

# A Comparative Analysis of Social Learning Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and the ARCS Model of Motivation

Suthan a/l Panchadcharam <sup>1</sup>, Dr. Hj. Mohamad Nasir Hj. Saludin <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor, University Geomatika Malaysia. Email: [psuthan74@gmail.com](mailto:psuthan74@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> University Geomatika Malaysia, Email: [datonasir@geomatika.edu.my](mailto:datonasir@geomatika.edu.my)

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 20 Dec 2024	This comprehensive comparative analysis addresses three prominent pedagogical frameworks, namely social learning theory, experiential learning theory, and the ARCS model of motivation. Each of these models plays an important role in shaping our understanding of learning processes and the factors that motivate learners. The aim of this review is to highlight key features, similarities and differences and to provide educators and curriculum planners with insights into how these theories can inform and enhance the learning experience.
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## INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of education and instructional design, understanding different theories and models is essential to creating effective learning environments. Albert Bandura's social learning theory focuses on the effects of observational learning and modeling on behavior. David Kolb's experiential learning theory emphasizes the cyclical process of learning through hands-on experience, reflection and active experimentation. The ARCS model of motivation, developed by John M. Keller, provides a systematic framework for incorporating motivational elements into instructional materials, emphasizing attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction.

As educators strive to engage learners and optimize the learning process, a comparative analysis of these three models is invaluable. This research will highlight not only the different characteristics of each theory, but also the synergies that can exist between them. By examining their key concepts, similarities and differences, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how these theories contribute to the multifaceted landscape of education.

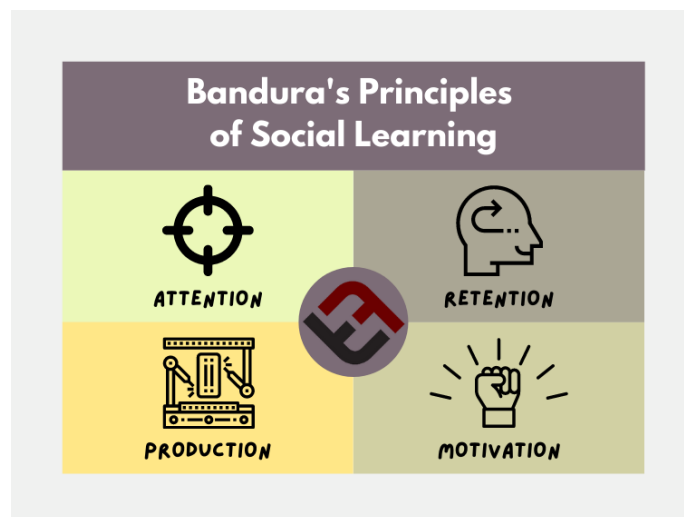
The comparative analysis will unfold through an examination of the basic principles of each theory and how they address different aspects of the learning process. In addition, we will examine the unique contributions of each model and how they complement or diverge from each other. This comprehensive examination will provide educators and instructional designers with a holistic perspective that will enable them to make informed decisions when designing learning experiences.

It is important to recognize the central role that these theories play in shaping pedagogical approaches and promoting an effective learning environment. The point is not to pit one theory against another, but to uncover the nuances that characterize each theory. Through this comparative analysis, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how educators can utilize the strengths of these theories to create engaging, motivating, and impactful learning experiences for diverse learners.

We will begin our examination of each pedagogical framework and understand the benefits and value of each.

## **Social Learning Theory:**

### **Unveiling the Dynamics of Observational Learning and Modeling**



**Source:** <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/principles-of-social-learning-theory/>

Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, is a cornerstone of educational psychology and highlights the intricate interplay between observation, imitation and the learning process (Bandura, 1977). This study addresses the key concepts of social learning theory and emphasizes the importance of observational learning and modeling. We also draw parallels with experiential learning theory and highlight the common principles of active participation and the cyclical nature of learning.

At the heart of social learning theory is the concept of observational learning, which states that individuals learn new behaviors by observing the actions and experiences of others (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's Bobo doll experiment, a seminal study in this area, showed how children who experienced aggressive behavior toward a Bobo doll repeated these actions when given the opportunity (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). This experiment showed that learning through observation goes beyond mere passive observation and actively influences subsequent behavior.

A central element of social learning theory is modeling, in which people learn by observing others, so-called models, and imitating their behavior in different situations (Bandura, 1977). Whether parents, teachers or peers - the influence of role models shapes the learning path. Modeling is a dynamic process that involves not only the imitation of observed behaviors, but also the internalization and potential reproduction of these behaviors in different contexts (Bandura, 1977).

Both the theory of social learning and the theory of experiential learning agree on the fundamental principle of active participation in the learning process (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984). Bandura (1977) assumes that people are not passive recipients of information, but actively engage with the learning content and react to it. This is consistent with Kolb's (1984) assertion that experiential learning involves active engagement and hands-on experiences that foster a dynamic and participatory learning environment.

Although the theory of social learning focuses primarily on observational learning, it has similarities with the theory of experiential learning in terms of the cyclical nature of the learning process (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984). Kolb's theory of experiential learning describes a four-stage cycle — concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. In both theories, the learning process is seen as iterative and comprises various stages that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the learning material.

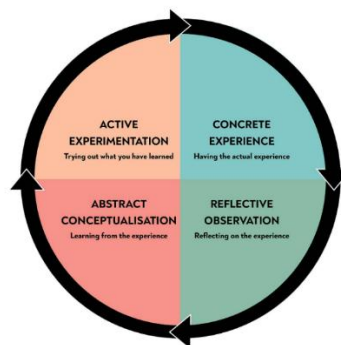
Understanding the intricacies of social learning theory has profound implications for educators and teachers. Integrating observational learning into pedagogical strategies involves providing different role models and incorporating real-world examples to enhance the learning experience (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, in line with

experiential learning theory, educators can create environments that encourage hands-on experiences, reflection and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). This synthesis allows for a holistic approach that combines the power of observation with direct engagement to meet diverse learning preferences.

In summary, social learning theory introduces us to the dynamic processes of observational learning and modeling and emphasizes the active role of individuals in shaping their learning experiences (Bandura, 1977). By drawing parallels to experiential learning theory, we recognize the importance of active participation and the cyclical nature of learning. A nuanced understanding of these theories enables educators to navigate the complexities of instructional design and create engaging and effective learning environments that utilize both observation and experience.

## Experiential Learning Theory

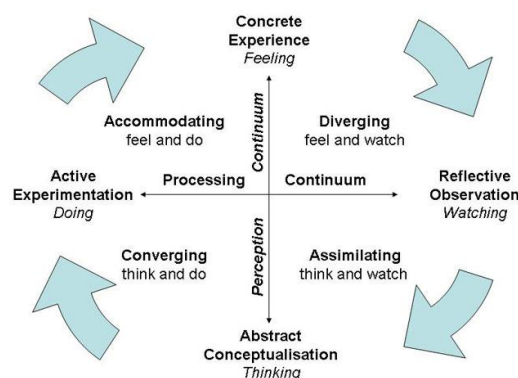
### Nurturing Insight Through Active Engagement



Source: <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/kolbs-learning-cycle>

David Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) has left an indelible mark on the landscape of educational psychology. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how people learn through direct experience (Kolb, 1984). This review addresses the key concepts of experiential learning theory, highlighting learning styles and the transformative power of hands-on experiences. In addition, we make links to social learning theory and highlight common elements such as observational learning and reflective observation.

### Learning Styles: A Kaleidoscope of Preferences



Source: <https://www.structural-learning.com/post/kolbs-learning-cycle>

Experiential learning theory introduces the concept of learning styles and provides a nuanced understanding of how individuals prefer to approach the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). The four learning styles — converging, diverging, assimilating and accommodating — reflect different preferences in the way learners process information and

approach learning tasks. Convergers prefer abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, divergers prefer concrete experience and reflective observation, assimilators are characterized by abstract conceptualization and reflective observation, while accommodators are characterized by concrete experience and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

At the heart of experiential learning theory is the belief that learning is most effective when individuals gain practical experience and then reflect on that experience (Kolb, 1984). Direct involvement in real-life situations, coupled with attentive reflection, creates a strong learning dynamic. This hands-on approach goes beyond the traditional classroom and includes a variety of environments where individuals can apply their knowledge in practical contexts, Illeris, K. (2018).

Experiential learning theory and social learning theory have similarities in that they recognize the importance of observational learning (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984). In experiential learning, individuals actively observe and reflect on their experiences and gain insights that contribute to their learning process. This is consistent with social learning theory, in which observation of others serves as a catalyst for the acquisition of behavior (Bandura, 1977).

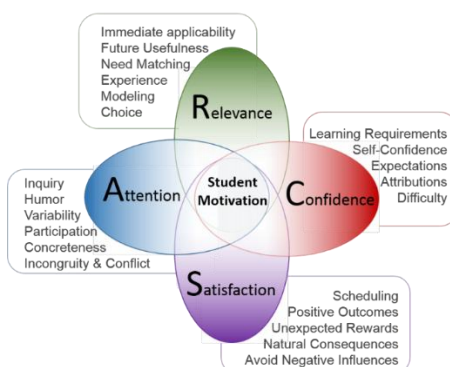
Both the theory of experiential learning and the theory of social learning emphasize the importance of reflective observation for the learning process (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 1984). In experiential learning, reflective observation is an integral part of the learning cycle that promotes deeper insights and understanding. Similarly, social learning theory recognizes reflective observation as a key element in the process of internalizing and reproducing observed behaviors.

Understanding the different learning styles described by Kolb enables educators to tailor teaching methods to different preferences (Kolb, 1984). For convergers, emphasizing abstract concept formation and active experimentation can be effective, while divergers benefit from concrete experience and reflective observation. The assimilative learner thrives in an environment that encourages abstract conceptualization and reflective observation, while the accommodative learner excels in concrete experience and active experimentation. Incorporating hands-on experiences that match these preferences enriches the learning environment and improves overall educational outcomes.

In summary, experiential learning theory offers a dynamic perspective on learning and emphasizes the importance of practical experience and individual learning styles. By understanding the diversity of learners and recognizing the common elements with social learning theory, educators can create immersive learning environments that cater to diverse preferences and promote meaningful engagement. As we navigate the ever-changing educational landscape, experiential learning theory serves as a compass that guides us toward a holistic approach that emphasizes active participation, reflection, and personalized learning experiences.

## **The ARCS Model of Motivation**

### **Elevating Learning Through Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction**



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/arcs-model-melvin-goh/>

John M. Keller's ARCS model of motivation is a beacon in the field of instructional design, providing a systematic approach to increasing learner engagement and motivation (Keller, 1987). This research addresses the key concepts of the ARCS model — attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction — and explores its systematic approach to motivational interventions. In addition, we make links to social learning theory and experiential learning theory by highlighting common principles and emphasizing the importance of attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction to the learning process.

The first pillar of the ARCS model is attention, emphasizing the need to arouse learners' interest and concentration (Keller, 1987). By using strategies that stimulate curiosity and inquisitiveness, teachers can create an environment in which learners are actively engaged and want to explore the content.

Relevance, the second component, emphasizes the importance of connecting the learning materials to the needs, interests and goals of the learners (Keller, 1987). When learners recognize the relevance of the content to their lives, the motivation to engage and understand increases significantly.

Confidence, the third element, recognizes the importance of providing learners with a sense of competence and self-efficacy (Keller, 1987). This involves designing tasks and challenges to match learners' abilities and promote a positive and empowering learning experience.

The last pillar, satisfaction, is about learners finding the learning experience rewarding and fulfilling (Keller, 1987). This involves creating a positive learning environment, recognizing achievement and reinforcing the link between effort and success.

One of the distinguishing features of the ARCS model is its systematic approach to the design of motivational interventions in teaching materials (Keller, 1987). Educators and learning designers can use this model as a guide to systematically incorporate attention-grabbing elements, strategies to increase relevance, confidence-building activities and measures to ensure learner satisfaction.

The ARCS model fits seamlessly with social learning theory and experiential learning theory because it recognizes the importance of capturing learners' attention and ensuring the relevance of content (Bandura, 1977; Keller, 1987; Kolb, 1984). Social learning theory assumes that attention in observational learning is a key factor in the acquisition of behavior (Bandura, 1977). Similarly, the ARCS model's focus on attention emphasizes the need to arouse learners' interest and curiosity. In addition, experiential learning theory emphasizes the relevance of hands-on experiences, which is consistent with the ARCS model's focus on connecting content to learners' needs and interests.

Both the ARCS model and experiential learning theory recognize the importance of building learner confidence through hands-on experience and ensuring satisfaction with the learning process (Keller, 1987; Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning theory focuses on building confidence by encouraging learners to actively experiment and apply their knowledge. The ARCS model complements this by incorporating confidence-building strategies that align with learners' abilities to promote a positive and empowering learning experience.

Understanding the key components of the ARCS model provides educators with a powerful tool to design instructional materials that engage learners and maintain their motivation (Keller, 1987). By incorporating attention strategies, ensuring relevance, fostering confidence, and promoting satisfaction, educators can create a motivating framework that enhances the overall learning experience. This systematic approach is particularly valuable when addressing the diverse needs and preferences of learners.

To summarize, the ARCS motivational model provides a solid framework for integrating motivational elements into instructional design and fits seamlessly with social and experiential learning theory, Keller, J. M. (2010). By prioritizing attention, relevance, trust, and satisfaction, educators can create engaging and impactful learning environments that address the diverse needs of learners. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the ARCS model remains a valuable resource for educators looking to foster motivation and ensure meaningful learning experiences.

### **Exploring Differences and Unique Aspects in Learning Theories**



Albert Bandura's theory of social learning is primarily concerned with observational learning and modeling (Bandura, 1977). It assumes that people learn by observing others and imitating their behavior. In contrast, David Kolb's experiential learning theory focuses on direct practical experience and subsequent reflection (Kolb, 1984). It emphasizes learning through action and reflection on these actions.

Experiential learning theory introduces the concept of learning styles, a dimension that is not explicitly emphasized in social learning theory (Kolb, 1984). The learning styles in experiential learning theory, including converging, diverging, assimilating, and accommodating styles, emphasize the different ways in which individuals engage in the learning cycle, Illeris, K. (2018).

The theory of experiential learning follows a cyclical learning process that includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). This cyclical approach recognizes the iterative nature of learning in which the individual is in a continuous loop of experience, reflection and application.

The ARCS model of motivation developed by John M. Keller takes a different approach. It provides a systematic framework for designing motivational interventions without necessarily considering a cyclical learning process (Keller, 1987). Although the ARCS model emphasizes attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction, it does not explicitly include the cyclical structure described in experiential learning theory.

The ARCS model focuses on specific motivational components — attention, relevance, trust and satisfaction (Keller, 1987). It aims to increase learner motivation by systematically considering these factors in lesson design. In contrast, social learning theory focuses on observational learning and modeling without paying particular attention to these motivational components (Bandura, 1977).

Understanding these differences is crucial for educators and curriculum developers as they navigate the terrain of educational theories. In implementing social learning theory, educators can emphasize the role of role models and observational learning by creating opportunities for learners to observe and emulate positive behaviors.

In contrast, experiential learning theory encourages educators to design activities that engage learners in hands-on experiences and provide opportunities for reflection to reinforce what has been learned. Consideration of learning styles is crucial in order to tailor teaching methods to different preferences.

When applying the ARCS model, teachers need to systematically integrate attention-grabbing elements, strategies to increase relevance, confidence-building activities and measures to ensure learner satisfaction, Keller, J. M. (2010). This includes tailoring content to learners' needs, stimulating interest, promoting confidence and providing a sense of accomplishment.

To summarize, the landscape of learning theories offers a rich palette of approaches, each with its own focus and principles. Social learning theory and experiential learning theory differ in their emphasis on observational learning versus hands-on experience and reflection. The ARCS model introduces a motivational lens that systematically addresses attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction.

It is beneficial for educators to recognize these differences so that they can carefully integrate the principles that align with their educational philosophy and the diverse needs of learners. Each theory offers unique insights that contribute to the mosaic of effective instructional design and enrich the learning experience.

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