

Research Article

Experiential Learning Across University Faculties at the Arab International University, Syria and a Comparison with State Universities

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Abstract

This paper examines the integration of experiential learning across diverse faculties at the Arab International University (AIU), Syria, and contrasts these practices with the predominantly lecture-based approaches at state universities. Drawing on Kolb's experiential learning cycle and subsequent scholarship, the study situates AIU's practices within global debates while highlighting the unique challenges of the Syrian higher education landscape. In addition to a faculty-level analysis, the paper incorporates survey and interview data comparing private and state university students. Findings reveal that private university students report significantly higher levels of practical competence, motivation, civic engagement, and adaptability, while state university students often remain confined to theoretical knowledge with limited opportunities for application. These disparities underscore systemic inequities in access to experiential learning and their implications for employability and civic readiness. The discussion demonstrates that experiential learning at AIU not only enhances academic outcomes but also fosters resilience, social responsibility, and innovation—qualities urgently needed in Syria's ongoing recovery. Policy recommendations are proposed to extend experiential methods into state universities through curriculum reform, faculty development, resource allocation, and national strategy alignment. In sum, the paper argues that experiential learning in Syria is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a nation-building tool, equipping graduates with the competencies required to lead reconstruction and contribute to global academic and professional networks.

Keywords

Experiential Learning, Lecture Based, Civic Readiness, Practical Competence

1. Introduction

Experiential learning has emerged as a cornerstone of contemporary pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of learning through direct experience, reflection, and application. David Kolb's [7] seminal work laid the foundation for this paradigm, introducing a cyclical model that includes *concrete experience*, *reflective observation*, *abstract conceptualization*, and *active*

experimentation. His theory posits that effective learning occurs when students are actively involved in a process that integrates experience with reflection and conceptual understanding.

Building on Kolb's framework, Burch et al. [2] conducted

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a meta-analysis of 89 studies spanning over four decades, revealing that experiential learning significantly enhances critical thinking, retention, and engagement. Beard and Wilson [1] emphasized the role of emotion, context, and structured reflection in deepening learning outcomes, suggesting that experiential learning fosters personal growth alongside academic achievement. Similarly, the UCL Institute of Education [10] found that experiential methods led to notable improvements in students' performance in math and science, as well as gains in problem-solving and vocabulary. However, the study noted mixed results in language acquisition, indicating that experiential learning may be more effective in certain subject areas than others.

Motivation and engagement are also key outcomes of experiential learning. Kong [8] demonstrated that students in experiential classrooms exhibit higher emotional engagement and academic success, particularly when supported by strong teacher-student relationships. This aligns with Garate's [5] assertion that experiential learning fosters innovation and adaptability, preparing students to navigate complex global challenges through creative thinking and resilience. Eyler [4] explored the civic dimension of experiential education, highlighting how service learning and community engagement cultivate ethical reasoning and social awareness. Cantor [3] echoed this perspective, advocating for the integration of community-based projects into curricula to develop leadership and collaboration skills.

Technological integration has further expanded the scope of experiential learning. A 2025 study titled *Experiential Learning in Action* [11] identified best practices such as project-based learning, internships, and simulations, concluding that these methods improve skill transferability and real-world readiness. Itin [6] added a philosophical lens, arguing that experiential education promotes learner autonomy and lifelong learning habits, challenging traditional didactic models.

Collectively, these studies affirm that experiential learning is not merely a pedagogical trend but a transformative approach that enhances academic, personal, and professional development. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to connect theory with practice, foster reflection, and empower students to become active participants in their own learning journey. In Syria, where higher education operates under the dual pressures of reconstruction and globalization, experiential learning acquires an even greater significance. It equips students not only with technical expertise but also with the resilience, adaptability, and civic-mindedness required to rebuild their communities [13].

2. Theoretical Framework and Critiques

While Kolb's [7] cycle remains the most widely cited model, experiential learning has roots in *John Dewey's pragmatism*, which emphasized education as a process of living rather than preparation for future living. Dewey argued that reflection on experience is central to growth. Donald Schön [9]

later introduced the concept of the *reflective practitioner*, highlighting how professionals learn by reflecting in and on action. Vygotsky's social constructivism also resonates with experiential learning, stressing the role of social interaction and scaffolding in knowledge construction.

Critiques of experiential learning caution against over-romanticizing its outcomes. Some scholars argue that without structured reflection, experiences may reinforce misconceptions rather than correct them. Others note the difficulty of assessing experiential learning outcomes compared to traditional exams. In resource-constrained contexts like Syria, logistical challenges—such as limited access to technology, materials, or safe field sites—can hinder implementation. Nevertheless, these critiques underscore the importance of *designing experiential programs with intentionality*, ensuring that experiences are scaffolded, inclusive, and aligned with learning objectives [12].

3. Faculty-Specific Experiential Training Programs

3.1. Faculty of Pharmacy

Pharmacy students undergo a multi-phase experiential training program designed to bridge academic learning with pharmaceutical practice.

3.1.1. Community Pharmacy Internships

Students work in neighborhood pharmacies, often family-run or affiliated with local chains. They learn to dispense medications, explain dosage and side effects in Arabic, and manage inventory with limited digital systems. Emphasis is placed on navigating shortages and substitutions due to import restrictions. Ethical dilemmas—such as handling counterfeit drugs or balancing patient needs with scarce supplies—are openly discussed, preparing students for real-world decision-making.

3.1.2. Hospital Pharmacy Rotations

In public hospitals such as Al-Mouwasat or Ibn Al-Nafees, students assist in preparing IV medications, organizing drug storage, and participating in ward rounds. They observe how pharmacists collaborate with physicians in prescribing decisions, especially in emergency and internal medicine departments. These rotations highlight the pharmacist's role as both a clinician and a systems manager.

3.1.3. Simulation Labs

Universities provide basic simulation labs where students practice compounding and prescription interpretation using mock setups. These labs allow for safe trial-and-error learning before students interact with patients.

3.1.4. Regulatory Training

Students study Syrian pharmaceutical law, including the role of the Ministry of Health and the Syrian Syndicate of Pharmacists. They learn to report adverse reactions and understand the ethics of dispensing under resource constraints. This training situates pharmacy practice within broader debates about public health and governance.

3.2. Faculty of Dentistry

Dental students receive hands-on training in university clinics and outreach programs.

3.2.1. Preclinical Simulation Labs

In the first two years, students practice on dental mannequins using high-fidelity simulators to master procedures like cavity preparation, scaling, and crown placement. They learn instrument handling, ergonomics, and infection control protocols.

3.2.2. Clinical Rotations

Starting in the third year, students treat real patients in university clinics. They perform restorations, extractions, root canals, and prosthetic fittings under faculty supervision. Each case includes diagnosis, treatment planning, and follow-up care.

3.2.3. Radiology and Diagnostics

Students are trained to take and interpret intraoral and panoramic radiographs. They conduct oral cancer screenings and periodontal assessments, integrating diagnostic data into treatment plans.

3.2.4. Patient Management and Communication

Training includes managing patient records, obtaining medical histories, and delivering treatment explanations with empathy and clarity. Students also learn to handle anxious or pediatric patients.

3.2.5. Specialty Exposure

Rotations in pediatric dentistry, orthodontics, periodontics, and oral surgery provide exposure to advanced techniques and interdisciplinary collaboration.

3.2.6. Outreach Programs

Mobile clinics in rural areas allow students to provide basic dental care and hygiene education to underserved populations. These programs cultivate empathy and civic responsibility, while also addressing urgent public health needs in post-conflict Syria.

3.3. Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering

Training in these faculties combines creative design with

technical fieldwork and industry collaboration.

3.3.1. Design Studios (Architecture)

Students work on iterative design projects, developing conceptual models, architectural drawings, and digital renderings. They present their work in juried critiques, receiving feedback from faculty and practicing architects.

3.3.2. Site Visits and Fieldwork

Students visit construction sites, heritage buildings, and urban developments to study materials, structural systems, and environmental impact. These visits are often tied to coursework in sustainable design and urban planning.

3.3.3. Software and Technical Training

Students master industry-standard tools like AutoCAD, Revit, Rhino, and GIS. Civil engineering students use MATLAB, SAP 2000, and surveying equipment for structural analysis and geotechnical studies.

3.3.4. Collaborative Projects

Civil engineering students simulate infrastructure projects, working in teams to design bridges, roads, or water systems. They prepare budgets, schedules, and safety plans, mimicking real-world engineering workflows.

3.3.5. Lab Work

Students conduct experiments in soil mechanics, fluid dynamics, and materials testing. They analyze data to evaluate structural integrity and environmental compliance.

3.3.6. Internships and Professional Practice

Many students intern with engineering firms or architectural studios, contributing to client presentations, site inspections, and regulatory documentation. In Syria, these internships often involve reconstruction projects, heritage restoration, or municipal infrastructure upgrades—giving students a direct role in national recovery.

3.4. Faculty of Fine Arts

Art students engage in immersive creative practice, public engagement, and professional development.

3.4.1. Studio Practice

Students specialize in disciplines such as painting, sculpture, photography, or digital media. They produce a portfolio each semester, exploring themes, techniques, and personal expression.

3.4.2. Critiques and Reviews

Regular peer and faculty critiques help students refine their

artistic voice and technical execution. These sessions foster critical thinking and constructive dialogue.

3.4.3. Exhibitions and Curation

Students curate and install their own exhibitions in campus galleries. They learn lighting design, spatial layout, and audience interaction. Public feedback is used to refine future work.

3.4.4. Art History and Theory

Training includes contextual studies that inform students' conceptual development. They analyze movements, philosophies, and cultural influences to deepen their artistic narratives. In Syria, this often involves examining the interplay between heritage, identity, and resilience in the face of conflict.

3.4.5. Professional Development

Workshops cover grant writing, artist statements, and portfolio preparation. Students learn how to apply for residencies, submit to galleries, and navigate the art market. These skills are crucial for sustaining artistic careers in a fragile economy.

3.4.6. Community Projects

Students collaborate with local organizations on murals, performances, or installations. These projects teach public engagement, teamwork, and site-specific design. In Syria, many projects focus on cultural preservation and healing through art, positioning artists as agents of social cohesion.

3.5. Faculty of Informatics Engineering

Training focuses on applied computing, systems design, and industry collaboration.

3.5.1. Programming Labs

Students learn languages like Python, Java, and C++ through hands-on coding assignments, debugging exercises, and algorithm design. They build applications ranging from simple calculators to full-stack web platforms.

3.5.2. Systems and Networks

Labs simulate network configuration, cybersecurity protocols, and server management. Students set up firewalls, manage databases, and troubleshoot connectivity issues.

3.5.3. Capstone Projects

Final-year students develop full-scale software solutions, often for real clients. Projects include mobile apps, machine learning models, and enterprise systems. Students follow agile methodologies and present their work to panels.

3.5.4. Internships

Students intern with tech companies, working on development teams and using tools like GitHub, Docker, and cloud platforms. They contribute to live projects and attend code reviews.

3.5.5. Hackathons and Competitions

Participation in coding challenges fosters innovation and teamwork. Students solve real-world problems under time constraints, often winning internships or funding.

3.5.6. Ethics and Law

Training includes modules on data privacy, intellectual property, and ethical computing. Students debate topics like algorithmic bias and surveillance technologies. In Syria, they also study cybercrime law and digital rights, preparing them for the regulatory realities of the region.

3.6. Faculty of Business Administration

Business students in Syrian universities receive a multifaceted experiential training that blends theoretical instruction with practical exposure to local economic realities, public sector dynamics, and entrepreneurial innovation.

3.6.1. Case Studies and Simulations

Students analyze real-world business scenarios, often drawn from Syrian enterprises facing inflation, supply chain disruptions, or currency fluctuations. Simulations include managing virtual companies, responding to market crises, and making strategic decisions in pricing, investment, and HR.

3.6.2. Internships

Many students complete internships at Syrian banks such as Banque Bemo, Byblos Bank Syria, or the Commercial Bank of Syria. They rotate through departments like customer service, credit analysis, and compliance. Others intern with ministries, NGOs, or private firms, gaining exposure to public finance and project management.

3.6.3. Entrepreneurship Labs

Students develop business ideas tailored to local needs—food delivery services, agricultural startups, or digital tutoring platforms. They conduct market research, build financial models, and pitch to panels of faculty and entrepreneurs. Some projects receive incubation support.

3.6.4. Finance and Accounting Training

Students practice financial reporting, budgeting, and auditing. They use Excel for modeling and study Syrian accounting standards and tax regulations. Training emphasizes compliance and transparency.

3.6.5. Leadership and Organizational Behavior

Through role-play and workshops, students practice negotiation, conflict resolution, and team management. They simulate boardroom discussions, performance reviews, and crisis communication.

3.6.6. Public Sector and Policy Exposure

Given Syria's centralized economy, students study public administration, economic reform, and the role of government in business. They analyze policy documents, attend guest lectures, and simulate budget planning.

3.6.7. Networking and Career Development

Students attend career fairs, alumni panels, and forums hosted by chambers of commerce or international agencies. They build LinkedIn profiles, practice interviews, and connect with mentors.

This comprehensive training equips business students with the adaptability and insight needed to contribute meaningfully to Syria's economic recovery.

3.7. Faculty of Law

The Faculty of Law integrates experiential learning through practice-oriented modules that prepare students for legal careers in Syria's evolving judicial and commercial landscape.

3.7.1. Moot Courts

Students participate in simulated trials, arguing cases before panels of faculty and practicing lawyers. They draft briefs, present oral arguments, and receive feedback on legal reasoning and advocacy.

3.7.2. Legal Clinics

Under supervision, students provide free legal advice to low-income clients. Clinics often focus on family law, property disputes, or small business contracts. This fosters civic responsibility and practical competence.

3.7.3. Court Observations

Students attend sessions in civil, criminal, and administrative courts, observing judicial procedures and case management. They reflect on the differences between theory and practice.

3.7.4. Legislative Drafting Workshops

Students practice drafting statutes, contracts, and policy documents. They learn to balance precision with accessibility, a skill vital in Syria's reform-oriented legal environment.

3.7.5. Human Rights and International Law Projects

Students engage with NGOs on issues such as refugee

rights, humanitarian law, and post-conflict justice. These projects expose them to global legal frameworks while grounding them in local realities.

3.7.6. Ethics and Professional Responsibility

Training emphasizes the lawyer's role in upholding justice, confidentiality, and integrity, especially in contexts of political and economic instability.

4. Cross-Faculty Themes

Across faculties, several themes emerge:

4.1. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Pharmacy and law students collaborate on pharmaceutical regulation; business and informatics students co-develop startups; fine arts and architecture students design cultural heritage projects.

4.2. Soft Skills Development

Communication, teamwork, leadership, and ethical reasoning are cultivated across all programs.

4.3. Community Engagement

Outreach clinics, rural projects, and cultural initiatives embed civic responsibility into professional training.

4.4. Resilience and Adaptability

Students learn to innovate under constraints, a skill particularly relevant in Syria's reconstruction context.

5. Private vs. State Universities

To complement the theoretical and faculty-specific analysis, a mixed-methods survey and interview study was conducted with students and faculty from both private universities (such as AIU) and state universities in Syria. The aim was to compare the outcomes of experiential learning programs with the predominantly lecture-based, non-experiential approaches still prevalent in state institutions.

6. Methodology

6.1. Survey Sample

320 undergraduate students (160 from private universities, 160 from state universities) across faculties of pharmacy, dentistry, engineering, business, and law.

6.2. Interviews

24 semi-structured interviews with faculty members and students (12 from private universities, 12 from state universities).

6.4. Key Survey Results

6.3. Focus Areas

Skill acquisition, motivation, employability, civic engagement, and adaptability.

Table 1. Comparison of private universities and state universities percentages of educational dimensions implementation

Dimension	Private Universities (Experiential)	State Universities (Non-Experiential)
Practical Skill Mastery	82% reported strong confidence in applying skills (labs, clinics, projects)	41% reported confidence, with most citing lack of practice opportunities
Motivation & Engagement	76% felt highly motivated due to hands-on learning	48% reported low motivation, citing passive lectures and rote memorization
Employability Readiness	69% had internship or project experience linked to jobs	33% had no practical exposure before graduation
Civic Responsibility	71% engaged in community projects (clinics, outreach, cultural work)	29% reported civic engagement, mostly through voluntary student clubs
Adaptability & Resilience	74% felt prepared to handle uncertainty and resource constraints	38% felt unprepared for real-world challenges

6.5. Interview Insights

Private University Students emphasized that internships, simulations, and community projects gave them “a sense of responsibility toward society” and “confidence to enter the job market immediately after graduation.”

State University Students frequently described their education as “theoretical” and “detached from reality,” with one law student noting: “*We study codes and procedures, but we never practice them in a courtroom setting.*”

Faculty at Private Universities highlighted the challenge of sustaining experiential programs under resource constraints but stressed their transformative impact on student learning.

Faculty at State Universities acknowledged the limitations of large class sizes, outdated curricula, and lack of funding for labs or fieldwork, which restrict opportunities for experiential learning.

7. Results Analysis and Discussion

The survey and interview findings reveal a pronounced divergence between the outcomes of experiential learning at private universities and the predominantly lecture-based instruction at state universities. Several key themes emerge:

7.1. Practical Competence and Employability

Students at private universities consistently reported higher confidence in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts. With 82% of private university respondents affirming strong practical skill mastery, compared to only 41% at state universities, the data underscores the effectiveness of experiential methods such as internships, clinics, and simulations. Interviews with private university students highlighted how these opportunities provided “a bridge to the workplace,” while state university students frequently described their education as “detached from reality.” This gap has direct implications for employability, as employers increasingly demand graduates who can demonstrate applied competencies rather than abstract knowledge alone [14].

7.2. Motivation and Engagement

Experiential learning environments were strongly correlated with higher levels of motivation and engagement. Private university students described their studies as “dynamic” and “purpose-driven,” while state university students often expressed frustration with rote memorization and passive lectures. The survey data supports this, with 76% of private university students reporting high motivation compared to only 48% of their state university peers. This suggests that experiential learning not only enhances academic outcomes but also

fosters intrinsic motivation, a critical factor for lifelong learning [15].

7.3. Civic Responsibility and Community Engagement

A striking difference emerged in civic engagement. Private university students, through outreach clinics, cultural projects, and community-based initiatives, reported significantly higher participation in civic activities (71%) compared to state university students (29%). Interviews revealed that these experiences cultivated empathy and a sense of social responsibility, aligning with Eyler's [4] argument that experiential education fosters ethical reasoning and civic-mindedness. In contrast, state university students often relied on extracurricular clubs for civic engagement, which were less systematically integrated into the curriculum.

7.4. Adaptability and Resilience

Given Syria's post-conflict context, adaptability is a crucial graduate attribute. Private university students reported greater preparedness to navigate uncertainty and resource constraints (74% vs. 38%). This reflects the way experiential learning environments simulate real-world challenges, requiring students to innovate under pressure. Faculty interviews at private universities emphasized that "constraints became opportunities for creativity," whereas state university faculty acknowledged that their students often struggled when confronted with unstructured or unpredictable situations.

7.5. Structural and Policy Implications

The findings highlight systemic inequities in Syrian higher education. While private universities like AIU are pioneering experiential approaches, state universities—serving the majority of students—remain constrained by large class sizes, outdated curricula, and limited resources. This creates a two-tiered system in which access to experiential learning, and thus to employability and civic readiness, is unevenly distributed. Addressing this gap requires policy reforms that embed experiential components into state university curricula, alongside investment in labs, clinics, and community partnerships.

7.6. Synthesis with Theoretical Framework

These results reinforce Kolb's [7] experiential learning cycle, demonstrating that students who engage in concrete experiences, reflection, and active experimentation achieve deeper learning outcomes. They also validate critiques that without structured opportunities for reflection and practice, traditional lecture-based models risk leaving students underprepared for professional and civic life. The Syrian case illustrates both the transformative potential of experiential learning and the urgent need for systemic integration across all higher education

institutions.

7.7. Policy Recommendations

The contrast between experiential learning outcomes at private universities and the more traditional approaches at state universities highlights the urgent need for systemic reform in Syrian higher education. To bridge this gap and ensure equitable access to transformative learning, several policy directions can be pursued.

First, curriculum reform is essential. State universities should move beyond a reliance on lectures and rote memorization by embedding internships, simulations, and project-based learning into their core curricula. These experiential components should not be treated as optional add-ons but as integral parts of the educational process. This aligns with Kolb's [7] experiential learning cycle, which emphasizes the integration of concrete experience, reflection, and experimentation. Furthermore, interdisciplinary modules that encourage collaboration across faculties—for example, between law and pharmacy students on pharmaceutical regulation, or between business and informatics students on entrepreneurial ventures—would help mirror the complexity of real-world problem-solving, echoing Dewey's (1938, as cited in Itin, [6]) vision of education as a process of living rather than mere preparation.

A second priority lies in resource allocation. State universities require targeted investment in laboratories, clinics, and community outreach centers to provide students with opportunities for hands-on practice. Given the financial constraints of the Syrian higher education system, public-private partnerships could play a vital role in this process. Collaborations with private universities, NGOs, and industry partners would allow for the sharing of facilities, expertise, and training opportunities, thereby expanding access to experiential learning without overburdening state budgets. This approach resonates with Cantor's [3] advocacy for linking classroom learning with community-based projects to maximize impact.

Faculty development is another critical area. Many instructors in state universities have limited exposure to experiential pedagogy, and professional development programs are needed to equip them with the skills to design and implement active learning strategies. Training in reflective practice, project-based assessment, and student-centered teaching would help shift the culture of instruction, consistent with Schön's [9] concept of the reflective practitioner. At the same time, incentive structures should be introduced to recognize and reward faculty who successfully integrate innovative teaching methods into their courses, reinforcing Beard and Wilson's [1] argument that structured reflection and context are central to deep learning.

Assessment and accreditation frameworks also require reform. Traditional exams remain dominant in state universities, but they often fail to capture the full range of competencies

students need in professional and civic life. National frameworks should be developed to measure practical skills, civic engagement, and adaptability alongside academic performance. Accreditation standards could then require universities to demonstrate the integration of experiential learning as part of their quality assurance processes, ensuring accountability and consistency across institutions. This recommendation reflects Burch, Heller, and Freed's [2] meta-analysis, which found that experiential learning significantly enhances retention, engagement, and critical thinking compared to traditional methods.

Equity and access must remain central to these reforms. Experiential learning opportunities should not be confined to urban centers or elite institutions. Expanding community-based projects in rural and underserved areas would ensure that students from diverse backgrounds benefit from practice-based education. In addition, digital platforms such as virtual laboratories, online moot courts, and remote internships could help overcome resource and mobility constraints, making experiential learning more widely available. These innovations align with recent findings from the *Experiential Learning in Action* [11] study, which emphasized the role of digital simulations and virtual platforms in improving skill transferability and real-world readiness.

Finally, these reforms should be embedded within a broader national strategy. The Ministry of Higher Education could adopt a unified policy framework that positions experiential learning as a cornerstone of higher education reform in Syria. Such a strategy should align with the country's reconstruction priorities, linking student projects and internships to national needs in infrastructure rebuilding, healthcare delivery, and cultural preservation. In this way, experiential learning would not only enhance individual student outcomes but also contribute directly to Syria's recovery and long-term development, echoing Garate's [5] argument that experiential education fosters innovation and adaptability in the face of global challenges.

8. Concluding Synthesis

The comparative analysis of experiential learning at private universities and traditional instruction at state universities in Syria demonstrates both the transformative potential of practice-based education and the systemic inequities that currently shape student outcomes. Survey and interview data revealed that students in private institutions benefit from higher levels of practical competence, motivation, civic engagement, and adaptability, while their peers in state universities often remain confined to theoretical knowledge with limited opportunities for application. These findings echo Kolb's [7] assertion

that learning is most effective when experience, reflection, and experimentation are integrated, and they reinforce Burch, Heller, and Freed's [2] conclusion that experiential methods significantly enhance retention and critical thinking.

At the same time, the disparities between private and state institutions highlight the structural challenges of Syrian higher education. While private universities such as AIU have pioneered innovative approaches despite resource constraints, state universities—serving the majority of students—continue to rely heavily on didactic models. This imbalance risks perpetuating unequal access to employability, civic readiness, and resilience. As Schön [9] and Beard and Wilson [1] remind us, reflection and context are essential to professional growth, yet these elements remain underdeveloped in many state institutions.

The policy recommendations outlined in this study provide a roadmap for addressing these inequities. By embedding experiential components into curricula, investing in laboratories and clinics, training faculty in active pedagogies, and developing national assessment frameworks, Syria can move toward a more equitable and effective higher education system. Moreover, aligning experiential learning with national reconstruction priorities ensures that education contributes directly to social and economic recovery, consistent with Garate's [5] argument that experiential education fosters innovation and adaptability in times of crisis.

In sum, experiential learning in Syria is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a nation-building tool. Expanding its reach across both private and state universities will equip graduates with the technical expertise, civic responsibility, and resilience needed to lead Syria's recovery and reintegration into global academic and professional networks. The evidence presented here affirms that the future of Syrian higher education depends on its ability to transform classrooms into laboratories of practice, reflection, and social responsibility [3, 4].

Author Contributions

Ranwa Khorsheed: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest while preparing this manuscript.

Appendix

Appendix I: Survey Instrument

Section 1: Demographics

University type: ☐ Private ☐ State

Faculty: ☐ Pharmacy ☐ Dentistry ☐ Engineering ☐ Business ☐ Law ☐ Other

Year of study: ☐ 1st ☐ 2nd ☐ 3rd ☐ 4th ☐ 5th+

Section 2: Learning Experience

How often do you participate in hands-on activities (labs, clinics, internships, projects)?

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Very Often

To what extent do you feel your courses connect theory with real-world practice?

☐ Not at all ☐ Slightly ☐ Moderately ☐ Strongly ☐ Very Strongly

How confident are you in applying your academic knowledge to professional settings?

☐ Not confident ☐ Slightly confident ☐ Moderately confident ☐ Confident ☐ Very confident

How motivated do you feel to attend classes and engage with your studies?

☐ Not motivated ☐ Slightly motivated ☐ Moderately motivated ☐ Motivated ☐ Very motivated

Have you participated in community-based or civic engagement projects through your university?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 3: Outcomes

Do you feel prepared for employment after graduation?

☐ Not at all ☐ Slightly ☐ Moderately ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

Rate your development in the following skills (1 = very weak, 5 = very strong):

Communication ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Teamwork ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Problem-solving ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Leadership ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Ethical reasoning ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Appendix II: Interview Guide

For Students

- 1) Can you describe a learning experience that felt especially practical or hands-on (or, if in a state university, how often such opportunities are available)?
- 2) How do you think your university prepares you for the job market?
- 3) What role, if any, does your university play in connecting you with community service or civic projects?
- 4) What challenges do you face in applying what you learn in class to real-world situations?
- 5) If you could change one thing about your learning experience, what would it be?

For Faculty Members

- 1) How do you integrate (or attempt to integrate) experiential learning into your teaching?
- 2) What barriers exist to implementing experiential methods in your institution?
- 3) How do you assess whether students are gaining practical skills, beyond theoretical knowledge?
- 4) In your view, how do graduates from your university compare in employability and adaptability to those from other institutions?
- 5) What reforms or resources would most improve the quality of student learning in your faculty?

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