

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: HOW IT CAN HAVE EFFECT ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' LANGUAGE GROWTH AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Article History:

Received:

July 12, 2019

Revised:

August 15, 2019

Accepted:

November 3, 2019

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Abstract :The present study was carried out to determine the effect of experiential learning on a group of Iranian EFL learners' language growth and personal development. A group of male and female sophomore learners of English (N=30) participated in the study. After receiving the treatment in the form of experiential learning in the first session, the participants were given questionnaires, the content of which was about this type of learning. The purpose was to collect their comments about experiential learning and to see which types of experiential activities were more popular among the participants. In the second session, they were randomly divided into two groups who were exposed to different methods of teaching, content-based traditional method and experience-based method. Then they were given a reading test, the result of which indicated which method of teaching was more successful. The quantitative analysis of the data with regard to the questionnaires showed that most of the students showed a positive feeling towards experiential learning. The quantitative analysis of the data also indicated that those who received experience-based method of teaching significantly outperformed the other group.

Keywords – Experiential Learning, Learning by Doing; Iranian EFL Learners, Language Growth; Personal Development

INTRODUCTION

Language learning and teaching has gained an important place in the pedagogic realm in recent years. It has undergone the ongoing process of change, because change in the pedagogic realm is inevitable. Little by little, teachers have become aware of the unpredictable elements of the learning context and understood that the best place in which one could make decisions is the classroom. They have also tried to focus on the ability and

maturity of the learners and involve them in the process of learning in order for the learners to use the language to learn it (Kumaravadivelu, 1984). This idea is in line with the well-known quotation of Confucius (450 BC): "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand" (as cited in Kolb, 1984, p.21). Therefore, nowadays what becomes important for most of the teachers is not the product of learning anymore; it is the psychological process of learning. As a result, teachers should be more careful about the feelings and attitudes of the learners who try to form their identity in the classroom and bring about social transformation by influencing the learning process of the other learners. One of the methods that has gained popularity among most of the teachers recently and is in line with the conditions of the modern context of learning is experiential learning.

For human beings, experience is a means to penetrate further into the nature. The way they experience the world and what they learn from that experience is very valuable. As Vygotsky (1978) articulated, "Learning from experience is the process whereby human development occurs" (as cited in Kolb, 1984, p. xi). Thus, teachers have tried to incorporate experiential learning or, better to say, experience-based education in their pedagogic program. From theoretical point of view, the experiential learning styles literature has had a revival during last years, especially in the first decade of 21st century (Duff & Duffy, 2002; Kayes, 2003; Loo, 2004; Reynolds & Vince, 2007). It has also held importance in the practical realm. For instance, in 1973, the Cooperative Assessment of the Experiential Learning (CAEL) project was established in cooperation with the Educational Testing Service to create some practical methodologies which can assess what people have learned from their prior work and life experience (Kolb, 1984).

We call experiential learning "experiential" because it emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process (Brown, 2001). In this type of learning, the learners are directly in contact with the realities of the world and they do not just read about or talk about them. Experiential language learning activities engage both left and right brain processing, contextualization of language and integration of the skills, all of which have some authentic and real-world purposes (Brown, 2001); therefore, there is a link between the classroom environment and the real world. Furthermore, students bring different types of experience with themselves to the classroom; hence, teachers can increase the students' inquiry and understanding by focusing on different personal experiences in the classroom.

However, in spite of the widespread use and acceptance of experiential learning all over the world, this type of learning has its own critics and skeptics. Researchers and

practitioners in this area have been more concerned with what people learn- knowledge or skills they learn from their prior experiences- than they are with how learning takes place or the process of experiential learning. That is, what has been written so far on this type of learning was more concerned with the product rather than the process of this approach (e.g., Dart et al, 2000; Champoux, 2007; Reynolds & Vince, 2007). However, experiential learning offers the foundation for an approach to education and learning that is based on social psychology, philosophy and cognitive psychology (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, relatively little of literature contains the empirical evaluation of learning in experiential setting (Burnard, 1991; Penger, Znidaršič, & Dimovski, 2010), and few studies have considered experiential learning as a process whereby learners are totally involved in the learning process (e.g., Chapman, Schetzle & Wahlers, 2016; Leal-Rodriguez & Albort-Morant, 2018). Furthermore, none of the studies has examined the effect of experiential learning on linguistic and personal development of the learners in one research. As a result, the present study intends to shed light on the empirical evaluation of this process-oriented approach and its effect on the language growth and personal development of the learners.

Literature Review

The concept of experiential learning is embedded in different scholarly literatures, including psychology and organizational development (Duff & Duffy, 2002; Kayes, 2003; Ruholl & Boyajian, 2007; Sladek, Bond & Phillips, 2010; Abe, 2011; Gibbs & Priest, 2011), higher management education (Burnard, 1991; Berwick & Whalley, 2000; Dart et al., 2000; Hewson, Copeland & Mascha 2006; Herbert & Stenfors, 2007; Coven & Kazamias, 2009; Adamson, 2011), sociology (Atao'v & Kahraman, 2009; Ataya, Kaslioglu & Kurta, 2010; Suh, Bae, Zhao, Kim & Arnold, 2010; Nazari Nooghabi, Iravani & Fami, 2011), and management science (Specht, Fusilier & Ganster, 1984; Nembhard & Uzumeri, 2000; Davis, 2008; Matsuo, Wong & Lai, 2008; Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath & Trivedi, 2009). As such, it turns out that the concept of experiential learning is founded on a wide range of theoretical assumptions that should be viewed as complementary to each other in the understanding of different aspects of it. However, all of them investigated the theoretical aspect of experiential learning and not its empirical evaluation. Generally speaking, we can divide the literature written on the experiential learning into three main groups, which are mentioned in the following.

Experiential Learning in Higher Education: The Legacy of John Dewey(1938)

This movement is related to the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1938) who tried to consider experiential learning as a process that links education, work and personal development. In his opinion, as the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied, and not just thinks about the encounter with the problem or considers the possibility of doing it, he can easily relate his learning interests with his vision of who he is and what he can do in the real world. He believed that, as a result, higher education not only develops students' verbal skills but also leads to their intellectual and human development required for effective citizenship and social changes. His idea is in line with that of Reynolds and Vince (2007) who believe that, "Experiential learning is learning approach that can reveal the educational institution" (as cited in Penger, Znidaršič& Dimovski, 2010, p. 341), in that it also reveals the important role of experiential learning in the higher education. This idea is also reflected in the works of Specht, Fusilier and Ganster (1984), Burnarrd (1991), Berwick and Whalley (2000), Nembhard and Uzumeri (2000), Hewson, Copeland and Mascha (2006), Davis (2008), Matsuo, Wong and Lai (2008), Penger, Znidaršič and Dimovski (2010), and Adamson (2011).

Experiential Learning in Training and Organization Development: The Contributions of Kurt Lewin (1951)

Lewin (1951) who was the founder of American Social Psychology believed that by having the experiential learning in the classroom, we can foster the human relationship and the organizational development, because from his point of view, students should be incorporated in small groups and large complex organizations and should experience the problem with the help of their peers (Bang, 2011). He believed that experiential learning could only occur in situations where personal values and organizational norms are considered. In this way, he focused on the relationship between observation and action, and the subjective experience leading to the personal involvement of the learner using both his feeling and thought. He also believed that experience is an organizing focus for learning. That is, when we want to learn something, we should pay attention to it as a whole, because the whole is always more than the accumulation of the parts. The role of experiential learning in organization development is reflected in Atao`v and Kahraman (2009), Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath and Trivedi (2009), Ataya, Kaslioglua and Kurta (2010), Suh et al. (2010), Bangs (2011), and Nazari Nooghabia, Iravani and Fami (2011).

Jean Piaget (1952) and the Cognitive-Development Tradition of Experiential Learning

Despite Dewey and Lewin traditions of experiential learning which represent external challenges, “Dewey from the philosophical perspective of pragmatism and Lewin from the phenomenological perspective of Gestalt Psychology” (Kolb, 1984, p.12), this tradition of experiential learning represents a challenge from within the rationalist perspective. His model is more descriptive than practical. Piaget (1952) focused on the cognitive development, the nature of the intelligence and how it develops. He believed that our intelligence is partly shaped by the internal characteristics of the individual and partly by the external experiences, the interaction between the person and his immediate environment. By looking at the cognitive development of a child, he tried to understand the human knowledge itself. He wanted to know how intelligence is shaped by experience; therefore, he paid attention to child’s reasoning process and generalized his findings to the adult learning. From his point of view, each person can experience learning at any cognitive developmental stage. He believed that learning consists of accommodation of concepts and schemas to experiences in the real world and assimilation of real experiences into the existing schemas. Piaget’s movement is in line with Ruholl and Boyajian (2007), Sladek, Bond and Phillips (2010), Abe (2011), and Gibbs and Priest (2011).

All these three models focus on an experiential cycle presented by Kolb (1984). The cyclical process that begins with an experience or problem situation (concrete experience), followed by a reflective phase within which the learner examines and evaluate the experience and draws learning from that reflection (reflective observation). The reflection is then assimilated into a theory when the learner tries to relate it to his existing schemas and concepts in his mind and structure the new type of information he got from the experience (abstract conceptualization). Finally, these new integrated insights or learning are tested in new situations or experiences in a testing phase (active experimentation). Therefore, the students assess the experience and assign their own meaning to it based on their own expectations and goals. Then based on their own understanding, discoveries and insights, they try to relate it to their schematic knowledge and generalize it to other related experiences. Here is the pictorial representation of the experiential cycle presented by Kolb (1984)

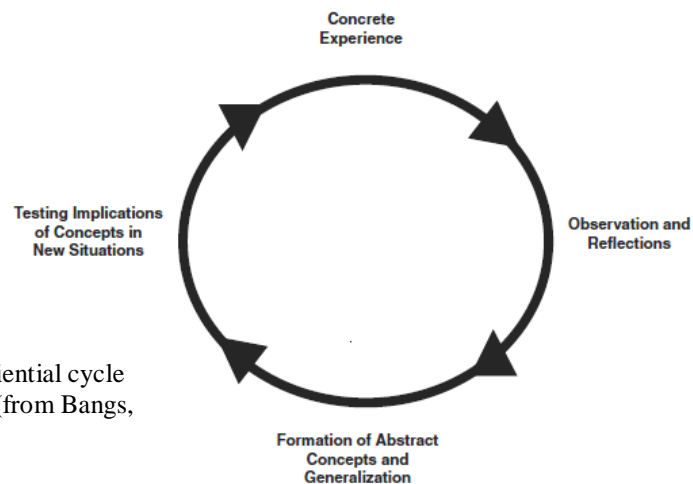


Figure 1 The experiential cycle presented by Kolb (from Bangs, 2011, p.30)

In all these models, experiential learning is not a series of techniques to be applied in current practice, it is a program for creating and recreating our personal lives and social systems (Kolb, 1984). In other words, “[c]ommon to all traditions of experiential learning is the emphasis on development toward a life of purpose and self-direction as the organizing principle for education” (Kolb, 1984, p.18). However, this emphasis has not been obviously shown in the traditions we talked about because they were more theoretical than practical.

Purpose of the Study

This study intends to shed light on the importance and usefulness of experiential learning and the way it could link the students’ classroom experience and their real world experience. Furthermore, it aims to focus on the way experiential learning leads to the personal development of the learners and the way the teacher could help the learners to consider the ideology, identity formation and social transformation in this type of learning. On the other hand, because experiential learning is challenging for most of the teachers who are accustomed to the traditional techniques, it seems beneficial to make them aware of the advantages of such challenging approaches which are not teacher-friendly that much. This study is also informative for the learners who seek to have fun in their learning process, by shedding light on how dealing with the unpredictable and unknown materials can bring about curiosity and enjoyment for the learners, and at the same time make a link between their linguistic and social needs.

Therefore, the present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How can the experiential learning lead to our language proficiency development?
2. How can the experience link our language growth and personal development?

3. How can the experiential learning be related to the identity formation and social transformation of the learners?
4. Is there any significant difference between males and females' mean scores across the two approaches of teaching?

METHOD

Participant

The participants of the study were a group of sophomore students of English literature, studying English as a foreign language at the department of foreign languages and linguistics of Shiraz University. They were a total of 30 participants (20 females and 10 males). The ages of the sample ranged from 19 to 25. They all had passed at least three years of English learning in the other institutes before they entered the university. The students' level of proficiency was determined at the beginning of the experiment by using an appropriate proficiency test. They were not divided into groups for the first phase of the treatment, therefore all were considered as one group at the beginning. However, for the second phase of the treatment they were randomly divided into two groups. Each group consisted of 5 males and 10 females. The control group was taught a reading comprehension passage by the traditional content-based method of teaching, while the experimental group received the same lesson by experience-based method of teaching.

Instruments

In this study, the researcher used three instruments. A TOEFL test consisted of 150 multiple-choice items was administered at the beginning of the experiment to make the researcher sure that the participants would be of the same level of proficiency. It consisted of three sub-parts, vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. It was a valid TOEFL test which had undergone several processes of validation. The reliability index for this test estimated through KR-21 method, used for determining the internal consistency of the tests, was .65. The reason for the relatively low reliability of this test is that the tests consisting of different sub-parts usually yield relatively low indices.

The second instrument was a questionnaire about experiential learning consisting of three sections, which was given to the participants again in the first phase of the study. The first part consisted of 8 Likert-scale items about the participants' personal priorities to see whether they were interested in experiential learning or not. The second part consisted of 22 statements in the form of three-point Likert-scale items about the experiential learning itself to see which aspects of experiential learning were more popular among the

participants. The last part included a group of experiential activities (10 items) towards which students were asked to show their preferences. The purpose was to collect their comments about the experiential learning they had. After the collection of the questionnaires, the researcher calculated the scores of the participants' responses to the first part and the percentages of their responses to the last two parts, based on which he intended to talk about different aspects of experiential learning. This questionnaire was adopted from a valid paper (Burnard, 1991) accepted in *Since Direct*; therefore, there was no need to examine its validity. A good internal reliability (.86) was reported for this questionnaire, using KR-21 method.

The last instrument of this study was a multiple-choice reading comprehension test, which was used in the second phase of the study. It was adopted from a TOEFL sample test. It consisted of 30 items on three reading comprehension passages. It was a valid test because the reported correlation value between this test and another valid test of reading comprehension was relatively high ($r=.86$). The reliability index reported for this test, using KR-21 method, was .80. This test was administered to indicate the difference of the two methods of teaching, content-based and experience-based, across the two groups.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure for the study was carried out during the students' regular classes. The process of data collection comprised of two main phases. The first phase of the study was conducted in the reading comprehension class. At the beginning, the teacher gave the students a TOEFL test to make sure that they were of the same level of proficiency. In this phase of the study, all of the students were considered as one group. The teacher focused on the experiences of the students as the reading subjects for that specific session. He told the students to write their own experiences because he intended to work with their experiences and not with an external material. The kind and number of the devices involved, the grammatical rules or vocabularies worked on in the classroom depended on the nature of the subject under consideration. Then the teacher collected the experiences of the learners to become aware of their needs, wants and attitudes. Based on what he had collected, he would decide on the posterior syllabus that he wanted to follow in the classroom, according to the complexity of the subject matter or the content of the experiences. He should produce opportunities for students to experience the subject matter directly in the classroom by doing problem-solving activities, games, watching TV, doing experiments and so on. He tolerated the students' mistakes and just referred to the negative experiences that might hinder their learning safety. The reason that we were careful about

the size of the classroom is that, the class should be small in order for the teacher to monitor all the students' experiences in the class and provide them with enough feedback whenever it is necessary and motivate those who are so worry about their failure during the course. After they received the treatment, a questionnaire consisting of three parts was given to them. The purpose was to gather the students' comments about this type of learning. The responses of the students to the first section of the questionnaire would make the teacher aware of the personal priorities of the students with regard to the method of teaching they preferred. Their responses to the second part revealed which aspects or characteristics of experiential learning were more popular among the participants. Finally, their responses to the last part indicated which experiential activities were more popular among the students.

The second phase of the treatment was conducted one week after the first phase in the same reading comprehension class. This time the participants were randomly divided into two groups. Each group consisted of 5 males and 10 females. The control group was taught a reading comprehension passage through a traditional content-based method. That is, the teacher provided the students with a general explanation of the passage before the students started to read the text. He also provided them with the explicit explanation of the new grammatical rules and vocabulary they would encounter in the passage. Then he read the passage aloud and the students followed him as he read the text. He did not give the students any time to the read it themselves. The experimental group was given the same reading comprehension passage but the treatment they received was in the form of experience-based method. That is, the teacher provided the students with no explicit explanation, and asked them from the very beginning to read the passage themselves and discover the new grammatical rule used in the text. He just helped them if they asked questions. Each method of teaching took 20 minutes. Then a reading comprehension test was administered to indicate the difference of the two methods of teaching across the two groups.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively in this research. In order to do this, the researcher made use of SPSS 16. For the descriptive statistics, the percentages of the participants' responses to each of the statements of the questionnaire were estimated. For the inferential statistics, a two-way ANOVA test was run to see whether the difference between the mean scores of the students was significant across the two groups because of different treatments they received. Another purpose of running this test was to indicate

whether the performances of males and females differed significantly across the two groups or not.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The results of the questionnaires given to the participants were analyzed quantitatively in the form of scores and percentages. As it was said before, the questionnaires were divided into three parts, in the form of three tables. Table 1 is included in the appendix because it deals with the scores of 30 participants and we cannot report all the scores here. The results for the first part of the questionnaire showed that about 90% of the participants' scores were above 20. That is, they preferred experiential learning (Table 1 is included in the appendix). However, the results of Table 2 and Table 3 are shown here because they are reported in the form of percentages.

Table 2 shows the percentages of the students' agreement with each of the statements about experiential learning.

Table 2 Rank order of degree of agreement with questionnaire statements

Rank	Statements	Percentage
1	Experiential learning can be fun.	92%
2	Students learn best from personal experience.	91%
3	Experiential learning is learning by doing.	89%
4.5	Experiential learning methods encourage you to reflect on your educational practice.	88%
4.5	Experiential learning can increase self-awareness.	88%
6	Experiential learning is contextualized.	87%
7	Experiential learning methods are useful for learning interpersonal skills.	86%
8	Students learn more in the authentic situation produced by this type of learning.	84%
9	Experiential learning focuses on fluency rather than accuracy.	82%
10	Experiential learning methods do not suit all students.	80%
11	Experiential learning methods can be embarrassing.	77%
12	Experiential learning is learning from life experience.	75%
13	Experiential learning is not "textbook" learning.	69%
14	Experiential learning can be time-consuming.	65%
15.5	Experiential learning is difficult to define.	64%
15.5	Experiential learning is "practical" learning rather than "theoretical" learning.	64%
17	Experiential learning methods can be a form of therapy for the students.	62%
18	Experiential learning methods can feel challenging.	60%
19	Experiential learning is concerned with learning more about how you feel.	58%
20	Students are allowed to negotiate their learning programs with	57%

	their teachers in this type of learning.	
21	Experiential learning sessions could get out of control.	56%
22	Students learn more by observing other students at work.	52%

(Adopted from Burnard (1991). Learning from experience: Nurse tutors' and student nurses' perceptions of experiential learning in nurse education: Some initial findings.)

Based on what is shown in Table 2, the researcher ordered the statements and gave them ranks according to the percentages of the respondents' agreement with the statements. The results show that most of the students believe that experiential learning can be considered as fun (92%), and that they can learn best from their personal experiences (91%). A considerable number of the participants also believe that experiential learning is learning by doing (89%) by which they can reflect on their educational practice (88%), and which increases their self-awareness (88%).

Table 3 indicates the percentages of the participants' preferences toward each type of experiential activities.

Table 3 Rank order of the identified experiential learning methods, by percentage

Rank	Experiential learning methods	Percentage
1	Small group discussion	98%
2	Role play	96%
3	Problem solving activities	94%
4	Structured group activities	84%
5	Purposeful activities	83%
6	Exercises that involve reflection on past or present experience	74%
7	Information gap activities	62%
8	Simulations	51%
9	Empathy building exercises	47%
10	Gestalt exercises	12%

(Adopted from Burnard (1991). Learning from experience: Nurse tutors' and student nurses' perceptions of experiential learning in nurse education: Some initial findings.)

As the results of Table 3 indicates, among different types of experiential learning activities prepared for the participants, small group discussion (98%), role play (96%) and problem solving activities (94%) have more advocators. Here again, the researcher ordered the activities according to the percentages of the respondents' agreement with each of the experiential learning methods.

Table 4 shows the result of a two-way ANOVA test which was administered in the second phase of the study. This test was applied to reveal the effect of different types of methods and the participants' gender on the reading performance of the respondents.

Table 4 Two-way ANOVA test for the effect of method and gender on the mean scores of the students

Dependent Variable: reading

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
method	345.600	1	345.600	34.062	.000
gender	1.667	1	1.667	.164	.689
method * gender	2.400	1	2.400	.237	.631
Total	9753.000	30			
Corrected Total	635.367	29			

As it is shown in Table 4, gender does not have any statistically significant effect on the reading performance of the participants ($F=.164, p>.05$). Even, the interaction of gender and method does not make a significant difference between the performance of the two groups ($F=.237, p>.05$). However, different types of methods lead to statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups ($F= 34.06, p<.05$). That is, those who received experience-based method of teaching outperformed the other group, because the mean scores of both males and females in experiential group were more than those of the other group.

Discussions

With regard to the respondents' answers to the questionnaires, we understand that the majority of the students pointed to the three important aspects of the experiential cycle presented by Kolb (1984). As it was said before, this cycle consists of four stages. In this experiment, the participants referred to the first three stages. By experiential learning, first of all, the learner learns something by doing it in an active way, then he reflects on it to make it a part of his personal knowledge by relating the new information to his previous schematic knowledge. Therefore, it seems that students were aware of the pragmatic aspect of this type of learning. In this section, the results related to each research question are discussed in order.

The Effect of Experiential Learning on Language Proficiency Development

- i). Experiential learning is learning by doing.
- ii). Experiential learning is contextualized.
- iii). Students learn more in the authentic situation.
- iv). Experiential learning focuses on fluency rather than accuracy.

Based on the quantitative analysis of the participants' answers to these statements, one can conclude that this type of learning is very effective for our language proficiency development; because it involves the learners in the process of learning and help them learn not in the passive way but by tackling with the learning materials. Because the learning materials are contextualized, the learners focus on the meaning and not specifically on form. Therefore, accuracy becomes marginalized and fluency will be centralized. Furthermore, because experience is closely related to the culture learning, it can make the learner familiar with different aspects of the second culture incorporated in the second language and this assimilation helps a lot to the language growth, because when all the inhibitions of learning a new language are removed, one can easily learn different aspects of that language. On the other hand, the quantitative analysis of the data showed that those who received experience-based method of teaching had a better performance comparing with the performance of the other group ($F= 34.06, p<.05$). Therefore, from practical point of view, experiential learning leads to our language proficiency development.

The results are in line with the findings of Dart et al. (2000), Duff and Duffy (2002), Kayes (2003), Cuthbert (2005), Herberts and Stenfors (2007), and Reynolds and Vince (2007), all of which focus on the effective role of experiential learning in higher education, learning and academic performance. They are also in line with the findings of Chapman, Schetzslle and Wahlers (2016) who believe that students under innovative teaching methods usually tend to have superior performance while they enjoy the learning experience. Leal-Rodriguez and Albort-Morant (2018) also found in their study that "fostering experiential learning strategies favors the students' understanding of theoretical concepts and leads to the attainment of superior performance" (p. 131). What Dewey (1938) says about the effect of experiential learning in higher education can also be in line with this idea, in that it refers to the learning by doing, and not just knowing, which leads to the learners' educational and language proficiency development.

The Effect of Experience on the Connection between Language Growth and Personal Development

- i). Students learn best from personal experience.
- ii). Experiential learning can increase self-awareness.
- iii). Experiential learning is concerned with learning more about how you feel.

Based on the quantitative analysis of the data and the participants' relatively high reaction toward these statements, it seems that for this type of learning, the teacher should be careful about the feelings and attitudes of the learners because here we are dealing with the individuals and their total involvement in the process of learning. Furthermore, individuals should self-evaluate themselves and have the ability to evaluate their learning process, in order to be aware of how their learning takes place. This involvement in the learning process and the experience students are tackling with help them to retain the information for a longer period of time; furthermore, it leads to the individuals' maturity, personal responsibility, positive motivation, self-esteem and confidence. Thus, according to Girvan, Conneely and Tangney (2016), "the teacher's primary role in the classroom transitioned from content transmission into focusing on the progress of teams and supporting their development at appropriate moments" (p.134).

The idea is also supported by the findings of Kolb, (1984), Burnard (1991), Berwick and Whaley (2000), Loo (2004), Hyde (2007), and Coven and Kazamias (2009), which focus on how the experiential learning can link the learner's language growth and personal development. It is also supported by the idea of Dewey (1938) who believes that experiential learning in higher education leads to the intellectual and human development of the individuals because they are tackling with the problem directly and not just think about it. What Piaget (1952) says about the effect of experiential learning on the intellectual development of the learners can also underline this idea, in that from his point of view learners' relationship with their external environment could lead to their rational and intellectual and, as a whole, personal development.

The Effect of Experiential Learning on Identity Formation and Social Transformation of the Learners

- i). Experiential learning methods are useful for learning interpersonal skills.
- ii). Experiential learning methods can be a form of therapy for the students.
- iii). Students are allowed to negotiate their learning programs with their teachers.
- iv). Students learn more by observing other students at work.

Here again, the quantitative analysis of the participants' answers to the above statements reveal that the teacher should believe in the ability of learners as mature people and provide opportunities for them to have a direct confrontation with the problem. He also helps them to formulate their identity in the classroom by relating their academic and social experiences. He wants to teach them the language within the social, political and cultural context. In this way, this type of learning leads to the personal development of the

learners, their identity formation and social transformation. Therefore, learners learn how to work with others in group works and learn the materials in a collaborative and cooperative way.

This type of learning also gives flexibility and variability to the course, because the materials the teacher uses in the classroom are the experiences different students bring with themselves to the classroom, which are not fixed and predictable. Furthermore, the flexibility in this system is out of the differences among the students with regard to their learning styles and strategies because different learners have their own way of dealing with the problem.

It is in line with what is said by Vince and Reynolds (2007), “Experiential learning is an approach that encourages collective and critical reflection as well as individual learning” (as cited in Penger, Znidaršič& Dimovski, 2010, p. 332), in that they also underline the effective role of experiential learning in identity formation and social transformation of learners. Lewin (1951) also underlines the effect of experiential learning on the organizational and social development of the learners because from his point of view, learners should work with each other in the cooperative way in order to learn much better from their experiences. It is also supported by Kolb (1984), Constantinidou and Baker (2002), Duff and Duffy (2002), and Kayes (2003), highlighting the effect of experiential learning on the psychology and organizational development. The effect of experiential learning on the sociology (Dunn, 2001; Welsh, 2007), and management science (Kayes, 2003; Hyde, 2007) could also refer to this idea, in that it improves different social and communicative strategies among the learners.

Difference between Males and Females’ Mean Scores across the Two Approaches of Language Teaching

Based on the quantitative analysis of the data, it was revealed that there wasn’t any significant difference between males and females’ mean scores across traditional content-based language teaching and experience-based language teaching ($F=.164, p>.05$). In other words, in this experiment, gender didn’t have any significant effect on the performance of the participants across the two approaches of teaching ($F=.164, p>.05$). This finding is contrary to that of Sladek, Bond and Phillips (2010), who found in their study that men demonstrated a higher preference for rational processing than women, and women preferred more experiential processing than men.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

As it was said before, experiential learning is a process of learning from experience. In other words, learners should work with the comprehensible input provided for them and discover the rules out of it. Therefore, learning is largely incidental and students should make meaning out of the activities and automatically internalize linguistic knowledge out of them. As mentioned before, this study intended to shed light on the effect of experiential learning on linguistic and personal development of the participants. The study revealed that most of students indicated their interest towards this type of learning, because they understood that experiential learning led to their total involvement in the process of learning. As a result, they learned more because they were dealing with a kind of reflection and thinking while they were working on the problem. They also learned how to make a link between their classroom and the real life situation. The results of the study also indicated that those who received experience-based method of teaching significantly outperformed the other group ($F= 34.06, p<.05$). Therefore, the experiential learning that is the focus of our attention is in line with what Hoover and Whitehead (1975) said, “Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible participant cognitively, effectively, and behaviorally process knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by high level of active involvement” (as cited in Gentry, 1990, p.10).

All in all, from what has been told about experiential learning, it is concluded that, firstly, learning is best conceived as a process not as an outcome. In fact, by focusing on the experience and involving in it, learning does take place. Secondly, learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Since, knowledge is ultimately derived from the experience of the learners, which they gain from their personal life, their learning continues as life goes on. In other words, every moment, learners integrate new ideas and theories they gain from their continuous life into their belief system. Thirdly, learning is a process of learners’ adaptation to the real world and their interaction with the environment. In other words, in order to satisfy their needs, wants and values, learners always interact with their immediate environment, the people around them and the materials they work with. In fact, learning does not happen just in the classroom. It occurs in all human settings. Therefore, it consists of the holistic integration of all human functions and experiences.

Regarding the pedagogical implications of the present study, the findings suggest that specific attention should be paid to experiential learning and teachers should try to incorporate the strategies of this type of learning in their pedagogy. However, this type of

learning can be challenging for most of the teachers who are accustomed to the traditional techniques, because here in addition to different written and visual materials, teachers provide their students with different types of activities that help them understand the concepts better. Furthermore, they provide students with concrete experience while those who work on the traditional methods deal with abstract, classroom-based techniques. In other words, the flexibility included in the procedure of teaching is challenging for the teachers because they should no more deal with the fixed designs and syllabuses.

Another pedagogical implication is that this type of learning can bring fun and embarrassment for the students at the same time; because they should deal with the unknown materials and participate in the unpredictable activities, which gives them curiosity and enjoyment. However, at the same time, it is embarrassing for the students that are not extrovert and do not know how to work with other people in groups.

Still another pedagogical implication of the present study is that this type of learning focuses more on doing than on knowing. It also draws our attention on fluency rather than accuracy. In this way, we focus on the schematic knowledge, knowledge of the world and our general knowledge outside the text itself, and not on the systemic knowledge, knowledge of the linguistic signs. As a result, little by little, it shifts our attention away from the major purpose of language teaching, which is teaching the language itself. Therefore, teachers should be careful about their main pedagogic goal while they are incorporating this type of learning in their pedagogy.

Putting aside all the aforementioned challenges, a considerable number of teachers choose this type of learning in the post method era. Though it is not teacher-friendly and brings about lots of challenges for them, they try to use its strategies in the classroom.

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