



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AS A TOOL IN FRENCH PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

Traditional teaching and training is mainly transfer of knowledge, but this does not include individual student's progress and explore their potential really well. This is because traditional method of teaching a foreign language usually looks at what the student needs to learn, and the best way in which they can learn it. Experiential learning is a powerful way to address individual growth and potential, for people of all ages. It is more suited to individual styles, preferences, strengths, directions, etc. This paper highlights the historical background of experiential learning, its effectiveness in teaching foreign languages, how it emerged, and how well it has blended with French language Pedagogy. This paper on Experiential learning is aimed at identifying the concepts of experiential learning, the models of experiential learning, the experiential learning cycle, its principles and benefits for French language students particularly from the middle school. Since we are moving from traditional teaching towards Student centered learning, can reflection be an important aspect of teaching-learning process for both students and teachers? Also, in the Indian context, Experiential Education flips the role of a teacher and a student! A teacher becomes a learner too and the student will 'lead' the process of learning. Are our Indian schools ready for this? How do we decide which method of experiential learning will work best?



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Introduction

Experiential learning is the process of making meaning from direct experience, i.e., "learning from experience". It is learning through reflection on doing, which is often contrasted with rote learning. Majority of teaching, training in education continues to be conventional, narrow and not experiential. The users of a language are required to not only to express themselves but also become aware of new and different cultural expectations, social norms and practices. Experiential learning method is more strategic and easy to implement activities for language learning. When experience is made the core of the learning process, learning takes place automatically. It is also possible to make Experiential learning a guide to show the method of communication. Successful learning of language skills occurs through the process of experiential learning cycle. This method allows the learning transformation to take place in the learner without much intervention from the teachers and allows learners to overcome the fears and actively participate in doing activities. It permits learners in getting familiarized with the learning methods. The content and material chosen for the classroom teaching enables the learners to involve fully which, in turn, makes learning possible. Teaching of second language has changed greatly with a shift in focus from grammar and vocabulary based concepts to communicative methods . The teaching methods are now catered to student needs and learner profiles thereby encouraging student centered learning.

History and Evolution of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning has a long history. Early on, educators adopted experiential education as a way of learning . Similarly, education programs, which takes students into the outdoors, use real-world experiences to achieve their learning goals. As rightly referred by(Confucius), "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand." From the ancient times, or the time of the first teachers, it has been seen that an important relationship exists between experience and learning.

It was not until the 1970s that experiential education emerged as a recognized field of education, and in 1977 the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) was established. During this time, the work of John Dewey that learning through experiences has been valued as an important foundation in formal educational setting. Dewey challenged educators in the 1910's, 20's, and 30's to develop educational programs that would be related to real life experience. In the 60's

and 70's many educators started believing in the importance of experience in education not only as a replacement but as an added benefit. More recently, David Kolb has taken lead in supporting experiential learning. According to David Kolb, personal experience gives the “life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts”. At the same time it also provides “a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process”. If experience is one of the cornerstones of learning, the question faced by educators is this: What is it about experience that leads to learning? Kolb (1984) tackled this question in his work , he created a now widely accepted model of the learning cycle to demonstrate the process by which experience could be translated into learning. In order to learn, one must go through a series of steps after an initial experience: There must be a reflection on the experience followed by an understanding of what the new learning means to the student and also how it can be utilized in the coming years.

Literature Review And Theory- One can understand experiential learning by comparing it to traditional classroom learning. The goal of traditional education is the standardization of learning so that students can learn and “fit” into existing opportunities, and employment . In most traditional college classrooms, a “one size fits all” syllabus is produced for the entire classroom. The instructor determines the content of the course and develops the learning goals, chooses the texts, and designs the methods of evaluating the students in the course. Experiential learning is a pedagogy that engages the students in the curriculum that they are studying, such as in internships, clinical experience, service learning, outdoor leadership, organizational development, and activity-based learning. When students develop their own research skills, they are able to carry out critical thinking that tests their interpersonal skills, they develop their own view points on a particular concept and idea, thereby learning through both action and reflection. This type of learning engages students in a process of hands-on problem solving and critical thinking

The American philosopher **John Dewey** is considered the modern father of the pedagogy of experiential learning. He posted, late in the 19th century, that when we experience something, we act upon it, creating a consequence. We “do” something, and something happens to us in return. How the individual connects these two events denotes the true value of the experience. “Mere activity does not constitute experience,” says Dewey, “[...] experience involves change, but

change is a meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences, which flow from it.”

Paolo Friere, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, expanded on this thought with the “banking concept of education.” In Friere’s view of traditional education, the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing educational “deposits.” Friere wrote that, “The teacher leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content (of the lesson).

Dr. William G. Perry, Jr., the noted student development theorist, wrote in his book, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*: All students can benefit from direct learning opportunities. Most college teaching is vicarious in nature (reading, writing, talking about ideas) and students often have a difficult time making connections between their learning and their own lives.

Carl Rogers in his 1983 book, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* presented his full theory of experiential learning. He believed that the highest levels of significant learning included personal involvement at both the affective and cognitive levels, were self-initiated, were so pervasive they could change attitudes, behavior, and in some cases, even the personality of the learner. Learnings needed to be evaluated by the learner and take on meaning as part of the total experience.

David Kolb named his model as ‘*Experiential Learning*’ because he always believed that experience is the core reason which leads to all training and learning. Each end of the matrix formed by perception continuum and processing continuum leads to step of learning process. Steps in learning process are ‘Concrete Experience’ which is related to the ‘feeling’ in perception continuum, ‘Reflective Observation’ which is related to the ‘Watching’ in processing continuum, ‘Abstract Conceptualization’ which is related to the ‘Thinking’ in perception continuum and last one is ‘Active Experimentation’ which is related to the ‘doing’ in processing continuum.

Task based learning/action approach or 'do it yourself' method

Task-Based Language Teaching is the latest trend in FLE. Task-based learning focuses on the use of authentic language through meaningful tasks such as visit to the doctor, the shopping mall or a telephone call to a friend. The real life situation based activities encourage meaningful communication and is student-centered. At any given point of time, there are certain changes in

second language education(FLE) that influence both teaching and learning process. The concept of task is an important element in the designing of course curriculum, in classroom teaching and assessments.

Task based French Pedagogy thus relates to the kind of answers one would give when questioned as to why they are learning French. In this method of learning, the answer would be more like I'm learning French in order to be able to carry out conversation at the airport, or railway station in France, ask for directions on the road, talk to the employees at the hotel, etc..

The CEFR's(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) action-oriented approach stresses upon the use of language to perform tasks directing our attention towards task-based learning/teaching. Thus it can be summarized that the CEFR's function is to tell the ministries of Education, curriculum and syllabus designers, textbook authors and teachers what to do and how to use its action-oriented approach to carry out task based teaching using the target language(French) as the medium of instruction.

Models of Experiential Learning and their applications in French Pedagogy

Experiential Learning Theory "provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multi linear model of adult development" (Baker, Jensen, Kolb, 2002, p. 51). In other words, this is an inclusive model of adult learning that intends to explain the complexities of and differences between adult learners within a single framework. The focus of this theory is experience, which serves as the main driving force in learning, as knowledge is constructed through the transformative reflection on one's experience (Baker, Jensen, Kolb, 2002).

The learning model outlined by the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) contains two distinct modes of gaining experience that are related to each other on a continuum: concrete experience (apprehension) and abstract conceptualization (comprehension). In addition, there are also two distinct modes of transforming the experience so that learning is achieved: reflective observation (intension) and active experimentation (extension) (Baker, Jensen, Kolb, 2002). When these four models are viewed together, they constitute a four-stage learning cycle that learners go through during the experiential learning process. The learners begin with a concrete experience, which then leads them to observe and reflect on their experience. After this period of reflective observation, the learners then piece their thoughts together to create abstract concepts about what occurred, which will serve as guides for future actions. With these guides in place, the learners

actively test what they have constructed leading to new experiences and the renewing of the learning cycle (Baker, Jensen, Kolb, 2002).

There are currently many applications of Experiential Learning Theory within educational systems. These examples include field trip courses, study abroad programs, role plays, internships etc . There are also numerous examples of computer-based applications based on experience.

Outward Bound Field trips- Schools may opt to offer a field-based campus course in curriculum related activities that requires students to actively participate in activities other than those normally encountered during a lecture or classroom experience..

Role plays-Another popular use of experiential learning which has been around for a long time is role play. It has been used for Foreign Language educational and training purposes. Students carry out role play just like how we do in childhood - imitating our parents, playing with dolls and cars, building sand castles and pretending we are princes and warriors - with the result that learning takes place, preparing us for life .

Simulations and gaming within instruction also involve direct experience and thus are valid examples of experiential learning. Within game interactions, there are often several cycles presented to the students. These cycles generally consist of participation by the students, decision making, and analysis.

Experiential Learning *versus* Traditional Methods in French Pedagogy

Classroom learning has a great impact on the students, which is actually good for all learners as the students listen to the teacher, get direct instructions in the form of written texts on the board, charts, and other teaching aids. Undeniably, having personal contact with other people (e.g. students, teachers) is always better. However, there are several issues that could hold students back from learning a language in the classroom. Most of the times, the learning differences can be ignored in the traditional classroom. In classrooms with more students, instructors face difficulties identifying and helping students with learning deficiencies. Maybe some students learn better when provided with visuals while others have other learner styles . The same learning can be achieved but will need different approaches for each student. This is nearly impossible in a classroom with many students. Moreover, learning a language in the classroom is very structured.

With the rapid evolution of technological advancements, there are now several options. Let us look into learning a second language keeping in mind the experiential method...

With the new introduction of iPad at schools as a learning tool, classroom experience is enhanced and learning a second language has stepped out of the boring and, sometimes, passive learning that leaves some students out of the classroom activities because of their lack of interest in the subject or learner difficulties.

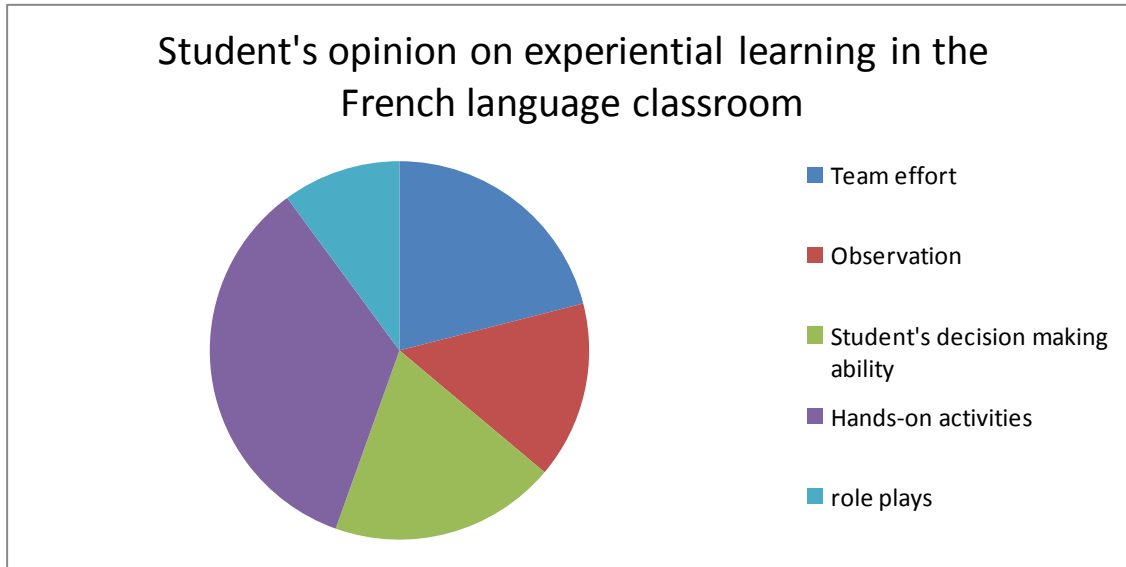
Case Study

This case study was carried out in three different schools across Bangalore. Questionnaires were given to 4/5 French language teachers and 40/50 students of the middle school and also classroom observation was carried out relating to the role of experiential learning in the language classroom. All these observations were made with the help of the student survey and classroom observation.

The Survey Procedure: It involved circulating survey based questionnaires among 40/50 middle school students across Bangalore. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face in a classroom under the teacher's supervision. The results of the analyses on the information is presented here about learner readiness for experiential learning, their preferences, ability to observe others, use their decision making skills, team spirit and readiness to do and learn.

In the pie chart given below the results of student's opinion on experiential learning have been shown. The students are in the age group of 11-14 years, grades 6-8

1) Achievement of group efforts during French class activities	25/40
2) Opportunity to observe others during EL activities	18/40
3) Ability to make decisions	23/40
4) Preference for /food fests/field trips	21/40
5) Role plays in French classroom	12/40



Analysis

In recent days, the approaches to learning foreign language have undergone several changes. Students contribute themselves in the process of language learning by taking initiative and participating in classroom and outdoor activities. Therefore, students themselves independently go through the language learning process and depend upon reflecting on their experiences, beliefs and assumptions. Reflection plays an important role in this process by providing a bridge between practical experience and theoretical conceptualization. Reflection is thus a process for making changes in the experiences gained from experiential learning activities, classroom learning, and the course material etc.. into true learning. Reflection enhances the student's critical understanding of the course content and their own ability to assess their goals, achievements and progress.

Critical reflection, and getting students to participate in that process of analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning, are the main components of successful experiential learning. Critical reflection can be done individually or in groups, and in many forms — oral, written, or through use of technology. In Experiential learning, the role of a teacher and a student is flipped! A teacher in-effect becomes a learner too and the student leads the process of learning..

Future Strategies

By working together in a dramatic/role play situation, children learn to use language to explain what they are doing. They learn to ask and answer questions and the words they use fit whatever

role they are playing. Individual vocabularies grow as they begin to use new words appropriately, and the importance of reading and writing skills in everyday life becomes apparent by their use of literacy materials. Dramas/role play engage children in both life and language learning. It's real value lies in the fact that it increases their understanding of the world they live in, while it works to develop inter personal skills that will help them meet with success throughout their lives. Another important aspect of experiential learning is the role of instructional designing or content creation with respect to the creativity, learner profiles etc.. Instruction which is designed according to the principles of experiential learning will provide opportunity for experience, encourage reflection and generalization (e.g. asking questions like, "why do you think this happened?"), followed by opportunity for better experience.

Conclusion

With the help of the data collected by circulating questionnaires to students and teachers and also by observing the French language classroom, these observations have been made..

This study is not comprehensive or extensive, and it has covered only few dimensions – the learner's preference for the language activities, the learner's perceptions towards team work, observation and teacher's role towards learning French language. The word experiential means that learning and development are achieved through personally determined experience and involvement, rather than on received teaching or training, typically in group, by observation, listening, study of theory or hypothesis, or some other transfer of skills or knowledge. The expression 'hands-on' is commonly used to describe types of learning and teaching which are to a lesser or greater extent forms of experiential learning.

The expression 'chalk-and-talk' (wherein the teacher writes on a board and speaks while students listen and look and try to understand facts) thus referring to a style of teaching which contains no hands-on/ experiential learning aspect whatsoever.

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