

# Applying Social Constructivism in English Language Curriculum

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### Abstract

*This paper talks about the key concepts underlying social constructivism and its theoretical backgrounds, along with some practical suggestions for designing English language curriculum. Social Constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasis the collaborative nature of learning. Vygotsky has argued that knowledge is constructed by the learner through social interaction and with the help of the society. Meaning and the rules of application of words and other factors of language is regulated by culture and hence the society. This approach looks upon the learner as a social being who interacts with everyone around in the environment from birth and goes beyond the existing level to higher levels of ability.*

### Key Words

**Social Constructivism- English Language Curriculum- Collaborative Learning**

### Introduction

Along with other aspects, the psychological factors too have to be considered while designing the curriculum. Modern psychologists up hold intra personal intelligence and inter personal intelligence as part of human intelligence. Language learning must enable the learners to achieve emotional equilibrium and bear psychological and social pressures. Language learning must provide opportunities free expression of an individual. Through free expression, the learner can develop interpersonal skills, establish social relations and shape his philosophy of life.

Lev Vygotsky's point of view was that acquisition and participation were synergistic strategies in learning situations. Aspects of participation involved teaching in contexts that could be meaningful to students based on their personal and social history, negotiating, class discussions, small group collaborative learning with projects and tasks, and valuing meaningful activity over correct answers.

## The Theoretical Background of Social Constructivism

The concept of learning has undergone a series of revolutionary changes in the twentieth century. Early learning theorists, attempted to explain learning in terms of some form of 'conditioning'. Part of the problem with early behaviourist theories was that they concentrated almost exclusively upon the nature of incoming stimuli and different kinds of responses. However, this proved to be of limited value in accounting for the enormous range of human actions.

In contrast to behaviourism, cognitive psychologists are interested in the mental processes that are involved in learning. In recent years, cognitive psychology has had a considerable influence on language teaching methodology. In a cognitive approach, the learner is seen as an active participant in the learning process, using various mental strategies.

Constructivist movement is an extension of the cognitive movement. The contribution of thinkers like Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky helped to create a new awareness in this field. The main features of constructivism can be listed as below:

- Learners construct new knowledge from authentic experience
- Learning happens as a part of the attempt, to find solution to the problems faced by the learner.
- Learning is, construction of knowledge
- The learner assimilates the knowledge, he/she has constructed to his/ her cognitive structure.
- Intellectual and linguistic development happens through social interaction

### Social Constructivism

Lev Vygotsky put forwarded the theory, Social constructivism, in the late 1970's. Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, defines it as :

Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge that applies the general philosophical constructivism into social settings, wherein groups construct knowledge for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings. When one is immersed within a culture of this sort, one is learning all the time about how to be a part of that

culture on many levels. It is emphasised that culture plays a large role in the cognitive development of a person. Its origins are largely attributed to Lev Vygotsky.

Cognitive approach emphasizes the importance of what the learner brings to any learning situation, as an active meaning maker and problem solver. Social interactions emphasize the dynamic nature of the interplay between the teachers. Social Constructivism, according to Vygotsky, emphasizes that learning takes place through interactions with other students, teachers, and the world-at-large. The learners, teacher and the tasks provide a view of learning as arising from interactions with other. Since learning never takes place in isolation, it should also be recognizes the importance of learning environment or context within which the learning takes place. There are four key sets of factors that influence the learning process: teacher, learners, tasks and contexts. However, more of these factors exist in isolation; they all interact as a part of a dynamic process.

Teachers select tasks that reflect their beliefs about teaching and learning. Learners interpret tasks with regard to their meaningfulness in their life, as they are

individuals. The task is therefore the interface between teacher and learners. Teachers and learners also interact with each other. These three elements teacher, task and the learner, are in this way a dynamic equilibrium.

Social constructivists see reading, like learning, as social practice. The social context affects when you read, what you read, where you read, whom you read with and, of course, why and how you read. Interacting with text can involve practices as diverse as reading instructions, scanning a newspaper, or reading an academic article. Social constructivist theory emphasizes the need to encourage students to create their own meaning from text, rather than to impose a teacher's interpretation of the meaning upon them. Of course, teachers may help as resources to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap that students experience in reading a text.

Some strategies like asking questions, providing a context and purpose for reading, modelling, integrating the four major skills, creating awareness of the author behind the text, using peer-scaffolding, setting students free etc. are proposed here to show how the social constructivist theory can be translated into action for teaching reading in an ESL classroom.

Social Constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning. The two important aspects of the learning process are the sharing of ideas and negotiation among the learners. These happen in collaborative learning. The group members share their responsibilities in a learning activity. All the learners share the result of learning. The teacher discusses the tasks to be undertaken and the duties of each member, within the groups. The teacher encourages the learner to find out new tasks and to undertake them. As a result, it promotes the ability for divergent thinking.

### Conclusion

Language plays a crucial role in sustaining and reforming its culture. Moreover, the vocational opportunities provided by the modern world have to be made use of. Hence, it is essential to have sufficient spoken and written skills to present ideas forcefully and effectively in all walks of life. It can be said that in order to achieve the aims and objectives of English, application of social constructivism in the Curriculum seems as very essential.

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