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CONSTRUCTIVE CLASSROOM: A COGNITIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY IN ELT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study, the extent of constructivist classroom characteristics that exist in ELT (English Language Teaching) Methodology. It is an attempt to explore the constructivist learning activities and evaluation strategies, whether they are useful to the students and the instructors. This paper elevates the contrast of traditional classrooms and constructivist classroom setup through the pedagogical approach. Multiple strategies for Constructivist Learning are elaborated to enhance student learning. Nevertheless, educators must meet the challenge mandated by reform efforts to produce highest quality of student learning. In order to be effective, educational reforms must be tied to the development of an enhanced curriculum that incorporates authentic assessment practices.

Keywords: ELT Methodology, Pedagogical Approaches, Constructivist Learning.

INTRODUCTION

For the past few decades, English Language Teaching has been experiencing a revolution. The goals of language learning have been changed since globalization. Memorization of facts has been recognized less important than developing skills for life-long learning. In line with these changes, the desire to understand the nature of language learning has also been enhanced. Currently, theoretical and empirical studies in education are favoring a knowledge construction model over the traditional information transmission model [5].

Educators are required to struggle to find ways to teach knowledge and skills pertaining to communication to the learners as they are highly necessary in the workplace. Further, they are responsible for students' outcomes and achievements. Constructivism can be an effective ELT instructional strategy. It involves collaboration between instructors, students and others (community members), tailored to needs and purposes of individual learners and features active, challenging, authentic and multi disciplinary learning [3].

'Constructive alignment' starts with the notion that the learner constructs his or her own learning through relevant learning activities. [2]. The teacher's job is to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The key is that, all components in the teaching system - the curriculum and its intended outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks - are aligned to each other. All are tuned to learning activities addressed in the desired learning outcomes.

Constructivist classroom is an unconventional and a highly radical pedagogical strategy. This methodology is contrastive to the traditional classroom in many ways. The features to facilitate constructivist pedagogical approach are summarized below:

1. Constructivist teachers (CTs) encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative. According to constructivist perspective, in order to tailor the instruction to the students' needs, the teacher should know what the students are thinking.

2. CTs adapt curriculum to address students' suppositions. They use raw data and primary sources, along with manipulative and physical materials. It is crucial that, teachers actively learn about their students' thinking and apply this knowledge to their lesson planning. Lesson planning flexibility is crucial for addressing student needs.

3. CTs inquire about students' understanding of concepts before sharing their own understandings of those concepts. Teachers withhold their notions to encourage students to develop their thoughts.

4. When framing tasks, CTs use cognitive terminology such as "classify," "predict", "create", "analyze" – these words affect the way of thinking and, ultimately the actions.

5. CTs allow student responses drive lessons, shift instructional strategies, and alter content, and allow wait time after posing questions. CTs nurture the students' natural curiosity through frequent use of Learning Cycle Model as shown in Figure 1.
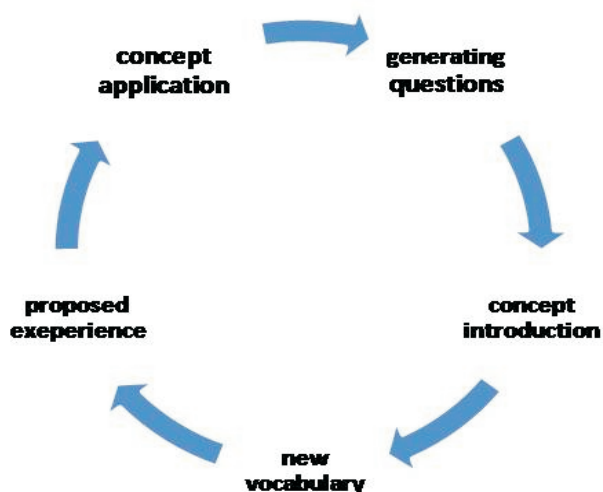
During concept application, students work on new approaches and search for their own understanding rather than follow other people's logic [7]. These descriptors serve as guides that may help other educators to adopt constructive teaching in ELT classroom.

Constructivist Classrooms vs. Traditional Classrooms

Constructivist Classrooms are completely different from Traditional Classrooms with respect to their curriculum, learning methodology, and assessment of students' learning. The growing interest for constructivist approach to learning, especially in language acquisition and teaching stems from the perceived need to alter educational practice from associational / behaviorist approach to the one that emphasizes the higher level knowledge construction needed to cope with the rapid expansion of information [1].

Traditional Classrooms vs Constructivist Classrooms

The Constructivist Classroom establishes a link between theory and practice. However, the variety in learning activities in the Constructivist Classroom should address the students with different learning styles such as preparing portfolios, debates, power point presentations, creative assignments, grammar projects, and story narration. Table 1 shows the characeritics of Traditional and Constructivist Classrooms [6].

Limitations

Though Constructivist Classroom is a cognitive approach, there are certain limitations. As it is a student-oriented system, chaos and noise may occur. Perhaps, not all students may participate equally in solving or understanding the process. To evade this, the learning activities should be student-centered and encourage creative and critical thinking and independent learning. However, the prospective teachers should develop an understanding of Constructivist Classroom management based on managing the classroom through engaging students in the tasks that arouse their interest rather than through forcing them [4].

Conclusion

The classroom management strategies compatible to Constructivist Classroom for ELT are not new, but they are helpful in creating a caring environment that facilitate learning. A change from Traditional Classroom to Constructivist Classroom suggests redefining of roles. The language teacher should be dynamic and effective to make new changes to facilitate construction of new knowledge.

Language learning and development is a collaborative activity that cannot be taught simply. For this, activities are supposed to be designed to compare their previous and

Source : Atkin and Karplus Cycle(1962)

Figure 1. The Learning Cycle Model

Traditional Classrooms	Constructivist Classrooms
Stern adherence to fixed curriculum is greatly valued.	Pursuit of student questions is highly valued.
Curricular activities rely heavily on text books and workbooks.	Curricular activities rely heavily on calculating resources.
Students are viewed as blank sheets on which information is imprinted by the teacher.	Students are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories about the world.
Teachers generally behave in a traditional educational manner giving out information to students.	Teachers generally behave in an interactive manner, mediating the environment for students.
Students primarily work alone.	Students primarily work in a group.

Source: Thirteen Ed Online (2004).

Table 1. Traditional Classrooms vs Constructivist Classrooms

present learning experiences. Therefore, it is up to the learner to construct his or her own understanding. Thus, it is obvious that constructivist classroom ignites zest of knowledge among the students. In future studies, constructivist classroom characteristics would be highly preferred and evaluation process needs to be made effective.

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