

## **The Application of Learning Theories in Language Class: A Scenario in the Preschools in Dhaka City**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the implementation of three fundamental learning theories, namely Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism, in English language teaching at a preschool in Dhaka. This research aims to investigate the teaching and learning environment in preschools in Bangladesh and provide insights to improve the current scenario. The study employs classroom observation using a checklist and a questionnaire for preschool teachers to collect data. The research results provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of using these theories in preschool English language teaching. The study concludes with recommendations for educators to incorporate these theories in their teaching practices to enhance the language learning experience of young learners in preschools.

**Keywords:** Preschool, Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, English Language Teaching, Bangladesh

### **Introduction**

Early pre-primary or preschool education is an essential part of a child's education, and research has shown that it helps young children in many ways. Preschool education helps children grow socially and emotionally and gives them a foundation for future learning. As a result, many parents in Bangladesh and other countries see the value in sending their kids to pre-primary or preschool around the age of three. Bangladeshi governments and non-government organizations have also realized how important it is to improve pre-primary or preschool education. Abedin (2018) says that this sector is vital for the development of the next generation. The government has taken several steps to set up pre-primary schools to increase enrollment and improve the quality of education.

Even though Bangladesh is becoming more aware of the benefits of preschool education, some things could still be improved in the field, especially when teaching English. To deal with these problems, it is essential to look at preschools' teaching and learning environments and find ways to help young kids learn languages better. So, this study aims to discover how learning theories can be used when teaching English in pre-primary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study focuses on three main learning theories—behaviorism, cognitivism, and Constructivism—and examines how well those theories help children learn languages. By looking at the teaching and learning environment in pre-primary schools, this research gives ideas and suggestions for how to help young people in Bangladesh learn languages better.

### **Importance of Foreign Language Teaching at Early Stage**

Teaching English language to young children is getting more and more attention in education. Experts like Bamford and Mizokawa (1991), Genesee (2009), Ford (2014), Lowry (2011), and Halgunseth (2010) say that learning a foreign language at a young age is very good for cognitive and social development. In addition, Halgunish (2010) states that three years old is the best age to start learning a second language (p.1).

In Bangladesh, where most people only speak one language, it is hard to learn two languages simultaneously, so sequential dual language learning is usually started in preschool. Studies have shown that learning a foreign language gets harder after age six or seven. This shows how important it is to begin teaching young children a second language as soon as possible (Bongaerts, 2005). Also, young children have brains that are more open to learning new sounds and patterns and can learn through play. They can try different ways to use language without worrying about embarrassment (Ford, 2014). Genesee (2009) says it is essential to start learning a foreign language early and keep learning the target language. Even though pre-primary education is not new in Bangladesh, the field has yet to be looked into enough to ensure that young students can benefit from starting school early. We must fix the problems in this area and ensure that foreign languages are taught well.

This study aims to find out how well learning theory and teaching English as a second language to young children in urban preschools in Bangladesh matches up. This study aims to determine how well learning theory helps young children learn English. The study also examines how well language teachers' beliefs and methods match the needs of young language learners. The results of this study can help policymakers, language teachers, and people who make school curricula in Bangladesh improve how they teach foreign languages to young children.

### **Theoretical Framework of Learning Theories**

Brown (2000) says that learning is getting new information or skills through study, experience, or being taught. Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner came up with Classical Conditioning and Operant Conditioning, respectively. Bruner and Ausubel came up with Cognitivism, and Vygotsky and Piaget came up with Constructivism. These theories offer different points of view that form the basis for other ways to teach languages. For example, Ivan Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning is based on the idea that there is a link between stimuli and reflexive responses.

On the other hand, Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory is based on the idea that the results of that behavior strengthen behavior. Skinner thought that operant behavior was the only way that people could learn. Both theories are based on behaviorism, which looks at outward behavior and the scientific method.

Cognitive theory, on the other hand, focuses on meaningful learning that is linked to cognitive function. Cognitivism studies how the mind takes in information and remembers it. This theory says that learners are active participants when learning and that their minds play a crucial role from when they first take in information until they store it and then recall it later. Cognitivism also emphasizes learning strategies, background knowledge, and ways of doing things necessary for making schemas (Ortega, 2011). In Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, connecting new information to what you already know is essential.

On the other hand, Constructivism contends that learners acquire knowledge as they go through life. Vygotsky and Piaget are two of the most influential people who contributed to this theory, which focuses on how social interaction affects learning. In short, these four learning theories offer different points of view that form the basis of different ways to teach languages. Both Operant Conditioning and Classical Conditioning are based on behaviorism. Cognitivism and Constructivism, on the other hand, focus on how learners can take an active role in the learning process.

In 1913, Watson came up with the word "behaviorism" to describe a way of thinking about how people learn that focuses on outward behavior and the scientific method. Classical conditioning, like the behaviorist approaches of Pavlov and Watson, has dramatically impacted learning theories and how languages are taught for a long time. Skinner, who was also a well-known member of the behaviorist school, came up with a theory of learning based on operant behavior and reinforcement. Skinner said operant behavior is the only way to show how people learn. Reinforcement is based on events or stimuli that happen after a behavior and tend to make it stronger or more likely to happen again. It is more important to learning than simple association, which is what classical conditioning does (Baum, 2017). Skinner thought that the results of our actions control us and that we need to pay close attention to reinforcers to teach someone or change their behavior.

However, behaviorism cannot explain everything about how people learn. This theory says learners react to stimuli as passive agents and are not seen as active agents. Behaviorism does not care about past experiences and thinks everyone is born with a "clean slate " (Baum, 2017). Behaviorism says that the primary way people learn is by making habits repeatedly. Behaviorism has been linked to how people learn for a long time, but it cannot always explain how complicated people are. They based on stimulus-response or repetition-reinforcement does not consider the many things that affect how people learn.

The cognitive theory (Elliot, 1981; Ellis, 1986; Harley, 2001) emphasizes learning that has meaning and is linked to cognitive function. According to this theory, learners are active participants. Their minds are crucial to learning, from taking in new information to storing it and later "recalling it" (Ratna & Tron, 2019, p. 3). Cognitivism also says that learning strategies, background knowledge, and different ways of thinking are essential for making schemas. Ratna and Tron (2019) say, "Schemas are learned learning strategies, past knowledge, and attitudes that shape learning. The cognitive view of learning is centered on the teacher, and information needs to be organized for the best learning. (p. 3).

Ausubel is known for his theory of meaningful learning, which says people learn best when they connect new information to what they already know (Brown, 2000, p. 83). The cognitive theory says that learning cannot be a simple mechanical process. Instead, learners must actively link their mental structures to their experiences (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991). Anderson and Ausubel (1965) say that meaning in learning is a conscious experience when learners can relate new signs, symbols, concepts, or propositions to their existing cognitive structures in a non-arbitrary and meaningful way. This vital learning process is essential for getting further information, remembering it, putting it in a hierarchy, and not "forgetting" it (Anderson & Ausubel, 1965, p. 8).

Cognitive learning theory differs from behaviorism because it focuses on how learners actively use their minds to learn rather than on forming habits (Elliot, 1981; Ellis, 1986; Harley, 2001). The theory also examines how long learning lasts and whether it can be done by making good habits. Cognitive learning focuses on making connections to make sense and help people remember things for a long time. On the other hand, learning things by heart is less likely to help you make sense of new information and retain it for a long time. Ratna and Tron (2019, p. 3) say that Psychological Constructivism and Social Constructivism focus on how the learner interacts with the learning reality. Roger (1951) called this way of learning "Humanistic Learning." It is based on the functional parts of

the learning process. Constructivist learning theory encourages learners to actively participate in their learning, with teachers or other adults as guides. (Ratna & Tron, 2019, p. 5).

Constructivists believe learners should be given a non-threatening environment to engage them in learning. Roger (1951) said this helps learners build self-esteem and personality without fear. Both Vygotsky and Piaget developed learning theories based on the idea that people learn by interacting with the real world. Vygotsky says that social factors help people build knowledge, while Piaget says there is a link between cognitive factors and knowledge building (Piaget, 2001). Ratna and Tron (2019) state that Vygotsky's theory of Constructivism is Social Constructivism, and Piaget's is cognitive Constructivism.

Social Constructivism says that people have a unique ability to understand what words mean in a social setting and that social interaction is essential for learning. Vygotsky used the term "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) to describe this ability to build knowledge at the individual level. Learners can build knowledge up to a certain level, but interacting with others in society helps their knowledge grow (Ratna & Tron, 2019).

Assimilation and Accommodation are two terms in Piaget's theory of cognitive Constructivism. This theory says that learners use assimilation when they connect new information to their schema or background knowledge. On the other hand, learners use Accommodation when they find further information that doesn't fit their schema and need to change or make a new schema to understand it (Derry, 1996). As Ratna and Tron (2019, p. 5) say, "The schema must be changed to resolve this conflict."

In short, Constructivism focuses on how the learner interacts with the learning environment and how the learner takes an active role in the learning process. Social Constructivism focuses on how important social interaction is in building knowledge, while Cognitive Constructivism ties making knowledge to cognitive factors like schema, assimilation, and Accommodation.

### **Methodology**

The present investigation employed a variety of research methodologies to scrutinize the utilization of learning theories in preschool language instruction in Dhaka City. The research used a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The study employed convenient and purposive sampling techniques to select the individuals who participated in the investigation. The researcher used the convenient sampling method to choose schools for the study due to the limited time frame and the unwillingness of some preschools in Dhaka City to grant access for the investigation of pertinent cases. Concurrently, the English educators responsible for instructing the nursery classes at the designated preschools were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection from the selected schools was restricted to teachers of a specific level.

The data acquisition procedure involved the participation of three nursery classes and 12 English instructors from three distinct types of educational institutions: an English medium school, an English version school, and a Bangla medium school. The researcher observed English classes on five consecutive days across selected nursery schools. This facilitated the comprehension of the application of learning theories in the context of English language instruction. In addition, classroom

observations were conducted utilizing a checklist informed by learning theories deemed efficacious for preschool-aged children acquiring a second language.

A questionnaire was administered to 12 English teachers to elicit their perspectives on applying learning theories in their instructional practices. The questionnaire's objective was to assess educators' level of comprehension of learning theories and their implementation in instructional settings. The questionnaire was administered within a scholarly context to ensure the accuracy and dependability of the responses. The study used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze the data gathered from classroom observations and questionnaires. The study presented the quantitative data in tabular format, whereas the qualitative data underwent descriptive analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The report provides a comprehensive account of the study's findings, elucidating how learning theories can be effectively applied in language instruction for preschool students in Dhaka City.

### **Results and Discussion**

Based on the results of the observation checklist, it was found that School 1's language teacher used behaviorism theory well by setting clear learning goals, giving students suitable materials, using repetition, and praising good behavior. The teacher also gave students corrective feedback when it was needed. However, there needed to be more focus on the theory of Constructivism, as problem-solving activities and learning through trial and error were not seen.

In School 2, the teacher taught the English alphabet and rhymes similarly but sometimes gave corrective feedback or encouraged students to use what they had learned. The teacher did talk to the students and use suitable materials, but there needed to be more focus on group or pair work or learning by making mistakes.

In School 3, the teacher used behaviorism theory well by setting clear goals, using repetition, and giving positive reinforcement. However, the female teacher did not encourage students to connect what they already knew to what they were learning at the time. Also, she should have asked students to use what they knew or encouraged them to correct themselves. The teacher did talk to the students, but again, there needed to be more emphasis on working in groups or pairs or learning from mistakes.

Overall, the results show that preschool teachers mostly used the behaviorism theory in their language classes. On the other hand, the constructivism theory was given less attention. The teachers did an excellent job of using suitable materials and interacting with students. However, they could have used more problem-solving activities, error- and trial-based learning, and group or pair work to get students more involved and help them apply what they had learned.

The study results show that the English teachers in the three preschools chosen in Dhaka City use various learning theories when teaching English. The behavioral approach is used the most in all three schools because all teachers use positive feedback and repetition to help students learn. Also, all teachers work actively with the students and use different methods to help them learn. The cognitive theory is also evident in all three classes because the teachers tell the students to use what they already know to understand new concepts and ideas.

However, the third theory, Constructivism, is used less in the classes that were watched than in the other two theories. This could be because the age of the students and the type of activities they do in class might not be suitable for using the constructivist approach well. Even though most teachers may not know the different learning theories, their parts are often used without realizing it. So, a mix of behaviorism, cognitivism, and Constructivism is used in language classes. This helps the students learn more effectively.

According to the preschool teachers' survey, many think memorizing things is essential to learning. 83.33% of teachers agree with this idea. Also, 66.66% of teachers think that repetition is an excellent way to teach, and 55.33% agree that writing helps students remember what they have learned. However, almost all teachers stressed the importance of understanding and remembering learning. In addition, people have different opinions about the freedom to change teaching materials. For example, 33.33% of teachers do not agree with the idea of changing materials, while 41.66% say they can change materials if they get permission. Still, many teachers think that the materials they are given match the learning goals.

Both Bangla and English languages are used in different ways in the classroom. 58.33% of teachers only use English, while 41.66% use English and Bangla. Most teachers introduce new words in both languages to ensure their students understand. All teachers agree that reading out loud is also a common way to teach in preschool classrooms. Many teachers need formal training in teaching, and even fewer get training while working, even though most people think trained teachers are better. However, 58.33% of teachers learn how to teach from more experienced teachers, while only 16.66% learn in school. Surprisingly, almost all teachers do not know anything about teaching theories. Only 16.66% of teachers read about them in school. Even so, all teachers use positive reinforcement in the classroom, such as verbal rewards and praise.

Overall, the research shows that preschool teachers use different teaching methods based on learning theories, even though only a small number of teachers understand these theories. Still, their main goal is to teach and reach the course goals, and they use methods they think work well for preschoolers.

## **Conclusion**

The study looked at how preschool teachers taught and what they knew about learning theories. The results show that teachers employ various instructional strategies, including interactive learning, repetition, and positive reinforcement. Although behavioral theory is the most frequently used, preschool teachers use cognitive theory in their lessons. However, the nature of the activities and the level of the learners may prevent the application of constructivism theory from being as successful.

It is interesting to note that the majority of teachers in preschool classes use strategies they feel are adequate for young students despite having little formal training or knowledge of teaching theories. They value comprehension and think memorization and repetition are crucial learning components. Senior teachers act as mentors and sources of knowledge, and teachers heavily rely on one another for learning and development.

This study's contribution is to shed light on the instructional strategies employed by Bangladeshi preschool teachers and their comprehension of learning theories. To better understand the needs of preschool teachers and enhance their training and development, policymakers, teacher training

organizations, and curriculum developers can benefit greatly from this study. In addition, the results of this study can also be used to guide the creation of engaging instructional strategies and resources for preschool classrooms.

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### Appendix A Observation Checklist

Learning theories	Teaching-learning strategies		Material used		Type of activities				Feedback procedure			
Behavioral theory	The focused learning objective is used		Material is sequenced from simple to complex		Repetition technique is used		Emphasis is given on memorization		Positive and negative reinforcement is used		Teachers give feedback to correct mistakes	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	yes	No	Yes	No
Cognitive theory	The teacher encourages learners to link their prior knowledge		Materials match with learners' cognitive level		Teacher involves learners in applying their knowledge				The teacher doesn't always correct mistakes directly but instead encourages self-correction			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Construc-activism theory	Active interaction with the class		Materials are used so the learners can be involved in the learning process.		Problem-solving activities are used in groups or pair				Self-correction /error and trial are encouraging			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes		No		Yes		No	

### Appendix B Questionnaire

Topic: The Application of Learning Theories in Language Class: A Scenario in the Preschools in Dhaka City

Name of the participant (optional):

Name of the institution (optional):

1. Gender:

2. Teaching experience at preschool:

Put a tick (√) mark on the most appropriate answer:

3. Do you think that memorization is necessary at the preschool level?

a. Yes, b. no c. sometimes

4. Do you believe a child can learn better by including the same thing repeatedly?

a. Yes, b. no c. sometimes



5. Writing something several times helps me remember that thing.
  - a. Strongly agree with b. agree c. neutral d. disagree e. strongly disagree
6. At preschool, which one of the following options should be more prioritized?
  - a. Memorization b. Understanding
7. Do you think the materials (books and other materials) provided by the school are appropriate?
  - a. Yes, b. No c. mostly d. not always
8. Do you enjoy any freedom to bring any change in the materials you use in a language classroom?
  - a. Yes, b. no c. yes with prior approval
9. In the language classroom, do you always use English with the learners?
  - a. Yes, b. no c. not always
10. To introduce a new word which strategy do you usually follow?
  - a. Telling the Bangla meaning of the word
  - b. Explaining the meaning in English
  - c. Using both Bangla and English to explain the meaning of the word
  - d. Anything else... please specify...
11. Reading aloud is a common technique in preschool language classes.
  - a. Strongly agree with b. Agree on c—neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly disagree
12. Have you gone through any pre-service (before joining teaching) training?
  - a. Yes, b. No
13. Have you gone through any in-service (during the job) training?
  - a. Yes, b. No
14. Do you believe that a trained teacher is a better teacher?
  - a. Yes, b. No c. Sometimes
15. How do you usually learn teaching techniques?
  - a. From senior teachers
  - b. From my observation
  - c. From my previous education
  - d. Anything else? Please specify.....
16. Have you ever heard of the "learning theories"?
  - a. Yes, b. No
  1. Do you use positive reinforcement (praising the learners, saying "good/very good") with the learners?
    - Yes, b. No c. sometimes

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