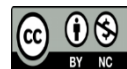


## Experiential Learning Strategy and Preschoolers' Performance in English Language

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### Abstract

This experimental study was conducted to examine the effect of experiential learning strategy on vocabulary development of preschool children in English language. The study used a pretest-post quasi experimental design. Two intact groups of preschool children were selected from an English medium school. Each group consisted of 30 children. Instrument was English language test consisting of vocabulary development, spelling test, sentence writing and creative writing. Pre-test was given to both the groups and the results were recorded. The control group was taught using conventional method of teaching; while the experimental group was taught using experiential learning strategy. After intervention of experiential learning strategy, a post test was conducted. Findings of the study showed that the children instructed using experiential learning technique achieved significantly higher scores on English subject test as compared to the students who were taught with conventional teaching method. It was suggested that experiential learning strategy may be used to improve performance in vocabulary development, spelling test and creative writing at preschool stage.

**Keywords:** *Experiential learning, Teaching strategy, Vocabulary development, English language learning*

### 1. Introduction

Experiential learning is a teaching strategy adopted by a teacher to make learning fun and long lasting. A lot of work has been done in previous decades on how people learn. Conventional lecturing or traditional ways of teaching is becoming obsolete for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Children only take interest in class if innovative methods of teaching are applied. Moreover, they willingly and actively learn through activities rather than simply reading and writing; and so, the process of learning is enhanced by their hands-on experiences. Though it involves several trials at times, but the learning becomes concrete and long lasting (Jolaoso, 2012). Learning becomes more effective, interesting, and long-lasting when the students are made to perform rather than just being asked to

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listen to the teacher and remember. Learning by doing is a technique introduced by Dewey (1938). He remained consistent on his concept of instrumentalism in education or learning by doing or a hand on learning which elaborated that learning is not effective until there is simultaneous practice. To Dewey, “Experience is cumulative and creative”, and human experience is active, reflective, and intelligent, whereby reflective experience is same as thinking. Dewey was of the view that people learn the best through experience. Students prefer to involve themselves in real-life tasks and challenges (Neill, 2005). He believed in student centered classroom rather than curriculum centered or teacher centered. It is found in literature that the more the senses are stimulated, the more a person learns and retains. In learning by doing, all the senses are involved so it is imperative in successful learning (Bowman, 2000). In the teaching learning process, the children experience learning tasks, memorize and understand to complete the tasks. They need necessary material and data to focus their thinking, interaction, and interest to process and analyze the information. In a traditional class, most of the students just copy the notes from lecture of board, thinking that it is their responsibility, but they remain unable to engage themselves with the course being taught.

Before the new technology was established and innovative methods of teaching were introduced, the instructor was the transmitter, and the learner was only the receiver of the knowledge. The mediums of this process were chalk, board and the content being delivered in the form of lecture. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century methods and techniques are still being followed at many places. Teacher centered classrooms are still there in most of the schools. The students have a minimum role to play here, and they are only at the receiving end of this process. Today, the educators find this method an outdated and less effective one as the learners usually tend to face boredom due to their passive role and least participation in the class. The traditional teaching methodology does not cater to real life experiences, rather it is just a rote learning of the concepts (Teo & Wong, 2000). Learning by doing approach gives students a real chance to learn to tackle life situations based on applied knowledge. It keeps the interest and understanding of the students at peak (Boud & Feletti, 1999).

Modern educationists find this method uninteresting and less effective as the learners tend to lose concentration in a short span of time due to inactive role and less participation. On the other hand, in learning by doing teaching strategy, teachers are actively involved in directing, guiding and helping the students in analyzing the information. With repeated practices in this process, students not only learn the contents of the lesson, but also develop many other skills. The intention of the teacher is to build students’ engagement in learning and to help

them develop their skills and to enable them to learn for life. This method gives opportunities of motivation, better chance of transmission of knowledge and engagement in active problem-solving skills. It may sometimes be complex, time-consuming and expensive. Promoting self-directed investigation and research compels learners to depend on evidence instead of upon authority i.e. textbook, teacher, or parent. Most students live in an authoritarian world with little or no opportunity to practice decision; further outdoor experience create urge to explore more (Prince, 2020). Previous studies were conducted using experiential learning strategy to explore children social development during play but this research aimed to find the effect of experiential learning in English language performance of the preschoolers.

### **1.1 Objective of the Study**

Following was the objective of the study:

1. To find the effect of experiential learning strategy on performance of preschool children in the subject of English.

### **1.2 Hypotheses of the study**

The following hypotheses were formulated to achieve the objective of the study:

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of control group and the experimental group in pre-test on domains of vocabulary development, spelling test, sentence writing and creative writing.
- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of control group and the experimental group in post-test on domains of vocabulary development, spelling test, sentence writing and creative writing.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The study is useful in employing experiential learning strategy in developing vocabulary and spelling among preschoolers. It may help the language teachers, teacher trainers and students to practice experiential learning approach in their teaching-learning activities. It may highlight findings that experiential learning creates an interactive and engaging environment. By integrating real-life experiences into language instruction, learners can achieve deeper language comprehension, increased motivation, and improved communicative competence. Instead of passively receiving information, children actively use the language in real-life contexts. This active engagement enhances vocabulary, spelling, and creative writing.

## **2. Literature Review**

Experiential Learning is the exponent of the teaching learning process where learning of the students takes place through their hands on experiences. The teacher acts in the class as facilitator and students are the active participants

of the process. Experiential learning is entirely different from rote or didactic learning method in which student plays a passive role in teacher centered classroom. Experiential learning has many names in educational setting such as cooperative learning, action learning, learning by doing, service learning and situated learning. Kolb (1984) worked to develop the educational approach drawing from the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget. Teaching through learning by doing method motivates the people most. Learning has the best effects on the learner when there is a desire to gain knowledge (Senge, 1990). According to Kolb experiential learning model, going to the zoo and learning about the animals through observation and interaction with the zoo environment is far more fruitful than reading about the animals from the book.

Jirasek (2004) defined experiential learning in terms of educational processes which provides experience to analyze and reflect and gain experience to serve better in life. Experiential learning emphasizes on the direct experience of phenomena under assumption which will lead to true meaningful and long-lasting learning (Neill, 2005). Experiential learning gives a challenging situation and engages learners in tasks which they try to resolve. In experiential learning challenging activities are given in a specific way that the learners remain uncertain about the result of their experience, there can be more solutions and those include mental, emotional, social, financial and additional risks (Chytilova, 2005).

Activities in experiential learning follow a sequence learning pattern which would lead to significant experiences. These experiences help individuals in critical situations and enable them to overcome tough situations. Moreover, these experiences would come back to individuals during critical moments of their lives, and they would bring them support to overcome crisis (Martin, 2004). Effectiveness of experiential learning in education was examined by Aggarwal and Goodell (2016) and they reported that hands-on, real-world experiences enable them to do practical application and prepare themselves for market workforce. In experiential learning, things are easier to learn when we learn them by doing. The ancient concept is being followed which asks for doing the things practically and the same is appreciated in modern and recent vintage for teaching the young children.

Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2005) examined experiential learning techniques and its impact on students' learning and found that these techniques led to enhance students' learning. The study used common tools at higher education level, but this study focused on techniques suitable for early childhood education children. A real client project-based learning experience was introduced by Annavarjula and Trifts (2012) in an international business program

and a significant impact was found. The experiential learning intervention provided multiple benefits to the students and the university.

The inclusion of experiential learning techniques all through the students' learning experience can provide significant benefit according to Kolb and Kolb (2012). Experiential learning theory supports that experiential learning and real life learning are mutually supportive. Five propositions were developed related to experiential learning. Boud et al. (2000) highlighted that experience sets the basis of and stimulus for learning. They discussed a holistic way in which learners are actively engaged and socially and culturally responsive due to the socio-emotional perspective in which it happens. Chavan (2011) conducted qualitative and quantitative study and reported findings about students' attitudes and experiential learning effectiveness. The strategy not only engaged them but also improved their learning experiences.

McLeod (2013) discussed process of learning in which knowledge is constructed when human experiences are transformed and it consists of abstract concepts which learners can apply in real world situations. Further, new experience open ways to develop new ideas. Beard and Wilson (2006) described that the disposition and perspective make the experiences unique. Learners see the same experiences with different angle. Different interaction with an event gives different experience as it is perceived and processed differently by different learners. There appears a relationship between previous experience, current experience and perception of the learner and that is not the same. Thus, experiential learning creates new ways to think and perceive and lead learners to resolve the problems independently. Children also experienced increase in getting feelings of connectedness and empathy when taught with experiential learning strategy. It improved their behaviour and they felt better sense of community engagement (Gartland, 2021). Preschool children were engaged with positive effects through experiential learning and children's participation improved when they were given activities and tasks like role play, worksheets and group discussions (Holmes, 2022). The context of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is critical to start sustainable work and ECE practitioners are now using UN Sustainable Development Goals to practice relevant pedagogies. Thus, experiential learning provides a way to employ collaborative exploration which results in the transformation according to ECE context (Engdahl & Furu, 2022).

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

In this study, quantitative approach was followed. The study adopted pre-test post-test intact group, quasi-experimental design. Before intervention, pre-

test was conducted and then after intervention, post-test was conducted. Measures were taken to control threats to internal validity and external validity. No home assignments were given to the students to minimize the chance of any intervention from the parents.

### **3.2 Population and Sample**

All children of Preschool level enrolled under low-cost private schools of urban area of Islamabad were the population. These schools were registered with private school network Islamabad. A school was conveniently selected to conduct the experiment. Two classes each having 30 children were selected. These children were considered as equal students in average performance in the class. Then randomly one was included in the control group and the other one for the experimental group.

### **3.3 Intervention**

In order to examine the effect of experiential learning strategy on performance of preschool children in English language, two sections of the preschool children were selected. One was taken as experimental group that was given treatment of experiential learning environment. The techniques used were: Field trips, Flash cards, Real objects, Audio visual aids, Computer Assisted Instructions, Role plays, Worksheets, Group discussions, Quizzes, Mind maps, Word Puzzles, Spelling games. The experiment was conducted after the final exams of the preschoolers with the consent of their parents.

The children of both the groups were called during the summer break with special permission of their parents. The reason of conducting the experiment during summer break was not to disturb the regular classes and the regular syllabus. According to the four weeks' planner; the four general topics of English subject were taken, namely: vocabulary building, spelling test, sentence writing and creative writing.

Initially, both the classrooms were set up in a regular setting where the pretest was conducted, and the results were recorded. The pretest was conducted from their regular previously taught syllabus to assess that they were almost at the same level. The two groups were formed on a random selection basis. Later the experimental classroom was taught using flash cards; real objects; worksheets; word puzzles etc. It was 2 hours and 40 minutes' class every day, Monday to Friday for four weeks. 40 minutes each were given to the above-mentioned four topics. Both the groups were taught the same topics but with different methodology.

In the traditional class, only textbooks and reader were used by the teacher whereas, in the experimental class the children were provided with modern aids such as flash cards; real objects; smart boards; worksheets; word

puzzles. These children were also given time for group discussions and class presentations. For experiential learning group, the teacher introduced some games inside and outside the classroom.

For vocabulary building children were provided with scrambled words and they were asked to rearrange the letters of those words to make correct words. Once a week they were taken outside the classroom in different places such as playground; art rooms libraries and laboratories and were asked to make lists of the things around them. This is how they made their own dictionary of words. After two weeks course they were assessed. Twenty-five words were taken from their dictionary and were scrambled by the teacher. The children were asked to unscramble the letters to make proper and correct words. Each word contained one mark. On the other hand, in traditional classrooms the children were taught the names of the things that are considered to be present in the playground, laboratories and art rooms. They learned the names by heart and were not very successful in unscrambling the same letters that were given to the students of the experimental group.

For the spelling test the experimental group was taught spellings with sounds and phonetics in association with the pictures of flash cards while the controlled group was asked to learn the same spellings as per the routine classwork. For sentence writing only key words and a picture of the object on which they were supposed to write short sentences were given to the experimental group. They were asked to make a map out of those key words. The key words and mind mapping helped them to join interesting sentences to form a paragraph. They were also provided with the internet facility to find out more details about the object. The other group was only asked to copy down the paragraph from the classroom white board.

For the creative writing, the experiential learning group was shown a short video on smart board out of which they were taught to make a story of their own. They were also guided by the teacher to role play the story they had read in the class. The natural creativity which was already enhanced by the variety of activities helped them to create a new story. They were also asked to write about the school trip they had before the summer holidays. The writing practice and their vocabulary made story writing easy for them in the exam. While for traditional class the students were given a picture to write about it. After one month the post test was conducted on those topics and the results were recorded. A test consisted of vocabulary, spelling, sentence writing and creative writing was developed.

For the vocabulary development test, few letters were given to the students, and they were asked to make as many words as they could start with

those letters; maximum limit was 25 words. For spelling test, dictation of 25 words was given from their own textbook, reader and things in the classroom. The experimental group was taught phonetics, so they were able to spell new words on their own. For sentence writing, three topics were given out of which they were asked to write on any one topic of their choice. This question contained 10 marks. In order to measure their strength in creative writing, a picture was given to them, and they were asked to write about what was happening in the picture in 10 lines. To control intervening variables, variables such as environment of the classroom and qualification and experience of the teaching staff arranged for both the groups were kept the same. To avoid parents' participation home assignments were made very easy and the same for both the groups.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The descriptive as well as the inferential statistics were used for the analysis of the data. For the descriptive statistics, the mean scores and standard deviation were computed. For the inferential statistics, the t-test was applied for drawing inferences and to test the hypotheses.

Table 1

*Mean Scores on Pretest and frequency distribution of scores of experimental group and control group*

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Mean	65.16	64.43
Standard Deviation	19.77	19.33
Range of Scores		
20 – 30	2	2
30 – 40	2	0
40 – 50	3	2
50 – 60	5	4
60 – 70	2	3
70 – 80	4	6
80 – 90	5	6
90 –100	6	8

There were two groups in the study i.e. experimental and control were compared. The means scores were shown in table 1. Pre-test results showed that the students in both the groups are on the same academic level and there is a clear similarity between the control group and the experiment group. The mean scores of control group are quite close to those of the experimental group i.e. 65.16 and 64.43. The standard deviation and variance showed that the scores are equally distributed in the two groups. And the frequencies of the various grades are also



almost same with equal number of students in each group. So there exists a symmetry and it was kept as per hypothesis, the experiment is supposed to examine the effect of experiential teaching strategy on performance of the children in English.

Table 2

*Analysis of sub factors of control group in the posttest*

	Vocabulary Building	Spelling Test	Sentence Writing	Creative Writing
Mean	15.56	17.96	14.5	13.83
S.D	5.37	5.09	4.43	4.68

Table 2 indicates the variance in the result of posttest of control group is 406.50 which show that almost all the children performed average in all the subjects taught by traditional teaching techniques.

Table 3

*Analysis of experimental group on sub factors in language learning in posttest*

	Vocabulary Building	Spelling Test	Sentence Writing	Creative Writing
Mean	21.54	22.7	19.23	18.53
S.D	3.42	2.67	2.94	4.81

Table 3 indicates the coefficient of variance in the result of posttest of experimental group is 165.97 which show that almost all the children have secured good marks in all the subjects taught by experiential strategy.

Table 4

*Comparison of achievement scores of control group and experimental group in English subject*

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Mean	56.9	82.23
S.D	20.16	12.88
Variance	406.50	165.97

The posttest results show the remarkable difference in the learning of the experimental group. There lies a massive difference in the mean scores where experimental group performed better. The mean score of the controlled group is 56.9 whereas, the mean score of experimental group is as high as 82.23. The variance shows that how far the data is spread out. The coefficient of variance of the experimental group is smaller depicting very less variations in its scores.

The post test results of the experimental group are different from those of the control group. There is a noticeable difference in the mean scores of control and experimental groups. The experimental group has clearly outperformed the controlled group as was hypothesized. The reduced standard deviation and variance in the results of vocabulary development; spelling test; sentences

writing, creative writing and of the total test result depict the overall achievement of the group. The similarity in the pattern of scores among the experimental group is the obvious indication of the better understanding of the learning material. The results get further clarified by frequency of various ranges of scores. In the experimental group no student is found in the minimum band of scores.

### **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The study examined the effect of experiential teaching strategy on preschoolers' performance in English language. The value of using experiential teaching was confirmed as there was improvement in vocabulary development, spellings, sentence writing and creative writing of the children. The results showed that the children taught through experiential teaching strategy performed better in English vocabulary and spelling test and these findings were also aligned with findings reported by Tete et al. (2014) and Paul (2005). The results also showed significant difference between experimental group and control group in the domain of sentence writing and creative writing. As the study used intact groups in the experiment, there might be slight effect of background variables on vocabulary development but both groups had same level of variation regarding the previous performance records. The findings of the study showed evidence of experiential teaching strategy as student-centered teaching actively engaged students and they took interest to learn by doing. They also applied their concepts in real situation which were supported by Chavan (2011). It was examined that small activities to put the children in practical situations like role play, mind maps, spelling games etc. made their learning experiences more engaging and enjoyable. The children of experimental group were more prepared to do quizzes and word puzzles and that of control group were interested in listening and depended on available material and these findings were supported by Jolaoso (2012). Learning at preschool level becomes more effective and long lasting when it is employed in a practical form. It involves both self-initiation and hands on activity. From the findings it is quite evident that experiential learning gives better results as compared to the traditional teaching. The impression is retainable for both individual and the group. The students who scored low in the pretest indicated significant improvement.

### **5. Recommendations**

On the basis of the conclusions, it is recommended that;

1. Preschool teachers may focus on active learning pedagogies which are based on experiential learning strategy.
2. Teachers of early grades may be given hands-on training on creating activities of learning by doing.

3. Preschool children may be given exposure to see and do and may be involved in tasks related to their lives through worksheets, outside visits and role plays.
4. Emphasis may be increased on practical tasks instead of curricular content at early childhood level.
5. Flexible schedule, readiness of the children and activity plan may be made part of teaching at the preschool level.

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