Chapter 3
Empowering Students Through Real-World Projects:
A Case Study of Unlocking Experiential Learning at Bhopal School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the effect of commissioned projects on skill development, empowerment of students, and professional development, with emphasis on the influence of previous industry exposure. Findings indicate a moderate positive influence of commissioned projects on skill development, yet previous industry exposure was a more significant predictor of skill competency, empowerment, and career preparedness. Institutional backing, mentorship, and industry partnership were determined to be most influential in ensuring project success and enhancing student outcomes.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-0644-5.ch003

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and competitive job market, there is an increasing emphasis on equipping students with practical skills and industry experience to enhance their employability. Traditional education, while essential for building foundational knowledge, often lacks the hands-on exposure necessary to prepare students for real-world professional challenges. As a result, institutions of higher learning have begun incorporating experiential learning models, including commissioned projects, internships, and industry collaborations, to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This study focuses on understanding the impact of commissioned projects on student skill development, employability, and professional growth, with a particular emphasis on the role of institutional support, challenges faced, and prior industry exposure. Commissioned projects involve students working on real-world assignments provided by external organizations, businesses, or industries, where they are required to apply their academic knowledge to solve practical problems. These projects typically demand a high level of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and communication skills—competencies that are crucial in today's professional landscape. Unlike traditional classroom learning, where assessments are primarily theoretical, commissioned projects require students to engage in active problem-solving, collaboration with industry professionals, and management of real-world constraints, making them an ideal avenue for fostering professional readiness. The increasing global emphasis on work-integrated learning (WIL) further highlights the importance of such projects, as they enable students to transition seamlessly from academia to the workplace.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate how commissioned projects contribute to student empowerment, skill enhancement, and career preparedness. By examining student experiences, this research seeks to identify the factors that encourage undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students to actively participate in such initiatives. The study explores how different variables—such as faculty support, institutional resources, and project feasibility—affect the overall learning experience. A key focus is placed on measuring improvements in problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and project management skills, which are critical for professional success. Moreover, the research investigates whether students with prior industry exposure benefit differently from these projects compared to those with no previous work experience. Understanding the impact of commissioned projects is essential not only for educational institutions but also for industry stakeholders seeking to collaborate with academia. Employers increasingly look for graduates who possess both technical expertise and practical, hands-on experience, making it imperative for universities to integrate experiential learning opportunities into their curricula. While internships and apprenticeships have traditionally served this purpose,