

## BEHAVIORISM, INNATISM, AND INTERACTIONISM IN ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING

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**Abstract:** In Indonesia, English has been introduced into school curriculum since junior secondary schools at the first grade though some elementary schools have English as their local content since the fourth grade. Indonesian government has been engaged in activities for many years with the aim of improving the English competency of school graduates in the country. However, the reality has been too far from the expectation. The English skills' output of the students is still categorized into a low proficiency level. As stated in *Education First*, English Proficiency Index (EPI) in Indonesia in 2018 is ranked 51 out of 88 countries in the world. Therefore, there needs to be an explanation of what makes Indonesian students' English proficiency low and how to teach or learn English by considering language acquisition theories, namely *behaviorism*, *innatism*, and *interactionism*. It is the purpose of this paper to briefly explain about these issues.

**Keywords:** *behaviorism, innatism, interactionism, English, teaching, learning*

The adoption of English by Indonesian government has brought about a tremendous change in the educational policies of the country. Consequently, some policies in relation to English teaching, namely, curriculum, teaching methods, and learning materials, have been given considerable attention in order to improve the English competency of the students. Indonesian government has been engaged in activities for many years with the aim of improving the English competency of school graduates in the country, and English teachers play important roles in the success or failure of the students. The ability of the teachers who are non-native speakers to disseminate instructions effectively to students is a key factor in the effective language learning.

However, as a foreign language, English is rarely used not only outside the classroom but also inside the classroom. The fear of making mistakes has affected the rate of personal expression so much that not all students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speaking classes have

confidence to speak. Many students feel anxious in speaking classes (Padmadewi, 1998), and some are likely to keep silent to avoid making mistakes (Tutyandari, 2005). Beyond the classroom, Indonesian students speak Indonesian or their local language instead. This condition affects the Indonesian students' English mastery. Their English mastery tends to be unsatisfactory. There are still a large number of senior secondary school graduates who cannot use English well though they have learned English for six years since the first grade of junior secondary schools while some other students especially living in cities have learned English for nine years since the fourth grade of primary schools. When they pursue their study to university level, they find it difficult to understand English reading texts and cannot speak and write in English well. PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) research indicated that in reading test, Indonesia ranked 48 of 57 countries surveyed (Jalal et al., 2009). The English skills' output of the students is still categorized into a low proficiency level. As stated in *Education*

First, English Proficiency Index (EPI) in Indonesia in 2018 is ranked 51 out of 88 countries in the world. Furthermore, when university students graduated from university, most of them do not acquire good command of English (Lie, 2004; Thalal, 2010). This phenomenon is not only experienced by university graduates, but also experienced by graduate students and lecturers. As Kardena (2019) said, besides reading, mastering English is the main obstacle that is often faced by graduate students and lecturers in written publications.

Therefore, the profile of English learning in Indonesia still needs more in-depth investigation. It is the purpose of this paper to present the factors that make English difficult to learn and propose some possible English teaching or learning activities by considering theories of language acquisition, i.e., *behaviorism*, *innatism*, and *interactionism*.

#### **FACTORS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

According to Dardjowidjojo (1995: 1-10), as quoted by Nugraha (2003), there are general factors that cause problems experienced by foreign learners in learning a language. First, individual class forms often cause problems for learners. This is because the initial ability of the target language that they have is not the same, so there is an inequality in ability in the class. Second, learning materials that are not in accordance with the level of mastery of the language and the background of the learners pose difficulties in understanding the target language. Third, the teaching methods used in learning are inappropriate. Fourth, teacher qualification is relatively low. Fifth, the implementation of training/courses is not well organized. The five problems have resulted in ineffective English learning, and achieving its objectives is less than optimal.

In addition to the general factors above, Ellis (1995: 472), as quoted by

Susanto (2007), provides two main factors that cause foreign learners make mistakes in learning a language. The first factor is the characteristics of the mother tongue or first language. Although languages in the world have universal characteristics, which make them easier to learn, there are also distinctive features in each language which sometimes make it difficult to learn. The characteristics of the first language mastered by language learners will affect them when they learn a foreign language which has different features from their first language. The thing that will appear is that there will be a negative transfer from the first language to a foreign language. For example, Indonesian language does not have verb tenses, while English has. When an Indonesian learner creates an English sentence in Past Tense, he does not use the correct verb for Past Tense, instead he still uses the verb in its basic form. The second factor is learners' characteristics. Differences in learners' characteristics have an influence on the success of foreign language learning. Those characteristics can be their beliefs in language learning, their affective factors, and their general factors, including age, language aptitude, learning style, personality, and motivation. As also said by Suryanto, (2014), learners' poor performance may be caused by some factors like learners' characteristics, teachers' factors, norms and beliefs, and English aspects.

Setyawati (2010), as cited by Darsita (2001), also states that language errors can occur due to several things, such as the influence of the first language, lack of understanding of the target language, and the imperfect language teaching strategies.

Richard (1997), as quoted by Darsita (2001), suggests that there are three categories of sources of language errors. First, there are Interlingua errors or first language interference when learners process the target language. Second, there are intralingua errors that occur due to the lack of understanding of language rules. Third, mistakes that often occur when

language learners try to build hypotheses about the target language based on their limited experience of the target language.

## **THEORIES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

There are some basic theories that illustrate how a language is acquired, learned, and taught. Behaviorist theory, innatist theory, and interactionist theory are some of these theories. These theories do not only apply to the acquisition of the original language or first language but may also apply to the acquisition of foreign languages. These three basic theories of acquiring a language should not be separated from each other. They complement each other in providing various language learning case solutions. In this paper, these three theories will be explained from the perspective of acquiring a foreign language.

### **Behaviorism**

The behaviorist theory states that someone learns oral language from other humans through processes that involve imitation, appreciation, and practice. The main principle of behaviorist theory depends on the analysis of human behavior in observable stimulus-response interactions and the relationship between them. Basically, behaviorist theories about stimulus-response learning, especially those developed in Skinner's operant conditioning model, assume that all learning is a process of habit formation as a result of reinforcement or appreciation (Rivers, 1968: 73). This is reminiscent of Pavlov's experiments which indicate that stimulus and response work together. According to this theory, language learners acquire a language through words repeated by others, in this case by the person who teaches them. When they repeat these words correctly, a stimulus is given in the form of reinforcement or appreciation, which then results in further responses produced by them.

Through a process of trial and error, where acceptable words are reinforced with rewards, and unacceptable words are not reinforced with appreciation, language learners gradually learn to make separations between acceptable words and unacceptable ones. In this case, behaviorist theory emphasizes that learning is a process of habit formation.

The following principles describe the principles of behaviorist theory (Atkinson, 1982; mc, 1987; and Mc Shane, 1987):

- Behaviorist theory focuses on spoken language; that is, the main media of a language is oral. Speech is language. There are many languages without writing because we learn to speak before we learn to read and write. Therefore, the first form of language is what is spoken, and the second form of language is what is written. That is why oral language must have priority in language teaching.
- Behaviorist theory is a theory of teaching and language learning that focuses on habit formation. In other words, language learning is a mechanical process that directs language learners to habit formation whose basic scheme is conditioned reflexes.
- The stimulus-response (S-R) chain is a case of pure conditioning. Each stimulus provokes a response, and each response is the cause of the stimulus. This process continues this way.
- All learning is a process of habit formation as a result of reinforcement or appreciation. Positive reinforcement is appreciation, while negative reinforcement is punishment. When there is a stimulus, a response is given. If the response is positively reinforced by an award, the relationship between stimulus and response itself will be strong. Eventually, it will produce conditioning. If the response to

stimuli is coherently strengthened, the formation of habits is formed. This is what causes the behaviorist theory also known as the *habit-formation-by-reinforcement theory*.

- Learning, because of its socially conditioned nature, can be the same for every learner. In other words, everyone can learn the same if the conditions, where learning takes place, are the same for each learner.

It is clear that language learning and its development, for behaviorists, is a conditioning matter by imitating, practicing, strengthening (reinforcement/reward), and habit formation. All of these are steps to language acquisition.

### **Innatism**

Innatists do not see language development as something that is influenced by responses to stimuli as behaviorists do. Chomsky theorizes that all humans are born with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that gives them the innate ability to process linguistic rules (Flynn and O'Neil, 1989; White, 1987). According to this theory, children do not only imitate the sounds they hear when learning languages, but also arrange grammar in the language as they go through the natural development process. However, this LAD will be difficult to function after the critical period for language learning has passed. That is the reason why innatists believe that it is more difficult to learn languages in adulthood. Chomsky also establishes a dichotomy between linguistic competence (knowledge of the system of grammatical rules obtained through the use of LAD) and performance (the manifestation of grammatical rules through communication).

Krashen (1981) developed Chomsky's linguistic competence concept in his language theory, namely monitor model. Monitor model is widely considered to be very influential in the

field of second or foreign language learning. Krashen describes five main hypotheses, which distinguish between the processes of acquisition and learning needed to internalize new languages. Acquisition is defined as a subconscious process in which language learners acquire a language, as in Chomsky's concept of how children acquire their first language. The knowledge gained then allows them to produce the language. Learning, on the other hand, is a more conscious effort to know the structure and workings of a language, which is often done in formal teaching settings (such as the Chomsky competence model). Therefore, the learned material will help language learners monitor the truth of the acquired knowledge in producing language (performance). This is the monitor hypothesis.

Another hypothesis in Krashen's monitor model includes an affective filter hypothesis in which he states that learning occurs when there are no barriers or filters (for example, environment, social, and attitudes) that affect the intake of new information. Only when the filter is low, new information will be processed efficiently and integrated into the basic knowledge possessed by language learners. This new information will be processed and understood by language learners, and this process is known as comprehensible input hypothesis. Krashen states that input must be based on what language learners already know (*input +1*), and after that they deconstruct and understand it. Output or performance should reflect that understanding. Therefore, in communication, meaning must be processed, and sometimes negotiated, by language learners before input can be understood and output can be assessed correctly.

The practice of second or foreign language teaching today has included various aspects of innatism with the view that language learners will first absorb basic grammar rules from the language

used around them. The teaching-learning process, which is centered on learners with an emphasis on the affective domain and the idea that language learners bring some basic knowledge and experience into their classrooms, will give new direction to language pedagogy.

### **Interactionism**

The third theory about the acquisition of second or foreign language focuses on the use of language in communicative actions which emphasize more on language functions and their use in various contexts (Hatch, 1978; Long, 1983, 1985; Parker and Chaudron, 1987). Interactionists state that when native speakers communicate with language learners, they modify their language to accommodate communicative abilities and the level of understanding of language learners. Language learners also use their language skills when they communicate with native speakers, and if there are some unclear messages during the communication process, both native speakers and language learners will negotiate the meaning of the message delivered. During the communication process, language errors generated by language learners can be corrected by themselves. Hymes (1972: 269-293) hypothesizes that through this act of interacting and communicating, language learners gain the ability to communicate, known as communicative competence (in contrast to Chomsky's linguistic competence). According to Hymes, knowing the grammatical rules of language is not enough because this does not guarantee language learners have the ability to communicate effectively in various contexts.

The curriculum which is made based on this interactionist theory will use a communicative approach that emphasizes the use of real-life language materials in the classroom and the creation of situations in which there are more meaningful interactions. The instructor

does not control learning, but acts as a facilitator. Examples of popular communicative approaches in second or foreign language learning are by using collaborative learning groups and by teaching all aspects of communication (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in an integrated manner in the classroom.

### **DISCUSSION**

The question that may arise is how knowledge about these theories can be useful for a language instructor. This section will discuss practical ways in which knowledge of these theories can help a language instructor develop his learning models. The learning models discussed here combine aspects of the behaviorism, monitor model (innatism), and interactionism. It will also discuss five factors, which most linguists believe, that can have an impact on how to learn a language, namely social context, learner's characteristics, learning conditions, learning process, and learning outcomes.

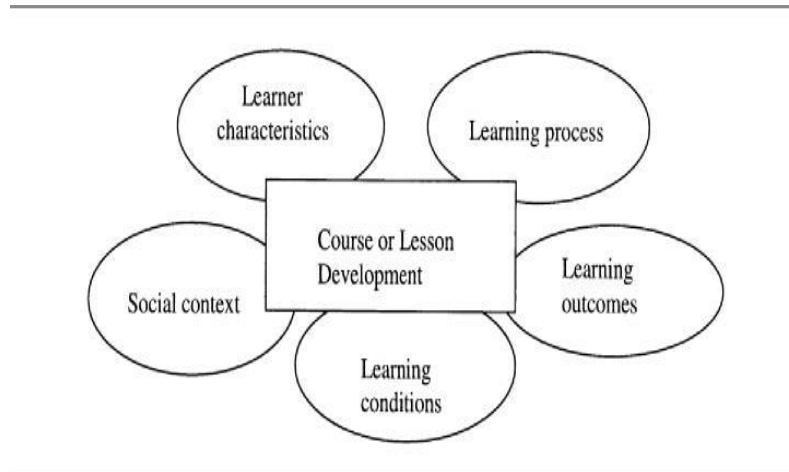
The first factor, the social context, refers to general atmosphere of the learning environment, class dynamics, opportunities for interaction among learners, and learners' perceptions of the instructor's commitment to their learning. The second factor, the characteristics of the learners, cover the overall aspects of personal characteristics, social, and attitudes. This includes the average age of learners, learning experience, their level of ability in the language, and their motivation to learn. The third factor, the conditions of learning, revolve around the physical condition of the class (for example the class is large or small, the class is hot or cold, the equipment in the classroom is adequate and functioning or not) and materials designed for the learning process. The fourth factor, the learning process, refers to various ways of learning or strategies chosen by learners and mental operations that they need to complete certain tasks. Only after these four factors are combined, the fifth factor,

namely learning outcomes, can be assessed.

These five factors, separately or combined, influence learning (Stern, 1984: 337-341). With regard to the development of the lessons, Figure 1 illustrates how these five factors can form the basis that

an instructor must pay attention to. Depending on the unique situation of each class or program, the instructor can choose among these factors to be more focused.

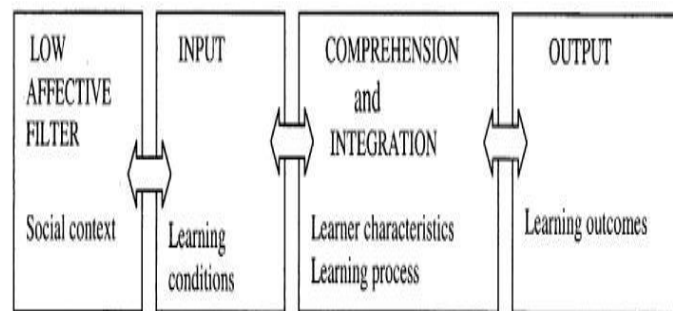
**Figure 1 Factors Affecting Learning**



The five factors in Figure 1 are adapted to the Krashen monitor model feature to produce four cells, as shown in the instructional model in Figure 2. Matching the factors and features is to make it easier for an instructor to plan classes/programs and to design activities that strengthen

learning. Two-way arrow flow illustrates the effect of one model component on the adjacent model. Each model cell will be discussed separately.

**Figure2 Instructional Model**



**Affective Filter (Social Context)**

As stated earlier, low affective filters help determine success in learning. Therefore, the social context, where learning occurs, should provide a low affective filter that enters input to the next level. A comfortable atmosphere must be felt when the learners enter the class, and it is expected that the filter will be lower when learning takes place. A research conducted by Helms (1995: 295-307) to ESL (English as a Second Language) students indicates that an ideal learning environment should have a small student-teacher ratio, coupled with enthusiasm, patience, warm welcome, personal acceptance, and attention to each student. An instructor should be able to create a sense of comfort for learners of the language. Friendly smiles, preliminaries, fear relievers, and the right ice-breaker activities will help lower the filter and make the input acceptable to the learners effectively.

**Input (Learning Conditions)**

In the following are three examples of conditions that are conducive to learning.

***Instructor's Language***

The language used by the instructor is considered important in language learning. One way to teach a language especially for beginner learners is to speak slowly, so that understanding is easier for them. A language instructor can use several forms of teacher-talks that are modified when communicating with language learners. Modifications can have slower speeds when speaking or using clear articulation. However, for advanced language learners, an instructor can use language at normal speed, reflecting original communication in the real world. In addition, to help understanding language learners, an instructor can try to give clearer statements and prefer using

restatement and reformulation of sentences that are issued but not yet fully understood by language learners rather than using repetition of the same sentence.

***Mode of Instruction***

The basic principle that supports the philosophy of teaching is how an instructor thinks that the knowledge he has can be given effectively to the learners. This will have a direct impact on how he plans the learning and how he measures the results. For example, if he believes that learners learn by doing, in other words, they learn by using the language, the instructor should create a communicative classroom environment that is centered on learners, so that they will use language skills and thinking skills critically. In this case, they will be able to build their oral skills by using new vocabulary. Activities like this underline the view of interactionist theory which states that language learning will occur through communication.

***Building on Prior Knowledge and Experience***

It is important for the instructor to make connections between the materials that language learners might already know and the new information they will receive. In other words, he should give a placement test before the class starts to measure the level of proficiency of language learners. This will be very helpful in determining the starting point of learning. If this information cannot be obtained before the class starts for the first time, the information can be obtained in various ways. For example, at the first meeting, he can use a dual-function ice-breaker. The first function is to provide simple activities, and the second function is to provide more difficult activities.

### Comprehension and Integration (Learner's Characteristics and Learning Process)

Creating the right learning conditions should, theoretically, lead to successful learning. However, to ensure that such learning occurs or that an input is understood and integrated into previous knowledge possessed by language learners, there needs to be an understanding of the instructor on the characteristics of the learners and the ways of learning that they use. Language learning characteristics include average age, prior experience, language skills, learning styles, and learning strategies. Understanding learners' characteristics will help the instructor in determining relevant or interesting topics to be used in the teaching-learning process.

### Output (Learning Outcomes)

Post-instruction assessment is more commonly used after the teaching-learning process ends. This type of assessment is summative and is usually used to measure the success of learning that has taken place, to determine whether the learners can rise to a higher level.

Besides a post-instruction assessment, a class assessment or whilst-instruction assessment can be used as an additional assessment. This assessment is formative because it provides information about what, how much, and how well the learners have learned during the teaching-learning process, and this assessment prepares them for the next assessment, namely post-instruction assessment.

### SUMMARY

An understanding of the factors that make English difficult to learn by Indonesian learners and an understanding of the theories of language acquisition are expected to improve the ability of English instructors to teach better and help Indonesian learners to learn English more

effectively. The three language acquisition theories will produce better English teaching when the positives they have are integrated.

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