



Research Paper

## Applying Experiential Learning in English Language Teaching at Thai Nguyen Colledge of Economics and Techniques

Nguyen Thi Lap

Thai Nguyen Colledge of Economics and Techniques

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the use of experiential learning in English language instruction at College of Economics and Techniques, under Thai Nguyen University. It focuses on analyzing the theoretical framework of experiential learning and assessing its impact on enhancing students' motivation and communication skills. Through qualitative analysis and classroom observation, the research delves into experiential learning methods such as role-playing, project-based learning, and communication simulations incorporated in English lessons. The results show that experiential learning boosts student engagement, confidence, and the practical application of language skills. While challenges like overcrowded classes and limited teaching time persist, experiential learning emerges as a promising strategy for improving the quality of English education in vocational education, colleges, and universities in Vietnam.*

**Keywords:** *experiential learning, English language instruction, student-centered approach, communication skills, higher education.*

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### I. Introduction

In the age of globalization and international integration, English has emerged as a critical tool for communication, education, and career advancement. In Vietnam, proficiency in English is increasingly viewed as an indispensable skill for students aiming to excel in the global job market and academic arenas. Consequently, higher education institutions have prioritized improving the quality of English teaching and learning. Despite years of formal instruction, however, many university students still struggle to use English effectively in practical communication settings. This challenge is particularly pronounced among non-English majors, who often study the language primarily to pass exams rather than to engage in real-world conversations. Traditional teaching methods that emphasize grammar translation, rote vocabulary memorization, and teacher-centered instruction often limit students' opportunities to practice authentic communication. As a result, learners may gain theoretical knowledge of English without developing the confidence or ability to use it in practical scenarios. To address these shortcomings, educational experts and practitioners have increasingly supported innovative teaching methods that prioritize student engagement, interactive participation, and experiential learning. One promising approach is experiential learning, a pedagogical model that focuses on acquiring knowledge through hands-on experience, reflection, and real-world application. Inspired by David A. Kolb's experiential learning theory, this method posits that effective learning occurs when individuals actively engage with tasks that bridge theoretical concepts with real-life practice. In foreign language education, experiential learning fosters communicative competence by immersing students in authentic language use. Activities such as role-playing, simulations, project-based exercises, and real-world scenarios enable students to practice English in realistic contexts while also building their critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. At the College of Economics and Techniques, a member institution of Thai Nguyen University, English is a core subject across various academic disciplines. While there have been efforts to modernize teaching approaches, many English classes still rely heavily on traditional methods that may no longer align with the evolving needs of today's learners. This underscores the importance of exploring experiential learning as a means of enhancing English instruction at the university. The present study aims to investigate how experiential learning can be incorporated into English language education at College of Economics and Techniques and assess its potential to boost students' motivation, engagement, and communication abilities. By examining both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, this research seeks to provide valuable insights that can help advance the quality and effectiveness of English language education at vocational education, colleges, and universities in Vietnam.

## **II. Content**

### **2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Experiential Learning in Language Education**

Experiential learning is recognized as a highly effective pedagogical approach that emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge through direct experience and reflective engagement. This concept is primarily associated with David A. Kolb, who devised a cyclical model of learning comprising four interconnected stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In this framework, learners begin by actively engaging in a specific experience and then proceed to reflect on its nuances and implications. Subsequently, they derive abstract insights or theoretical concepts from the experience and apply these findings to novel situations or challenges. This iterative process promotes the transformation of lived experiences into structured and meaningful knowledge, fostering a more profound and enduring understanding of the subject matter. Within the sphere of language education, experiential learning has particular relevance given the intrinsically interactive and context-dependent nature of language acquisition. In contrast to conventional methodologies that often focus on passive absorption of grammatical rules and vocabulary, experiential learning advocates for active engagement in activities modeled after authentic communicative experiences. Such practices enable learners to develop linguistic skills within contexts that closely resemble real-world language use, enhancing both their proficiency in language structures and their pragmatic confidence in communication. Experiential learning finds significant theoretical parallels with the principles underlying communicative language teaching (CLT), a widely endorsed approach that prioritizes language as a functional tool for communication rather than an abstract subject of study. Research in second language acquisition has consistently underscored the importance of meaningful interaction in effective language learning. By participating in dynamic exchanges requiring the negotiation of meaning, articulation of ideas, and adaptive responses to interlocutors, learners not only refine fundamental components of language, such as vocabulary and grammar, but also cultivate advanced competencies like pragmatic sensitivity and sociolinguistic dexterity. To foster such dynamic engagement, language educators increasingly incorporate experiential methodologies into their practice, including simulations, role-playing activities, collaborative projects, and tasks grounded in real-life communication scenarios. These instructional strategies have the dual benefit of enhancing linguistic aptitude while promoting critical cognitive abilities such as analytical reasoning, problem-solving skills, and self-directed learning assessments. The development of such higher-order cognitive competencies resonates with contemporary educational priorities aimed at preparing learners to thrive in complex professional and interpersonal contexts. Moreover, experiential learning contributes significantly to fostering learner autonomy by redistributing the responsibility for education from the teacher to the student. Instead of emphasizing the role of educators as primary repositories of knowledge, this framework encourages students to take an active part in their learning processes through exploration, experimentation, and autonomous knowledge construction. This student-centered approach aligns with contemporary global movements advocating participatory and learner-driven educational reforms. In the specific context of English language instruction in Vietnam, the application of experiential learning methodologies holds considerable promise for addressing long-standing challenges associated with traditional pedagogical practices that emphasize rote memorization and grammar-based instruction. By integrating experiential strategies into classroom environments, educators can design more engaging and interactive models that prioritize the development of communicative competence, collaborative skills, and practical language application. Such approaches enable Vietnamese learners to move beyond mechanical language acquisition toward a more meaningful and functional mastery of English.

### **2.2 The Integration of Experiential Learning in English Language Instruction at College of Economics and Techniques**

The application of experiential learning methods in English language teaching at the College of Economics and Techniques, Thai Nguyen University, is considered an important step toward innovating teaching methodologies and improving students' learning effectiveness.

To evaluate the feasibility of this approach, experiential learning activities were implemented in several English classes for first-year and second-year students during the 2025–2026 academic year. The study was conducted with 120 students majoring in Accounting, Electronics, and Industrial Electrical Engineering.

Over a period of twelve weeks, lecturers integrated experiential learning strategies such as role-playing, project-based learning, and simulated communication activities into regular English lessons. The objective of these activities was to create a highly interactive learning environment in which students could practice English through real-life experiences rather than passively absorbing knowledge.

Among the various experiential learning strategies employed in English language instruction, role-playing emerges as one of the most widely utilized methodologies. This pedagogical approach requires students to simulate authentic communication scenarios, such as job interviews, customer interactions, or dialogues related to daily life and professional contexts. Classroom observations indicate that approximately 78% of students actively engaged in role-playing exercises, a notable increase from the 42% participation rate in traditional

speaking activities prior to the introduction of this method. Students expressed that these simulated scenarios enhanced their comprehension of practical English usage and enabled them to respond more naturally in real-world conversations. Another significant experiential learning approach integrated into these classes is project-based learning. Students were organized into small groups, typically composed of four to five members, to execute mini-projects covering topics such as tourism promotion, product marketing, or technological innovation. Each group undertook tasks involving information gathering, idea discussion, presentation preparation, and delivery—all conducted in English. Evaluation data revealed that nearly 72% of students exhibited marked improvements in fluency and vocabulary usage for presentations upon completing these projects. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the tasks fostered teamwork skills while providing an opportunity for students to practice English extensively during group discussions. Alongside role-playing and project-based learning, simulation activities were integrated to mimic workplace communication scenarios. For instance, students participated in mock meetings where they deliberated on issues pertinent to their academic disciplines or addressed hypothetical organizational challenges. Such activities required them to exchange ideas, articulate viewpoints, and respond to their peers' contributions in English. An end-of-semester survey demonstrated that 81% of students found that experiential learning activities rendered English lessons more engaging and comprehensible. These experiential methodologies were further complemented by reflective learning practices. Following each activity, students were encouraged to compose reflective journals to evaluate their learning experiences. This introspective process enabled them to identify personal strengths and areas for improvement, facilitating the development of strategies to enhance their language proficiency.

### **2.3 Impact of Experiential Learning on Students' Motivation and Communicative Competence**

The adoption of experiential learning methods in English language teaching has yielded numerous positive outcomes in boosting students' learning motivation and enhancing their communication skills. To assess these effects, a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation was conducted, incorporating classroom observations, student surveys, and comparative pre- and post-tests focused on speaking abilities. At the start of the semester, students completed a preliminary speaking test along with a survey designed to gauge their confidence levels and interest in learning English. These same assessment tools were administered again after the twelve-week experiential learning program. The findings showed marked improvements in both students' motivation to learn and their capability to communicate effectively. One key discovery was the notable rise in students' intrinsic motivation for English learning. Prior to the integration of experiential activities, only about 46% of surveyed students expressed a strong willingness to engage actively in English classes. Many commented that traditional approaches, which prioritized grammar rules and textbook exercises, often felt monotonous and disconnected from practical real-world communication. By contrast, following the introduction of experiential learning practices, 79% of students reported high levels of motivation. Activities such as role-playing, project-based teamwork, and simulated scenarios made the lessons more stimulating and relevant by encouraging students to use English in situations reminiscent of real-life contexts. Beyond improving motivational factors, experiential learning also positively impacted communication competence. The analysis of speaking proficiency revealed an increase in average scores from 6.1 to 7.4 on a 10-point scale. Significant strides were observed in areas like pronunciation, fluency, and interactive conversational skills. Classroom observations further highlighted that students became more confident and proactive in initiating discussions, asking questions, and sharing opinions in English. The inclusive and dynamic learning environment fostered by experiential methods allowed students to interact more freely and practice without undue fear of making mistakes. Another crucial advantage identified in the study was the enhancement of collaborative communication skills. Group-based activities required students to negotiate meanings, exchange ideas, and coordinate efforts entirely in English. Post-program surveys indicated that 83% of participants felt that these collaborative exercises improved their ability to articulate thoughts clearly and efficiently. Moreover, experiential learning contributed significantly to the development of transferable soft skills essential for professional contexts. Students reported growth in their presentation abilities, teamwork proficiency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. These competencies are vital for graduates at the College of Economics and Techniques under Thai Nguyen University, where alumni are expected to seamlessly transition into professional roles and adapt to international work environments. In conclusion, the results underline how experiential learning methods not only enhance linguistic capabilities but also cultivate a range of vital professional skills. This approach has proven to be a highly effective strategy for teaching English at collegiate and university levels, providing learners with the tools they need to excel academically and professionally.

### **2.4 Challenges and Recommendations for the Implementation of Experiential Learning in English Language Teaching**

Although experiential learning presents significant advantages for English language instruction at the tertiary level, its practical implementation is often accompanied by a variety of challenges that necessitate careful planning and strategic interventions. One of the most pronounced issues is the prevalence of large class sizes, a common feature in many Vietnamese universities. In these settings, it becomes exceedingly difficult for educators

to design and administer interactive activities that facilitate meaningful engagement for all students. Activities such as group discussions, role-plays, and project-based tasks require substantial investments of time and physical space—resources that are frequently limited in these contexts. A further complication arises from the restricted instructional time allocated to English courses within higher education curricula. In many academic programs,

In many fields of study, the allocation of English class hours per week is relatively limited, or classes are scheduled intensively based on the specific requirements of each major. This situation requires lecturers to carefully balance the teaching of essential grammatical knowledge with the organization of experiential learning activities. This dual focus can diminish opportunities to adopt interactive and participatory teaching approaches effectively. Also noteworthy is the inherent challenge of transitioning both educators and students to experiential learning paradigms. Students accustomed to traditional, teacher-centered methods may initially resist active participation in experiential tasks, especially if they lack self-assurance in their English communication skills. Similarly, instructors who have long relied on conventional educational methodologies may face difficulties in conceptualizing and implementing experiential activities without appropriate training, guidance, or resources. Resource limitations further exacerbate these challenges. Experiential learning often requires access to advanced multimedia tools, authentic materials, and immersive real-world interaction settings—resources that are financially or logistically unattainable for many institutions. Without sufficient institutional support, the practical adoption of these methods is hindered. Addressing these obstacles necessitates a multi-faceted approach underpinned by robust institutional backing. Higher education institutions should prioritize professional development initiatives tailored to enhance educators' competencies in deploying experiential learning techniques. This could involve the provision of specialized training workshops, platforms for collaborative teaching practices, and opportunities for curriculum innovation that encourage faculty exchanges of best practices. Moreover, curriculum design processes should systematically integrate experiential learning components into English language courses. Such integration must align closely with defined learning outcomes and assessment criteria to ensure pedagogical coherence. The adoption of technology can also offer promising solutions to resource limitations; virtual communication tools, online platforms for collaborative projects, and digital simulations can enable interactive language practice with minimal reliance on physical infrastructure. In summary, while experiential learning introduces certain challenges in the domain of English language teaching at the tertiary level, these difficulties are not insurmountable. Through thoughtful planning and organizational commitment to implementing supporting policies, higher education institutions can create environments conducive to experiential learning. Doing so offers the potential for enhancing students' linguistic proficiency while fostering their active engagement and ability to apply language skills in authentic contexts.

### **III. Conclusion**

Experiential learning has demonstrated its effectiveness as a pedagogical approach in improving the quality of English language teaching in vocational education, college, and university settings. By prioritizing active involvement, reflection, and practical application, this approach fosters the development of linguistic proficiency alongside vital soft skills. The adoption of experiential learning techniques at College of Economics and Techniques has shown positive outcomes, including improved student motivation, engagement, and communicative confidence. Despite obstacles such as large student numbers and restricted instructional time, tailored pedagogical strategies and enhanced institutional support can address these issues. Integrating experiential learning into English curricula holds substantial potential for advancing the quality and impact of language education across Vietnamese universities.

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