

Bridging the Students' Differences in the EFL Classroom Cubing Activity in Accommodating the Students with VAK Learning Styles

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Abstract: The students have their own learning style. They can be distinguished into the types of learners, namely visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK). However, the students' learning styles differences are seldom acknowledged in the classroom. This results in their low learning performance. Thus, it is very important to adjust and differ the teaching and learning process based on the students' learning style. In line with this, this paper purposes at providing the ideas of using cubing activity in accommodating the learning styles differences among the students in the English language classroom. This paper is a library-based research study which collects several theories on differentiated instruction, VAK learning styles, and the classroom activity which can be used to accommodate the students with learning styles differences. As a result of reviewing the theories, this paper ends by presenting a sample of lesson plan to bridge the individual differences among students based on their learning styles by using cubing activity as it has several features which will be beneficial in bridging the students' individual differences. The lesson plan is developed to teach English in the context of Indonesian education and is suitable for the skill of writing.

1 INTRODUCTION

The English language teaching and learning process nowadays has more concerns on the students' individual differences. The English language classroom might consist of the students with individual differences. It is believed that the students are unique and have distinguished characteristics from each other. Tomlinson (2001) states that the students can be different in terms of their readiness, learning interests, and learning profiles or learning styles.

Today, the students' variations in their learning readiness, interests, and styles are highly valued and acknowledged. This phenomenon has led the teaching and learning of English to distinguish instruction which attempts to engage the students from different backgrounds to be able to learn according to their interests. The main goal of differentiated instruction is to make sure that the teacher is able to address effective learning for varied individuals, give the

students to learn at their full potential, and develop instructional activities based on the students' diversity as well as display multiple ways to learning (Gregory and Chapman, 2012; Heacox, 2012; Tomlinson and McTighe, 2006). Achievements in educational field depend much on the ability to adapt lesson based on each individual's aspects (Othman and Amiruddin, 2010).

One of the most highlighted issues in the differentiated instruction is how to facilitate the students with different learning styles into a well-established learning process. Learning styles are the situations in which the students are able to perceive, process, store, and learn what they learn efficiently and effectively (Wehrwein et al., 2007). A teacher should be creating an environment to fulfill the demand of students' various learning styles, as well as knowing the importance of teaching by using various learning styles (Drago and Wagner, 2004). Thus, it is very important to adjust the teaching and learning of English according to the students'

learning styles to enable them to learn at their full potential.

One way to administer a meaningful instructional activity which fits the students' learning styles is by providing an appropriate activity which is able to cover the students' needs and preferences in the classroom. Throughout this paper, the authors will explain the use of cubing activity as one of the activities to bridge the learners with different learning styles. Therefore, in this paper, the authors will provide several examples of cubing activities which can be used as ideas for teachers to help the learners able to learn based on their preferred learning styles.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning styles are often defined as the preferences of the students to learn and study. It is supported by Surjono (2011) who defines learning styles as the way the students prefer to learn. Similarly, Honey and Mumford (1992) state that learning style is the attitudes and behaviors that affect the students' preferred ways of learning and studying.

Other than that, learning style is also often defined as the differences among the students' learning methods. McLoughlin (1999) explains that learning style is the adoption of typical and different learning modes that each student possesses. Furthermore, Othman and Amiruddin (2010) believes that learning style refers to the style or learning method that an individual has and is used in the process of learning. In addition, learning style is often acknowledged as different styles of learning methods which exist between the students (Drago and Wagner, 2004).

It is very prominent to adjust the teaching and learning process into the students' learning styles as it is believed that the students will be able to learn better and effectively if they are taught based on their learning styles. Subban (2006) also mentions that it is important to adapt the teaching and learning into the students' learning styles because the students' performances are said to be significantly better when they are given instruction through learning style approaches rather than traditional teaching methods (Subban, 2006). It is supported by a research study conducted by Alavinia and Farhady (2012) which showed that teaching vocabulary on the students by differentiating instruction and focusing on learning styles and multiple intelligences had positive effect on the process of teaching and the students performed better rather than those who were not taught by focusing on learning styles.

2.1 VAK Learning Style

According to Wahrwein, Lujan, and DiCarlo (2007), there are three types of learning styles on the students which are based on the preferred way of receiving information. These learning styles are regarded as visual (V), auditory (A) kinesthetic which are later commonly known as VAK learning styles. Similarly, Sarasin (1999) claims that most learners can be classified as visual, auditory or kinesthetic learners according to how they receive and process information. In line with this, VAK learning style theory is now a preferred accelerated learning community because its principles and benefits can cover all types of learning (Gholami and Bagheri, 2013; Wehrwein et al., 2007). Hence, in this paper, the activities proposed by the authors are focused on accommodating the students with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

2.1.1 Visual Learning Style

The students with visual learning style prefer to obtain information associated with images and visual displays. Visual learners learn best of what they see and observe, such as pictures, charts, graphs, diagrams, tables, maps, timelines, movies, and demonstration (Felder and Silverman, 1988; Vaishnav and Chirayu, 2013; Wehrwein et al., 2007). According to Oxford (1995), visual learners learn best through visual channels which implies that they like to read a lot and thus needs concentration and time spent alone. In order to function well in the classrooms, visual learners need to have written directions. Surjono (2011) adds that activities which include seeing and reading are very important and helpful for visual learners. the title.

2.1.2 Auditory Learning Style

Oxford (1995) claims that auditory learners enjoy the oral-aural learning channel and work well with oral directions. It means that the students with auditory learning style are best perceiving their learning through listening. It is in line with Surjono's (2011) statement that auditory learners prefer to absorb information by listening. In recalling information, these learners will remember the information the way they heard it. They learn better based on what they hear, what they say, and they prefer to have a lot of discussions as well as verbal explanations (Felder and Silverman, 1988). According to Wehrwein, Lujan, and DiCarlo (2007), learners with auditory learning

styles enjoy discussing materials and talking through material with themselves or others. In addition, Oxford (1995) also explains that these learners like to engage in the activities like conversations and group work.

2.1.3 Kinesthetic Learning Style

The kinesthetic students learn by practicing and doing something. This type of learners like to learn through physical experiences and involvement with the learning environment, such as touching, feeling, holding, doing, and practical hands-on experiences (Kanninen, 2009). Therefore, these learners prefer lab activities or field trips over classroom lectures (Surjono, 2011). This is in line with the statement of Kinsella (1995) that kinesthetic learners are those who imply total physical involvement with a learning environment such as taking a field trip, dramatizing, pantomiming, or interviewing. Wehrwein, Lujan, and DiCarlo, (2007) also state that kinesthetic learners best by using physical activities like touching, performing an activity, moving, lessons that emphasize doing, and manipulation of objects.

2.2 Cubing Activity in Bridging Different Learning Styles

One of the activities that can be used to accommodate the learners' differences in learning styles is cubing. According to Tomlinson (2001), cubing is a teaching and learning activity which requires a six-sided cube in which each side contains different activities to be done by the students and it allows the students to consider the concept of various ways and perspectives. It is very simple to make this kind of instructional media and it can be used in any situation or place because it does not require sophisticated tools. Teachers could make different kinds of cubes adjusted to the students' different learning styles. They might create more than one cube in the classroom.

In addition, Tomlinson (2001) further explains that the application of cubing is very useful in accommodating the students' individual differences into a meaningful classroom activity through differentiated instruction. Individual differences here can be interpreted as different learning styles as well since learning styles are one of the major issues in the students' individual differences. Cubing can accommodate the students' differences in learning styles as it has some features which are able to connect the students' different learning styles through differentiated instruction as the use of cubing as

media in differentiated instruction could cover the needs of the students with different learning styles.

First of all, cubing can be used in many different ways and it is helpful to be implemented by the teacher due to its practicality and its ability to reach the students with different learning styles for it can be differentiated based on the students' learning styles, interests, and preferences. Cubing is beneficial to differentiate learning according to the students' different learning profiles, for instance, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Cockroft, 2010a). The cube could be modified that the teacher could differentiate the tasks and activities to meet the students' styles of learning without reducing neither the essence nor the objective of the lesson. For instance, the classroom consists of the students with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. The teacher could make three types of cubes to cover each learning style. Therefore, the students with visual learning style will get tasks or activities provided in the cube which support their preference of learning. In this way, cubing activity can encourage differentiation and stretch the students' thinking, extends the students' ideas, and help the students to make the learning process successful.

Second, cubing provides the students with a meaningful and interesting activity. It is fun, attractive and stimulating for learners because it can teach and challenge both problem-solving activity and thinking (Chapman et al., 2003). Cubing allows the students to learn while putting the students into a situation in which they would feel like playing a game. This helps students to relax and to feel less pressured towards the teaching and learning activity. The students are also given activities which enable them to study based on their preference. This will enhance their learning motivation since they will not feel burdened and anxious during the instructional activity. The students will be able to learn at their optimal level because the activities in which they are required to do are varied according to their learning styles and the learning environment is very supportive for them to learn which later leads them to deepen their understanding about a certain concept, skill, or learning objective easily. Other than that, the students are also given challenging and interesting activities which will improve their problem-solving skill and lead them into higher order thinking skill. To teach the students with different learning styles, it would be a good idea to give the students an option of cooperating on tasks or assignments as learners they learn well when they interact with others (Felder and Silverman, 1988). This assumption works extremely well with cubing as the students are also given

chances to work their own or in groups to solve the given activity.

Third, cubing is good media to reinforce the students into the teaching and learning process. The use of cubing can strengthen the students' strengths and the students' weaknesses (Chapman et al., 2003). When a student finds it difficult to understand a concept or a skill, the use of cubing could be embodied to make it easier for the students to learn.

Cubing itself can be used as an activity to foster the students thinking about a certain topic to be discussed in the English as a foreign language classroom (Zygouris-Coe, 2014). As an example, in the essay writing class, the students might find out that it is hard to produce a descriptive essay in writing skill. The teacher might use different cubes for different learning styles to foster the students into writing. For visual learners, the teacher could employ a task or activity which asks the students to draw something and give description of the picture that they make in the cube. For auditory learners, the students might be asked to watch and listen to a video and make a description about the character that they watch after that. Meanwhile, for the students with kinesthetic learners, they could be assigned with the task of going around the school and find an interesting object to be described. Thus, the use of cubing could facilitate and help the students with some activities that enhance the instructional process in the classroom.

2.3 Putting Cubing Activities into Practices

In this part of paper, the authors intend to propose a lesson plan to apply cubing activity in the classroom to accommodate the students with different VAK learning styles. The cubing activity in the lesson plan is designed based on the theories of the students' visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learning styles. Therefore, the activities are developed by considering the students' characteristics according to the theories of VAK learning styles.

There are several considerations that the English language teachers need to take into account in implementing the lesson plan. First, the lesson plan proposed in this paper is a sample activity which can be used in teaching English as a foreign language in the context of Indonesian education. Second, this lesson plan is designed for grade X students of senior high school and it applies for teaching writing skill, particularly writing a descriptive text. Third, in implementing the cubing activity in this lesson plan, the teachers need to create several cubes consisting of

several tasks which are appropriate to accommodate the students' VAK learning styles. The tasks given in the cubes can be adapted and adjusted according to the topics of the lesson, the skills taught, and the learning objectives. Lastly, the teachers are also required to understand and recognize the students' learning styles. To find out the students' learning styles, the teachers can administer the test of the students' learning styles. Other than that, the teachers can also observe the way the students in the classroom.

Furthermore, in the lesson plan, there are two options of activities offered in implementing cubing activities proposed by the authors. These options are on the basis of grouping the students.

In the first option, the students are grouped homogeneously according to their learning styles. It includes grouping the students according to their learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Therefore, the visual learners will be in the same group with the other visual learners. It goes the same for the auditory learners as well as kinesthetic learners.

Meanwhile, the second option of the activity offers another way of grouping the students. In the second procedure, the students are divided into heterogenous groups in which each group has visual, auditory, and kinesthetic students.

2.3.1 Activity 1: Grouping the Students with Similar Learning Styles in Cubing Activity

In this activity, the students in the classroom are grouped homogeneously according to their learning styles. The teacher will need to identify the students' learning styles and the learning objective before cubing the lesson. After identifying the learning styles, the teacher groups the students based on their preferences of learning. Therefore, one group consists of the students with the same learning preferences, for example the group with visual learners only, the group with auditory learners, and the group with kinaesthetic learners. The teacher then gives the tasks wrapped in the cubing activity. Other than that, the teacher is also required to make sure that the tasks given to the students met the learning objectives.

In this activity, the teacher will need at least three different cubes. One cube is designed for visual style, the other one is for auditory style, and the last one is for kinaesthetic students. Each cube has six different tasks which must be fulfilled by each group. The tasks

are developed according to the students' learning preference and the characteristics of learning styles.

In addition, the procedure for implementing this activity is as follows:

1. The teacher explains to the students about the learning objective of the lesson and the materials (for instance, descriptive text)
2. The teacher groups the students into a group of 4-6 based on their learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic.
3. The teacher gives each group a cube adjusted to their learning style. The cube will be different for each learning style
4. By taking turns, the students start to roll the cube.
5. The students start doing the task written on the cube.
6. The students submit their work to the teacher.
7. The teacher ends the classroom by summarizing the lesson.

2.3.2 Activity 2: Grouping the Students with Different Learning Styles in Cubing Activity

In this activity, the students are grouped into some heterogeneous group. Each group is given some tasks to be fulfilled in the form of cube. The tasks are adjusted to the students' learning styles. The tasks are developed based on the visual style, auditory style, and kinaesthetic style. The students might select the tasks according to their preferences and learning styles but they need to do the task collaboratively with the group members.

In this option of activity, the teachers only need to prepare at least one cube which consists of different instruction representing and adjusting each VAK learning style.

Furthermore, below is the procedure to conduct the activity:

1. The topic of the task is dream school. Therefore, at the end of the activity, the students are asked to write a descriptive text about their dream school.
2. Divide the students into a group of 4-5. The students are from different learning styles.
3. Provide a cube for each group consisting of 6 tasks which need to be completed by each group. The tasks should be developed based on VAK learning styles. Each

student must be responsible for the task. The students might decide who is going to do task number 1, number 2, etc.

4. After completing the task, ask the students to combine the tasks and make a conclusion and a report in the form of a descriptive text which describes about their dream school.

3 CONCLUSIONS.

Based on what has been discussed, as the conclusion, it can be said that the instructional process has now recently moved forward into developing an instructional environment which welcomes and covers the students' individual differences, including the students' different learning styles. In creating such environment, the role of activity in the teaching and learning process is undeniably very significant. As what has been stated earlier, the use of cubing as an instructional activity is very essential and contributive in supporting the differentiated instruction with the students of different learning styles as it is applicable in any situation, attractive and could sustain the students into a meaningful teaching and learning process (Chapman et al., 2003; Cockcroft, 2010b). Therefore, it can be used as one of the alternative activities which can accommodate the students' individual differences in the English language classroom.

In this paper, it has been discussed the ideas of designing a model of cubing activity in the lesson plan to teach the students with visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learning styles. The lesson plan is proposed to be used to teach English in the context of Indonesian education. It fits to teach the students of Senior High School Grade X and is used to teach writing skills, especially in writing descriptive texts. As the lesson plan is limited at providing the samples of cubing activities related to descriptive text writing, any education practitioners or English teachers who want to use cubing activity in their classroom can modify the activities according to their needs.

In addition, as this paper is limited only on proposing the activities, a further research study is needed to justify the success implementation of cubing activity. If the further researchers are interested to conduct a research study on cubing activity, they can conduct an experimental study to see the effectiveness of cubing activity. Furthermore, if the researchers find out several problems related to learning styles differences in the classroom, they

could try to solve the problems by implementing an action research study using cubing activity.

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