



## CONSTRUCTIVISM AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) TEACHERS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper investigated how constructivism was reflected in the pedagogical practices of ESL teachers. It is a qualitative case study where teachers were observed during classroom discussions and interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide and a cellular phone with video and camera features and voice recorder. Findings showed that the teachers encouraged their students to link their schema to their new knowledge through asking questions, using games and video clips, and dividing the class into groups. For students to formulate and show their own understanding of the concepts, the teachers used differentiated group and individual activities. In terms of classroom assessment, the teachers used various assessment tools that were categorized into individual and group/collaborative formative and summative assessments. Constructivism was manifested in the classroom based on the following assumptions: cooperation among learners, making use of multimedia technology, and autonomous learning. Furthermore, several implications were presented for ESL instruction and for future research.*

*Keywords: constructivism, pedagogical practices, ESL teachers, qualitative design, case-study method*

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasing knowledge about the importance of pedagogy as an important skill to be acquired by teachers, most nation still fail to satisfy even minimum performance levels and fall short of what educators want and need (World Bank, 2016). They also claim that the primary concern of education sector where they allocated most of the fund is on teacher's training on content and pedagogy.

The success of classroom instruction is greatly dependent on the selection and application of appropriate pedagogical approach.

In the same way, life-long learning rest on the teacher's ability to use the pedagogical methods in the classroom (Effective and appropriate pedagogy, 2018). Effective pedagogy can lead to academic accomplishment, social and emotional growth, technical skills acquisition, and the capacity to contribute to society. On the other hand, innovative pedagogies according to Paniagua & Istance (2018) should include gamification, problem-solving approach through logic, experiential learning, embodied learning,



multiliteracies and discussion-based teaching and blended learning.

Paniagua (2011) stressed that teachers are accountable for preparing young individuals in a rapidly changing world to encounter new difficulties; and that is why innovation in teaching methods has become crucial to engaging learners. Furthermore, teacher must not only have a mastery of the material and curriculum, an understanding of the different types of norms, an awareness of evaluation, and the capacity to organize the classes, but also the capacity to engage students — to understand them well enough to create suitable educational choices.

One of the most popular and widely recognized pedagogical approaches in the field of education is constructivism. It is commonly praised as a probing strategy to the level of comprehension of children and how this knowledge can be brought to greater level thinking. Constructivism is a way to learn and to think. Teachers then create on this understanding, and learners can put their knowledge into practice (Mvududu and Thiel-Burgess, 2012).

To maximize the effect on student learning, a constructivist approach must be holistically aligned in all parts of the curriculum (Bigg, 2003). For instance, instruments and strategies for evaluation need to be aligned with learning results. This implies that if the required learning outcome is to generate students with excellent analytical abilities then questions and situations that involve and test analytical thinking abilities must be included in the evaluation instrument. An evaluation instrument with multiple-choice issues will not make the required learning outcome easier to achieve.

Building understanding and what that means for learners and educators are the strengths of constructivism. Since information cannot be transmitted as a commodity from one person to another, the function of the teacher in the classroom as a giver of knowledge becomes irrelevant. Educators must recognize that knowledge is built in practice and must be created by an individual's understanding; teaching must be student-dominated where

educators act as facilitators (Akpan & Beard, 2016).

Several studies revealed that constructivist approaches have positive effect of the students' academic performance in science class, math class, economic class, and English class specifically in teaching vocabulary, listening, and writing skills (Tosun & Bahadir, 2018; Pondevida, Gonzales & Sonico, 2009; Ayaz, & Şekerçi, 2015; Obrero & Obrero, 2015). The use of relevant material, small group learning and problem solving are contributory to the success of a constructivist class. Metacognition and self-reflection are also heightened in the class which help the students performed better.

Likewise, a constructivist class is highly characterized by using technology in class such as smart phones, computers, tablets, and social media. ESL and EFL teachers who are constructivist-oriented, tend to use ICT more (Chen, 2011; Ebadi & Bashiri, 2018). Online platforms like Moodle and Edmodo have positive impact on the students to achieve mastery of different skills in English using internet as a medium. The positive influence of information-communicative technologies and internet on students' opportunities to study English was theoretically proven and practically confirmed in the research process (Mokhtar, 2018).

Banking on that, the revised curriculum of the Philippines which is known as K to 12 Basic Education Program have good faith that constructivism would greatly respond in providing the required abilities and competencies for the Filipino learners to prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century. It makes the fundamental education structure in the Philippines equivalent to global norms by ensuring it to be useful, responsive, and appropriate to the learners (DepEd Order No. 021, series 2019). In constructivism, it views learners as significant knowledge's active builders. Inquiry-based learning places a premium on questioning, investigating, probing, analyzing, explaining, predicting, and linking evidence. Reflective learning offers learners the opportunity to reflect on what they need to know and how to do it. Differentiation requires an



excellent account of the learners' distinct learning styles and various intelligence, which are important elements of their differences as learners as well as people. Lastly, integrative pedagogy embraces the significant links and relations between and among fields of ideas and concepts.

On the other hand, Senator Erwin Gatchalian blames K to 12 implementations for the "alarming state" of the country's educational quality specifically the declining performance of learners and educators (Ager, 2019). He added that there is a link between the learners' and teachers' performance because it has not been refined in its application. There is a probability that the K-12 curriculum may not be correctly taught. Teachers who are intended to teach K to 12 are not ready properly and are therefore not fully skilled in what they teach. Teachers have also been ill-prepared for the implementation of Senior High School. Many lecturers were forced on the go to know their subjects. A teacher might say, be allocated to teach Physics even though he or she only had a two-week crash course (not a major in physics). A study by the World Bank showed the low efficiency of K-12 educators using the K-12 curriculum in terms of understanding of subject matter. A disturbing finding is that in 2014, except for elementary English educators, the average elementary or high school teacher could properly answer less than half of the content test issues (Punongbayan, 2019).

The inclusion of the ideas in the guidelines and policies of the said K to 12 Basic Education Program of the country, the negative issues the government has found out with the said curriculum, and with the related studies on the constructivism's use and impact being reviewed which had contradictions to the findings of World Bank's report on students and teachers performance purport the researchers to describe the pedagogical practices of English teachers and further see if whether these teachers apply religiously the philosophy of constructivism in carrying out their roles as teachers and eventually be successful in properly implementing the aims and objectives of the Department of Education.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study investigated how constructivism was reflected in the pedagogical practices of ESL teachers. In accordance, the study sought to attain the following specific objectives: 1) determine how English teachers design learning activities that will engage students in linking prior knowledge to new knowledge, formulating their own understanding of concepts, and creating new knowledge; 2) identify how English teachers assess learners in terms of understanding of concepts, creating new knowledge, and integrating knowledge to other discipline; and 3) analyze the learning outcomes that manifest the assumptions of constructivism.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research in investigating the pedagogical approaches employed by ESL teachers in different areas of the country. Specifically, it employed a case study method.

The participants of this study were 12 ESL teachers from different areas of the country who were observed and interviewed. There were three male participants and nine female participants.

Correspondingly, it used a semi-structured interview as the main tool in data gathering. It was divided into three main parts. The first part dealt with the questions on how teachers design learning activities that engage students to link prior knowledge to new knowledge, formulate their own understanding of concept and create new knowledge. The second part focused on how teachers assess learners in terms of understanding concepts, creating new knowledge, and integrating it to other disciplines. The last part of the interview focused on the learning outcomes or the students' output that manifest the assumptions of constructivism. Furthermore, cellular phone using its video and camera features and digital voice recorder were used as supplementary tools to capture the needed data.

The researchers sought first the permission of the school administrator. They ensured that



the participants were aware of the confidentiality of the data and their anonymity. Informed consent was given to them which indicates the purpose of the study, duration, procedures of the study, and the research benefits. They were also asked if they would permit the researchers to video tape the classroom observation.

To collect the data, the participants were observed during classroom discussions. The focus of the observation was to see how teachers utilized constructivism in terms of the learning activities, assessment and learning outcomes produced by the learners. Students' responses and teachers' activities were carefully investigated so as to see how instruction and assessment meet along the lesson execution. The interview guides also served as the instrument in data gathering as well as the lesson log of the teacher during the classroom observation.

The responses of the participants during the interview were transcribed verbatim. These were carefully coded by putting up relevant themes that were revealed in the data. To ensure the accuracy of the analysis of the data, the daily lesson logs were reviewed together with the video of classroom observation. Documentary analysis among the sets of data gathered reduced the influence of potential biases on the part of the researchers. It also helped them polish their findings based on triangulation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Learning activities that engaged students in linking prior knowledge to new knowledge

#### 1.1 Linking Prior Knowledge to New Knowledge

*Teachers' Activities.* When the participants were asked about how they design learning activities that will engage their students in linking their prior knowledge to new knowledge, majority of them replied that asking questions, incorporating games, using video clips, and dividing the class into groups help

students build connection on what they learned in the past and the new lesson to be introduced.

For example, in a classroom where one of the participants taught the types of characters in fiction writing, she said, *I connected the previous topic to the new topic by just simply asking questions and giving introductory statement explaining the significance of the previous lesson to the new lesson (P5).*

The other participant who taught verbal and nonverbal communication replied, *"The class played Charades and was divided into four groups. Also, a video on verbal and nonverbal communication was played (P9)."*

*Students' Responses to the Activities.* The participants were also asked about how their students responded to their initial activities. They said that the students positively and cooperatively responded on the given activities and that they were able to link their schema to new knowledge. This was supported with the observations made during the classroom discussions and exemplified in the following statements:

*The students had a positive response to the activities, and they were cooperative (P4).*

*They showed interest when questions are related to their experiences, motivated when there were gifts or prizes, and felt happy and elated when winners have additional points to the quiz (P5).*

*The students enjoyed the activity and guessed the items as quickly as possible (P9).*

*They respond enthusiastically since most students enjoy games (P10).*

#### 1.2 Formulating Own Understanding of Concepts



*Teachers' Activities.* For students to formulate their own understanding of concepts, the participants employ group or individual activities that differentiate instruction to suit each student's distinct aptitudes.

*Because my students have different learning styles, I try to develop plan lessons that use differentiated instruction (P7)*

*I let each learner to think of their own examples either a dialogue or a situation about the topic (P1).*

*Students work in pairs to create a concept or semantic map to define feminism (P8).*

*Indicators that Students Understood the Concept.* The participants observed that the students were able to explain the new concepts, give examples, work with their peers, correctly answer questions, share key words and insights related to the concepts, and make logical relationships between and among the concepts.

*The students gave examples and further explained the concepts learned (P1) and they were able to share their ideas, thoughts about watching movies and reading books (P2). They met the criteria or rubric presented for the presentation (P3) and provided samples and ideas easily and creatively (P4).*

### 1.3 Creating New Knowledge

When the participants were asked about their ways on how students apply the concept they learned, they gave examples of performance tasks or outputs that show students' understanding of the concepts. These performance tasks were categorized as individual and group.

#### Individual Formative Assessment

*The students watched a film and read a selection about feminism. Each was also able to identify the roles of women in the past and in the present and formulated their own questions (P8).*

*I asked each student to come up with a writing/composition like response to reading where he/she is expected to give a write-up about a particular angle from the story (P11).*

#### Group/Collaborative Formative Assessment

*The students were required to present how they use verbal and nonverbal communication in real-life situations. The class was divided into four groups. Each group was given a task (P9).*

*The students were able to come up with the output for Living Gallery Walk (P3).*

*They made a poster and a creative video about it and posted in on YouTube (P5).*

### 2. Teachers' assessment in terms of understanding of concepts, creating new knowledge, and integrating knowledge to other discipline

#### 2.1 Understanding of Concepts

When all teacher participants were asked of how they assessed their students' understanding of concept, a variety of assessment methods were shared by them.

Basically, these are formative assessment in the form of performance tasks. Formative assessments used were further classified into individual, dyad, triad, or group.

#### Individual Formative Assessment

First, three of the teacher participants used video/film presentation.



According to P1, *I used a video presentation.*

P2 added that, *"I used it to assess whether the students understood the concepts and I let the students explain what the film adaptation is all about and what its importance is.*

Also, P6 followed up that, *To assess the concept, I asked motive questions and gave various activities such as Story/movie playback.*

For P3 and P4, they let their students perform these tasks. P1, P4, and P5 shared that they used paper and pencil, short answer essays.

Besides, P5 added that, *I attended to their multiple intelligences also by giving them activities like making poster and slogans, giving them topics on essays or letting them choose it for themselves.*

*For me, I gave an activity called a genius hat where students pass the hat around and give their generalization of the day's lesson.*

Lastly, other tasks which are remarkable include P7's practices. *I used hand signal to rate or indicate students' understanding of content. Also, I have response cards like index cards, signs, whiteboards, etc.*

### Group/Collaborative Formative Assessment

Only one teacher made mention of think-pair-share used as assessment for understanding students' concepts.

According to P7, *Think-pair-share is used wherein students take a few minutes to think about the question and they pair with a designated partner to compare thoughts before sharing with the whole class.*

Written tasks were also used as performance assessments as collaborative activities like song composition, developing Math games, making scripts for news programs, concept map rubric and Venn diagram rubric.

P5 shared that, *I attended to their multiple intelligences also by giving them activities like composing songs about the topic, developing math games about the topic, and making their own version of news program through scripts written by them.*

Further, P9 stated that, *I did use Venn Diagram Rubric. This was used to assess student's ability to use a Venn Diagram and organize similarities and differences.*

Likewise, some performance assessments were also used to further measure learners' understanding of ideas.

P5 would say, *I let my students choreograph an interpretative dance to show the message or concept learned about the topic and they also perform a speech choir.*

### 2.2 Creating New Knowledge

In terms of checking of whether their students could create new knowledge, English teachers also had used different formative assessment tools.

### Individual Formative Assessment

Individual evaluation tasks in the form of role play and communication situations were used by the following participants:

P1 and P5 used role playing in assessing the student's skill in creating.

P10 would say, *I did use individual assessment activities like calling volunteers to deliver the lines in front...*



Interesting practices were made mentioned by P5. For her, *“I did use actual performances using multiple intelligences activities.”*

Other assessment tasks made used by other teacher participants include making PowerPoint presentation (P11), asking questions (P1), giving diagnostic tests, (P12), self-assessment/self-evaluation (P3 & P4), and portfolio assessment (P6).

### Group/Collaborative Formative Assessment

P3 and P4 both used peer evaluation in their assessment of whether students can create new knowledge after discussion.

Collaborative tasks in the form of role play and communication situations were used by the following participants:

P1 and P5 used role playing in assessing the student’s skill in creating.

P10 would say, *I did use collaborative assessment activities like role playing.*

Besides, both P9 and P10 were vocal that they used rubrics for assessing a communication situation. Likewise, P5 did use stimulating differentiated activities focusing and targeting the student’s different intelligences.

According to her, *I did use actual performances using multiple intelligences activities like letting students make videos, poster and slogans, etc.*

### 2.3 Integrating Knowledge to Other Disciplines

For the teachers to further evaluate learners in terms of integrating knowledge to other disciplines, most of them use different interesting individual, dual and group performance assessments.

### Individual Formative Assessment

*Multimedia Technology Assessment.* Most of the teacher participants did use multimedia and technology evaluations. These evaluations were also integrated to different subjects. These were showed in the ideas shared by them below. P1 and P4 used video clips for presentation.

According to P1, *through asking questions and video presentation of tourist spot in the Philippines, the students were able to integrate it with contemporary arts and Araling Panlipunan.*

Then, P2 shared that, *The students were asked to find literary texts to be used as film adaptation. I posted in google classroom.*

While, P12 exclaimed that, *I integrate multimedia form of assessment. One example of measuring their understanding is through Vlogging.*

*Portfolio Assessment.* Four out of 12 participants used portfolio assessment.

P3 had used *portfolio*. When asked about it, P5 expressed that, *“Yes, sir. My students have portfolio, but it is only like drawing book where they put their checked performances/activities.”*

Also, *“Portfolios are selected collections of a variety of performance-based work.*

Three participants specifically, P3, P5, and P7 used written tasks as formative evaluation. These activities were bases to integrate the new learned concepts to other subjects or disciplines.

P5 expressed that she also did see to it that the lessons are integrated to other disciplines. When ask how she do it she exclaimed that,

*First, I am integrating the subject English for Specific Purposes (E.S.P) through relating the values they can learn from the topic to real life like the intelligent use of the free will, the role of conscience, humility, empathy, etc. Also,*



*Math can also be integrated by letting them know about the concept of narcissistic numbers for example which could be included in mythology class, or simply giving them activities which requires them to do simple operations like additions, subtractions, and multiplication before arriving to the answer, or giving them the magic square box where in order to know the magic number which is the total number of all the numbers in the box both horizontal and vertical, they first have to get the correct answers with regards to the figures of speech. Furthermore, Entrepreneurship can also be injected by letting them make business proposals using pronouns, conjunctions and the different parts of speech involved.*

### **Group/Collaborative Formative Assessment**

P9 alone used peer evaluation as assessment tool. This is how P9 did the activity.

*The class was divided into groups. Each group searched for video clips that show the speeches on different topics of the prominent person/s in the country or abroad. Then, the students identified the verbal and nonverbal strategies that each speaker used. A checklist was provided to them as guide in evaluating the speaker's strategies. Then, peer evaluation followed for checking their outputs.*

P10 and P11 did use formative assessments like collaborative and group play.

*For P11, Play is integrated with other disciplines such as P.E. and Art.*

On the other hand, even though most of the teacher's participants had let the students integrated the lessons concepts with different subject areas, most of them had only identified the kind of assessment activities that they used

but answered that they had not integrated the lessons.

P4 used video clips. P3, P5 and P7 did use portfolio assessment, and P3 and P6 did use written output in the form of formative assessment.

### **Summative Assessment**

It was on P10 who answered that she used individual assessment using summative assessment.

### **3. Learning outcomes that manifest assumptions of constructivism**

*Cooperation among Learners.* In the learning outcomes formulated by the participants, assumptions of constructivism were manifested. First, the students were able to interact with their peers during group work. This advocates a cooperative approach in which students actively participate and work together in the learning process (Fernando & Marikar, 2017). Within their peers, the students make decisions, produce a critique or generalization.

*The learner was able to interact with their peers, give their decisions on a certain topic and create lines or dialogues according to the topic given (P1).*

*Within a group setting, the students were able to differentiate verbal and nonverbal communication through graphic organizer. Also, they were able to identify the different verbal and nonverbal strategies used by speakers of various speech situations (P9).*

*Making Use of Multimedia Technology.* Second, the participants were able to present how technology complements constructivism. The students were able to experience meaningful interactions with the use of multimedia technology.





*The students were asked to choose, read, and adapt a literary text into film. The use of ICT and effective use of language were few of the learnings that the students could experience as they perform the activity (P2).*

*Each student produced a critique using the feminist approach and shared their output to Facebook (P8).*

**Autonomous Learning.** Lastly, the participants were able to encourage students' autonomy and initiative. The students were not only given the opportunity to construct knowledge but also motivated to become responsible for their own learning as exemplified in the following:

*The goal is to make them realize the importance of the topic or the values which can be learned from it when used in day to day living and, in the process, they will be able to display the learning they have gained in an activity they are most comfortable with where they can also showcase their hidden talents and interests and something which they would enjoy doing (P5).*

*After giving various activities, the students were asked to explain how they could apply what they have learned and its importance in fiction writing. They were also asked to generalize by sharing it to the class. It will serve as a springboard for them in creating characters for their own short stories (P6).*

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are presented.

1. In the classroom, the constructivist approach can be manifested towards a few different teaching practices. In most cases, teachers encourage their students

to link their schema to their new knowledge through asking questions, using games and video clips, and group tasks.

2. For students to formulate their own understanding of the concepts, the teachers provide various group and individual activities that cater the different learning styles of the students.
3. The teachers require students to accomplish different individual and group tasks to show their understanding of new concepts.
4. The theory of Constructivism is applied in assessment where the focus shifts from traditional to authentic assessment. The teachers use tools to measure students' understanding of concepts, creating new knowledge, and integrating knowledge to other disciplines. These tools are categorized into individual and formative assessments.
5. As a paradigm of teaching and learning, constructivism is manifested in the classroom based on the following assumptions: cooperation among learners, making use of multimedia technology, and autonomous learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions posted in this study, the following are suggested:

1. Continue the usual practices of the teachers to effect positive change in their students' acquisition of knowledge and skills while they are inside the classroom. Teachers should never stop learning. They must attend training and workshop which cater the improvement of their crafts.
2. Use assessment tools as stipulated in the policy and guidelines of the Department of Education.
3. Utilize collaborative and multimedia technology activities, and autonomy in learning. Teachers should give more attention on the implementation of these



activities in their learning plans as assessed by the administrators and teachers.

4. The government must allocate funds for the provision ICT in public schools and teachers' training on ICT integration.
5. ESL teachers in high school must track their students' performance and competence. In this case, they can check whether the activities they are practicing are effective or not and whether they are following the prescribed practices as mandated by the law.
6. Use a larger sample which includes 20 participants in future studies to provide optimal findings in this area.
7. Conduct series of classroom observations and utilize focus group discussions to obtain a more in-depth understanding of how constructivism is reflected in the pedagogical practices of ESL teachers.

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