

# EXAMINING THE PEDAGOGICAL EFFECTIVENESS OF ROLE-PLAY SIMULATION EXERCISES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MIDDLE EAST AND UK GRADUATES

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## ABSTRACT

*Engaging in active-learning techniques like role-play simulations can provide opportunities for graduates and other learners to probe and reflect on the vicissitudes of communication that can help them build their analytical skills (Dengler, 2008), hone their critical and interpersonal skills (Weiss, 2003), as well as their public speaking and communication (Asal and Blake, 2006; Smith and Boyer, 1996). From a pedagogical viewpoint, enabling students to learn from the decisions they make, and helping them apply the knowledge and theories learned in the classroom to a simulated environment can deepen their understanding about the business challenges they are likely to face in the real-world. It is thus important to immerse students in concrete situations that require their active participation, allowing them to apply new knowledge and observe the consequences of their actions first-hand. While it is essential to equip students with the theories, concepts and other knowledge bases that can expose them to the emotional and behavioural effects of interactions that other conventional teaching styles may not be able to provide (Weiss, 2003), at the same time, it is also critical to address the lack of consensus on effective pedagogies and teaching models that can train students on the various aspects of negotiation (Fisher and Fisher-Yoshida, 2017). The latter can limit students from gaining in-depth insight into the negotiation process, which is incumbent in today's international business world.*

*As an educator and scholar, I believe it is essential to compare and find approaches that can encourage students to learn some of the myriad complexities and sensitivities that are inherent within a negotiation process, which may come in the form of cultural differences, language, experiences, and personalities. Graduates must be equipped to analyse the negotiating context, be knowledgeable to develop a negotiation strategy and learn the essential actions and behaviours that can help them in achieving their negotiation goals (Menkel-Meadow, 2009).*

*Corroborating with overlapping notions put forth by negotiation and communication scholars over decades, we investigate the learning potential of role-play negotiation simulations on graduate learning, specifically within Business Schools. Our empirical data comprises of video recordings of role-play simulation exercises carried out by graduates from the Middle East and the UK. This data was collected during the covid-19 pandemic period. Using the 'Experiential Learning Theory' (ELT) that was developed by Kolb (1984) we conceptualise how role-play simulations can help both educators achieve their pedagogical goals and support students to meet their learning goals. This cyclical model that comprises of four learning stages i.e., concrete experiences, reflection, abstract conceptualisation and experimenting has no pre-determined starting point (Kalfadellis, 2005) but accommodates varied learning styles (Shellman and Turan, 2006) and provides educators and instructors with the flexibility to structure and design their course/s in a way that stimulates students' interests, encouraging them to freely discuss issues in a protected and inclusive learning environment. ELT encourages learners to chart their own path on the learning way (Abdulwahed and Nagy, 2009; Kolb and Kolb, 2009).*

*With the changing notions of pedagogy and the diverse student groups present in Business Schools, it becomes important to create an engaging environment and learning experience that all students can benefit from. The covid-19 pandemic required many UK Universities to adopt a 'blended' or 'hybrid' learning approach to education. This unique approach that involves both face-to-face and online sessions, pushes educators to think beyond the teaching methods they are familiar with, especially for a hands-on course that involves social interactions. Given the accelerating growth of negotiation and conflict resolution courses within Business Schools (Lewicki, 1986), little research has been conducted to examine the learning potential of role-play simulations as an effective and inclusive pedagogical tool to teach the topic. Hence, the purpose of this study is two-fold: (i) to provide an overview on the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1976) and map the four stages of the ELT model with the course components on the negotiation curriculum; and (ii) to assess the influence of role-play simulation exercises in Negotiation's curriculum for graduates from Middle East and the UK. Our findings will shed light on the effectiveness of role-play simulations as a pedagogical method for teaching negotiations to graduates. Encouraging more dialogue on this topic among interested scholars can lead to new avenues for research and additionally, help educators, instructors and practitioners understand how to incorporate role-play simulation exercises in their negotiation curriculum and training sessions.*

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