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(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

The impact of experiential learning on self-confidence in personal competence among students of Hung Vuong university of Ho Chi Minh city

Hang Thi Thu Phan, Luyen Thi Thu Dang *, Nguyet Anh Pham, Le Thi Hong Dang and Dung Tri Thai

Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

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Abstract

This study examines whether participation in university-organised experiential learning activities strengthens students' self-confidence in their own capabilities and whether lecturer support changes this relationship. The research was conducted at Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, focusing on undergraduates who had recently attended seminars, workshops, panel discussions, or guest lectures related to their major. A mixed-method design was applied. First, survey data were collected from 284 students and analysed using structural equation modelling with a partial least squares estimation approach, including a product-term interaction to test moderation. Second, in-depth interviews with students and lecturers were used to explain how support practices shaped students' interpretations of their experiences. The results indicate that lecturer support strongly predicts students' engagement in experiential learning activities and also has a direct positive association with self-confidence. In contrast, experiential learning alone shows a weak and statistically non-significant direct association with self-confidence once lecturer support is considered. Importantly, the interaction effect is positive and significant, suggesting that experiential learning contributes more to self-confidence when lecturers provide clear briefing, emotional encouragement, opportunities for interaction, and structured reflection before, during, and after the activity. Interview findings align with the quantitative results by highlighting briefing, feedback, and debriefing as key mechanisms through which students reinterpret challenging experiences as mastery experiences. The study provides practical implications for designing experiential activities in local university contexts by embedding consistent lecturer support across the full experiential cycle.

Keywords: Experiential Learning; Lecturer Support; Self-Efficacy; Self-Confidence; Higher Education; Viet Nam

1. Introduction

In the time of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), universities are under strong pressure to prepare graduates not only with solid subject knowledge but also with practical skills and the confidence to work well in fast-changing and complex workplaces. Experiential learning has become an important way of teaching to answer these needs. It allows students to work directly with real or realistic tasks, think carefully about their experiences, and use what they have learned in real-life situations, instead of only listening to lectures in class (Kolb, 1984, 2015; Marshall, Fry, & Ketteridge, 2008). For undergraduate students, especially in applied fields such as business and management, joining activities like seminars, workshops and industry-based events can be powerful learning chances. These activities can help students develop their skills and strengthen their beliefs about their own abilities.

The main theories about experiential learning and self-belief give a clear reason to study the connection between experiential learning and students' self-confidence in their own abilities. Experiential Learning Theory explains learning as a cycle that includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. It shows that deep learning happens when students keep moving through and combining these stages

* Corresponding author: Dang Thi Thu Luyen

(Kolb, 1984, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). At the same time, Self-Efficacy Theory says that people's beliefs in their ability to plan and carry out actions to reach certain goals are very important for their motivation, persistence and achievement (Bandura, 1977). Mastery experiences, learning by watching others (vicarious learning), social persuasion and emotional or physical states often found in structured experiential activities are key sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). In addition, Self-Determination Theory suggests that learning environments which support autonomy, competence and relatedness can increase intrinsic motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These conditions are often created in well-designed experiential learning activities.

International studies have given strong evidence that experiential learning can improve students' skills and self-efficacy. When students take part in projects, fieldwork, workshops and other practice-oriented activities, they often become more confident in using their subject knowledge, working with others and getting ready for professional roles (Kolb, 1984, 2015; Marshall et al., 2008; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Recent research also shows that technology-supported and innovative learning formats can further support students when they are well guided. These formats can help students grow as human beings and feel more confident in using new tools (Lee & Low, 2024; Pendergast, Main, & McManus, 2024). Overall, these findings suggest that when students actively join meaningful experiences rather than just receive information, they are more likely to develop strong beliefs about their abilities and to use their learning in new situations.

In Vietnam, discussions about educational innovation now often focus on competence-based curricula, soft-skill development and closer connections between universities and the labour market. However, empirical studies on experiential learning are still limited. Many studies look broadly at extracurricular activities or soft skills, instead of examining specific types of experiential activities or the psychological processes behind them. For example, earlier research in Viet Nam has shown that participation in extracurricular activities and classroom interaction is positively associated with the development of students' soft skills, including communication and confidence (Lê Thị Thu Trang et al., 2022).Yet, the exact role of structured experiential events such as academic seminars and professional workshops in building students' self-efficacy has not been studied in a systematic way. Also, many existing studies focus on overall results and do not explore which concrete features of experiential activities such as how relevant the content is, how much interaction is possible, or how many practice-oriented tasks are included have the strongest effect on students' confidence in their own competence.

This gap is especially important in local higher education institutions such as Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City. As a regional university that serves students with different academic backgrounds and different levels of prior practical experience, the university faces a double task: it must help students meet the required academic standards and, at the same time, build their confidence and practical skills for a very competitive labour market. Although the university has tried to organize seminars, talks and other experiential events, many students still say that they have little real-world experience and feel unsure when moving into internships or jobs. Informal reports suggest that many graduates still doubt their own abilities, especially in communication, problem solving and professional decision making. This lack of confidence may make it harder for them to find jobs and develop their early careers. For this reason, it is both relevant and urgent to understand how experiential learning activities at the university help students' self-confidence.

In this context, the role of lecturers and academic staff is likely to be very important. Lecturers not only design and run experiential activities but also act as facilitators, mentors and sources of social persuasion. Through these roles, they can strongly shape how students understand their experiences and how their self-efficacy develops (Bandura, 1977; Marshall et al., 2008). Supportive lecturers can help students see challenges as learning opportunities, give constructive feedback and encourage them to keep trying when they face difficulties. In this way, lecturer support can increase the positive effect of experiential learning on self-confidence. On the other hand, if guidance is weak or scaffolding is not enough, experiential activities may bring fewer benefits or even reduce students' beliefs in their abilities. Recent studies on technology-enhanced and innovative learning also show that teacher support is essential. It helps students use new learning tools in ways that truly empower them, instead of making them feel stressed or confused (Lee & Low, 2024; Pendergast et al., 2024). Yet, there is still little empirical evidence on how lecturer support and experiential learning work together to influence self-efficacy in Vietnamese universities.

Based on this background, the present study explores how experiential learning affects students' self-confidence in their own capabilities at Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City. It focuses on students who have joined experiential events such as seminars and workshops. The study examines which aspects of experiential learning are linked to higher self-efficacy, how strongly experiential learning predicts students' confidence in their own abilities, and how lecturer support contributes both directly to experiential learning and self-confidence and as a possible moderator of the relationship between experiential learning and self-confidence. By answering these questions, the study aims to fill

important gaps in both international and Vietnamese research. In theory, it extends the use of Experiential Learning Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory to a developing-country, local-university context, brings lecturer support into the model, and responds to calls for more detailed studies of experiential learning processes and outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Marshall et al., 2008; Lee & Low, 2024; Pendergast et al., 2024; Lê Thị Thu Trang et al., 2022). In practice, it offers research-based suggestions for university leaders and lecturers who want to design and apply experiential learning activities that improve students' self-confidence and employability. In this way, the study supports the development of a higher-quality human resource base for Vietnamese society in the context of Industry 4.0.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Literature review

The literature on experiential learning and students' self-beliefs gives a strong theoretical base for studying how structured learning activities shape self-confidence in one's own abilities. Self-Efficacy Theory explains that people build their beliefs about their own capability mainly through mastery experiences, vicarious learning (watching others), social persuasion and the way they understand their own feelings and emotions. These elements are usually present in real or authentic learning activities (Bandura, 1977, 1997). In universities, experiential learning activities such as seminars and workshops can give students real chances to try professional tasks, get feedback and observe role models. These experiences can strengthen or adjust what students believe they can do. Experiential Learning Theory adds to this view by describing learning as a cycle with four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. When students move through this cycle in well-designed activities, they not only understand theory better but also feel more confident to use it in practice (Kolb, 1984, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Self-Determination Theory further suggests that learning environments that support autonomy, competence and relatedness can increase intrinsic motivation and mental well-being. This means that experiential formats which give students real choice and meaningful interaction can strengthen both their motivation and their self-confidence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within all these frameworks, lecturers and other facilitators play an important role. Their guidance, encouragement and feedback work as strong forms of social persuasion and scaffolding. These forms of support influence how students understand their learning experiences and how they judge their own competence (Bandura, 1977; Marshall, Fry, & Ketteridge, 2008).

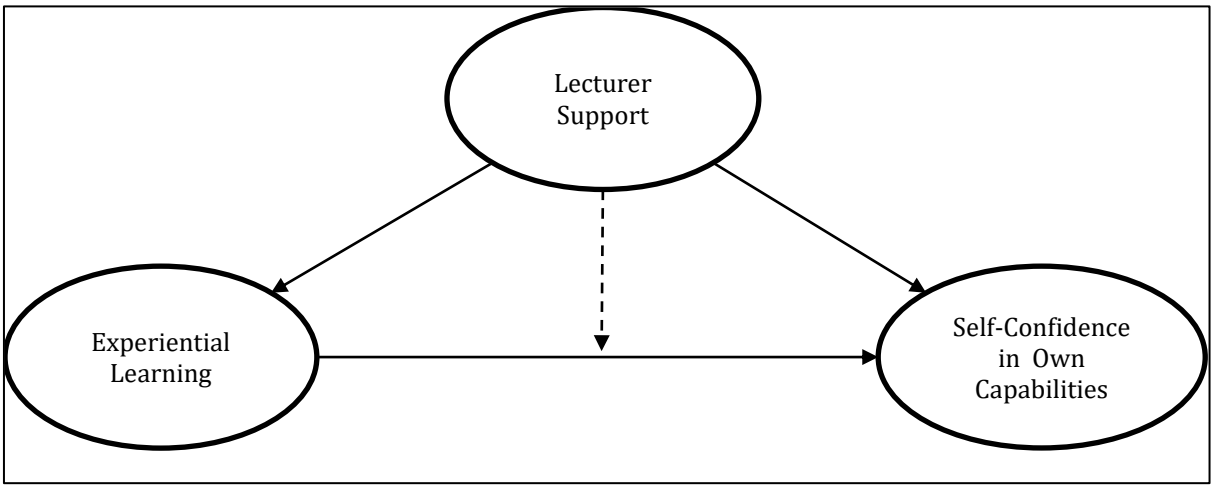
International empirical research has shown many positive effects of experiential learning on students' skills, motivation and self-efficacy. Studies based on Experiential Learning Theory report that when university students take part in projects, workshops and other practice-focused activities that require them to use theory to solve real or realistic problems, they often feel more confident in their subject knowledge, show better problem-solving skills and feel more ready for professional work (Kolb, 1984, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Marshall et al., 2008). These activities usually bring students into contact with expert speakers and professionals, give them chances to interact and collaborate with others and ask them to perform authentic tasks. Such conditions create mastery experiences and vicarious learning, which can raise self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Research based on Self-Determination Theory also finds that experiential settings which support autonomy, offer suitable levels of challenge and encourage meaningful social connections are linked to higher intrinsic motivation and more positive self-beliefs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Recent studies on innovative learning formats, including technology-mediated experiences and massive open online courses, suggest similar results. When these formats are designed with enough learner support and opportunities for real engagement, they can help students build both competence and confidence. Together, these findings support the wider conclusion that active, experience-rich learning environments help students develop self-efficacy and a stronger professional identity (Lee & Low, 2024; Pendergast, Main, & McManus, 2024).

Compared with this growing international literature, Vietnamese research on experiential learning and self-confidence is still quite limited and not very consistent. Many studies focus on traditional teaching methods or talk about soft skills in general, without studying specific experiential formats in detail. For example, research at a Vietnamese university has found that participation in extracurricular activities and classroom interaction is positively associated with the development of students' soft skills, including communication and confidence. This suggests that experience-based activities can support students' personal and professional growth (Lê Thị Thu Trang et al., 2022). However, such studies usually do not separate structured experiential events like academic seminars and professional workshops as clear types of intervention, and they rarely study their impact on self-efficacy as a psychological concept. In addition, many existing works focus on large universities in big cities and often see students as one similar group. They give less attention to local or regional universities where students may differ more in their academic preparation and in their earlier practice experience.

Building on this literature, four main gaps motivate the present study. First, although international research consistently shows that experiential learning is an important driver of student self-efficacy (Hayes et al., 2020; Toombs et al., 2022; Heng & Jin, 2025), empirical evidence from Viet Nam is still limited, especially regarding how specific experiential formats such as seminars and workshops organised by universities influence students' self-efficacy, understood as their confidence in their own capabilities. Second, previous Vietnamese studies usually examine broad outcomes such as soft skills or academic performance and do not unpack which concrete features of experiential activities, for example speaker quality, opportunities for interaction, perceived relevance of content to students' needs and opportunities to apply knowledge in practice, have the strongest impact on student self-efficacy (Lê Thị Thu Trang et al., 2022). Third, although theory and international evidence emphasise that lecturer support and facilitation are crucial for realising the benefits of experiential learning (Bandura, 1977; Marshall et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2025; Prananto et al., 2025), Vietnamese research has rarely modelled lecturer support at the same time as an antecedent of experiential learning and student self-efficacy and as a potential moderator of the relationship between experiential learning and student self-efficacy. Finally, only a small number of studies integrate Experiential Learning Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory and motivational perspectives such as Self-Determination Theory in a single framework to explain how experiential activities in local university settings help students build self-efficacy, especially in developing-country contexts (Jeno, 2015; Rahayu & Bandjarjani, 2022).

To address these gaps, the present study focuses on students at Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City. It examines which aspects of experiential learning events are most strongly connected to self-confidence and analyses how lecturer support shapes these relationships. In doing so, the study offers context-specific evidence for both international and Vietnamese discussions on experiential learning and student self-efficacy.

2.2. Research model and hypothesis development



Source: Proposed by the research team, 2025

Figure 1 Research Model

Drawing on experiential learning theory, supportive learning theory, self-efficacy and moderation perspectives, this study builds a research model in which experiential learning is a main factor that shapes students' self-confidence in their own abilities. In this model, lecturer support works in two ways: it directly affects students' self-confidence, and it also changes how strongly experiential learning influences self-confidence. Experiential learning here means students' participation in practice-focused activities such as seminars, workshops and other structured events where they can use what they have learned in real or realistic situations. Based on experiential learning theory, Kolb (1984) explains that students learn best when they join concrete activities in which they not only receive information but also apply it in real life. By taking part in such activities, students have chances to test and prove their abilities in clear situations. This process helps them build stronger beliefs in their own competence. Empirical findings from Pendergast (2024) also show that experiential learning events such as seminars and panel discussions help students develop skills and feel more confident. Following this logic, the research model includes a direct positive link from experiential learning to students' self-confidence, and H1 states that experiential learning has a positive effect on students' self-confidence in their own capabilities.

The model also places lecturer support at the centre as an important contextual factor that shapes both students' participation in experiential learning and their confidence outcomes. According to supportive learning perspectives, lecturers should not only deliver knowledge; they should also encourage, guide and create good conditions for students to join experiential activities. When lecturers actively support students, for example by sharing information about available activities, explaining how to take part and building a psychologically safe environment, students are more willing to join experiential learning and are likely to participate more seriously. Bandura (1977) notes that guidance from experienced people makes real-world experiences more effective and increases how much these experiences contribute to learning and self-belief. In the Vietnamese context, findings by Lê Thị Thu Trang et al. (2022) show that curriculum design, classroom interaction and extracurricular activities are positively associated with students' soft skills and active learning, suggesting that supportive learning environments play a central role in students' engagement in developmental and experiential activities. Based on this theoretical and empirical evidence, the model includes a direct positive path from lecturer support to experiential learning, and H2 proposes that lecturer support has a positive effect on students' participation in experiential learning activities.

Besides shaping learning behaviour, lecturer support is also expected to influence students' self-confidence directly. From a self-efficacy point of view, Bandura (1977) stresses that support from the environment, including important people such as lecturers, plays a key role in forming beliefs about personal capability. Lecturers who give clear orientation, useful feedback and emotional encouragement help students see challenges as manageable and view their successes as proof of their own competence. This process allows students to overcome mental barriers such as fear of failure or anxiety when speaking in public, which then strengthens their self-confidence. Findings from Lee and Low (2024) support this idea by showing that lecturer support helps students feel more confident when dealing with both learning situations and real-world problems. Therefore, the research model includes a direct positive path from lecturer support to students' self-confidence, and H3 states that lecturer support has a positive effect on students' self-confidence in their own capabilities.

Finally, the model assumes that lecturer support does not only have direct effects. It also changes how strongly experiential learning leads to self-confidence. The link between experiential learning and self-confidence may become stronger when students receive high levels of support from lecturers, because this support helps them understand experiential activities in more positive ways, learn more from these experiences and expand their success experiences into broader self-beliefs. Moderation perspectives suggest that a third factor, such as support, can increase or reduce the strength of the effect of one variable on another. In this study, lecturer support is seen as such a moderating factor in the relationship between experiential learning and self-confidence. Kolb (1984) and Bandura (1977) both point out that when students receive timely and suitable guidance, they can make better use of experiential learning opportunities to build their self-confidence. For this reason, the research model includes an interaction effect between experiential learning and lecturer support, and H4 proposes that lecturer support positively moderates the relationship between experiential learning and students' self-confidence, meaning that the positive impact of experiential learning on self-confidence is stronger when lecturer support is higher.

3. Methodology

This study used a mixed-method design. It combined a quantitative student survey with qualitative in-depth interviews. The aim was to find out how experiential learning affects students' self-confidence in own capabilities, and to understand why this happens, in the context of Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City.

The research population was undergraduate students who had taken part in experiential learning events organized by the university. These events included seminars, panel discussions and thematic workshops related to their field of study. The study focused on students at Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City, where experiential activities are often included in co-curricular and extra-curricular programs. From this population, the study selected students who had recently attended at least one experiential event. In this way, their views about experiential learning, lecturer support and self-confidence were based on real and recent experiences.

Data collection was planned for the 2025 academic year. Surveys were given both on campus and online from January to December. This allowed the study to reach students from different cohorts and majors. The study used a non-probability convenience sampling method. This choice reflected the practical limits of working in one institution and the exploratory nature of the research. The research team aimed to collect 300-400 completed questionnaires. This number was considered enough to give stable results in multivariate analyses and to reflect the diversity of students in terms of gender, age, field of study and level of participation in experiential learning.

Students were invited to join the study in two main ways. First, researchers contacted them directly in classes and at events, gave them paper questionnaires and collected them after completion. Second, the same questionnaire was put online using Google Form and shared through university communication channels. This allowed students to answer the survey in their own time.

Primary data were collected with a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed based on Self-Efficacy Theory and Experiential Learning Theory. More specifically, Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) was used to measure students' self-confidence in their abilities, and Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory was used to describe the main aspects of experiential learning activities.

The questionnaire had several sections. One section measured students' perceptions of experiential learning events. It asked about the quality of speakers, the relevance and clarity of content, chances for interaction and discussion, and opportunities to apply knowledge in practice. Another section measured perceived support from lecturers, such as guidance before, during and after events, encouragement to participate, and feedback on students' engagement. A further section measured students' self-confidence in their academic and professional abilities, including confidence in communication, problem solving and applying knowledge to real life.

Following common practice in survey research, most items were closed-ended statements. Students showed their level of agreement or frequency on ordered response scales. This allowed the researchers to build composite indices for each latent construct. To capture possible changes in self-confidence linked to experiential learning, the questionnaire also asked students to report their self-confidence levels before and after taking part in experiential events. This made it possible to examine within-student differences in perceived self-efficacy related to experiential learning participation.

Before using the questionnaire on a large scale, the research team improved it through qualitative pre-testing and pilot interviews with a small group of students who had joined experiential activities. These steps had two goals: to make sure the content was valid and to adjust the wording so that it matched the Vietnamese higher education context.

Secondary data were also used to provide context and theoretical support. These data came from institutional documents about training programs and experiential activities at Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City, as well as from published reports and studies on experiential learning, self-efficacy and modern teaching methods. They were used to describe the wider educational environment, to place the research problem in national and international debates, and to help interpret the empirical results.

Along with the survey, qualitative primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with two groups. The first group was students who had joined experiential learning events such as seminars and panel discussions. Interviews with these students explored how they experienced these events, what they found most valuable, and how participation affected their confidence in their own abilities. The second group was lecturers and event organizers. Their interviews showed how experiential activities were designed and run, what types of lecturer support were offered and how they saw the impact of these activities on students' development. Interviews followed semi-structured guides, were recorded with permission and then transcribed word for word for analysis.

Quantitative data from the student survey were analysed in two main stages. First, SPSS was used to produce descriptive statistics for all variables and to summarise the sample profile in terms of gender, year of study, field of study and participation in experiential events. This step also included initial reliability checks using Cronbach's alpha and item–total correlations to screen out potentially problematic items.

Second, the study applied partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM was chosen because the research aims to explain variance in students' self-confidence and to test a model with interaction effects in an exploratory higher education context, where the main goal is prediction rather than exact model fit. The analysis was carried out in SmartPLS.

In the measurement model, the reliability and validity of the scales were assessed through several indicators. For each latent construct, Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), rho_A, and composite reliability were examined to ensure internal consistency, and the average variance extracted was used to check convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). Standardised outer loadings were inspected and items with low loadings were considered for removal (Hair et al., 2017). Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratios (Henseler et al., 2015).

In the structural model, collinearity among predictors was examined by looking at inner VIF values. The explanatory power of the model was evaluated using R^2 values for experiential learning and self-confidence. Effect sizes (f^2) for individual paths were used to judge the practical importance of each predictor, and model fit was checked using SRMR and NFI indices in line with current PLS-SEM recommendations. Hypotheses were tested through a bootstrapping procedure with a large number of resamples, which provided standard errors, t-values, p-values and bias-corrected confidence intervals for all path coefficients, including the moderating effect of lecturer support on the relationship between experiential learning and self-confidence.

Qualitative interview data were analysed using content analysis to create themes that could support and compare with the quantitative results. After transcription, the research team read the interviews many times, coded parts of the text related to experiential learning processes, perceptions of lecturer support and signs of self-confidence, and then grouped these codes into broader themes. The team paid special attention to students' stories about specific moments or features of experiential events that helped them feel more confident, and to lecturers' explanations of how they designed and supported these activities. The themes were then compared between student and lecturer groups and interpreted in light of Self-Efficacy Theory and Experiential Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984). This allowed the study to see how closely participants' real experiences matched theoretical expectations.

By combining a structured survey with detailed qualitative insights and connecting both to well-known theoretical frameworks, this mixed-method approach aimed to give a strong basis for evaluating how experiential learning affects students' self-confidence and for understanding the role of lecturer support in this process.

4. Findings

4.1. Sample

Table 1 Description of the survey sample

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	108	38
	Female	176	62
Year of study	Year 1	60	21.1
	Year 2	94	33.1
	Year 3	82	28.9
	Year 4	48	16.9
Field of study (major group)	Business and Management	128	45.1
	Economics and Finance	51	18
	Social Sciences and Humanities	63	22.2
	Engineering, Technology and IT	42	14.8
Number of experiential events joined in the last 12 months	1 event	77	27.1
	2–3 events	131	46.1
	4 or more events	76	26.8
Most recent experiential event	Academic seminar	114	40.1
	Career workshop	80	28.2
	Panel discussion	54	19
	Thematic talk / guest lecture	36	12.7

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

The survey includes 284 undergraduate students from Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City. The gender balance is a bit uneven: about 62% are female (176 students) and 38% are male (108 students). This is quite normal in many local universities, where majors like business and social sciences usually have more female students.

For the year of study, the sample has students from all four years. The largest group is second-year students (33.1%), followed by third-year students (28.9%). First-year students account for 21.1%, and final-year students make up 16.9%. This mix helps the study collect opinions from students at different stages of their university life.

In terms of field of study, almost half of the students are in Business and Management (45.1%). Economics and Finance students account for 18.0%, Social Sciences and Humanities for 22.2%, and Engineering, Technology and IT for 14.8%. This matches the profile of a local university that focuses more on applied business and social fields but still has some technical programs.

The results also show that most students have already joined experiential activities. In the last 12 months, about 46.1% joined 2-3 events, 27.1% joined 1 event, and 26.8% joined 4 or more events. This means that most of the students in the sample are not new to experiential learning, which is suitable for studying how these activities relate to self-confidence.

Finally, the most recent experiential activity that students remember is usually an academic seminar (40.1%), followed by career workshops (28.2%). Panel discussions (19.0%) and thematic talks or guest lectures (12.7%) are also quite common. This pattern fits the study context, where the university often organizes structured events that combine academic content with practical and career-related topics.

4.2. Measurement model

Table 2 Scale reliability and convergent validity

Latent construct	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE
Experiential Learning (EL)	0.874	0.881	0.913	0.725
Lecturer Support (LS)	0.886	0.893	0.921	0.744
Self-confidence in their own Capabilities (SC)	0.828	0.833	0.885	0.659

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

All the scales have Cronbach's alpha and CR values higher than 0.7. The CR values of EL (0.913) and LS (0.921) are very high, so their internal reliability is good. The AVE values of EL, LS and SC are 0.725, 0.744 and 0.659, all higher than 0.5. This means that most of the observed variance is explained by the latent factor, so the condition for convergent validity is met.

The interaction term EL × LS is measured by only one item (product indicator). Because of this technical feature, its Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE are equal to 1. The main point is that the loading of this indicator is high (see Table 2). Overall, the scales in the model meet the requirements for reliability and convergent validity according to current PLS-SEM guidelines (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3 Outer loadings

Latent construct / Observed variable	Indicator code	Standardized loading
Experiential Learning (EL)	EL1	0.843
	EL2	0.850
	EL3	0.836
	EL4	0.877
Lecturer Support (LS)	LS1	0.864
	LS2	0.882
	LS3	0.866

	LS4	0.838
Self-confidence (SC)	SC1	0.810
	SC2	0.853
	SC3	0.790
	SC4	0.791
Interaction term	EL × LS	0.871

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

All factor loadings are ≥ 0.79, higher than the recommended threshold of 0.7: EL: 0.836–0.877; LS: 0.838–0.882; SC: 0.790–0.853; and the interaction term EL × LS: 0.871. The cross-loading differences show that each observed variable loads highest on its own latent construct and clearly higher than on the other constructs. This supports unidimensionality. All observed indicators are good representatives of their related theoretical concepts, and they help strengthen the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 4 Discriminant validity

Latent construct	**EL**	**LS**	**EL × LS**	**SC**
EL	0.852			
LS	0.566	0.863		
EL × LS	0.136	0.077	1	
SC	0.327	0.434	0.238	0.812

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

For each construct, the square root of AVE (the bold value on the diagonal) is larger than its correlations with the other constructs in the same row or column. For example, for SC, $\sqrt{AVE} = 0.812$, which is higher than its highest correlations with EL (0.327), LS (0.434) and EL × LS (0.238). This shows that discriminant validity is ensured according to the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Table 5 HTMT values

Construct pair	**HTMT**
EL – LS	0.635
EL – EL × LS	0.144
EL – SC	0.377
LS – EL × LS	0.078
LS – SC	0.500
EL × LS – SC	0.261

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

All HTMT values are below 0.85, which is lower than the recommended threshold of 0.85 (or 0.90, depending on the author). This means the discriminant validity between the concepts is good, and the scales do not overlap in terms of content.

4.3. Structural model

Table 6 Structural model estimation results

Relationship / Dependent variable	Path coefficient (β)	R^2 of dependent variable	f^2 (effect size)
H2: LS → EL	0.566	0.32	0.471 (LS → EL)
H1: EL → SC	0.093	0.236	0.008 (EL → SC)
H3: LS → SC	0.366	0.236	0.119 (LS → SC)
H4: EL × LS → SC (moderating effect)	0.226	0.236	0.050 (EL × LS → SC)

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

Level of explanation (R^2):

- For EL, R^2 = 0.320. This means lecturer support explains about 32% of the variance in students' experiential learning. This is a moderate level, following the suggestion of Chin (1998).
- For SC, R^2 = 0.236. This means EL, LS and the interaction term EL × LS together explain about 23.6% of the differences in students' self-confidence in their own abilities. This is a low-to-medium level, which is acceptable in social and behavioral research.

Size of direct effects (β) and f^2:

- LS → EL (β = 0.566; f^2 = 0.471):
  - This is the strongest effect in the model.
  - $f^2 \approx 0.47 > 0.35$, so the effect size is large. This shows that lecturer support is very important for encouraging students to join and make use of experiential learning activities.
- LS → SC (β = 0.366; $f^2 \approx 0.119$):
  - The path coefficient is positive and of medium size. f^2 is between the small (0.02) and medium (0.15) thresholds.
  - This means that when lecturers give more support, guidance and encouragement, students feel more confident about their abilities. However, the direct effect is only small to medium in strength.
- EL → SC (β = 0.093; $f^2 \approx 0.008$):
  - The coefficient is positive but very small, and f^2 is close to 0. This means the direct effect of experiential learning on self-confidence is weak once we also consider LS and the interaction term.
  - This suggests that for the same experiential activity, it is mainly the way lecturers support and explain it that makes students feel clearly more confident, not the activity alone.
- EL × LS → SC (β = 0.226; $f^2 \approx 0.050$):
  - The coefficient is positive, and $f^2 \approx 0.05$, so the effect size is small but meaningful in practice.
  - The positive direction shows that when lecturer support is high, the effect of experiential learning on self-confidence becomes stronger (a positive moderating effect).
  - In other words, experiential learning "blooms" into higher self-confidence only when it goes together with active support from lecturers.

Multicollinearity and overall model fit:

- The inner VIF values between independent variables in the structural model are all below 1.5 (EL: 1.49; LS: 1.47; EL × LS: 1.02), so there is no serious multicollinearity problem.
- SRMR (Estimated Model) = 0.063 < 0.08 and NFI ≈ 0.863 > 0.8. This shows that the overall fit of the model to the data is acceptable in the PLS-SEM context.

For the measurement model: PLS-SEM analysis shows that all scales achieve good reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.827 to 0.886, composite reliability ranges from 0.885 to 0.921, and all AVE values are above 0.5. The standardized loadings of the observed variables are all higher than 0.79. The Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT values show that each latent construct is clearly distinct from the others, ensuring discriminant validity for the measurement model.

For the structural model: At the structural level, the model explains 32% of the variance in experiential learning and 23.6% of the variance in self-confidence in students' own abilities. Lecturer support has a strong effect on experiential learning (β = 0.566; f^2 = 0.471) and a small-to-medium direct effect on self-confidence (β = 0.366; f^2 = 0.119). The direct effect of experiential learning on self-confidence is quite small (β = 0.093; f^2 = 0.008), while the interaction term EL × LS strengthens this relationship (β = 0.226; f^2 = 0.050). This highlights the central role of lecturer support in turning learning experiences into higher student self-confidence.

4.4. Bootstrapping results

Table 7 Bootstrapping results and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship (path)	β (O)	t	p-value	BCa 95% CI	Conclusion
H1	Experiential Learning → Self-confidence (EL → SC)	0.093	1.280	0.201	−0.054 ; 0.231	Not supported
H2	Lecturer Support → Experiential Learning (LS → EL)	0.566	14.014	0	0.478 ; 0.637	Supported
H3	Lecturer Support → Self-confidence (LS → SC)	0.366	5.346	0	0.226 ; 0.493	Supported
H4	Moderating effect of LS on the EL → SC relationship (EL×LS → SC)	0.226	3.568	0	0.105 ; 0.353	Supported

Source: Data analysis results, 2025

Based on the Bootstrapping results in the table above, only hypothesis H1 is not supported. Its path coefficient β = 0.093 is quite small, the t-value = 1.280 does not pass the 1.96 threshold, and p = 0.201 is larger than 0.05. The 95% BCa confidence interval from −0.054 to 0.231 also includes 0, which means the direct effect of experiential learning on self-confidence in one's abilities is not statistically significant.

In contrast, the other three hypotheses are clearly supported. H2 shows that lecturer support has a strong positive effect on experiential learning, with β = 0.566, t = 14.014, p close to 0, and a fully positive confidence interval. H3 confirms that lecturer support also increases self-confidence, with β = 0.366, t = 5.346 and p close to 0; the confidence interval from 0.226 to 0.493 does not include 0. H4 proves a positive moderating effect of lecturer support in the relationship between experiential learning and self-confidence (β = 0.226, t = 3.568, p ≈ 0.000, confidence interval from 0.105 to 0.353, all positive). This means that when students feel a high level of support from lecturers, the impact of experiential learning on their self-confidence becomes much stronger.

In short, the Bootstrapping results show that the research model highlights the central role of lecturer support. This factor not only directly improves experiential learning and students' self-confidence, but also amplifies the effect of experiential learning on self-confidence. Meanwhile, experiential learning by itself, if separated from lecturer support, is not strong enough to create a clear direct impact on self-confidence in one's abilities.

5. Discussion

The PLS-SEM results show that lecturer support has a strong effect on experiential learning (β = 0.566; f^2 = 0.471) and a small-to-medium direct effect on self-confidence (β = 0.366; f^2 = 0.119), while the direct effect of experiential learning on self-confidence is very small and not statistically significant (β = 0.093; p > 0.05). This is somewhat different from many international studies, which often report a clear direct impact of experiential activities on self-efficacy and career confidence (Kolb, 1984, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Marshall et al., 2008; Pendergast et al., 2024). However, it matches the ideas of Bandura (1977, 1997) and Self-Determination Theory, which say that the way learners are guided, encouraged and helped to "make sense" of their experiences is just as important as the experiences themselves.

In a local university context like Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City, where students have very different backgrounds and starting points, this result suggests that without active support from lecturers, activities such as seminars, talks and workshops mainly stop at the level of "exposure". They are not yet strong enough to turn into a firm

belief in one's own abilities. This is different from some large universities, where students already have many chances to practice and therefore experiential activities alone may produce a stronger direct effect.

The strong support for H2 and H3 adds further evidence to earlier findings about the role of lecturers in modern learning environments. The path LS → EL is consistent with perspectives on supportive learning environments and with the results of Marshall et al. (2008) and Lee and Low (2024). These studies portray lecturers as brokers of opportunities who encourage students and create a sense of psychological safety, which in turn increases both how often and how seriously students engage in experiential activities. In the Vietnamese context, findings by Lê Thị Thu Trang et al. (2022) similarly show that curriculum design, classroom interaction and extracurricular activities are positively associated with students' soft skills and active learning, suggesting that supportive lecturers and learning environments are central to students' participation in developmental and experiential activities.

Similarly, the direct effect of LS on SC is consistent with Self-Efficacy Theory, which stresses the power of "social persuasion" and encouraging feedback from respected figures such as lecturers (Bandura, 1977, 1997). The result is also in line with Lee and Low (2024), who show that students feel more confident in facing academic and career challenges when they receive clear guidance, constructive feedback and emotional support from their teachers. In this model, lecturers are not only a "resource" that pushes students into experience, but also a "meaning filter" that helps students connect those experiences with a positive view of their own abilities.

The result for the interaction EL × LS → SC ($\beta = 0.226$; $f^2 = 0.050$) makes the role of lecturer support even clearer. The positive moderating effect shows that experiential learning really helps self-confidence only when it goes together with high lecturer support. In other words, for the same level of participation in seminars and workshops, students feel more gains in confidence if lecturers prepare them beforehand, support them during the activity and help them "sum up and reflect" afterwards.

This explanation is similar to Kolb's (1984, 2015) argument about the role of guided reflection in the experiential learning cycle, and to the findings of Pendergast et al. (2024), who show that well-designed experiential activities with strong guidance help students develop both skills and confidence. At the same time, the structural model results, with $R^2 = 0.320$ for EL and $R^2 = 0.236$ for SC, show that although the explained variance is in the low-to-medium range typical for social behavior research, a meaningful part of the variance in self-confidence is explained by factors that schools can actually change (such as how they design experiential activities and how lecturers support students). This confirms the practical value of the model.

From these results, some recommendations can be made for the university and lecturers. First, instead of only increasing the number of experiential activities, Hung Vuong University of Ho Chi Minh City should focus on building a "full experiential cycle" with three stages: preparation, participation and reflection, in which lecturers play a key role at all three stages.

Before the activity, lecturers should clearly explain the learning goals, link the event content with course learning outcomes and encourage students to set their own expectations. During seminars and workshops, lecturers should not only introduce the event but also actively connect, ask questions, encourage students to interact with speakers, join group discussions or practice case situations. After the event, lecturers need to take time in class or through online platforms to help students organize what they learned, link it with theory and reflect on changes in their thinking, feelings and confidence.

In addition, the university should offer training programs for lecturers on how to design and lead experiential activities, how to advise and guide students, and how to give encouraging feedback. The school should also create mechanisms to recognize and reward lecturers who actively use experiential learning models linked to career outcomes.

At the student level, the results suggest the need to build a culture of active participation in experiential activities, where every event is seen as a chance to try, fail and learn, which can reduce fear of failure. This can be done through peer mentoring programs, academic clubs and by including process-based assessment that takes into account students' level of participation and reflection after activities.

Limitations and directions for future research

Limitations of this study should be noted. First, the use of cross-sectional data limits causal interpretation. Second, the sample was drawn from a single university, which may constrain the generalisability of the findings to other

institutional contexts. Third, self-reported measures may be subject to common method bias and social desirability. Future studies should replicate the model across multiple universities and academic disciplines, apply longitudinal or experimental designs to strengthen causal inference, and incorporate objective indicators of engagement in experiential activities. Additional moderators and mediators, such as students' prior experience, learning orientation, and perceived relevance of activities, should also be examined to better explain when and for whom experiential learning most effectively enhances self-confidence.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how experiential learning activities organised by a local university contribute to students' self-confidence in their own capabilities and highlighted lecturer support as a critical enabling condition. Using survey evidence from 284 undergraduates and complementary interview insights, the findings show that lecturer support is the strongest driver of students' engagement in experiential learning and is also directly associated with higher self-confidence. Experiential learning, when viewed in isolation, does not produce a clear direct gain in self-confidence; instead, its benefits emerge when lecturers actively guide students through preparation, participation, and reflection. In other words, supportive practices such as clear orientation, encouragement, facilitation of interaction, constructive feedback, and structured debriefing help students interpret challenging experiences as successful learning moments, which then strengthens belief in their own competence. These results imply that universities should prioritise the quality of facilitation rather than only increasing the number of events, and should equip lecturers with practical tools to scaffold students before, during, and after experiential activities. Overall, the study contributes context-specific evidence from Viet Nam and suggests that future work should test the model across multiple institutions and disciplines and, where possible, use longitudinal designs to track confidence development over time. It should also include additional psychological and career variables to explain remaining variance.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Author Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study. All authors were involved in the conceptualization and study design, instrument development, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, manuscript drafting, critical revision of the manuscript, and approved the final version for submission.

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