A Comparative Study of the Effectiveness of Constructivist Method and Traditional Method in Teaching English to the Learners in India

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Abstract: English is considered as a language of opportunity which provides access to knowledge, power and material possessions. In most of the communication, at international level, English language is being used for exchanging ideas and concepts. Therefore, command over English language is considered to be the most important determinant of access to employment possibilities and higher education especially in a multilingual country like India where, in general, most of the times, during teaching-learning process, conventional teaching approach is used in classrooms that provides students fewer opportunities to master various language skills. In order to deal with this situation, new innovative strategies are being used. Among these strategies Constructivist approach is one such strategy which may prove to be helpful in developing the basic communication skills i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing which are required to communicate in English language. Although Constructivism is a concept that has been embraced by many teachers over the past 15 years, the meanings that are attached to this term are varied and often inadequately understood. Educators need to have a sound understanding of what Constructivism means and own the appropriate skills to use it proficiently and effectively. The purpose of this study therefore is to compare Constructivist and Traditional Teaching Approaches in enhancing students' use of appropriate English language learning strategies. To achieve this purpose, in this study an attempt is made to discuss in detail the strategy of Constructivism, its historical itinerary and theoretical groundwork and how it helps in nurturing the basic communication skills of the English language learners and speakers in India.

Keywords: Constructivism, conventional, effectiveness, Scaffolding, behavioral modeling, Cognitive modeling, Learning Environments

Introduction: “Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.” ~ Abigail Adams

Learning is one of the most important ongoing process that starts right from the first breath one takes to one’s last breadth. It is therefore a continuing complex process; as all things have evolved, so has learning. But at times we notice that both the teachers as well as the psychologists seem to be bothered about the question of how to facilitate learning which is the most complex of all human behavior. A learner learns only when he is internally inspired to learn. It is this self-inspiration that enables him to explore and learn different things. Still there are some factors like family background, parents’ qualification, socio-economic status, standards of the peer groups, and many more that contribute to one's acquisition of knowledge and education. Technically speaking Education is the process by which the society deliberately transmits the accumulated, knowledge, skill and values from one generation to another. It is a beam of light in a mind full of darkness which paves the way for the students to achieve their goals and dreams. Education is a wide concept which has a strong effect upon pupil’s success. So our teaching methods cover four learning modalities i.e. Kinesthetic (moving), Visual (seeing), Auditory (hearing) and Tactile (touching) which provide equal opportunities to all the students. Sometimes learning seems to be very easy and convenient but in most of the cases specially in terms of learning English as a foreign language, it becomes a challenging for the learners to compete with the growing demands of the society. In most of the schools, a teacher has to teach a large class in which sixty to seventy students learn together. As a result, the teacher has no opportunity to give individual attention to all students in a large class while using traditional learning method. Hence, students fail to have command over their skills of conversing, expressing, comprehending as well as composing in English language especially by adopting traditional learning method. Constructivist learning method thereby may be used as instructional approach to improve the LSRW i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills of the students.

English Language and Teaching Methods: “Language is considered to be the key to one's own imprisonment.”

Language being a tool of communication is important because it gives stimuli and frees an individual from
the constraints of not only dealing with appearances but provides a more complex yet flexible cognition too. It also gives one the ability to deal with abstract things (Brunner, 1978). Brunner (1966), states that there are four main features which can be considered when teaching a language. He puts them under the following headings:

Predisposition to learning
The structure and form of knowledge
Sequence and
Reinforcement.

“In learning, the teacher is expected to arouse the learners’ curiosity to learn and also specify how the structured knowledge should be disseminated and evaluated.” In the 21st century, English has become the dominant global language and can be established that today English is used as a medium of communication by more non-native than native speakers (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997). Therefore the teaching of English has become a feature of policies and practices in education systems around the world. If Graddol's (2006) predictions are correct then we are currently at a global peak among the number of people learning English as a subject: 2 billion learners worldwide. It is hard to find a country which does not include English in schooling in some form; if not as a subject in the state curriculum, then almost certainly available through private schools and other institutions. As the English language is getting consolidated as a global language, it is indispensable for all the countries to teach and learn English. Otherwise, it is difficult to keep pace with the development in the world. In particular, it is very essential for a multilingual and developing country like India to learn this global language. Hence, to make the learning of English effective and successful a teacher should consider the following aims and objectives. They are to enable the students:

- listen and understand English when someone speaks it at a normal conversational speed
- use English for communication
- read English and understand the content
- write English for communication
- enjoy Simple poems
- develop interest in library reading and listening

In order to develop these skills, new innovative strategies are being used. Among these strategies Constructivist approach is one such strategy which may prove helpful in developing the basic communication skills i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) which are required to communicate in the English language. Constructivist approach teaching methods are based on constructivist learning theory. This learning theory says that all knowledge is constructed from a base of prior knowledge. Children are not a blank slate and knowledge cannot be imparted without the child making sense of it according to his or her current conceptions. Therefore, children learn best when they are allowed to construct a personal understanding based on experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. The purpose of this study is to develop an insight into the paradigm shift from conventional to new strategy i.e. constructivism and also highlight the utility of its five elements (5E) – Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate. To achieve this purpose, in this paper an attempt has been made to discuss in detail the strategy of constructivism, its historical itinerary and theoretical underpinnings and how it helps in nurturing basic communication skills of the English language.

What Does Constructivism Mean? Constructivism is a learning theory found in psychology which explains how people might acquire knowledge and learn. It therefore has direct application to education. The theory suggests that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Constructivism is not a specific pedagogy. Piaget's theory of Constructivist learning has had wide-ranging impact on learning theories and teaching methods in education and is an underlying theme of many education reform movements. Constructivism activates the learner's inborn curiosity about the real world to observe how things work. It is centered on the belief that cognition is the result of —mental construction. Hence, it provides academic freedom to them. They use their own learning strategies by adapting different approaches of Constructivism. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging learners to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. The teacher makes sure that he understands the learners' pre-existing conceptions, and guides the activity to address them and then build on them. Constructivism modifies role of teacher that he facilitate and help them to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce a
series of facts.

**Perspectives of Constructivist Learning:** Constructivism is a theory of learning to help the learners to construct something based on their own understanding by assimilating prior knowledge and new ones. According to Kanselaar (2002) there are two major constructivist perspectives. They are Jean Piaget from Switzerland and Lev Vygotsky from Russia.

**Jean Piaget Cognitive Constructivism As Individual Perspective (1896-1980):** Piaget is a Swiss psychologist who describes knowledge development from a holistic and cognitive perspective, emphasizing that there are many channels that are used to construct understanding e.g. reading, listening, exploring, and experiencing (Savery & Duffy, 1995). Constructivism tries to help the students as active learners while behaviorism is in opposite. In the information processing, the learner perceives stimuli, encodes them into useful information then stores the information for later use while in the Constructivism tries to assimilate the previous knowledge and the new one to be the current problem solving. In this case, cognitive Constructivism tries to make a situation in which learning as the result of constructing based on individual perspective and his or her previous knowledge. Overall, Piaget's cognitive Constructivism focuses on how the individual processes and relates new information to information that already in mind.

**Lev Vygotsky Social Cultural Constructivism (Socio-Constructivist Perspective (1896-1934):** Social Constructivism classroom is rooted from Vygotsky's psychological theory that knowledge is not transferred from teachers to students but constructed in the students' mind. In this case, the focus of knowledge doesn't come from teacher to students but how the students can construct by their own selves. Here is the list of some characteristics of social Constructivism classroom:

- The goal is emphasized in collaborative meaning.
- The role of teacher is as facilitator who monitors the students' thinking.
- The social interaction can occur in classroom.
- The curriculum that is applied in classroom can absorb the interest of the students and then assimilate it with their own cultures.

From the characteristics of social Constructivism, it is important to emphasize to the social environments not within the individual's mind. Moreover, it is also important that the teacher and peers also have the significant role in the application itself.

**Activities Promoting Constructivist Learning In Classroom:** In the constructivist classroom, students work primarily in groups and learning and knowledge are interactive and dynamic. There is a great focus and emphasis on social and communication skills, as well as collaboration and exchange of ideas. This is contrary to the traditional classroom in which students work primarily alone, learning is achieved through repetition, and the subjects are strictly adhered to and are guided by a textbook. Some activities encouraged in constructivist classrooms are:

**Experimentation:** Students individually perform an experiment and then come together as a class to discuss the results.

**Research Projects:** Students research a topic and can present their findings to the class.

**Field Trips:** This allows students to put the concepts and ideas discussed in class in a real-world context. Field trips would often be followed by class discussions.

**Films:** These provide visual context and thus bring another sense into the learning experience.

**Class Discussions:** This technique is used in all of the methods described above. It is one of the most important distinctions of constructivist teaching methods.

**Campus Wikis:** These provide learners with a platform for curating helpful learning resources. Constructivism avoids direct instruction. Instead, the teacher guides students in discovering knowledge on their own. Constructivism theory states that there is no knowledge independent of the knower, only the knowledge that they create for themselves based on the information that they obtain from the world around them. Instead of having a finite answer, Constructivism teaches that the learner creates the answer as they see it. Since students begin with existing knowledge as the starting point, teachers are less like dispensers of information and more like learning guides that allow students to make their own conclusions. This method of teaching tends to be more tolerant of different cultures and encourages diversity rather than other theories.

**Advantages of Constructivist Learning:** Constructivist teaching places more emphasis on
sensory input, something that has long been overlooked by many traditional educators. Learners aren't just passive participants in the classroom; they need to be actively involved in "the bigger picture" of the world around them. It is quite effective for those students who have special needs like sensory processing disorder or those on the Autistic spectrum. Some of these students have brilliant minds, but simply can't be reached through traditional methods. Rather than simply doing out information, a teacher is more of a guide for a learning journey and actively participates in the learning process with the students as well as encouraging them to challenge ideas. Thus we may conclude that Constructivist method of teaching English is really effective as by using this learner-centered method, Students are actively involved, rather than passively absorbing information;
The learning environment is democratic, the teacher is not seen as an authority figure as much as a learning guide;
The activities are interactive and student-centered instead of being lesson-centered;
A teacher facilitates activities in which students are responsible for their own learning and are autonomous from one another.

Teacher's Role in Constructivist Learning: In the constructivist classroom, the teacher's role is to prompt and facilitate discussion. Thus, the teacher's main focus should be on guiding students by asking questions that will lead them to develop their own conclusions on the subject. According to David Jonassen, one of the distinguished Professor of Learning Technologies at the University of Missouri, there are three roles for teachers who use the constructivist learning theory in their class.

Modeling: Jonassen describes Modeling as the most commonly used instructional strategy in CLEs. Two types of modeling exist: behavioral modeling of the overt performance and cognitive modeling of the covert cognitive processes. Behavioral modeling in Constructivist Learning Environments demonstrates how to perform the activities identified in the activity structure. Cognitive modeling articulates the reasoning (reflection-in-action) that learners should use while engaged in the activities.

Coaching: For Jonassen the role of coach is complex and inexact. She acknowledges that a good coach motivates learners, analyzes their performance, provides feedback and advice on the performance and how to learn about how to perform, and provokes reflection and articulation of what was learned. Moreover, she posits that coaching may be solicited by the learner. Students seeking help might press a "How am I Doing?" button. Or coaching may be unsolicited, when the coach observes the performance and provides encouragement, diagnosis, directions, and feedback. Coaching naturally and necessarily involves responses that are situated in the learner's task performance (Laffey, Tupper, Musser, & Wedman, 1997).

Scaffolding: Scaffolding is a more systemic approach to supporting the learner, focusing on the task, the environment, the teacher, and the learner. Scaffolding provides temporary frameworks to support learning and student performance beyond their capacities. The overriding goal of the constructivist educator is to stimulate thinking in learners that results in meaningful learning, deeper understanding and transfer of learning to real world contexts. To accomplish this goal, a constructivist framework leads teachers to incorporate strategies that encourage knowledge construction through primarily social learning processes, in which students develop their own understanding through interactions with peers and the teacher.

Mode of Assessment in a Constructivist Classroom: Traditionally, assessment in the classrooms is based on testing. In this style, it is important for the student to produce the correct answers. However, in constructivist teaching, the process of gaining knowledge is viewed as being just as important as the product. Thus, assessment is based not only on tests, but also on observation of the student, the student's work, and the student's points of view. Some assessment strategies include:

Oral Discussions: The teacher presents students with a "focus" question and allows an open discussion on the topic. This can be done by giving oral drills to the students like Just a Minute (JAM) or by extempore.

KWL(H) Chart (What we know, What we want to know, What we have learned, How we know it) This technique can be used throughout the course of study for a particular topic, but is also a good assessment technique as it shows the teacher the progress of the student throughout the course of study.

Mind Mapping: In this activity, students list and categorize the concepts and ideas relating to a topic.
**Hands-On Activities:** These encourage students to manipulate their environments or a particular learning tool. Teachers can use a checklist and observation to assess student success with the particular material.

**Pre-Testing:** This allows a teacher to determine what knowledge students bring to a new topic and thus will be helpful in directing the course of study.

**Story Map:** A story map is a strategy that uses a graphic organizer to help students learn the elements of a book or story. By identifying story characters, plot, setting, problem and solution, students read carefully to learn its details.

**Fishbone:** This helps the students in analyzing and exploring many aspects or effects of a complex topic, helping the student to organize their thoughts in a simple, visual way.

**Traditional Teaching V/S Constructivist Teaching Method:** The Traditional Classroom generally begins with parts of the whole and emphasizes basic skills. There is a strict adherence to fixed curriculum. The instructor in such learning classrooms imparts knowledge and assumes directive and authoritative role while the student is mere a passive receiver and works individually. The basic teaching aids used by the instructor are the textbooks and workbooks and the knowledge imparted via this methodology is generally inert and teacher-centered. On contrary to it, the Constructivist Classroom begins with the whole – expanding to parts. It aims at pursuit of student questions and their interests. The instructor in such learning classrooms interacts and negotiates with students. Here the knowledge of both the teacher and the student turns dynamic and changing with teaching-learning experiences. Here, the learning is interaction – building on what students already know. They work in groups and their assessment is done via student works, observations, points of view and tests. Here the process is as important as the product. The Traditional Classroom often looks like a one-person show with a largely uninvolved learner. Traditional classes are usually dominated by direct and unilateral instruction. Traditional approach followers assume that there is a fixed body of knowledge that the student must come to know. Students are expected to blindly accept the information they are given without questioning the instructor (Stofflett, 1998). The teacher seeks to transfer thoughts and meanings to the passive student leaving little room for student-initiated questions, independent thought or interaction between students (VAST, 1998). Even the in activities based subjects, although activities are done in a group but do not encourage discussion or exploration of the concepts involved. This tends to overlook the critical thinking and unifying concepts essential to true science literacy and appreciation (Yore, 2001). This teacher-centered method of teaching also assumes that all students have the same level-of background knowledge in the subject matter and are able to absorb the material at the same pace (Lord, 1999). In contrast, Constructivist or student-centered learning poses a question to the students, who then work together in small groups to discover one or more solutions (Yager, 1991). Students play an active role in carrying out experiments and reaching their own conclusions. Teachers assist the students in developing new insights and connecting them with previous knowledge, but leave the discovery and discussion to the student groups (VAST, 1998). Questions are posed to the class and student teams work together to discuss and reach agreement on their answers, which are then shared with the entire class. Students are able to develop their own understanding of the subject matter based on previous knowledge, and can correct any misconceptions they have. Both teaching styles can lead to successful learning but it has been shown that students in the constructivist environmental demonstrated more enthusiasm and interest in the subject matter.

**References:**


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