

**EFFECTS OF CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH ON DEVELOPING
COMPOSITION SKILLS IN ENGLISH AT UPPER PRIMARY STAGE**

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Abstract

The present study aimed to answer about the learner-centred approach (constructivism) which can transform thinking and practice beyond the conventional boundaries of our educational system in general and for Upper Primary students English Composition skill in particular. To prove it two research question formulated keeping relation with composition skill of class VII. For this study sample comprised 64 students in class VII. The findings of the study disclosed that the strategies exerted positive compact on the learners in developing Composition skill in particular and constructivism actually enables the children to invent ideas in general.

Key words: *constructivism, composition skill, Radical Constructivist, social-constructivist, cognitive constructivist.*

Introduction

The modern teaching concept holds the view that it is more learner centred and learner driven. Education has been understanding a slow evolution: from teacher centred system to a learner centred system, and this demands changes in the instructional process and materials used for making the process more effective. The understanding of different learning styles has brought to the consciousness that each individual is different, and any one method of teaching will not be equally effective for all the students. If a curriculum is to be effective in the classroom, it must contain different ways of motivating the students, different ways of presenting sequences, and different opportunities for some students to skip parts while others work their way through different ways of putting things. In the teacher centred educational system their lack the basic amenities and the overcrowded classrooms resulted in the failure of achieving many planned objectives. Hence we are also making continuous efforts to modify and revitalise the school education. The new curriculum, which is followed in developed countries and some of the states of our country, has constructivism as a major theoretical backing. It is constructivism that initiated learner centred approach in education. Constructivism suggests that the learners understanding of the way the world works is the result of his or her own active construction rather than someone else's presentation.

Constructivism is a view of learning that believes that learners use their experiences to actively construct understandings that make sense to them, rather than have understanding delivered to them in an organised form. They believe that knowledge is the result of individual constructions of reality. From their perspectives, learning occurs through the continual creation of rules and hypothesis to explain what is observed. The need to create new rules and formulate new hypotheses occurs when the student's present conceptions of reality are thrown out of balance by disparities between those conceptions and new observations.

Constructivism Views

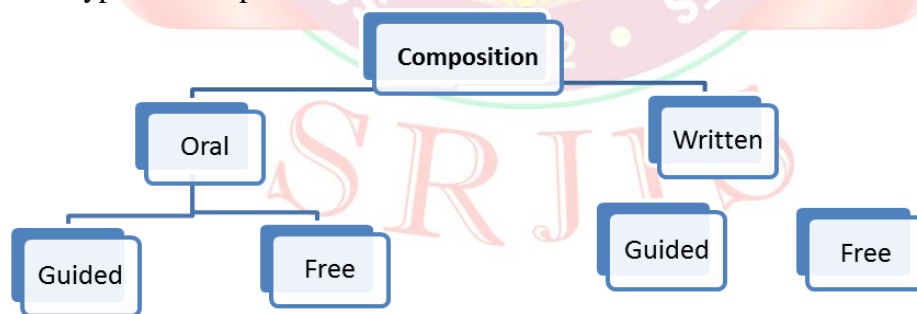
There are different views about knowledge construction from one to another i.e. cognitive, social and radical constructivism.

'Cognitive Constructivism' believes that knowledge is the result of the accurate internalization and reconstruction of external reality by the learner. At the same time 'Social Constructivism' believes that knowledge is the result of social interaction and language usage, and thus is a shared, rather than an individual experiences. But 'Radical Constructivism' is the opposite one from the social group and emphasizes that knowledge is constructed from individual experiences, but is not in any discernible way, an accurate representation of external reality.

The present study focuses on the effect of constructivist idea on English composition skill of class VII.

Composition Skill

Among four skills writing is the most difficult skill. Expressions of ideas in English in written form constitute composition. According to Thompson and Wyatt "The power of expression in a language is matter of skill than of knowledge". Bhatia and Bhatia have defend composition as "It is the expression of child's thought, his own ideas feelings and observation. It includes both the process and product of composing". The following diagram reflects the types of composition.



Purpose of oral composition is to develop speaking practice in English language verbally/orally and it lays foundation of written composition. **Purpose of written composition** its main purpose is to enable pupils to express their ideas in English in a clear and logical way. In the beginning, up to upper primary stage guided composition plays an instrumental role in developing the writing skill of the student. It paves the way for free composition at a later stage. According to the exponents of constructivism the learners acquire knowledge by connecting their new knowledge to the existing experiences and try to structure and restructure their ideas. Some new ideas emerge as a result of these experiences and the learner expresses his ideas through composition of essays, poems, short stories etc.

Review of related studies

There are many questions raised from different group like (i) how this approach can use by the teacher? (ii) how it is fruitful for the students within classroom? (iii) how knowledge will form by this method? etc. so here some review which will help us to know about these questions. **Bruner (1960)** the highest state of human autonomy and perfection is achieved when children begin to find out for themselves regularities or irregularities in their physical and socio-political environments. **Massialas and Zevin (1967)** tried to recapture the kind of intellectual adventure of a group of students when asked to identify the country and the approximate year that the population count had been taken of the basis of an 'age pyramid'. They find that population growth, pressure and structure are factors in estimating national power. Thus constructing new knowledge becomes a continuous interplay of intuitive and counterintuitive or analytic process. **Chickering (1977)** our lives consist of many trivial and significant experiences daily. For these experiences to become learning, or for change to occur in awareness and behaviour, selected experiences are to be singled out, reflected and acted upon. "Experimental learning means the learning that occurs when changes in judgements, feelings, knowledge and skills result for a particular person from living through an event". **Cunningham (1992)** the assumptions we make, our beliefs, and our experiences shape what each of us comes 'to know' about the world. If students are aware of the influences that shape their thinking, they will be more able to choose, develop, and defend positions in a self-critical way while respecting the positions of others. **Good and Brophy (1994)** constructivism emphasizes active learners, the thinking of new knowledge to learners already possesses, and the application of understanding to authentic situations. **Eggen, Paul and Kauchak, Don (1999)** listed different steps to apply and understanding of constructivism in the classroom i.e. Develop learning activities around realistic problems, Teach new ideas in the context of current understanding, Embed important concepts in authentic learning tasks, Structure classroom tasks to encourage student interaction, Use scaffolding to help students progress through the zone of proximal development, and create a "learning community" environment in the classroom. **NCF (2000 & 2005)** strongly support the constructivist and Lerner centred approach in school education. By it in the school the teacher should create the situation through which the learner should construct knowledge the teacher cannot supply it.

Rationale of the study

Empirical evidences say most of the time, teachers teach a lesson either by lecture or by reading text loudly to the students. Sometimes he takes up activities to verify the factual knowledge given in the text book. In this objectivist paradigm, the teacher transmits the knowledge to the learners who are considered as passive learners. Here teachers are the transmitter of knowledge and pupils are mere recipients of knowledge.

But in a constructivist approach, learning is not a receptive process rather an active meaning making process. In this approach learning implies the reorganisation of prior concepts. That means new learning depends on learner's previous knowledge. It is also facilitated by social interaction and meaningful learning tasks. In order to learn learners should perceive the process, not the product. Process is as important as product, that process facilitate knowledge construction, and the teacher is the facilitator of knowledge not a sage on the stage as was thought before. Autonomy of the learner plays a vital role in the learning process.

Therefore, in the paper an attempt has been made to analyze the present status constructivism approach to develop composition skill of class VII students of our educational system. Then it may give some measure to the teachers so that they will use it in their teaching English in upper primary stage.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are

1. To adopt constructivist approach for developing composition skill among the learners of class-VII.
2. To study the effects of constructivist approach on the learners in developing composition skills.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is

The constructivist approach will render positive effects on the achievement of the learners.

Methodology

Experimental method was taken here to justify the objectives as well as to prove the hypothesis of the study. The study was based on "Pre-Test and Post-Test" single group design.

Sample

Sample of the study comprised 64 students of class VII selected purposively for the study.

Statistical technique

For the present study Mean, SD, and 't' value were used to analyse and interpret data.

Tools

The researcher decided to take the following tools for the study.

- Achievement test on composition for Class-VII.
- Test A: Guided composition (Oral and Written)
- Test B: Free composition (Oral and Written)

Focus

Collaborative learning and peer learning.

Task Analysis

To fulfill the pre-determined objectives here some task planned by the researcher so that the experiment will go smoothly. The planned tasks were..

1. Selection of cartoon pictures/collected pictures.
2. Preparation of printed strikers to paste below the cartoon pictures.
3. First speaking on the pictures and then describing the pictures in 25 words.
4. Supplying clue words to write a paragraph. Filling in the blanks to complete the sentences.
5. Completing the vacant lines of the rhymes and writing rhymes.
6. Writing paragraph on day-to-day events.

It is instructed to the students that the duration of the study-10 days. After completion of the given duration now activities conducted by the researcher to develop the skill of composition in English.

Activity-1: Some clue words given here and instructed to the students to write one paragraph using these words just to know the effect of teaching through constructivist approach on them.

Clue words: - sky, cloud, tree, rain, heavily, boy, sky, ground.

Answer

There were clouds in the sky. A boy was coming from school. On the way to home he saw branches of the trees shaking. Heavy wind blew. In a few minutes it began to rain. He ran and stood under a tree. He thought the place was not safe for him. One of the branches of the tree broke and fell on the ground. He prayed God and after sometime the rain stopped. In a few minutes he went home.

Activity:-2

Some fill in the blanks type work also designed by the researcher to know the influence of constructivist approach on developing composition skill. So students were instructed in this activity to complete the rhyme by choosing words from the brackets. (Whistle. Bat, rat, quickly)

Catch the _____ Take your _____
Come _____ Blow the _____

Answer

Catch the cat. Take your bat.
Come quickly. Blow the whistle.

Activity- 3

In this stage one different and interesting type of work designed for the students and instructed to put the words together to present a meaningful piece of writing.

My	ball	bat	it
Mouse	tall	house	
Fat	cat	small	thin
Big	rat	this	
Is	in	and	yours

In this activity, the teacher will ask the students to compose rhyme of their own choice.

Activity -4

Here is a letter by Nikita to Mitali, her pen friend. Let's read it and fill in the blanks.

Hello Mitali!

I am fine. Everything around here is quite OK. This time i am writing about a great man of our country. Do you know _____, the Father of our country? I _____ him. Because he _____ in time. He was very _____. Every day he had _____ to do. He had to _____. He wrote _____. How could he _____. He in the morning and did everything _____, Gandhi ji _____ watch. It was _____ from his waist. Do you _____? He needed to _____ watch very often, because _____ in time. The watch _____ for him.

The above mentioned activities were organized interchangeably on different matters in writing letters to friends, senior and juniors.

RESULT & DISCUSSIONS

Table- 1

Performance of the students in composition in terms of Mean. N=64 Pre-Test Post-Test mean score of a single group design.

Test	Mean	SD	SEMD	t
Pre-Test	45	6	.75	-
Post-Test	50	5	.63	7.9

The above table reveals that the mean score of post-test is higher than the mean score of pre-test. The obtained 't' of 7.9 is much higher than the table value that 2.39 as it is clearly significant. It is ascertained that the student made substantial progress in Composition. Thus the hypothesis "the constructivist approach has positive effects on the achievement of the learners." is accepted. That means constructivist approach has a positive impact on learning composition skill and it is a new and very useful method to teach English composition through it.

Table-2

Activities in the light of constructivist approach (For the first 3 days and the last 3 days.) Observation Schedule

		Day-1	Day-2	Day-3	Day-8	Day-9	Day-10
1	Students asking question to the teacher	Needs improvement	Needs improvement	Up to mark	Good	Good	Very good
2	Students asking questions to the peers	Just a little	Just a little	Up to mark	Good	good	Very good
3	Helping the peers to understand (cooperative learning)	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Independent thinking	-	-	-	Observed partly	Observed partly	Observed partly
5	Asking for clarification	-	-	-	partly	partly	Partly
6	Explaining to the teacher/peers	Needs improvement	Needs improvement	Needs improvement	Up to mark	good	Very good
7	Producing with assistance	-	-	-	Partly	Partly	Very good
8	Producing without assistance	-	-	-	Partly	Partly	Very good

The above table reflects that the students have gradual improvement as a result of regular practice during a specified period of 10 days. We can draw a hypothesis according to the

experiment that this approach will give good result to learn composition skill but a little bit of effort by the teacher and practice by the students needed.

Evaluation

Then they were administered a Post-Test. It included Oral composition and written Composition, for Oral composition they were asked question to respond orally basing on a picture. For written composition –The topic was your close friend. They were given points and clue words to write-down and found that it has the positive impact to learn composition skills in English.

Findings of the study

The findings of the study are

- The constructive approach adopted in the study made the learner recalled their previous knowledge to link to the new knowledge from their experience and intuition in constructing knowledge.
- The strategies exerted positive compact on the learners in developing Composition skill.
- Above all it may be concluded that a constructivist class room culture Improves the learning and encourages the learners to create new ideas and did not depend on rote memory learners worked collaboratively for sharing of ideas.
- Group leaders consolidate the presentation of individual learner and prepared the gist on a particular topic given for composition.
- Teachers can apply constructive approach to develop language skills among the learners.
- Collaborative and co-operative learning techniques help the learners in achieving the skills of language through sharing of ideas.
- Use of different materials and techniques facilitates construction of knowledge.

Conclusion

Constructivist approaches may involve, among other things that authentic or real life tasks, social negotiation and shared responsibility as part of learning. Constructivist views of learning focus on how individuals construct their own cognitive structures, as they interpreted their experiences in particular learning situations. If students are aware of the influence that shape their thinking, so they will be more able to choose, develop, and defend positions in a self-critical way while respecting the positions of others.

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