

# ENHANCING STUDENT LEARNING THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH EXPERIMENT WITH THE SELECTED GROUP OF BUSINESS STUDENTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Both the intrinsic and extrinsic values of the teaching are long established as important metrics to measure the effectiveness of teaching practices in higher education across the globe. In this context, the enhancement of pedagogical practice through reflection and research into practice has remained the core to develop tutor's capability to effectively teach and facilitate learning in present day higher education. Business management higher education is no exception. Here also, the significance of action research as a method of revelation, instruction and improvement and as the realization of technical skills, application of the concepts and facilitation of learning, is hard to over-emphasise. In the present action research project, unit 4.5 on marketing of the ATHE Business level 4 curriculum has been chosen for intervention and experimentation. The unit has been introduced for the first time and is the first unit of marketing, that must be taught to the students. As the students did not have any prior knowledge and understanding on the subject, it was indeed challenging for the tutor to make them understand, learn and to develop a clear concept on the subject by ensuring better learning experience. A total number of sixteen students enrolled with the course was chosen for the entire project. During the initial two sessions, the tutor used traditional lecture method, but that failed to generate much impact on the student and this was visible in the class reactions and responses. The same could have been supported through the MCQ test result and the standard feedback collected through questionnaire. As, case study linked problem based teaching is widely considered as an effective method for better business student learning experience across the globe and the literature also supports the same, the same was attempted in the class. Four different cases on well known brands were chosen and mapped with the indicative contents and learning outcomes and were administered in the class for class discussion and analysis. Thus the process based curriculum delivery approach or model was adopted. The tutor also subsequently used MCQ tests designed according to the specific indicative contents covered in the respective cases. Standard student feedback questionnaire was also used along with. Since, the intervention of case study linked problem based learning and teaching was adopted, the average and mode score of the MCQ tests were found to be improved and during the seventh, ninth and twelfth weeks such improvement was quite significant. The feedback collected through the standard questionnaire also shown significant improvement in student learning experience during the period. From the results of this experiment, the tutor realised to adopt this new technique of incorporating case study linked problem based teaching and learning as the effective curriculum for teaching intervention. The tutor also planned to recommend to the awarding body, i.e. the ATHE, to identify the specific cases to be taught in line with specific indicative contents and learning outcomes and to make such practice mandatory in future. A continuous evaluation through feedback collection and through tests (including MCQ tests) have also been recommended.

**Keywords:** *Student learning, Problem based teaching, Action Research experiment*

## **Introduction**

Both the intrinsic and extrinsic values of the teaching are long established as important metrics to measure the effectiveness of teaching practices in higher education across the globe (Atkinson and Bolt, 2010). In this context, the enhancement of pedagogical practice through reflection and research into practice has remained the core to develop tutor's capability to effectively teach and facilitate learning in present day higher education. Business management higher education is no exception. Here also, the significance of action research as a method of revelation, instruction and improvement and as the realization of technical skills, application of the concepts and facilitation of learning, is hard to over-emphasise (Willcoxon, 1994).

Awards for Training and Higher Education (ATHE) is an Ofqual regulated awarding organisation providing QCF qualifications to over 200 centres around the world (ATHE, 2018). One of the most popular streams, on which ATHE offers properly accredited qualifications, is business management. In the present research project, ATHE level 4 business programme has been chosen and a specific unit, i.e. unit 4.5 on marketing mix has remained the area of action research intervention. Here, action research has been adopted mainly with three key broader objectives such as curriculum enhancement, pedagogical improvement, more effective student learning experience through enhanced student engagement. Such essentialities were realized during the initial sessions as the learners were found the specific unit curriculum more theoretical and less engaging. Such experiences were also captured by the tutor through specific techniques (discussed in chapter 4) as the unit was chosen correctly for its first ever introduction as a separate module. In the process, the specific problem based teaching approach has been adopted as it does not focus on problem solving with a defined solution, but it allows for the development of other desirable skills and attributes (Azer, 2011). As per Shannon and Hunt (2009), such problem-based teaching helps the learners to understand the concepts and lessons better and they become more capable to relate the theories and concepts with practical applications, which might not be otherwise that much effective.

## **Research objectives**

According to Arnold and Norton (2017), the starting point of action research should focus on either or all of the four areas of concern such as concern for students, concern for staff development, concern for institutional priorities and pursuit for intellectual pursuits. In the present case, the focus has remained for concern for students and to be more precise, enhancing their learning experience and making them competent to apply the learned concepts in real life situations. The present action research project has been carried out with the following objectives:

- i) To experiment the learning improvement by adopting the problem-based teaching with the target students' group.
- ii) To evaluate the improvement in learning of the targeted students over the period since adoption of the problem-based teaching methods.
- iii) To include the practice of problem-based teaching in future curriculum, if found appropriate and effective.

## **Review of literature**

A literature review is a survey of scholarly articles, books and researches done by others, relevant to the research area. By providing a literature review the researches gives the reader and overview of what knowledge and ideas have been established (Galvan, 2015). In this literature review, attempt has been made to review and discuss the concept of curriculum and curriculum models, Concept of action research, action research cycle, action research methodology, concept and practices of problem based teaching in general and in business related subjects etc.

### *Concept of Curriculum and curriculum models:*

Curriculum is often considered as one of the most common concerns in the field of education. However, before understanding the appropriate curricula for the learners, what is implied through the term 'curriculum' seems to be more important. Because, such question remains inconclusive to a great extent. Variety of definitions have been given to the term 'curriculum' and such definitions owe to divided perceptions of the stakeholders such as students, educators, researchers, administrators, evaluators etc. According to Pratt (1994), Barrow and Milburn (1990), the word 'curriculum' has derived from the Latin verb '*currere*' 'to run'. The same studies have revealed that, Cicero made an extension of this term by adding a metaphor termed '*currucula mentis*', that

means; the educational course of mind'. However, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term was not widely used in the field of education. Some of the earlier prominent scholars such as Barrow and Milburn, 1990; Beauchamp, 1997; Goodson, 1994; Longstreet and Shane, 1993; Marsh, 1997; Wood and Davis, 1978 have defined the term from different perspectives, those have guided the further research on the matter till recent times. From the studies and observations made, it can be found the way the term 'curriculum' has been expanded from narrow to broad meaning. Finally, the definition of 'curriculum' given by Kerr and quoted in Kelly (1983, 1999) can be used as the standard and widely accepted. According to the same, 'curriculum' is, 'All the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school (Kelly, 1983, 1999). More recent prominent definitions of the curriculum can be found from Warren (2003) and Gwele (2005). According to Tanner (1980), curriculum has been defined as the planned and guided learning experiences and intended outcomes, those are formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences. Warren has defined the concept of curriculum as the 'nexus of teaching, learning, knowledge and context', whereas Gwele has explained the same as the 'planned learning experiences that the educational institutions intend to provide for their learners'. All these three definitions have been found to be somehow similar as the aspects of planned learning, under the influence of guided experience for intended outcomes in the specific contexts etc. are largely mentioned.

Many definitions, concepts, approaches and models on the curriculum theories and models have been found in the knowledge domain. According to Beauchamp (1977), Wood and Davis (1978), 'curriculum' mostly indicates the 'subject/ content' taught to Tanner (1980), the learners; whereas subsequent studies and others have described the concept as 'curriculum as plans' (Tom, 1984; Pratt, 1994), 'curriculum as documents' (Barrow and Milburn, 1999; Brady, 1995), 'curriculum as experience' (Longstreet and Shane ,1993; Goodson, 1994; Marsh ,1997; Barrow and Milburn, 1999; Hyles et. al., 2004; Chen, 2007; Su ,2012; Roger ,2016) etc. Furthermore, the study by Morrison and Ridley (1989), can also be referred to understand the evolution of the concept of 'curriculum' over the period in a more specific manner. According to them, the ideologically, the concentration on the 'curriculum' research has been shifted from 'progressive-student centered approach' to contemporarily more popular and practiced 'democratic and socialist approach', through the subsequent stages such as 'traditional, academic and conservative approach', 'liberal humanistic approach' and instrumentalist approach'. The definition of 'curriculum' as propagated by Kerr and mentioned by Kelly (1983, 1999) as mentioned earlier has however, classified the approaches of curriculum theories in four major categories. These are *curriculum as a body of knowledge to be transmitted*, *curriculum as the product as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students*, *Curriculum as process* and *Curriculum as praxis*.

*Curriculum as a syllabus to be transmitted* can be explained as equating a curriculum with a syllabus. Scholars like Curzon (1985), Kelly (1983), Blenkin *et al* (1992) have made several observations on such approach. According to Curzon (1985), under this approach, a syllabus tend to follow the traditional textbook approach of an 'order of contents'. Whereas, Blenkin *et. al.* (1992), have opined that education is transmitted or 'delivered' to students by the most effective methods, that is following the syllabi, under this approach. Kelly (1983), is however, found to be more critical of such approach as according to him, the approach mainly focuses on transmitting knowledge, rather than focusing on quality of learning content. *Curriculum as the product as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students* has been developed and promoted by two American scholars Franklin Bobbitt (1918; 1928) and Ralph W. Tyler (1949). According to this approach, curriculum is considered as the product as an attempt to achieve certain end results, mainly the behavioural objectives. According to the approach of *Curriculum as a process*, attempt is made to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice (Stenhouse, 1975). Under *Curriculum as praxis* approach, curriculum itself develops through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection. *Spiral* and *hidden* models have also been subsequently discussed widely. Bruner (1971) has defined 'Spiral model' as developing a curriculum comprising of the topics those are suitable for the specific level of intellectual development. Therefore, according to him, spiral curriculum model should increase the difficulty of the topics of the curriculum over the period as the learners' ability to understand deepen. Coined by Jackson in 1968, 'hidden curriculum' model has been further explained by Charalambous and Holborn (1991) and later by Richard Nickham (2007) as the curriculum consists of any such things, students learn through experience by attending schools, rather than stated educational objectives.

#### *Concept and theories of action research:*

Stringer (2008) has defined action research (AR) as the either the research initiated for solving an immediate problem or reflecting the process of progressive problem solving, those can be led by individuals, working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice" for improving the way of addressing the issues and solving such problems. Described by Kurt Lewin (1946) and subsequently revised and adapted many times over

in different contexts. The major subsequent action research theories have been propagated by Chris Argyris (1957), Heron *et. al.* (1971), Paulo Freire (1972) and William Barry (2012). (Refer table 1).

Table 1: Major action research theories

Kurt-Lewin	‘Action Research’ (1946)	Action research has been explained as a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to specific social initiative that uses a spiral of steps and each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action.
Chris Argyris	‘Action Science’ (1957)	Action science has been explained as the complicated but cyclical process, where human beings design their actions to achieve intended consequences under a set of environment variables, those are uncontrollable and ever changing. Under such variables, actions are designed, where loops of learning can differ from each other.
John Heron, Peter Reason and Demi Brown	‘Cooperative Enquiry’ (1971)	The major concept of the ‘Cooperative enquiry’ is to research for desired actions ‘with’ the people rather than ‘on’ the people." It emphasizes the full involvement in research decisions of all active participants as co-researchers.
Paulo Freire	Participatory Action Research (2013)	PAR builds on the critical pedagogy as a response to the traditional formal models of education where the "teacher" stands at the front and "imparts" information to the "students" who are passive recipients.
William Barry	Living educational theory approach to action research (2012)	This theory is based on the critical and transformational approach of action research, where attempts are made to overcome the barriers and norms to improve the situation.

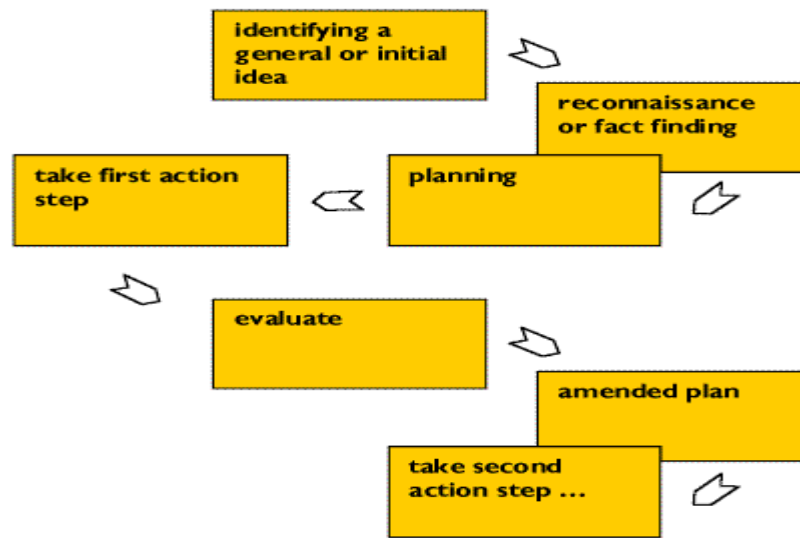
*Action Research Cycle:*

Described by Kurt Lewin (1946) and subsequently revised and adapted many times over in different contexts, action-research can be characterised as a cyclical process (Figure 1) of informed and intentional actions designed to address an identified issue or opportunity. Following steps have been identified in the cycle (Table 2).

Table 2: Steps of action research cycle

Step 1	Identifying a general or initial idea	Initial ideas are generated or received based on initial experience through personal observation, results, unwanted developments initial
Step 2	Reconnaissance or fact finding	Fact findings are done through empirical investigations, fact finding interventions such as surveys, interviews, observations etc.
Step 3	Planning	Based on the findings from the fact finding initiatives, plans are made for new interventions or first time interventions. Planning also includes operational planning.
Step 4	Taking first action step	First round of or stage of interventions towards betterment or desired improvements or outcomes are taken.
Step 5	Evaluate	Evaluation of the results are completed to compare the actual outcomes with desired outcomes.
Step 6	Amend plan	Plans can be amended based on requirements
Step 7	Take second action step	Based on amended plans, second round of or stage of interventions are initiated.

Diagram 1: Action Research Cycle



Developed by Kurt-Lewin, 1946

*Concept of Problem based teaching and learning:*

Problem based teaching and learning has become the Centre of great interest in higher education. Any attempt to find a singular definition for the problem based teaching and learning can be an elusive task (Davis and Harden, 1999). Harden and Davis (1998) have identified such differences from rigid definitions to anything that includes problem solving. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2003) have identified two main types of definitions. According to them, one type of definitions are based on distinctive, well documented instructional approaches that give problems central places in learning activity. Whereas, another types of definitions, they have found, are based on problem centered and task based learning and teaching. However, Myers and Distlehorst (2005) have given a more comprehensive definition of problem based learning. According to the scholars, the basic outline of the problem based learning process is encountering the problem first, followed by problem solving with clinical skills and finally the learning needs are identified. The definition has further added that based on the learning needs, learners are encouraged to apply their gained knowledge to the problem solving in real life. Grant (1996) and Hooper (2010) have explained the concept of problem based teaching and learning as developing the 'know-how' to solve real time problems or to take decisions. Definition by Wood (2003, 2009) has however, defined the concept of problem based teaching and learning as a process that uses identified issues within a scenario to increase knowledge and understanding.

*Practices of problem based teaching and learning in business education:*

Though problem based learning (PBL) has been pioneered by Barrows and Tamblyn at the medical school program at McMaster University in Hamilton in the 1960s, which later became quite popular practice in medical education over the years; have started getting acceptance in the field of management education too. Traditional approaches to business education have been increasingly criticised for having having little relationship with what is important for succeeding in business and management. Getting inspiration from the problem based teaching and student learning from the Harvard Law School, Harvard Business School pioneered the same as the part of their curriculum since 1970s. Gradually, the trend became popular across the globe in the field of business of management education. However, there have been different observations regarding effectiveness of such practice at different levels of professional education, including the business and management education. Large number of studies has also been found in the areas of finding the appropriate problem based teaching and learning strategies in business education and on aligning the same with the business management curriculum. Scholars like Scott (1992), Wenger (2000) and others have emphasized on applying simulation practices to get aligned with the curriculum. According to them, the contextual alignment of such practices with the curriculum can ensure better learning experiences of the learners, rather than pure content teaching without contextualisation. Management scholars like Kotler (2009), Armstrong (2006), Morici (2010) and many others have also agreed on the effectiveness of the simulation based teaching and learning in enhancing student learning experience in management.

*Action research experiment framework in present research:*

The present project has adopted ‘Process theory of curriculum’. The project has adopted ‘Process theory’ as attempt has been made to communicate the essential principles and features of the specific educational proposal (ATHE level 4, unit 4.5: Marketing Mix) in such a manner that is kept open to critical scrutiny by the learners. Case studies have been used to communicate the essential principles of the unit. The curriculum has been planned and delivered in such a manner that the indicative contents of the unit (refer appendix IV) are properly covered through the case studies discussed (refer appendix III) and at the same time learning outcomes are achieved (Table 3).

Table 3: Curriculum alignment Plan adopted

Week	Case study	Indicative contents (overview)	Learning outcomes (overview)
Week4	Coca Cola Marketing Mix overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to marketing mix</li> <li>• Role of the product or service in marketing mix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the role of the product or service in the marketing mix (Learning outcome 1).</li> </ul>
Week 6	Land rover : the marketing campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of price in marketing mix</li> <li>• Use of pricing to offset the costs of product manufacturing and/or service delivery</li> <li>• Evaluate the role of price in the marketing mix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the role of price in the marketing mix (Learning outcome 2)</li> </ul>
Week 8 & Week 9	Range rover : Promotion and marketing mix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of place in marketing mix</li> <li>• Use of types of distribution of products</li> <li>• Evaluate the role of place in the marketing mix in a chosen organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the role of place in the marketing mix (Learning outcome 3)</li> <li>• Understand the role of promotion in the marketing mix</li> <li>• (Learning outcome 4)</li> </ul>
Week 11	Zara: The process innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process activities</li> <li>• How role of process in the marketing mix leads to customer focus</li> </ul>	Understanding the role of process in the marketing mix

In above table (refer table 3) shows the way the cases have been mapped and the students have been asked to analyse such cases. Here the content oriented learning has been attempted to facilitated through process orientation.

*Action research cycle of the present project:*

The classic action research cycle, designed by Kurt-Lewin has been adopted in the present project in the following manner (Refer table 4).

Table 4: Action research cycle adopted

Step 1	Identifying a general or initial idea	Based on unsatisfactory class experience and student engagement level, fact finding needs were felt.	Week 1 and week 2 of the lesson
Step 2	Reconnaissance or fact finding	Standard questionnaire was designed to collect student feedback on learning experience and separate MCQ questions were prepared to administer in the class.	Week 2 and week 3 of the lesson

Step 3	Planning	Based on the student feedback and average results on the MCQ test conducted, planning has been done to carry out such feedback collection and MCQ tests after changing the teaching style from lecture method to lecture plus case study discussion and analysis method (refer table 3)	Week 3 and week 4 of the lesson
Step 4	Taking first action step	Introduction of the case method of teaching along with the regular lecture method. Student feedbacks and MCQ tests were continued	Week 5 and Week 6 of the lesson
Step 5	Evaluate	MCQ test results, student feedback through question shows significant improvement in student learning experience	Week 7 –Week 12 of the lesson
Step 6	Amend plan	Curriculum delivery plan should be mapped with appropriate problem based teaching techniques such as case studies etc. on regular basis. Suggestions will be sent to ATHE (the awarding body) to incorporate case studies according to the broader indicative contents and learning outcomes in future.	Future sessions on the same unit (Unit 4.5) and on any unit related to marketing concepts and theories (Unit 4.9 Marketing Communication, Unit 5.2 Marketing principles, Unit 6.3 International marketing etc.)
Step 7	Take second action step	Regular case mapping and case updation, case alignment with the subject contents will be done	Future sessions on the same unit (Unit 4.5) and on any unit related to marketing concepts and theories (Unit 4.9 Marketing Communication, Unit 5.2 Marketing principles, Unit 6.3 International marketing etc.)

*Problem based teaching adopted:*

Based on the poor student learning and engagement experience during initial two weeks of lesson delivery, the problem based teaching was adopted. During the subsequent weeks, case studies, mapped with the indicative contents and learning outcomes (refer table 3) were used in the class. Students were asked to find out the solutions of the cases given (refer appendix III) in the class and they were found quite enthusiastic. Feedbacks and subsequent MCQ test results have also shown significant improvement in the following weeks.

**Data Collection:**

*Concept of data collection:*

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on targeted variables in an established system, which then enables one to answer relevant questions and evaluate outcomes (Das, 2017).

*Data collection method:*

Based on the type of data to be collected, different data collection methods are popularly used. Such data can be classified as primary data and secondary data as well as quantitative data and qualitative data. Primary data are those data, collected first hand from the sources. Whereas, the secondary data are those data, collected through already available or published sources (Das, 2017). Quantitative data are mostly close ended data and are collected through structured data collection instruments. Qualitative data are normally open ended data (Das, 2017). Primary and quantitative data are collected through structured data collection instruments such as structured questionnaire, structured interview etc. Secondary data are collected from published or available

sources such as books, journals, periodicals, web sites, reports, leaflets, newspapers, magazines etc. Qualitative data are collected through unstructured interviews, observation methods, document review etc. (Das, 2017).

#### *Data collection in present research:*

Primary and quantitative data collection methods have been adopted in the present research project. Two separate instruments were used to collect data. One instrument, used in the present research is a structured questionnaire, i.e. 'student learning-self-evaluation form' (refer appendix I). The form comprises of eleven questions on different aspects of student learning experiences in the class. The student feedback has been captured through 5 point likert scale, where point 1 has indicated most negative feedback, i.e. strongly disagree and point 5 has indicated most positive feedback, i.e. strongly agree. Out of eleven questions asked through the questionnaire, initial five questions (Question 1-5) have been framed from the inputs of the study conducted by Richard and Guy (2010). The remaining six questions (Question 6-11) have been taken from the study conducted by Heilsber (2011). A set of multiple choice questions (MCQ) (refer appendix II) have also been used to capture the student learning and to evaluate the compatibility of the student feedback with the student performance of such tests. A total number of 16 students have been surveyed and the marks of the same students have also been evaluated and analysed for the purpose of the study. Both the multiple choice question based tests and the 'student learning-self evaluation form' have been administered on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, 5<sup>th</sup> week, 7<sup>th</sup> week, 9<sup>th</sup> week and 12<sup>th</sup> week.

#### **Data analysis and findings:**

##### *Methods of data analysis in the present research:*

Data analysis is a scientific and logical process, by which the set of collected data are inspected, cleansed, transformed and modeled with the objective of discovering useful information, deriving at conclusions, and supporting decision-making (Das, 2017).

In the present research, data analysis has been done through the specific methods. As mentioned in the previous chapter (i.e., chapter 4), two separate type of instruments have been used in collecting data in the present research. A standard questionnaire, i.e., 'student learning self-evaluation form' was administered five times over the period of twelve weeks, whereas five separate multiple choice question set based tests were also conducted in the same frequency. Once these data have been collected, both were analysed through MS-Excel software. Collected data were analysed in the following stages, with the following objectives in line with the research objectives (refer chapter 1).

**Step 1: Analysis of the student learning experience feedback** on each question of the 'student learning self-evaluation form' was done through two subsequent stages. At the first stage, average (mean) and mode were calculated on the week-wise student feedbacks received from individual students and then at the second stage, an average of the mean of week wise response of the questions were calculated to capture the average trend in overall opinion of the students (refer Appendix VII). Finally, the trend in the changes in opinion over twelve weeks was identified (refer table 5: Graph 1)

**Step 2: Analysis of the marks obtained by the students** in the subsequent multiple choice question sets (MCQ) were analysed through the following way. At the first stage, individual students' marks in the individual tests over the weeks were captured. Based on the test wise captured marks, mean score of the batch and the modes of the obtained of the batch of students on weekly basis were calculated. At the third stage, the changes in trend of average marks of the batch were captured (refer table 6: graph 2). Change in the distribution of mode of marks obtained throughout the period has also been captured (refer table 6: Graph 2).

**Step 3:** Comparison has been done to find the **change in learning experience and the student score in subsequent MCQ tests**. This has been done to evaluate the improvement in learning of the targeted students over the period since adoption of the problem-based teaching methods.

#### **Findings of data analysis:**

Following are the findings of data analysis.

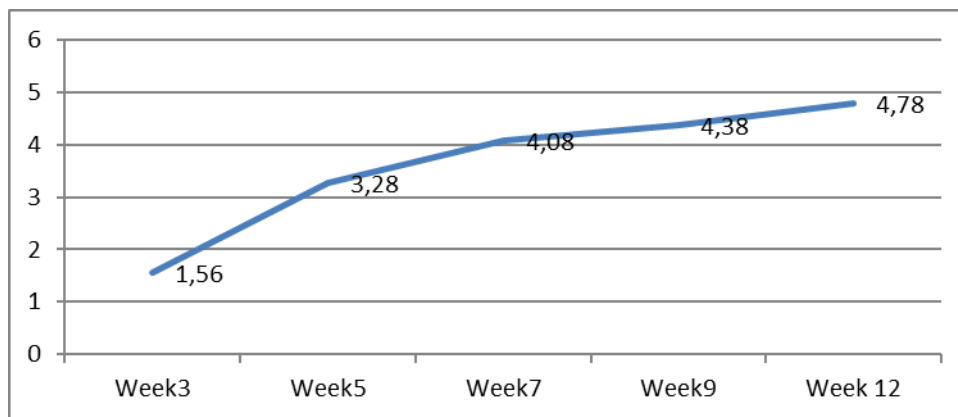


Table 5: Change in trend in student feedback based opinion over twelve weeks

Question no.	Week3	Week5	Week7	Week9	Week 12
Question 1	1.56	3.37	4	4.56	4.81
Question 2	1.25	3.06	4.31	4.5	4.81
Question 3	1.56	2.81	4.06	4.18	4.56
Question 4	1.62	3.62	4.06	4.25	4.75
Question 5	1.75	2.5	3.93	4.31	4.75
Question 6	1.5	3.31	4.12	4.56	4.87
Question 7	1.81	3.62	4.06	4.25	4.81
Question 8	1.37	3.43	4.12	4.37	4.87
Question 9	1.56	3.56	4	4.43	4.75
Question 10	2.18	3.43	4.25	4.5	4.93
Question 11	1.06	3.37	4.06	4.31	4.75
Average of mean	1.56	3.28	4.08	4.38	4.78

From the above table significant improvement in the pattern of opinions have been witnessed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> week to 12<sup>th</sup> week. It was merely 1.56 (average of mean) during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, that started improving since 5<sup>th</sup> week after intervention of changing teaching style. Finally, it reached at the level of 4.78. Following graph (refer graph 1) clearly depicts such changes.

Graph 1: Change in trend in student feedback based opinion over twelve weeks



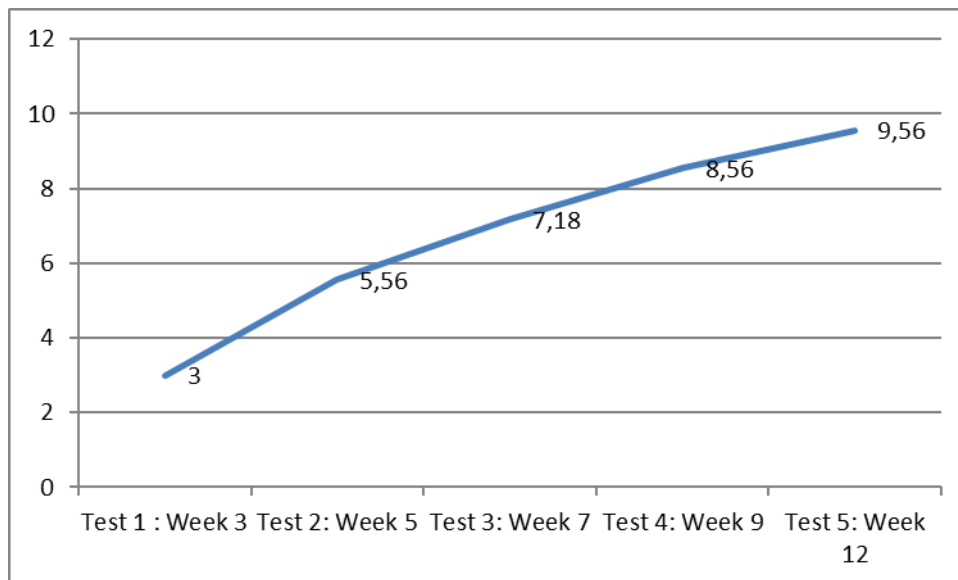
Change in the pattern of student performance in the MCQ tests can also be witnessed through the following tables and diagrams.

Table 6: Change in the distribution of mean and mode of marks obtained throughout the period

Student No.	MCQ test 1 Marks	MCQ test 2 Marks	MCQ test 3 Marks	MCQ test 4 Marks	MCQ test 5 Marks
1	3	5	7	9	
2	4	6	7	10	
3	5	8	9	10	
4	4	7	8	9	
5	2	5	6	8	
6	1	5	7	8	
7	3	5	7	9	
8	4	6	8	8	
9	2	5	7	8	
10	4	6	8	8	
11	2	4	7	9	
12	2	4	6	8	
13	4	5	7	8	
14	1	6	7	9	
15	4	6	8	8	
16	3	5	6	8	
Mean	3	5.56	7.18	8.56	9.56
Mode	4	5	7	8	

From the above table, the significant changes in the average marks of the batch of students can be clearly witnessed. From only 3 as the average marks and only 4 as the mode marks, the student performance improved significantly. These improvements can be seen during subsequent tests. Following graph (refer graph 2) clearly depicts such changes.

Graph 2: Change in the distribution of mean marks obtained throughout the period



Therefore, both the student feedback on the student learning experience and the student learning as captured through the marks in the subsequent MCQ test marks are found to have improved since the problem based teaching and learning intervention (refer: Table 7).

Table 7: Similarity in improvement pattern

Week	Student feedback average of mean on the learning experience	Mean score of the students' marks in MCQ tests
3 <sup>rd</sup> week	1.56	3
5 <sup>th</sup> week	3.28	5.56
7 <sup>th</sup> week	4.08	7.18
9 <sup>th</sup> week	4.38	8.56
12 <sup>th</sup> week	4.78	9.56

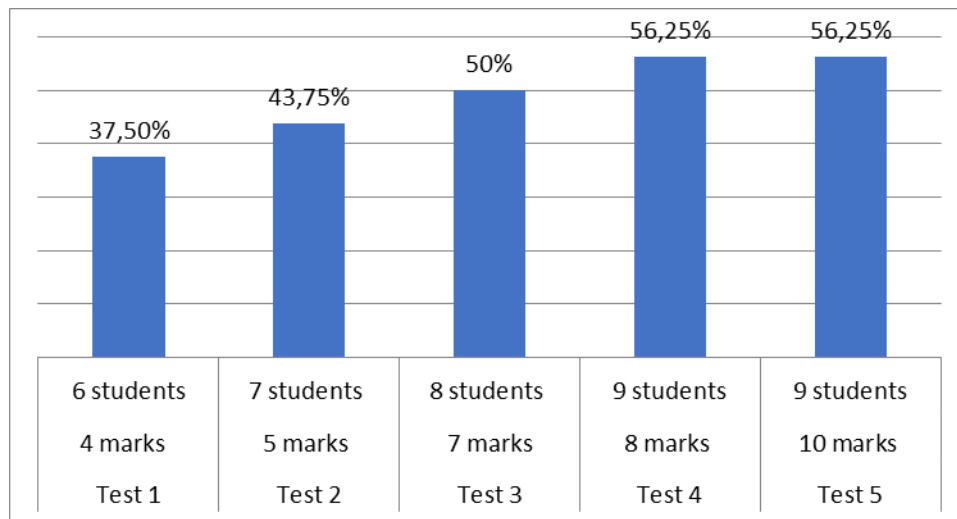
The table clearly shows that maximum positive improvement from the 7<sup>th</sup> week onwards in both the cases, though the intervention of problem-based teaching and learning is initiated from the 4<sup>th</sup> week of the lesson.

Such improvements in the student learning can further be captured by the increased mode numbers over the weeks, since the problem-based teaching and learning intervention has been introduced (refer Table 8 and graph 3).

Table 8: Trends of improvement in mode numbers in MCQ tests

Week	MCQ Test no.	Mode marks	Number of students scored mode marks	% of students scored mode marks
3 <sup>rd</sup> week	MCQ Test 1	4	6	37.50%
5 <sup>th</sup> week	MCQ Test 2	5	7	43.75%
7 <sup>th</sup> week	MCQ Test 3	7	8	50%
9 <sup>th</sup> week	MCQ Test 4	8	9	56.25%
12 <sup>th</sup> week	MCQ Test 5	10	9	56.25%

Graph 3: Trends of improvement in mode numbers in MCQ tests



It is clearly visible from the analysis of the MCQ test marks, obtained by the selected group of students that not only mode score has improved over the weeks (from only 4 in the test 1 to 10 in the test 5), but also the number of students have obtained such marks has also been significantly improved, since the intervention of the problem-based teaching and learning practice from the 4<sup>th</sup> week onward. During the first test 6 students (I.e., 37.50%) obtained mode score, which improved to 9 students (i.e. 56.25%) during the fourth and fifth tests.

Therefore, from the above analysis, following key findings can be mentioned:

- 1) Significant improvements have been found in both student feedback on learning experiences and the MCQ test scores over the weeks, mainly since the case study based problem solving teaching and learning has been introduced from the 4<sup>th</sup> week.
- 2) It can also be concluded that such improvements in marks not only is reflected in the increase in the mode marks, but also in the number of students obtained such marks over the period.

### **Overall project evaluation and summary of findings:**

The project was successfully carried out based on meticulous plan and appropriate interventions. The specific group of students were selected for the project as they happened to be taught this completely new unit, i.e. unit 4.5 on marketing plan. Not only the unit was introduced this semester, but also the unit happened to be the first unit on marketing taught to this ATHE level 4 business students at the campus. Moreover, the urgency to intervene in this batch was felt as the problems like lack of student learning was understood by the tutor. Student feedback on learning experience through structured questionnaire and the initial MCQ test performance also supported the concern. However, with the intervention through case study based problem based teaching and learning changed the situation, those could be found in both the student feedback pattern captured through the questionnaire and the MCQ test performances.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the successful results observed in the student learning, the following recommendations are made.

- ***Recommendation on the unit 4.5 (marketing mix)*** of the ATHE Business.
  - i) The course curriculum must incorporate the properly mapped case studies with the specific indicative contents. Landmark cases are available on the different marketing mix components and such cases must be incorporated in the ATHE Business unit 4.5 (Marketing Mix) curriculum.
  - ii) Specific teaching calendar should be prepared incorporating lecture classes, case study analyses etc. for the ATHE Business Unit 4.5 (Marketing Mix) programme.
  - iii) As the unit 4.5 (Marketing Mix) is a newly introduced unit and this is the first time, an important subject such as marketing is taught, separate problem based teaching workshops can be organized from time to time for the tutors, engaged in teaching.
  - iv) Regular evaluation of the student engagement and learning for the unit 4.5 (marketing mix) must be introduced as a practice through multiple choice questions, taking student feedbacks through questionnaire etc.
  - v) Case studies should be regularly updated and new cases can be introduced over the time for the unit 4.5 according to proper case mapping techniques.

### **Conclusions and the scope of further study:**

The present study has been a great experience of learning. This has helped to understand the way curriculum model can be chosen and applied in the context of a completely new subject. Also, application of problem based learning as the intervention has been found to be effective. Student learning experiences have also been appropriately captured. Based on combination and use of these three major aspects of curriculum modelling, problem based learning and teaching intervention and evaluation of student learning, the present action research project can be considered as a comprehensive and effective approach to experiment and to upgrade the teaching practices.

The study has also helped to identify few areas on which future study can be conducted. It has been found that the number of students improved their learning in the present intervention. However, still the scope of further improvement can be found out. It has been observed that approximately 56.25% of the students of the selected group (refer table 8) have improved their learning. Such number is though a considerable increase from the earlier situations as found during session 3 and session 5, still a need for further inclusion of students in the highest scoring group can not be denied. More cases and problem based teaching and learning techniques should also be considered. Further study can also be done on a larger group of students and comparative study needs to be done between the students studying at different levels of business management. Subject wise comparison can also be statistically analysed.

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## Appendix

### Appendix I: Student feedback questionnaire (Duplicate)

#### Student's learning self –evaluation form

**Date of the class:**

**Programme name: ATHE Diploma in Business Management**

**Level: IV (Four)**

**Subject: Marketing Mix**

**Unit number: 4.5**

Sl. No.	Question/statement	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree(1)
1	The instructor stimulated my interest in the Subject in the class today					
2	My understanding of the subject taught in the class today is satisfactory					
3	I am encouraged to ask questions in the class today					
4	The instructor created the challenging environment to learn at my best through problem based approach					
5	The teaching style creates an opportunity for me to do reference work and to do better self-study					
6	I could contribute constructively in the class today					
7	I could find today's class more suitable for overall learning of the concept and practices					
8	I could find myself more prepared to solve problems related to the subject after attending the class today					
9	The learning has been less practical oriented, than being more theoretical today					
10	Today's class has given me the opportunity to clearly visualize the situations and has motivated me to analyse the situation in a much better manner					
11	Overall learning experience in the class today is found to be satisfactory					

Signature of the learner \_\_\_\_\_

For Faculty only:

- Choose the appropriate week, this questionnaire has been filled up by the learners:  
Learning Week 1/3/4/6/8/10 /12 /14/16

#### **Appendix II: MCQ tests questions**

Week 3: Test 1

**MCQ Test 1**

**Third Week**

**Marketing Mix**

**ATHE Business (Unit 4.5)**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

Q.1. Out Of 4ps in marketing mix three are product, promotion, and price, which is the 4th P.

- (1) Purpose
- (2) Place
- (3) Pursuit
- (4) Promotion
- (5) Plan

Q.2. Who suggested product, pricing, place, promotion all these in a company represents "Market Mix"?

- (1) Philip Kotler
- (2) Stephen Morse
- (3) Neil Borden
- (4) Neilsen
- (5) Lorie and Robert

Q.3 What is the not the C of 4Cs, those are considered by marketing mix elements

- (1) Customer Value
- (2) Cost of the product
- (3) Customer convenience
- (4) Creativity
- (5) Communication

Q.4 Choose the correct answer from the following options.

A. What is the core essence of product as strategic tool of marketing mix?

- i) Customer value
- ii) Customer convenience
- iii) Communication

B. What is the core essence of price as strategic tool of marketing mix?

- i) Cost perspective/affordability
- ii) Customer convenience
- iii) Communication

B. What is the core essence of promotion as strategic tool of marketing mix?

- i) Convenience
- ii) Communication
- iii) Customer value

Q. 5. What is not the part of product life cycle, that is considered for marketing strategy making through 4Ps?

- i) Embroyic stage
- ii) Introduction stage
- iii) Decline stage

Q. 6. Maximize market share, service and warranty, penetration strategy, intensive distribution, promotion is the preferred strategy at the

- i) Growth stage
- ii) Development stage
- iii) Introduction stage

Q. 7. What is the fourth stage of customer life cycle

- i) Advocacy
- ii) Develop
- iii) Acquire
- iv) None of the above

Q. 8. You are a marketer of product content. Do you agree that the product content will vary (choose the correct option)

- i) Product contents vary according to component, ingredients and parts of the product from one to another.
- ii) Product content will vary according to customer understanding of the product



Q. 9. You are going to launch the same product in two countries. In one country safety regulation is more stringent than the other country. What will be your first priority in such situation related to the product, you are going to those countries?

- i) You will change the product components according to the safety standards and regulations
- ii) You will change pricing strategy immediately
- iii) You will change the communication strategy immediately

Q.10. One of the ancillary information of the product is

- i) Details of manufacturer
- ii) Ingredients of the product
- iii) Components of the product

Each question carries one mark (Total marks 10 questions X1=10 marks)

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Week5: Test 2

**MCQ Test 2**  
**5th Week**  
**Marketing Mix**  
**ATHE Business (Unit 4.5)**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Q.1. Which is the mode of pricing technique?

- (1) Elasticity
- (2) Market skimming
- (3) Market penetration
- (4) All of these
- (5) None of these

Q.2. You are a late entrant to a market. When you entered the market with your product, three other companies have already been found to be present in the same market. You decided to set the price of your product relatively low to attract more customers to your product, without compromising on quality. What is this strategy called?

- (1) Skimming pricing
- (2) Going-rate pricing
- (3) Value based pricing
- (4) Penetration pricing
- (5) All of these

Q.3. This is the price that a buyer carries in their mind and refers to it when they look at the given product. This is .....

- (1) Psychological pricing
- (2) Segmented pricing
- (3) Product-line pricing
- (4) Reference pricing
- (5) Product-form pricing

Q.4. When different version of products are priced differently but in accordance to difference in their value then it is a form of

- (1) Psychological pricing
- (2) Segmented pricing
- (3) Product-line pricing
- (4) Reference pricing
- (5) Product-form pricing

Q.5. "Place" in 4Ps mean same as

- (1) Promotion
- (2) People
- (3) Distribution
- (4) Demand
- (5) Service

Q.6. This deals with the specification of the actual good or service and how it relates to the target customer. This is

- (1) Price aspect
- (2) Product aspect
- (3) Promotion aspect
- (4) Place aspect
- (5) Planning aspect

Q.7. In Marketing mix which scope of product supports the elements:

- (1) Guarantee
- (2) Warranty
- (3) Quality
- (4) Packaging
- (5) All of these

Q. 8. Which P is not included in the 7Ps of marketing mix?

- (1) People
- (2) Purpose
- (3) Promotion
- (4) Price
- (5) Physical environment

Q. 9. This is the distribution channel, where end consumer buys from wholesaler or retailer. This is known as

- (1) Direct channel of distribution
- (2) Indirect channel of distribution
- (3) None of the above

Q. 10. Perception of benefits of a product to the customer can be primarily related to the

- (1) The perceived value of the benefits of a product to the buyer only
- (2) The perceived value of the benefits of a product, supported by direct and indirect pricing only
- (3) None of the above

Each question carries one mark (Total marks 10 questions X1=10 marks)

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Week 7

Test 3

**MCQ Test 3**

**7th Week**

**Marketing Mix**

**ATHE Business (Unit 4.5)**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Q.1. You want to adopt a marketing strategy under which the company sells through as many outlets as possible, so that the consumers encounter the product virtually everywhere they go: supermarkets, drug stores, gas stations, and the like. Your strategy will be:

- (1) Intensive distribution strategy
- (2) Exclusive distribution strategy
- (3) Selective distribution strategy

Q. 2. This is the best promotion tool in any type of marketing.

- (1) Creativity
- (2) Communication
- (3) Tele-calling
- (4) Publicity
- (5) None of these

Q.3. Which is NOT the ingredient of promotion mix?

- (1) Advertising
- (2) Public relation
- (3) Personal selling
- (4) Sales promotion
- (5) Discriminatory promotion

Q.4. Knowledge of which is necessary for effective selling skill.

- (1) Promotional market
- (2) Related market
- (3) Digital market
- (4) Virtual market
- (5) Real time market

Q.5. This concerns with pricing policies for late entrants to a market.

- (1) Marketing skills
- (2) Marketing research
- (3) Elasticities
- (4) Market penetration
- (5) Market skimming

Q. 6. This is the unique product benefit that the competition cannot be claim.

- (1) Unique selling preposition
- (2) Unique sales preposition
- (3) Unique selling price
- (4) Unique strategy promotion
- (5) Unique selling product

Q.7. is the straight reduction in price on purchase during a stated period of time.

- (1) Discount
- (2) Allowance
- (3) Sale
- (4) All of the above
- (5) None of these

Q.8. In order to promote a product continuous approaching of prospect consumer is being done, this is called

- (1) Lead
- (2) Target group
- (3) Call
- (4) Telemarketing
- (5) Prospect

Q. 9. The motive that drive a consumer towards selection of particular outlet, retailers or supply of service is known as

- (1) Public relation
- (2) Futile exercise
- (3) Patronage motives

- (4) Prestige
- (5) None of these

Q. 10. Which is NOT the form of the element of promotion mix among?

- (1) Personal selling
- (2) Advertising
- (3) Sales promotion
- (4) Publicity
- (5) Distributive promotion

Each question carries one mark (Total marks 10 questions X1=10 marks)

Week 9

Test 4

**MCQ Test 4**  
**9th Week**  
**Marketing Mix**  
**ATHE Business (Unit 4.5)**  
**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

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Q.1. Who suggested product, pricing, place, promotion all these in a company represents “Market Mix”?

- (1) Philip Kotler
- (2) Stephen Morse
- (3) Neil Borden
- (4) Neilsen
- (5) Lorie and Robert

Q.2. What is the not the C of 4Cs, those are considered by marketing mix elements

- (1) Customer Value
- (2) Cost of the product
- (3) Customer convenience
- (4) Creativity
- (5) Communication

Q.3. Choose the correct answer from the following options.

A. What is the core essence of product as strategic tool of marketing mix?

- i) Customer value
- ii) Customer convenience
- iii) Communication

B. What is the core essence of price as strategic tool of marketing mix?

- i) Cost perspective/affordability
- ii) Customer convenience
- iii) Communication

B. What is the core essence of promotion as strategic tool of marketing mix?

- i) Convenience
- ii) Communication

Q.4. Which one is not the promotion activity in marketing?

- (1) Activity
- (2) Public relations and publicity
- (3) Sales promotion
- (4) Market analysis
- (5) Personal selling

Q.5. Advertising is a marketing communication that employs an openly sponsored, non-personal message to promote or sell a product, service or idea.

- (1) True
- (2) False

Q.6. Which one is not the type of direct marketing?

- (1) Direct mail
- (2) Face to face selling
- (3) Telemarketing
- (4) Free sampling
- (5) Direct response advertising

Q.7. This is where mass media is used to promote brands and reach out to the target consumers. These include conventional media as we know it, television and radio advertising, print as well as internet. This is communication that is targeted to a wider spread of audience, and is not specific to individual consumers. This is

- (1) Above the line promotion
- (2) Below the line promotion
- (3) Both of the above
- (4) None of the above

Q. 8. This involves joining up with another business or businesses and pooling the resources to promote all of the businesses. This is :

- (1) Direct response promotion
- (2) Moderate line promotion
- (3) Market analytics
- (4) Cross-promotion
- (5) None of the above

Q. 9. This is the act of exaggerating a product's worth through the use of meaningless unsubstantiated terms, based on opinion rather than fact. This is an unethical practice in promotion called....

- (1) Angel dusting
- (2) Moot colouring
- (3) Bait and Switch
- (4) Puffery
- (5) None of the above

Q.10. This is an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom which prevents manufacturers, retailers or service industry providers from misleading consumers as to what they are spending their money on. This law empowers the judiciary to punish companies or individuals who make false claims about the products or services that they sell. This is known as....

- (1) The Trade Descriptions Act, 1968
- (2) The Business Ethics Promotions Act, 1980
- (3) The Trade Regulations Act, 1970
- (4) None of the above

Each question carries one mark (Total marks 10 questions X1=10 marks)

Week 12: Test 5

**MCQ Test 5**  
**12th Week**  
**Marketing Mix**  
**ATHE Business (Unit 4.5)**  
**Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

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Q.1. E\*trade, General Motor etc. are the following type of brand name/image...

- (1) Geographical brand/image
- (2) Founder brand/image
- (3) Lexical brand/image
- (4) Descriptive brand/ image

Q.2. Dunkin' Donuts, Krazy Glue, Volare, and Sizzler Steakhouse are the following type of brand name/image.....

- (1) Geographical brand/image
- (2) Founder brand/image
- (3) Lexical brand/image
- (4) Descriptive brand/ image

Q. 3. These are built from Latin, Greek, or other foreign root words and modified to best embody the brand personality. These brand names reflect the identity of the inventor of the particular product, services, invented by the brand itself.....

- (1) Geographical brand/image
- (2) Inventor brand/image
- (3) Descriptive brand/ image
- (4) None of the above

Q.4. Just-in-time is a quality process initiative under.....

- (1) Procurement, manufacturing and distribution
- (2) Procurement and manufacturing
- (3) Procurement and distribution
- (4) Manufacturing and distribution
- (5) None of the above

Q. 5. Marketing of other products and services to the existing customer is known as...

- (1) Sweep selling
- (2) Cross-selling
- (3) Intensive selling
- (5) Premier selling
- (6) None of the above

Q.6. Who suggested product, pricing, place, promotion all these in a company represents "Market Mix"?

- (1) Philip Kotler
- (2) Stephen Morse
- (3) Neil Borden
- (4) Neilsen

Q.7. This deals with the specification of the actual good or service and how it relates to the target customer. This is .....

- (1) Price aspect
- (2) Product aspect
- (3) Promotion aspect
- (4) Place aspect
- (5) Planning aspect

Q. 8. In Marketing mix which scope of product supports the elements:

- (1) Guarantee
- (2) Warrantee
- (3) Quality
- (4) Packaging
- (5) All of these

Q.9. Which P is not included in the 7Ps of marketing mix?

- 1) People
- (2) Purpose
- (3) Promotion
- (4) Price

(5) Physical environment

Q. 10. Which is the mode of pricing technique?

- (1) Elasticity
- (2) Market skimming
- (3) Market penetration
- (4) All of these
- (5) None of these

Each question carries one mark (Total marks 10 questions X1=10 marks)

### Appendix III: Case studies

#### Week 4

##### **Coca Cola Marketing Mix (4Ps) overview**

Problem Question:

1. Identify the 4PS of marketing mix strategy from the above case let on Coca-Cola, with special reference to Product Mix of Coca-Cola.
- 

#### Week 6

##### **Land Rover: the marketing campaign**

Problem Question:

*What are the 4Ps of marketing mix strategy of Land Rover? Can you identify pricing mix component from the above case and how such pricing mix component supports other marketing mix decisions of the company?*

*Task clue: Use websites/portals such as <https://www.cars.com/price>*

#### Week 9

##### **Range rover: Place and Promotion and marketing mix**

Problem Question:

*Identify the 4Ps of Marketing mix strategy adopted by Range Rover in general. Also identify the place & promotional mix adopted by Range rover in international market.*

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#### Week 12

##### **Zara Process innovation as marketing mix**

Problem question:

*Explain how process innovation as a marketing mix helped Zara to improve it's product, price and place mixes in strategy making and caused significant impact in enhancing sales.*

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**Appendix VI: Indicative content and Learning outcomes of ATHE Business Unit 4.5 (Marketing Mix)**

<b>ATHE Unit 4.5 Marketing Mix</b>		
<b>Learning outcome number</b>	<b>Learning outcome</b>	<b>Indicative content</b>
<i>1</i>	<i>Understand the role of the product or service in the marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Features and benefits of products or services</li> <li>- Use of marketing mix at each stage of product life cycle</li> <li>- How a business can create lifetime value to a customer by using the customer life cycle</li> <li>- Evaluate the role of product or service in the marketing mix</li> </ul>
<i>2</i>	<i>Understand the role of price in the marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of pricing to reflect the perceived value of the benefits of a product to the buyer</li> <li>- Use of pricing to offset the costs of product manufacturing and/or service delivery</li> <li>- Effects of adjusting the price of a product or service</li> <li>- Evaluate the role of price in the marketing mix</li> </ul>
<i>3</i>	<i>Understand the role of place in the marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of distribution channels</li> <li>- Types of distribution</li> <li>- Direct marketing channel</li> <li>- Evaluate the role of place in the marketing mix of a chosen organization</li> </ul>
<i>4</i>	<i>Understand the role of promotion in marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aims of promotion in marketing mix</li> <li>- How the success of a promotional campaign is measured</li> </ul>
<i>5</i>	<i>Understanding the role of process in marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process activities</li> <li>- How role of process in the market mix leads to customer focus</li> </ul>
<i>6</i>	<i>Understanding the role of people in marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Importance of recruiting right people for best customer orientation</li> <li>- Importance to the business of training customer facing and non customer facing staffs</li> </ul>
<i>7</i>	<i>Understanding the role of physical evidence in marketing mix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concept of physical evidence</li> <li>- How it impacts marketing</li> </ul>