

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THROUGH CASE STUDIES: AN INSIGHT USING KOLB'S LEARNING THEORY.

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Abstract

Higher educational institutions are always under pressure to improve their quality of education to enhance employability among students. This is more when it comes to institutions offering business management courses. Experiential learning is the buzzword today. In simple terms it means “learning by doing”. This is all about providing learning through experience, reflection and analysis. The objectives of the study include an understanding of the experiential learning, various methods of experiential learning and an insight into the transformative skills that the students gather through the process. This study makes use of secondary data and the personal experience of the authors to compile and collate the data. Certain reports like the GMAC survey report and Wheel box Skills India Report has been used to showcase the important management skills required by the students in future. This article is an effort to explore the importance of experiential learning in management education. It delves into various methods of experiential learning. It discusses the experiential learning methods at an abstract level. Notable among these methods include- case study, mini projects, practicum, internships and student exchange programs. This article also has a section that provides a comprehensive view on case study analysis using Kolb's learning theory. It also tries to bring out various skills that students develop while engaging through case studies.

Key Words: Experiential Learning, case study, Kolb's learning Cycle , skill development, transformative learning.

Introduction

India is one of the most populous countries with a higher percentage of younger population. Approximately around 580 million people in India fall under this age group. India is also considered as one of the largest providers of higher education with this sector contribution to about 41.4 million as per the 2020-21 statistics. As per UGC statistics, September 2023, the total number of universities were 1196 and colleges count stood at 49,385. India also plans to increase its gross enrollment ration to 50% by the year 2035 as is laid out in the National Education Policy 2020.

Today we have a very dynamic and a challenging business environment. The speed and the rate at which these changes occur are unimaginable. These changes are contributed by technological disruptions , economic fluctuations, increasing competition , societal changes, regulatory reforms , digital transformation and supply chain disruptions to quote a few. Management education has undergone enormous changes in not only India but throughout the world. With the changes happening at a lightning speed, the requirements of the industry too

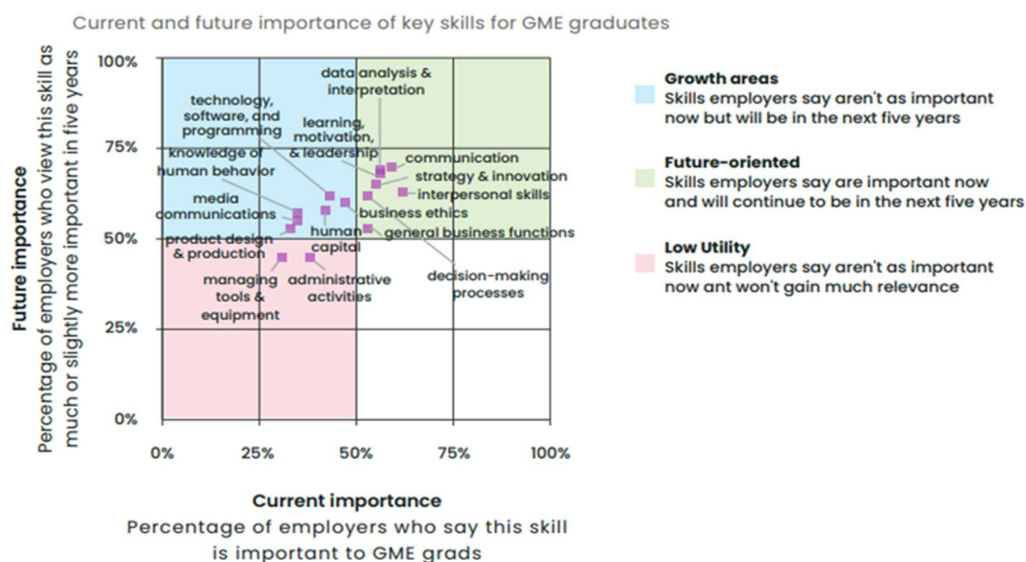
are changing. This has amplified the realization for the requirement of improvised skill for the students' of management education. Matching up to the changing requirements of the industry has become a herculean task today. With the focus on quality, conscious application of outcome based education and more focus on experiential learning, management schools and universities are trying extremely hard to cater to the industry requirements.

As these changes happen at a very alarming rate, the business leaders should be prepared as well as competent enough to handle these changes. This situation directly or indirectly focuses on developing the skills and competencies of managers to handle these VUCA changes. Therefore today's managers would require not just the theoretical knowledge, but also practical skills honed through varied real world experiences. This also is an indication for the educational institutions, offering business management courses, to design their curriculum in such a way as to make them employable in such evolving and dynamic situations.

The Skill India Report of 2023 reveals that employability has improved to 50.3% in 2023 with MBA topping the employability list with a 60.1% followed by BTech / BE with a 57.44 %. The current Skill India Report of 2024 , reveals that the employability of MBA students have increased to 71.16% and BTech /BE stood at 64.67 %. The GMAC Report 2024 gives the glimpse of the skills required by management graduates.

The GMAC study of recruiters 2024 categorizes the skills required by management graduates under three categories :

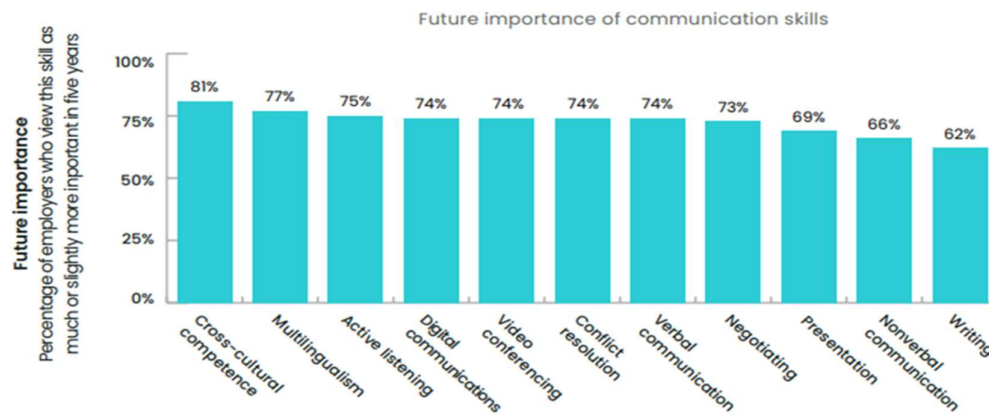
- **Growth Areas** – recruiters consider these skills to be not important in the current context but would be very important in future. Some of such skills that are going to be in demand in future are technology, media communication skills and knowledge of human behavior.
- **Future oriented** – recruiters point out that such skills are important in the present day context and will also be important in future too. Two such demanding skills identified are data analysis and strategy.
- **Low utility** – the third category of skills identified in GMAC survey of recruiters 2024. Employers point out that such skills are not important now and also won't be important in future too.
- **Fig.1 – Key Skills for GME graduates**



The GMAC survey of employers 2024, also suggest the importance of communication skills in the future. The following figure indicates the importance of the various communication skills as predicted by the employers during the survey.

Fig:2- Future Importance of communication skills.

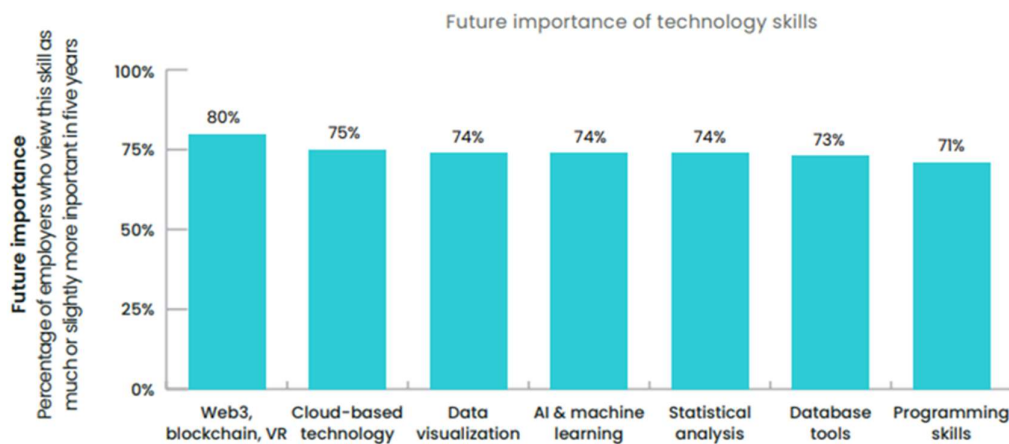
A majority of these employers view all of these communication skills as more important in the future, though writing and nonverbal communication were selected least often.



Source: GMAC Survey of Employers 2024.

The GMAC survey has also provided a list of technical skills that would be of greater importance in future. Some of these technical skills are Web3 , blockchain and Virtual reality. The figure below shows the list of technical skills as predicted by employers during the GMAC survey of Employer 2024.

Fig:3- Future important technical skills



Source : GMAC Survey of employers 2024

Experiential learning and its relevance in management education.

Experiential learning as a pedagogical tool has gained quite a significance in management education today as it prominently tries to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is one of the approaches that encourages learning through real experience , reflections and active engagement. Kent university, defines it as a process of learning by doing. It engages students into hands on experiences through a reflective method that helps them to connect theories and knowledge learned to real life situations. It is different from the traditional approaches of

classroom learning as it places students at the center of their own learning journey. They actively engage themselves through hands-on activities such as case studies, simulations, and other real time activities. While engaged in such activities, they try to connect their experiences with various theories learnt in classrooms. This provides them an immersive learning environment that facilitates their learning by honing their analytical, critical thinking, problem solving, and interpersonal skills.

Experiential learning provides a practical exposure with greater involvement and engagement among students. As they get involved and experience the learning by themselves, retention is better. It also enables them to hone their analytical, critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills. It provides a personalized experience and improves collaboration and reflection. It also enables them to understand the complex organizational dynamics and also provides them an exposure to real world challenges.

Purpose and objectives of the research.

The purpose of this article is to bring out the importance of experiential learning in management education. The primary objective of this article is:

- To understand experiential learning.
- To understand the various methods of experiential learning management education.
- Decoding a case study using Kolb's learning theory.
- To decipher the skills developed during analysis of case studies.

Literature Review

Overview of traditional learning approaches in management education.

Association of experiential education defines "Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities." Rishika (2022) suggests immersive / experiential learning as a modern method of educating students providing them a better learning through real world applications. Sevinj (2024) examined the role of experiential learning among students of doctoral level leadership program. The results indicated a strong relationship between the stakeholders that provided a wider learning experience. Davis Enersto (2022) suggested an integration of ADDIE model of instructional design to enhance the learning among students of supply chain management.

According to Megan (2024), Case studies in classrooms, offer effective learning through the application of various concepts and theoretical framework .

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

This theory was developed by David Kolb in the 1980's. His experiential learning theory works under two levels :

1. A learning cycle and
2. Learning styles

The learning cycle is a four-stage process:

- **Concrete learning** - this stage occurs when a learner undergoes a new experience or construes a previous experience in a new way. Here the learner engages in a direct experience as he does the work or gets involved in it directly.
- **Reflective observation** – during this stage the learner reflects on the new experience to understand what it actually means and examines the same from different perspectives.

- **Abstract conceptualization** – the learner acclimatizes their thoughts or constructs into new ideas based on experience and reflection. They try to bridge theory and experiences to gather new insights and experienced learning.
- **Active experimentation** – the learner in this stage tries to apply the new ideas to real-world situations to test the compatibility and to check if any changes need to be made.

The Learning styles -defined as the learners preferred way of engaging themselves in the process of learning. It provides insights into how they process, understand and retain information during their learning process. Four different styles have been identified by Kolb based on two dimensions – perceiving (feeling VS thinking) and processing (doing VS watching). These are the four styles of learning - Diverging-(feeling + watching), Assimilating(Thinking + watching), Converging (thinking + doing), Accommodating (feeling + doing)

Of late there has been a growing awareness in experiential learning methods. There has also been a lot of research conducted in the area of experiential learning in management education. This article is an effort to bring out the transformative learning among students while making use of case study approach in learning. It tries to focus on the skills that the students acquire while learning through case studies.

Methodology

This article on experiential learning relies mostly on the secondary data. Extensive uses of information from articles, books, research articles have been made to formulate this article. One case study by the author has been used in facilitating the case study analyses. This article also makes use of the extensive academic experience and exposure that the authors have in the field of academics.

Findings and Discussion

- **From 1st objective: To understand all about experiential learning.**
Experiential learning occupies a prominent position in management education. In fact the entire world is discussing about experiential learning. Today the emphasis is more on preparing management students for a VUCA world, where the speed at which the change happens is unimaginable. As such the traditional methods of classroom delivery doesn't hold good. A quote by Benjamin Franklin (1750) “ Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember , involve me and I will learn”, clearly explains the importance of learning by doing in the current context. Hence higher education demands the use of EL techniques and more so for the Management education. This section of the article discusses on various methods that management education institutes can think of for imparting a better learning experience for students. As we discuss further , let us have a look into the requirements of management education today .
In the present day context , it is very clear that EL has no replacement as such . This section is basically to provide a detail enumeration of EL activities that teachers can provide for better learning. As it is very important that management education should be curated in such a manner to provide better exposure. Broadly the entire activities can be brought under two classification – Academic and non-academic activities. Academic activities is believed to bring about learning experiences in academics and non-academic activities is believed to bring about experiences in personal development front.

From 2nd objective: To understand the various methods of experiential learning management education

Some of the academic activities can be listed are :

Fig 4: Experiential learning methods



The below table gives the summary of various Experiential learning methods used in management education and its various implications.

Sl. No	EL Methods	Implications / Consequences
1	<p>Case study Yin (1994) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”</p>	Helps students to get exposed to different situations and problems which help them to analyze and suggest practical solutions through critical analysis;
2	<p>Mini Projects A mini project is a smaller project that is completed within a short span of time. Students are given these so that they are able to understand things with much clarity and also get an experience on the same.</p>	Students learn to apply the concepts learnt in classrooms. They experience the outcome by themselves and helps in improved learning with enhanced cognitive , affective and behavioral skills.
3	<p>Practium It is a work arrangement where students work in an organization under the supervision of an expert in their own field of study.</p>	This helps them to understand and imbibe the basic knowledge, skills and attitude required for the job under consideration. They get an awareness of the job, the environment and the context.
4	<p>Laboratory work Laboratory is a place where experiments / researches are conducted in a controlled manner.</p>	Students get to do experiments by themselves and also get a feel of the outcomes. They experience the outcomes themselves leading to better learning and experience.
5	<p>Internships Cambridge dictionary defines “internship as a period of time during which someone works for a company or</p>	Students get to work in an organization. Understands what an organization is? how it works? The culture and the functioning

	organization in order to get experience of a particular type of work.”	of the same. They also get hands on experience on the work allocated to them.
6	Student exchange program This is an arrangement where students of one institution go to another, for a shorter period of stay and study in that institution.	Such programs provide a transformative learning experience to the students. Through this they share experiences, understand cultural differences , develop tolerance and become adaptable as well as develop new skills.
7	Research Students are encouraged to investigate on various topics related to the area of their study. This may be in collaboration with peers or other organizations or government institutions.	This helps them to gain a better understanding of the focus area. They also learn to develop research skills. They observe, collect, analyze and interpret data to make informed and desired decisions.
8	Inquiry based learning It is a process by which students are encouraged to ask questions and investigate into the real life problems. Students are given ample freedom to harness their curiosity to the fullest.	A student centered learning method, where students are provided with the complete freedom to fulfill their inquisitiveness. This method increases motivation, increases curiosity and improves confidence. It helps them with a deeper understanding, critical analysis and an improvised thinking and decision making
9	Role plays This is a process by which students enact out a scenario or a situation. This helps them to understand, learn and demonstrate their actions skills to suit the situation or scenario.	This is again a very prospective method of learning. In the process of enacting , they own up the situations and assume themselves to be the key participants and enact the roles accordingly. This helps them to deeply understand the situation and be empathetic and clearly lay out roles.

- **From 3rd objective – decoding the case study using Kolb’s learning theory**

Here an attempt is made to decode and analyze a case using the Kolb’s Learning theory. Step wise analysis of the case let helps in better understanding of the case thereby engaging students to a proper analysis.

1. Experiential Learning Method – Case Study Method	
A case is usually a “description of an actual situation, commonly involving a decision , challenge , an opportunity , a problem or an issue faced by a person or persons in an organization” Mitchell (1983) defined a case study as a “detailed examination of an event (or series of related events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified general theoretical principles”.	
Explanation using Kolb’s learning stages	
1. Concrete Experience	Case Analysis

<p>As per the definition, each case provides a description of a situation, an event or a problem. Students get a concrete experience when they are presented with specific real life situations or scenarios. The following things happen in this stage :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -They are exposed to different situations. - they get to understand an outline about the case – the context, situation, the stakeholders, the problem and its various facets. -They get a chance to understand business situations/stakeholders/issues/problems/opportunities/ challenge. - encourages involvement and engagement. - improves their thinking and knowledge. - hands on experience - team participation and involvement 	<p>Students are exposed to situations : PRIMA Institute of Management Studies, an institute pioneered by Mr. Atul Bhasker in 2009. Dr. Prathibha joins as Academic Director. She is given the task of performing performance appraisal. The normal procedure is a report by the superior. Dr. Prathibha had two challenges –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She was new and did not know much about the faculty members. 2. The current system of PA had drawbacks as it was a report. <p>Dr. Prathibha charts out a new appraisal system. Students understand the problems here</p>
Skills Gained /Developed	
<p>Students work together in group Gather the basic information about PRIMA Institute of Management studies Gather information (Get to know about Dr. Prathibha, newly joined Academic Director.) They understand the problems faced by Dr. Prathibha who is new and is assigned with the task of performing performance appraisal. Students also get to understand drawbacks of the current appraisal system. Skills – awareness, team work, discussion and deliberations, collaboration, engagement and effective communication.</p>	
2. Reflective observation	Analysis
<p>The first step provides an initial exposure to the case study in hand. They gather a basic understanding of the problem/issue. This step, students engage in a reflective observation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -They critically analyze the case study and the problem /issue and the challenges it poses. -They analyze in from different perspectives. - They try to connect it with underlying theories and concepts. -They also engage in a reflective observation, fine tuning their understanding, analysis and potential solutions relative to their core theories and concepts. 	<p>They focus on these two major issues here.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The problem is Dr. Prathibha’s inability to apprise the employees of the organization. 2. The current method of appraisal using a written report has its drawbacks. <p>Students adopt a reflective approach They do not have any doubts with the capability of Dr. Prathibha. They also know that her inability to assess the employees is due to – i) she is new to the institution and ii) she does not know all the employees well and iii) the method of performance appraisal used here is the report system. A modern institute with a very old system of PA cannot be accepted. Students try to link it with various theories / various methods of PA. Dr. Prathibha had come up with a new PA system. Students can reflect upon the new system and can suggest ways to improve the same.</p>
Skills gained /Developed	
Students try to question to understand things for better.	

<p>They try to analyze Dr. Prathibha's situation here and her ability. They critically analyze the current method of performance appraisal at PRISMA institute. They try to find out the drawbacks of the current system. What makes Dr Prathibha incompetent to the performance appraisal? Critically analyze Dr Prathibha's suggested method and drawbacks if any? Skills – engagement, team work , collaboration, critical thinking, collaboration, analytical skills.</p>	
3. Abstract conceptualization	Analysis
<p>Next stage is abstract conceptualization. With the understanding on the case , students try to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conceptualize theories - Come up with frameworks for better understanding and - Explain the issues / problems in the case study. - Establish principles to substantiate the findings and solutions. 	<p>Students focus on problems :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Limited information with Dr. Prathibha to carry out PA. -think of various performance appraisal methods suitable for the institution. -they analyze the PA method suggested by Dr. Prathiba - try to point out drawbacks if any
Skills gained / developed	
<p>This is the phase where students try to break down their learning into smaller units, try to connect them, build relationships and relate it with various concepts they have learnt. They try to come up with creative and innovative solutions. Skills – Critical thinking and Analysis, building constructs and relationships, communication, problem solving, substantiation and strategic planning.</p>	
Active Experimentation	
<p>This the final step in experiential learning process of the case study method. This is where students actually apply the theories and concepts they have developed. Here they also propose actionable solutions or strategies for addressing the challenges elaborated in the case. They simulate the decision-making processes and devise suitable implementation strategies. They substantiate these strategies with strong conceptual and theoretical framework, principles and analysis.</p>	<p>Students deliberate on various issues. They try to bring out the drawbacks of the earlier method. They also go through the method suggested by Dr. Prathibha, assess the method and also be able to bring out its advantages and drawbacks. They can even suggest suitable methods of PA and also be able to substantiate the same. They are able to critically think, analyze, come up with solutions and make suitable decisions.</p>
Skills gained/ developed	
<p>This phase there is complete clarity about the situation or problem at hand. They strategically plan and implement the same. Skills – strategic planning, problem solving, decision making, substantiating and implementing the actionable solutions.</p>	

- **From the 4th objective - To decipher the skills developed during analysis of case studies.**

This section of the articles gives the description of the skills students gain through their exposure, engagement and analysis through case study. The following are skills gained by students while working with case study.

Critical thinking and analysis – In simple words critical thinking is the ability to analyze the information and to form a judgment. Critical thinking, as defined by Michael Scriven and Richard Paul (1987) is the” intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action”. It involves a thoughtful observation and examination, questioning, analysis, assessment and evaluation to form a judgment that can be substantiated with much clarity and perfection.

While going through case studies students voraciously look at the information presented, scan for more data, analyze, relate to the various theories and understand the situation with utmost clarity and also find effective solutions. It helped students in being appreciative of different perspectives and situations, improved communication, better understanding and improved decision making.

Collaboration and team work- Since students work in group most of the time during case analysis, they learn to work together as a team. It keeps them engaged, they discuss on various issues. Each of them has different perspectives and contributes to the conversation and discussion. There is an exchange and sharing of viewpoints. Due to collaboration, creative and specialized ideas may crop up. They learn to trust and respect each other as well as understand and value each other. This helps in buiding a strong bond with the team.

Deliberation – As the team gets engaged in the case analysis, deeper, creative and innovative discussions happen. This improves their participation and presentation skills and also improves their thinking skills.

Communication – As per dictionary communication skills refers to the ability to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively. Case study analyses involve a lot of discussions that help in improving their communication and presentation skills. Frequent discussions help them to interact with each other, thereby reducing inhibitions and motivating them for more fruitful interactions.

Problem solving – Case study encourages the students to think and delve more deeper into the problem laid in it. It engages them into deep rooted thoughtful processes and leads them to a deeper discussions and deliberations. These discussions enable them to come up with alternate solutions to the problems posed in the case studies thereby honing their problem solving skills.

Decision making – by analyzing the case study students are able to critically analyze and finally make a decision.

Creativity and innovation – students work in group as well as individually. As they collaborate, they are able to go through a lot of deliberations and discussions. They are able to brainstorm creative and innovative strategies for the problems at hand. As a group activity many creative and innovations solutions can be sought.

Conclusions

To sum up, experiential learning has become very important for management education today. There are many methods by which experiential learning can be imparted in management education. Some of them include – case studies, mini projects, practicum, laboratory work,

internships, student exchange program, research collaborations and inquiry based learning. All these methods as well as other methods are extremely helpful for building different types of skills among students. This article makes use of a case study to show how students engage in the learning process through the various stages as suggested by Kolb. It also brings out the skills developed / learnt in each of the stages. Some of the skills developed during this case study method are –critical thinking and analysis, collaboration and teamwork, deliberation, communication, problem solving, decision making, creativity, strategic planning and decision making

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A case let from the book “ DEERA, a cluster of case studies “ was taken for analysis .