadership qualities while managing group activities, while 54.00 per cent reported improvement in communication and presentation skills. A particularly notable finding was that 73.34 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that ELP increased their confidence in dealing with farmers, entrepreneurs and buyers. Similarly, 69.34 per cent reported improvement in managing financial and production records.

These findings indicate that ELP was perceived not merely as a source of technical practice but also as an avenue for developing interpersonal, managerial and professional skills. This is consistent with the broader objective of experiential learning under Student READY, which emphasizes competence, practical skills, confidence, teamwork, decision-making and problem-solving.

Gain in knowledge

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards gain in knowledge.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (n = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 16)	28	18.67
2	Medium (17 to 20)	78	52.00
3	High (above 20)	44	29.33
Total		150	100.00

More than half of the respondents (52.00%) had a medium level of perception regarding knowledge gain, followed by 29.33 per cent with high and 18.67 per cent with low perception. The findings sug-

gest that ELP provided students with opportunities to connect theoretical concepts with practical agricultural situations.

2. Perception in terms of gain in knowledge						
Sr. No.	Statements	SA(5) F (%)	A(4) F (%)	UD(3) F (%)	DA(2) F (%)	SDA(1) F (%)
1	ELP helped me understand real-life agricultural production systems.	34 (22.67)	75 (50.00)	27 (18.00)	14 (9.33)	0 (00.00)
2	I acquired new knowledge about enterprise management and value addition.	68 (45.33)	50 33.33	22 (14.67)	10 (6.67)	0 (00.00)
3	ELP gave me practical exposure to post-harvest handling and processing.	78 (52.00)	41 (27.33)	15 (10.00)	16 (10.67)	0 (00.00)
4	My understanding of marketing channels and agribusiness management improved through ELP.	19 (12.67)	49 (32.67)	1 (0.67)	81 (54.00)	0 (00.00)
5	ELP bridged the gap between classroom learning and field realities.	30 (20.00)	72 (48.00)	30 (20.00)	18 (12.00)	0 (00.00)

The statement-wise results further demonstrate the knowledge component of ELP. About 72.67 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ELP helped them understand real-life agricultural production systems. A substantial 78.66 per cent reported acquiring knowledge about enterprise management and value addition, while 79.33 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that ELP provided practical exposure to post-harvest handling and processing. Further, 68.00 per

cent agreed or strongly agreed that ELP bridged the gap between classroom learning and field realities.

Thus, ELP appears to have provided an important link between theoretical knowledge and its practical application, which is a central characteristic of professional competency development.

Hands-on expertise in core agricultural practices

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards hands-on expertise.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (n = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 22)	25	16.67
2	Medium (23 to 28)	93	62.00
3	High (above 28)	32	21.33
Total		150	100.00

The findings showed that 62.00 per cent of respondents had a medium level of perception regarding hands-on expertise, followed by 21.33 per cent with high and 16.67 per cent with low perception. This was

one of the important dimensions of professional competency development because ELP directly exposes students to practical agricultural activities.

3. Perception related to hands-on expertise in core agricultural practices.						
Sr. No.	Statements	SA(5) F (%)	A(4) F (%)	UD(3) F (%)	DA(2) F (%)	SDA(1) F (%)
1	ELP gave me confidence to operate agricultural machinery and equipment.	17 (11.33)	67 (44.67)	19 (12.67)	32 (21.33)	15 (10.00)
2	I acquired hands-on skills in field production, processing, packaging and quality control.	16 (10.67)	68 (45.33)	18 (12.00)	37 (24.67)	11 (7.33)
3	I can independently manage a small-scale agribusiness after undergoing ELP.	22 (14.67)	70 (46.67)	44 (29.33)	14 (9.33)	0 (00.00)
4	Through ELP, I learned to apply theoretical knowledge effectively.	61 (40.67)	43 (28.67)	27 (18.00)	19 (12.67)	0 (00.00)
5	I learned to perform agricultural operations independently.	18 (12.00)	66 (44.00)	30 (20.00)	36 (24.00)	0 (00.00)
6	The ELP strengthened my understanding of farm management.	70 (46.67)	48 (32.00)	32 (21.33)	0 (00.00)	0 (00.00)
7	I have confidently demonstrated the practical skills, I learned.	31 (20.67)	87 (58.00)	21 (14.00)	11 (7.33)	0 (00.00)

The statement-wise responses indicate that 56.00 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that ELP gave them confidence to operate agricultural machinery and equipment. Similarly, 56.00 per cent reported hands-on skills in field production, processing, packaging and quality control. About 61.34 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they could independently manage a small-scale agribusiness after un-

dergoing ELP, while 69.34 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they learned to apply theoretical knowledge effectively.

The findings are in line with the purpose of ELP, which emphasizes hands-on training and practical exposure for building competence and confidence among agricultural graduates.

Enhancement of creativity**Table 4.** Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards creativity development.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (n = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 17)	39	26.00
2	Medium (18 to 23)	93	62.00
3	High (above 23)	18	12.00
Total		150	100.00

A majority of respondents (**62.00%**) had a medium level of perception regarding creativity development, followed by 26.00 per cent with low and 12.00 per cent with high perception. The findings sug-

gest that ELP provided opportunities for students to use independent thinking and new ideas while undertaking practical and enterprise-based activities.

4. Perception in terms of enhancement of creativity.

Sr. No.	Statements	SA(5)	A(4)	UD(3)	DA(2)	SDA(1)
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1	ELP encouraged me to develop innovative ideas for improving enterprise operations.	8 (5.33)	54 (36.00)	23 (15.33)	64 (42.67)	1 (00.67)
2	I was able to apply creative thinking to solve problems during ELP activities.	23 (15.33)	77 (51.33)	19 (12.67)	17 (11.33)	14 (9.33)
3	The programme gave me an opportunity to design and market new value-added products.	61 (40.67)	47 (31.33)	27 (18.00)	15 (10.00)	0 (00.00)
4	ELP improved my ability to think critically and make improvements in work processes.	18 (12.00)	40 (26.67)	21 (14.00)	56 (37.33)	15 (10.00)
5	I was encouraged to experiment with new technologies or techniques during ELP.	15 (10.00)	58 (38.67)	25 (16.67)	52 (34.67)	0 (00.00)
6	ELP enabled me to develop innovative approaches for financial management during ELP activities.	2 (1.33)	36 (24.00)	77 (51.33)	35 (26.67)	0 (00.00)

The statement-wise findings showed that 66.66 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they could apply creative thinking to solve problems during ELP. About 72.00 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the programme provided opportunities to design and market new value-added products. However, responses concerning innovative approaches to financial management and experimentation with

new technologies indicate that there remains scope for greater autonomy and innovation-oriented activities.

Therefore, ELP appears to provide a useful platform for developing **creative thinking and problem-solving orientation**, although greater freedom to experiment and design enterprise activities could further strengthen this competency.

Management orientation**Table 5.** Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards management orientation.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (n = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 39)	17	11.33
2	Medium (40 to 46)	106	70.67
3	High (above 46)	27	18.00
Total		150	100.00

The highest proportion of respondents (70.67%) had a medium level of perception regarding management orientation, followed by 18.00 per cent with high and 11.33 per cent with low perception. This indicates that ELP was perceived to provide moderate opportunities for

developing planning, coordination, production and resource-management abilities.

5. Perception related to management orientation

3. Perception related to management orientation				
Sr. No.	Statements	A (3)	UD (2)	DA (1)
		F	F	F
		(%)	(%)	(%)
Planning orientation				
1	Every year, fresh planning should be done for effective implementation of ELP activities.	99	35	16
		(66.00)	(23.33)	(10.67)
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Sr. No.	Statements	A (3)	UD (2)	DA (1)
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
2	Making advance decision for ELP activities is not essential.	35 (23.33)	76 (50.67)	39 (26.00)
3	The requirement of inputs, capital and other resources for ELP activities should be estimated beforehand.	88 (58.67)	46 (30.67)	16 (10.67)
4	It is important to consider the costs involved in establishing and running ELP activities in advance.	102 (68.00)	39 (26.00)	9 (6.00)
5	Consultation with an agribusiness incubator is useful while planning ELP activities.	96 (64.00)	39 (26.00)	15 (10.00)
Production orientation				
6	Establishing ELP activities at the right time helps in obtaining better profits.	94 (62.67)	56 (37.33)	00 (00.00)
7	Initiating an enterprise at an appropriate time results in higher economics returns.	74 (49.33)	51 (34.00)	25 (16.67)
8	ELP activities should be reviewed regularly, regardless of the profit level.	105 (70.00)	44 (29.33)	1 (0.66)
9	Special attention should be given to work during critical stages of ELP activities.	95 (63.33)	39 (26.00)	16 (10.67)
10	Investing additional funds in ELP activities can lead to increased returns.	47 (31.33)	32 (21.33)	71 (47.33)
11	Adoption of improved production technologies helps in achieving higher productivity and returns.	113 (75.33)	37 (24.67)	0 (00.00)
Market orientation				
12	Information related to market trends and prices is highly useful.	84 (56.00)	51 (34.00)	15 (10.00)
13	Proper sorting and grading of produce helps ELP students to obtain better prices.	108 (72.00)	35 (23.33)	7 (4.67)
14	Students acquired knowledge of appropriate marketing practices to realize better prices.	62 (41.33)	40 (26.67)	48 (32.00)
15	Students learned about value addition techniques related to their produce.	70 (46.67)	48 (32)	32 (21.33)
16	ELP produce should be sold in the market irrespective of prevailing prices.	83 (55.33)	42 (28.00)	25 (16.67)
17	Proper storage of produce helps in realizing better market prices.	112 (74.67)	31 (20.67)	6 (4.00)
18	Inputs should preferably be purchased from shops familiar to family members.	64 (42.67)	41 (27.33)	45 (30.00)

The statement-wise results demonstrate strong management orientation. About 66.00 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that fresh planning should be undertaken every year for effective ELP implementation. Similarly, 88.00 per cent considered advance estimation of inputs, capital and resources important, while 94.00 per cent considered advance consideration of costs important. In production orientation, 100 per cent agreed that ELP activities should be reviewed regularly and 100 per cent agreed that adoption of improved production technologies helps achieve higher productivity and returns.

Market-oriented competencies were also evident: 95.33 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that proper sorting and grading helps obtain

better prices, while 95.34 per cent considered proper storage important for realizing better market prices.

These findings are particularly relevant to the professional competency aspect of the paper because management of resources, production, costs and markets represents an essential part of functioning in agricultural enterprises.

Leadership qualities

The majority of respondents (69.33%) had a medium level of perception regarding leadership development, followed by 18.67 per cent with low and 12.00 per cent with high perception. The findings suggest that group-based and enterprise activities under ELP provided opportunities for students to develop leadership-related competencies.

Table 6. Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards leadership qualities.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (n = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 33)	28	18.67

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Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (<i>n</i> = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
2	Medium (34 to 41)	104	69.33
3	High (above 41)	18	12.00
Total		150	100.00

6. Perception regarding leadership qualities.						
Sr. No.	Statements	SA(5)	A(4)	UD(3)	DA(2)	SDA(1)
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1	I effectively guided my group during various ELP activities.	31 (20.67)	60 (40.00)	15 (10.00)	31 (20.67)	13 (8.67)
2	I willingly took additional responsibilities for my group whenever necessary.	71 (47.00)	19 (12.67)	26 (17.33)	34 (22.67)	0 (00.00)
3	I motivated all group members to undertake duties and responsibilities confidently.	13 (8.67)	60 (40.00)	22 (14.67)	39 (26.00)	16 (10.67)
4	I planned daily ELP activities in consensus of my group.	18 (12.00)	67 (44.67)	38 (25.33)	27 (18.00)	0 (00.00)
5	I voluntarily helped in resolving problems faced by group members.	17 (11.33)	84 (56.00)	23 (15.33)	17 (11.33)	9 (6.00)
6	I avoided criticizing my group members in the presence of others.	51 (34.00)	64 (42.67)	26 (17.33)	9 (6.00)	0 (00.00)
7	I treated all member of my group equally during ELP activities.	25 (16.67)	80 (53.33)	17 (11.33)	22 (14.67)	6 (4.00)
8	I appreciated the efforts of group members who performed their tasks well.	75 (50.00)	33 (22.00)	28 (18.67)	11 (7.33)	3 (2.00)
9	I am conscious of my leadership role when placed in a position of authority.	19 (12.67)	96 (64.00)	34 (22.67)	1 (00.67)	0 (00.00)
10	I lack the capability to be an effective leader.	0 (0.00)	6 (4.00)	31 (20.67)	79 (52.67)	34 (22.67)

Statement-wise findings showed that 60.67 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they effectively guided their group during ELP activities. About 59.67 per cent reported willingly taking additional responsibilities, while 61.33 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they motivated group members to undertake responsibilities. Further, 67.33 per cent reported helping group members in re-

solving problems and 72.00 per cent appreciated the efforts of group members who performed their tasks well.

Thus, ELP appears to provide an environment where students can develop leadership through **team coordination, responsibility sharing, problem-solving and group management.**

Decision-making ability

Table 7. Distribution of respondents according to their perception towards decision-making ability.

Sr. No.	Perception Level	Respondents (<i>n</i> = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (up to 08)	24	16.00
2	Medium (09 to 13)	112	74.67
3	High (above 13)	14	09.33
Total		150	100.00

Decision-making showed the highest concentration in the medium category, with 74.67 per cent of respondents reporting medium per-

ception, followed by 16.00 per cent with low and 9.33 per cent with high perception.

7. Perception regarding decision-making ability.				
Sr. No.	Decision	Not Considered	Considered after consultation with others (1)	Considered independently(2)
		(0) F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1	Selection of specific ELP activities.	23 (15.33)	85 (56.67)	42 (28.00)

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7.	Perception regarding decision-making ability.			
2	Preparation of work plan and work schedule.	17 (11.33)	105 (70.00)	28 (18.67)
3	Planning of budget and cost.	31 (20.67)	92 (61.33)	27 (18.00)
4	Purchasing of required inputs.	32 (21.33)	98 (65.33)	20 (13.33)
5	To attend agricultural meetings, exhibitions or trainings associated to ELP.	33 (22.00)	85 (56.67)	32 (21.33)
6	Selection of production & processing methods, technology during ELP.	29 (19.33)	115 (76.67)	6 (4.00)
7	Distribution of work among group members.	36 (24.00)	84 (56.00)	30 (20.00)
8	Taking new challenges during ELP module.	36 (24.00)	45 (30.00)	69 (46.00)
9	Pricing and selling strategy for products.	19 (12.67)	43 (28.67)	88 (58.67)
10	Use of income earned through ELP.	19 (12.67)	109 (72.67)	22 (14.67)

The statement-wise results reveal that students generally made decisions after consultation rather than independently. For example, 70.00 per cent considered preparation of work plans after consultation, while 76.67 per cent did so for selecting production and processing methods. However, independent decision-making was more evident in taking new challenges (46.00%) and pricing and selling strategies (58.67%).

This indicates that ELP provided opportunities for decision-making in practical situations, but students still relied considerably on consultation for several enterprise-related decisions. Greater student autonomy in planning, budgeting, production and enterprise management could therefore strengthen this professional competency.

Overall perception agricultural students towards ELP

Table 8. Overall perception of agricultural students towards ELP.

Sr.No.	Perception Level	Respondents (<i>n</i> = 150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Very Low (up to 160)	8	5.33
2	Low (161 to 175)	38	25.33
3	Medium (176 to 191)	67	44.67
4	High (192 to 206)	31	20.67
5	Very High (above 206)	6	4.00
Total		150	100

The overall findings show that 44.67 per cent of respondents had a medium level of perception towards ELP, followed by 25.33 per cent with low, 20.67 per cent with high, 5.33 per cent with very low and 4.00 per cent with very high perception.

The dimension-wise results provide an important interpretation of this overall finding. Students perceived the strongest concentration in the medium category for decision-making ability (74.67%), followed by management orientation (70.67%), leadership qualities (69.33%), hands-on expertise (62.00%), creativity development (62.00%), knowledge gain (52.00%) and skill development (43.33%). Thus, all seven dimensions recorded their largest proportion in the medium category, indicating a moderately favourable perception of ELP as a platform for professional competency development.

The finding is broadly consistent with earlier research on experiential learning. Lekang *et al.* reported that ELP was perceived as useful for imparting entrepreneurial skills and competencies, while ICAR describes experiential learning as a means of developing competence, skills, expertise and confidence through hands-on experience.

The findings demonstrate that ELP was perceived by agricultural students as a useful platform for developing multiple dimensions of professional competence, rather than only technical agricultural skills. The programme provided opportunities for students to apply knowledge in practical situations, gain hands-on expertise, participate in enterprise activities, develop creativity, manage resources, work in teams and make practical decisions.

However, the predominance of the medium perception category across all seven dimensions also indicates that the competency-development potential of ELP has not been fully realized for all students. The findings therefore point towards the need for greater practical exposure, improved technical guidance, stronger student autonomy, better enterprise-management opportunities and more structured learning experiences. This interpretation is also consistent with ICAR's stated objective of experiential learning to build competence, confidence and practical skills among agricultural undergraduates.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP) serves as an important platform for developing professional competencies among agricultural students. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents had a medium level of overall perception towards ELP (44.67%), indicating a moderately favourable perception of its contribution to competency development.

Overall, the findings indicate that ELP extends agricultural learning beyond conventional classroom instruction by providing students with opportunities to strengthen practical, managerial and personal competencies required for their future professional roles. However, the predominance of medium-level perception across the dimensions suggests further scope for strengthening the learning experiences and competency-development potential of the programme. Thus, ELP can

be considered a valuable component of agricultural education for preparing students with the practical knowledge, skills and professional competencies needed to meet the emerging demands of the agricultural sector.

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