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Learning Characteristics Viewed From Educational Theory Perspectives

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Abstrak

Studi kasus ini menganalisis karakteristik belajar seorang pembelajar EFL ditinjau dari gaya belajar, konteks pembelajaran, teori belajar, dan strategi pembelajaran. Data diperoleh dengan menganalisis literatur dan praktik pembelajaran peserta. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karakteristik belajar peserta didik memiliki peran penting agar bisa menjadi seorang pembelajar yang sukses. Untuk meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran, disarankan agar pendidik dan lembaga pendidikan secara intensif menganalisis karakteristik dan konteks sosial peserta didik. Hasil analisis tersebut akan memberikan arah dalam menentukan cara terbaik dalam memicu motivasi siswa. Kedua, gaya belajar siswa harus dianalisis pada awal pembelajaran. Terakhir, membantu peserta didik untuk mengetahui strategi belajar terbaik mereka harus diprioritaskan oleh para pendidik.

Kata Kunci: *EFL, karakter peserta didik, teori pembelajaran.*

Abstract

This case study focused on analyzing the learning characteristics of an EFL learner. The characteristics are viewed from the learning style, learning context, learning theories, and learning strategies. Data were gained by analyzing the literature and the participants' learning experience. The results showed that the learner's learning characteristics play an important role to be successful in the future. To improve the learning quality, it is suggested that the educators and the educational institution should intensively analyze the students' characteristics and social contexts in order to find out the best ways to trigger the students' motivation. Secondly, the students' learning style should be identified at the beginning of the study. Lastly, helping the learners to find out their learning strategies should be prioritized by the educators.

Keywords: *EFL, learner characteristic, learning theories.*

INTRODUCTION

James (2005) states that "learning is about building relationships with people–children and adults–and creating connections between ideas and the environment; not separating or isolating subjects, skills or people (p. 110)". Learning activities can be analyzed based on three broad theories: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). In the theory of behaviorism, learners are believed to be reactive to any response from the environment instead of actively taking a role to discover the environment. Learning has been seen to be successfully achieved when the learners can demonstrate suitable responses towards any stimuli from their environment. In formal educational design, the learners are mainly provided by a set of stimulus-response

association such as cues, practice, and reinforcement. This kind of educational design has been claimed to be quite effective when learning activities are intended to involve facts recall, generalizations, associations, and chaining. Similarly, in non-formal educational contexts, without being realized that people learn to develop their life by this theoretical principle. They respond to any particular stimuli from their neighborhood to attain a determined goal.

The second broad theory is cognitivism. The emphasized factors of cognitive theory are on acquiring knowledge and structuring internal mentality of learners which are almost similar to the epistemology continuum (Bower & Hilgard, 1981, as cited in Ertmer & Newby, 2013). It is believed that learning is the process of increasing knowledge instead of changing ways of learners' responses to any stimulus and learners are recognized very active in the process of learning. It is because learners are believed to use their mental activities such as planning, goal setting, and organizational strategies in their learning process. In connection with this, according to a Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, people cognitive ability changes and develops from birth to maturity as people constantly try to comprehend the world around them (Woolfoks & Margetts, 2016). Therefore, the development of the cognitive ability of people is in line with their maturity increase.

The last theory is constructivism. Ertmer and Newby (2013) emphasize that this theory is based on the principle that the learners come to know the world from self-interpretation of experiences. For example, any event experienced by a group of people will have different interpretation among them. Therefore, the process of learning is the mental activities to interpret new information based on the learners' previous experience.

This article provides an analysis of a case study in the context of education, more specifically, in the setting of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The case is about the learning process of a student pursuing undergraduate study in an Indonesian private university majoring in English education. As he did not have sufficient knowledge background about his major, he met big difficulties in the first step of his study. To overcome his weaknesses, he made a close relationship with one of the smart students in his class. At the beginning of his study, he learned a lot from his friend about the materials and actively consulted his tutor. Besides, to improve his social skill, he also actively involved in organizational activities. Because of his seriousness, he was successful and gained satisfactory results on his undergraduate graduation.

Factors of learning development in connection with the perspectives of educational theories are examined based on this case study. In addition, the effect of learner style, as well as learning issues in the learning process, are identified. From this identification, the issues of learning in the individual and educational, and professional contexts are deeply explored. Finally, suitable learning strategies are suggested to be applied as the responses to those issues.

METHODOLOGY

This is a case study analysis in which the data was collected from the reflection of the author's own experience as a former student in Indonesia. In addition, the data was also gained from the analysis of the literature. The

discussion and the results are presented in the light of learning style, learning context, learning theories, and learning strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Learning Style

Learners' characteristics and social condition both contribute to their behaviour and attitude in their daily life including their classroom life (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2016). In this case study, the learner's personality can be categorized as an introverted student. It can be seen from the beginning of his study that he had an inclination of being a closed person and did not want to seek help from his tutors or friends. It is believed that an introverted student can be changed to be more open by providing external causal factors (Busch, 1982).

The student in this case study got motivation from his parents and turned out to be more confident. As a result, he became an active learner whose learning style tended to be active in asking questions and working with others. There are seven popular categories of learning style such as visual (spatial), aural (auditory-musical), verbal (linguistic), physical (kinaesthetic), logical (mathematical), social (interpersonal), and solitary (intrapersonal) (Garcia, Amandi, Schiaffino, & Campo, 2005). The student, in this case, can be categorized having social learning style because of his activeness to ask information from one of his classmates.

Learning Context

Learning environment can be defined as a various physical location, condition, and cultures in which the learners learn (Marsh, Clarke, & Pittway 2014). Most of the professional practitioners agree that to a great extent the learning environment is a crucial factor in students' achievement (Oblinger, 2006; Lippman, 2010). Their enthusiasm, motivation, sense of wellbeing, and security all together contribute to the learners' result and learning environment is inseparable from these elements. On the other hand, the setting beyond the school is also included in learning environment (Hanrahan, 2007). The social condition where the learners live and interact with adults and their fellow friends inevitably influence their learning progress. In connection with this, Hallinan and Williams (1990) states that close friends who come from similar personal and social background are more influential to the students' learning atmosphere.

In the case being analyzed, the student is surrounded by a positive learning environment. His learning environment encompassed his beneficial interaction with one of his smart classmates and encouragement from his parents. It can be predicted that without encouragement from his parents and support from his friends, he could not succeed in his study.

Learning Theories

Analyzing the learning process of the student in this case study, it can be identified that his learning process was dominantly under the theory of cognitivism. It is clear that his mental ability played an important role to build his understanding of the materials. As he did not have sufficient previous knowledge about his major, he maximally used his internal mentality to construct his understanding about the received knowledge. It is true that behaviorism was also occurring in his learning process, but they are not so significant. Although the influence of his learning

environment that is, in this case, encouragement from his parents and help from his friend can be said as the starting point as well as the biggest milestone in his success, it was his activeness to construct knowledge of the material that contributed the most. On the other hand, constructivism did not occur significantly since his previous knowledge about the materials was low. Instead, this theory happened in the later steps of his study.

Learning Strategies

The student learning process will not be effective without appropriate learning strategies. Although students are the most responsible party on their success, the contribution of the teacher is no less important. It is mainly because the teacher can help students to examine their strength and weakness and draw suitable goals and objectives by providing an achievable standard. Probably the students can do it by themselves, but only a few realize its importance. Therefore, acknowledging the essence of this, finding out and determining an appropriate strategy to be implemented in teaching context have become a part of the teachers' responsibility. An important element of teaching strategies is the stipulation of a pattern to allocate the expected outcome.

A popular parameter that commonly used by educators across the world is three domains of learning (Wilson, 2016). The three domains encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor/ kinesthetic. Wilson claims that these three domains are essential in the field of education and teachers should know and use them for constructing the teaching activity. It is believed that the teachers can construct and develop more comprehensive lesson activities using those three domains. Creating various methods in teaching with achievable goal may potentially aid learners to keep the materials more lasting in their memory. The domains are presented in form of taxonomy or classification on the basis of the level from the simplest item to the most complex one.

1. **Cognitive domain**

Cognitive domain or thinking domain popularly known as Bloom's taxonomy has been revised into a new version with some modification. This domain is divided into some subsets based on the level of difficulty. The old version of this learning domain had been used by many professionals for many years before the coming of the revised one. The name Bloom's taxonomy was born from the main original author Benjamin Bloom, and he worked with his partners to arrange this taxonomy. The old Bloom's taxonomy namely original cognitive domain was published in 1956. In the year of 2001, it was Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl who led the project of revision from 1995 to 2000 and this newest version has been acknowledged to have stronger benefits to use to establish the lesson activities by the educators. The obvious change of this domain of learning happened as the two most top level of cognition have been reversed. The order of the old version is as follows: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation arranged from the simplest to the most complex one. Meanwhile, the updated version has changed by using verbs instead of the noun as follows: knowing, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Thomas, 2004). A more

detailed explanation, as well as the comparison between those two versions, is presented in the table bellow.

Bloom's Taxonomy 1956	Updated version 2001
1. Knowledge: Remembering or retrieving previously learned material. Examples of verbs that are commonly used in this level are: know, identify, list, relate, recall, define, memorize, etc.	**1. Remembering:** the process of recognizing or recalling knowledge from memory. Remembering refers to the action of the retrieval of knowledge from memory.
2. Comprehension: The ability or skills in interpreting meaning from the material. Examples of verb usually used in this level are: illustrate, explain, describe, identify, etc.	**2. Understanding:** making theconstruction of meaning from various functions such as in form of writing, graphic, etc.
3. Application: the skill to implement	**3. Applying:** finding out systematic
what have been learnt in real life. Verbs relate to this level are: organize, apply,interpret, employ, implement, etc.	ways to implement the materials that have been learnt. This involves the product making such as models, presentations or simulations.
4. Analysis: The skill to examine every single element of the material to be better understood. Some examples of verb relating to this level are: analyze,compare, examine, categorize, explore, etc.	**4. Analyzing:** dividing the wholematerials into some parts and examinethem one by one to find out the relationship among one another.
5. Synthesis: The ability to combine some smaller parts of concept to form a new distinct one. Examples of verb: compose, construct, design, create, prepare, arrange,organize, etc.	**5. Evaluating:** doing critique to establish a judgment on a concept.
6. Evaluation: Making a judgment on a concept based on a particular purpose. The examples of verb used in this level are: evaluate, critique, argue, judge, assess, etc.	**6. Creating:** combining some elements to construct a new concept. This level is considered the most difficult mental process in the updatedcognitive taxonomy.

2. Affective domain

This learning domain refers to feelings or emotions and, similar to the cognitive domain, is divided into a hierarchy (Jagger, 2013). The levels of the affective domain are explained below:

a. **Receiving** means the sensitivity of the learners to any existing stimuli around them. This level includes the learners' awareness, willingness to receive, and selective attention.
b. **Responding** refers to the activeness of students' attention to any existing stimuli. This level encompasses acquiescence, willing responses, or feelings of satisfaction.
c. **Valuing** relates to the faith and attitude of the learners of worthiness. Acceptance, commitment, and preference are included in this level of the affective domain.
d. **Organization** pertains to the activity of internalizing values and faith. This internalization consists of conceptualizing values and organizing the values system.
e. **Characterization** is relating the highest level of internalization and reflection of accepted values and life meaning. The learners have been able to act and practice by their own beliefs.

3. Psychomotor domain

This domain refers to the function of physic to judge, reflex and make interpretive action (Krathwohl, 2002). This domain is also known as the learners' natural and autonomic reflexes. There are seven classifications of this domain, and they are presented from the simple to the most complex behavior (Simpson, 1972).

a. **Perception** (awareness): the ability to control motor activity by using sensory cues. The process runs through sensory stimulation, cue selection to translation. Some examples of the practice are guessing cues of non-verbal communication, knowing the location where a ball falls, setting the appropriate heat of a stove, etc. Some key words for this classification are choose, describes, detects, distinguishes, selects, etc.
b. **Set**: pertains to the level of readiness to do an action involving the factors of mentality, physic, and emotion. All of these three elements contribute to the learners' response to different condition. Some examples of this classification are detecting a range of working process of a machine, identifying the others' strength and weakness, and showing encouragement to learn a new process. Some key words of this level are begins, shows, states, reacts, explains, etc.
c. **Guided response**: This level encompasses imitation as well as trial and error. Some activities to train this level are performing a numerical formula, establishing a particular model based on instructions, understanding the hand-signals while parking a car, etc. Key words of this level are react, follow, respond, copy, and reproduce.
d. **Mechanism** (basic proficiency): This level has been considered as intermediate in mastering a complex skill. The learners have been more confident and proficient in this level. The examples of physical activities of this level are using laptop, repairing a tape recorder, and riding a motorbike.
e. **Complex overt Response** (Expert): this level has been considered very proficient in performing a complex scheme. The accuracy and efficiency of the action without spending much energy is the main measurement of this level. Those who have achieved this level are able to drive a car even in a very thigh road, for example, and operate computer quickly and accurately. Some key words for this level are calibrates, constructs, displays, fastens, fixes, etc.
f. **Adaptation**: the learners in this level have gained well-developed skills and are able perform a distinct and special movement. Those who have achieved this level of physical domain are able to respond to unpredictable stimuli. For example, modifying a motorbike beyond the imagination of common people without any danger. Key words of this classification are adapt, alter, change, rearrange, reorganize, etc.
g. **Origination**: learners have been able to perform a distinct movement to solve a particular problem. For examples, creating theory, providing training courses, running a consultation center, etc. Key words for this level are build, construct, create, design, initiate, etc.

In analyzing this case study, the focus is the student's learning strategies during his particular study episode. After exploring the three domains of learning above, it is identified that the student applied four strategies. Two of them are **remembering** and **applying** that can be categorized as cognitive domain, and the last two ones are **responding** and **valuing** which are includes in affective domain. Remembering is an effective cognitive strategy in the beginning of his study when he was required to recall every English vocabulary that he had memorized previously. Although at first he faced big difficulty in memorizing the English vocabulary one by one due to his lack of previous background knowledge of English, he was successful to overcome this challenge. After succeeding in this step, he forced himself to apply his knowledge into conversation with his classmates and using English to do chatting with the other people from the other countries. Another form of application he experienced is practicing his teaching skill at school by joining his organization programs. This application established his proficiency in both using and teaching the language. In the affective learning domain, he applied responding in the first step when he actively followed his friend's suggestions and instruction. The last strategy is valuing when he promised to himself to be commitment in learning English as his parents asked him to do so.

The four strategies applied by the student in this case study can be implemented and developed in the field of English teaching as a second language. They are suitable especially when the students are still at the beginning of English study. The first two ones, remembering and applying, can be set up in such a way to ease the students learning. To empower the process of remembering level, some strategies can be used. One is considered appropriate in teaching a second language is chunking (McInerney, 2014). Chunking refers to the mental activity to divide a material into some smaller chunks to ease learning and retrieval. To implement this strategy in teaching English as a second language, the sentence can be broken down to be some parts, for example, based on the category of parts of speech.

Another strategy is self-questioning. McInerney proposes that this strategy is useful for encoding and encourages learners to be more active. In English teaching, using this strategy fits the teaching of reading skill. In the level of applying, role-play technique is one among the most effective strategies (Jalaluddin, 2015). The students can be required to take a role such as a farmer, a teacher, a professor, etc. to encourage so that they can use the language in their real life. On the other hand, the level of responding and valuing can be easily achieved by the students when they have a high level of motivation to learn something. Woolfok and Margetts (2016) claim that motivation to learn is distinct that the learners focus more on achieving the quality of study rather than only the quantity. External factors such as family support, teachers' style, and peer attitude play an important role to enhance this motivation.

CONCLUSION

From this case study analysis, there are some important points worth highlighting to support the development of education quality. First of all, an analysis of learners' characteristics and their social context should be done intensively and carefully. From this analysis, both internal and external factors of students'

motivation can be triggered. Secondly, examining and identifying students' learning styles at the beginning of the study should be highly taken into consideration. Matching the teaching method and students' learning styles will result in maximal learning outcomes (Felder & Brent, 2005). Thirdly, helping students find and choose their own learning strategies should be the teacher's priority. This leads to independent and lasting learning habit. Lastly, educators should position their students in a positive learning environment to reach the expected result of education.

It is often assumed that the activities of teaching only needs to analyze and prepare the materials. However, after following the result of this analysis claims that understanding learners' characteristic is a central part of ideal education. Therefore, besides improving pedagogical skill, the best educators should spend a proportional amount of time to focus on this matter.

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