

A Study of Experiential Learning on the Acquisition of Mandarin Language Through A Cultural Programme

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Abstract

Learning a third language is essential for effective intercultural communication. The focus of the study is the introduction of a third language to one's first and second. This area of study presents an opportunity to examine the efficacy of experiential learning in the context of Mandarin language education and it is guided by Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning which includes Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Learning Mandarin was assessed using frequency distributions. The investigation involved 83 Malays learners from three faculties. The data collection process involved administering surveys consisting of 21 questions and gathering the responses. The findings showed concrete experiences in language learning programmes improve language competence, motivation, and outcomes. Encouraging reflective practises can enhance language learning and cultural awareness. Cultural language exercises encourage students' critical and reflective thinking, which helps them learn and understand the third language. The most significant finding is improved communicative competence and confidence. However, it is important to note the limitations of this study, as the participants were all from the same background, and thus the results may be different if applied to participants from diverse backgrounds. Regardless of how extensively the results can be used, the main purpose of cultural programmes is to show learners how important culture context is when learning a third language.

Keywords: Cultural, Diverse, Patterns, Mandarin, Malay

Introduction

Culture shapes beliefs, communicates ideas, and disseminates information about customs and values. All of these characteristics are transmitted by means of language, which is an

integral component of culture. Culture is a taught pattern of social behaviour that must be followed; it cannot be a biological phenomenon. The most beautiful aspect of human society is this incredible and unique phenomenon with its amazing diversity and ever-changing patterns. Many people have different ideas on how culture and thought are connected to language, and some of these ideas have become popular. Sapir (1921), an American anthropologist, believes that culture and thought are dependent on language due to the fact that language is responsible for expressing the implicit meaning and inherited patterns of existence. The acquired information on such patterns provides insight into one's identity by highlighting the ways in which one thinks, feels, acts, and behaves within the framework of a certain culture. In addition, the cultural environment is what defines how individuals interact with one another and how they form their perceptions of any given circumstance or thing in life. As a result, the incorporation of language into culture acts as a medium of communication amongst the individuals that make up a society.

People's interactions with one another through the medium of language and other forms of communication are central to the cultural phenomenon known as culture. They typically study more than one language in order to satisfy the communicative needs that will arise throughout the course of their academic and professional careers. It is considered that a person has learned a "third language" when they have previously mastered their "first language," also known as their native tongue, as well as a "second language," also known as their foreign language. It is expected that the learner has already acquired a proficient level in two of the languages that they are studying before beginning study of a third language. If a person's first language is Malay and they decide to learn English as a second language and then decide to learn Mandarin, then Malay would be considered their native language, English would be considered their second language, and Mandarin would be considered their third language. Learning a third language, in addition to one's first and second languages, will be the primary focus of this particular effort.

The process of learning third language not only requires an individual to practise linguistic forms, but it also necessitates becoming familiar with the culture of the target language in order to interpret intercultural communication. Learning a third language foreign language requires an individual to practise linguistic forms in addition to becoming familiar with the culture of the target language. As a result, it is essential to offer learners with cultural context and awareness when teaching them a third language. This is necessary in order to achieve competence in the intercultural communication of the target language.

As a result, the purpose of this research is to investigate the utilisation of a third language, specifically the Mandarin language, in the context of a cultural phenomenon for the purpose of the interchange of ideas, opinions, or experiences. The development of communication skills and an increased knowledge of the role that language plays in cross-cultural communication are both outcomes of an understanding of the target culture. Communication and culture are intimately interrelated in terms of attributing similar meanings and values to the objects of life, as stated by (Koester & Lustig, 2010). According to the findings of various research studies, effective intercultural communication that reflects competence must go beyond the simple transmission of facts about culture in order to enlighten the participants with information regarding how and why students should perform certain behaviours and have certain attitudes when interacting with people from different cultures. As a consequence, the language cultural programmes ought to be implemented so as to acquaint the students with the primary distinctions that exist between the core cultural patterns of attitudes and behaviours (Schmidt, 2000).

Problem Statement

When it comes to mastering a third language in an educational environment, a large number of learners struggle mightily. They have already achieved fluency in their native language as well as in a second language; nevertheless, they struggle to achieve fluency and proficiency in the third language despite having already accomplished these feats in the first two languages. Because of this, their general language development is hindered, and it becomes more difficult for them to successfully communicate and connect with others from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, it is essential to do research into the aspects that contribute to these challenges and discover effective practical ways to improve students' ability to acquire a third language and assist them in becoming trilingual individuals who are skilled.

The theory of experiential learning developed by Kolb (1984) is utilised in this research. Learners are given the opportunity to put their acquired information and skills to use in meaningful and useful ways through the use of experiential learning. This authentic environment gives the impression that the learners were given chances to interact with aspects of Mandarin language and culture that were real and not fabricated for the purpose of the activity. In the realm of education and learning, particularly in the area of comprehending how individuals learn through direct experience, Kolb's theory has gained widespread recognition and application over the years.

Literature Review

Experiential learning

According to Alkan (2016), the stages and processes of experiential learning have the potential to "enable students to be aware of their professional identities, question their actions, and note the importance of their suspicions" (Alkan, 2016, p. 22). Alkan conducted research to determine the impact that experiential learning has on students' ability to perform scientific procedures and their performance in chemistry. He came to the conclusion that experiential learning can have a good impact on the academic achievement and learning outcomes of learners. This is because experiential learning encourages learners to go through the process of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting upon their own experiences.

In addition, Arnold, and Paulus (2010) conducted their research with educators using ELT as a theoretical framework for their work. In the course of their research, these educators gained an understanding of how their future students may make use of technology in the classroom by first experiencing and utilising the technology for themselves. They gained an understanding of how their future students would make use of such technology as a result of doing so. They were also able to reflect and think about any potential issues that their students might experience because the ELT process allowed them to do so.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate Kolb's theory of experiential learning with the aim of assisting educators and prospective students who will be studying Mandarin as their third language to develop effectively through the use of experiences. The theory of experiential learning and teaching (ELT) proposes that any experience can be converted into a dependable source of knowledge. Learners should go through the four stages of the process, which are experiencing, reflecting on that experience, thinking about what they've learned, and acting on what they've learned. This will make the experience more meaningful and dependable as a source of knowledge. Learners will be able to acquire more meaningful knowledge if they do so.

According to Kolb (1984), the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) places an emphasis on the value of experience and the part it plays in the learning process. In addition, it differentiates itself significantly from cognitive learning theory, which centres on cognition and behavioural learning theory, by emphasising the role that experience plays in learning. According to Kolb (1984), "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience".

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

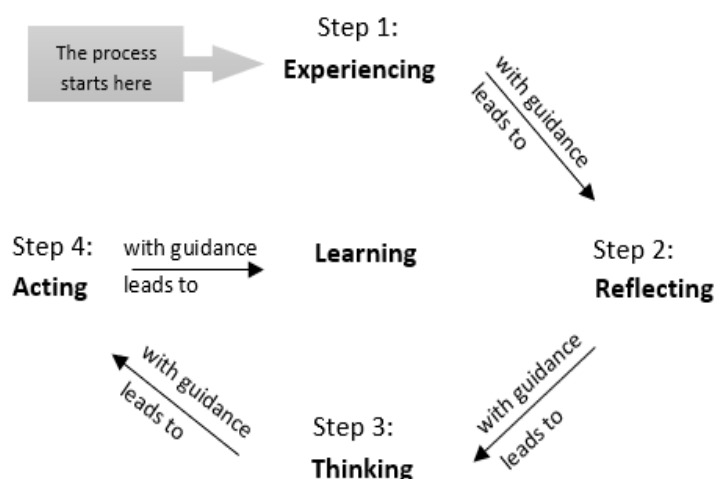
Both classroom instruction and academic research could benefit from utilising the ELT approach. To effectively use ELT in educational settings, instructors need to "take the students through the whole process in sequence" (McLeod, 2017), as this is the most important step in the implementation of ELT. For instance, prior to the instructor inviting students of Mandarin language to take part in a cultural programme that takes place outside of the classroom, the teacher can lead students to formulate questions and discuss with their classmates in order to acquire experience. After putting this experience into practise, the students, with the aid of the instructor, may then reflect on their experience, reflecting on what aspects of the cultural setting up went well and what aspects required additional improvement. The learners are able to go to the following stage once they have reflected and thought about the previous stage. During this phase, students put their ideas, thoughts, and reflections into practise by participating in activities that take place outside of the classroom. Learners gain new experiences through active participation, which they can then apply to the next stage of the process.

When conducting a study for the purposes of research, researchers often follow the same phases and sequence in order to either acquire a deeper understanding of their topic of interest or arrive at conclusions that are more definitive. For instance, a researcher who is interested in determining the most effective methods for enhancing the speaking and writing skills of students would follow the same processes outlined in the model in order to investigate specific methods that could be of assistance to these students. In the real world, the researcher may arrange for a pilot study to get a core understanding of the participants, the context, and any other pertinent information that may impact or assist the research in order to discover the best practises for these students. In doing so, the researcher will be able to identify the best practises for these students. Following the completion of the pilot study, the researcher may begin to reflect on the pilot and consider any potential changes that could be made to improve the practises. As the last stage of the model suggests, the researcher may take action based on their reflections and accommodations by adding, eliminating, or altering the actions that they employed in the pilot study. This might be done in any of the three ways described above. The researcher will have a deeper comprehension after each iteration of the model's procedure, and they will be more likely to arrive at a sound conclusion as a result of going through the process. This is the situation with regard to the cultural programming that has been carried out. Students were given the opportunity to embrace and practise the cultural arts of China through the participation in a variety of activities, such as the growth of Chinese culture, paper scissors art (剪纸), Chinese tea ceremony (茶艺), Chinese calligraphy (书法), Chinese knot (中国结), Chinese opera mask (变脸), lion dance (舞狮), and Chinese fan dance (扇子舞). These events were held for the learners.

Therefore, in this research, participants in a cultural programme can engage in a dynamic learning process that incorporates real-life experiences, reflection, conceptualization, and active application of knowledge if the Experiential Learning Theory developed by Kolb is

incorporated into the programme as shown in Figure 1. This theory was developed by David Kolb (1984). Within the framework of the programme, this holistic approach improves participants' Mandarin language acquisition, cultural comprehension, and overall learning outcomes.

Figure 1
Model of Experiential Learning Theory



The findings would inform educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers about the effectiveness of experiential learning in Mandarin language education and guide the design of future language programs. Finally, doing cultural activities for language learning is great fun.

Language and Culture

Without much of a doubt, acquiring linguistic knowledge is essential in order to engage in effective communication; yet the cultural background of the target language requires significantly more consideration. It entails familiarity with the cultural patterns, norms, and values of a society, as well as the ability to communicate their specific meaning to members of that society. Learning through active participation in a culture's activities brings both the language and the culture to life and contributes to increased intercultural understanding. Because it engages all four of the learner's senses, the experience makes the information more memorable.

In today's world, it is nearly hard to envision acquiring a language without also becoming immersed in the culture (or cultures) associated with that language. Both the question of how to motivate students to learn new languages and the challenge of bringing the culture and language of the target language's native country to life for students has always been a challenge for instructors of third languages all over the world. This initiative takes use of the fact that many language students find their curiosity in other nations and the cultures of other nations to be a driving force in their desire to further their language skills. Our study has proven that (Seedhouse, 2015) individuals are able to learn components of a foreign language and culture as well as digital abilities while carrying out real-world, practical, engaging tasks with a concrete end product. This is something that can be accomplished while individuals are working on a tangible end product.

It is important to keep in mind that not everyone associates the terms "languages" and "cultures" in the same manner, and that there is no one-to-one correlation between languages, cultures, and countries. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to determine whether or not it is possible for students to learn a new language while also actively and physically engaging in learning how to carry out some of the proposed cultural activities which are to be carried out in the mentioned and related environment of the culture.

This issue provides the opportunity to investigate the efficacy of experiential learning in the teaching of Mandarin language learners and to design questionnaires that are able to effectively quantify the effects of pedagogical approaches such as these. The research would involve the development and validation of questionnaires that capture the experiential learning activities, the outcomes of language acquisition, as well as the learners' perceptions of their language learning experiences.

This research could investigate a number of different experiential learning activities, such as cultural immersion programmes, community-based projects, or real-world language use situations, and investigate how these activities increase Mandarin language acquisition and cultural comprehension. According to the definition provided by UNESCO, cultural heritage "includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practises, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practises concerning nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts."

The learners' levels of language proficiency, experiential learning in terms of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, based on perceptions of their learning experiences can all be measured using the questionnaires.

Methodology

During the second and fourth semesters, 83 Malay students from three faculties, including Business Studies, Tourism and Hospitality Management, and Mass Communication, studied Mandarin for specific purposes. Thus, 83 students were selected as participants for this research. 21 male and 62 female participants were selected for this research using a method of purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling permits the selection of participants based on specific criteria pertinent to the research objectives (Creswell, 2014). Participants in this research were chosen based on their specific characteristics and eligibility requirements. Using standardised tests for speaking and writing, the (beginning) preliminary levels of Mandarin language proficiency of participants was determined. Additionally, proficiency-based grading rubrics were developed to assess the level of comprehension of various student.

Participants took part in a cultural activity intended to improve their study of Mandarin. Chinese culture's development, paper-scissors art, a tea ceremony, Chinese calligraphy, a Chinese knot, a Chinese opera mask, a lion dance, and a Chinese fan dance were just a few of the activities featured in the programme. The objective of this study is to examine how a third language, in this case the Mandarin language, is used in the context of a cultural phenomenon to facilitate the exchange of thoughts, opinions, or experiences. During the post-assessment phase, information on the participants' questionnaire responses was collected using a questionnaire containing 21 questions. The surveys are based on Kolb's experiential learning theory, which has four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Frequency distributions were used to analyse

the data that had been gathered. A summary of the distribution and frequency of responses for each question on the questionnaire is given using frequency distributions. Patterns, trends, and commonalities in the participants' responses can be found using this analysis method.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis focused on the "valid" numbers of 2.00 (disagree), 3.00 (Neutral), 4.00 (agree), and 5.00 (strongly agree) as its main focus. Each value represents a particular measurement or response that was deemed to be valid and was then incorporated into the analysis.

Table 1

averagea				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 2.00	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
3.00	22	26.5	26.5	27.7
4.00	36	43.4	43.4	71.1
5.00	24	28.9	28.9	100.0
Total	83	100.0	100.0	

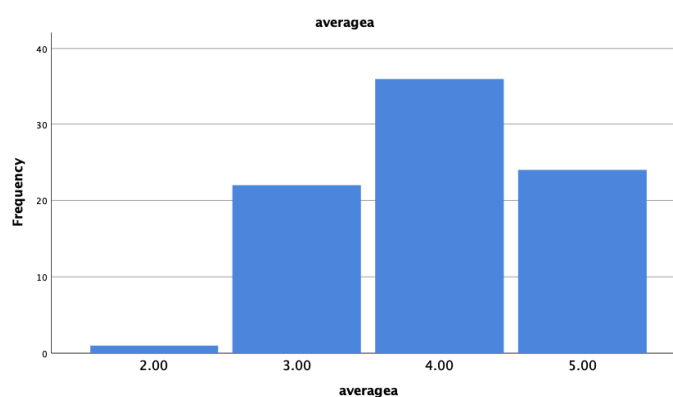


Table 1 (Concrete Experience stage) frequency distribution shows that there was one participant who disagree with a value of 2.00. This individual accounts for 1.2% of the entire population. It appears from this that the participant does not frequently experience this value in the course of his or her contacts with other people. There were 33 participants were neutral, which makes up 39.8% of the total, and the value of 3.00 was the most prevalent. There were 41 participants, which is 49.4% of the total, who had a value of 4.00, and this number had the highest frequency that agree to concrete experience in which leads them to learn Mandarin language. This demonstrates that significant numbers of the participants support this value. The number 5.00 was mentioned by 8 different participants, which indicates that 9.6% of the whole population strongly agree that experience plays important role in learning third language. The cumulative proportion of observations up to each category is illustrated by the cumulative percentage figures. For a value of 2.00, the cumulative percentage reached 1.2%; for a value of 3.00, it reached 41.0%; for a value of 4.00, it reached 90.4%; and for a value of 5.00, it reached 100. According to the findings, there is a diverse range of frequencies, with a value of 4.00 being the one that was recorded a significant number in stage 1 experience is important in learning a third language.

These results suggest that learners are better able to make connections between theoretical concepts and real-world applications when they get acquainted with real-life scenarios and opportunities for hands-on experience through concrete experiences. Learners are able to acquire language skills using this technique more successfully because it helps them to connect newly learned vocabulary, grammar, and phrases to their own personal experiences.

In addition to this, students are given the opportunity to experience cultural understanding, in which they are given the opportunity to connect to the relevant multilingual and multicultural context, such as Malaysia. As a result, learners are able to gain a better awareness and understanding of the cultural nuances and contexts associated with the target language. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that concrete experience is consistent with the concepts of the experiential learning theory. This theory proposes that learners gain the knowledge and skills necessary for success by participation in real-world activities followed by introspective thought about those activities. Through participation in authentic activities, with the expectation that learners would be able to take an active role in the language-learning process, which will ultimately result in a more profound knowledge of linguistic concepts and their long-term retention.

Table 2

recodeb				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	1	1.2	1.2
	3.00	30	36.1	37.3
	4.00	43	51.8	89.2
	5.00	9	10.8	100.0
Total	83	100.0	100.0	

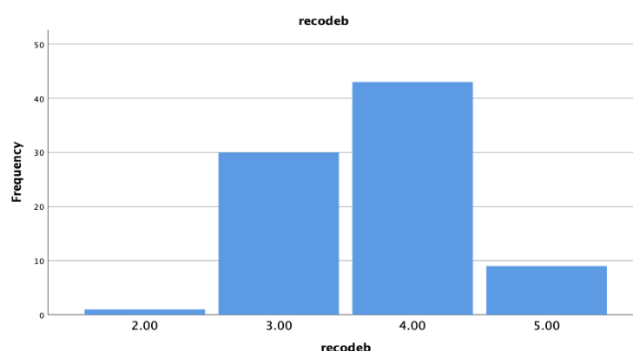


Table 2 (Reflective Observation stage) frequency distribution shows that there was one participant who disagree with a value of 2.00. This individual accounts for 1.2% of the entire population. It appears from this that the participant does not frequently experience this value in the course of his or her reflection on past experience in learning the Mandarin language. There were 30 participants were neutral, which makes up 36.1% of the total, and the value of 3.00 was the most prevalent. There were 43 participants, which is 57.8% of the total, who had a value of 4.00, and this number had the highest frequency that agree to reflective observation in which enables them to learn Mandarin language. This demonstrates that significant numbers of the participants support this value. The number 5.00 was mentioned by 9 participants, which indicates that 10.8% of the whole population strongly agree that reflection plays important role in learning third language. The cumulative proportion of observations up to each category is illustrated by the cumulative percentage figures. For a value of 2.00, the cumulative percentage reached 1.2%; for a value of 3.00, it reached 37.3%; for a value of 4.00, it reached 89.2%; and for a value of 5.00, it reached 100%. According to the findings, there is a diverse range of frequencies, with a value of 4.00 being the one that was recorded a significant number in stage 2, reflection.

Results from table 2 indicates that Learners are able to become more aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and different approaches to learning when they engage in reflective thinking which helps learners to think about their own thinking processes. Following that, reflection gives learners the chance to understand and make sense of the experiences they

have had while learning a third language. Learners are able to consider cultural characteristics connected to the third language learned in a multiracial country like Malaysia when they reflect on what they have learned. Learners can deepen their awareness of cultural norms, practices, and perspectives by reflecting on their own experiences in order to get new insights into those areas. This can help learners become more interculturally competent. It is the hope of the third language instructors that learners will be able to understand that by reflecting on their experiences learning a third language, learners in Malaysia can develop metacognitive skills that will enable them to monitor and regulate their own learning, resulting in greater self-awareness and improvement.

Table 3

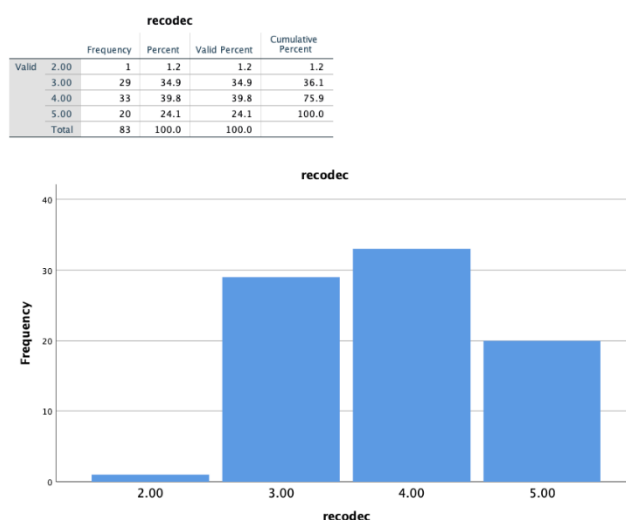


Table 3 (Abstract Conceptualisation stage) frequency distribution shows that there was one participant who disagree with a value of 2.00. This individual accounts for 1.2% of the entire population. It appears from this that the participant does not frequently experience this value in the course of his or her process of thinking in learning the Mandarin language. There were 29 participants were neutral, which makes up 34.9% of the total, and the value of 3.00 was the most prevalent. There were 33 participants, which is 39.8% of the total, who had a value of 4.00, and this number had the highest frequency that agree to thinking process in which enables them to learn Mandarin language. This demonstrates that significant numbers of the participants support this value. The number 5.00 was mentioned by 20 participants, which indicates that 24.1% of the whole population strongly agree that thinking process happened in learning third language. The cumulative proportion of observations up to each category is illustrated by the cumulative percentage figures. For a value of 2.00, the cumulative percentage reached 1.2%; for a value of 3.00, it reached 36.1%; for a value of 4.00, it reached 75.9%; and for a value of 5.00, it reached 100%. According to the findings, there is a diverse range of frequencies, with a value of 4.00 being the one that was recorded a significant number in stage 3, thinking.

Learners are able to engage in critical thinking to identify creative approaches when confronted with problems or linguistic issues, as demonstrated by the findings of this study, which are related to the objectives of this study. Learners in Malaysia are able to investigate the features and rules of the third language, compare it to their mother tongue, and determine the similarities and contrasts between the two. Language acquisition is improved as a result of this awareness since it leads to increased comprehensive understanding and promotes more efficient language use.

Table 4

recoded				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3.00	29	34.9	34.9
	4.00	36	43.4	78.3
	5.00	18	21.7	100.0
Total	83	100.0	100.0	

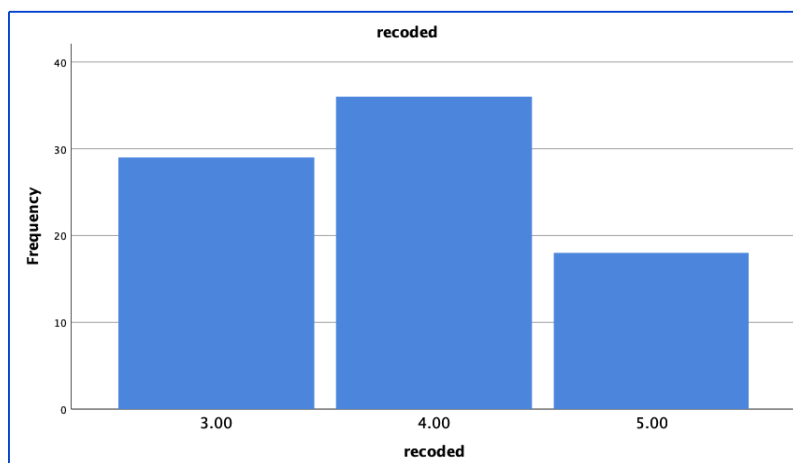


Table 4 (Active experimentation stage) frequency distribution shows the valid value is at neutral, agree and strongly agree only. There is no disagreement in this acting stage. There were 29 participants were neutral, which makes up 34.9% of the total, and the value of 3.00 was the most prevalent. There were 36 participants, which is 43.4% of the total, who had a value of 4.00, and this number had the highest frequency that agree to acting process in which enables them to learn Mandarin language. This demonstrates that significant numbers of the participants support this value. The number 5.00 was mentioned by 18 participants, which indicates that 21.7% of the whole population strongly agree that thinking process happened in learning third language. The cumulative proportion of observations up to each category is illustrated by the cumulative percentage figures. For a value of 3.00, it reached 34.9%; for a value of 4.00, it reached 78.3%; and for a value of 5.00, it reached 100%. According to the findings, there is a diverse range of frequencies, with a value of 4.00 being the one that was recorded a significant number in the final stage, acting.

These results are also important for the objectives of this study, which state that learners may strengthen their knowledge and acquire confidence in their abilities by actively utilising the third language in real-world situations. The instructors of third language also have high hopes that learners will be able to practise and act out situations because of this cultural programme. As a result of this, instructors hoped that learners would be able to develop communicative competence, which would enable them to effectively convey their ideas, opinions, and intentions in the Mandarin language. Learners can then improve their ability to comprehend and use the Mandarin language across a variety of communicative contexts by participating in role-plays, discussions, or simulated exchanges as the opportunity were provided in the activities which was strongly emphasised in this cultural programme.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be demonstrated from the cultural programme that participants have good responses to the 4 stages as outlined in the experiential learning theory. This was observed through the entire programme. In order to learn a third language effectively in Malaysia, one must rely heavily on first-hand experience. It makes acquiring contextual

information easier and promotes cultural awareness, both of which are in line with the objectives that support the experiential learning theory. Concrete experiences, when incorporated into language learning programmes, have the potential to improve learners' language ability as well as their motivation and overall outcomes regarding language learning. In addition to that, the importance of reflective thought cannot be understated when it comes to learning a third language in Malaysia. According to the findings, it is crucial to encourage learners to engage in reflective practises since doing so can develop a more comprehensive and meaningful experience in language acquisition, which in turn leads to greater proficiency and cultural awareness. The learners' ability to engage in critical and reflective thinking processes, which allow them to develop their proficiency in the third language and get a better understanding of it, can also be improved through participation in cultural language activities. Finally, the importance of acting as the final stage in the process of learning a third language in Malaysia is obvious. Learners were able to improve their communicative competence and build confidence by participating in the activities, which could result in more successful outcomes in terms of language learning.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight out the limitations that were placed on this study. Because there were only 83 participants, the sample size was limited, which may have an effect on how generalisable the findings are. In addition, the participants in the study were all Malay students who were learning Mandarin in a particular setting. This may limit the extent to which the findings may be applied to other groups or contexts. It is possible that the expectations of instructors may not be seen in an encouraging way, but the objective is that through doing cultural programmes, learners will have the opportunity to experience how important it can be to understand the cultural context in order to improve their outcomes in learning a third language.

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