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Reconstruction of John B. Watson's Behaviorism Principle in Indonesia's Education System in The Digital Age

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A B S T R A C T

This research reconstructs the core principles of John B. Watson's behaviorism in the context of Indonesia's educational system during the digital age. Modern education necessitates adaptability to technological advancements, prompting a reevaluation of traditional learning theories. The objective of this study is to investigate the relevance of Watson's psychological behaviorism in relation to contemporary digital learning and to assess its implementation in current teaching methodologies. Employing a qualitative library research approach, the study references a diverse range of literature, including books, journals, and research papers pertinent to behaviorism and educational technology. The results indicate that behaviorism, which focuses on stimulus–response interactions and reinforcement, continues to be effective for structured and quantifiable learning processes, thereby facilitating adaptive digital instruction. Nevertheless, it also uncovers certain limitations, such as a decrease in student creativity and an overreliance on external motivation. The study concludes that while behaviorism provides systematic and observable learning advantages, it should be combined with constructivist and humanistic theories to more effectively address emotional and cognitive aspects, ultimately improving learning outcomes within Indonesia's digital education framework.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, education is no longer foreign to human life. The majority of people view education as crucial. Changes in a person can occur through the process of education. In the field of education, some theories underlie the essence of education itself. Education should not be provided carelessly, and the basis used must have a positive impact on students (Rahmah & Aly, 2023). The development of the times is a continuous change, including in the field of education, which also keeps pace

with progress over time. Therefore, education is required to adapt to the changes that occur so as not to fall behind in current conditions (Susnita et al., 2024)

The significance of learning in human life encourages the spirit to continue developing aspects related to learning. One development in the world of education is the existence of learning theories. In the field of education, there are many learning theories that have been discovered by experts (Hartati et al., 2023). These theories are researched and developed in accordance with the stages of human development and the progress of the times, so that these theories can be applied appropriately (Hazmiyara et al., 2023). Throughout the history of education, various learning theories have provided guidance and a foundation for the learning process, one of which is the Behaviorism theory pioneered by (Mustika et al., 2024)

Behaviorism is an important educational theory in Indonesia. The behaviorist view considers humans to be passive entities, influenced by stimuli in their environment (Rahmah & Aly, 2023). This theory experienced rapid progress in the early 20th century, driven by famous individuals such as Ivan Pavlov, Edward L. Thorndike, and especially John B. Watson. Watson defined learning as a process of interaction between stimulus and response, emphasizing the importance of both components being observable and measurable. As a result, although he acknowledged that mental changes occur within a person during the learning process, he considered these factors insignificant for analysis due to their unobservable nature (Hadi, 2024).

However, reveals that behaviorism theory also faces criticism for neglecting students' cognitive and affective aspects. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the extent to which Watson's behaviorism theory is still relevant and how its principles can be adapted in today's technology-based learning design (Anindita, 2025). In addition, Juraganda (2025) states that behaviorist learning theory is one of the most promising and relevant approaches to be applied in advanced technology learning, such as deep learning in the context of mathematics learning. This theory emphasizes observable and measurable behavior, while highlighting that learning occurs in response to external stimuli, which are reinforced through reinforcement and repetition (Rogti, 2021).

Along with advances in science and technology, education systems around the world, including in Indonesia, are undergoing significant changes. Education is one of the main foundations for a country's development, and it continues to undergo transformation in line with the progress of the digital age (Westari, & Sumarsono, 2025). The digital revolution has brought about various innovations in the learning process that require a change in perspective on learning. Technology now serves as the primary tool in creating interactive, flexible, and learner-centered learning experiences. Based on this phenomenon, this study seeks to analyze in depth the principles of Behaviorism psychology proposed by John B. Watson and their relevance to the Indonesian education system in the digital age. This study also aims to explore the application of these principles in the context of modern learning and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

2. Methodology

The research method used was descriptive research with a literature analysis approach. Data for this study was collected through literature review and document analysis from primary sources, including articles, journals, books, and secondary literature discussing Behaviorism and its implementation in education (Nurul Azizatul, 2023). The research steps include identifying the basic concepts of Behaviorism, collecting relevant literature, analyzing the collected data, and compiling a report based on the research findings. The research results are analyzed qualitatively by organizing and analyzing the collected data. This study also considers ethical aspects, such as proper citation and maintaining objectivity in interpreting the research results. The limitations of this research are related to the availability and relevance of data in accordance with the accessibility of literature.

3. Results and Discussion

The Principles of Behaviorist Psychology According to John B. Watson

John Broadus Watson was born in Greenville on January 9, 1878, and died on September 25, 1958. He was an American psychologist. In 1908, he was appointed professor of experimental psychology and comparative psychology at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he also served as director of the psychology laboratory. Watson served as professor and director of the psychology laboratory at Johns Hopkins University from 1908 to 1920. John Watson is recognized as the founder of the behaviorist movement in the United States. His important work is titled “Psychology According to the Behaviorist View” (1913) (Hamruni et al., 2021a).

Behaviorism, recognized as the first formal school of psychology, was founded by J.B. Watson in 1913. He viewed psychology as part of the natural sciences, which are experimental and objective in nature. As a result, he believed that psychology should be studied through empirical methods, including observation, conditioning, testing, and verbal reports (Irfan et al., 2019.). Some important figures in behaviorism who developed the laws of learning include Edward L. Thorndike, Ivan Pavlov, Edwin Guthrie, and B.F. Skinner.

J.B. Watson claimed that psychology is the objective examination of human and animal behavior. An important element of Watson's contribution to psychology involved his efforts to distance the field from debates related to mentalistic perspectives. He argued that psychology is entirely objective. Watson fully embraced environmental determinism, which was the result of the strong influence of empiricism in the United States. According to Watson, the environment plays a much more important role than hereditary factors in determining behavior. Watson also argued that conditioning is the key to understanding behavior (Mardiyani, 2022).

Behaviorism is a school of thought in psychology that argues that the study of individual behavior should focus on activities that can be observed directly. As a result, this school of thought ignores the involvement of conscious elements or mental conditions that cannot be measured objective(Trihandayani & Haryati, 2025). Behaviorism emerged as a reaction to introspectionism, which investigated the human mind through subjective accounts, and psychoanalysis, which emphasized the hidden unconscious. Behaviorism asserts that only real, observable behavior is worthy of study because it can be measured, explained, and predicted. As it developed, this school of thought became known as learning theory, as its proponents believed that all human behavior, except for instinct, is the result of a learning process (Hamruni et al., 2021b).

The Application of John B. Watson's Behaviorism Theory in Education

The application of behaviorism theory in the educational framework is influenced by various factors, including learning objectives, subject matter characteristics, the nature of the learning process, and the availability of media and supporting resources. By taking these factors into account, the behavioristic approach can be used effectively to develop and reinforce desired behaviors in the educational environment (Miftahul Ulum, 2023a). Watson played an important role in the field of education. He emphasized the importance of education in shaping behavior. He stated that by applying targeted conditioning throughout the educational journey, a child can develop certain characteristics. (Harahap et al., n.d.)

The application of Behaviorism theory in educational practice has had a significant impact on the development of educational theory and practice to date. This theory emphasizes the growth of observable behavior as a result of the learning process (Eka Saputri & Irawan, 2025). In the stimulus-response model, learners are considered passive participants. To foster certain behaviors, methods such as repetitive practice or habituation are used, in which behavior is gradually reinforced through positive reinforcement and can be reduced through punishment. This is further clarified in a study conducted by (Nurul Azizatul Isnaini, 2023) which shows that the application of certain learning approaches, particularly the method of repeated practice in religious education, which focuses on understanding and practice, can greatly improve students' cognitive and psychomotor abilities, in accordance with Behaviorism theory.

Several principles that need to be considered when applying behaviorist learning theory, which include the following: The application of behaviorism in educational practice has had a significant impact on the development of educational theory and practice to date. This theory emphasizes the growth of observable behavior as a result of the learning process. In the stimulus-response model, learners are considered passive participants (Sanjaya et al., 2019). To foster certain behaviors, methods such as repetitive practice or habituation are used, in which behavior is gradually reinforced through positive reinforcement and can be reduced through punishment. This is further clarified in a study conducted by (Rahmah & Aly, 2023), which shows that the application of certain learning approaches, particularly the method of repetitive practice in religious education, which focuses on

understanding and practice, can greatly improve students' cognitive and psychomotor abilities, in accordance with the following Behaviorism theory:

1. The learning process is most effective when students are actively involved.
2. Learning concepts should be introduced in small, well-organized segments that require specific responses from students.
3. Feedback should be given immediately for each answer so that students can quickly assess the correctness of their responses.
4. Reinforcement should be given every time a student provides an answer, especially positive reinforcement, to motivate them to repeat their answers.
5. Teaching should not only cover theoretical aspects but also include practical examples that are relevant to the real world (Karunia et al., 2025).

The Importance of Behaviorist Learning Theory Introduced by John B. Watson in the Framework of Islamic Education in Indonesia

Indonesian Islamic education is based on Islamic principles as explained in the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as the perspectives of scholars and the historical context of Muslim communities. This education serves as a form of teaching that must be provided by teachers *(adults)* to young people who are going through their developmental stages, in accordance with Islamic principles, with the aim of shaping their character to reflect that of a Muslim. In conclusion, the objectives of Islamic education in Indonesia are outlined as follows:

1. Instilling Islamic character and personality in individuals
2. Teaching and guiding students in acquiring cultural knowledge
3. Teaching and guiding students in mastering Science and Technology (IPTEK)
4. Teaching and guiding students in developing relevant skills (Thorndike & Watson, 2023).

In today's technological era, innovation in technology is used to increase productivity and meet human needs. These technological advances are also being applied in the education sector, particularly in relation to the development of intelligent systems. Intelligent systems are control mechanisms that exhibit human-like intelligence and integrate artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence, often abbreviated as AI, represents advances in robotic technology, where decision-making capabilities can mimic human cognitive processes (Kirana et al., 2024).

Transformation of Education In the era of digitalization and globalization, education has undergone significant transformation, especially in terms of delivery and comprehension methods. Technological advances have penetrated the educational environment, transforming traditional learning models into formats that are more engaging, interactive, and universally accessible (Islami et al., 2025). Integration Technological advances, including digital devices, educational applications, and online platforms, have expanded the reach of education by providing access to learning resources from various regions around the world. This evolution has introduced innovative methods of information delivery, facilitated

distance learning, and encouraged collaboration among students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Sastrawati, 2024).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Behaviorism Theory in the Context of Digital Learning in Indonesia

Maydiantoro revealed that behaviorist learning theory emphasizes the importance of repetition and practice in the educational process. A person is more likely to master a particular action when they consistently do it, especially with support from others or by using effective learning strategies. However, this theory has several limitations, including ignoring internal elements such as emotions and motivation during learning, as well as ignoring cognitive factors that influence individual behavior (Miftahul Ulum, 2023). The advantages of behaviorism theory in general include: Measurable and systematic. Behaviorism allows teachers to directly observe changes in student behavior, especially through digital media that records every learning activity; Effective for mastering basic skills. Repeated practice and reinforcement are well-suited for training simple motor or cognitive skills, such as basic mathematics, reading, and memorization; Supports adaptive learning. Digital systems can adjust stimuli based on student responses, making the learning process more individualized and efficient (Giezka Khaleda Anindita, 2025).

Based on the principles of behaviorism as explained by (Schunk, 2012) One of the main strengths of behaviorist theory in digital learning lies in its ability to produce a systematic, measurable, and easily evaluated learning process. Digital technology enables the detailed recording of student responses, allowing for the objective observation of changes in learning behavior. Through reinforcement mechanisms such as scoring, badges, or automatic feedback, students are encouraged to repeat expected learning behaviors. This approach has proven effective in learning that emphasizes mastery of basic skills, memorization, and routine practice, as emphasized in the framework of classical behaviorist theory (Ratnasari et al., 2022).

As stated by Drijvers, Boon, and Van Reeuwijk, technology used in Islamic education has various roles, specifically: technology for doing, which refers to the use of technology as a substitute for traditional learning media; technology for training skills, where technology functions as a learning environment that has the potential to improve students' knowledge and skills; and technology for developing conceptual understanding, where technology is used to deepen students' understanding of ideas related to the material being examined (Hazmiyara, 2023). The relationship between E. Thorndike's behaviorist learning theory and educational technology is very close, covering the following elements:

1. Both highlight the evolution of students' attitudes and behaviors during their educational journey. The application of technology can reinforce changes in the learning process, as demonstrated by the results obtained during practical activities and the achievement of targeted learning objectives.
2. Technology helps educators create an interactive learning environment, thereby preparing students for successful learning.

3. Technology acts as a source or channel that encourages access to educational stimuli, allowing students to obtain materials and practice anytime and anywhere.
4. The presence of technology allows educators to offer repetition, both in content and practical exercises. The more often students read or review the material they have learned, the more knowledge and understanding they gain (Hazmiyara, 2023).

Utilizing behaviorist learning theory in education offers several benefits, including:

1. Encourage educators to be thorough and pay attention to all events during the learning process.
2. In teaching-learning interactions, educators should not rely solely on lectures, thereby enabling students to engage in independent learning. If students encounter difficulties or are unfamiliar with the material, they will be motivated to seek help from the teaching educator.
3. The behavior that educators wish to instill can be developed. Reinforcement is given through rewards for those who are deemed deserving, while those who do not meet the criteria are not given rewards.
4. Through the routine application of positive reinforcement and continuous practice, students' abilities and intellectuality can be realized to the fullest.
5. Educators offer structured learning resources that progress from simple to complex, breaking down learning objectives into key elements, which demonstrate students' proficiency in acquiring specific skills and maintaining consistent behavior in that area.
6. If the desired response is not achieved, the previous stimulus (*motivation*) can be replaced with a new one until the desired result is achieved.
7. Behaviorist theory is well suited to learning that requires practice and routines involving speed, proximity, and endurance.
8. This theory is also very beneficial for students who need guidance from educators, encouraging behaviors such as willingness to try again, imitation, and preference for immediate rewards (Muis et al., 2024).

The weaknesses of behaviorist learning theory include;

1. Students tend to be passive. In behaviorist-based learning, students mainly act as listeners and memorizers of information. The learning process is one-way, so students have little opportunity to think critically, express opinions, or develop creativity.
2. Learning motivation depends on external reinforcement. Students' motivation to learn often arises because of rewards or punishments from teachers. As a result, learning motivation is more external in nature, rather than coming from the students' own desires and awareness.
3. It ignores the emotional, spiritual, and creative aspects of human beings. This theory focuses on observable behavior, but pays less attention to students' feelings, intentions, moral values, and creativity. In education, especially Islamic education, the formation of spiritual and moral character is very important.

4. Lack of attention to the individual needs and interests of students. Because this approach emphasizes teacher control and structured activities, students' freedom of movement becomes limited. As a result, students' potential, interests, and personal talents do not develop optimally.
5. Too much focus on visible behavioral changes. The learning process is only directed at shaping observable behavior, without paying attention to understanding the meaning, reflection, or instilling moral and religious values behind that behavior.
6. High teacher dominance *(teacher-centered).* The teacher retains complete control over the learning process, while students become passive recipients. This creates student dependence on the teacher and hinders independent learning.
7. Not all subjects are suitable for the behaviorist approach. This approach is more effective for training routine or mechanical skills, but is less suitable for subjects that require conceptual understanding, reflection, or high creativity.
8. The learning process is less interactive and less enjoyable. Because communication is one-way and learning activities tend to be rigid, learning becomes less interesting and student participation declines. This can reduce the enthusiasm and active involvement of students (Muis et al., 2024b).

Other weaknesses in the theory that need to be considered include: This approach requires detailed preparation of teaching materials before the learning process begins. Not all subjects are suitable for this approach, and students tend to be passive, only listening and memorizing without deep understanding. The use of punishment for discipline can create an uncomfortable atmosphere and hinder students' motivation to learn. The dominance of the teacher's role reduces opportunities for students to learn independently and develop critical thinking. The lack of imagination and creativity development, as well as teacher-centered learning, can hinder students' social development and communication skills. The orientation towards measurable results often neglects other important aspects such as the development of values and non-academic skills (Munthe et al., 2024).

Suggestions for overcoming the weaknesses of Behaviorist theory can be combined with other learning theories, such as constructivism and humanism, which pay more attention to students' emotional, social, and creative aspects. This can also increase the effectiveness of learning in today's modern era (Mardianawati et al., 2022). Behaviorist theory should be applied to learning that involves repetition and practice, such as memorization or mathematical problem solving (Priatna et al., 2025).

4. Conclusion

Education is a fundamental aspect that continues to evolve with the changing times, requiring adaptation and innovation in the learning process. The behaviorist theory, pioneered by John B. Watson, plays a crucial role as a foundation for understanding

and managing student behavior through the stimulus-response principle. Although this theory is effective in learning that requires repetitive practice and reinforcement, such as mastering basic skills and memorization, behaviorism has also been criticized for ignoring the cognitive, emotional, and creative aspects of students.

In the digital age, the application of behaviorism theory in Indonesian education can increase the effectiveness of learning through the use of interactive and adaptive technology; however, this must still be combined with other holistic approaches such as constructivism and humanism. This is important so that learning does not only focus on observable behavior, but also accommodates the development of motivation, creativity, and spiritual values, especially in the context of Islamic education. Thus, the integration of behaviorism principles with modern technology and other learning approaches can create a more dynamic and inclusive education system that is ready to face the challenges of globalization and the digital revolution.

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