



Enhancing English Language Acquisition in Young Learners Through Experiential Learning Activities

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Abstract

This study examines the perspectives of two English teachers at SEED Academic on the use of experiential learning in teaching young learners. Using a qualitative descriptive case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The research aimed to explore how teachers conceptualize experiential learning, the strategies they use to implement it, and the challenges they face in doing so. The current study made advantage of a qualitative descriptive instrument. According to the study, teachers employed different methods to teach English to young learners and had different opinions regarding how to use experiential learning. It also found that implementing experiential learning proved challenging for educators. Findings reveal that experiential learning promotes student engagement, creativity, and real-world application of language skills. However, teachers also reported challenges such as time constraints and managing diverse learning needs. The study recommends greater support for English teachers in implementing experiential learning to enhance student-centered language education in primary settings. Nonetheless, a teacher has already included practical learning into several English language teaching exercises. Through encouraging critical thinking and creativity, experiential learning helps students to apply their knowledge in relevant settings. Incorporating practical learning into English language instruction helps young students acquire their language far better. All things considered, using experiential learning to teach English to young kids was advantageous. Consequently, the study advises English teachers to use experiential learning since it offers empirical data supporting its adaption in primary-level language classrooms and shows how interactive, real-world events can raise students' participation and learning results.

Keywords: *Experiential learning, Teaching, English, Young Learners*

Introduction

Experiential learning has gained prominence in recent years as a student-centered approach that emphasizes learning through experience, reflection, and real-world application. Rooted in the works of Dewey, Piaget, and Kolb, experiential learning highlights the importance of engaging learners actively in tasks that allow them to construct meaning from their actions and interactions. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle—comprising concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—provides a structured model for educators aiming to develop critical thinking and practical skills in their students.

In the context of English language teaching (ELT), particularly for young learners, experiential learning offers a powerful means to integrate language acquisition with hands-on activities, emotional engagement, and real-life scenarios. Young learners, due to their developmental stage, benefit from language instruction that is dynamic, multisensory, and contextually meaningful. Research has shown that children acquire language more effectively when they participate in tasks that require them to use the target language in authentic, engaging contexts (Anisa, 2021; Martella et al., 2020).

However, implementing experiential learning in early childhood language classrooms is not without challenges. Teachers often encounter issues related to classroom management, time constraints, and aligning experiential tasks with curriculum goals. Furthermore, the diversity of learners' needs and the demand for individualized instruction add complexity to this pedagogical approach. Despite its potential, limited research in the Indonesian context has explored how English teachers conceptualize and apply experiential learning in real classroom settings, particularly in non-formal or semi-formal educational institutions.

SEED Academic, an English-focused kindergarten in Indonesia, has adopted experiential learning as a core instructional approach. Yet, little is known about how teachers at SEED implement this method, the strategies they employ, and the difficulties they face. This gap underscores the need for a deeper understanding of experiential learning from the teacher's perspective in early language education. This study aims to explore: (1) How English teachers at SEED Academic conceptualize experiential learning (2) What strategies they use to implement experiential learning in the classroom; and (3) What challenges they face in applying experiential learning when teaching English to young learners.

By addressing these questions, the research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of experiential learning in English language teaching and offer practical insights for educators working with young learners. According to the Experiential Learning theory, one studies four phases related to doing, feeling, observing, reflecting, thinking, and planning. One of the most salient features of the theories is their connection of distinct phases with specific learning styles. Pupils have different ways of learning. Accepting this is a fundamental idea that helps pupils see the various feasible solutions and become more adaptable in other

learning environments. Teachers also need to understand their learning styles to create effective study plans and lessons. Studying can suffer if there is an accentuated mismatch between the style of the students and the teacher's various techniques and to become more flexible in the varied learning environments (Van Dalen, 2020).

Based on the principles of active and reflective learning, experiential learning as a philosophy builds upon past learning experiences and requires students to be personally engaged. Particularly in classrooms where project-based and task-based learning already forms the foundation of the curriculum, the approach is readily adaptable to a wide range of educational environments. Every classroom activity contributes to shaping the student experience. Through inquiry methods and student reflection, an activity can be conducted both independently and in groups and effectively mined for emotional value. The separation of the learning process into experiential phases helps to organize the learning activities toward the accomplishment of their stated goals. Unlike fragmenting the learning process into cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor skill acquisition.

From birth, young learners have a great instinct to investigate their surroundings. This is the way young students like to interact with objects, pressing buttons and switches. According to several studies, cognitive growth starts with this kind of investigation through exercise. In language education, this suggests that young learners are more likely to acquire language vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and functions from engaging in activities that demand their use than they are when taught formally and carefully.

For instance, if the young learners follow directions to make a mask and then use the mask to participate in a role-playing or drama, the activities the young learners have been involved in contributing to their understanding of the language used and, though they may not be consciously aware that the young learners have been listening to language or using it in the role-playing, the students may gradually start to acquire some of the language they are exposed to indirectly. Young students are unlike adults in that they can learn rationally as well as practically.

Up to about nine or so, most young learners typically depend more on experience kinds of learning. Teaching young students in kindergarten differs since they still develop cognitively, linguistically, physically, and emotionally. Successful English instruction for young learners requires consideration of these and other traits by the teachers to enable some of the circumstances necessary for successful results. The young learners are still learning how to control and manage their behavior and emotions since the young learners are still growing.

Of the young learners, eleven lose control of their behavior when they become enraged or extremely happy. Young learners differ from teenagers and adults in that they often lose interest in things done in erratic ways; this is this unpredictable aspect. Through their behavior—the young learners get restless, disturb other children, and so on—they will rapidly let the teacher know they are bored. Although some elements of their language learning program may irritate or bored adults, most of them will continue and suppress their emotions since they have decided to study English.

Older learners can co-operate and manage themselves when working in pairs or groups since they know that this mode may be beneficial for language learning. Young learners will not understand why they are working in this manner and will therefore require careful supervision and training to do so effectively. Therefore, this quality of young learners has significant consequences for classroom management, as new teachers of young learners often discover it to be costly (Mendy, 2021).

Since the turn of the 20th century, teachers have been seeking to apply, change, re-invent, and improvise teaching approaches in an attempt to link theory to practical experiences that is, to generate educated people who can satisfy the expectations of a democratic society. Higher education institutions are under more demand to assist students in developing employability skills that would enable them to transition from graduation to a white-collar job without any problems. This need calls for specific teaching strategies that enhance students' educational experiences both outside and within the classroom.

The development of self-sufficient learners who can take responsibility for their education and personalize their experiences to maximize their learning outcomes and become competent speakers of the target language is the main aim of education. It is well established that there is no "one size fits all" strategy for motivating competent users of the target language since numerous factors influence the approach, method, or technique a teacher decides to utilize in the classroom. The fundamental objective is supporting the learning process, which differs depending on context, culture, gender, and other internal and external elements (Diana, 2020).

Mezirow, cited by Babu, 2019 defined experiential learning as "the exploitation and processing of experience, aiming not only at acquiring knowledge but also at transforming the way of thinking and changing attitudes." More especially defined as "learning through reflection on doing," experiential learning is the process of learning by experience. Though it is a type of experiential learning, hands-on learning does not always entail students considering their output. One component of active learning, a strategy used in education that requires every student to participate in the learning process, is experiential learning. Unlike "traditional" forms of instruction in which students are passive consumers of knowledge from an expert, active learning contrasts with

Active learning can be applied in any field and manifest itself in various ways.

Students will often participate in either small or large activities focused on writing, speaking, problem-solving, or introspection. Active learning is a general spectrum of instructional approaches designed to involve students as active participants in their learning during class time with their teacher. Usually, these techniques demand some of the students to work together in class, but they could also call for solitary work and perhaps introspection.

From brief, basic exercises like diary writing, problem solving and partnered conversations, to lengthier, more involved educational frameworks like case studies, role-playing, and team-based learning, these teaching strategies span short, simple activities to Learning is categorized as "active" in that students participate in overt, purposeful, interactive activities under direction. Most of the active learning research, however, does not include a thorough theoretical model explaining why and how successful active learning is (Martella et al., 2020).

From the first educators, experience, and knowledge have been recognized to have a major correlation. Phrases like "experience" illustrate how much Western society values experience in education; they are the best teachers' and "school of life" tools. Though the experiential method of education is somewhat old, it is yet unknown how experience results in learning.

Kolb (1984) addressed this concept in his book, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Kolb created a model of the learning cycle, now widely used to illustrate how experience can be transformed into learning. Following an initial contact, learning involves several steps: reflection on the experience is required, followed by an appraisal of the relevance of the new knowledge to the individual and a strategy for its potential future use (Knutson, 2020).

Teachers have to allow their pupils some time to absorb the content before introducing the idea or theory of the course of study. Although they should still receive direction from the teachers, they should allow the pupils to work on the content without presenting the theory (Maba & Mantra, 2021). Students will then consider their work and come to judgments. Teachers present the theory and invite students to apply what they have learned through the self-learning process. This approach of training is known as experiential learning.

This method helps pupils develop their speaking abilities, as it allows them to practice and gain experience before being taught the theory. Typically implemented in scientific education, the experiential learning approach is also a component of humanistic education. Experiential learning or maybe more appropriately, experiential education was established in response to unique historical, social, and cultural settings of teaching and learning, as Viljo Kohonen's own important

contributing chapter notes.

Its defining goal is the change in educational institutions and their teaching strategies. Its posture on the school as a necessary institution in social development is based on this great determination to change. Moreover, the idea of experiential education emphasizes the need of school language as a tool for transforming and reconstructing the character of interactions between instructors and students (Kohonen, 2021). SEED Academic has adopted experiential learning as the primary goal of the educational process.

This approach is used frequently in many kinds of activities, particularly in English instruction for young students. Teachers at SEEd Academic do, however, have various challenges in the implementation stage including class management and time allocation. This paper seeks to identify some significant ideas regarding Experiential Learning in English instruction by teachers for young learners. Based on the explanation as mentioned above, the researcher will clearly demonstrate how the experiential learning approach is beneficial in teaching English and addressing the challenges that teachers face when instructing young learners using Experiential Learning, thereby closing the existing gap.

Activities involving left and right brain processing, contextualizing language, integrating abilities, and pointing toward real-world, genuine uses are part of experiential learning. Experiential learning, then, is constructivist learning—that is, learning when students actively construct their knowledge instead of watching a teacher exhibit demonstrative behavior. Experience-based learning is an active learning approach, enabling students to more easily grasp the material and retain the knowledge to a higher degree than when knowledge is presented to them by another (Anisa, 2021).

Then, based on the idea that one's life events, education, and job play a vital role in learning and understanding new knowledge, experiential learning is considered a comprehensive educational philosophy. Rather than just analyzing isolated aspects of the target language, experiential learning allows students to engage in such events, as it develops learners' target language skills by having them work together on a particular task (Ida et al., 2023).

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how English teachers at SEED Academic conceptualize and implement experiential learning in teaching young learners. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices within their natural classroom setting (Gay et al., 2012).

Participants and Sampling

Two English teachers from SEED Academic, an early childhood English education institution in Jakarta, were selected through purposive sampling. Both participants had over three years of experience teaching English to young learners

and were actively involved in designing and implementing experiential learning activities. One teacher had an undergraduate degree in English education and the other held a master's degree in early childhood education.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in a quiet setting at the school. The interview guide focused on three major areas: teachers' conceptualization of experiential learning, their implementation strategies, and the challenges they encountered. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Observations were conducted across four English classes, each lasting around 60 minutes, to gain insights into how experiential learning was enacted in practice. Field notes were taken to record classroom activities, teacher-student interactions, and observable outcomes of experiential learning implementation.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze both interview transcripts and observation field notes. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Codes were derived inductively from the data, focusing on recurring patterns related to the teachers' understanding and use of experiential learning.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with the participants for feedback and verification. Triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews and classroom observations. An audit trail of data collection and analysis steps was maintained to enhance dependability and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research committee. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and how the data would be used. Written informed consent was obtained, and pseudonyms were used to protect participant identity.

Case Study Boundaries

This case study focused specifically on SEED Academic and involved only English teachers who taught children aged 4–7 years. It did not include students or other staff members. The study emphasized current teaching practices, without seeking to make historical comparisons.

Results

This section Conceptualize Experiential Learning: Teachers

This section presents the findings of the study based on interviews with two English teachers at SEED Academic and classroom observations. The data are organized thematically under three core areas: (1) conceptualization of experiential learning, (2) implementation strategies, and (3) challenges in applying experiential learning in the classroom.

1. Teachers' Conceptualization of Experiential Learning

Both participants demonstrated a strong understanding of experiential learning, describing it as an approach that emphasizes learning through doing and meaningful engagement. They viewed experiential learning as essential for young learners who thrive on hands-on experiences and contextualized instruction.

"Experiential learning is when students can connect the lesson with real activities. It's not just theory—they have to feel it, do it, and reflect on it," (Teacher 1).

Teachers noted that this approach allows children to construct knowledge actively by interacting with their environment, materials, and peers. One teacher emphasized the emotional and cognitive value of experiential tasks:

"When they act out the story or make something with their hands, they remember more. The experience sticks because they enjoy it and feel proud," (Teacher 2).

Five key characteristics of experiential learning emerged from the data: (1) deep comprehension, (2) emotional involvement, (3) engagement through play and tasks, (4) skill development (language, social, and motor), and (5) connection to real-life contexts.

2. Implementation Strategies in the Classroom

Teachers used a variety of experiential activities such as role-play, storytelling with props, collaborative projects (e.g., making crafts or posters), and outdoor explorations linked to vocabulary lessons. These activities were often accompanied by follow-up discussions or reflective prompts.

"In one lesson, we made animal masks and then the students used them to act out a short drama. They practiced the animal names and sentences like 'I am a lion!' that's experiential learning," (Teacher 1).

Observation data confirmed that experiential learning was a consistent element of classroom practice. Activities were designed to integrate language input with emotional expression, social interaction, and physical movement.

Additionally, teachers encouraged students to use English in practical ways, such as asking for materials or expressing needs during class activities. This language-in-action approach was seen as key to reinforcing vocabulary and sentence structures.

3. Challenges in Applying Experiential Learning

Despite the perceived benefits, both teachers reported notable challenges in applying experiential learning regularly. The most common issues included limited instructional time, difficulty managing student behavior during active tasks, and a lack of materials or space for certain activities. Teachers also expressed concerns about aligning experiential learning activities with formal assessment requirements and standardized curriculum expectations. Differentiating instruction for students with varied language levels added another layer of complexity.

These findings suggest that while experiential learning is embraced in principle and practice, its effective implementation requires strategic classroom management, adequate resources, and institutional support. To learn more about how English teachers perceive costly education, the researcher collected information from interviews and texts. Based on the findings of the interview, the English teacher effectively combined and applied experiential learning, as stated in the lesson plan for the English class. Regarding teachers' notion of expensive learning, several results have been obtained.

The first respondent mentioned that one approach that might inspire a passion for learning is experiential learning. Every activity meant for the classroom generates a dynamic environment. Teachers and students alike are excited when children interact with their friends, and this is seen throughout the school. A pleasant, non-monotonous, and highly contextual learning environment is available to students. This is consistent with the characteristics of early childhood education, which prioritize enjoyable outdoor activities.

Based on observations and interview findings, the teacher proposed a theory regarding the primary approach to teaching English to young learners: experiential learning. Based on the interview, five primary ideas of teachers conceived of experiential learning emerged. Experiential, such as Deep comprehension, student engagement, skill development, personal development, and acquiring information. Therefore, Experiential learning is a technique that can inspire students to

understand something more deeply and enhance their critical thinking, as well as their development, since the emphasis of this method is that students can practice the material taught directly, not only in theory but also in action.

The different English teacher who participated in the interview offered a helpful notion regarding experiential learning. The instructor provided details on several topics, including Learning that occurred in response to students' emotions, angst, and significant, real-world experiences. The second English teacher interviewed, therefore, demonstrated a sound grasp of experiential learning. This educator explained the idea by highlighting the fact that learning is most successful when it is grounded in emotional connections and meaningful, real-world experiences.

From the teacher's point of view, pupils learn through engaging in tasks that have a direct impact on their daily lives rather than merely receiving abstract information. The impact and memorability of the learning process are increased when students form emotional connections with the material. The instructor emphasized that hands-on learning provides students with a distinct and authentic context, which enhances their memory of information and facilitates a deeper understanding of concepts. Learning is viewed as something that comes to life when students are personally committed, actively engaged, and able to perceive how what they are learning relates to their everyday lives.

Discussion

Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984), which highlights learning as a continuous cycle involving concrete experience, observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, has its roots in the seminal work of educational theorists like John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. Teachers who use this model view learning as a dynamic, integrative process that links new information to past experiences, preparing students for future use. Deep learning requires this reflection process because it compels students to reflect on their prior learning experiences and understand how they relate to their current development. The reflection phase focuses on the future and requires students to actively engage with their own prior learning experiences (Knutson, 2023).

Student motivation and interest are also strongly correlated with hands-on instruction. Students are more likely to engage fully, stick with an activity, and remember what they have learned when they are emotionally immersed in it. Studies have demonstrated that interest, which is a psychological state characterized by delight and focused attention, improves learning outcomes and student engagement.

Because of this, teachers can use the experiential approach to maintain students' interest and encourage meaningful engagement with the material in a way that is both pedagogically sound and practically effective. The demands of rigorous curricula, testing requirements, and limited classroom time can make it more difficult for teachers to organize and implement experiential activities.

Furthermore, there are differences in student preparation; not all students possess the self-control, self-assurance, or teamwork abilities necessary for this approach, so teachers must modify and differentiate their instruction accordingly (Bohon et al., 2017). Educators' knowledge about hands-on education is fundamentally based on the conviction that learning must be an active, active, and personally significant endeavor. Experiential education views students not as passive recipients of information but as active participants in knowledge construction through direct engagement in significant tasks. Through task-based collaboration and deliberate reflection, experiential learning promotes holistic skill development and goes beyond the analysis of discrete components of the target language (Knutson, 2023). This reflective process is crucial, as it enables learners to link prior experiences with future applications, so enhancing long-term comprehension and personal engagement in learning.

Conclusion

Experience-based English language training for young learners enhances language learning. This method increases vocabulary, language production, motivation, and social and emotional skills. Through hands-on activities and real-life circumstances, youngsters improve their language skills. Exposure to diverse contexts fosters imaginative and critical thinking, enabling students to apply their knowledge effectively. In conclusion, experiential learning promotes language competency and holistic development in young English language learners. For varied young learners, educators can build dynamic and successful English language learning environments by incorporating real-life experiences.

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