An Analysis of Experiential Learning During Language Learning: A Case Study of Undergraduates from a Japanese University

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ABSTRACT

Students who participated in edutourism programmes benefitted more than normal tourists do; and gain more content than students in classroom do. Tourists enjoyed the places the visit, understood new culture and learn to assimilate with the new environment. Students who participated in edutourism gained content knowledge that was planned for then while at the same time enjoying new environment, and also learnt new culture. This study explored how the language activities in an edutourism programme carried benfitted the participants in more than just what was planned for them. Specifically, the benfits they gained mirrored the gains of experiential learning. 20 students participated in the study and responded to an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire was given at the end of the 4 weeks programme. Findings revealed that the participants gained concrete experience, participate din reflective observation, learn through abstract conceptualization, and also experienced active experimentation. Implications of the study bear interesting implications for future edutourism programmes.

Keywords: Edutourism, Concrete experience, Reflective observation, Abstract conceptualization, Active experimentation.

Highlights of this paper
- This study explored how the language activities in an edutourism programme carried benfitted the participants in more than just what was planned for them.
- The findings of study revealed that the participants gained concrete experience, participate din reflective observation, learn through abstract conceptualization, and also experienced active experimentation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Edutourism is gaining popularity in higher institutions of learning in and outside Malaysia. According to Yfantidou and Goulimaris (2018) edutourism is defined as an internationally impactful business with wide cross section components of activities such as transportation, accommodation, recreation, food and other related services The engagement of a person's learning process with a tourist context is more effective that ordinary classroom learning . Students who participate in edutourism programmes benefit more than normal tourists do; and gain more content than students in classroom do. Tourists enjoy the places the visit, understand new culture and learn to assimilate with new environment. Students who participate in edutourism gain content knowledge that was planned for then while at the same time enjoying new environment, and also learn new culture. Mustafa (2016) sates that educational tourism gain self-improvement, relaxation and also a fun way of learning things. Edutourism can tke the form of short term programmes such as summer programmes or even credit exchange. Edutourism packages offer the opportunity to combine leisure with guided experiential learning. Participants are exposed to unique sets of knowledge-based attractions that may lead to positive change in perception and attitude. In addition to that, Mustafa (2016) also added that when a country taps into edutourism, they not only tap into the monetary benefits of edutourism, they nurture lifelong learning for the participants.

1.2. Statement of Problem

It was reported by Kamdi, Jamal, and Anuar (2018) that edutourism packages are popular among domestic and international edutourists to gain new skills, enhance their critical thinking abilities and explore new experiences. How are useful are these experiences to the learners involved in edutourism?

In addition to that, Yfantidou and Goulimaris (2018) suggested that future research could be applied to all educational levels to explore the needs, and especially the psychological benefits and the knowledge gained due to edtuourism. Hence, this study is done to explore the evidence of experiential learning among participants of edutourism.

1.3. Objective of the Study and Research Question

This study is done to investigate the prevalence of experiential learning among participants of edutourism in language learning environment. Specifically, this study hopes to answer the following questions;

    1.1.1   How do the learners respond to concrete experience?

    1.1.2   In what ways so the learners display reflective observation?

    1.1.3   How do learners display abstract conceptualization?

    1.1.4   How do the learners use active experimentation during learning?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

There are several views on language learning strategies employed by different learners. Hardan (2013) said that the different definitions of language learning focus on different aspects of language learning and acquisition. This section discusses different characteristics of language learning strategies and also experiential learning.

2.2. Gender in Language Learning Styles

There has been report on gender differences on learning styles. Severiens and Ten Dam (1994) found that men prefer activities that involve abstract conceptualisation. Men were also reported to score higher for extrinsic motivation. Women were also reported to prefer concrete experience men -men scored higher for extrinsic motivation. In addition to that, Lau and Yuen (2010) report that females preferred concrete sequential and abstract random. Males, on the other hand, preferred concrete random. Both genders attend to learning in different ways and activities that they like or dislike will differ in some ways.

2.3. Factors in Language Learning

One of the many factors that influence language learning is the use of affective factors. According to Henter (2014) affective factors such as attitudes, motivation and anxiety determines the success or failure of language learning Figure 1. A learner may have anxiety towards learning a language. This anxiety may then lead to the learner forming a negative attitude towards learning the language. This attitude may then influence his/her motivation towards the mastery of the language learnt.
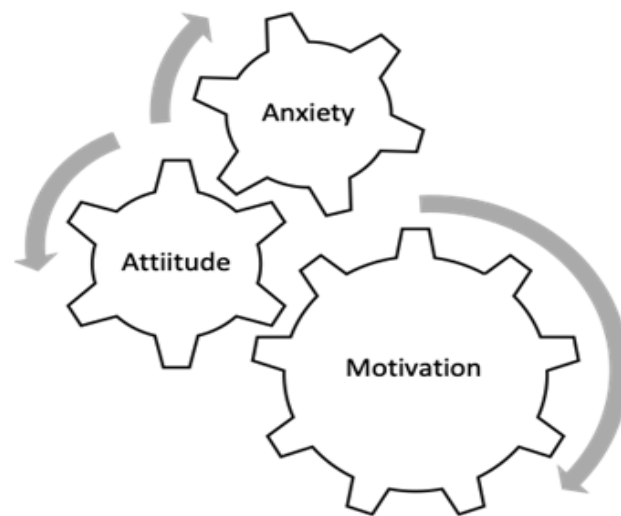

Figure-1. Affective Factors influencing Language Learning (adapted from Henter (2014).

Another factor in language learning involves the perception of learners. According to Rahmat (2019). With reference to figure 2, the success or failure of language learning depends on the learners use of strategies. The use of a variety of strategies can further help or hinder the learner from being proficient in the language. Next, different learners go through different learning process. This can be influenced by the learning situations/environment that the learners were put into throughout the process of learning.
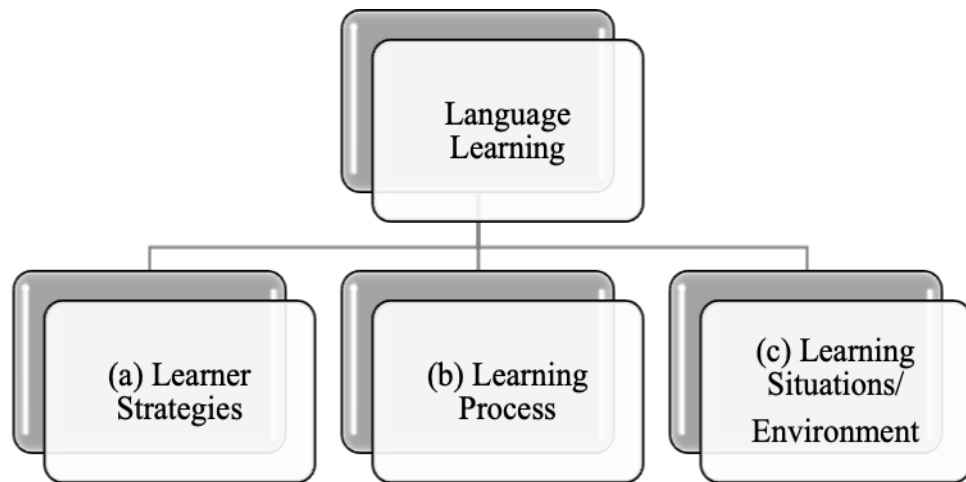
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Figure-2. Perception of Language Learning (adapted from Rahmat (2019).

Source: Rahmat (2019).

Yet another definition is introduced by Stern (1992). He presented five main language learning strategies. The strategies are management and planning strategies, cognitive strategies, interpersonal strategies, affective strategies, and the also communicative -experiential.

a.   *Management And Planning Strategies*

This strategy relates to learners' intentions to direct his/her own learning. Learners need.

to decide what commitment to make to learn the language. He /she needs to set reasonable goals. He /she needs to decide on an appropriate methodology, select appropriate resources and monitor progress. Finally, the learner needs to evaluate his/her achievement.

b.   *Cognitive Strategies*

Steps in operations. Used in learning or problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning material. Cognitive strategies are;

i.   Classification/verification.

ii.   Guess/inductive inferencing.

iii.   Deductive reasoning.

iv.   Practice.

v.   Memorization.

vi.   Monitoring.

c.   *Interpersonal Strategies*

Interpersonal strategies are used when learners need to communicate using the target language in the environment of native or near native language setting. Learners must also know the target culture in order to communicate well with the people using the target language.

d.   *Affective Strategies*

Affective strategies are learning strategies concerned with managing emotions, both negative and positive. Language learners can have either positive or negative emotions towards learning a target language.

e.   *Communicative –Experiential Strategies*

Communicative strategies are used between two or more people to get meaning across. Strategies such as circumlocution, gesturing, a\paraphrase, or asking repetition and explanation are used to to keep conversation going. Communication-experiential strategies in group interaction where members of the group communication to learn; and learn to communicate.
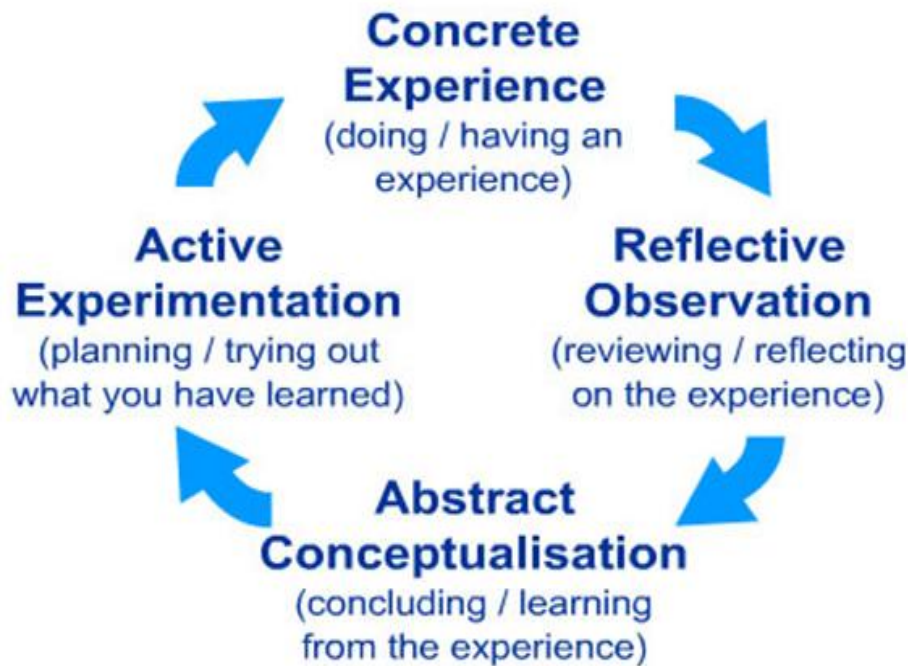
2.4. Experiential Learning

Figure-3. Experiential Learner (adapted from Kolb (1984).
Source Kolb (1984).

Learners gain more than just the content of the lesson through activities that promote. Figure 3 shows the cycle of experiential learning experiential learning potential of experiential learning cycle in promoting language learning strategies through an activities. When learners are given the chance to perform activities in learning, they can be guided by the teacher to reflect on the experience. Next, teachers can plan activities for learners to express what they have learnt from the experience. Finally, some learners would go ahead and plan more learning to take place or they just try out the new skills they have just gained.

In addition to that, experiential learning encourages learners to learn from their team mates. Kayes, Kayes, and Kolb (2005)report that among some of the causes of failures of team work are issues like social loafing, groupthink, overdependence on a dominant leader, over commitment to goals, and diffusion of responsibility. These negative factors can be overcome and team effectiveness improved when teams intentionally focus on learning. Kayes et al. (2005) identified learning as the key component of six aspects of team development: purpose, membership, role leadership, context, process, and action. Teams learn differently in early versus later stages of development. The Kolb Team Learning Experience addresses all six aspects through a structured written simulation. Upon completion of the simulation, the team has knowledge about the functions of teams in general, experience about the functions of its team specifically, and awareness of learning and progress through the learning cycle modes.

Many have written about the use of experiential learning in the language classroom. According to Knutson (2003) experiential learning is defined by the inclusion of phases of reflection designed to help the learner relate a current learning experience to past and future experience. The use of activities in experiential learning to in second-language classrooms is found to increase the learners' motivation for and investment to learning. In addition to that, Mollaei and Rahnama (2012) report that conventional teaching and training are based mainly on knowledge/skills transfer. This type of learning does not address individual growth and potential particularly well. This is because conventional skills/knowledge transfer usually assumes (wrongly) what the individual needs to learn, and the best way in which they can learn it. Experiential learning is a powerful way to address individual growth and potential, which is commonly a much neglected approach to teaching and developing people of all ages. It is adaptable for individual style, preferences, strengths, direction, etc.

2.5. Past Studies

McMullen (2009) explored the use of language learning strategies (LLSs) by Saudi EFL (English as a Foreign Language). The study investigates the effects of gender on academic major strategy instruction. Data was collected from three universities in Saudi Arabia. The instrument used was Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a self-report questionnaire, as the instrument. Participants in the study ($N = 165$) who registered for similar Freshman English composition courses and totaled 71 male students and 94 female students. The results of ANOVA (analysis of variance) tests showed that female students used slightly more LLSs than male students, and Computer Science students used slightly more LLSs than Management Information Systems students.

Nisbet, Tindall, and Arroyo (2007) explored the relationship between language learning strategy (LLS) preferences and English proficiency among Chinese university students. The instrument used were Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and an institutional version (ITP) of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The respondents for this study were 168 third-year English majors. Multiple regression analysis revealed that SILL strategies accounted for only 4% of the variation in ITP-TOEFL score. Results of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) showed no significant differences across genders on eight measures of learning strategy preferences and proficiency.

The study by Kelly and Joshua (2003) explored the role of experiential learning in helping students acquire these necessary skills and the mechanics of experiential learning. The study looked into the benefits and limitations, lessons learned, assessment techniques, and recommendations for use in future. Findings revealed that students responded favorably to experiential learning opportunities and rated these experiences highly. Activities planned could improve retention, thinking skills, problem solving, and decision-making.

The study by Boggu and Sundarsingh (2016) was done to examine the effectiveness of the experiential learning theory to enhances language learning strategies in an EFL context. 60 undergraduate students participated in this experimental research. Series of task were developed 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 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. potential of experiential learning cycle in promoting language learning strategies through an integrated skills-based curriculum.

Henter (2014) conducted a study on 92 first year students to look into how affective factors influence learning a foreign language. The study was done with the assumption that learning process depends on a series of factors:

cognitive factors (language aptitude, learning strategies), affective factors (attitudes, motivation, anxiety), metacognitive factors, and demographic factors. Samples were taken from first year Psychology and Educational Sciences students.. They were tested with Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and an English language test. There were identified significant differences in how affective factors influence learning a foreign language between this category of students and those coming from a faculty of letters.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This qualitative case study explores 20 participants' feelings on the summer programme they attended. The instrument used was a set of open-ended questions. The open-ended questions that the students responded to provide information, such as feelings, attitudes, and the understanding of the participants' perceptions on the subject (summer programme). The data collected from the responses in the open-ended questionnaire was analysed using codes. Coding or tagging is done on the responses and the data is presented in descriptive form.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This section presents the data analysis through the research questions presented in the previous section.

4.2. Concrete Experience

RQ1-How do the learners respond to concrete /real;-life(opposite imaginary, invented) experience?

Table-1. Open -Ended responses on concrete experience.

Topic	Sub Topic	Male	Female
Concrete Experience	Doing/having an experience	• Fashion show/Culture activities(dance)	• Love buddies Session. Hate musical instrument
		• Fashion show	• Buddies session
		• Fashion show	• Putra Mosque and Blue Mosque
		• Malacca Trip	• Activity in the forest
		• Music activity	• Blue Mosque
		• We dance and sing Malaysian song	• Love quiz of words. Hate play a instrument
		• We wore Malaysian traditional clothes	• Talk with my buddy and others
		• It's fun. Everybody fun	• I could touch difference culture
		• We went mosque to learn traditional	• I could experienced the nature and friendship
		• Learning traditional music instrument was good	• With APB buddies and Blue Mosque is beautiful

Source: (Henter, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Rahmat, 2019).

Concrete experience is when a new experience or situation is encountered. This can also refer to a reinterpretation of existing experience. Table 1 shows the concrete experience reported by the participants. Students were able to learn about tradition at the mosque, and also first-hand experience of learning about Malaysian costumes. The experience at the mosque is a new experience for them. Similarly, the male participants were reported to "dance and sing Malaysian song" showing how they embraced the new experience. Interestingly,

the female participants focused on what they also gained from the experience. The female participants mentioned "touch" different culture. The word "touch" refers to a meaning more than just getting to know the Malaysian culture-it is attaching a feeling to the experience-a positive one. The female participants also used the word "experience" nature and friendship. The word "experience" indicates an attachment to the opportunity. Something they remember strongly.

4.3. Reflective Observation

RQ 2-In what ways so the learners display reflective observation?

Table-2. Open-ended response on reflective observation..

Topic	Sub Topic	Male	Female
Reflective Observation	Reviewing/	• PBL-It's difficult to do it	• PBL: It is first time for me to investigate something in English
	reflecting on the experience	• PBL	• PBL program-we have to think themselves
		• PBL work. It is really difficult	• PBL. I have never given presentation in English before coming to Malaysia
		• There are 6 people in the same group. I like time with myself	• Shy personality to talk to everyone-improve!!
		• PBL	• Speaking-I can't speak a lot in English
		• Do it together	• By consulting with PBL buddies
		• Do PBL together	• Discuss with our member
		• Talking with buddies and friends	• I corporate with group member with buddies help
		• I usually was in room alone	• I tried to talk to buddies sometime
		• Work together with group members and we overcome it	• Communicate with buddies

Source: Henter (2014); Kolb (1984); Rahmat (2019).

During reflective observation, participants get to watch others. It is also about learning from their experiences Table 2. The male participants reported that "work together with group members and we overcome it". They mentioned that some were used to working alone before this. They gained knowledge about team-work. The female participants "first" time was not working in groups but "first time investigating something in English". The female participant also learnt "presentation in English".

4.4. Abstract Conceptualization

RQ 3-How do learners display abstract conceptualization?

Abstract Conceptualisation is the process of making sense of what has happened and involves interpreting the events and understanding the relationships between them. This is the stage where the learner makes comparisons between what they have done, reflect upon and what they already know. The male participants were reported to learn a few things Table 3.

They learnt to "importance of friends", and also "the importance of organizing ideas".

The female participants, on the other hand, reported learning more than their male peers. They learnt (a) language skills –"speaking and listening skills". They also learnt (b) the importance of "making good relations with not only foreign people but also with Japanese". This is interesting because they admitted to gaining social skills as well. Finally, the female participants learn the "difference between Japan and Malaysia." They particularly learn about Malaysian food and they got to experience "Malaysian people kindness".

Table-3. Open-ended response on abstract conceptualisation

Topic	Sub Topic	Male	Female
Abstract Conceptualization	Concluding/learning from the experience	• English, Culture, Custom	• It is very hard to explain what I want to say in English
		• English, culture, religion	• 1.Culture and religions and anything. 2.Speaking skill, listening skill
		• The importance of friends	• Culture
		• I learned about Malay culture	• I learned the importance of making good relation with not only foreign people but also Japanese
		• The importance of organizing ideas	• Difference between Japan and Malaysia. For example, food, Malaysian people kindness

Source: Henter (2014); Kolb (1984); Rahmat (2019).

4.5. Active Experimentation

RQ 4-How do the learners use active experimentation during learning?

Table-4. Open-ended response on active experimentation.

Topic	Sub Topic	Male	Female
Active Experimentation	Planning/	• Although it was hard, it was really fun. E.g. writing class	• I try to speak confidently and loudly
	trying out what you learnt	• Writing is very hard, but it was fun	• In Malaysia, I could experience culture and religions and more
		• Go out with buddies and friends	• I visited mosque and touched in Islam
		• I went night market	• I tried to study more and more. I enjoyed with buddies and friends. Also, PBL group member is also kind to me and we could cooperate
		• To summarize the conclusion and it's difficult to think in English	• Dansing is good and I'm happy wearing traditional clothing

Source: Henter (2014); Kolb (1984); Rahmat (2019).

The stage of learning where a person uses theories to help them solve problems or make decisions. Table 4 shows the responses for open-ended responses for both male and female participants. The male participant reported their attempt to "think in English". Although it was difficult, but they managed. The female participants succeeded in their attempt to "speak confidently and loudly".

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary and. Discussion

5.1.1. Concrete Experience

The enjoyable activities experienced in general, with the female participants particularly attaching emotions to the experience is a good sign of positive learning behaviour displayed This is also agreed by Henter (2014) who felt that attitude factors in learning improves motivation towards learning as well as reduce anxiety.

5.1.2. Reflective Observation

Both the male and female participants were exposed to group work probably for the first time. In addition to that, the female students were positive about the oral presentation done in English-something they were not familiar with. McMullen (2009) reported that female students were able to use slightly more language learning strategies compared to their male counterparts.

5.1.3. Abstract Conceptualization

For abstract conceptualization, both types of participants gained more than just the content of the lessons prepared.

The male participants mentioned gaining friends, besides content knowledge. The female participants were positive about their exposure in speaking and listening skills. This findings is in accordance to the study by McMullen (2009) and Boggu and Sundarsingh (2016) who emphasized on the exposure form experiential towards the practice of language learning strategies.

5.1.4. Active Experimentation

The stage of learning where a person uses theories to help them solve problems or make decisions. Table 4 shows the responses for open-ended responses for both male and female participants. The male participant reported their attempt to "think in English". Although it was difficult, but they managed. The female participants succeeded in their attempt to "speak confidently and loudly".

The findings reported that the activities in experiential learning encouraged the participants to use their thinking skills.in the target language. This finding is in accordance by the studies by Kelly and Joshua (2003) and Henter (2014). Thinking and problem-solving activities in experiential learning help learners improve their thinking and also metacognitive skills.

5.2. Implications of the Study

There are several interesting implications from the study. Language learning has been taken to a new level. According to Henter (2014) affective factors are salient in language learning. Factors such as anxiety, attitude, motivation are considered influential.

Figure 4 presents the summary of the findings and the influence of activities in experiential learning on language learning. Activities in experiential learning help learners develop positive attitude towards learning the learning of target language. The positive attitude creates a snowball effect on the learners' motivation towards learning the language. This positive attitude in turns reduces anxiety of the learners for future language learning.
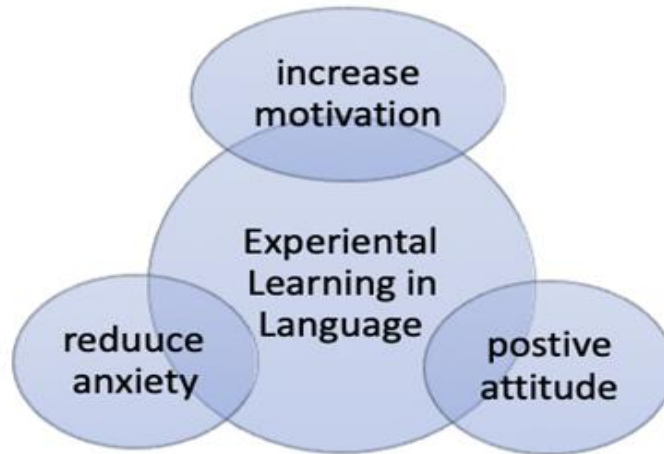
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Figure-4. Influence of experiential learning on language learning.
Source: Henter (2014); Kolb (1984); Rahmat (2019).

The findings in this study did reveal gender differences towards some activities. This gender differences help complement the weakness and strength of one another to make language learning a success.

5.3. Suggestion for Future Research

This study looked at learning target language through activities in experiential learning. Future research could look into the language strategies used that both facilitate and hinder learning through edutourism programmes.

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