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Promoting Learners' Autonomy at Elementary Level through Experiential Learning: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

This research aims to ascertain Learners' Autonomy through Experiential Learning of elementary students at class 8 level in a role play activity conducted at a private sector English Medium School. Experiential Learning could be a learner-friendly apparatus that has not been enough investigated at the basic level. Most writings and researches are recognized the significance of "learning through doing", "hands-on approaches" or "Experiential Learning". Experiential Learning has developed in notoriety with grown-up learners since Dewey and a number of researches examining the potential benefits of utilizing Experiential Learning Strategies. It plays vital role in educational institutions. In depth, analysis of the literature review was done. Hypothesis was formulated, the strategy of the research was survey. The population of the study was the students of elementary private schools of Karachi. Simple random sampling design was adopted. The sample size is consisted of118 students as participants respectively. Two questionnaires were adopted; Experiential Learning Scale (ELS) by Clem & Beasley and Learner Autonomous Scale (LAS) by Fletcher & Averill for data collection. Data was analyzed by applying inferential statistics with the correlation and linear regression through SPSS. It was found that the value of "r" between the Experiential Learning and Learner Autonomous is .989, it indicates high correlation exists between (EL) and (LA) variables. Overall relation of all the categories of Experiential Learning and Learner Autonomous were found moderate at 0.05 level of significance. The overall linear regression model suggests that there is only R^2 =.331, P < .05 variation on Learner Autonomous because of Experiential Learning. Based on finding of this research, practitioners and instructors can utilize Experiential Learning as a part of their own teaching methodologies. It is also recommended that through this process, the concept of Autonomous Learning be observed further; while a comparative study can also be initiated to ascertain how the process affects students' involvement in differing curricula.

Keywords: Collaboration, experiential learning, learner autonomy, learning environment.

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Introduction

Experiential Learning approach emphasizes the learners to acquire skills and build knowledge is the direct result through experiences. The ability to select and participate in experiences of the learners' can be increased through Experiential Learning (Atherton, 2009). Experiential Learning is related to the Leaner Autonomous that would be existed without teacher involvement (Benson, 2013). Newsome et al., (2005) conducted research on Experiential Learning approach elevates students' cognition levels, increases use of critical thinking skills, and enhances students' ability to obtain, retain and retrieve knowledge to increase achievement. Successful Experiential Learners develop into Autonomous Learners with skills that enable them to undertake the responsibility to work alone or in a group (Moon, 2004). It is seen that no matter what activity is planned, reflection and application play a vital role in ensuring a deeper understanding of abstract concepts.

Clark, Threeton, and Ewing (2010) stated that in order to acquire more in-depth understanding, learning should not halt at the experience stage; if this occurs, then the learner is deprived of the chance to absorb or retain valuable knowledge gained through experience (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019).

As per the theory of Social Determination, people possess a tendency towards leaning. However, for the learning process to be effective, the presence of autonomy and an appropriate environment is a pre-requisite. Moreover, the conversion from regular inexperienced persons to engaging newcomers who are fascinated with how things are done and enjoy responding to their colleagues is additionally crucial (Dam, 2011). Furthermore, the autonomy in the learning process with the pupils would involve to increase their growth and development adopting the route and the choices that enable them to reach their desired goals; and autonomy for these learners shifts the role of the traditional instructor to a facilitator (Ünal, Celiköz, & Sari, 2017). Other important causeways also need to be taken into consideration, namely that motivation can be seen in two forms, that being intrinsic and extrinsic. In the case of extrinsic motivation, the performance of the students can be graded as a means of measurement or tracking of the progress. The role of extrinsic motivation as a means to add impetus to the learning process is therefore acknowledged and its prevalence as a contributor is also accepted but it is equally important to track intrinsic motivation as a sustainer in the learning process (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009).

Encouragement of the Autonomous Learning Process requires an enabling environment to be created at the behest of the instructor. The role of the instructor is to ensure that the learning environment gives chances for maximum experience based inquiry where faculties are actively utilized to the maximum rather than as listener who is

passive (Dolotallas & Nagtalon, 2015).When seeking to encourage autonomy, the tasks set before the learners must be based on their capabilities. Moreover, while they engage with the task, they require the presence of freedom when they undergo the task. It thus bears merit that the instructor must recognize their own role in the learning process. They are a facilitator, who incorporates the autonomous learning process within the curriculum and gives opportunities to attain it through tasks, strategies that must be undertaken before the task is delineated and reflection post task (Al Asmari, 2013).The rationale behind this research is to promote the concept of autonomy that is facilitated by the facilitator to propel the students towards becoming self-learners in the optimal environment suited to the task present. It should also be noted that the purpose of having the activity built on role play is because this process allows the creation of a real world situation involving Experiential Learning that fosters a sense of empathy and adaptability in multitudinous ways (Gerber, 2015).

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain the effects of Experiential Learning on positive learning outcomes (Competencies) of elementary students at class 8 level.
2. To ascertain the effects of Experiential Learning on Learners` Autonomy (Inventiveness, assurance, reassurance and collaboration) of elementary students at class 8 level.

Literature Review

One of the factors that affects the learning process of the individuals involved is a sense of autonomy. Autonomy encompasses the notion of having no outside influence, where the responses and reactions are independent in terms of their development (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1984) thus encouraging a concept of self-direction or being in control of one’s own learning process (Abdel & Razeq, 2014). The ability to examine these effects of their cognitive functioning and lets in room for the flourishing and presence of new patterns of behavior that they experience via interaction with different people (Bandura, 1986).The Experiential Learning Process empowers learners to become autonomous, possessing the requisite abilities to operate both in groups and at an individual level (Moon, cited in Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019). Moreover, it is important that before any activity is earmarked for delineation, the underlying conceptual frame work attached to it and these are clearly comprehended and clarified through contemplation as is the mode of application of the activity (Clark, Threeton, & Ewing, 2010). In addition, in order to enhance the learning process, due care needs to be taken that it is not dissatisfied at the experience stage, as this limitation will impact the overall assimilation through Experiential Learning of the wealth of knowledge available to the learners (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019).

Ultimately students ought to show the variety of capabilities and competencies that allow them to become adapted to the demands of the twenty-first century (Najmonnisa, Amin ul Haq, & Saad, 2015).In this regard the role of teacher is very significant (Smith, Kuchah, & Lamb, 2018). The teacher must also recognize the necessity to shift away from a pure lecture based method of teaching as- well as, the concept of writing on the board with the sole aim that the material be copied without comprehending the content or the outcome derived (Sultana & Zaki, 2015). The learning process must therefore give rise to individuals who are viable members of the community they are a part of it. It would additionally be essential to explore the emotional acumen of the students which encompasses of discomfiture, acrimony, anxiety and egotism as a phase of human interplay (Leasa & Corebima, 2017).

Kolbe's Experiential Learning Model allows theoretical basis for gaining knowledge based on novel experiences during the cognitive process (Ernst, 2013; Tanaka & Son, 2019). Kolb's Experiential Learning Model clearly highlights that for learning to attain its positive purpose, the needs to be a tangible experience that the learner undergoes, they should be able to undergo inner scrutiny based on observation, there should be provision for building abstract concepts and finally engaging in actual experience (Kolb, 2014; Tanaka & Son, 2019). Thus at the outset or stage one the learner needs to be primped and open to receiving new ideas and engaging with them. At stage two, the learner needs to scrutinize their experience through varying lens and elicit significant information based on their observation. The third stage combines the first two to bring forth and to understand concepts. The last stage involves change within the learner being transformative as the previous stages through active testing helps in finding solutions to problems and taking appropriate decisions (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019).

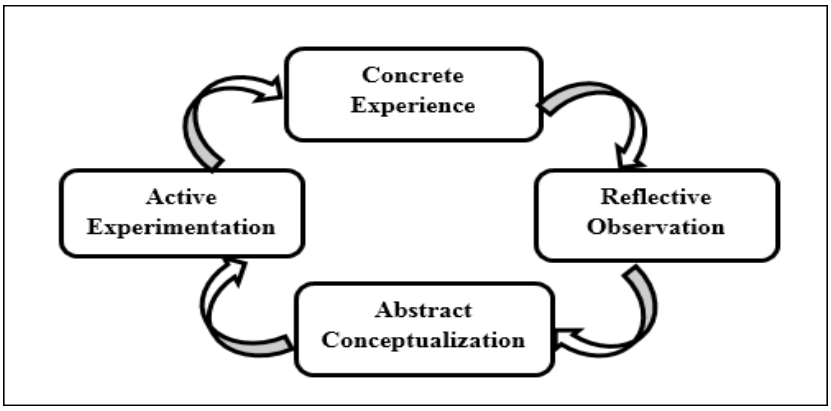

Figure 1. Bower, G. G. (2013). Utilizing Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory to Implement a Golf Scramble. *International Journal of Sport Management, Recreation & Tourism, 12*.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model as shown in figure 1 is divided in four stages that can be improve the learning process. These are: a) Concrete experience b) Reflective experience c) abstract conceptualization d) Active Experimentation. On first stage students can understand the meaning of concepts and observe the things carefully and second stage reflection observation helps the learner to make them understand about experiences. They see how the things happen in different perspectives. On third stage of Kolb's Model, leaner integrates the observations into theory and make their concept more strong and concrete and at last stage the learner implement theories and connect the subject matter with real life skills.

Mastering the procedure whereby information is garnered viaa transformative experience forms the basis of the Experiential Learning Theory. Experiential Learning encompasses experiences that permit student-centered learning. The cumulative of understanding, coupled with the transformative change leads to the consequence of knowledge attainment, compelling participation based on an individual level (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Additionally, it is important that the students feel comfortable with their learning environment if the environment is comfortable, then their learning will be of greater value and will display better quality because there will be a sense of enjoyment attached thereby allowing them to do apply more efforts and deliver more results (Moos, 1991). In fact, if the environment is less than ideal, then the students display a lack in connectivity with their peers and their performance and input displays a diminished sense of worth. The presence of optimal classroom environments is thus one of the key determinants of learning (Walberg, 1984). Classroom environments that follow a traditional method of teaching promote a one-way process, where the students tend to be passive listeners and are not encouraged to take the onus of the learning process in their own hands (Najmonnissa & Haroon, 2014).In this instance the students themselves displayed Autonomy by chosen to exit from the traditional indoor classroom environment and moving outdoors. This would not have been possible if the students were not confident about their choice and had not gained enough merit in their own abilities to be in a different environment. This ability to adapt thus shows that individuals should be able to adapt in differing environments and changing circumstances as a part of the Experiential Learning Process (Ounis, 2016).

"Autonomy" is a dynamic concept that has yet to be described as very important in pedagogy. Holec (1998) first described the word autonomy as "the ability to take responsibility for one's learning" listed in (Schmenk, 2005). According to Dickinson (1995), the learner's mindset plays an important role in which the learner can take ownership of their own learning decisions (Nunan, 1992) is going a step further from the ability and ability to be autonomous. He strives to lead the learner away to Autonomous

Learning from the teacher's dependence. Nunan (1992) identified nine steps in the educational process to make the Learner Autonomous. As is evident from the above steps, if the learner sets his or her own goals, they are more likely to follow them because they are self-created, through thinking in the shoes of teachers and researchers, they are conscious of their own preferred learning method and try to create their own. Sharing similar views (Dickinson, 1995) points out that participation of learners in decision-making ensures effective learning. Pedagogically, the majority of Learner Autonomy researchers support the view that it is more meaningful and relevant when learners are psychologically attached to the learning process.

Autonomy is described as being able to use a set of tactics to regulate one's teaching (Cotterall, 1997). Cotteral's strategies would include most of Nunan, (1992) defined steps, such as setting goals, choosing resources, scheduling, tracking, and assessing their own learning progress. All facets of learner independence are evident in the Kolb, (2005) Experience Learning Process, where learners are made aware of their learning approaches, focus on their experiences, set learning goals, and take responsibility for learning in an out-of-class. "Before measures aimed at promoting independence are introduced, it is important to determine the willingness of the learners to make changes in beliefs and behaviors that indicate Autonomy" (Cotterall, 2000). Were students able to assume responsibility? Do teachers have confidence that students can be autonomous? There are several such problems that question the practicality of teacher-learner independence (Autonomous) theoretical assumptions.

Van (2011) conducted his study of Autonomous Learners, and the results showed that students were ignorant of the idea of autonomy and pleased with their current learning environment. Maia (2014) wanted to look at the ability of the learner to be autonomous. The study specifically assessed the readiness of learners to carry out autonomous activities in English on factors such as duties, skills and their readiness to do so. A similar study was conducted at a university in Hong Kong with 320 students and 24 teachers (Üstünlüoğlu, 2009). The study's purpose was similar to that of (Maia, 2014). The research also investigated the effect of variables such as degree of motivation and sex on perceptions of autonomy. Many studies conducted to propose that students ought to be considered to accomplices and given an opportunity to decide the time, put and pace of the course (Little, 1995; Dam, 1995; Nunan, 1997; Benson, 2001).

Furthermore, the success of any communication based activity needs to display that the students themselves feel a sense of comfort in performing that task and are able to do it with aplomb (Koizumi & In'nami, 2013).When learners are active and they are made aware of the importance of their own involvement in the learning process, they behave by incorporating linguistic social practices based on second language acquisition practices present in their environment (Paiva, cited in Ounis, 2016). In this instance a role

play activity was chosen to encompass various individuals from a variety of backgrounds. One of the reasons for choosing a role play activity is that it encourages the concept of mutual learning based on experiences that are common in their essence and opens the opportunity for the students to contribute in an equivalent manner to the task at hand (Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2014).At this point it should be noted that one of the compounding factors that affect performance in students is a sense of anxiety in a public setting. Individuals who face s sense of anxiety may avoid situations that place them in such environments (Raja, 2017).

It is therefore, imperative that the learning process that involves Experiential Learning focuses on the development of skills that require confidence building and an increase in self-esteem so that the individual can face public situations. The onus of providing such an environment and the right conditions falls not only upon the facilitator or instructor but the academic institution as well. Moreover, the process of Experiential Learning fosters many positive outcomes that encourages group cohesion and unity. It enhances decision making power and leadership potential and the notion of individual input in determining the viability of the individual within the group as an element (Chesimet & Ng'eno, 2016). It also corroborates the viability of the entire group as a worthwhile single unit. Individuals who do not display command over oral communication skills are often viewed negatively by their peers where they consider them as not being attractive and not having enough friends (Raja, 2013). At the same instance cooperative learning encourages positive social outcomes and a sense of greater achievement (Murphy, 2015). The sense of cooperation has such a strong impact that even if the students themselves possess the necessary skills to undergo the task and they receive the right instructions yet, if they feel that their peers are uncooperative or that their instructors do not display a sense of fairness then their abilities tend to be affected (Fraser, 1991; Walberg, 1991). The communication process is thus important in building a lasting bond within peers and the society as a larger connected unit. Based on the foregoing review of the literature, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between Experiential Leaning and Learner Autonomous.

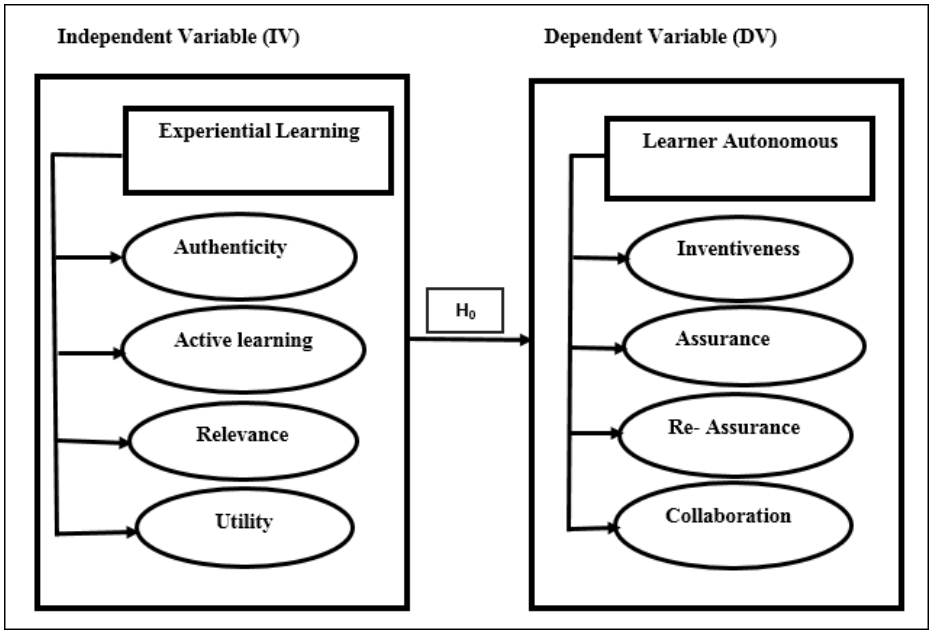

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework or Research Model

Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework of this study whichis included the independent variable and dependent variable with their categories; including Experiential Learning (Authenticity, Active Learning, Relevance and Utility) and Learner Autonomous (Inventiveness, Assurance, Re-assurance and Collaboration).

Methodology

The study involved 118 participants (students) selected through convenience sampling enrolled in a private sector English Medium school in class 8, divided into 8 sections comprising of approximately 15 students per class who were engaged in a role play activity as a part of their syllabus. Statistical techniques such as correlation and regression were used to analyses data. The students responded to a (ELS) questionnaire and (LAS) questionnaire after they had performed the activity during class timings. This accounted for the data collection process to be time barred. In addition, since the activity involved both boys and girls, the activity accounted for impartiality in the questionnaire process by being a gender blind study. The students were also asked to sign consent forms in order to release the data assimilated for research. It should be noted that the students underwent a precursory role play activity in order to familiarize them with the process. They then followed this first attempt with a second one and the data was collected from this final activity. Since this process was centered on the concept of autonomy as a part of the process involving learning therefore, the students were given complete autonomy in the formation of their groups and construction of the dialogues as

well. In order to track the students' responses, Experiential Learning Scale (ELS) questionnaire was adopted for collection of data that is developed by Clem and Beasley (2014). It is also consist on four dimension. Learner Autonomous Scale (LAS) Questionnaire developed by Fletcher and Averill (1984) was used to collect the data for the construct Learner Autonomous. Both consists of four dimensions. Each dimension on a 5-point Likert Scale.

Data Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability test was undertaken for the pilot test. According to Nunnally (1978), the minimal reliability coefficient required to claim a measure construct as consistently reliable is 0.97.

H_0: There is no significant relationship between Experiential Leaning and Learner Autonomous.

Table 1
Correlation between Experiential Learning (EL) and Learner Autonomous (LA)

	Pearson Value	Inventiveness	Assurance	Re-Assurance	Collaboration	Total (LA)
Experiential Learning	r	.782**	.678**	.567**	.809**	.989**
Authenticity	r	.793**	.568**	.679**	.887**	.746**
Active Learning	r	.561**	.401**	.712**	.676**	.549**
Relevance	r	.345**	.467**	.566**	.678**	.394**
Utility	r	.520**	.289**	.764**	.595**	.512**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows the correlation of four areas of Experiential Learning with Learner Autonomous and all its functions at 0.05 level of significance. The value of "r" between the Experiential Learning and Learner Autonomous is .989, indicating high correlation exist between these two variables. Furthermore, Active learning and Utility show significant moderate relation with total (LA) while Relevance shows significant weak relation with total (LA). Overall relation of all the categories of Experiential Learning and Learner Autonomous were found moderate at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2 shows the results of the linear regression analysis for the Experiential Learning (EL) with Learner Autonomous (LA) score. The overall linear regression model suggests that there is only (R^2 =.331, P < .05) variation on Learner Autonomous because of Experiential Learning. In other words the results indicated that Experiential Leaning as perceived by students about 33% of total variance in the Leaner Autonomous. The overall linear regression model suggests that there is only (R^2 =.331, P < .05) variation on Learner Autonomous because of Experiential Learning.

Table 2
Linear Regression analysis of Experiential Learning (EL) and Learner Autonomous (LA)

			Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		
Model	R	R^2	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	sig
(Constant)	.530[a]	.331	2.355	.215		10.974	.000
Experiential Learning			.430	.055	.530	7.858	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Learner Autonomous
*p < .05

Discussion

This research study apportioned with the findings the Learners` Autonomy through Experiential Learning are positive correlated with each other, the elementary students of class 8 level were engaged in a role play activity as a part of their syllabus conducted at a private sector English Medium School. Statistical techniques such as correlation and regression were used to analyses data. The students responded to a (ELS) and (LAS) questionnaire after they had performed the activity during class timings. Cronbach alpha value for the both scales was (0.97). It was found that the value of "r" between the Experiential Learning and Learner Autonomous is .989, indicating high correlation exist between these two variables. Overall relation of all the categories of Experiential Learning and Learner Autonomous were found moderate at 0.05 level of significance. The overall linear regression model suggests that there is only (R^2 =.331, P < .05) variation on Learner Autonomous because of Experiential Learning. Based on finding of this research, practitioners and instructors can utilize Experiential Learning as a part of their own teaching methodologies. It is also recommended that though this process the concept of Autonomous Learning showed be observed further; as Cotterall, (2000) believes that the 'potential for Learner Autonomy increases as an individual's learning awareness and grows capability of decision making. Consequently, tasks or activities should be designed to stimulate reflection on the learning process (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019). While a comparative study can also be initiated to ascertain how the process affects students engaged in differing curricula. The success of the learning process is inimically dependent on the presence of workable conditions that allow confidence for the participants in order to deliver success. The facilitator has to develop means that adopt practices in their teaching that look beyond the norm and compel the students to operate keeping innovative thinking patterns in mind (Clements & Cord, 2013). We thus see that the role play activity encouraged the students to adopt a practice that many may not have been used to before as many students may have been unfamiliar with the activity in the first instance due to lack of participation and presence of such an

activity in their earlier classes or in other schools where they might have studied. Moreover, participation in activities that encourage emotional and social development amplifies a sense of well- being (Barry, Clarke et al., 2018). Furthermore, the students should be engaged by Authenticity, an Active Learning and Collaboration of individuals seeking similar goals, the presence of self –esteem and confidence comes as a consequence of such a sense of belonging (Van, 2011). This engagement would require close coordination which would be present when the groups had to create synergy in order to construct their dialogues and displayed greater confidence as a means of this synergy in the decision making process to choose their environment for their role play performances. Indeed, in recent Exploratory Practice manifestations (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), the learner is conceived as just as much as the teacher as a researcher or explorer of classroom life. Pinter, Mathew and Smith (2016) have also shown that elementary students can be adequately and successfully engaged in activities through which they themselves act as co-researchers in the context of teaching. Indeed, in recent Exploratory Practice manifestation (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), the learner is conceived just as much as the teacher as a researcher or classroom life explorer. Pinter, Mathew and Smith (2016) have also shown that children can be effectively and efficiently engaged in activities through which they themselves serve as co-researchers in the sense of teaching. The overall cooperative based learning process and the optimal learning environment had to be produced by the instructor involved. This process thus required trust in relationship between teacher, students and Assurance was created between them (Gerber, 2015).

Conclusion

Based on the result of analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of Experiential Learning-Based Teaching enhance the Learner Autonomous and it is proven effective in improving the Cognitive Ability, Collaboration, Authenticity and Assurance of the students. This study indicated that Experiential Learning (EL) creates a safe, flexible and engaging classroom environment through social interaction, sharing of experiences and reflection. At the outset, students held the teacher responsible for learning within the classroom however after experiencing the intervention tasks there was a change in students' perception. They became more focused and accepted ownership of their learning. This shift from dependency to independency is vital to any work environment where the person has to take the initiative to solve problems rather than depending on the boss or the person in authority. The active involvement of students in the (EL) activities depicts their enthusiasm and motivation towards being a part of the Experimental Learning Cycle (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2019). Effort must be exerted in the use of Experiential Learning to have better achievement of students. Furthermore, there is a need for training other teachers to become better facilitators in order to use Experiential Learning as an approach in teaching process and Learner Autonomous (Dolotallas & Nagtalon, 2015).

Limitations

There are several limitations attached to the research conducted. It should be noted that many of the students may not be comfortable with the activity but may perform it as a form of peer compulsion. In addition, there might be peer pressure to be active in the performance and it is therefore difficult to gauge whether there was indeed authenticity in their responses. For this purpose, more research is required with another set of subjects in the subsequent year in order to ascertain whether the responses are indeed genuine.

Recommendations

1. Further research is required to measure other factors that bear an impact on Autonomous Learning such as socio economic status of students and facilitators` classroom management skills.
2. A comparison based study can be designed to validate results between two different systems of education.
3. Expansion of the research sample will allow room to discover the efficacy of this form of teaching practice.

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