

THE IMPACT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT: *This paper seeks to examine the effectiveness of the experiential learning theory by David Kolb in enhancing language learning strategies in an EFL context. Kolb's four-stage model enables the learner to learn by experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing and experimenting. The experimental group were selected through purposive sampling technique and comprised of 60, Undergraduate students registered for a Business programme. A series of tasks were designed to facilitate the development of skills at each stage of the cycle. A pre and post strategy evaluation was done using the SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) devised by Rebecca Oxford (1990). In addition to the SILL, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and students reflections through reflective learning journals. Findings revealed that there was an extremely significant difference between the pre and post SILL survey results after the period of intervention. It resulted in a rise in strategy use from medium to high. Implications for further research into innovative pedagogical approach that would develop high strategy users are discussed.*

KEYWORDS: Experiential learning cycle, language learning strategies, teaching methodology reflection, curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century educators are attempting to implement, adapt, re-invent and improvise teaching methods that would link theory with real life experiences, in other words creating an educated individual who can meet the needs of a democratic society. The stress is more on the higher education institutions to develop employability skills in learners that would facilitate a smooth transition from graduation to obtaining a white collar job. This demand calls for dedicated pedagogical methods that would enhance the educational experience of students in and out of the classroom. The main aim of teaching is to create autonomous learners, who are able to take responsibility of their learning and are capable of individualizing their experiences to obtain maximum benefit to be competent users of the target language. It is a well-known fact that there is no- 'one size fits all' method to promote competent users of the target language due to various factors that influence the method, approach or technique that a teacher intends to use in the classroom. Primarily, the focus is to support the learning process, which differs based on context, culture, gender and other external and internal variables.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of the experiential learning cycle in developing language learning strategies. This paper does not intend to suggest an alternative to strategy instruction however, it embeds strategy awareness tasks within the existing curriculum following the experiential learning cycle.

Rationale for choosing the ‘Experiential learning model’

A great deal of previous research into Language learning strategies has focused on models that would develop language learning strategies in both EFL and ESL contexts. (J Rubin, Chamot, Harris, & Anderson, 2007) The debate on whether learning strategies should be taught implicitly or explicitly is an ongoing discussion with different views by several influential researchers. (Chamot, 2004) suggests that teachers should prefer explicit instruction and integrate instruction into their regular curriculum, rather than teaching it as a separate course for learning strategies. However, at the tertiary level, it is assumed that adult learners bring with them strategies that have already been developed during their past educational experiences, so the teachers role in this context is to make the learners aware of the existing strategies and develop strategies that are used less frequently. (Joan Rubin & Associates, 2005) opine that in order to deploy strategies effectively, learners should contextualize their strategies and develop the means to evaluate, reflect and adapt strategies according to the demands of the task. (A. D. Cohen, 1996) maintains that the primary aim of Strategy-Based Instruction is to create awareness among learners regarding the manner in which they prefer to learn the target language and identify ways to continue their learning process after they leave the classroom. Teaching strategies explicitly to learners involves knowledge of Strategy Based Instruction. As noted by (Vieira, 2003) as cited in (J Rubin et al., 2007) teachers experience difficulties in implementing strategy instruction due to restrictions in customizing the curriculum, rigidity to change existing teaching style, teacher’s beliefs and inadequate knowledge of strategy instruction.

(Griffiths, 2004) points out that learning strategy theory has the potential to work alongside any methods, theories and approaches and can easily be a part of an eclectic syllabus. The goal of a strategy based instruction seems achievable with the implementation of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle. A well-established approach that has frequently been implemented in various disciplines at higher education is the experiential learning approach. ‘It provides an integrative framework for understanding the teaching-learning process’’. (Fry & Kolb, 1979)

There are several experiential learning theories till date, however, Kolb’s experiential learning model has been tried out in several studies. This model provides a holistic development of the learner, by taking the learner through the four stages of the learning process. The first stage begins with the concrete experience of the learner where they are made aware of the existing strategies from their previous experiences, then reviewing them, conceptualizing what they have reviewed and trying to analyze ways how to put into practice what they have learned. (J Rubin et al., 2007) As stated by (Andrew D .Cohen) if learners are equipped with tools to explore their preferences to learning styles and strategies, they would consciously select strategies suitable for specific tasks. Kolb’s learning cycle encourages the application of various learning strategies at every stage of the learning process. As the learner moves from one stage to the other, along with enhancing their learning strategies, they tend to take responsibility of their learning, thus leading towards autonomy. Above all, the experiential learning cycle provides flexibility for the teacher as well as the learner. In the process of reflecting and personalizing learning, the learner becomes more independent in managing the learning process on their own. Therefore, an awareness of learning strategies and active involvement in the experiential learning cycle promotes effective language learning.

Experiential learning Model works well with skills based modules where the focus is on developing language learning strategies. This method can be adopted with content based modules as well if the institution supports integration of experiential learning tasks as a part of the regular curriculum.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brief overview of language learning strategies

'Learning strategies' is a commonly used term, yet it is a concept that is difficult to define. The most prominent studies that defined this term three decades or more is that of Rubin (1975). According to Rubin (1975), learning strategies are defined as 'the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge'. While a variety of definitions emerged to date, the most influential definition that was adopted by many researchers on learning strategies was that of Oxford (1990b) stated that, 'foreign or second language (L2) learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques students use often consciously to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2'. Similar to Rubin, (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) also consider strategies as 'techniques' and further adds that every individual uses these techniques to facilitate retention of new knowledge. (Weinstein & Mayer, 1983) highlight the goal of a learning strategy 'to affect the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or integrates new knowledge'. The central focus of all definitions is the 'learner' and the 'process of learning' 'As rightly stated by (R. L. Oxford, n.d.) 'there is no complete agreement on exactly what strategies are; how many exist; how they should be defined, demarcated and categorized; and whether it is possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies'.

Several researchers contributed to the area of language strategies, however Oxford's definition seems to be very transparent. It focusses on the conscious effort of the learner to improve L2 skills. According to Oxford (1990), the general features of language learning strategies are:

1. Contribute to the main goal: communicative competence	7. Support learning both directly and indirectly
2. Allow learners to become more self-directed	8. Are not always observable
3. Expand the role of teachers	9. Are often conscious
4. Are problem-oriented	10. Can be taught
5. Are specific actions taken by the learner	11. Are flexible
6. Involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive	12. Are influenced by a variety of factors

(R. L. Oxford, n.d.) classified the six learning strategies into two categories: direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. As observed in the features of language learning strategies, LS takes into consideration direct and indirect learning which is evident in strategies acquired indirectly such as metacognitive, affective or social strategies. Oxford (1990) reports that memory strategy also termed as mnemonics is not a strategy that was unknown. Memory strategies are powerful mental tools which assists in storing, making associations and reviewing meaningful information. The four significant cognitive strategies identified by Oxford (199) are Practicing, Receiving and Sending Messages, Analyzing

and Reasoning and Creating structure for Input and Output which are crucial for learning a new language. The next direct strategy is the compensation strategy, it implies that learners use this strategy when they need to substitute their lack of information in crucial situations. A successful learner guesses intelligently the meaning of an unknown word in context, while a less proficient learner tries to find resources like a dictionary to find the meaning of the word.

The indirect learning strategies, (metacognitive, affective and social) are called indirect because they support the process of learning implicitly. Metacognitive strategy enables learners to coordinate their own learning process through centering arranging, planning and evaluating. Affective strategies deals with the learners' emotions, attitudes, motivation and values. Negative feelings and attitude towards the target language might create a mental block and hinder the learning process. Social strategies implies interaction between peers leading to effective communication skills through asking questions and cooperating with each other in activities that require social interaction

Similar distinction of direct and indirect learning strategies were made by (Joan Rubin, 2009). The direct strategies that contribute to language learning are cognitive and metacognitive strategies that involves clarification or verification, guessing or inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice, memorization, monitoring, planning and self-management. On the other hand the indirect strategies are communication strategies and social strategies which arise due to the necessity of interacting with co-speakers. Rubin notes that obtaining knowledge of strategies employed by successful language learners can contribute towards developing these strategies in the less proficient learners.

(O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) list three categories of language learning strategies namely Metacognitive, Cognitive and Socioaffective strategies. Metacognitive strategies assist learners in planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning process. Cognitive strategies deals with specific learning tasks that entails direct manipulation of the information to enhance learning. Socio affective strategies are questioning for clarification and cooperation. The classifications of the language learning strategies by several researchers provide insights into the process of the language learning, based on cognitive and educational psychology.

Oxford's classification provides a systematic categorization of the learning strategies as compared to the other LLS models.

Related studies in Language Learning Strategies

Language strategies vary depending on several contextual, socio-cultural, educational and psychological factors. A great deal of previous research into learning strategies have focused on foreign language learners and second language learners. Research has shown that compared to the foreign language learners, second language learners exhibit a wider range of learning strategies because they are exposed to an environment that demands greater language proficiency (Green & Oxford, 1995). The influence of external factors on LLS, results in different sets of classification systems. As cited in (Chamot, 2004), an environment that demands interaction with speakers of the target language demand strategies such as social, compensatory and affective learning strategies (Cummins, 2000). Likewise strategies differ if it is an examination setting where the

learner is required to memorize grammatical facts or vocabulary. The choice of learning strategies depends of the learners own evaluation of the learning process.

The challenges faced by researchers with regard to learning strategies is that it is unobservable and can only be understood from the behavior of the language learner.(Griffiths, 2004) A large and growing body of literature has investigated learner variables such as age, gender, learning styles, motivation, educational and cultural backgrounds on the effect of learning strategies. It is interesting to note the fluctuation of the effect of leaner variables on strategy use.

A study carried out by (Dhanapala, 2007) on Japanese and Sri Lankan learners aimed to investigate the learning strategies that were employed by ESL and EFL learners. The Japanese students were from a background where English was taught as a foreign language, while the Sri Lankan students were from an environment where English was the second language. The study indicated significant differences between both the groups of learners with regards to the overall strategy use, although both were advanced learners.Sri Lankan learners displayed more frequent use of strategies than the Japanese learners, which the researcher attributes to a cultural differences in both countries. Studies that have utilized SILL have claimed that learners surrounded by the target language have demonstrated frequent use of learning strategies that those learners who had limited exposure to the target language. Green and Oxford)

(Razi, 2012), grouped English Language Teaching department students into two, one group consisted of learners with ten years of learning experience and the other with more than ten years of experience. His findings revealed that there was no significant difference between learners with less or more than ten years of English language learning experience with regards to strategy use. In a similar Turkish context (Uztosun, 2014) investigated LLS employed by 275 Turkish students. He inferred that educational background greatly influences strategy choice, the experienced learners use cognitive and compensations strategies more frequently than the less experienced one. A variation was observed between Omani and Palestinian students influence of proficiency on learning strategies. (Radwan, 2011) surveyed 128 students at a University in Oman, to examine the relationship between gender and English proficiency, it was deduced from the findings that language proficiency had a significant effect on the overall strategy use. Likewise, (Khalil, n.d.) surveyed the strategy use of 184 University EFL learners from Palestine and found a similar effect. On the contrary, Shamis conducted her research on 99 Arabic speaking BA English major students in a University in Palestine and noted no significant difference of gender and proficiency on the use of learning strategies.

The studies on the effect of gender on language strategies were highlighted by several reserachers. Most of the studies indicated no significant difference of gender on strategy use. (Ehrman and Oxford, Abu shamis, 2003; Radwan,2011; Salim Razi 2012;Ali Erarslan,2014, Ismail, S. A. A., & Al Khatib, , Boggu.A ,A. Z. 2013,SARIÇOBAN, Arif and SARICAOĞLU Aysel,Nisbet, Tindall, and Arroyo).Although statistical analysis displayed no significance, it was evident that females exhibited more use of strategies than their male counterparts.(OXFORD, REBECCA NYIKOS, MARTHA,Sherafat, Zahra,Kabiri, Pantea; Soori, Afshin) . Oxford infers that the fluctuation in strategy use found in some gender studies are due to the manner in which both sexes reflect on their strategies but *'are not in reality all that different when they actually use strategies.'*” (p. 248)

Brief Overview of Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning is an important component that is often discussed in learning theories. Learning in any context, formal or informal provides learners with experience whether past or present, it depends on how relevant the experience is to the learning process. It is the role of the teacher to find ways to channelize rich experiences and incorporate them into the curriculum. "The best way for learners to learn how to use knowledge in multiple contexts is to have the experience of applying knowledge in multiple contexts". (Buriak, McNurlen, & Harper, 1996). 'Learning by doing' or experiential learning is enhanced when learners reflect on their prior experiences and infer related knowledge that would support their process of learning.

David Kolb's book on Experiential Learning has greatly influenced researchers and practitioners specifically at the tertiary level. 'Learning 'in the words of (D. A. (1984. Kolb, 1984) is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience " Experiential learning engages learners actively in the learning process, hence it attracts teachers of all disciplines to apply this model in their learning and teaching activities. ELM encourages the learner to discover their learning styles, reflect upon their areas of weakness, make connections between theory and real life situations, and think critically.

Although literature reveals scholars who emphasized on the educational experience of the learner, the theory that gained ground was proposed by David Kolb. Kolb draws his ideas of experiential learning from theories laid by Dewey, Lewin and Piaget. A working definition on the learning process coined by Kolb is '*Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences*'. Kolb's ELT is a holistic theory that encompasses the learning process as an adaptation of the whole being, with sound background from humanistic concepts of learning. Kolb's experiential model was a product that originated after extensive study of learning models proposed by Piaget, Lewin and Dewey. He defined the nature of experiential learning by identifying the similarities between these three models. He characterized learning as (i) a process ;(ii) a continuous process based on experience ;(iii) a dialectic process; (iv) a holistic process of human adaptation; (v) a transaction between the individual and the environment; (vi) a process of creating knowledge.(D. A. (1984. Kolb, 1984)

According to Kolb, learning is cyclical in nature. The four-component cyclical mode of learning is known as the 'Kolb Learning Cycle'. For successful learning, the learner should involve actively in all the four modes, i.e. Concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC) and active experimentation. The first stage requires the learner to be open minded towards new experiences and fully immerse themselves in gaining knowledge from the experience. The second stage is reflective observation, which is indispensable to any successful learning. As the stage suggests, the learner must reflect on the experience and observe any meaningful knowledge from various perspectives. This is followed by the abstract conceptualization stage where the knowledge gained from the two stages are integrated. In other words, integrate their observations with their past experience and create concepts. The last stage in the experiential cycle is the active experimentation, in which the learner transforms the new knowledge gained from observing and reflecting on the experience to theories that could be applied in making decisions and problem solving.

Studies related to Experiential Learning Theory

(a. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009) provided a comprehensive review of studies that applied the experiential learning methods in various disciplines at the tertiary level. Cited in (a. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009), the ‘*2008 Experiential Learning Theory Bibliographies (A. Kolb & Kolb, 2008a, 2008b) include 2,453 entries*’ Practitioners evaluated, tested, adopted and measured the effectiveness of experiential learning method in an effort to enhance student learning. All in all, the studies conducted in the various disciplines is an evidence that experiential learning method is flexible and can be customized to different fields of education.

(Laing, 2009) studied the effect of an experiential learning activity on students understanding of concepts related to management accounting. For this purpose students were divided into focus group and treatment group. Data was analyzed based on the mid and the final exam tests, and the results were positive indicating a reasonable escalation in the performance of the treatment group. The study recommends incorporating experiential learning activity in accounting education since students are greatly involved in such activities and this facilitates better understanding of difficult concepts. A similar study in University of Malta, using Kolb’s Learning Cycle was conducted by (Muscat & Mollicone, 2012). Thirty one mechanical engineering students who were in their third year participated in this study. The aim of the research was to assess the process of learning of the engineering students and design laboratory activities that would stimulate them to learn the mechanics of materials in their course. It was interesting to note that the majority (59.7%) indicated a strong preference to learn through ‘concrete experience’ and the least preferred section of the learning cycle was (9.7%) ‘reflective observation’. Comments from student feedback was positive. They felt the method applied in the lab sessions was very effective to learn difficult concepts, in this study it was the key concepts behind mechanics of materials. Both studies reveal that challenging concepts related to either accounting or engineering was comprehensible when the Experiential learning cycle was applied to the task.

Two studies using Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory on performance of students in an English course indicated similar results. In a study using Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory conducted by (Chermahini, Ghanbari, & Talab, 2013) showed that there was a significant relationship between students learning style and the academic performance in an English Test. The participants were 488 EFL High School students from Iran, enrolled in an English course. The analysis of the achievement test indicated that the performance varied according to the preferred learning styles. They concluded that an awareness of the learners learning style can be a good predictor of academic performance in an EFL context. Some writers (e.g. YANG et al.) have mainly been interested in questions concerning learning styles and patterns for English among Chinese college students. The researchers measured the learning styles of 83 students using Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory, out of which 16 were native speakers of American English. The study aimed to examine whether learning styles differed depending on the duration of English learning or on the age at which English was learned. Findings indicated that students displayed diverse patterns of learning styles that affected their perceptual patterns of English. Significant variation was found in the length of learning English and perceptual English patterns, but age at which English is studied was insignificant.

Experiential learning model has also been employed by instructors to design online courses. One study by (Ikuta, 2008) examined the effect of Kolb's learning style in designing online instruction. Kolb's LSI was included to make the activity more learner centred. The findings revealed that creating an awareness among designers regarding their own learning styles, increased the use of learner centered activities in the online course which resulted in a rise in learner participation in the course. (Lu, Clarke, & Gong, 2007) trace the relationship between Kolb's Learning styles and online learning behaviors and outcomes. Although KSLI was administered to 104 third year undergraduate students in the Department of Educational Technology at Shandong Normal University in China, only 40 were selected based on their preferred learning styles for a better investigation into the relationship. The study revealed a significant effect of KSLI on the online behavior, i.e. total reading and discussion time of the participants, however the effect was not significant between the KSLI and learning outcomes. The findings provide implications for instructors designing online learning modules for mixed ability students possessing varied learning styles.

An investigation into the relationship between learning environment and teaching techniques was carried out by (Huerta-Wong & Schoech, 2010). The study utilized two learning environments, virtual learning environments and a direct learning environment. The second aspect was the implementation of two teaching techniques, the experiential method on one hand and the lecture method with discussions on the other hand. The effectiveness was evaluated on the learning of listening skills, satisfaction and learning gains. The outcomes of the study revealed that the direct or face to face learning environment produced better results compared to the virtual learning environment merely because of the experiential learning techniques used. Likewise, (Tete, Limongi, Almeida, & Borges, 2014) were on the lookout for an effective teaching strategy to develop entrepreneurship skills. The model was applied on Brazilian undergraduate students who were enrolled on a business administration course. Majority of students (87%) evaluated the new pedagogical method as 'good' or 'very good'. The results demonstrate that the experiential learning project was successful in developing entrepreneurial skills.

(McGlenn, 2003) examined the reflective component in the experiential learning cycle. The process involved student teachers on the teacher education programme. Data was drawn from the reflections carried out by the student teachers during the semester and comments from the supervisors on the reflection cycle were incorporated into the study. The investigator asserts that the experiential learning model enabled the student teachers to reflect on their teaching practices, which was more beneficial than hearing feedback about their teaching from a third person. The aspect of reflection was supported by (Steel, Carmichael, Holmes, Kinse, & Sanders, 2007). They attempted to apply the experiential learning approach to students belonging to the Department of Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield. A number of experiential learning exercises and semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the opinion of students and teachers on their experiences. The data conceded that experiential learning exercises caters to the demands of the real world of journalism. They further reiterate that experiential learning should be embedded with the curriculum and more stress laid on the reflective element of experiential learning.

(Specht & Sandlin, 1991) compared a traditional method of teaching with the experiential learning method. The groups under observation comprised of undergraduate accounting students. Data was

collected through quizzes that were given after each class and six weeks after the teaching began. Surprisingly, both groups indicated no significant difference in short-term learning but the retention of knowledge after a span of six weeks was evident in the experiential class. Moreover, the scores of the group taught through the lecture method was low. The researchers concluded that experiential learning method was able to create a better understanding of the subject and thus enabled the learners to retain information better than the class that followed the traditional method of teaching. A parallel study considering knowledge retention was carried out by (Powell & Wells, 2002). Kolb's experiential model was employed in three experiential science lessons to assess the progress in learning. Information was gathered through written reflections and exams conducted in the class. Although there were no significant differences noticed among the 3 science lessons in meeting the specified standards, there was a significant knowledge gain among students.

The current study differs from studies conducted previously on LLS and ELM. The present study provides insights into the potential of experiential learning cycle in promoting language learning strategies through an integrated skills-based curriculum.

Research Questions

1. What language learning strategies do Level 1, Semester 2, undergraduate students possess when they register for Level 2, semester 1?
2. How will the implementation of the experiential learning cycle effect language learning strategies?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants for this study were full time, Level 2, Semester 1, undergraduate students enrolled in a business programme. Two groups taught by the researcher were the groups that received the treatment. Both groups together totaled to 62 students. The sample for this study was chosen using the purposive sampling technique based on convenience and accessibility. Since the samples were from a linguistically homogenous background (Arabic) and share common characteristics with regard to socio-cultural aspect, purposive sampling was deemed as suitable.

Eligibility criteria required individuals to have passed the 'Academic Reading and Writing module' in the previous semester. The samples were between 20-23 years old with the same cultural background. However, variables such as age and gender will not be considered in analyzing the effect of the treatment. The samples were enrolled for an 'English for Professional Development' module offered on the Business programme. It is to be noted that only full time mode students were part of this study to avoid the influence of external factors that could be a threat to the validity of the study. All the participants came from different pathways on the Business Management Department; Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Tourism, Human Resource Management and Small Business pathway. Despite coming from different pathways, they all assemble for a common English course.

Procedure

At the outset, Rebecca Oxford's 'Strategy Inventory for Language Learning' was administered to participants in teaching week 2, since the first teaching week was for orientation and induction.

The duration for the module is 15 teaching weeks, out of which week 15 is set aside for end of semester examinations. The students have two sessions per week, each session lasting for about 2 hours. However, the researcher implemented the experiential tasks only for a duration of 90 minutes per week. At the end of the treatment period which lasted for 10 weeks, the same SILL instrument was given to evaluate the impact of the intervention on the use of learning strategies. Ten experiential tasks were embedded within the existing syllabus for the experimental group, whereas groups taught by the other lecturers received the same materials without the treatment. All the students were required to sit for the same examinations during the semester.

Data collection tools used in this study

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The SILL is the most influential questionnaire used in most studies to obtain information on learning strategies. In this study, SILL 7.0 version was used as a data collection tool. The SILL is available in two versions; namely one for the learners whose native language is English and the other for learners where English is taught as a foreign language. The current study uses the second version, as the learner's native language is Arabic and English is taught as a foreign language. (Green & Oxford, 1995) opine that the reliability of SILL was found to be .93 to .98 (Cronbach's alpha). Due to its high validity, SILL was administered in studies linked with language performance. Cited in (Fazeli, 2011) factor analysis for SILL was well established by several studies (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Oxford, 1996a; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995)

The SILL comprises of 6 subsections based on the type of strategy used. Part A is the section on Memory Strategies and with 9 questions. 14 questions related to Cognitive Strategies form Part B. Part C is the section on the use of Compensation Strategies with a total of 6 questions. Metacognitive Strategies contains 9 questions in Part D. Affective and Social Strategies, Part E and F respectively, contain 6 questions in each category. The participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale. The advantage of a Likert Scale is that it allows the researcher to obtain quantitative data by providing the respondent more choice in expressing their attitudes or opinions and not just a yes/no answer. (McLeod, 2008) .The SILL allowed participants to choose from a scale ranging from 1 to 5, indicating a degree of opinion from Never or almost never true of me (1) to Always or almost always true of me (5) .A separate answer sheet is provided where participants can transfer their choice of answers, with the values assigned to each question in every section. The values pertaining to sections from Part A-Part F are divided according to the instructions given on the answer sheet. Based on these values, the mean is calculated. According to Oxford's 1990 classification, low strategy users are grouped under mean 2.5, the moderate strategy users mean ranges between 2.5 to 3.5 and strategy users whose mean is above 3.5 are rated as high strategy users.

Reflective journals

(Kohonen, 2007) maintains that a conceptual change occurs only when the individual is made aware of it and is encouraged to plan, monitor and evaluate the processes that led to the change. He further adds that positive rewards gained due to the process, motivates the individual. The individual is made to realize the change only through reflection. On the contrary (Moon, 1999) reports that although numerous studies have investigated on the effect of reflective journal writing, only some of them showed a positive effect while others did not.

The experiential learning cycle incorporates an element of reflective observation, hence the researcher decided to use reflective learning journals to enable students to reflect on their experiences of the language learning process. The experimental groups were provided with a folder with sheets of daily reflection, marked as Lesson 1, 2, 3 and so forth. During the process of learning, they were required to use the sheet relevant for that week and write their reflections. Some example questions were, 'What did I learn today? What helped me to understand the concept better? What was challenging for me? How did I overcome the difficulty? , How can I apply my knowledge gained in today's class? The main aim of writing a journal in class was to record self-reflection on what was learned and what strategies were used to comprehend the given experience. To provide a flexible and tension free environment at the time of reflection, the researcher informed them at the start of the treatment that their reflections would not be marked or graded. The student's reflections were coded and it was assured that it would be kept confidential. Students involvement in assessing the way they learn enhances their 'metacognition' and ultimately enables them to regulate their learning.(Chamotet.all 1999) cited in (J Rubin et al., 2007)

Semi-structured Interviews

Despite having data collection tools like learning journals and SILL scores, the researcher felt the need of a semi-structured interview for the reason that, what could not be expressed or written in a learning journal could be expressed verbally. Semi structured interviews are flexible and can be adapted based on the interviewee's response to the questions. 15 students from the experimental group were randomly selected for the interview. Students voluntarily consented to participate in the interview upon request. The interviews were conducted in groups of 5 each, this was to create an informal and relaxing environment to avoid stress. The interviews were conducted in English since the level of proficiency was quite good and they were able to understand the researcher. Each interview with group of 5 students lasted for about 30 mins. With the consent from students, the interviews were audio recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The SILL scoring scale places the learner's strategy use at three levels; high strategy users, medium strategy users and low strategy users. The table below shows the mean values that fall under these categories.

Table 1:

High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

The scoring scale for the interpretation of strategy use. Oxford (1990)

Table. 2

	Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F
Pre	3.02	3.13	3.19	3.02	3.11	3.20
Post	3.38	4.09	3.58	3.70	3.60	3.79

Means of the Pre-and Post-SILL survey

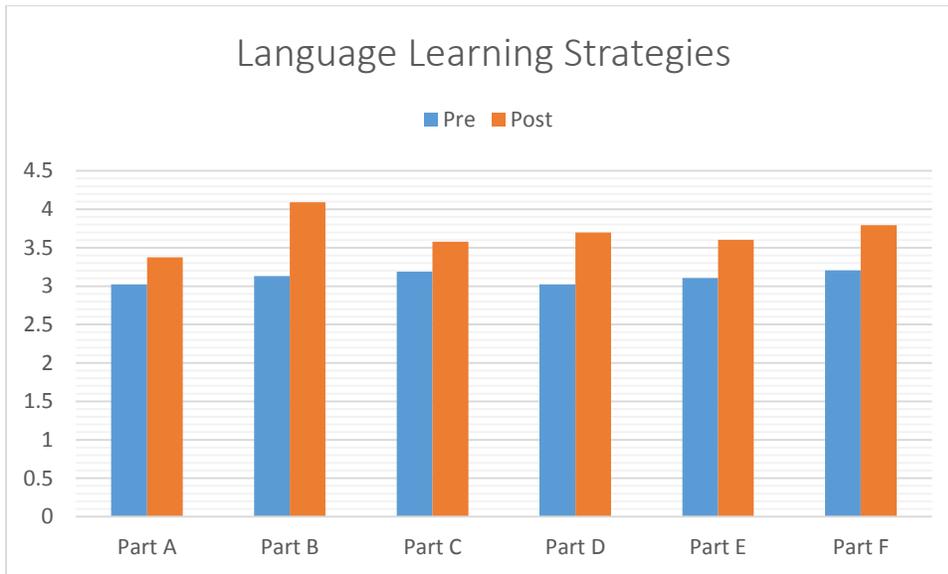


Fig.1 Results of Pre and Post SILL Survey

Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F		
Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	ffective	social		
	Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F	
Pre	3.02	3.13	3.19	3.02	3.11	3.20	Medium
Post	3.38	4.09	3.58	3.70	3.60	3.79	High

Table 2, the first row indicates the mean scores of the SILL administered before and after the treatment. The pre-survey is indicative of the strategies that students have gained in their previous educational experience. As is evident from the table, the respondents were medium strategy users with a score below 3.4 as per the scale provided by Oxford, which apparently means they use these strategies sometimes and not frequently. Social strategies (3.20) and compensation strategies (3.19) were the most frequently used strategies. Memory strategies and Metacognitive strategies scored the same mean as the least preferred strategy use. The present findings seem to be consistent with other research conducted in Arab countries which found that most of the students were medium strategy users.(Shmais, 2003)(Ismail & Khatib, 2013)

On the contrary, a significant increase in overall strategy use is evident in the post-survey results. From the graph above we can see that the mean scores indicate a significant difference between

the pre and post survey. A paired t-test was conducted in order to find whether there was a difference before and after the treatment. The two-tailed P value equals 0.0015. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be very statistically significant.

Figure 1 illustrates that the implementation of the experiential learning model enhanced the development of the existing language learning strategies. Among the six strategies, an improvement in Cognitive Strategies is indicated, followed by Social and Metacognitive Strategies. As indicated in Table 1, the mean scores range from 3.38- 4.09, which signals that the participants are medium to high strategy users. It is interesting to note that the pre-survey revealed cognitive strategy as the third least strategy that was used whereas cognitive strategy scored the highest mean in the post-survey strategy use. However, the pre and post results are contradictory to the observations made by (Radwan, 2011) who inferred from his study that Omani students preferred metacognitive strategies.

The overall post-survey results reveal a significant rise in strategies. This signals to the fact that communicative teaching methods like the experiential learning cycle has the potential to develop language learning strategies, whereby learners learn through experience, observe, reflect and evaluate their learning.

Excerpts from students reflective journals

Students maintained reflective journals throughout the semester and since they were promised that it will not be graded, the reflections were not discussed openly. However, the researcher reviewed the journals and identified the requirements of the learners and provided guidance unobtrusively. The content of the journal addressed weekly content of the module and how the student achieved the learning objective. The following are a few reflections of students:

Student 1

“ Although I didn’t feel any difficulty related to SWOT analysis, I had some trouble with differentiating between opportunities and threats. I will overcome this difficulty by reading it more clearly. I can use SWOT analysis in future especially in choosing a job or in analyzing what could be my weakness in a certain job. My progress for this week was overall good but I think OKAY is more suitable for my performance”

Student 2

“In the first session, the business vocabulary was difficult, but after two classes the words are not new to me anymore. I will use the new words in the next class and I’ll make sure to know about how they are used”

Student 3

“I had problem with the exam schedule, as I had very little time to prepare. I can overcome this difficulty by working on managing my time well”

Student 4

“The group meeting task was easy but it came in pressure week, because this week has many exams. I must prepare from before and get time in day for each module. The group meeting task taught me to get confidence and to know what is discussed in meeting.”

Student 5

“The videos and handouts were very helpful in preparing for the exam, but I was nervous because it the first time to do a meeting. I must do more practice, encourage myself to do more and manage time very well. This will give me experience to do more in any job in the future”

The reflections have been copied as it was written by students with no corrections made to grammatical errors. The evidence of students reflections demonstrate that students have reflected on the lessons taught and formulated action plans to overcome the challenges they encountered. Students not only look back at past experiences but also relate what they have learned to real world situations.

Semi Structured interviews

The semi-structured interview included questions related to their own personal SWOT analysis, their attitude towards the tasks that were implemented in class and their awareness of strategies they employed while working on specific tasks assigned to them. The following are two recordings that comprise of what the whole group thinks about the tasks carried out during the semester.

Student A (Female Student)

“The first assignment was an assignment in your module, I felt it was hard for me but with the help of the teacher and the rough draft correction, I got a good result, it makes me feel proud and from now onwards I don’t have the fear of doing assignments and I am ready to face challenges. I enjoyed group assignments, we had several practices, and we made a WhatsApp group and discussed all our weaknesses. We got used to reflecting in class in your module so we continued reflecting even outside class. We feel reflecting is advantage for our whole life.”

Student B (Male Student)

“By reflecting, we can convert our weakness to strength. In my opinion, my skills will improve .My communication skills improved a lot because I know my weakness is not having eye contact. Then I practiced with my friends. I prefer to learn in the group, we help each other. I had doubts with my assignments, so I spoke to the lecturer and tried to overcome my weakness. I wish to continue reflecting even after I complete this module”

CONCLUSION

Several studies conducted in the Arab regions have reported students as medium strategy users in line with the findings of the current study at the pre-survey stage. This study provides valuable insights to consolidating, developing and enhancing medium strategy users to high strategy users by taking the learner through the experiential learning cycle that provides opportunities for refining existing language learning strategies.

This research has several practical applications. Firstly, it points to selection of appropriate instructional methods and approaches to learning, creation of tasks that create an awareness of language strategies, material selection and design and above all the teacher’s willingness to be a part of the whole teaching and learning process.

The results obtained indicated a variation in strategy use before and after the treatment which could be attributed to the implementation of the experiential learning cycle. However, a note of caution

is due here since there is a strong possibility of influence of variables such as motivation, personality of the learner, context, background and learning styles and gender.(El-Dib, 2004) draws our attention to the fact that strategy use is closely associated to learning contexts and tasks and hence suggests that future research should investigate strategy use in and outside the classroom in a more natural context. Thus there is abundant room for research into examining the authentic resources that facilitate the development of language learning strategies. One such experiment is the adoption of an experiential learning cycle that embeds opportunities where learners discover themselves naturally, 'learning by doing'

The teaching profession nowadays is focused on developing autonomous learners who can take responsibility for their learning. The shift in focus from teacher to student has consciously brought about an awareness among students about themselves and their learning. The experiential learning approach includes a variety of opportunities to provide the learner with personally interact with each other's experiences and engage in active learning. As stated by Kolb, 'knowledge is created by the transformation of experiences', reflection plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between theory and experience. The learner's role in the experiential learning cycle is not just a passive learner, watching and thinking but an active learner who directly participates in the learning process. Having said this, the teacher's role is also of great significance. The role of the teacher is to enable the learner to integrate the experiences and provide a link to the curriculum thus making it relevant and purposeful.

The current study was conducted on Business students who were enrolled in different pathways. It would benefit the lecturers to embed the experiential learning cycle in their content modules, thus creating opportunities for students to enrich their learning strategies. It is also wise to make students aware of existing strategies at the outset and make them conscious of latent strategies that they have not attempted before. Although the study implemented the experiential learning cycle in the course, it is recommended that educators experiment with various communicative teaching methods.(R. Oxford, 2001) calls for an integrated approach in teaching language skills in the classroom.

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