



THE EFFECT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ON TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AT LAC HONG UNIVERSITY

HIỆU QUẢ CỦA PHƯƠNG PHÁP HỌC TIẾNG ANH BẰNG TRẢI NGHIỆM ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC DẠY VÀ HỌC KỸ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC LẠC HỒNG

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ABSTRACT. This article deals with implementing experiential learning in the teaching and learning of English speaking skills as a foreign language in Universities. Theoretical foundations for the experiential approach are outlined and implemented in the language classroom, thus discuss some viable difficulties, and highlight possible benefits students gain from their participation in speaking activities. The article is a valuable resource to effectively implement the experiential approach in English as a Foreign Language classroom context, from grammar to communicative goals.

KEYWORDS. *experiential learning, speaking, communicative, English as a foreign language.*

TÓM TẮT. Bài viết này đề cập đến việc thực hiện phương pháp học tiếng Anh bằng trải nghiệm (Experiential Learning) đối với việc dạy và học kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh tại trường Đại học Lạc Hồng. Cơ sở lý thuyết cho phương pháp trải nghiệm được phân tích và triển khai trong lớp học kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh, trên cơ sở đó tác giả đề cập một số khó khăn khả thi và nêu bật những lợi ích có thể có sau khi sinh viên tham gia vào các hoạt động được tổ chức trong lớp học này. Bài viết còn cung cấp một nguồn tài liệu về việc thực hiện phương pháp học trải nghiệm một cách hiệu quả trong bối cảnh một lớp học nói tiếng Anh, từ học ngữ pháp đến việc đạt được các mục tiêu giao tiếp.

TỪ KHÓA. *học trải nghiệm, nói, giao tiếp, tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ*

1. INTRODUCTION

Table 1. Some researches on experiential learning

Author	Topic	Research aim	Year
Knutson, S. [1]	Experiential Learning in Second Language Classrooms	Establishing a theoretical foundation for incorporating experiential phases into the second language classroom	2003
Moreno-López, I. et al. [2]	Transforming ways of enhancing foreign language acquisition	Effectively implementing Experiential learning approaches in the Spanish classroom	2017
Xuesong Zhai et al. [3]	An Experiential Learning Perspective	A students' satisfaction model for the flipped classroom	2017
Schechtel, S. et al. [4]	The Name of the Game: Utilizing Experiential Learning in the Classroom.	Engaging, Empowering and Reflecting on Student Learning and Assessment	2020

All students are equally important, and they all have different ways of accessing information and displaying their knowledge of that information. Teachers have an expanded

view of learning and education. Therefore, creating a classroom that provides opportunities for all students to participate is essential. Being open-minded, empathetic and respectful in recognizing and celebrating the diversity among those under our care will enrich our classroom and society. Educators are and should always be, agents of change. Everyone has different talents and abilities, and we need to understand that every student learns differently.

Students often study grammar for years, however, they still have difficulty applying it in a real-world context. An experiential approach to speaking can address this issue by enabling students to use language in many different real-life situations. The teachers need to explore how experiential learning provides authentic, real-world communicative contexts for using specific grammar points. And, it is also essential to examine practical, creative activities for bringing grammar to life that can suit the different class size and learners of different ages or proficiency levels.

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in the experiential learning model. (Table 1)

Accordingly, Sonja Knutson discussed second language classroom in the light of experiential methodology. Her initial aim was to discover the relationship between motivation and investment, curriculum and possible solutions. She emphasized that experience is the first step in the learning process, and it goes with self-reflection and reactions [1]. Simultaneously, Xuesong Zhai et al. looked at

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the level of students' satisfaction with the flipped classroom based on the experiential learning theory [3].

Experiential learning is a student-focused approach which supports and engages the learners to do, to reflect and to make their learning process happen. This article explores the practice of experiential learning as the basis for delivering engaging and useful speaking activities.

2. CONTENT

2.1 Benefits of experiential approach in foreign language settings

This learner-centred approach enables students to participate in the learning process actively. They can apply what they have learnt immediately into solving the real-world situation. One of the keys to be successful is to have sufficient knowledge, suitable attitudes and necessary skills so that learners can face challenges and overcome obstacles to be dynamic at work upon their graduation.

Secondly, learners have many opportunities to get real-life experience which is hard to have in one-way lectures from the teachers because "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand" enunciated by Chinese philosopher and reformer Confucius (551 BC to 479 BC). From such experience, students can reflect on their learning, and decide their learning style by involving in language classroom activities.

With the useful language in each lesson, students will have favourable opportunities to practice in various communicative situations [4]. This method allows them to get instant feedback from the instructor and their peers as well. This reflective learning helps develop students' target language skills from each grammar point to language use. They then work on it by immediately applying useful language to solve specific tasks together.

Thirdly, in the experiential approach, learners have a collaborative environment to improve their communication and teamwork skills. Being in the same project together, they will decide what they should agree with each other to get the final persuasive result together. Win-win negotiation shines in experiential learning. Simultaneously, they will improve not only their speaking skills but also interpersonal skills, and to come up with bright ideas together.

Experience is the first stage in the learning process because it shows the learner's ability in their reflection on their learning process. Therefore, experiential learning is based on the ideas of reflective learning and requiring the personal involvement of the learner. Teaching English as the foreign language through the use of experiential approach encourages learners to gain knowledge, develop English language skills, and shape their positive attitudes through the experience of working together on a specific task. Phases 3 and 4 (reflect and apply) allow learners to engage actively with their own past experiences and focuses them on the future.

In English speaking lessons, experiential learning enables students to engage actively in the learning process, to learn language by using it in real settings, to explain what they are learning and how they are learning. Once students get exposed to the language, they will participate enthusiastically, reflect on their own learning experiences, and apply right what they have learnt into the real-life scenarios. Thus, one of the significant benefits of experiential learning reflects on the investment that learners make toward their particular project. When they have the

motivation, learning English speaking skills is not a big obstacle for them because they get highly interacted with native speakers, and later on, they will seek opportunities to practice the language outside of class. Lifelong language learning remains long after formal language study is over.

2.2 Teacher role in project-based learning

The teacher role matters in experiential approach because this learner-centred technique requires them to be a facilitator, an advisor, a prompter, and helper rather than being a teacher-as-expert. To do so, they should be well-prepared with the steps of a good plan and can make the lesson viable to a different class with different levels of students.

However, it should be made clear that students are not free from teachers' supervision. Giving advice, support with practical skills are necessary for each phase of the project. Students will not feel that they are left alone, and teachers will have a close connection with them as well.

2.3 Four phases in the experiential learning cycle in English as a foreign language

2.3.1 Prepare (exposure phase)

This phase prepares students for participation stage because it activates background knowledge and experience. Before students take part in any activity, they should be able to look through the overall picture of the lesson objectives and goals. At this stage, teachers could teach common vocabulary, useful language or even grammar points. The better teachers prepare, the more engaged students will be.

2.3.2 Do (participation phase)

Students now really get engaged in the activity. For speaking lesson, they will take particular roles and act out the conversation by using necessary language and vocabulary that the teacher already introduced in the prior stage.

2.3.3 Reflect (internationalization phase)

After the activity finishes, learners have a given time to reflect and share their feelings, and especially their experience when taking part in the role play. Their language learning journey does not merely mean how many vocabularies they can remember. It is how well they apply in each situation to make communication happens. Teachers should create a forum or survey to ask students for their sharing on their experience, both positive and negative one in an open manner.

2.3.4 Apply (transfer phase)

The last phase is when they could link what they learnt in the classroom with a real-world context. It is essential in a learning process because they can use what they learn in solving situation and communicating with other people in the real scenarios.

2.4 A case study of experiential learning: from theory to practice

2.4.1 Participants

Twenty-two English-majored students, aged 18-19 years, in the Faculty of English Language at Lac Hong University in Vietnam took part in the project. The project lasted three

months and students worked on it for three hours per week, in the English speaking coursework.

The ultimate aim was to equip students with useful language and necessary vocabulary they could use in a specific situation.

2.4.2 Sequence of experiential learning

In the following specific lesson, the topic is Restaurant. Before teaching important vocabulary, learners share about their experience related to ordering food at restaurant and watch a video between two customers talking to a waiter at the restaurant. The purpose of this activity is to activate student’s prior knowledge and to help them see the level of formality will also affect to their communication result.

Phase 1: (Prepare)

Some warm-up questions could be:

1. Do you often eat out?
2. What’s your favourite restaurant in Bien Hoa city?
3. When did you last eat out at a restaurant?
4. Who did you go eating out with?
5. What did you order?

The video is then shown on the slide so that learners can see how different language is used and why formality affects to the communication results. After watching, they will note down some useful language in welcoming customers, ordering food and taking order. Stress pattern and intonation will also be focused in this section because learners will apply in the role play later.

Phase 2: Practice the restaurant role-play

In this phase, student would participate in the role-play. Teacher can give learners a simple menu, or they themselves can design their own menu for some specific food and drinks. At this stage, students use the useful language what they have been given before to take the role of waiter and/ or customer. They can do this activity several times with different partners to improve their speaking skills.

Phase 3: Reflect

After finishing the classroom activity, students discuss how the role-play went and their feelings during the role-play, or think of the language that they learn during the class. Specifically, they would think about what went well or did not go well.

Table 2. Think-Pair-Share

1. What did you like about the activity?
2. Compare to the last time you ordered food in a restaurant, was it different?
3. What did you find most difficult about ordering food in the restaurant?
4. How did you feel during the role-play?

Students now will have chance to discuss these questions with their partners and finally put their comments on Padlet which is prepared by the teacher.

Phase 4: Apply

Students apply what they learn to different situations. They might plan how to order food in real life and think about how they might do things differently.

Table 3. Menu design

Design or find the menu for your favourite restaurant online

Imagine you are ordering food. Write down five specific things you would say when ordering:

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This will help them transfer the new useful language and grammar that they learnt to a new situation because they have to think about what they would say in different situation. Therefore, it will help them apply what they learnt in the classroom and outside of the class as well. They then consider how to use the new language in the next visit to the restaurant.

In order to make this sequence works, it is necessary for teachers to set clear objectives, create suitable topics and activities for learners to involve, and decide suitable method of assessment.

2.5 Benefits of using experiential learning

Experiential approach makes learning easier for the students because it is like hands-on learning in which they were able to learn directly through experience. Students are motivated in this approach because it helps create positive self-image, enjoyment, self-esteem and confidence [5] because they know that they can use grammar in real life and transfer language skills to the real world. Secondly, experiential learning leads to deeper learning and self-awareness through reflection on their own language skills. Students find more engaged in learning new language without being afraid of making mistakes. Finally, this approach is compatible with many other approaches [1] so it can be used with task-based learning, project-based learning, service learning, communicative language teaching approaches that many teachers already used.

At the end of the semester, students’ language skills are greatly improved because they had good opportunities to take part in authentic communication scenarios organized by teacher through the incorporation of integrated skills into the language classroom.

2.6 Challenges encountered

Despite its value, this teaching and learning approach faces such challenges as time-consuming, difficult to assess, and hard to meet course outcomes experientially. Time constraint refers to each phase of experiential learning, preferably reflecting one's experience. The teacher should support and give guidelines and ask questions so that learners can offer authentic feedback and to be able to use language in the real world. But this also drives to the challenge, that is hard to assess qualitatively. Qualitative assessment is encouraged to apply in many institutions, though many teachers still "teach to the test" [6]; therefore, this decreases the value of teaching and learning approaches.



Picture 1. Menu design (A student work sample)

Regarding teacher roles, at the beginning of the course, students felt uncomfortable to choose the topic or partners they would like to work with because they did not know what they had to do in role-play or group discussion. However, gradually, they understood that the teachers were always there to give guidance and assistance whenever they were in need. Thus, teacher role in this approach has well shifted from provider of solutions to facilitator.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Students' motivation, interest, and performance were increased and achieved during experiential learning methods [4]. They were at first not familiar with this approach, but with the guidance and support from the teacher, gradually got engaged in their learning process [4]. Their conversations with real-world content and their English speaking skills were improved even though sometimes they lacked vocabulary or unable to use sufficient language to express their opinions.

The activities presented in the article are to promote students' teamwork and decision-making skills. Their fear and lack of experience disappeared after joining in experiential learning methods. Most importantly, they showed their excitement, cooperation, critical thinking, self-reflection and engagement with each scenario the teacher gave them.

One top priority is to choose activities like presentations or short-term projects and to shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred approach carefully. Using experiential learning improves not only students' speaking skills but also such soft skills as teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving and interpersonal skills through video projects, to group discussion, to presentations. The goal of Lac Hong University is to meet students' needs and interests to assist them to be successful upon their graduation.

An implication for further research is to discover students' motivation in the context of experiential approach. With experiential learning approach, teachers can foster learners autonomy towards language learning and help them become successful future leaders.

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