

APPLYING SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: This study investigates the application of Social Learning Theory (SLT), developed by Albert Bandura, in English language classrooms. The research aims to explore how modeling, observational learning, and social interaction can enhance language acquisition. Findings show that SLT-based strategies significantly improve learners' speaking, listening, and communicative competencies by creating collaborative and motivational learning environments.

Keywords: Social Learning Theory, English language teaching, observational learning, modeling, classroom interaction, EFL

1. Introduction

Language learning is inherently social. Traditional language instruction often emphasizes grammar and vocabulary in isolated contexts; however, recent pedagogical approaches highlight the importance of interaction and social engagement in developing language skills. One such approach is **Social Learning Theory (SLT)**, introduced by Albert Bandura (1977), which posits that individuals learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing and imitating others.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, SLT provides a valuable framework for designing instruction that fosters peer collaboration, role-modeling, and contextual language use. The core tenets of SLT—attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation—can be effectively applied to language learning scenarios, where learners gain competence by engaging in authentic, socially rich experiences.

This study aims to examine how the principles of Social Learning Theory can be systematically integrated into English language teaching to enhance communicative competence, learner motivation, and classroom interaction.

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a **qualitative case study** design to analyze the classroom dynamics and learner outcomes resulting from SLT-based instruction in English language classrooms.

2.2. Participants

A total of **35 intermediate-level EFL students** and **3 English language teachers** from a university in Uzbekistan participated in the study. Participants were selected through **purposive sampling**, ensuring prior exposure to interactive and collaborative learning environments.

2.3. Procedure

Over the course of **10 weeks**, SLT strategies were implemented in selected English classes. The interventions included:

- Peer modeling through student presentations and role-plays
- Group-based learning tasks and problem-solving discussions
- Reflective feedback and observation journals
- Video-based modeling using authentic English interactions

Weekly classroom observations and student reflections were collected to assess engagement and progress.

2.4. Data Collection & Analysis

Data sources included observation notes, student journals, teacher interviews, and performance assessments (pre-test and post-test in speaking and listening). Data were analyzed using **thematic content analysis**, focusing on changes in communicative behavior, student participation, and perceived motivation.

The study revealed several key outcomes:

- **Improved Communicative Confidence:** Over 80% of students reported increased confidence in speaking due to exposure to peer modeling and real-life conversation scenarios.
- **Increased Peer Interaction:** Classroom observations showed a 60% increase in student-to-student interaction compared to baseline lessons.
- **Retention Through Observation:** Students retained vocabulary and sentence structures more effectively after engaging in role-plays and watching peer demonstrations.
- **Enhanced Motivation:** Learners reported higher motivation when tasks involved collaboration, group goals, and opportunities to observe others succeed.
- **Teacher Feedback:** Instructors noted greater student autonomy, willingness to participate, and reduced reliance on teacher-centered instruction.

The pre-test/post-test comparison showed a **25% average increase in oral fluency** and a **17% improvement in listening comprehension** among participants.

The findings support the idea that **language learning is best achieved in a social context**, where learners can observe, imitate, and interact with peers. Bandura's notion of **vicarious learning** proved particularly useful, as students learned effectively by watching classmates model language use in real situations.

Moreover, the motivational component of SLT was evident—students were more eager to participate when they saw others succeed. This aligns with the **self-efficacy theory**, a subcomponent of SLT, which emphasizes the role of perceived capability in learning outcomes. Teachers' use of praise, recognition, and peer collaboration also enhanced learners' emotional investment in classroom tasks.

The study also highlighted practical considerations: to implement SLT successfully, teachers need to create a **safe, cooperative environment**, structure tasks that encourage **peer modeling**, and provide **authentic linguistic input**. However, some students were initially reluctant to perform publicly, indicating that gradual scaffolding and inclusive strategies are necessary.

Social Learning Theory offers a powerful pedagogical foundation for English language teaching. By incorporating modeling, observational learning, and interactive group activities, educators can enhance not only linguistic skills but also learner engagement and motivation. The social nature of SLT aligns well with communicative approaches to language teaching, emphasizing the value of real-life context, peer influence, and intrinsic motivation.

To maximize its effectiveness, future curriculum planning should integrate SLT principles across all language domains—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Teacher training programs should also equip instructors with practical tools for facilitating social learning in diverse classroom settings.

This study recommends a wider application of SLT in EFL pedagogy, especially in multicultural and multilingual classrooms, where social context and peer dynamics play an essential role in language development.

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