

The Effectiveness of Work-Based Learning Via Classroom Workshop Exercises in Teaching Company Secretaries' Subject

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i9/28023>

Published Date: 30 September 2026

Abstract

Work-based learning for university students becomes vital due to the real experiences and skills gained while learning, rather than focusing on concepts and theories. Graduates with the necessary early and job-related skills are able to enhance their graduate employability and meet industry demands. As potential company secretaries, the graduates are expected to have a better understanding of the company's governance and administration skills, such as incorporating a company and submitting necessary forms to the regulators. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the classroom workshop's exercise in the teaching of the company secretarial subject. The sample for this study is 47 bachelor's degree students who are learning the company secretarial subject at a public university in Malaysia. The students selected in the sample have completed at least four (4) workshops. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations and multiple regression. The results show that the last two stages of Kolb's model, which are abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, can enhance students' effectiveness in learning the subject. This study contributes to the field of study by highlighting the vital components of experiential learning that can be embedded in classroom activities. Thus, collaboration between academia and industry ensures the curriculum is updated with the new knowledge and skills required by industry.

Keywords: Work-Based Learning, Experiential Learning, Company Secretary, Teaching Methodology, Classroom Workshop

Introduction

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is among the prominent pedagogical approach that integrates academic study with work experience, primarily occurring through and at the workplace. It is designed to bridge the gap between formal education and the job market demands by focusing on the application of knowledge and skills among students within real-world contexts. The development of WBL as a distinct field of study at the higher education level

has been emerged from initiatives in the early 1990s, and it is characterised by a learner-centred, negotiated and often transdisciplinary nature (Garnett, 2016). WBL is conceptualised with a framework that is grounded in experiential learning theories, where it proposes that individuals acquire and retain knowledge most effectively through direct experience and reflection (Autsadee & Phanphichit, 2025). Within this framework, the actual environment experienced by the student dictates the depth of learning (Ngonda & Ngonda, 2025). Consequently, the overall quality of this experiential learning is heavily shaped by environmental factors such as structured mentorship, realistic task assignments, and professional social dynamics (Ngonda & Ngonda, 2025).

The need for implementation of WBL frameworks is particularly evident in most professional programmes, including corporate governance and company secretarial subjects. Historically, the profession of company secretary is viewed as a purely administrative or clerical function. However, the modern company secretary's role has shifted dramatically into a strategic, high-level advisory position that is essential to boardroom decision-making and ensuring the company's compliance. As corporate environments face increasingly volatile regulatory shifts, emerging artificial intelligence ecosystems, and complex statutory frameworks, the modern company secretaries need to be able to respond to these complexities. Non-compliance particularly legal and financial will carry severe penalties for companies and their officers. To protect institutional integrity, a company secretary must possess not only technical legal expertise but also the advanced behavioural, strategic, and high-stakes advisory and negotiation skills to manage and deal with various parties, especially the board of directors. Higher education institutions must therefore prepare students to handle these complex and real-world business dynamics before graduation.

Despite the documented need for practical preparation in corporate governance and company secretarial studies, a critical pedagogical gap remains in terms of how WBL is operationalised. Historically, the vast majority of literature and academic implementation of WBL has focused almost exclusively on external practical training such as off-campus internships or cooperative placements (Garnett, 2016). Although these external placements are undeniably valuable to students, it occurs entirely outside the university, which means that the learning process exists beyond direct institutional control. This situation introduces immense variability in learning quality, as students' experiences are highly correlated with unpredictable workplace dynamics, varying mentorship quality or superficial task assignments (Jackson, 2014; Fleming & Hay, 2021).

Furthermore, the literature, including Jackson (2015) and Musa (2025), highlights that relying solely on unstructured external internships often fails to guarantee that every student will experience a relevant and complex decision-making situation, such as managing a high-stakes board crisis due to the inherent variability and unpredictable nature of their work environment and employer (Valencia-Forrester, 2020). On the contrary, there is a notable lack of research and empirical implementation regarding in-class work-based learning specifically utilising controlled, simulation-based classroom workshop exercises (Reedy et al., 2020; Thi Ngoc Ha, 2023). Recent educational findings demonstrate that embedding board-level and corporate simulation games directly into institutional frameworks significantly amplifies student engagement, critical reflection, and analytical capability by safely mirroring complex corporate pressures (Ferreira et al., 2021; Hsu & Wu, 2023).

Accordingly, this study examines classroom workshop exercises as a structured WBL mechanism in company secretarial education. Drawing on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the study considers four experiential learning dimensions, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation, and their relationship to students' perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises. By examining WBL within the classroom, rather than solely through external workplace placements, the study extends WBL to a structured learning environment that simulates company secretarial practice. Further, this study focuses on final-year (Year 3) bachelor's degree students who are approaching graduation and transition into employment. This study is guided by the following research objectives:

Research Objective 1: To examine the perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises.

Research Objective 2: To identify the factors that may influence the effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises using Kolb's experiential learning model.

Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

The increasing complexity of corporate governance, digital reporting, regulatory compliance, and board accountability has intensified the demand for company secretarial graduates who possess technical competence, ethical awareness, professional judgement, and workplace readiness. The evolving roles of a company secretary or chartered governance professional are no longer limited to administrative tasks, but also include governance advisory responsibilities, board support, ethical oversight, regulatory interpretation, and risk-sensitive decision-making (Chu May-Amy et al., 2020; Kakabadse et al., 2016; Singh & Singh, 2022). Consequently, higher education institutions must move beyond transfer-based knowledge by providing students with opportunities to practise company secretarial work-based activities before entering the work environment.

Work-Based Learning in Higher Education

Work-Based Learning is broadly acknowledged as an educational approach that integrates academic learning with practice-oriented experiences. In higher education, WBL supports the development of employability by facilitating students to apply disciplinary knowledge to tasks that resemble professional work environments (Garnett, 2016). Although traditional WBL is often associated with internships, apprenticeships, and workplace placements, the quality of such experiences may vary depending on supervision, task relevance, workplace culture, and the extent of student participation (Ngonda & Ngonda, 2025). Therefore, structured classroom-based WBL can provide a more consistent pedagogical alternative by allowing lecturers to design authentic, assessable, and discipline-specific learning activities within the university setting.

Simulation-based learning complements WBL by allowing students to rehearse professional tasks in a structured and low-risk environment. In higher education, simulations can promote engagement, analytical thinking, decision-making, and confidence because students are required to respond to realistic scenarios rather than passively receive information (Kerridge & Simpson, 2021; Khalil et al., 2024; Sheikh et al., 2023). For company secretarial education, classroom workshops can simulate corporate events such as company incorporation, changes in the company secretary, changes in directors, and annual return preparation. These activities expose students to procedural accuracy, compliance deadlines, documentation

requirements, and governance responsibilities. As a result, simulation-based workshops provide a practical mechanism for developing the technical and professional skills expected of future company secretaries.

Experiential Learning Theory and Classroom Workshops

The theoretical foundation of this study focuses on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. The theory conceptualises learning as a cyclical process in which knowledge is generated through the transformation of experience, moving through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is relevant in promoting deeper learning, practical reasoning, and measurable learning outcomes across different educational contexts (Ananda et al., 2026; Henríquez et al., 2025; Molnar et al., 2026; Wei et al., 2025) as depicted in Figure 1. This model is particularly appropriate for the company secretarial practice course because students must not only understand the statutory provisions of the Companies Act 2016, Bursa Malaysia Listing Requirements, Capital Market and Services Act 2007, and Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance, but also apply them when preparing documentation. Besides, students must ensure that the process for preparing the secretarial documents adheres to the timelines and incorporates board-related advice and professional decision-making. These simulated hands-on secretarial classroom activities are aligned with the four processes of Kolb's experiential learning.

The first stage of concrete experience requires students to engage directly with a simulated practical task. In this study, concrete experience occurs when students complete company secretarial exercises such as incorporating a company, preparing documentation for changes in the company secretary and directors, and preparing annual returns. This stage is important because experiential learning is most effective when learners encounter tasks that resemble the complexity of professional practice rather than merely receiving academic explanations (Ananda et al., 2026; Henríquez et al., 2025).

After completing the practical task, students engaged in reflective observation by reviewing their performance, identifying mistakes during document preparation, evaluating the accuracy of the completed documents, and considering feedback from lecturers. Reflection is central to experiential learning because it enables learners to transform experience into awareness and develop an understanding of their decision-making processes (Molnar et al., 2026). For the company secretarial course, this stage strengthens students' attention to detail, compliance awareness, and ability to evaluate the professional consequences of documentation or procedural errors.

The third stage of abstract conceptualisation requires students to connect their workshop experiences with legal principles, statutory timelines, governance codes, and professional standards. Any mistakes made while completing the tasks serve as a basis for deeper conceptual understanding. This process requires students to explain why a particular procedure is necessary and how non-compliance may affect the company, its directors, and stakeholders. This process supports deeper learning by expecting students to integrate experience with company secretarial knowledge (Henríquez et al., 2025; Wei et al., 2025).

The final stage involves active experimentation in which students apply refined knowledge to more complex tasks. In this study, active experimentation occurs when students use feedback from the lecturer and their conceptual understanding to complete subsequent workshop exercises with increasing independence. Simulation-based learning research suggests that repeated cycles of practice and application can improve practical competence, confidence, and future-oriented problem-solving skills (Khalil et al., 2024; Sheikh et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2025).

Development of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was developed to address a pedagogical gap in company secretarial education, particularly the limited use of structured classroom-based WBL activities to replicate professional practice. As shown in Figure 2, the conceptual framework positions classroom workshop exercises as an active WBL intervention in company secretarial education. The framework is grounded in the four dimensions of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. These dimensions represent the experiential process through which student engage with simulated professional tasks, reflect on their performance, connect their experiences with relevant concepts and apply their learning in subsequent activities.

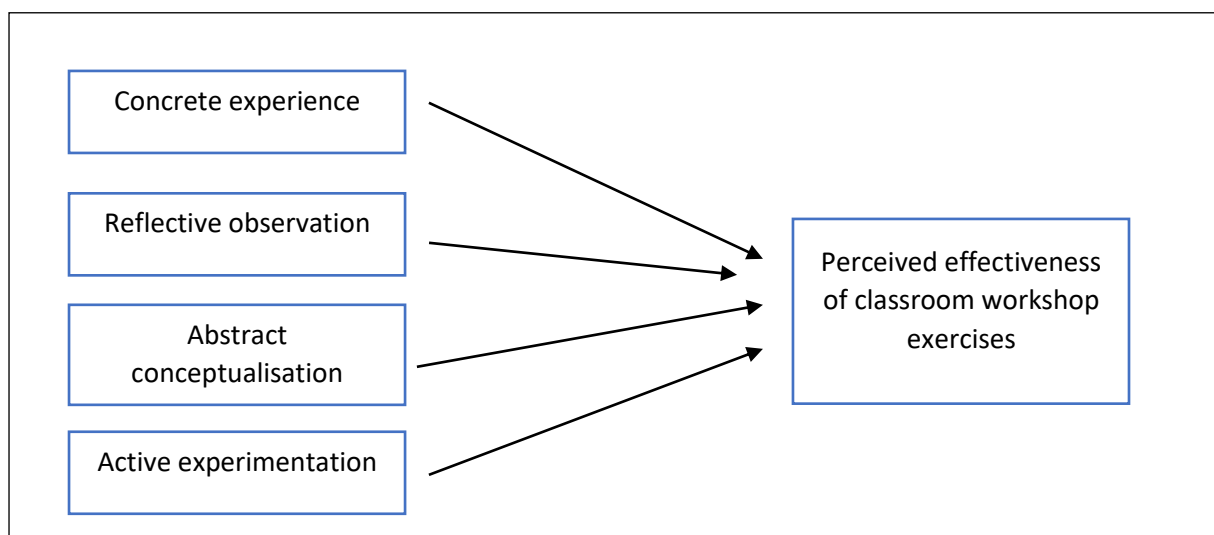


Figure 2 Conceptual framework

In the present study, the four experiential learning dimensions are examined in relation to the perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises. Perceived effectiveness reflects students' evaluation of the extent to which the workshops support their learning in terms of competency development, skill acquisition, engagement and overall satisfaction. Using the

framework provides a structured basis for examining whether classroom-based WBL can prepare students more effectively for the professional demands of governance, compliance, and board support roles (Chu May-Amy et al., 2020; Kakabadse et al., 2016; Singh & Singh, 2022).

Methodology

This research employed quantitative research to explore the relationship between work-based learning by using classroom workshop exercises. The quantitative research approach would allow a greater understanding of the extent to which the teaching methodology used by lecturers in class via classroom workshop exercises has an influence on the learning outcomes. This study used purposive sampling by getting the response from the students who are enrolled on the company secretarial practices subject. The total sample size for this study is 47 bachelor's degree students of corporate administration from Universiti Teknologi MARA. Section A of the questionnaire provides demographic profiles of respondents such as gender, semester and prior educational background.

Kolb's Experiential Learning components as independent variables were used to examine the extent of work-based learning in classroom exercises. There are five items in the questionnaire for each component: concrete experience (5 items), reflective observation (5 items), abstract conceptualisation (5 items), and active experimentation (5 items). The dependent variable of this study is the perceived effectiveness of classroom exercises, which measures students' perception of the impact of classroom exercises towards their competency, skills acquired and satisfaction. There are 8 statement items developed to measure the perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises. The Five-point Likert Scale was used to respond to each statement for independent and dependent variables (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of this study is presented in Figures 3-5. The total number of respondents in this study is 47 students. Of the 47 respondents, 74.5% are female, and 25.5% are male. Based on the respondents' current semester, 59.6% are in semester 6 and 40.4% are in semester 5. The majority of the respondents came from a diploma in public administration (40.4%), followed by other diplomas (34%) and a diploma in corporate administration (25.5%).

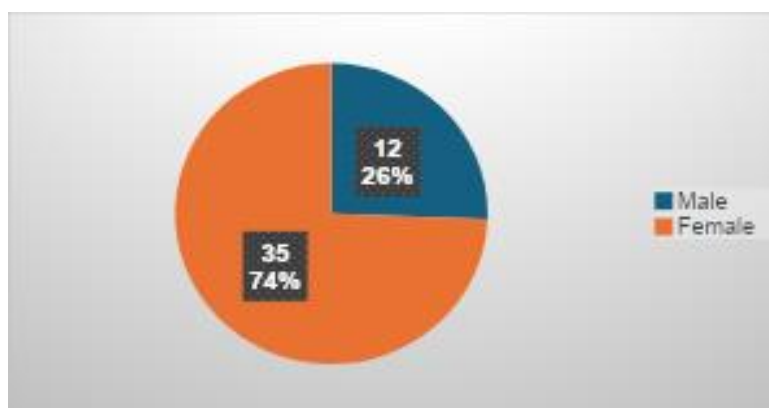


Figure 3 Gender

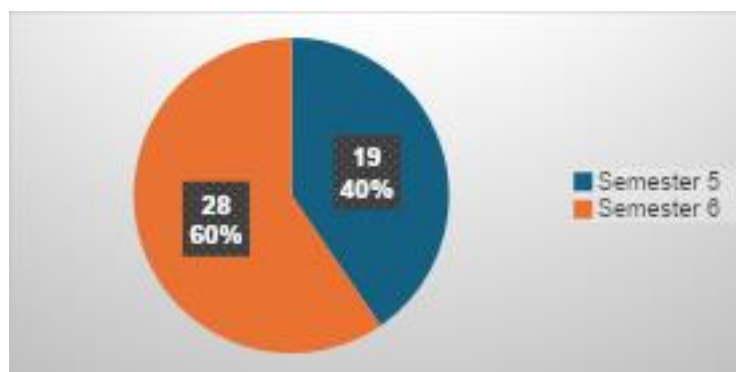


Figure 4 Semester

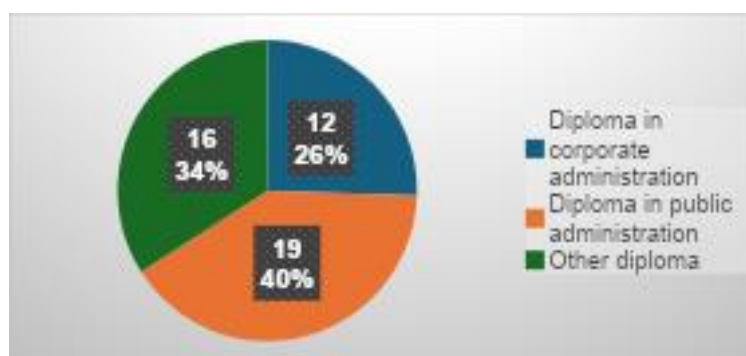


Figure 5 Prior educational background

Results and Discussion

The graph in Figure 6 illustrates the students' perception of the effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises as a medium of work-based learning. The highest score, with a mean value of 4.38, the workshop activities, which improved their competency in legal procedures. The students would also recommend more workshop-based learning for the company secretarial subject (mean = 4.34). The students also perceived that the workshop approach can enhance their learning experience and critical skills (mean = 4.28). It was followed by the workshop activities, which can enhance their engagement in learning (mean = 4.17). Lastly, the students found that classroom workshop exercises are more effective than traditional lectures (mean = 4.15). Overall, the students have a high perception of the effective functions of classroom workshop exercises in the learning of the company secretaries' subject.



Figure 6 Perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises

The second objective of this study was to identify the factors that influence the perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises using Kolb's experiential learning model. Several statistical analyses were applied to test the relationship between work-based learning components and the effective function of classroom workshop exercises. The first analysis used correlation analysis in order to see the direction between independent variables (work-based learning) and dependent variables (effective function of classroom exercises) in Table 1. The results showed a strong and positive relationship between concrete experience and perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises ($r=0.864$, $p<0.01$). The reflective observation also showed a strong and positive relationship with perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises ($r=0.879$, $p<0.01$).

Table 1
Correlation table

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Perceived effectiveness	-				
Concrete experience	.864**	-			
Reflective observation	.879**	.852**	-		
Abstract conceptualisation	.918**	.927**	.905**	-	
Active experimentation	.904**	.812**	.868*	.883**	-

** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

Similarly, this study showed a strong and positive relationship between abstract conceptualisation and perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises ($r=0.918$, $p<0.01$). The last component of work-based learning, which is active experimentation, also showed a strong and positive relationship with perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises ($r=0.904$, $p<0.01$). As referred to Table 2, the multiple regression analysis showed that only abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation have an influence on perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises. The most contributing factor is active experimentation with B value 0.383 and p-value <0.05 . The abstract conceptualisation is the other contributing factor with the B value 0.355 and p-value <0.05 . The results indicate that the last two components of work-based or experiential learning allow students to be actively involved in the workshop activities and receive less or no guidance from the lecturers.

As referred to in Table 2, the multiple regression analysis showed that only abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation have an influence on the perceived effectiveness of classroom workshop exercises. The most contributing factor is active experimentation, with B-value of 0.383 and p-value <0.05 . Abstract conceptualisation is the other contributing factor with the B-value 0.355 and p-value <0.05 . The results indicate that the last two components of work-based or experiential learning allow students to be actively involved in the workshop activities with less or no guidance from the lecturers. The result indicates that having higher involvement of students in the activities can enhance students' learning experience and develop more skill sets. Thus, it suits the experiential learning concepts that experiential learning in higher education helps students to develop their career management capacities, adaptability, and readiness towards workplace standards (Nguyen, 2026). Overall, the cycle of Kolb's experiential learning determined the ratio between students' involvement in the activities and the lecturer's guidance or supervision.

Table 2

Multiple regression table

Variables	Beta	Std. Error	t	p
Concrete experience	0.102	0.142	0.720	0.475
Reflective observation	0.118	0.141	0.834	0.409
Abstract conceptualisation	0.355	0.173	2.057	0.046*
Active experimentation	0.383	0.117	3.284	0.002**
R ² -value	0.886			
Model Sig.	0.000			

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

Conclusion

In the era of advancement, the future generation is required to adapt to 21st-century skills to face adversity in the real world, regardless of gender or level of study. This can be achieved through Work Based Learning (WBL) or business simulation in the teaching system in the higher education institution as both of these methods are perceived as the effective tool that can benefits the students as previous studies by Sheikh et al. (2023) and Khalil et al. (2024), had shown positive relationship between this method and student's soft skill aside of helping to improve the educational experience. On the other hand, according to the study by Outsadee and Phanphichit (2025), WBL has the capacity to offer an exclusive value in teaching, where it helps students to have hands-on experience, which results in the enhancement of career readiness and allows networking along with good problem-solving skills in terms of real-world prospects. Therefore, this study contributes to the WBL scope by examining the effectiveness of the classroom workshop exercise using the WBL mechanism in company secretarial studies. This is because company secretarial studies deal with constant regulatory changes, which lead to complexity in this subject. In the past, WBL tended to rely on the internship phase for students to experience real-world dynamics. However, by adopting a simulation-based classroom environment, this paper highlights that practical exercises can help students deal with compliance procedures, such as filling out a form for the incorporation of a company, during the tutorial session.

Based on the data analysis in this paper, the results show that students tend to lean toward classroom workshop exercises rather than the traditional teaching format. This was supported by Garnett (2016), who stated that real-life issues do not align well with traditional methods. Moreover, the results show that students prefer workshop-based learning to improve their skills in legal procedures and suggest that more elements of workshop-based learning be included in the course. Besides that, based on Kolb's Experiential Learning model, it is shown that active experimentation acts as the most influential factor among the four components, which indicates that the students favour exercises that physically execute the task during the workshop session with the guidance of the lecturer as part of an active learning session during the tutorial. Hence, the WBL approach in teaching can diminish disparities between formal education and the job market, and this approach can be improved by making a proper amendment on the company secretarial subject by blend the simulation into the formal assessment as it can encourage collaboration between industry practitioner and academy institute as it can help the academicians to fully aware on the constant shift in the regulatory aspect of company secretarial practice.

For future research, it is highly recommended to broaden the sample size by conducting a mixed-methods study to identify the long-term effect of WBL on employability after graduation. In conclusion, the outcome of this study reflects that WBL allow students to experience the real life situation which allows the students to be industry-ready when it comes to boardroom and secretarial practice complexity by applying workshop exercises such as handling mock meetings and filling the forms needed in the process, as the data retrieved from this study indicate that WBL exert a beneficial effect on students' learning process, which it align with the evolution of the company secretarial role in the corporate sector in this dynamic environment.

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