



Constructivism Learning Theory: Implications to Language Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Constructivism is one of the renowned theories in education. Its contributions to learning, and by extension, to language teaching and learning are enormous. It recognises the contributions of both teacher and the environment, in learning. Most importantly, constructivism believes in the active roles of learner in the learning process. It believes that learners should not be dormant in learning procedures. In this paper, the authors discuss the tenet of constructivism, the role of learner. They juxtapose the traditional theory of learning with that of constructivism and discuss the implications of constructivism to language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language, Teaching and Learning, Constructivism Theory.

Introduction

Jean Piaget renowned educational psychologist is known to be a good figure and one of the fathers of constructivism school of thought. Piaget emphasized the importance of social interaction in both teaching and learning. He posits that learning is contextual, constructed, active and personal. Karimova (2020) submits that in Piaget's constructivism, the focus tends to shift from the teacher to the students. The classroom is no longer a place where the teacher pours knowledge into the passive students. The constructivist believes that in learning the student factor is germane and his experience should be taken into consideration. In Constructivism, the teacher functions more as a facilitator who coaches, mediates, prompts and helps students develop and assess their understanding and thereby aids their learning. Joydip (2018) is of the opinion that in Piaget constructivism learning theory, the teacher plays a limited role. As a dispenser of knowledge, he submits that the teacher's role is to guide, facilitate, coach, provoke and co-explore in ways that allows the learner to engage in critical and creative thinking. Constructivism is based on the belief that new knowledge is constructed on the basis of prior knowledge. The previous knowledge or prior knowledge that learners bring with them to the teaching and learning situation in the classroom should be brought to the forefront. The constructivists consider knowledge as consensual and therefore emphasize the importance of discussion, collaborative learning, social negotiation and interaction.

Tenets of Constructivism

Constructivism is an educational theory that process learning as active, constructive process where learners build their new knowledge on their prior experiences and interactions with the environment. Driver (1988) listed the following six features of the constructivist perspective as it relates to schooling.

1. Learners are purposeful, active and responsible for their own learning. They bring their prior experiences and knowledge to all learning situations.
2. The process of learning is regarded as active in the sense that it entails activities on the part of the learner.
3. Knowledge is not a thing that exists out there but it is personally and socially constructed
4. It is not only the learners who bring their prior experiences to learning situations. Teachers also bring in their prior conceptions to the learning situations. The prior conceptions are consanguine not only to the scholastic subjects they teach but also to their assumptions and view points about teaching and learning.
5. Teaching does not involve mere transmission of knowledge. It involves the organisation of the learning situation, tasks and opportunities which facilitate the construction of knowledge.
6. Curriculum is not a given task that is to be a schedule of learning tasks, materials and resources by virtue of which learners construct their knowledge.



Ebo (2023) agrees with Driver (1988) when he gives the following as the key principles of Constructivism.

1. Active Learning - Learners are actively engaged in the learning process. They are not just passive recipients of information.
2. Prior knowledge: New knowledge is constructed based on existing knowledge and previous experiences.
3. Social interaction: Social interactions with peers, teachers and the environment plays a vital role in learning.
4. Zone of Proximal Development: There is a range of tasks that a learner can perform with the help of a more knowledgeable others.
5. Scaffolding: Teachers or more skilled peers provide support or guidance to help learners achieve higher levels of understanding.
6. Meaningful Learning: Learners connect new information to existing knowledge, making the learning experience more meaningful and memorable.

Agola (2004), while discussing the Constructivism in Language Arts/Education curriculum submits that the materials learned by students are not prescribed. They are generated by the joint efforts of the teacher and the students through inquiry. There are no set textbooks and students have the liberty to pick reading materials based on their taste and experience. Agola (2004) agrees with Driver (1988) when he says that the teacher is primarily a facilitator, rather than the 'guru' on a stage. All students' responses are respected and there are neither completely right nor wrong answers.

The constructivist's teaching methods and teaching are direct opposite to the traditional methods and techniques.

The Traditional Theories of Language Teaching and Learning

Traditional teaching methods focus on the teacher as the only source and dispenser of knowledge. It embraces the idea of a teacher - centred method involving face to face interactions mainly from the teacher to the students. Igor (2002) sees traditional teaching methods of instruction in which the teacher transmits knowledge to students through lectures, reading or other forms of presentation.

Therefore, the traditional method of acquiring, a teacher directs students to learn through memorization and recitation techniques thereby not developing their critical thinking and problem solving and decision making skills. Ebo (2023) submits the following as the principles guiding traditional approach to teaching.

1. Students the traditional classrooms are passive, they listen and react to the teacher's direct instructions.
2. The teacher using the traditional approach is all in all. He dictates, and serves as the reservoir of knowledge.
3. Learners work in isolation. They don't have freedom to express their will and interest. They are restricted and limited to classroom situation. They are passive.
4. Learning process is through role memorization and repetition, textbooks are the resources.
5. The knowledge attained by the learner depends on the knowledge of the instructors

The Traditional Classroom	The Constructivist's Classroom
Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.	Curriculum emphasizes big concepts beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.
Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.	Pursuit of student questions and interest is valued.
Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.	Materials include primary sources c material and manipulative materials.
Learning is based on repetition.	Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows
Teachers disseminate information to students; students are recipients of knowledge.	- Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.
Teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority	Teacher's role is interactive, rooted in negotiation.
Knowledge is seen as inert.	Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.
Students work primarily alone	Students work primarily in groups.
Assessment is through testing, correct answers	Assessment includes student work: observations, and points of view, as we as tests. The process is as important as the product.

(http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/constructivism/index_sub1.html)

The Characteristics of Constructivism in Language Class Situation

Diva (2013) citing Seigel (2004) identifies some characteristics of constructivism theory as they relate to language teaching. They are as follows;



1. Constructed - The students learn how to construct the meanings of things or words through assimilating prior knowledge and new one to get new understanding.
2. Reflective - The students reflect what they already know to their real life.
3. Collaborative - Constructivism is the theory of learning to construct the meaning of certain word by discussing with the peers or others in group discussions.
4. Inquiry Based - Study of Constructivism to find the solutions is the problem.
5. Evolving - Evolving is the temporary way to integrate the knowledge that is already gained to reduce invalidity.

Implementing Constructivist Approaches in Language Teaching

As it relates to language teaching and learning, the principles of Constructivism cannot be underestimated. The following approaches are suggested by Agola (2004) and corroborated by Ebo (2023);

1. Student Centered Learning: Language lessons should be directed or centered on students. The lesson planning and preparation should take into consideration the needs of the learners. Students should be allowed to take active role in their learning process and make choices in their educational journey.
2. Authentic and Contextualized Learning: Language lessons should be connected to real life situations and contexts that are relevant to the learners. Textbooks and other materials including the topics to be learnt should not be alien to the life situations of the students. Learning tasks should be applicable to the experience of students. This enhances their understanding.
3. Project-based and Inquiry-based learning should be used: This enhance their inquisitiveness and it promotes active engagement. The Language teacher should design learning activities that involve students in projects and investigations. This fosters critical thinking. Problem solving and collaboration.
4. Collaborative Learning: The Language teacher should form group works and peer discussions. Collaboration helps learners see different perspectives and construct knowledge collectively
5. Scaffolding and Guidance: The Language teacher should provide appropriate support and guidance to learners as they face and

tackle challenging tasks. Strong ones should be paired with the weak ones under the through supervision of the language teacher. The support should be gradually withdrawn as learners become more proficient.

6. Assessment for Learning: The Language tutor should use formative assessment methods that focus on understanding and progress. He should understand learners thinking processes and adjust instruction accordingly.
7. Integration of Technology: The introduction of technology is helping not in a small way in language teaching. The Language teacher should make use of the available technology to provide interactive, dynamic and personalized learning experiences.

Recommendations

Having considered the tenets of Constructivism as they relate to education and specifically to language teaching, the authors therefore give the following recommendations.

1. The Language class should be participatory. The teacher of language should allow learners participate actively during language lessons.
2. Instructional materials that relate with student's prior knowledge and experiences should be adopted in language lessons.
3. Both weak and strong students should be accommodated during language lesson - There shouldn't be segregation during language lessons.
4. Tasks during language lesson should be those that promote the critical thinking of students.
5. Language tutors should not be the alpha and Omega in class. Opportunities should be provided to learners to think and try to resolve issues.

Conclusion

Constructivism places learners at the centre of learning activities. Their active role in constructing knowledge is appreciated and acknowledge. The Language teachers can make use of this approach in their classes, as it will foster meaningful, Contextualized and collaborative learning that will enhance and promote the understanding of their students.

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