

## Investigating the Possibility of Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle for the Development of *Khudi*

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The present research article looks to make a comparison between Iqbal's theory of development of '*khudi*' through questioning, contemplating, reasoning, experimenting and creating with Kolb's experiential learning theory that comprises of goal setting, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The article claims that all components of Iqbal's theory of *khudi* can easily fit into Kolb's experiential learning cycle and as such the cycle can be used to further Iqbal's cause of attainment of *khudi*. Where the purpose of Kolb's experiential learning cycle is to make lifelong learners by expanding participant's potential to its fullest through engaging them in a learning process; the purpose of Iqbal's *khudi* demands the achievement of a profounder personality that enables an individual to rely on one's own potentials. The aim of both the theories is to fully develop the potential of individuals making them more aware of their capabilities.

*Keywords:* Experiential learning, *khudi*, lifelong learner, individual potential, goal setting

The concept of *khudi* or *ego* was first introduced by Iqbal in his book *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of Self; Iqbal, 1920). This concept differed greatly from his fore-runners as well as from his fellow philosophers such that his fore-runners saw *khudi* as a negative attribute and equated it with narcissism, selfishness and arrogance. Whereas his contemporaries had a polar opposite view of the *khudi* and demanded the amalgamation of oneself with the absolute and lose all self-identity. For Iqbal, *khudi* meant the achievement of a profounder personality that enables an individual to rely on one's own potentials and abilities. One's potentials for Iqbal are the unique attributes that one has received from God which one should use in order to excel and succeed in life instead of being dormant beings waiting for fate to befall them. Iqbal believed that by using our God gifted potentials to their maximum, we can use our capacity to the optimum and carve one's own destiny.

Iqbal was influenced by Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (767–820) which resulted in developing the idea of *khudi*. Even though Rumi's basic teaching circled around oneness of God (*Tawhid*) he was nevertheless a mystic, poet, philosopher, lawyer and a teacher. Iqbal called himself Rumi's disciple and acquired from him ideas such as (a) concept of God, (b) appreciation of continual endeavor in life, (c) free will, and (d) creative evolution and thus creation of an impeccable or an ideal Man through the development of *khudi* (Razak & Abbas, 2011).

Iqbal believed that the East in his time was backward because of its philosophy of indifference and an attitude of self-denial. As a devout Muslim, Iqbal not only rejected the idea of Hindu pantheism but also rejected Muslim Sufi beliefs that preached submissiveness to one's fate and substituted it with the philosophy of struggle, action, and quest for knowledge. Thus, Iqbal calls *khudi* an attribute that is cultivated and nurtured for a continuous progression of

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society. Even though, the concept of *khudi* was first introduced by Iqbal to uplift the subjugated Muslims of the subcontinent, but the concept itself is relevant for all times and ages. Iqbal believed that life without *khudi* is not worthy of living as it is the *khudi* that awakens the true spirit of humanity and the meaning of existence in a person. Iqbal believed that the only way for human ego to obtain permanence is to consciously experience one's environment and to become proficient in the talents gifted to him through this interaction (Iqbal, 1930/2013). Omar (2004) aptly pens the idea down by saying that Iqbal considered the development of ego or *khudi* to be of utmost importance as it leads to the highest degree of self-affirmation, where one is an individual who is unique and self-contained. For Iqbal the progression and attainment of *khudi* springs from the environment.

The focus of the experiential learning theory is upon how people's perception of the same situation may differ from one and other which leads to different reactions to the same situation. Because, the perceptions and reactions to situations are different for different people, therefore, each one of us learn differently. In experiential learning, the learning is associated with one's environment therefore it is considered to be situated. Therefore, to understand ones environment is the foremost thing for learning to happen. Second, the learning is possible in groups or individually. Finally, learning happens through real world experiences (Yardley, et al., 2012).

The theory of experiential learning is not new; in fact, this concept is known from the times of Aristotle when he negated Plato's idea of reaching towards the truth by pure thought alone. Aristotle was of the view that experience plays a great role in learning and that, "*men of experience succeed even better than those who have theory without experience*" (Ross, 2016, p. 2). Aristotle observed more than once, that men of knowledge were considered better than men of experience because men of knowledge know why, and the cause of why, but men who only have experience do not know the answer to the 'why' (Ross, 1958). So we deem men of knowledge wiser by the virtue of theory; therefore, what made men of knowledge greater than men of experience was their knowledge, and the element lacking in the men of experience was the knowledge.

Kurt Zadek Lewin (1890-1947) in his various works laid great importance on one's experience. He reached the conclusion, that personal involvement and subjective experience was of utmost importance; he believed in learning through action, since according to him impulse was an internal needs (Cook, 2007). He was also of the view that it is only through being involved in an action that individuals could have the opportunity to create the reality of their liking (Cook, 2007); therefore, Lewin's research supported learning through action. On the other hand, John Dewey (1859 – 1952) showed the relationship between experience and reflection. According to him, actions that are non-reflective are dominant form of experiences, known as habits. Dewey considered it a necessity to reflect as it helps to solve problems; yet he elaborated that culture plays an important role in the way one reflects (Miettinen, 2010).

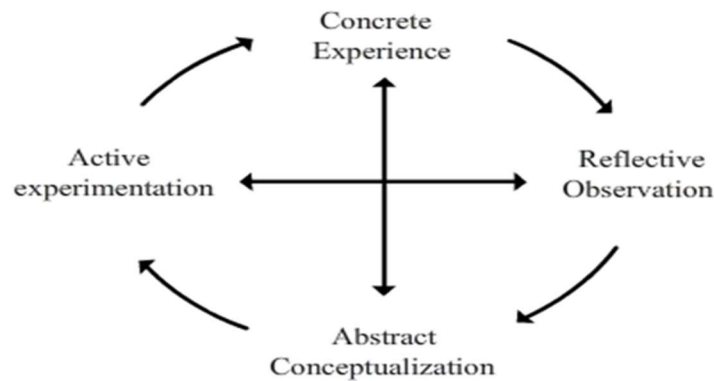
Kolb proposed experiential learning theory which he called different from traditional learning and behavioral theories (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's in his experiential learning theory called learning a continuous process, where the roots of this learning are grounded in one's experience. Kolb defined experiential as, "*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience*" (p.41). One of the main aspects of experiential learning is *the creation of knowledge* whereby knowledge is continuously created as long as one is involved in the experiential learning process. Kolb further explains that ideas are not a fixed entity; rather, they

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are formed and reformed through ones experience, thereby making learning a process that is renewed and modified through experience. Hence Kolb proposed that any new skill, new knowledge or new attitudes are achieved through four different abilities: Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE). Kolb came to the conclusion that learning is a process filled with tension and conflict such that the learning activities are opposite where concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are opposite and reflective observation and active experimentation are opposite to one another (Kolb, 2014). Since it is a cycle, therefore the educators and learners may choose to start it from any point in the cycle (Kolb et al., 2014). Figure 1 shows Kolb's experiential learning model.

**Figure 1.**

*Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle*



This research was a discussion paper, the purpose of which was to understand if there is compatibility between Kolb's experiential learning cycle and the development of *khudi* and whether the cycle can be put to use for the attainment of *khudi*.

### **Methodology**

For the above mentioned purpose, two major readings that were considered were '*Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of Self)' by Iqbal (1920) to understand the concept of *khudi* and 'Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development' by Kolb (1984) to understand experiential learning cycle. For the understanding of Iqbal's *khudi* and Kolb's experiential learning, articles and books were consulted that elaborate the basic ideas given by Iqbal and Kolb and to understand the points of convergence of the ideas given. The outcome of the document analysis was the conceptual model given in figure 2.

### **Attainment of Khudi through the Experiential Learning Cycle**

For Iqbal the cultivation of ego was possible through the attainment of knowledge which he believed could be gained through five human faculties: questioning, reasoning, contemplation, experimentation and creation (Nauman, 2018). Ego according to Iqbal cannot be cultivated until one comes in contact with the material world and goes through the thick and thin of life. Thus the contact with the real world and with real situations is very important for ego to evolve according to Iqbal. Kolb presented the same concept of learning where he points towards

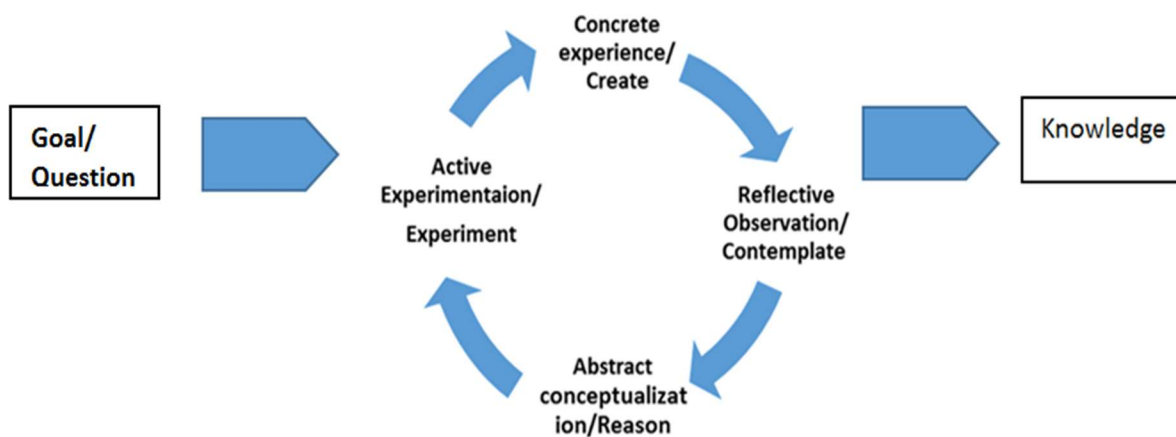
learning through engaging with real life problems stemming from one’s environment. Both Kolb and Iqbal believe that the more challenges one comes across in this world and vanquishes those challenges; more one realizes his/her potentials.

When Iqbal talked about creation, he talked about creating tailor made solutions for the Muslim world instead of adopting from the west. Thus he says that contemplation and reason should take one towards practice and creation (Ali, 2011). But the concept is very much at par with Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, where he points towards getting involved in active reflection and abstract conceptualization before moving on to active experimentation and reaching concrete learning (Kolb, 1984). Ross (2016) explains that it is important that any experiential activity must begin with goal setting and then through experience and experimentations one must try to reach the chalked out goal, whereas, Iqbal believes that the quest for knowledge begins with a question (Iqbal, 1920).

Iqbal wants the learners to find out the answer to their question; where Kolb wants the learners to reach their goal, this goal may or may not be to seek an answer to question. The learners therefore devise a goal for themselves and then through experience and experimentation try to achieve concrete thinking or holistic understanding of an experience (Ross, 2016). Since one is constantly experiencing this world, and when one is in habit of using the experiential learning cycle to understand new and old experiences, the outcome is a lifelong learner (Kolb, 1984). For Iqbal, the outcome of this constant struggle is the optimization of one’s capabilities (Iqbal, 1920/06). For Iqbal, to create means to become God’s co-worker by using one’s creative instinct which is developed through experimentation, contemplation and reasoning (Iqbal, 2006) whereas concrete experience in one develops one is able to work to solve everyday challenges through one’s actions (Ross, 2016). Hence, it may be concrete experimentation or creativity; both require one to be in action and to work towards the solution of a problem at hand. Figure 2 shows how Iqbal’s philosophy of cultivation of ego through attainment of knowledge can be amalgamated with Kolb’s experiential learning cycle.

**Figure 2**

*Amalgamation of Iqbal’s Philosophy with Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle*



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Similarly, reflective observation for Kolb is to think about the problem at hand, which Iqbal calls contemplation. Whereas abstract conceptualization is an outcome of reflection for Kolb and building reason is outcome of contemplation for Iqbal. Both Kolb and Iqbal believe that thinking should lead to experimentation. The attainment of knowledge through the process of thinking and acting leads one to attain his khudi or ego (Iqbal, 1920) and according to Kolb it produces lifelong learners (Kolb, 1984).

Both Kolb's and Iqbal's purpose of attaining education is the cultivation of knowledge where Kolb wants to harness one as a lifelong learner and Iqbal wants to develop one's khudi. The attributes of a 'lifelong learner' and a man with fully developed khudi whom Iqbal called the 'complete man' are no different from one another except that Iqbal's complete man seeks the affirmation of God in all actions that he/she takes. On the other hand, Kolb is more focused on universal ideals and ideas. Hence, where Kolb's process of attainment of knowledge is more universal in nature, Iqbal's is more focused on the needs and the desires of the Muslim world.

### Conclusion

Environment, according to Iqbal should be the source of learning. A child will only be able to first discover and then unleash his potential if he is given opportunities to experiment with his hidden talents within his environment. Thus Iqbal is of the view that the educational institutes should provide children the environment where their God-gifted potentials can be effectively harnessed in order to produce the required attribute of *khudi* in them. Kolb has given us the experiential learning model that can help teachers plan activities in real life setting. Hence, Kolb has given shape to Iqbal's desires of construction of *khudi* in the students using the environment. Practitioners and educators of the Muslim world can use the experiential learning models effectively in order to inculcate *khudi* in generations to come.

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