

(Literature Review) Enhancing the Quality of Learning through Changes in Students' Approach to Learning

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ABSTRACT

Learning causes relatively a permanent change in one's behavior. There are multiple paradigms in the theories of learning, the latest theory in this group being Constructivism. This particular theory postulates that a learner himself/herself constructs his/her learning through an active and consistent engagement. This theory also brings the learning process to the center, where the concerned learner's prior experience is used as the base for future learning. Although quality learning is the global agenda in the 21st century, there is still no clear and concise definition. Quality of learning has diverse connotations. Researchers in this area search for it in its process as well as in its product. However, one may say the quality learning process motivates a student to have a deep engagement with the learning task possible through some suitable strategies. Kevin Warburton (2009) identified three main factors that greatly impact a student's motivation, leading to high or low engagement in the learning activity. A conducive learning environment, sophisticated course content, and favorable individual factors could enhance the student's motivation and make him/her have a deep engagement in the learning activity. The product of quality learning is measured by the nature and versatility of the learning outcome. The learning, which is extensive, integrative, and generative, may fulfill the rising demand for quality of learning.

INTRODUCTION

As a child grows older and older, he/she engages in different activities, which bring various changes in his/her behavior. A variety of reasons may cause these changes. Some changes are temporary, and some are permanent. However, the change in behavior that is relatively permanent, and becomes a part of the child's experience, is called learning. It has been defined as "Any activity can be called learning so far as it develops the individual (in any respect, good or bad) and makes him alter behavior and experiences different from what they would otherwise have been" (Woodworth, 1945). In light of the above definition, learning can be characterized as development. It brings a directional change in the behavior of an individual. This direction might be positive or negative. It is a comprehensive process that continues from the womb to the tomb. It covers all the experiences in the conative, cognitive, and affective domains of human behavior.

A literature survey offers multiple learning paradigms, such as conditional learning, observational learning, cognitive learning, verbal learning, concept learning and skills learning, and more. The latest paradigm in this field, which has a vital effect on a student's natural learning, is the constructivist learning approach. Constructivism is a relatively latest paradigm of learning and is rooted in philosophy as well as in psychology. This approach is influenced by the works of [John Dewey \(1929\)](#), [Jerome S. Bruner \(1961\)](#), [Lev Vygotsky \(1962\)](#), and [Jean Piaget \(1980\)](#).

This approach assumes that learning is the result of mental construction and that a learner constructs its knowledge and meaning through reflection, active participation, and experiences. As a result of interaction with the outside world, a learner builds its conceptual image about things. When a child grows up, he/she gathers new experiences, consequently updating his/her old perceptions and constructing his/her interpretation of reality accordingly. This philosophy believes that learning is a contextualized phenomenon. In this approach, the learner is the focus, and his/her logical and conceptual growth is the purpose of learning. This approach emphasizes the learner's learning construction and, therefore, the learning process is more important here than its outcomes are.

Quality of Learning

Both the knowledge acquired in learning and the process that goes on during learning are the determinants of the quality of learning. Degradation in the standard of any aspects of learning can adversely impact the quality of a student's learning at whatever level of education it may be. [Lowson & Kirby \(2012\)](#), while discussing the quality of students' learning, pointed out that 'Low-quality learning may result in knowledge that is narrow in scope (limited), fragmented (unlinked) and does not lead to further learning. On the other hand, high-quality learning brings knowledge which is extensive, integrative and generative'. There are, of course, many other characteristics of high-quality learning, but these are the core compositions.

1. *Extensive*: It connotes broad and context-based knowledge. In this sense, the more knowledge about atopic, the higher the quality of learning will occur. It must be noted that theoretically speaking, quantity and quality are not antithetical but are complementary.
2. *Integrative*: Extensive knowledge is not enough; we also require establishing a relationship between the knowledge acquired from different sources. Overarching ideas and clustered information uphold the knowledge for a comparatively longer duration.
3. *Generative*: When the knowledge is extensive and integrated, it leads to the generation of more and new knowledge. It motivates the concerned learner to go in for further study and learn something more continually. Sometimes one may even predict the next topic and the possible conclusion.

If the knowledge is of an extensive, integrative and generative kind, it will support the transfer of knowledge, by which we mean the application of that knowledge in a new context. The aim of education in the 21st century was emphasized by the [National Curriculum Framework \(2005\)](#) as "connecting knowledge to life outside the school."

Factors Affecting the Quality of Learning

Several factors have an enduring effect on the quality of learning. Most commonly, three broad factors contribute to the quality of learning. These are (i) dispositions towards learning, (ii) conditions under which learning takes place (iii) the learning process that a learner employs, along with the structures of the resulting knowledge retained in memory ([Lowson & Kirby, 2012](#)).

Dispositions towards Learning: The phrase 'learning dispositions' is often known as 'mind habits.' It refers to how students interact and relate to the learning process. According to [Simon et al. \(2012\)](#), 'learning dispositions refer to a relatively permanent tendency to behave in a certain way. It is tied to variables like motivation, affect, and value, as well as cognitive resources. These tendencies could be culturally determined or could be a long-term personality trait. Desire, or motivation, gives rise to a disposition, which serves as the source for action. The decisions can identify a person's disposition they make in a given circumstance – for example, one who is inclined to be "curious" will consistently ask many questions and investigate problems'.

Disposition can have positive or negative attributes. Some dispositions are less helpful than others for children's learning and development. However, dispositions are not static; they can be encouraged and strengthened or weakened over time.

Researches ([Aistear, 2009](#)) has identified some common learning dispositions that are undoubtedly important for inculcating the habits in students. These include (a) Persistence, (b) Flexibility, (c) Motivation, (d) Metacognition, and (c) Problem solving and questioning.

1. *Persistence*: A persistent student pursues his or her task until it is completed. Persistence is an important quality for learners to enhance their capacity to work. Since persistence supports a positive attitude toward the work at hand and resilience in researching the various ways to resolve a problem instead of giving up at the first hint of defeat. As a result, resilience is certainly an important quality for students' success, especially in the twenty-first millennium.
2. *Flexibility*: Flexible Students can adjust their thoughts as new information becomes available. They frequently explore different points of view or work with multiple sources of information at the same time. In the face of new knowledge, new data, or even reasoning that opposes their ideas, their brains are frequently receptive to change.
3. *Motivation*: A deep sense of motivation is a key factor of success. Highly motivated students are known for their eagerness and level of engagement, their interest and involvement in various learning areas, and their ability to cope with challenges and setbacks actively. In order to learn a great deal, they frequently seek out additional learning opportunities. Student motivation can come from within or outside of the student, but it is most often a combination of the two that drives the student's approach to learning.
4. *Metacognition*: "Thinking about thinking" is a typical term for it. It is defined by students' ability to create an approach to generate the needed information, their awareness of their learning process, and their ability to reflect on and evaluate the efficacy of their thinking. Students must monitor and access their performance by posing questions to themselves about their learning processes.
5. *Problem-solving & questioning*: One of the differentiating attributes of learners who are well prepared for future learning is their willingness and ability to seek out problems to solve and ask pertinent questions to enhance their knowledge and understanding. Effective problem solvers understand how to ask questions to connect the dots between what they already know and what they do not. They also ask questions about opposing viewpoints and frequently draw causal conclusions about people, events, or situations.

Conditions for Learning: Here, conditions refer to physical, social, and learning environments. The physical environment of a school ranges from the school plant, that is, the school buildings, classrooms, library, laboratories and toilet facilities to the learning materials and other infrastructures that would likely motivate students to learn something. "A healthy physical environment contributes to a favorable learning environment for children and better productivity for the teachers and staff ([Arda et al., 2010](#))".

The school's social environment refers to relationships among the students and between students, teachers, other staff, and school leadership. When considering a school's social environment, other factors include well-being, safety, inclusion, and diversity, and the school's social media and virtual settings.

According to [UNESCO \(2012\)](#), "Learning environment refers to the complete physical, social and pedagogical context in which learning is intended to occur. The term most often refers to school classrooms but may include any designated place of learning such as science laboratories, distance learning contexts, libraries, tutoring centers, teachers' lounges, gymnasiums, and non-formal learning spaces. The components and attributes of a learning environment are conceptualized about their impact on learning processes and outcomes in both cognitive and affective domains. This term may also refer to the natural environment surrounding school buildings when they are used as a learning space."

Learning Process: The learning process encompasses all the actions and activities that a learner employs during the learning phase and the resulting knowledge structures in the memory. It is more important because it develops the mental structure in the cognitive domain. The process of learning is highly influenced by the approaches that students adopt while going in for learning. The term learning approach refers to a student's intention to learning and his/her corresponding strategies to achieve. The commonly used approaches to learning are surface approach, deep approach, and achieving approach.

Approaches to Learning

Learning approaches are the ways that students employ to achieve a task of learning. At first, two learning approaches were identified by [Marton and Säljö \(1970\)](#) when they were engaged in examining

the qualitative differences in the students' learning outcomes. Later on, Professor John W. Biggs (2001) widened its scope and added a third approach in this arena. These three approaches are the surface approach, deep approach, and achieving approach. Students interested in just passing an examination without bothering about an understanding of the content or the grade in examination go about turning the pages only and skimming the content provided in the textbook. They adopt the surface approach to learning. However, students who are motivated intrinsically to develop an understanding of the course content and about what exactly the author wants to say or develop (understanding skill, analytical skill, psycho-motor skill, and more) do follow the instructions and go as deep into the content as possible and internalize it, are they are using the deep approach.

Further, students are sometimes much concerned about high grades or marks in examinations, and consequently, they arrange the course content and manage their schedule accordingly. They prefer to choose the best ways to achieve high grades in examinations though they may or may not be concerned about achieving the course objectives. Biggs termed it as the achieving approach. Obtaining high marks or grades in examinations does not always confirm the high quality of learning. For example, a student may be using the surface approach, but if he or she appropriately arranges the course content and manages time wisely, he/she may score high marks or grades without caring much about comprehension (Marton & Säljö, 2005). Good quality learning actions (deep approach) may result in good learning representation (Kirby & Lawson, 2012).

How a learner can be encouraged to give preference the deep approach to learning

Several factors determine whether one would adopt a surface or a deep approach to learning. Surface or deep approach to learning is nothing but the learner's level of engagement with the learning task (Ramsden, 1997). The level of engagement is highly associated with the learning environment, course content, and individual factors, as shown in the diagram below.

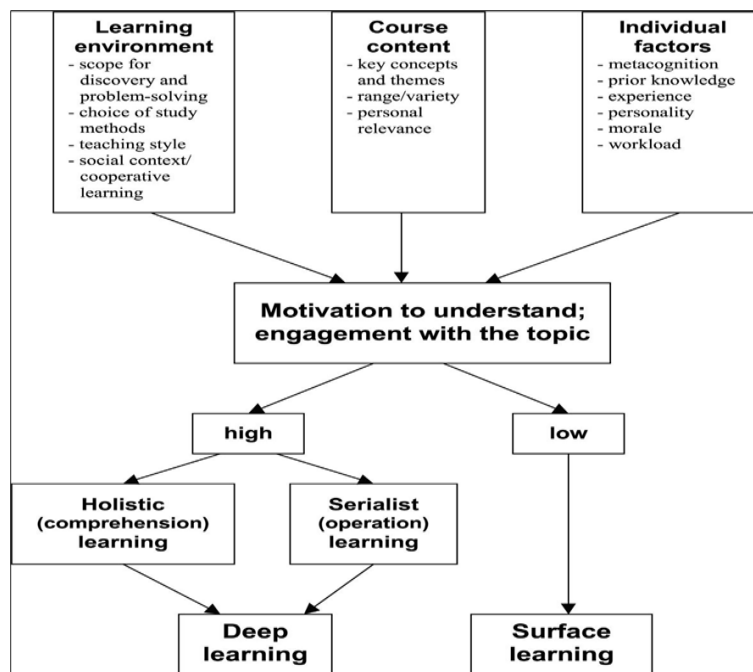


Figure 1. Motivation to Understand: The level of engagement

Source: Kevin Warburton (2009)

Motivation has a high degree of correlation with the determination of a student's learning approach. The deeper the engagement in the learning process, the deeper the acquired learning quality will be. In developing innate motivation, the learning environment can facilitate by a successful combination of active learning and experiential learning. An active learning environment motivates the learners to create the opportunities and engage his/herself in the learning activities. The teacher in this

situation does not inactive; instead, he or she has complete control over the curricular design and sequencing (Carroll, 1963). In experiential learning, student focuses on self-directed and self controlled, however, the teacher plays the role of facilitator. (Rogers, 1969). The curriculum should promote active learning and also allowing students to benefit from experiential learning through enquiry, autonomy, and increased personal relevance. Teaching may become child-centered in this manner.

The learning style in the school premises should be based on cooperative learning. Course content should focus on principles and concepts instead of accumulated facts (Hounsell, 1997). Individual factors like metacognition, prior knowledge, personality, morale and workload, and more influence the motivation of the concerned student. With a sophisticated endeavor by the stakeholders, personal factors can be positively engaged to boost the student's intrinsic motivation. When the students are intrinsically motivated to comprehend the course content, they will employ a deep approach to learning.

CONCLUSION

Learning is relatively a permanent change in one's behavior. There are multiple paradigms about learning theories. Constructivism is the latest one in the learning approaches. It suggests that a learner itself constructs its learning through active and consistent engagement. Quality learning is extensive, integrative, and generative (Lawson & Kirby, 2012). Based on several studies, they observed that three factors influence the quality of learning. These are dispositions towards learning, conditions for learning, and the learning process. The learning process is much associated with the approaches to learning. Marton & Säljö (1976), Biggs (1987) observed three commonly used approaches to learning: Surface, Deep, and Achieving. The surface approach is intended to pass an examination or increase the number of pages merely. The deep approach involves going deeper and deeper into the subject matter. It is intended to provide satisfaction to the learner. Kevin Warburton (2009) suggested three main factors that have a bearing on a student's motivation, leading to high or low engagement in a learning activity. A conducive learning environment, sophisticated course content, and favorable individual factors would enhance the student's motivation, ensuring close engagement with the learning activity. That is what results in deep learning. The ultimate aim of all this is to make teaching and learning process-oriented that results in high quality of learning.

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