

Developing the 3E Framework (Experience, Engagement, and Exposure) for Enhancing Teaching and Learning for Matured Learners in the United Kingdom

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Abstract— This paper seeks to develop and advance a model or framework that can enhance sustainable teaching and learning practice in higher education that is targeted at matured and underrepresented groups of learners in the UK. The 3E framework is focused on enacting innovative and inclusive pedagogy through experience, engagement and exposure of mature learners. This means that the application of effective teaching and learning towards matured and underrepresented groups of learners has to be linked to their unique experiences, tailored with appropriate tools for engagement and elicit pathways that expose them to future personal and professional development. The methodology followed a pragmatic research philosophy using qualitative research approach. The study used systematic literature to investigate each aspect of the 3E framework on how best to enrich student experience, engagement and exposure. Also, the study gathered primary data through interview with a sample of 20 teaching and learning professionals from selected higher education institutions in the UK. The data was analysed using thematic and content evaluation to develop the 3E framework. The outcome of this study set out a sustainable course of action that can benefit higher education stakeholders such as educators, practitioners, regulators and policy makers as well as students on how to embrace innovative and inclusive teaching practice that can be effective within the context of adult learners and underrepresented groups.

Index Terms—Experience, Engagement, Exposure, Higher Education, Matured Learners, Teaching and Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations sustainable development goal has mentioned that by 2030 education for all needs to be available. With this in mind, there is need to push the boundaries of conventional education system to meet the needs of unique individuals and groups. From the perspective of the office for student (OFS) in the United Kingdom, higher education providers have to make quality education accessible to all, regardless of background, and actively work to eliminate barriers for underrepresented groups. This has pointed out the need for nuanced approaches for effective and inclusive teaching practice. Rabourn, BrckaLorenz and Shoup (2018) explained that matured learners in higher education have always required multifaceted strategies in pedagogy to facilitate effective student engagement. The barriers facing matured/adult learning in higher education vary from language barriers, cognitive/intellectual barriers, socio-cultural barriers, technical and technological barriers (Rabourn, Shoup & BrckaLorenz, 2015; Heilporn, Lakhal, & B elisle, 2021). In essence, contemporary pedagogies have been perplexed in finding ways of navigating these barriers and providing mature/adult learners in HE with a more inclusive, robust and holistic teaching and learning practice, that can result in lasting outcomes that produce retained knowledge and preparation for future work and life.

The 3E Framework represents keywords that can be infused in teaching and learning practices to make it more inclusive and effective, namely: experience, engagement, and exposure. The combination of these words in this framework is considered novel with the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning by providing mature/adult learners with opportunities to participate and be involved in pedagogy.

Based on the backdrop in HE for matured/adult learners in the United Kingdom, this framework consisting of building pedagogy on learners' experiences, facilitating learners engagement and positioning learners for future exposures, seeks to address several key challenges. According to GOV. UK (2022) adult education in the UK has been observed to decrease in participation rates because of substantial disparities in accessibility, convenience and outcomes. This investigation is based on exploratory research into how the 3E framework can bridge the gaps in teaching and learning of matured/adult learners including those from underrepresented groups. The development of the 3E framework in this study, stems from approaching teaching and learning in a multivariant manner that combines into various intricate elements that can address the unique needs of the matured/adult learners whose first language is not English and socio-cultural context has made conventional education challenging to attain (Thorpe, Snell, Davey-Evans & Talman, 2017; Pearson, 2020).

Bengo (2020) posited that the COVID-19 pandemic has further altered classroom experiences of adult learners placing more emphasis on student-centred learning, blended learning as well as innovative and inclusive teaching. However, this is a complex web to pilot, making HE practitioners and professionals to seek out strategies, tactics and maneuvers that are simple and practicable enough to yield desired outcomes of teaching and learning in matured/adult learners as well as underrepresented individuals.

The aim of this study is to develop a comprehensive model called the 3E Framework, focusing on key variables of experience, engagement, and exposure, aimed at refining the teaching and learning of mature/adult learners in higher education.

The questions to be answered include:

i. To what extent can the life experiences of matured/adult learners be used to drive inclusive and effective teaching and learning in HE in UK?

ii. What approaches and practices can effectively engage matured/adult learners for inclusive and effective teaching and learning in HE in UK?

iii. How can mature/adult learners be exposed to future learning and professional developments in HE in UK?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

A. Experiential Learning Approach (Experience)

Experiential learning entails presenting knowledge to the students based on their past and present experiences. It can be considered as a hands-on approach to the delivery of HE by emphasising learning through experiences that students have had and linking learning to activities that allow them to suitable application of theoretical and conceptual knowledge to real-world situation (Adams & Brown, 2006; Leong & Nang 2019; Gupta, 2023). In this study the "experience" variable of the 3E framework, is made up of facilitating teaching practice by connecting what is being taught with examples and illustrations from the lives and times of the participants. This constitutes active probing of the factors that make up diverse, mature and unique learners, for instance their socio-cultural background. In addition, experience can mean allowing students to use their current situation as a learning curve by applying what they have learnt in class to their everyday life. For example, an adult learner in business management using the knowledge of SWOT analysis on his current job or business, thus giving a practical and tangible sense of learning abstract things. Kolb and Kolb (2017) stated that the use of learners' experiences as a teaching variable is multifaceted and all-encompassing based on insights from the experiential learning theory as a guide for experiential educators in higher education. Kline, Kolegraff and Cleary (2021) studied the perspectives of student perspectives on experiential learning and found that it impacted their skill development because of it being hands-on, easily understandable and contextualised. The authors expressed that learning from and through experiences enhances soft and technical skills of students for educational development utilizing different teaching modalities. From another study by Motta and Galina (2023) experiential learning can be productive in fields of business and entrepreneurship education, by allowing learners to use their personal and professional practices as point of reference for knowledge acquisition and retention. These evidence point to the fact that a framework for capturing experiences of students for effective teaching and learning is required.

B. Engaging Learning Approach (Engagement)

Engaging students in HE has been considered challenging and complex because of the nuanced predictors and outcomes (Gosavi & Arora, 2022). An inclusive and effective teaching approach has to be centred on ensuring engagement of learners which is represented in their level of interest, involvement and motivation to acquire and retain knowledge (Adams & Brown, 2006; Rabourn et al., 2018). Engaging learning approaches encompasses a range techniques and tools that assist in influencing student behaviours, conducts and attitudes in class. Engagement of students contributes to their meaningful, effective and impactful educational experience (Brussow & Wilkinson, 2010; Trinidad, Ngo, Nevada & Morales, 2020). In the context of this study in developing the 3E framework, the "engagement" variable consists on implementing teaching strategies that facilitate behavioural engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, social engagement and institutional engagement (Kuh, 2016; Kolhekar, Shah & Jadjav, 2021; Fasco, Asimwe, Ssekabira & Tushabe, 2024). Engagement strategies for learners have evolved from the prevalence of online and digital learning platforms and courses (Khan, Egbue, Palkie & Madden, 2017; Kolhekar et al., 2021), there are increasing use virtual

learning canvas and moodle where students can access learning resources anywhere and anytime. Khan et al (2017) studied active learning for online courses unlike face-to-face courses, stating the need for visual and audio participation of students. This can be through asking open-ended questions or using chat-box for polls and surveys as well as online breakout rooms for group discussions. The authors found that engagement needs to be interactive and collaborative with the aid of learning resources and materials. The challenge of driving concentration of students in online courses can be resolved through innovative engagement strategies that follow best practices of design and delivery.

C. Exposing Students for Future Learning Developments (Exposure)

The terminology “exposure” comes as a novel construct that is integrated into teaching and learning in HE. It refers to various processes, activities and implementations that can assist learners to become more opened to future learning opportunities and developments. Blackledge (2021) described exposing learning approaches as part of the key thoughts on the future of higher education in the UK. The author argued that when learners go through classes and earn a degree they have to be exposed to skills and capabilities that prepare them for the future. In other words, exposure involves setting plans for what comes next after going through a teaching level as well as putting students in positions to make future development forecasts based on strengths and weaknesses. Ahmad (2020) opined that the use of scenario based approach can set students in a preparatory pathway for the future of work. This entails using teaching and learning to develop skills and work-based learning. The essential aspects of the exposure variable in the 3E framework include using what students have learnt in class to develop skills and capabilities that can facilitate further learning and preparations for the future business, work and life in general. Some have described exposure in terms of employability skills such as using teaching and learning to drive problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, adaptability, negotiation, resilience and pursuit of purpose (Moriña, 2019; Ghafar, 2020; Menon & Suresh, 2020). From the perspective of Bonfield et al (2020) teaching and learning that fosters student’s exposure to future development can be considered in two ways; transformation in terms of moving from one level of study to another level of study or evolution in terms of moving from students to worker. In addition, exposing students to teaching and learning in the digital age has become a dynamic approach to higher education pedagogies.

D. Adult/Matured/Diverse Learners and their Unique Characteristics in Higher Education.

The 3E framework in HE is targeted at enhancing teaching and learning for adult learners that have attributes of being from diverse backgrounds, matured lifecycle and underrepresented. Majid and Dahan (2010) evaluated adult learners in the 21st century based on their specific needs such as life experiences, cultural backgrounds and personal relevance. The authors stated that institutions of higher education require robust strategies that tailors teaching and learning to resolve the adult learners’ challenges. Cleveland-Innes (2020) stated that as a result changes in student demographic there are rising pedagogical issues in HE such as economic underrepresentation, inequality and exclusion.

Adult learners are typically those that seek education in a later space of their life and seek to take control of their learning in terms of autonomy and active learning as well as focused on goal oriented such as personal and career advancement, skill enhancement, life progression. In the UK, based on the diverse background of the population, there are large amount of people with English as their second language, matured of age and life cycle that seeking HE is requiring enriched learning environment through varied techniques, perspectives and collaborative learning. Freeman-Green, Williamson and Cornelius (2023) opined that adult learners have diverse needs that require teaching and learning strategies such as (1) flexible teaching and learning alternative schedules that provide full and part time options, online courses, and distance learning study options with emphasis on accommodating the adult learner’s busy lives. (2) adopting and incorporating teaching and learning into real-world problems and case studies that make learning more relevant and engaging for adult students. (3) recognising prior learning experiences of adult learners thereby valuing their previous experiences and knowledge can boost their confidence, engagement and motivation. (4) creation of inclusive learning environment that values diverse perspectives and background can facilitate a sense of belonging and engagement of adult learners.

Benavot et al (2022) expressed that adult education is faced with widening social and economic divisions, massive shifts in technology, globalisation and workplace relations, climate change, environmental degradation and unsustainable lifestyles, and migration movements and intergenerational

demographic trends.

III. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The 3E framework can be developed based on insights of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory and the Social Exchange Theory as detailed in previous empirical studies on diverse pedagogies that are relevant for adult learners in HE.

The experiential theory by David Kolb was developed in 1984, postulating four stages in an effective learning process. It entails the four components of the experiential cycle of leaning and the resulting learning styles. The experiential learning stages are; concrete experience which involves engaging in a new experience or reinterpreting a current one, reflective observation which entails looking back on the experience from diverse perspectives, abstract conceptualization which consists of developing new ideas or modification of current concepts based on reflections, and active experimentation for the application of new ideas to the practical world to see what occurs out of it (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Kline, Kolegraff & Cleary, 2021). These stages in the learning cycle can be enacted through four distinct learning styles; diverging style based on the preference of concrete experience and reflective observations, assimilating based on the preference on abstract conceptualization and reflective observation, converging style that is based on preference towards abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, as well as accommodating style with respect to preference to concrete experience and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). The ELT by Kolb (1984) emphasises that effective teaching and learning involves a continuous process where experiences are converted into internalised knowledge through observations, reflection and experimentation.

This theory is relevant in linking the experience, to engagement to exposure in the 3E framework. This is based on the fact that teaching and learning that is rooted in alignment of knowledge with student’s experience can foster engagement and exposure for future learning developments. This theory is beneficial to adult learners, as it provides pathways for progression in knowledge using a logical sequence. Arguably, the ELT theory by Kolb (1984) has the advantage of providing pedagogy styles that can assist educators tailor their teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of students and improve engagement. Also, it presents robust outline for learning with experiences that can be adapted to the unique needs and purposes of different academic fields. More so, Kolb’s experiential learning theory promotes lifelong learning that is especially applicable in HE. This relates to the “exposure” variable of the 3E framework, where students need to be prepared for dynamic and evolving career paths from insights of teaching and learning. However, the disadvantage of this theory is that it may be considered rigid in its cyclical approach, and it can be construed as a complex integration into teaching and learning that confuses students more (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Despite the critique of the ELT by Kolb (1984), it is important in the development of the 3E framework because it curates how adult learners can learn by linking their experiences to knowledge and vice-versa.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was developed by George C. Homans (1958) based on the assumption that social behaviour is the outcome of exchange process where individuals seek to make the most benefits and take the least costs from their interactions. This theory can be effectively and efficiently applied for inclusive teaching practices in HE based on the focus on the exchange between teacher and student. Kemp et al (2021) asserted that the SET offers value in explaining how teachers can get their students to learn by means of social behaviours, establishing mutual benefits, equity and fairness, inclusion and belongingness.

SET explains four vital constituents of the social behaviour of individuals in general, (1) reinforcement tools in the form of rewards and resources of exchange, that speaks to the motivation for which individuals engage in social interactions (2) mechanisms of the social exchange based on the degree to which a similar performance has been rewarded to a person or other people in the past and the degree to which the result of the exchange is valued by a person. (3) social structures and factors including norms, rules, regulations, networks, information channels, platforms, expectations, requirements and obligations. (4) reciprocity which implies the creation of obligations between parties and interdependence between social actors in the social exchange (Cook et al., 2013; Al-Shammari, Faulkner & Forlin, 2019)

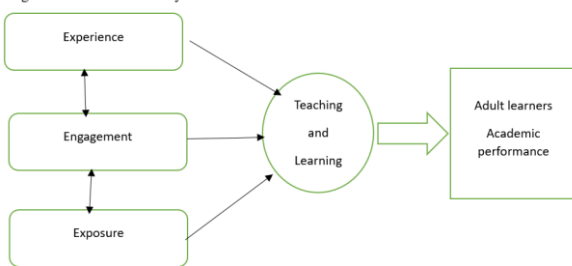
In essence, SET is vital in establishing the 3E framework because of the unique features of adult learners that require close interactions between teacher and students. This can be in the form of designing learning activities that provide clear benefits to both students and teachers, through collaborative pedagogies where students can apply their knowledge in a practical manner to real-world scenarios, while teachers gain insights into

student viewpoints and learning needs. SET connotes that students should receive inclusive teaching and learning through equal availability and access to resources and opportunities. This can be in the form of providing diverse learning materials that align with the experiences, engagement and exposures of adult learners, thereby catering to different learning styles and backgrounds. Hence SET is a proponent for the 3E framework in addressing the diverse needs of adult learners and enabling teachers create a more equitable learning environment that decreases barriers to effective teaching and learning outcomes for underrepresented learners.

IV. MODEL OF THE 3E FRAMEWORK

The model for the 3E framework constitutes experience, engagement and exposure as the independent variables with teaching and learning as the moderating variable and adult learners' academic performance. The 3E Framework is considered relevant as a model for comprehending factors that influence adult learners in terms of academic outcomes and performances. The combination of experience, engagement and exposure in teaching and learning becomes a powerful tool for the provision of innovative and inclusive pedagogy that fit into unique learner characteristics. This is diagrammatically illustrated in the image below:

Figure 1: Model of the Study



Source: Abiodun (2025).

The explanation of the model above presents insights on the following; firstly the experience construct is based on the use of learners' prior knowledge, life experiences, personal and professional background to execute bring inclusive teaching and learning environment. This can impact on ease of comprehension of new and complex concepts as well as allow for clarity in linking theory to practice, thereby making teaching and learning effective for enhancing academic performance of adult learners. In addition, engagement construct is based of using flexible approaches to drive the level of interest, involvement, motivation, active and dynamic participation in learning activities. This can be viewed through adult learners emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement in teaching and learning. Finally, the exposure construct focuses on the degree and value of interaction with learning resources, teachers, peers, and practical future applications of learning.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative research approach considering an interpretivist research philosophy that is focused on in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon of 3E as a framework for redefining teaching and learning for adult learners in HE. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2019) opined that qualitative research is relevant to providing inductive evaluation of the constructs of a phenomenon. This is particularly well-suited for development the framework of 3E (Experience, Engagement, Exposure) for teaching and learning in higher education. The purpose is to shape a theoretical approach that can be useful for pedagogy for adult learners.

This study used semi-structured interviews of selected lecturers, educators, and teachers in higher education in university colleges in Birmingham, United Kingdom. A convenience sampling technique was employed to reach 20 participants to provide primary data on the way they enact teaching and learning considering student experiences, facilitating engagement levels, and promoting exposures for future developments. The above methodology was employed to appropriate the unique context of this study and garner nuanced perspectives of the variables of this study. The data was analysed in the form of thematic analysis with considerations of the key words of the variables of the 3E framework. The thematic analysis was justifiable for this study for exploring the complexities and perspectives of participants in the 3E framework. Saunders et al (2019) argued that thematic analysis is flexible, rich in providing details of data collected and supports theory development as well as allows for ease in communication of research outcomes. Prior studies such as Bengo (2020) and Heilporn et al (2021) gave credence to the use of a qualitative methodology based on interviews and thematic analysis to evaluate investigations relating to adult learners in HE.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The section provides insights from interviewees which are educators in HE in diverse fields such as business, management, marketing as well as health and social care. The interview sessions took 15 to 20 minutes and the key responses to the research questions were collated and discussed below:

In light of the first research questions that borders around the extent to which life experiences of matured/adult learners be used to drive inclusive and effective teaching and learning, it was found to be very pertinent and relevant to link knowledge to experiences of adult learners. The participants mentioned that experience is multifaceted and multidimensional because of the diverse backgrounds of adult learners. It was stated that pointing out theory and concepts in real life experiences of students can better situate knowledge in a reachable comprehension breaking the barriers of technical language and ideation. The use of past and present student experience in teaching and learning for adult learners was mentioned to be inclusive and all-encompassing to make knowledge delivery acceptable. The participants mentioned that experiences can be based on cultural context of learners to drive teaching inward and in perspective. The findings were in line with the discussions of Jonathan and Laik (2019) as well as Gupta (2023) for experiential learning in higher education based on students actively participating in the learning process rather than passively receiving information when it reflects on their experiences. The participants stated that experiences are vital in learning through simulations and experiments. Adult learners can have suitable participation in class through relevant experiences and application of practical information (Karge et al., 2011).

From the answer to the second question on what approaches and practices can effectively engage mature/adult learners for inclusive and effective teaching and learning in HE. The participants gave a wide range of tactics that are relevant such as open-ended questions, reflective questions, using digital tools and platforms as well as problem solving scenarios, just to mention a few. Some of the central themes that the participants agreed upon for engagement include the need for flexibility, creativity and adaptiveness in dealing with adult learners because of their unique characteristics. The engagement factor focuses on active involvement that assists adult learners apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. The arguments from the Kuh (2016) and Kolhekar et al (2021) aligned with the insights from the interviews, where engagement was found as a predictor and an outcome of effective teaching and learning. The participants asserted in their response that engagement presents both the cause and effect in HE. Thus, elements such as communication and feedback as well as reflection are engagement drivers that get students to be attentive in class and echo on their academic performance. The responses from the interviewees shed light on the fact that engaging matured students require understanding their level of assimilation to offer support such as tutoring, counselling and career guidance. This agreed with Trinidad et al (2020) describing engaging pedagogical practices in higher education as those that are collaborative and technologically enabled.

Finally, the participants gave insights into how mature/adult learners can be exposed to future learning and professional developments in HE. It was a general consensus among participants that every teaching and learning needs to be connected to future developmental needs of learners. Exposure can be achieved by skills development through teaching and learning. The participants presented the themes of exposure to be thinking ahead, action plans, continuous improvements, practical application to industry and institutions in the field of study. Adult learners were found to perform better when teaching and learning was integrated with internships, apprenticeships and placement opportunities to practically apply their learning. The findings are similar to the arguments of Karge et al (2011) and Schleicher (2018) where exposure was found to be relevant for educating learners for guiding their future paths. Thus, exposing students to future development was identified by the participants as a part of innovative methods in teaching to enhance student engagement, support any teaching environment and encourage inquiry among learners.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory study concludes that effective teaching and learning in HE in the UK can be refined and benefit from the 3E framework by ensuring that adult learners be provided with pedagogy that takes alignment from their experiences, drives engagement and open up exposure for future learning development. When adult students are provided with 3E framework in their learning they are able to develop relevant reception of knowledge, critical thinking skills, reflection, support systems, and gain practical knowledge in an efficient way. The 3E framework draws teaching and learning examples from insights Karge et al (2011) for adult learners such as Think-Pair-Share, Tell-Help-Check, Group discussions, Give One, Get One, and the Immediate Feedback Assessment Test.

In essence, this framework is developed by means on executing pedagogy

that is through experience (e.g., prior learning, life and work background as well as context), engagement (e.g., class interaction and involvement, learning motivation, interests and participation) and exposure (e.g., access to resources, conducive learning environments, future plans). Hence, each element of the 3E framework contributes to learning outcomes and academic performance of adult learners.

This framework allows for effective teaching and learning through emergence from the lived experiences of learners and educators. Also, it refines pre-existing theories of experiential learning and social exchange in making teaching and learning more contextually relevant for adult/matured/diverse learners. The 3E framework in this study is developed to support grounded theory development, as an ideal approach for evolving HE.

The recommendation from this study is that teaching and learning should be done in a manner that the experiences from adult learners provide insights to resolve unique challenges and successes adult learners face. Also, it is recommended that engagement of adult learners can be enacted through effective strategies that make the class interesting, culturally relevant and impactful. This can be through diverse blends of teaching techniques that contextualize knowledge in a way adult learners can appreciate. Finally, it is suggested that adult learners need exposures to future learning development to make the best of teaching and learning. Thus, exposure can be enhanced through diverse and inclusive learning opportunities targeted at learners' academic and professional development.

The summary of the recommendations of this study in the 3E framework for adult learners is the use of student-centred pedagogy as detailed by Bengo (2020) interactive class lectures whether online or physical, group discussions, case studies, innovative assessments and feedback.

This study has provided and presented a robust framework that HE institutions can employ to tailor their courses, modules, programs and support services to better suit the peculiarities of adult learners. By contemplating and combining Experience, Engagement, and Exposure, the 3E Framework can change the trajectory of HE towards adult learners, thereby creating a more inclusive and effective teaching and learning environment for the growing demographic in the UK.

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