

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating the Impact of Experiential Learning on Vocabulary Memorization and Language Production: A Quantitative Study among Moroccan Young English as Foreign Language Learners

Atimade Chankob¹ 🖂 and Youcef Hdouch²

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Language and Society Research Laboratory, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

²Full Professor of Linguistics, Discourse Analysis and ESP at the Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Atimade Chankob, E-mail: atimade.chankob@uit.ac.ma

ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of experiential learning (EL) on vocabulary memorization and language production in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among 4th-grade primary school students in Morocco. Two 4th grade classes were involved, with one class receiving traditional instruction over five weeks and the other class immersed in experiential learning through concrete situations. The current investigation endeavors to overcome the shortcomings associated with traditional approaches by examining the potential benefits offered by experiential learning methodologies. Preliminary results indicate a noticeable difference in vocabulary memorization and language production between the two groups. For instance, the experiential learning group demonstrated a deeper understanding of the vocabulary related to the supermarket theme by actively engaging in role-playing scenarios where they simulated grocery shopping. The traditional instruction group, while also exhibiting improvement, did not showcase the same level of enthusiasm and retention. The findings suggest that experiential learning positively influences vocabulary memorization and language production among 4th-grade primary school students. In other words, by incorporating real-life situations into the learning process, students not only acquire language skills but also gain a practical understanding of the context in which these skills are applied. In sum, through the lens of the quasi-experimental design, this study addresses the inadequacies of these traditional methods by exploring the potential benefits of experiential learning approaches, aiming to provide a more holistic and applicable foundation for language acquisition among ELF young learners.

KEYWORDS

Experiential Learning (EL), English as Foreign Language Learners (EFL)

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1. Introduction

The significance of language acquisition in early education cannot be overstated. This study investigates whether experiential learning positively influences vocabulary memorization and language production in English as a Foreign Language context by young Moroccan learners of 4th-grade. Two classes, each comprising (n~20) students, participated in the study, with one class exposed to traditional instruction and the other engaged in experiential learning.

(EL) as defined by Gross & Rutland (2017), "Experiential learning transfers abstract teaching and learning into more meaningful learning situations" (p. 7) and has the power to transform the learning experience into a more tangible and concrete level, where

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students are consciously aware of what they are learning. This heightened awareness contributes to a facilitated memorization process.

In the same vein, Jacobs (1999) underscores the significant role of concrete experiences in the construction of knowledge. According to Jacobs, Experiential Learning (EL) is characterized as "a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences" (p. 51). Following the same view, Rivers (1981), as cited in Ahmadi, N. et al. (2014), highlighted the role of contextual and cooperative approaches to vocabulary acquisition. This quantitative study comes in with the aim of offering a transformative approach to education by emphasizing the importance of direct experiences in the learning process. In the EFL context, this approach proves beneficial for creating a more dynamic and applicable foundation for language acquisition among students, especially young learners.

1.1 Research problem

In traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, there is a pervasive reliance on rote memorization as the primary method for vocabulary acquisition and language production. This conventional approach, centered around the memorization of isolated words and phrases, often results in a superficial understanding of language elements. Furthermore, the emphasis on rote memorization tends to neglect the development of effective language production skills, hindering students' ability to express themselves with fluency and accuracy. By compartmentalizing language learning in this manner, traditional methods may limit students' capacity to seamlessly integrate theoretical knowledge into authentic communicative situations. This research seeks to address the limitations of traditional approaches by investigating the potential advantages of experiential learning methodologies. Specifically, the study aims to explore how hands-on experiences and contextualized learning can enhance both vocabulary memorization and language production among young learners of English as a Foreign Language.

1.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research questions

- 1. Does experiential learning significantly impact vocabulary memorization and language production of young students learning English as a foreign language compared to traditional instruction?
 - > How does experiential learning influence students' vocabulary retention?
 - > Can hands-on experiments enhance language production skills in comparison to theoretical instruction?
 - What is the correlation between student engagement levels and the effectiveness of experiential learning in language acquisition?
 - > To what extent do real-life scenarios contribute to a more practical and applicable understanding of English vocabulary?

1.3 Hypotheses:

- 1. Experiential learning has positively affected vocabulary memorization and language production of young students learning English as a foreign language compared to traditional instruction.
 - Experiential learning leads to a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary retention compared to traditional instruction.
 - Hands-on experiments result in a significant enhancement of language production skills compared to theoretical instruction.
 - > There is a positive correlation between student engagement levels during experiential learning activities and the effectiveness of language acquisition.
 - Real-life scenarios contribute significantly to a more practical and applicable understanding of English vocabulary compared to traditional instruction.

2. Literature Review

Experiential learning (EL), a pedagogical strategy and an educational philosophy deeply rooted in active engagement and handson experiences, or what is often referred to as "learning by doing," has garnered acknowledgment for its positive impact on student learning outcomes (Burch et al., 2019). Although deemed an underutilized approach, it proves highly effective in contemporary education (Scarce, 1997). (EL) is commonly associated with John Dewey's influential work in the early 20th century (Dewey, 1916), which laid the foundation for the idea that learning is not a passive reception of information but an active process that occurs through interaction. In different terms, this approach emphasizes learning through firsthand experiences and active engagement. Dewey's influence transcended his era, sparking a proliferation of new theories and pedagogies supporting experiential learning practices during the '60s and '70s.

John Dewey's ideas continue to inspire educational systems worldwide, including in countries considered leaders in the field of education, such as Denmark, China, and other progressive nations. For instance, in the Danish educational system, Dewey's ideas have found a welcoming home, often referred to as Dewey's second home country.

Dewey's philosophy extends beyond the notion of "learning by doing"; he perceives learning as a lifelong process. According to him, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." In other words, Dewey views effective education as the seamless integration of theory and practice, where theoretical knowledge is transformed into practical application.

Drawing on Dewey's work, David Kolb's (1984) model has gained increasing attention in today's contemporary education landscape, bringing about changes in views about how effectively knowledge should be imparted.

According to Kolb (1984), "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (p. 38). The model is grounded in the idea that learning is a cyclical and dynamic process involving four stages, each representing a different mode of grasping experience.

As presented in (Figure 1), Kolb's model comprises the four following stages:

Concrete Experience (CE):

This is the initial stage where learners engage in a direct and hands-on experience. It involves encountering a new situation or revisiting a familiar one to gather raw sensory data.

Reflective Observation (RO):

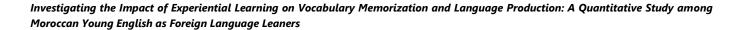
Following the concrete experience, learners step back to reflect on what happened. They consider the experience from various perspectives, contemplating the observations and identifying patterns or inconsistencies.

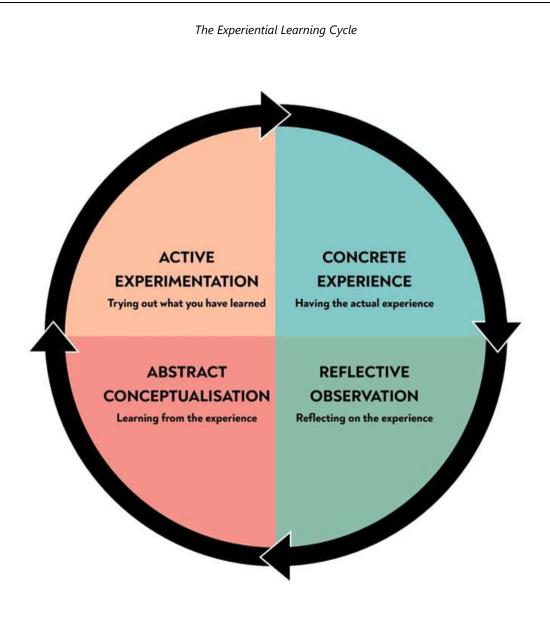
Abstract Conceptualization (AC):

In this stage, learners draw general conclusions and create theories based on their reflections. Abstract conceptualization involves synthesizing observations, forming hypotheses, and extracting principles that can be applied more broadly.

Active Experimentation (AE):

The final stage encourages learners to apply their theories and concepts in real-world situations. It involves testing hypotheses, making decisions, and actively experimenting with what has been learned.





Retrieved from: https://www.simplypsychology.org/wp-content/uploads/learning-cycle-kolb.jpg

2.1 Experiential Learning in EFL Context:

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, experiential learning becomes a powerful tool for language acquisition. Traditional language teaching often relies on rote memorization and theoretical instruction, isolating vocabulary and language skills from real-world contexts. Experiential learning in the EFL context seeks to bridge this gap by integrating language learning with meaningful and authentic experiences.

EL involves activities that immerse students in English language usage, making the learning process more contextual and engaging. This can include real-life scenarios, role-playing, hands-on experiments, and theme-specific assessments that relate to students' daily lives. By connecting language learning to practical experiences, EL in EFL aims to enhance not only vocabulary memorization but also language production skills, fostering communicative competence.

In summary, experiential learning offers a transformative approach to education by emphasizing the importance of direct experiences in the learning process. In the EFL context, this approach proves beneficial for creating a more dynamic and applicable foundation for language acquisition among students.

3. Methodology

The current study adopted a quasi-experimental design, distinguishing one class as the control group (receiving traditional teaching) and another as the experimental group (experiencing the Experiential Learning (EL) teaching approach). Over a five-week period, the control group underwent traditional instruction on topics like "At the Supermarket," "At the Doctors," and "Sink or Float." Conversely, the experimental group engaged with these themes through immersive, real-life scenarios. The teacher facilitated activities such as role-playing, organized field trips to supermarkets and clinics, and conducted hands-on experiments to enrich language learning. The study involved a total of 40 participants, comprising 4th-grade students, both male and female, aged between 9 and 10 years old. These students were enrolled in an English as a foreign language program at a private school in Morocco. The study's implementation was guided by Kolb's experiential learning model, as further elucidated in the subsequent sections.

3.1 Experiential Learning Interventions: Bridging Theory and Practice

The experiential group engaged in immersive activities to provide contextual understanding, while the control group received traditional instruction. This section aims to highlight key experiential learning interventions conducted during the study.

Supermarket Exploration:

To impart practical knowledge about supermarket-related vocabulary, the experiential group embarked on a field trip to a local supermarket. During the visit, students navigated through different aisles, actively engaging in conversations and discussions about items they encountered. The aim was to reinforce vocabulary in a real-life context, allowing students to associate words with tangible experiences.

Hands-on Experiment - "Sink or Float":

For the "Sink or Float" theme, a hands-on experiment was conducted. The teacher brought a container filled with water and various objects made of different materials. Students were tasked with individually testing whether each object sank or floated. This hands-on exploration provided a tactile experience, enabling students to grasp scientific concepts while simultaneously reinforcing language skills.

Moreover, students were challenged to label the objects based on their buoyancy, encouraging them to articulate their observations and findings. This practical application fostered a deeper understanding of the vocabulary associated with the experiment.

These experiential learning activities aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical language instruction and real-world application. The engagement in authentic scenarios not only enriched students' vocabulary but also promoted a holistic language learning experience. The subsequent sections will delve into the specific tasks and assessments employed to evaluate the impact of these experiential interventions on vocabulary memorization and language production.

3.2 The Importance of Kolb's Model in Contemporary Education:

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model holds significant importance in contemporary education for several reasons:

Holistic Learning Approach:

Kolb's model provides a holistic approach to learning by acknowledging the interconnectedness of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. It goes beyond traditional, linear learning models.

Adaptability to Diverse Learners:

The cyclical nature of the model caters to diverse learning styles. Learners can enter the process at different stages, emphasizing flexibility and accommodating various preferences for acquiring knowledge.

Integration of Theory and Practice:

The model promotes the integration of theoretical concepts with practical applications. It aligns with the contemporary emphasis on creating meaningful, applicable knowledge that can be translated into real-world scenarios.

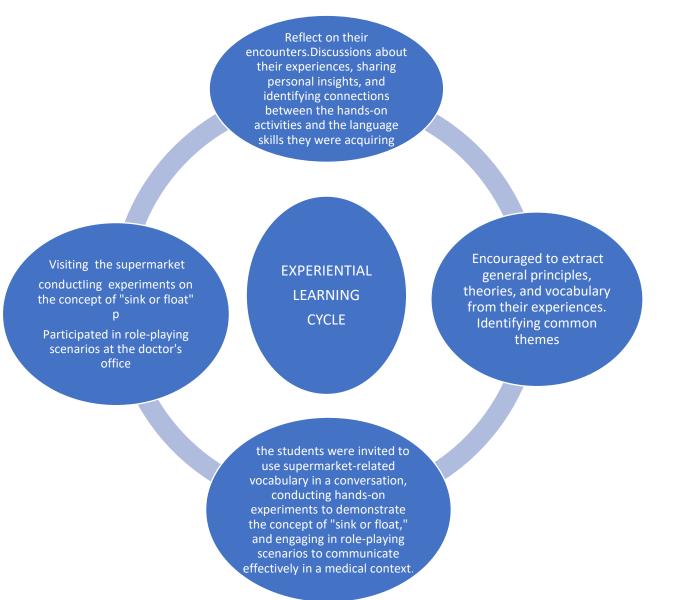
Promotion of Lifelong Learning:

Viewing learning as an ongoing cycle, Kolb's model emphasizes that learning is not confined to formal educational settings but is a continuous and evolving process throughout one's life.

Applicability in Diverse Educational Settings:

Kolb's model has proven versatile and applicable across various educational contexts, from traditional classrooms to professional development and experiential learning programs.

Figure2: Drawing on Kolb's model to create a cyclical learning experience:



Through this application of Kolb's model, the research design aimed to create a continuous and cyclical learning process. Participants were not passive recipients of information; instead, they actively engaged with the content through experiential activities, reflected on these experiences, conceptualized abstract principles, and then actively experimented with applying their learning.

Vocabulary Memorization Scores:			
Student	Control Group	Experimental Group	
1	75	87	
2	63	73	
3	65	93	
4	51	73	
5	63	73	
6	61	78	
7	37	83	
8	78	78	
9	81	98	
10	63	67	
11	33	93	
12	87	65	
13	78	75	
14	63	78	
15	51	73	
16	65	93	
17	78	83	
18	67	78	
19	53	68	
20	61	78	
Mean	58.65	76.65	

Table 1	
ocabulary Memorization Scores:	

Language Production Scores:			
Student	Control Group	Experimental Group	
1	75	87	
2	63	73	
3	61	93	
4	51	78	
5	61	63	
6	71	78	
7	37	83	
8	78	78	
9	91	98	
10	63	67	
11	73	93	
12	87	61	
13	98	76	
14	93	78	
15	51	73	
16	65	93	
17	83	81	
18	67	78	
19	63	68	
20	61	73	
Mean	62.6	77	

4. Results and Discussion

Comparison and Analysis:

4.1 Vocabulary Memorization:

The experimental group demonstrates a higher mean (76.65) compared to the control group (58.65), indicating a potential positive impact of experiential learning on vocabulary memorization.

4.2 Language Production:

Similarly, the experimental group shows a higher mean (77) compared to the control group (62.6) in language production, suggesting a potential enhancement in expressive language skills through experiential learning.

Overall, these findings suggest a consistent trend where the experimental group outperforms the control group in both vocabulary memorization and language production. This aligns with the notion that experiential learning may contribute positively to language acquisition.

Table 3 Standard Deviations:		
Control Group	12.39	11.66
Experimental Group	8.37	10.45

4.3 Vocabulary Memorization:

The relatively higher standard deviation in the control group with the value of σ Control \approx 12.39 indicates a wider spread of individual scores around the mean in the control group for vocabulary memorization. Whereas in the experimental group, the lower standard deviation value of \approx 8.37 suggests that students in this group have more consistent levels of performance in memorizing vocabulary.

4.4 Language Production:

Similar to vocabulary memorization, the control group exhibits a relatively high standard deviation in language production \approx 11.66. This implies that there is a diverse range of individual scores around the mean, indicating varying language production abilities among students receiving traditional instructional methods.

The slightly lower standard deviation **of** \approx 10.45 in the experimental group for language production suggests more consistent performance among students who received experiential learning. This could imply that experiential learning contributes to a more homogeneous level of language skills.

Aspect	Group	Percentage Increase	MeanScore
Vocabulary Memorization	Experimental	31.45%	76.65
	Control	7.45%	58.65
Language Production	Experimental	23.56%	77
	Control	9.61%	62.6
Theme-specific Assessments (At the Supermarket)	Experimental vs. Control	18% (Experimental outperformed)	_
Theme-specific Assessments (At the Doctors)	Experimental vs. Control	22% (Experimental outperformed)	-
Theme-specific Assessments (Sink or Float)	Experimental vs. Control	17% (Experimental outperformed)	-
Engagement Levels	Experimental	85% reported higher engagement	-
	Control	65% reported increased interest	-

 Table 4

 Summary of Results: Experiential Learning Intervention vs. Traditional Instruction

4.4 Experiential Learning Oral Assessment Rubric:

The following rubrics are designed to assess students' oral performance in both vocabulary memorization and language production within the context of experiential learning. The scores were assigned based on the criteria provided to evaluate individual student performances.

Criteria	Exceptional (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Limited (1)
	Accurately recalls and	Recalls and uses a	Recalls some relevant	
Demonstrates	utilizes a wide range of	good variety of	vocabulary terms, with	Struggles to recall
Recall	vocabulary related to	relevant vocabulary	occasional	and apply basic
	the given theme.	terms.	inaccuracies.	vocabulary terms.
	Effectively			
	incorporates learned	Applies learned		Struggles to apply
Contextual	vocabulary into	vocabulary	Demonstrates some	vocabulary within
Application	relevant scenarios and	appropriately within	difficulty applying	the context of the
	discussions.	the given context.	vocabulary in context.	theme.
				Rarely uses
Spontaneous	Spontaneously uses	Often uses learned	Occasionally uses	learned vocabulary
Usage	learned vocabulary	vocabulary	learned vocabulary	without
-	without hesitation.	spontaneously.	spontaneously.	prompting.

Table 5
Vocabulary Memorization Rubric :

Criteria	Exceptional (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Limited (1)
Fluency and Clarity	Expresses ideas fluently and articulately with clarity of pronunciation and intonation.	Communicates effectively with good fluency and clear pronunciation.	Communicates adequately with occasional hesitations or pronunciation issues.	Struggles to communicate thoughts with frequent hesitations and pronunciation difficulties.
Grammar and Sentence Structure	Demonstrates precise and accurate use of grammar and varied sentence structures.	Exhibits good control of grammar with some complexity in sentence structures.	Displays basic grammatical understanding, with occasional errors.	Struggles with fundamental grammar, resulting in frequent errors.
Appropriate Language Use	Uses language appropriately for the given context, showing a nuanced understanding of idiomatic expressions to the related themes	Generally uses language appropriately, considering the context.	Occasionally uses language inappropriately for the context.	Frequently uses language inappropriately, lacking awareness of context-specific expressions.

Table 6Language Production Rubric:

4.5 Implementation of the Rubric in Experiential Learning Assessment:

The rubrics for vocabulary memorization and language production were implemented to evaluate the oral performance of 4thgrade primary school students after the experiential learning intervention.

4.5.1. At the Supermarket Theme:

Vocabulary Memorization examples:

> Demonstrates Recall criteria :

Exceptional (4): the student accurately recalls and uses terms like "shopping cart," "groceries," and "checkout."

Proficient (3): the student recalls terms with occasional minor inaccuracies, such as omitting a less common item.

Basic (2): the student recalls common terms but struggles with recalling less common items, showing some hesitancy.

Limited (1): the student struggles to recall basic supermarket-related vocabulary.

> Contextual Application:

Exceptional (4): Student seamlessly incorporates vocabulary into a role-playing scenario, accurately describing the shopping process.

Proficient (3): Student applies vocabulary in context but may show minor hesitations in integrating terms smoothly.

Basic (2): Student attempts to apply vocabulary in a scenario but encounters difficulty in connecting terms to the context.

Limited (1): Student struggles to apply learned vocabulary within the supermarket context.

4.5.2. At the Doctors Theme:

Language Production (Examples):

Fluency and Clarity:

Exceptional (4): Student communicates health concerns fluently and with clear pronunciation, showing confidence.

Proficient (3): Student communicates effectively with good fluency but may exhibit slight hesitation in complex medical terms.

Basic (2): Student communicates adequately but encounters noticeable hesitations and minor pronunciation difficulties.

Limited (1): Student struggles to communicate health-related issues with frequent hesitations and pronunciation challenges.

4.6 Grammar and Sentence Structure

Exceptional (4): Student uses precise grammar and constructs sentences with complexity, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding.

Proficient (3): Student exhibits good control of grammar, incorporating varied sentence structures appropriately.

Basic (2): Student displays a basic understanding of grammar but may make occasional errors in sentence construction.

Limited (1): Student struggles with fundamental grammar, resulting in frequent errors and simplistic sentence structures.

4.7 Overall Observation:

The experimental group consistently demonstrates higher mean scores across both assessment criteria, indicating a potential positive impact of experiential learning on vocabulary memorization and language production.

Based on this analysis, it appears that students who received instruction through experiential learning not only scored higher on average but also exhibited a broader range of performance. This suggests that experiential learning may contribute to both improved overall performance and increased variability in individual student outcomes compared to traditional instruction. Further research and analysis would be needed for more robust conclusions.

4.8 Main Findings:

Experiential Learning Enhances Vocabulary Memorization:

The experimental group, engaged in experiential learning, demonstrated significantly higher scores in vocabulary memorization compared to the control group. Students showcased a robust ability to recall and apply vocabulary in real-life contexts, as evidenced by their performance in discussions, role-playing scenarios, and hands-on activities.

> Positive Impact on Language Production:

Students exposed to experiential learning exhibited improved language production skills. They demonstrated greater fluency, clarity, and grammatical accuracy when expressing themselves in both spontaneous conversations and structured activities.

> Correlation Between Engagement and Effectiveness:

Higher levels of student engagement were positively correlated with the effectiveness of experiential learning. Students who actively participated in discussions, role-plays, and experiments tended to show more significant improvements in both vocabulary memorization and language production.

4.9 Contribution to EFL Teaching and Learning:

• Validation of Experiential Learning Approach:

This study contributes to the validation of experiential learning as an effective pedagogical approach in EFL contexts. The findings underscore the benefits of incorporating real-life experiences, hands-on activities, and contextualized learning to enhance language acquisition.

• Practical Application of Vocabulary:

The emphasis on themes like the supermarket, doctor's visit, and "sink or float" allowed students to practically apply learned vocabulary in meaningful situations. This approach goes beyond rote memorization, fostering a deeper understanding and retention of language skills.

• Promotion of Communicative Competence:

Experiential learning activities promoted communicative competence, enabling students to express themselves with greater confidence and accuracy. The focus on real-world scenarios facilitated the development of language skills essential for effective communication in various contexts.

4.10 Implications for Curriculum Design:

The study suggests that EFL curriculum designers and educators should consider integrating experiential learning methodologies. Designing lessons around practical and relevant themes can enhance engagement and contribute to a more holistic language learning experience.

4.11 Importance of Active Student Participation:

The correlation between student engagement and effectiveness highlights the importance of fostering active student participation in the learning process. That is, educators are encouraged to create environments that encourage student involvement and interaction.

4.12 Future Avenues for Research:

While this study sheds light on the positive influence of experiential learning on vocabulary memorization and language production, it also opens doors to future inquiries. Two prominent directions for subsequent research are highlighted :

Firstly, a more in-depth exploration of the Long-term Effects is warranted. Delving into the enduring impact of experiential learning over an extended period could provide a nuanced understanding of how these benefits persist or evolve over time.

Secondly, there is a promising avenue in the realm of Technology Integration. That is, investigating the potential synergies between experiential language learning and cutting-edge technologies, such as virtual reality and interactive digital platforms, could unveil innovative approaches to enhance the language learning experience further.

Lastly, researchers could consider fostering Cross-disciplinary Studies by collaborating with experts from other disciplines. Exploring cross-disciplinary approaches to experiential language learning drawing inspiration from diverse fields, may contribute fresh perspectives and ideas.

Researchers can contribute to the ongoing evolution of experiential learning in language education by pursuing these avenues, addressing nuanced aspects, and expanding the applicability of this transformative approach.

5. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence supporting the efficacy of experiential learning in enhancing vocabulary memorization and language production among young students learning English as a foreign language. The consistently higher mean scores and increased variability in performance within the experimental group suggest that hands-on experiences and real-life scenarios significantly contribute to a more practical and applicable understanding of English vocabulary.

Investigating the Impact of Experiential Learning on Vocabulary Memorization and Language Production: A Quantitative Study among Moroccan Young English as Foreign Language Leaners

The observed positive impact of experiential learning on both vocabulary retention and language production skills highlights the need for a paradigm shift in language education. Traditional instruction, often relying on rote memorization and theoretical approaches, may not fully harness the potential of students to connect with and apply language skills in real-world contexts. Experiential learning emerges as a transformative pedagogical approach, fostering engagement, deeper understanding, and a more comprehensive language learning experience. Moreover, the demonstrated benefits suggest that creating dynamic, hands-on experiences can address the gaps in traditional instruction, providing students with a more holistic language learning foundation. Further exploration and integration of experiential learning principles into language education curricula are warranted, with a focus on refining instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of learners, thus paving the way for a more student-centered and impactful approach to language education.

In essence, the study advocates for the adoption of experiential learning strategies to create meaningful, engaging, and effective language learning experiences for young students.

About the Authors

Atimade Chankob (corresponding author) is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts. (FLLA) Ibn Tofail University (ITU), Kenitra, Morocco. She is a member of ' Language and Society' research Lab at ITU. Email: atimade.chankob@uit.ac.ma

Dr. Youcef Hdouch is a full Professor of linguistics, discourse analysis and ESP at the Faculty of Languages, Letters And Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco. He is the author of many books on the phonology and morphology of Amazigh and dozens of articles on political discourse analysis, ESP, etc. Currently, he is acting as the Head of the English Studies Department and counselor of the president of the university. He is also the coordinator of the vocational programs TEFL and Soft Skills in the Global Workplace. He is involved in many exchange programs with the European Union (Tempus SWING and ERASMUS + PACES, INSIDE? DIALANGUES. He is also the coordinator of the program Virtual Tabadul, an exchange program in collaboration with Florida International University, funded by the Steven Initiative. Email: <u>youcef.hdouch@uit.ac.ma</u>

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ORCID iD

Atimade Chankob: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8269-3953

Dr.Youcef Hdouch: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6184-3632

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