

# A Study of Constructivism as an essential approach for English Language Teaching and Learning

**Dipal Pandya**  
PhD Research Scholar  
Gujarat University  
Ahmedabad

**Abstract:** Constructivism has occurred in recent years as a prevailing approach in English Language Teaching. Among other innovative methods and approaches, constructivism has proved more helpful in the development of English communicative skills. The present paper studies constructivism as an innovative strategy in which the language learners construct their knowledge themselves through interaction with each-other on the basis of previous experiences. The paper offers the principles of constructivist theory and describes the characteristics of a constructivist teacher. Constructivism presents a radically different view about the process of education. This paper talks about constructivist language classrooms vision education as a meaning making development and centre their attention on the construction of knowledge and language by learners.

**Keywords:** Constructivism, Foreign Language Learning, Multilingual, Perspectives, Comprehension, ELT, Interdisciplinary classroom

English language has always been considered as a language of prospect which provides access to knowledge and power. The command over English is considered to be the most important element of access to employment possibilities and higher education especially in a multilingual country like India. There are different methods and approaches to English language teaching such as grammar translation method, direct method, structural approach, situational method, constructivism, audiolingual method, silent way, communicative language teaching etc. Further we discuss an over view of constructivism as it is an important approach to English language teaching and learning.

Since the 1970s, the studies by Piaget and other scholars have directed to the constructivist approach, which emphases on the background that learners transmit into learning situations. According to constructivism, the learners carry their personal experiences into the classroom and these experiences have a remarkable impression on students' views of how the things work. Learners enter to learning situations with a range of knowledge, feelings, thoughts, and skills, and this is where learning should begin. This existing knowledge within the student and is established as different individuals communicate with their fellow learners, teachers, and the environment. The learner's construct comprehension by making sense of their experiences and fitting their own ideas into certainty.

Constructivism has occurred in recent years as a prevailing approach in education. It has had a major intellectual influence on the development of teaching, fixed in the cognitive developmental of Piaget and in the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky. Constructivist concept has had an impact on the growth and application of technologically enhanced micro worlds and on linguistic investigation into literacy and narrative development constructivist learning has developed as a substantial approach to teaching.

Constructivism is widely toned as an approach in a diverse English language classroom. It is a way of learning and thinking and constructing new knowledge with the help of the existing. The students make sense of the material and how they can be used most efficiently. Constructivism is an innovative strategy in which the language learners construct their knowledge themselves through interaction with each-other on the basis of previous experiences. It is basically a learner-centered approach and teacher acts as a facilitator in language learning. Constructivism reflects that knowledge is not a 'thing' that can simply be given by the teacher to the students. Rather the knowledge is constructed by the learners through an active, mental process of development. According to Nyaradzo and Jennifer,

The constructivist view is touted as one of the leading theoretical positions in education. There is no universal definition of constructivism. For some it is a theory of learning, for others it is a theory of knowledge, and for others still it is a pedagogical theory. Additional views include theory of science, educational theory or an all-encompassing worldview. (Nyaradzo and Jennifer. 109)

A constructivist approach has not only been established to be effective language acquisition, but also overall participation and retaining of material. A classroom of varied learners with diverse language backgrounds [Indian classrooms] can be a great challenge for a classroom teacher. Learning English comprises cognitive processes, cultural processes and language processes. English Language Learners (ELL) stance a particular challenge to teachers as they represent such a wide range of academic abilities, English language abilities, and academic background. Moreover, cultural differences may affect the students' ability to be successful in the classroom. There has been a significant amount of research on the effectiveness of particular strategies or techniques in working with ELL students particularly in an inclusive setting.

A comprehensive ELL classroom is one in which ELL students and general education students learn in the same classroom with one teacher. This situation has many benefits for ELL students as well as many challenges. ELL students in an inclusive environment will be forced to use their English skills more regularly, especially with their peers. Simich-Dudgeon (1998) initiated that conversation amongst students, especially culturally and linguistically different students, can be a great help in language acquisition, comprehension, and reflection. Further, student shared talk can help the teacher understand the comprehension level of students and can help him or her to build on what students already know and make the material more pertinent to students. In an inclusive environment, ELL students are provided the opportunity to collaborate with students of all different English language proficiency levels. This may help ELL students to develop more complex vocabulary and notions. While there are contradicting opinions on the effectiveness of constructivism in ELL inclusive classrooms, there seem to be some areas of similarity. Constructivism suggests that students should be invested in the material being taught. Students should draw on their prior knowledge and background to relate to the material and make it personally relevant. As students do this, they are more invested and have a deeper level of understanding. Teachers are then accountable for ensuring that they (the teachers) have a basic thoughtful of students' prior knowledge and for redirecting or refining this prior knowledge and further developing it so that deeper and more complex concepts can be understood by the student within their own context.

The following are the principles of constructivist theory:

- 1 Learning consists of both constructing meaning and constructing systems of meaning. Learning is coated.
- 2 Learning occurs in the mind. Physical activity is not enough alone.
- 3 Vygotsky believed that language and learning are inextricably intermeshed.
- 4 Learning is contextual. The learner cannot be isolated from the situations and environments in which he/she is pertinent.
- 5 Knowledge is a significant feature for learning. It is the basis of structure and meaning-making.
- 6 Learning is not spontaneous, it takes time. The learner goes over information, ponders them, uses them, practices and experiments.
- 7 Motivation is a very necessary module, because it causes the learner's sensory device to be activated.

The characteristics of a constructivist teacher are as follows:

- 1 Teacher is one of the resources for the learners but not necessarily the primary source of information.
- 2 The teacher engages students in experiences and uses students' responses in the planning of next lessons and seeks expansion of learners' initial possessions.
- 3 The teacher encourages questions and discussion among students by asking open-ended questions.
- 4 The teacher encourages the learners' initiatives and lets go of the classroom control when required.
- 5 The teacher facilitates clear communication from students in writing and verbal responses, from the point of view that communication comes from one's deep structural understanding of the concepts being communicated.

Constructivist theory proposes that social communication plays an important part in knowledge construction. The knowledge is not transported from teachers, but accomplished in a particular social-cultural context, with others', containing teachers' and peers', help, using necessary learning materials and by way of gist construction. Therefore, interactional learning is a noteworthy suggestion by constructivist theory. In teaching intercultural communication, teachers can establish students to carry out collective learning in a simulated situation. Classroom activities such as role-playing through condition and goals, role-playing through debate and discussion, simulation activities and managing, enable students to personally experience the process of intercultural communication, even cultural embarrassment and shock. Such communication helps students to achieve concrete communicative skills in active intercultural circumstances. Besides, classroom discussion can provide students with opportunities to express their ideas and attitudes towards target culture, make their own judgment and interpretation of cultural phenomena, and finally, construct intercultural communicative competence on their own creativity.

Hence, constructivism has launched a reflective improvement in the field of English language teaching. Under the guidance of constructivist theory, teachers must abandon the old teaching methods, converting from the traditional teaching style in which teachers imparting knowledge into students' heads, to the new teaching mode in which students construct meaning initiatively. Teachers' roles change from expert and knowledge teller into the coordinator of activities and facilitator of meaning construction.

#### Work Cited:

- Aljohani, Muna. "Principles of "Constructivism" in Foreign Language Teaching". *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*. Vol. 7. No. 1 2017.
- Brown, H. D. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Longman, Inc. 2000.
- CAN. Tuncer. "Learning and Teaching Languages Online: A Constructivist Approach." *Novitas-Royal*. Vol. 3. 2009.

Liu, Lin & Ying Zhang. "The Application of Constructivism to the Teaching of Intercultural Communication. English Language Teaching." *Canadian Center of Science and Education* Vol. 7. No. 5. 2014.

Mvududu, Nyaradzo & Jennifer Thiel-Burgess. "Constructivism in Practice: The Case for English Language Learners." *International Journal of Education*. Vol. 4. No. 3. 2012.

Piaget, J. *The Origin of Intelligence in Children*. New York: International Universities Press. 1966.

Sharma, Hemant Lata & Poonam. "Constructivist Approach for Teaching English: Making Sense of Paradigm Shift from the Traditional Approach." *International Journal of Science and Research*. Vol. 5. 2016.

Skehan, P. *A Cognitive Approach to Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998.

Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 1978.

