

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the background, research questions and purposes, research significances, research framework, and previous researches which elaborates why this research is captivating to be conducted and supported by theories.

A. Background

This research explores the implementation of meaningful learning principle in an EYL online classroom. The importance of this research is to gain more understanding of learners' experiences in the online classroom. Learning foreign language, in this case is English, in early age is a must in this millennial era. Therefore, it is important to introduce and provide an appropriate principle of teaching English to young learners. One of the principles of learning is known as meaningful learning. Carvalho et al., (2015) defines meaningful learning as a learning model in which the students gain their knowledge through the assimilation of new concepts with the previous ones by means of an anchorage system, in which the previous information ties itself up to the new one and thus expands its cognitive structure.

Since the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) spreads around the world, most governments temporarily close educational institutions (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, the interaction between teachers and learners shift into online environments. Learners have to deal with diverse devices either mobile ones or fixed ones to explore diverse interfaces and to use them in diverse environment, in this case is online environments.

Young learners are known as active learners because they have a lot of energy which make them potentially have a perfect time to learn a new language (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). In online classroom environment, teacher has a central role in the integration of technology (Taghizadeh & Hasani Yourdshahi, 2019). Therefore, it is a challenge for the teacher to design the learning process as meaningful as possible.

Limited observation by interviewing one of the teachers in SDIT Insan Cermat shows that the teacher finds English is challenging to teach especially to young learners, because it is hard to engage students with the materials given. This problem becomes more complicated when the teaching activity shift into virtual. The teacher usually makes animation video, powerpoint, and quizzes as alternative media in the teaching process. However, the students need to be guided in this process because this is the new experience that they have to face. The role of parents is essential along the learning process. However, some students sometimes cannot participate well along the learning process because of internet connection problem, lack of guidance from their parents, and they also unmotivated. By realizing these problems, the teacher is supposed to come up with good ideas to make the teaching process effective. Therefore, this research tries to figure out whether the meaningful learning principle are reflected in the EYL online classroom and how the students respond to the learning process.

There are some previous researches related to meaningful learning. First, a research conducted by Kostianen et al., (2018) explores the meaningful learning in teacher education context. Second, research by Hung (2019) discusses the argument for meaningful learning as an essential factor in the teaching of English as a foreign language in the context of Vietnam education. The third is a research by Taghizadeh & Hasani Yourdshahi (2019) which investigates language teacher's perceptions toward integrating technology into young learners' classes. What makes the current research different from the previous researches is the context. The current research tries to figure out whether the meaningful learning principle are reflected in the EYL online classroom and how the students respond to the learning process.

B. Research Questions

From the descriptions above, this research is intended to answer these two following questions:

1. How are the attributes of meaningful learning principle reflected in the EYL online classroom?

2. How do the students respond to the meaningfulness of the online learning process?

C. Research Purposes

From the research questions above, this study is aimed at obtaining these two following purposes:

1. To explore how the attributes of meaningful learning principle are reflected in the EYL online classroom.
2. To find out the students' responses to the meaningfulness of the online learning process.

D. The Significances of Research

This research is expected to become a source of information about the theory of meaningful learning principle and how it works in Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL). Furthermore, this study is also expected to give an understanding of the importance of meaningful learning principle in teaching-learning activities and its effect on students and teacher, especially for young learners.

Theoretically, this research can be beneficial to become the reference of meaningful learning theories, which can be applied in the teaching activity. Practically, this research gives the significances to:

1. Teachers

This research contributes to the teachers to improve their knowledge about meaningful learning and sharpen the teaching skills, especially to make the learning process meaningful.

2. Students

The result of this research is expected to enhance students' motivation in studying English by engaging themselves to the learning process using the implementation of meaningful learning principle.

E. Research Framework

The popular concept of meaningful learning comes from an American psychologist, David Ausubel. His theory says that the meaning is defined as a phenomenological product of the learning process in which the potential significance is converted to cognitive content (Sousa, Formiga, Oliveira, Costa, & Soares, 2015). Meanwhile, the term meaningful means the meaning that the learners assign specific knowledge is useful for their everyday life (Sousa et al., 2015). When children perceive their learning process as meaningful, they will participate in the classroom enjoyable. This becomes one of the reasons why the teacher needs to vary the learning method to improve students' satisfaction in the learning process.

The concept of meaningful learning refers to learning processes and the experiences of various activities, circumstances, and events that students considered as a special meaning (Aarto-Pesonen & Piirainen, 2019). Meanings accompany experiences when learners know what is happening, and especially what importance the event carries for their personality (Ní Chróinín et al., 2018). It is also noted that the student's construction of her or his identity as a teacher may be based on the teacher student's processes of meaning-making in teacher education (Shuell, 1992).

Huang, Chiu, Liu, & Chen (2011) categorized the characteristic of meaningful learning based on earlier studies as follow:

Jonassen (1995)	Karppinen (2005)	Grabe and Grabe (2007)
Active	Active	Active
Authentic	Authentic	Authentic
Constructive	Constructive	Constructive
Cooperative	Cooperative	Cooperative
Intentional	Guided emotionally	Integrated

There are three opinions regarding to the characteristic of meaningful learning. In the table above, there are five characteristics of meaningful learning. Four of them

are similar; active, authentic, constructive, and cooperative. However, there is a different point of view on the fifth characteristic. Jonassen (1995) says that the fifth characteristic of meaningful learning is intentional, Karppinen (2005) says it is guided emotionally, and Grabe and Grabe (2007) says it is integrated (Huang et al., 2011).

This research is going to adopt the theory from Jonassen (1995) cited in Kostianen et al., (2018) who generalizes the characteristics of meaningful learning become five characteristics: active, authentic, constructive, cooperative, and intentional. Regarding to Huang et al., (2011), active is defined as the dynamism of the learning process which produces the initiative of knowledge acquisition. Authentic means the context awareness constructed by the learners from situated and authentic learning activities. Constructive is defined as the accommodation of new ideas to the learners' prior knowledge or experiences. Cooperative means the learners' encouragement to solve the problems or tasks together with their peers. The last is intentional, which means that meaningful learning requires a conscious goal setting.

In this rapidly globalizing world, it is essential for children to learn English from a young age. One of the primary aims for teaching English is to build children's confidence as their preparation for higher levels of education (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). For teachers, age is the major factor in deciding how and what to teach. Every age of people has different needs, competencies, and cognitive skills (Harmer, 2001b). Based on Harmer's theory, learners are categorized into three: young children, adolescents, and adult learners. Harmer (2001) stated that there are several characteristics of young children:

- They still respond to the meaning although they do not understand the individual words
- They prefer to learn indirectly than directly
- Their understanding comes from what they see, hear, and crucially, have a chance to interact with it.
- They are very curious about the world around them.
- They need personal approval and individual attention from their teacher.

- They are like to talk about themselves and engaging all-new knowledge with their life.
- They have a limited attention span.

Teaching English for young learners can be fun, yet challenging. Students have different backgrounds from previous school or grade so that they also have a difference in mastering English skills. In learning activities, teachers have roles that may change from one activity to another. According to Harmer (2001b), the roles of a teacher are: a controller, an organizer, an assessor, a prompter, a participant, a resource, a tutor, and an observer. The teacher of EYL has several problems in controlling the class. Therefore, the teacher has to choose what role he/she will play in the classroom, and he/she has to decide the best method to be applied in the classroom. According to the study conducted by Widodo & Dewi, t.t., students need hands-on activities, and they have to be encouraged by the teacher to fix the problems they face while learning English.

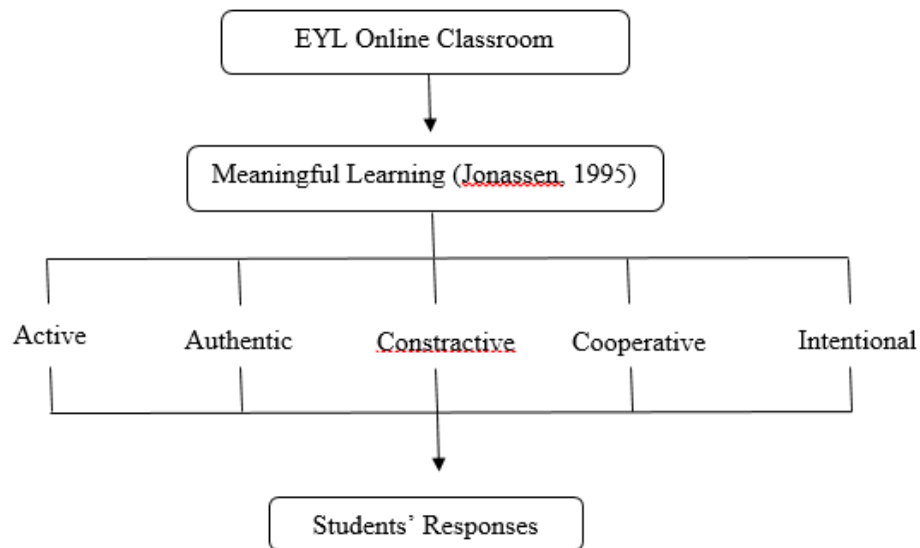


Figure 1.1 Research Framework

F. Previous Researches

There are several researches that discuss meaningful learning. First, the research conducted by Kostianen et al., (2018) investigates meaningful learning in teacher education. This research explores meaningful learning in the context of teacher education with qualitative technique by collecting and analyzing the data by using the thematic step-by-step analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data analysis consists of three sub-processes: generating initial codes based on the qualitative content analysis, identifying themes, and naming the main categories. The research shows the importance of course design in generating meaningful learning. To be contrasted, the current research focuses on exploring the implementation of meaningful learning in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) to figure out whether the meaningful learning principle are reflected or not, and how the students respond to the learning process.

Second, a research about meaningful learning and its implications for language education in Vietnam conducted by Hung (2019) discusses the argument for meaningful learning as an essential factor in the teaching of English as a foreign language. With a qualitative research method, this research compares the notion of meaningful learning with rote learning which consist of three parts: introduces the place of meaningful learning in ELT as well as the significance of the principle, demonstrates the main concepts and characteristics of meaningful learning compared with rote learning, and the recommendations on how meaningful learning should be applied in Vietnamese context. This research found that one's knowledge of a first language is essential for foreign language learning is given prior to giving the implications of meaningful learning in the Vietnamese context. Meanwhile, the current research will focus on the Indonesian context and not only discusses about meaningful learning theories but also explores the reflection of this principle in the classroom.

Third, a research conducted by Taghizadeh & Hasani Yourdshahi (2019) which explores the integration of technology into young learners' classroom. Using qualitative research design, this research finds out the attitude, knowledge, use, and

challenges of English teachers of young learners to integrate technological tools into English classes. The survey provides four parts; technological tools questionnaire, teachers' attitude questionnaire, teachers' challenges questionnaire, and 11 open-ended questions. The results show that most teachers did not have sufficient pedagogical and technological knowledge to use technology to teach the English language to young learners, and a large number of teachers were not provided with training courses on the use of technology in young learners' classes. Furthermore, the current research attempts to explore the young learners' responses toward virtual learning and whether the principle of meaningful learning are reflected in the learning process or not.

