Learning Approaches : Whether Demographics Matter ? - A Study on Business Management Students

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Abstract

Formal education is a systematic way of equipping the learners with required knowledge and skills to qualify oneself for performing the future assignments in such domains effectively. Business management courses are known for their inter-disciplinary inputs. The students are trained in many functional areas relating to management like finance, human resources, marketing, production, and operations management. This study investigated learning approaches among PG students of business management using the Revised 2- Factor Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) during the academic year 2016-17. The study examined whether the learning approaches of the business management students were related to demographics such as schooling, parental background, and gender. A total of 132 respondents were administered the Biggs 20 items revised 2 Factor Study Process Questionnaire covering surface and deep learning approaches. This study showed that the business management students who had higher aspirations preferred deep approach to surface approach. The study also revealed that either demographic characteristics or social background of the students had no bearing on learning approaches. Thus, this research endeavor brought to light that there is vast scope for influencing learning approaches, and the study would facilitate educators to better align learning approaches, subject content, and students for desired outcomes, irrespective of their demographics.

Keywords : **Bigg's R-SPQ-2F, learning approaches, surface approach, deep approach, business management students, demographic characteristics**

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A general perception of teachers is that students prefer surface to deep approach from an examination point of view. The surface approach requires little effort on the part of the student and results in low retention of knowledge and inability to apply the knowledge. The present engineering and management students are considered to have very little employable skills. With the changing technological advancements, the education landscape has brought out e-learning to the forefront. E-learning in higher education promotes more self-centered aka student-centered education that is faster and flexible than the other learning methods (Aggarwal, 2017). Learning approaches of students do matter in their adoption of the e-learning methods.The SAL model of Biggs

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suggests that the learning approaches of the students can be influenced through better teaching practices. Students can be motivated and stimulated to adopt a deep approach which can qualitatively improve their learning and application skills. The present study was undertaken with a view to understand the learning approaches of business management students of a university based in India.

Marton and Säljo (1976) published a seminal paper that described the manner in which students approached their studies. Marton and Säljo categorized the learning approaches of the students into 'surface approach' (SA) and 'deep approach' (DA). Since then, there has been considerable research at conceptual and empirical levels to understand learning approaches of the students across different cultures, disciplines, and contexts. The research during the last four decades has highlighted the importance of learner and learning processes and led to a redefinition of objectives of learning in terms of learning outcomes rather than teaching inputs (Biggs, 1999 ; Marton & Säljo, 1976; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1997 ; Prosser & Trigwell, 1998). The work of Marton and Säljo became the foundation for the emergence of the conceptual framework 'student approaches to learning' (SAL) theory (Biggs, 1993). The learning model propounded by Biggs explains the students' learning styles as consisting of three stages : input, process, and output, which are interconnected. Curriculum, content, and teaching context form the input variables. The means and techniques adopted by the students to transform the knowledge input into a learning outcome, that is, approaches to learning form the process. Output is the quality or achievement of the students resulting from inputs and processes (Biggs, 1979).

Biggs proposed that the learning approaches differ from student to student. Different learning approaches lead to different learning outcomes or outputs. The distinction between deep and surface approaches has been explained succinctly in a significant work : *Student Approaches to Learning* by Institute for the Advancement of University Learning, University of Oxford. The surface and deep approaches are not fixed learning styles. The learning styles may be reflective of the student's intention. The student may opt for either a "knowledge transforming" orientation or "information reproducing" orientation depending upon the context. For any distinct task, the student cannot adopt both surface and deep approaches. Memorization can be a feature of both surface and deep approaches, but it plays a different role in each of these approaches. According to Biggs, the learning approaches are not stable traits in individuals, although some students will tend towards taking a deep approach, while others will tend towards taking a surface approach. Surface approach has its own relevance. It enables students to meet a variety of learning objectives. Students who prefer a more structured learning environment opt for the surface approach (Fung, 2010). On the other hand, when learners tend to seek meaning and understanding in their learning, deep approach is employed (Kirby, Knapper, Evans, Carty, & Gadula, 2003). The importance of the deep approach lies in enabling the learners to integrate, synthesize, and apply knowledge.

Research in business education is criticized for neglecting the link between students' perceptions of the learning context and their approaches to learning (Lucas, 2001). Students' in-depth knowledge in a subject area can develop research insights and promote them to pursue research in the relevant fields. Role of learning context and the teaching-learning environment are very important to produce sustainable research culture in higher education. Students' proactive involvement and participation are essential to attain this culture in institutions (Choudhury, 2016). Learning approaches of students can unveil their potential and interest towards research. In India, the higher - education systems are undergoing a transformation. The government is in a process to elevate the standards of academic institutes not only to cater to the domestic students and stop the brain drain, but to attract the global students to pursue education in India. The scope for expansion of higher education in this context exists in the business management stream also (Chadha, Rai, & Dugar, 2016).

Business management courses are known for their inter-disciplinary inputs. The students are trained in many functional areas relating to management like finance, human resources, marketing, production, and operations management. The students are expected to gain knowledge from multiple perspectives as well as awareness about themselves. They are also trained to work in groups, lead them, and manage large-scale operations. In view of the diverse nature of training imparted to the students of business management, it will be interesting to examine how

students cope up with the training and the different learning approaches they adopt, and more precisely, what determines their learning approaches and learning outcomes.

Review of Literature

There has been a lot of interest in analyzing student approaches to learning across the world. Deep approach to learning generally leads to greater quality learning outcomes in relation to the surface approach. Gijbels and Dochy (2006) studied the relationship between students' assessment preferences and their approaches to learning. The revised two-factor study process questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) and assessment preferences inventory (API) were used to study the first-year graduate students. Their study revealed that there was greater correlation between differences in assessment preferences and differences in approach to learning.

Parsa and Saketi (2006), in their study, determined an inverse correlation between students' assessment results and their educational performance with respect to the surface approach. They could establish a direct correlation with respect to the deep learning approach. Thus, they concluded that to a great extent, the assessment methods can influence learning approaches. Wilding and Andrews (2006) conducted a longitudinal study, wherein the student responses before admission into a course, during their first year and again in the second year were recorded using the study process questionnaire. The study revealed no significant correlations between the SPQ scores and academic performance of students. Harlen (2007) in the study on student assessment criteria focused on three important dimensions such as behavior change, merit, and making data summary. The study was conducted with several objectives that may have a bearing on the curricular issues and thus which can be applied during the formative and summative assessment of students.

Leung, Mok, and Wong (2008) in their study on the impact of assessment methods on learning approaches of nursing students found a negative relationship between students' academic achievements and their surface learning approach. The study also identified that higher workload of nursing students made a significant decline in deep learning scores and led to higher surface learning scores. Furthermore, the study revealed that students preferred scenarios, role-plays, and case studies as assessment methods, which in their opinion were better for critical thinking and knowledge application. Hamm and Robertson (2010) studied learners' preferences for deep or surface learning among diploma students using the revised two-factor study process questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F). The study also focused on promoting deep learning approaches with the support of multimedia assessment. Their results were indicative that multimedia assessment enabled the adoption of both deep and surface learning approaches among students. Umar and Aliyu (2014) examined the study strategies among business education students. They aimed to bring out the impact of study strategies on their performance in financial accounting. The study concluded that there was a significant impact of study strategies on performance of business education students in financial accounting. The study indicated that students who adopted the deep strategy could perform better than those who adopted the surface strategy.

Lake, Boyd, and Boyd (2017) reviewed the SPQ and R-SPQ instruments and their usage in assessing learning approaches. The revised study process questionnaire is widely used in higher education to identify the learning approaches in different contexts. Hence, understanding its conceptual base and evolution over time helps researchers make better use. Martinelli and Raykov (2017) validated the reliability of the R-SPQ-2F in their evaluation and found the instrument helpful for teachers and learners to diagnose learning approaches and enhance the value of learning.

Objectives of the Study

The study has fourfold objectives :

- To explore the learning approaches of the students in management courses.
- To find out whether management students are predisposed towards any specific learning approach.
- To examine the association between demographic factors and student learning approaches.
- To assess the scope for influencing the learning approaches of the students.

The Study Methodology

Most of the studies on learning approaches have used the study process questionnaire (SPQ) developed by John Biggs (1987). The original SPQ developed by Biggs contained 42-items covering three dimensions towards learning as : surface, deep, and achievement orientation. Later, the 42 - item questionnaire was modified into a 20-item Revised Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) covering surface and deep learning approaches. This study aimed at finding out the learning approaches of the students using the Revised Two Factor Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F). The R-SPQ-2F consists of 20 items with 10 items measuring surface approach to learning and 10 items measuring deep approach to learning. A sample of 132 graduate and post-graduate business management students of a university in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh during the academic year 2016-17 participated in the study.

Analysis and Results

(1) Characteristics of the Respondents : The Table 1 indicates the distribution of the respondents based on their demographic characteristics. Of the 132 respondents, 75 were pursuing undergraduate programme and the remaining were enrolled in the post-graduate programme. A large majority (around 88%) of student respondents studied in English medium. A large proportion of them (80%) hailed from urban and semi-urban localities. Only about 20% of the respondents were from the rural areas. The social mix of the students indicated the predominance of forward castes. Less than 15% of the respondents were from scheduled and backward castes put together.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Respondents

S. No.	Characteristics	Classification	No. of Respondents (*N* = 132)	% Distribution of Respondents
1	**Course**	BBM	75	56.8
		MBA	57	43.2
2	**Medium**	English	116	87.9
		Telugu	16	12.1
3	**Background**	Urban	72	54.5
		Semi-Urban	39	29.5
		Rural	21	15.9
4	**Social Category**	Open Category (OC)	113	85.6
		Backward Caste (BC)	14	10.6
		Scheduled Caste (SC)	5	3.8
		Scheduled Tribe (ST)	0	0
5	**Gender**	Male	74	56.1
		Female	58	43.9

6	**Place of Stay**	Hostel	22	16.7
		Shared Room	8	6.1
		With parents	99	75.0
		With Relatives	3	2.3
7	**Father's Occupation**	Business	59	44.7
		Employee	32	24.2
		Agriculture	22	16.7
		Others	19	14.4
8	**Mother's Occupation**	Home Maker	82	62.1
		Employee	8	6.1
		Business	2	1.5
		Agriculture	8	6.1
		Others	32	24.3
9	**Father's Education Level**	Illiterate	9	6.8
		Schooling	42	31.8
		Intermediate	29	22.0
		Degree	36	27.3
		Higher Studies	16	12.1
10	**Mother's Education Level**	Illiterate	32	24.2
		Schooling	23	17.4
		Intermediate	40	30.3
		Degree	29	22.0
		Higher Studies	8	6.1

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Values for the Subscales

	Cronbach's Alpha	*N* of Items
Deep Motive (DM)	.765	5
Deep Strategy (DS)	.723	5
Surface Motive (SM)	.719	5
Surface Strategy (SS)	.731	5

Among the respondents, 56% were men, while the remaining were women. A majority 75% of the respondents were staying with parents. About 17% of the respondents stayed in hostels, while the remaining stayed in shared rooms and houses of relatives. It was heartening to note that a large proportion of the students were from literate family backgrounds. Most of the parents of the students were well educated, and one of the objectives of the study is to examine the impact of parental background on their learning approaches.

(2) Reliability : Cronbach's alpha values for internal consistency are estimated for the four sub scales - deep motive, deep strategy, surface motive, and surface strategy (Table 2). A Cronbach's alpha value of above 70% indicates good internal consistency. As estimated values are in accordance with the required value, the data set is considered to be internally consistent for further probing and analysis.

Table 3. Correlations Between Scales and Subscales of the Learning Approaches

		Deep Strategy	Surface Motive	Surface Strategy	Deep Approach	Surface Approach
Deep Motive	Pearson Correlation	.462**	-.136	-.151	.842**	-.160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.120	.085	.000	.067
	N	132	132	132	132	132
Deep Strategy	Pearson Correlation		-.106	-.147	.867**	-.140
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.226	.092	.000	.110
	N		132	132	132	132
Surface Motive	Pearson Correlation			.590**	-.141	.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.107	.000
	N			132	132	132
Surface Strategy	Pearson Correlation				-.174*	.869**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.046	.000
	N				132	132
Deep Approach	Pearson Correlation					-.175*
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.045
	N					132

Note : Values with * indicate level of significance at 5% level for corresponding values of *t*. Values with ** indicate level of significance at 1% level for corresponding values of *t*.

Table 4(a). Parameter Wise Mean Scores on Each Scale and Subscale Based on Course, Medium, and Gender

		MEAN VALUES					
Parameter	**Classification**	**Deep Motive**	**Deep Strategy**	**Surface Motive**	**Surface Strategy**	**Deep Approach**	**Surface Approach**
i) Course	BBM	15.87	16.45	12.75	13.13	32.32	25.88
	MBA	15.68	16.47	12.58	13.04	32.16	25.61
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77
ii) Medium	ENGLISH	15.80	16.53	12.39	12.95	32.33	25.34
	TELUGU	15.69	16.00	14.75	14.13	31.69	28.88
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77
iii) Gender	MALE	15.62	16.03	13.27	13.37	31.65	26.64
	FEMALE	16.00	17.02	11.91	12.73	33.02	24.65
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77

(3) Correlations : The correlations between the two approaches and their subscales are given in the Table 3. Deep motive and deep strategy are positively correlated, so are surface motive and surface strategy. As expected, deep motive and deep strategy are negatively correlated with surface motive and surface strategy. Consequently, and more importantly, deep approach and surface approach are negatively correlated. There is a positive correlation between motive and strategy in each construct.

The mean scores for main constructs are deep approach and surface approach and their subscales are presented in the Table 4(a) and Table 4(b). Based on the mean scores, one can safely infer that the students displayed a predominantly deep approach towards learning.

Table 4(b). Parameter Wise Mean Scores on Each Scale and Subscale Based on Social and Parental Background

Parameter	Classification	MEAN VALUES					
		Deep Motive	Deep Strategy	Surface Motive	Surface Strategy	Deep Approach	Surface Approach
iv) Category	OC	15.73	16.28	12.42	13.05	32.01	25.47
	BC	15.79	17.29	14.50	14.11	33.07	28.61
	SC	17.20	18.20	13.20	11.20	35.40	24.40
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77
v) Background	Urban	15.70	16.41	12.04	13.01	32.11	25.05
	Semi urban	15.77	16.79	12.87	12.90	32.56	25.77
	Rural	16.15	16.00	14.60	13.75	32.15	28.35
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77
vi) Parental	Illiterate	16.22	17.56	13.39	13.94	33.78	27.33
Educational	Higher secondary	15.60	15.57	14.12	13.67	31.17	27.79
Background	Intermediate	16.21	17.52	11.93	12.86	33.72	24.79
	Degree	15.50	16.36	11.82	12.43	31.86	24.25
	Post-Graduation	15.94	16.50	11.75	13.00	32.44	24.75
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77
vii) Present place	Hostel	15.64	17.18	12.61	13.27	32.82	25.89
of stay	SharedRoom	13.50	14.00	13.75	13.25	27.50	27.00
	With Parents	16.02	16.56	12.65	13.07	32.58	25.72
	With Relatives	15.33	14.67	11.00	12.00	30.00	23.00
	Total	15.79	16.46	12.67	13.09	32.25	25.77

The mean scores by course (BBM & MBA) for both DA and SA are more or less the same. For example, the mean score for deep approach is 32.32 for BBM ; whereas, for MBA, the same is 32.16. Similarly, the mean score for surface approach is 25.88 for BBM students ; whereas, for MBA course, the same is worked out to be 25.61. In both the streams, DA is the preferred approach.

The mean scores by medium of instruction studied show a different trend. Though DA is the preferred approach for both categories of students, the mean scores of English medium students for DA are slightly higher than those of Telugu medium students. The mean scores of Telugu medium students for surface approach are higher than those of English medium students.

Gender wise examination of mean scores of students reveal a known pattern - scores of women are higher than the scores of men in the case of deep approach, and scores of men are higher than scores of women in the case of surface approach. However, for both genders, deep approach is the preferred approach than the surface approach.

When the mean scores for the two approaches are examined by social category, the results are counter intuitive. Students belonging to the SC category showed a marked preference to deep approach than their counterparts, that is, the other categories. In the case of surface approach, students belonging to the BC category scored higher than their counterparts, that is, other social categories.

The mean scores of the students for deep approach have more or less remained the same even if the background of the students varied. However, in the case of surface approach, students from rural areas recorded higher mean scores than their urban and semi-urban counterparts. Irrespective of the background of the students, the preferred one is ,however, the deep approach.

Another important parameter examined in relation to the students' approaches to learning is the educational background of the parents. Parents of the students are categorized into five categories – illiterate parents, parents with schooling up to higher secondary, intermediate, undergraduate, and post graduate levels. Students with illiterate parental background showed greater inclination for deep approach, followed by students having parents with the highest educational qualification as revealed by the mean scores. The same results are obtained in the case of the surface approach.

An attempt is also made to examine whether the present place of stay of students had any bearing on their approaches to learning. In the case of deep approach : students a) living in the hostel, b) living with parents, c) living with relatives, and d) students sharing with other students recorded high scores in that order. Though students sharing with other students recorded lower mean scores for deep approach, they scored highest scores for surface approach. Those living with relatives scored lowest in the case of surface approach. It is needless to state that deep approach was the preferred approach for the majority of the students in all the four categories.

(4) Study Approaches and Fields of Study : ANOVA tests were performed to explore if mean scores of different approaches for all the fields of study are equal. In all, six parameters were selected.

↳ **Parameter (1) - Medium of Instruction :** The medium of instruction in which the student had studied in the past may have some influence on his/her approaches to learning. It is generally presumed that those students who have studied in private English medium schools may have better approaches to learning than their counterparts who have studied in Telugu medium in government schools. Against this background, the following null hypotheses are formulated :

Table 5. Mean Differences Between Fields of Study and Approaches to Learning - Parameter : Medium of Instruction

			Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Deep Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	.183	1	.183	.019	.890
Medium of	Within Groups	1131.543	1233.877	130	9.491		
Instruction	Total	1133.659	1234.061	131			
Deep Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.888	1	3.888	.350	.555
Medium of	Within Groups	1625.946	1442.922	130	11.099		
Instruction	Total	1626.333	1446.811	131			
Surface Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	78.449	1	78.449	6.319	.013
Medium of	Within Groups	1749.991	1614.043	130	12.416		
Instruction	Total	1829.879	1692.492	131			
Surface Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	19.469	1	19.469	2.224	.138
Medium of	Within Groups	1508.578	1137.940	130	8.753		
Instruction	Total	1537.720	1157.409	131			
Deep Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	5.761	1	5.761	.192	.662
Medium of	Within Groups	3578.679	3908.989	130	30.069		
Instruction	Total	3582.992	3914.750	131			
Surface Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	176.082	1	176.082	5.293	.023
Medium of	Within Groups	4520.190	4324.638	130	33.266		
Instruction	Total	4725.720	4500.720	131			

Table 6. Mean Differences Between Fields of Study and Approaches to Learning - Parameter : Location

			Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Deep Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.218	2	1.609	.169	.845
Location	Within Groups	1103.438	1230.843	129	9.541		
	Total	1130.885	1234.061	131			
Deep Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	8.780	2	4.390	.394	.675
Location	Within Groups	1589.013	1438.030	129	11.148		
	Total	1616.229	1446.811	131			
Surface Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	104.957	2	52.478	4.264	.016
Location	Within Groups	1682.347	1587.536	129	12.306		
	Total	1793.237	1692.492	131			
Surface Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	10.583	2	5.292	.595	.553
Location	Within Groups	1492.092	1146.826	129	8.890		
	Total	1498.550	1157.409	131			
Deep Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	5.487	2	2.743	.091	.914
Location	Within Groups	3536.853	3909.263	129	30.304		
	Total	3559.527	3914.750	131			
Surface Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	170.466	2	85.233	2.539	.083
Location	Within Groups	4423.144	4330.254	129	33.568		
	Total	4574.137	4500.720	131			

↳ **H_{01}:** Medium of instruction may not have any significant influence on student approaches to learning (deep approach).

↳ **H_{02}:** Medium of instruction may not have any significant influence on student approaches to learning (surface approach).

In the Table 5, since 'sig' value 0.662 is more than the *p* - value of 0.05, the null hypothesis H_{01} relating to the deep approach is accepted. As 'sig' value for surface approach is (0.023), which is less than the *p* - value of 0.05, the null hypothesis H_{02} regarding surface approach is accepted. Though the medium of instruction does not have any significant impact on deep approach, it does have some impact on students choosing the surface approach.

↳ **Parameter (2) - Background :** The next parameter chosen is the background of the students. It is postulated that students hailing from the urban areas may have better exposure and better motivation to choose deep approach than their counterparts from the rural and semi-urban areas. To examine these presumptions, the following null hypotheses are tested :

↳ **H_{03}:** Background of the student will have no bearing on students choosing the deep approach to learning.

↳ **H_{04}:** Background of the student will have no bearing on students choosing the surface approach to learning.

In the Table 6, since the 'sig' values for both the approaches are more than the *p* - value of 0.05, the null hypotheses H_{03} and H_{04} are accepted (the 'sig' values are 0.914 and 0.083, respectively for the deep and surface approaches).

Table 7. Mean Differences Between Fields of Study and Approaches to Learning - Parameter : Social Category of Students

			Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Deep Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	10.408	2	5.204	.549	.579
Category	Within Groups	1120.768	1223.653	129	9.486		
	Total	1133.659	1234.061	131			
Deep Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	28.215	2	14.108	1.283	.281
Category	Within Groups	1491.746	1418.595	129	10.997		
	Total	1626.333	1446.811	131			
Surface Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	55.082	2	27.541	2.170	.118
Category	Within Groups	1780.560	1637.411	129	12.693		
	Total	1829.879	1692.492	131			
Surface Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	32.538	2	16.269	1.866	.159
Category	Within Groups	1520.000	1124.872	129	8.720		
	Total	1537.720	1157.409	131			
Deep Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	65.630	2	32.815	1.100	.336
Category	Within Groups	3365.254	3849.120	129	29.838		
	Total	3582.992	3914.750	131			
Surface Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	132.010	2	66.005	1.949	.147
Category	Within Groups	4614.295	4368.710	129	33.866		
	Total	4725.720	4500.720	131			

Table 8. Mean Differences Between Fields of Study and Approaches to Learning - Parameter : Gender of Students

			Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Deep Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	4.655	1	4.655	.492	.484
Gender	Within Groups	1131.041	1229.405	130	9.457		
	Total	1133.659	1234.061	131			
Deep Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	31.882	1	31.882	2.929	.089
Gender	Within Groups	1576.302	1414.929	130	10.884		
	Total	1626.333	1446.811	131			
Surface Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	59.829	1	59.829	4.764	.031
Gender	Within Groups	1737.664	1632.664	130	12.559		
	Total	1829.879	1692.492	131			
Surface Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	13.271	1	13.271	1.508	.222
Gender	Within Groups	1533.566	1144.138	130	8.801		
	Total	1537.720	1157.409	131			
Deep Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	60.902	1	60.902	2.054	.154
Gender	Within Groups	3553.234	3853.848	130	29.645		
	Total	3582.992	3914.750	131			
Surface Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	129.455	1	129.455	3.850	.052
Gender	Within Groups	4590.209	4371.264	130	33.625		
	Total	4725.720	4500.720	131			

↳ **Parameter (3) - Social Category of Students :** The students belonged to different social categories - SC, BC, and OC categories. SCs are generally considered to be on the lower strata of the social ladder, BCs in the middle strata, and OCs on the top of the ladder. It is generally assumed that the students belonging to OC category by aptitude and training are better placed to adopt a deep approach to learning when compared to BC and SC categories. Hence, the social background of the students may have a positive impact on the students choosing either of the approaches. The following null hypotheses are tested to examine the phenomenon :

↳ **H_{05}:** The social background of the student will not have a bearing on the deep approach of the student.

↳ **H_{06}:** The social background of the student will not have a bearing on the surface approach of the student.

In the Table 7, the 'sig' value for deep approach is 0.336, while for the surface approach, the value is 0. 147. Since both the values are higher than the *p* - value of 0.05, the null hypotheses H_{05} and H_{06} are accepted.

↳ **Parameter (4) - Gender of Students :** There can be differences between students - both men and women in their learning approaches. The male students may have marked preference for surface learning, while the female students may have revealed preference for deep learning. An attempt is made to examine the gender differences among students on their approaches to learning. The following null hypotheses are formulated and tested against the evidence :

↳ **H_{07}:** Gender differences may not have any impact on deep approach to learning.

↳ **H_{08}:** Gender differences may not have any impact on surface approach to learning.

In the Table 8, for both the approaches, the 'sig' values are more than the *p* - value of 0.05. For the deep approach, the 'sig' value is 0.154, and for the surface approach, the value is 0.052. Hence, the null hypotheses H_{07} and H_{08} both are accepted.

↳ **Parameter (5) - Place of Stay :** Students who live with their parents may be better motivated to be serious learners, while the students living in the hostels or independently with friends may be surface learners. These presumptions are tested by formulating appropriate null hypotheses :

↳ **H_{09}:** Place of stay does not have any impact on students choosing the deep approach.

↳ **H_{010} :** Place of stay does not have any impact on students choosing the surface approach.

In the Table 9, since 'sig' values for both surface approach and deep approach are more than the *p* - value of 0.05, the null hypotheses H_{09} and H_{010} regarding present stay of students and their learning approaches are accepted.

↳ **Parameter (6) - Parental Education :** Parental awareness and educational levels will normally have significant impact on students' choices in learning approaches. Parental inputs and guidance may motivate students to choose the deep approach to learning rather than the surface approach to learning. The following null hypotheses are tested :

↳ **H_{011}:** Parental education does not have any impact on students choosing the deep approach.

↳ **H_{012}:** Parental education does not have any impact on students choosing the surface approach.

Table 9. Mean Differences Between Fields of Study and Approaches to Learning - Parameter : Present Place of Stay

			Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Deep Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	48.343	3	16.114	1.740	.162
Place of Stay	Within Groups	1079.193	1185.717	128	9.263		
	Total	1133.659	1234.061	131			
Deep Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	70.427	3	23.476	2.183	.093
Place of Stay	Within Groups	1581.501	1376.384	128	10.753		
	Total	1626.333	1446.811	131			
Surface Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	17.799	3	5.933	.453	.715
Place of Stay	Within Groups	1816.819	1674.693	128	13.084		
	Total	1829.879	1692.492	131			
Surface Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	4.540	3	1.513	.168	.918
Place of Stay	Within Groups	1517.035	1152.869	128	9.007		
	Total	1537.720	1157.409	131			
Deep Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	213.295	3	71.098	2.459	.066
Place of Stay	Within Groups	3421.338	3701.455	128	28.918		
	Total	3582.992	3914.750	131			
Surface Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	35.643	3	11.881	.341	.796
Place of Stay	Within Groups	4675.511	4465.077	128	34.883		
	Total	4725.720	4500.720	131			

Table 10. Mean Differences Between Fields of Study and Approaches to Learning - Parameter : Parental Educational Levels

			Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Deep Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	11.690	4	2.922	.304	.875
Parental	Within Groups	1124.372	1222.371	127	9.625		
Educational Level	Total	1133.659	1234.061	131			
Deep Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	76.756	4	19.189	1.779	.137
Parental	Within Groups	1542.029	1370.055	127	10.788		
Educational Level	Total	1626.333	1446.811	131			
Surface Motive *	Between Groups	(Combined)	148.260	4	37.065	3.048	.019
Parental	Within Groups	1683.242	1544.232	127	12.159		
Educational Level	Total	1829.879	1692.492	131			
Surface Strategy *	Between Groups	(Combined)	37.829	4	9.457	1.073	.373
Parental	Within Groups	1481.359	1119.580	127	8.816		
Educational Level	Total	1537.720	1157.409	131			
Deep Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	139.325	4	34.831	1.172	.326
Parental	Within Groups	3466.655	3775.425	127	29.728		
Educational Level	Total	3582.992	3914.750	131			
Surface Approach *	Between Groups	(Combined)	320.140	4	80.035	2.431	.051
Parental	Within Groups	4362.412	4180.580	127	32.918		
Educational Level	Total	4725.720	4500.720	131			

In the Table 10, since the 'sig' values are more than the *p* - value of 0.05 for both the approaches, the null hypotheses H_{011} and H_{012} regarding parental education levels and their wards' approaches to learning are accepted.

Managerial Implications

Learning approaches can be influenced and modified. Students can be encouraged or discouraged to go with a particular learning approach. One learning approach may not find consistency with all the subjects and courses the student undertakes. A combination of one or more learning approaches may even be adopted by the student on different parts of the same subject. It is important to understand the potential for variabilities in learning approaches, thus prompting the business management students and educators to adopt multiple approaches to learning.

Teachers, in general, believe that there are 'deep' students and 'surface' students. Yet, research has produced different evidences. A student, who takes a deep approach to one subject, or even part of a subject, may take a surface approach in relation to something else. Thus, students' approaches can vary according to students' perceptions of their learning environment. Creating a desired learning environment is essential in business management education. The way the business management courses are designed and delivered to students and the methods of testing can significantly influence the learning approaches of the students.

Describing the students as either deep or surface learners may not be helpful to the process of learning activity. The terms deep and surface refer to their approaches, but not to them. From the perspective of the students in certain circumstances of learning, a surface approach may be more appropriate than a deep approach. One should be careful while interpreting the results because learning approaches are just a pragmatic reaction to the context of learning. Much depends upon the institutional framework and the teachers as well as their methods of teaching and testing to motivate the students to become serious learners who can understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create knowledge. Role of managerial teams and academic executives of B-schools is vital to bring the right context of learning in business management education.

Conclusion

The present study with fourfold objective tries to explore student approaches in business management courses. A total of 132 respondents were administered the Biggs 20 items Revised 2 Factor Study Process Questionnaire covering surface and deep learning approaches. Biggs and others through their studies showed that the students in tertiary institutions have a marked preference for surface learning. The predisposition for surface approach has been brought out by many researchers (Biggs, 1987 ; Gow & David, 1990 ; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001; Rodriguez & Cano, 2007). However, the present study has shown that the business management students who had higher aspirations preferred the deep approach to the surface approach. The study also reveals that demographic characteristics or social background of the students had no bearing on the learning approaches. Hence, the learning environment in educational institutions becomes crucial both in influencing learning approaches and the learning environment. The results of the study thus have wider policy implications to improve the learning environment.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study was undertaken during the academic year 2016-17 in one institution confined to the select 132 students. Biggs 20 items Revised 2 Factor Study Process Questionnaire was employed to collect the data. In that way, the results of the study were interpreted carefully. Yet, this study opens up possibilities for further studies in view of its

importance. Similar studies have to be undertaken with larger samples covering a number of institutions, students, and courses to explore the subjective and objective perspectives of learning scenarios.

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