



Exploring Learners' Characteristics and Educational Practices and Proposing Four Learning Strategies: Case Study

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Abstract

The research's purpose is to explore learners' characteristics and educational practices. It is conducted because students' characteristics and educational practices are multifaceted, depending on the setting. This study employed a case study as the research methodology, utilizing observation in order to collect data concerning students' characteristics and educational practices. The result shows that there are two learners' characteristics found in the study; *application directed learners* and the level of motivation (*intrinsic and amotivation*), while *play based-learning*, *technological use*, and *outdoor learning activity* are the three educational practices found in this study. *Multisensory instruction*, *peer-feedback*, *simulated conversation strategy*, and *collaborative work* are the proposed learning strategies in this research in order to enhance and promote the teaching and learning process in this case study. These proposed strategies fill the research gap regarding learners' characteristics and educational practices since the majority of previous researches focused on exploring the related issue without proposing possible strategies.

Keywords: learners' characteristics, educational practices, application directed learners, motivation, learning strategies

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1. Introduction

The research aims to critically analyse a case study of teaching and learning practice conducted in an elementary school located in Indonesia, called The Modern Elementary School. Within the context of the study, the chosen class was an EFL class of sixth grade with 15 students comprising seven male and eight female students aged between 10 to 11 years old. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development stages, these average ages are categorised as the *concrete operational stage students*, in which they are concrete because they could apply to actual objects that are present, and they are operations because they could think through a series of steps, and they could mentally reverse the steps [1].

Furthermore, the learning environment of the chosen classroom in the case study was distinctive compared to other elementary schools existed in Indonesia since the students were required to learn and speak English in the

school environment. Thus, these students could be categorised as students who are able to use basic English in their daily conversations. In addition, the teaching material given to the students was about "*identifying noun in the English Language*", and the educational practice was elaborated with three primary teaching practices, which were *play-based learning*, *technological use*, and *outdoor learning activity*.

The paper portrays the overview of learners' characteristics and educational practices and its link to learning theories. Moreover, this study was conducted because the majority of previous researchers solely explored learners' characteristics and educational practices without proposing possible strategies to cope with the related issue [1]. Therefore, this research proposes four learning strategies, such as *multisensory instruction*, *peer-feedback*, *simulated conversation strategy*, and *collaborative work* in order to fill the related research gap.

2. Research Method

The research methodology employed in this research was qualitative research. It was selected because it relates to the research's purpose, which simultaneously aims to comprehend one's perceptions [2]. One of the various kinds of a qualitative study is the qualitative case study [3]. The qualitative case study was the chosen research methodology in this paper. The reason is that because the qualitative case study is used when the boundaries between the phenomenon under study and its context are not clear [4]. It means that the learners' characteristics and educational practices might happen all over the world so that it is impossible to explore it. In this paper, the researcher solely focuses on exploring the learners' characteristics and educational practices in a school located in *Kabupaten Dharmasraya, Indonesia*. It is the sixth-grade students of SDN *Islam Moderen*, an elementary school that has 15 students, comprising seven male and eight female students aged between 10 to 11 years old. The observation was chosen as a single research method. The reason is that observation can be utilised as a single method to provide appropriate and high-quality data [5]. Ultimately, thematic analysis was used to analyse collected data, in which it was categorised into the same theme before it was presented into the comprehensive discussion.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Learners' Characteristics

Learners' characteristics are diverse and multifaceted, and [6] divides students' characters into four main classifications, which are a meaning directed, a reproduction directed, an undirected and an application directed. In relation to the case study, the only one category which can be observed is application directed learners, in which students with application directed interested in applying the gained and given knowledge in the class into the real-world setting [6]

This condition could be seen in the case study how 14 of 15 students had successfully practiced the learning materials given in the classroom by reflecting it into the real things. To exemplify, after they were taught about some images which can be named as a noun in the English language in the classroom, then they still could apply and select real things in the real world which can be identified as a noun in the English language. By doing this way, they could be categorised as application directed learners, who could apply learning theory into practice in the real world.

Furthermore, another students' characteristic which can be identified in the case study would be their level of motivation. Standing on the notion of self-determination theory, learners' motivation could be divided into three main categories, which are amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation [7]. Based on this categorised motivation of self-determination theory,

intrinsic motivation and amotivation categories could be linked with learners' characteristics existed in the case study.

In order to illustrate it, intrinsic motivation could be defined as peoples' self-interest to achieve personal goals and deal with any given challenges [1], and it might be relevant to a situation, in which 14 of 15 students who passionately accomplished a given challenge to find and give names of particular things in noun of English language in the outside of classroom. They finished the given task without any reinforcement from external reasons like promising reward and punishment. On the other hand, amotivation which is known as peoples' lack of motivation to do any given activities [7], could be observed when the only one student, namely Ryan, who could not accomplish the give task because he said that it was lazy and had no motivation to do the given task.

3.2. Educational Practices

Concerning the educational practices, the first educational practice implemented by the teacher in the case study is play based-learning. In the principle of Piaget's theory of cognitive development, he believes that the primary principle of play based-learning is to assimilate and practice new schemas, and the play based-learning would assist learners to accommodate new information [1]. In my view, the notion of Piaget's theory above is reflected in the implementation of learning activities occurred in the case study, in which the teacher implemented a learning play to require students sitting down in a circle, and the teacher utilised and tossed a "fake apple" to one student by mentioning particular noun in English like "book".

Then, the student who received the "fake apple" should throw it to another student by saying a different English noun spontaneously when he or she passed the "fake apple". Hence, students will practice and assimilate their new schemas concerning various new noun in English after they participated in the given play, and [1] assert that the vocabularies can be easily presented when the learners had practiced and assimilated new schemas on their memory that can make a more meaningful learning process.

Another educational practice used by the teacher in the case study is the technological use. In the case study, teacher utilised a laptop and a projector to present some images which were associated with a noun in the English language which might be beneficial to enhance students' literacy in the English language since they were introduced with visual images presented in the slide that can be linked with English vocabularies of the noun. In my opinion, this learning practice is relevant with a central notion of visual literacy theory proposed by [8], in which humans' language development could be improved through their interaction with objects and visual images. Moreover, [9] reveals that visual learning

with technology offers the enhancement of students' critical thinking skill since they are required to critically analyse and relate the given visual presentation like images to the learning materials and topics.

The last educational practice could be observed from the case study is an outdoor learning activity. The notion implementation of outdoor learning activities could be classified into several zones, which are local neighbourhoods, expeditions, day excursions and school environment [10]. In other words, the practice of outdoor learning activities could be employed by teachers in those areas to provide learning flexibility to students. In relation to the case study, the school environment had been selected by the teacher to offer the related activity to students. To exemplify, after the students were given learning materials concerning some visual images of a noun of English in power point slides in the class, they were required to go outside and explore concrete things in the school environment that could be identified and named in 'noun' of English language. Hence, students grasp experiences by taking the information given by the teacher in the classroom, and they transform the related experiences by interpreting and acting on that information to find the things which could be identified and named in noun of English language. This view is relevant to a notion of experiential learning theory, in which knowledge obtained through the combination of grasping and transforming experiences [11].

3.3. Critical Review of the Implications of the Learners' Characteristics and Educational Practices

First of all, concerning the learners' characteristics, [12] asserts that students are diverse regarding their learning style and characteristics, every learner has their preference to follow the learning process and absorb the given knowledge effectively. In other words, every student will have different way in behaving and understanding materials given by their teachers, and all students could learn quickly while some students require more time in absorbing knowledge. This opinion could be observed in the case study where 14 learners could finish the given task, while the only one student, Ryan, failed to finish the task on time due to his limited motivation. According to [13], learners' motivation, learning speed and his enjoyment towards learning process could be improved if the teacher understands the students' learning style and use an appropriate approach.

However, connecting to the case study, the teacher did not attempt to use a suitable approach since the very beginning of the learning activity which leads to Ryan's late adaptation to the learning process. Whereas in fact, one of the appropriate approaches which can be utilised by the teacher would be a behavioural approach grounded from an extrinsic motivation theory [1]. In the notion of this approach, students should be motivated from external sides by giving reinforcement like a compliment, reward, and punishment [14]. Hence, by

giving the approach to the students, it could boost learners' motivation effectively [15]. This opinion could be seen and observed in the end of the learning process, when the teacher praised Ryan's work by saying 'very well done' and promised the whole classroom with a reward like 'gold star' which surprisingly triggered Ryan's motivation to point himself to be the first presenter in introducing his invention in front of the class.

Furthermore, concerning the review of educational practices conducted in the case study, the writer argues that the technological use employed by the teacher in the case study could be strengthened and improved even further to offer an effective learning process. This opinion appears because the teacher simply utilised the computer and projector as an aided tool instead of forming a meaningful and active learning context of teaching and learning process. It can be observed from the case study when the students being passive learners with computers, in which they were only presented and taught with some presented images in the slide associated with a noun in English without any further pedagogical approaches. Whereas, based on the students' responses in the case study, they were enthusiastic when the teacher opened a laptop and turned on the projector. It was actually the valuable chance for the teacher to create the learning process in more exciting ways, but the teacher did not try to elaborate the given learning.

This condition might contradict to Papert's theory of how the technological tool could be used to create a computational culture of the learning process, in which the learners could experience distinctive pedagogical approaches to learning English from computer programs to increase their language abilities like an increase of their English vocabularies [16]. For instance, attempting to incorporate *authentic computer simulation games (SIMs)* into the learning process. Moreover, a study conducted by [17], it showed that learners experienced the enhancement of their English vocabularies when they were given the *authentic computer simulation games (SIMs)* because they were required to match a definition of chosen vocabulary words using a pull-down option menu existed in computer tools. Hence, it may avoid students being passive learners with the computer which is useful to their rapid engagement towards the learning process.

Ultimately, another thing that the teacher in the case study must pay more attention might be on the careful implementation of the outdoor learning activity given to the students. It could be observed from the case study, the teacher did not provide more attention on what the students were doing in the outside, in which the teacher just instructed the learners finding the particulars things independently, whereas the teacher only waited in the classroom. Whereas, in my view which is supported by Vygotsky's theory of *Zone Proximal Development*, the

learners could absorb and accomplish the learning materials and outdoor learning activities effectively, if they were given such a guidance from *more knowledgeable other (MKO)* and a *scaffolding* to offer an easiness for them finishing the given tasks [18].

In other words, instead of letting the students going outside by themselves, it would be a sensible idea for the teacher to accompany them accomplishing the given task by giving a well organised learning step and clues as a scaffolding to improve the quality of teaching practice. For instance, by providing a map and setting up a certain spot or location that the students have to follow to find particular things which can be identified and named as a noun in the English language. By providing a scaffolding, the outdoor learning activity will be more well-organised and effective to maximise the learners' skills because there is an interaction between the students and the teacher as a more capable other which is beneficial to trigger their potentialities effectively [19].

3.4 Four Proposed Learning Strategies

The first proposed learning strategy that might be beneficial to promote learning process in the case study would be the multisensory instruction. The related instruction refers to designed learning activities that combine two or more sensory strategies to assist learners to absorb given information [20]. This view is relevant with information processing theory, in which humans' sensory receptors should be stimulated by setting up appropriate learning strategies to ensure every student obtain an effective sensory input [21], [22].

In other words, students should be given valuable chances to use various senses such as their eyes, ears, smell, touch, taste to process and internalise any incoming information provided by their teachers. It is beneficial to anticipate an issue occurred in the case study where there were some students still could not memorise the name of noun after it was explained by the teacher in the presentation slide. [20] suggests that teacher may incorporate the drama in the learning activity by writing the name or word of the related noun on strips of paper and place them in a box.

Then, asking the students to take turns choosing the word of the related noun in the box and requiring them to pantomime the meaning of the selected noun. On the other hand, the rest of the students attempt to guess which word/noun is being pantomimed by the selected students. Hence, it will offer significant opportunities for students in utilising various senses like their eyes, ears, and even their tactile/kinaesthetic modality in absorbing the given materials which are beneficial to improve their understanding regarding the meaning of the selected words/noun.

Secondly, maximising peer-feedback might be another strategy that can be employed by the teacher to increase

the quality of learning activities given in the case study. [23] asserts that feedback could be categorised as a response which is provided to the students to their current progress of learning, and feedback could be provided whether by teachers and peers [24]. However, connecting to an issue happened in the case study, in which there was an incident that teacher should leave 14 students who had accomplished the given task inside the class, and went outside the class to find a student that failed to finish the given task. In my view, rather than simply left the class which may lead them being busy with their own, it would be better for the teacher to implement peer-feedback by asking the 14 students to comment and discuss each other about what they had studied. Hence, it will not only anticipate the 14 students being busy with their own, but also enrich their understanding towards learning materials, because peer-feedback involves discussion to synchronise the interpretation among students toward the learning materials and activities [23].

Moreover, a study conducted by [25], it showed that peer-feedback could improve students' understanding about their strengths and weaknesses because peer learners who have just studied something are often better to review it to the student [23]. In the Vygotsky's theory, it occurs because peer learners are more in tune with students' *ZPD* zones, a zone where students could absorb learning materials effectively if they are guided by more knowledgeable others [1].

Another teaching strategy that might be applicable to develop teaching and learning practice further in the case study would be simulated conversation strategy. [26] postulate that the simulated conversation strategy is useful to encourage learners to be significantly involved in a conversation with their peers, and it will give an opportunity for students to implement and practice the learning materials that they have studied. Therefore, the related strategy might be beneficial to recall students' understanding about some images associated with noun explained by the teacher previously.

It means that students will be given significant chances to practice the given noun materials by implementing it in a conversational situation with their peers, and it may lead to a meaningful context of learning. The meaningful context of learning occurs because the conversation using words or noun will encourage students to explore the meaning of the related words or noun which is important to foster students' word knowledge.

Moreover, the implementation of simulated conversation strategy could be linked with Sternberg's Triarchic theory of intelligence, in which the three humans' intellectual capacities like creative, analytic, and practical skills proposed by [21], could be developed and trained in its implementation. To exemplify, the capacity of creative skills to encourage students to generate new ideas, practical skills to require students to

implement their ideas, and the analytic skills to trigger learners to evaluate their ideas could be trained when the students making conversation and discuss the learning materials concerning noun vocabularies which is beneficial to enrich their noun vocabularies acquisition.

Ultimately, employing collaborative work might be another strategy that can be utilised by the teacher to develop the learning process conducted in the case study. Collaborative work could be defined as an activity designed by teachers in the teams to ensure every learner actively involves in the completion of provided learning activities or tasks [28]. Moreover, a study conducted by [29], it found that the implementation of collaborative work resulted in a better students' development towards the learning process instead of assigning them to work individually.

It occurs because of the enhancement of the students' abilities affected by the assistance of other group members, particularly more capable peers. This view is relevant with Vygotsky's theory of *zone proximal development (ZPD)*, in which learners' potential development concerning their learning outcome could be maximised effectively if they are helped and guided by *more knowledgeable other (MKO)*, especially their more capable peers because the students' *zone of proximal development* might be more in tune with their peers [1]. Relating the advantage of the implementation of collaborative above to an issue happened in the case study, an issue where one of the students namely Ryan who was left behind and failed to accomplish the given task independently in the outdoor learning activity, it could be anticipated effectively if the teacher required the learners to work collaboratively outside the class, because Ryan will be guided and assisted by their peers to finish the given task.

4. Conclusion

In summary, although teacher had tried to comprehend students' characteristics and successfully employed some educational and teaching practices such as *play-based learning*, *technological use*, and *outdoor learning activity*, but there might be some limitations happened of its implementation. The limitations like teacher's omission in understanding a student needs which resulted in students' late adaptation to the learning process, the inappropriateness of technological use which made students being passive learners with computer, and the careless implementation of outdoor learning activity.

In order to fill the research gap and cope with the issue above, this research proposed four learning strategies, which are *the multisensory instruction*, *the peer-feedback*, *the simulated conversation strategy*, and *the collaborative work*. However, these four strategies should be employed carefully by the teacher to offer an effective learning process. Furthermore, based on the

critical review of learners' characteristics and educational practices presented in the case study, a valuable reflection could be taken as well, in which the teacher must suit among students' characteristic, educational practices, and selected learning strategies in order to offer high-quality of teaching and learning process to the students.

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