Constructivist Approach for Teaching English: Making Sense of Paradigm Shift from the Traditional Approach

Hemant Lata Sharma[1], Poonam[2]

[1]Professor, Former Head & Dean, Faculty of Education, MDU, Rohtak, India

[2]Research Scholar, Department of Education, MDU, Rohtak, India

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 the 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 helpful in developing the basic communication skills i. e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing which are required to communicate in the English language. The purpose of this paper is to develop an insight into the paradigm shift from traditional 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 detailthe strategy of constructivism, its historical itinerary and theoretical underpinnings and how it helps in nurturing basic communication skills of the English language.*

Keywords: Constructivism, Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, Vygotsky's Theory of Social Development.

1. Introduction

English is said to be the world's most important language having communicative and educative value as it provide access to knowledge, power and material possessions. Various commissions from time to time have highlighted the importance of English language. The Radhakrishnan University Education Commission (1948) pointed out that "of under sentimental urges we give up English, we would cut outcomes off from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge." Kothari commission (1964) in its report stressed that English would play a vital role in higher education as an important "Library Language". Of late National Education Commission (NEC) (2007) considered this language as an important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. Moreover, with the growing importance of computers in every field, the English language has received a further boost. Even United Nations organization (UNO) in year 1945 gave it the status of its official language inter-alia as they considered that practically social and economic exchange between people of different countries and cultures is possible through this. Keeping in view the importance of interpersonal, Inter-institutionalcommunication through English language, the need of the hour is that English language is to be taught at different levels of educational system through new approaches of teaching so as to make our students active learners.

2. Paradigm Shift: From Traditional Approach to Constructivism

Conventional Teaching Approach has remained dominant at the secondary as well as senior secondary level in our education system in which learning has focused on teacher centeredness and students are passive receivers. In Indian classrooms, in general, this Approach is adopted where most of the times, 'chalk and talk' method is used for spoon feeding the content unlike the new approaches that require active participation on the part of students. Approaches like cooperative learning, blended learning, flipped classroom and smart classroom enable the students to participate actively in various activities. Among those; constructivism is such approach which engages the learners in such a way that they construct their new knowledge by correlating it with their previous experiences.

2.1 Concept of Constructivism

Constructivism is an innovative strategy in which students construct their knowledge themselves through interaction with each-other on the basis of previous experiences. It is student-centered rather than teacher-centered in which teacher acts as a facilitator. Constructivism considered that knowledge is not a thing that can be simply given by the teacher at the front of the room to students in their desks. Rather knowledge is constructed by learners through an active, mental process of development; learners are the builders and creators of meaning and knowledge (Sharma, 2014). It is based on interests, general and specific abilities, attitudes, achievement, aspirations and motivations of students. This strategy offers flexibility, motivation, adaptation, creativity and versatility for the teacher and the students. It encourages students to learn through personal experiences along with others' help and suitable learning material (Grabe&Grabe, 1998). Because of these salient features of constructivism, if this strategy is fruitto use in English teaching and learning, learning on the part of the students will be more enjoyable.It will remove hesitation

and develop confidence among students during communication in English asIt is an arrangement in which students work in mixed ability groups and are rewarded on the basis of the success of the group as a whole (Stavin, 2000).

Constructivism…

Learner:
- constructs own knowledge
- through active discovery
- internally driven development
- relativistic

2.2 Historical perspective of constructivism

Constructivism has deep historical roots. The learning theory of Constructivism evolved from the extensive study of cognitive development by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget(1896–1980) and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky(1896–1934). Their study of development provided the foundation for the psychological theory of constructivism. Constructivists believe that children develop knowledge through active participation in their learning (Rummel, 2008, p. 80). **Jean Piaget** (1896–1980) defined accommodation and assimilation as ways for new knowledge to build upon previous knowledge.**Socrates**(470-399 BC) focused on helping students construct meanings on their own rather than having authority figures transmit information to them. **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804) built upon this by recognizing that the way learners perceive stimuli from their environment shapes their understanding of the world. In the early 20th century, **John Dewey** (1859–1952) proposed that education should work with students' current understanding, taking into account their prior ideas and interests (Bhattacharjee, 2015).Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934)placed more importance on the social context of learning."How constructivism is interrupted and whether the learning strategies account for individual and social diversity are issues that gain limited Attention during curriculum development" (Gulati, 2008, p. 184). He helped increase awareness of the interactions between the individual, interpersonal, and cultural historical factors that affect learning. The essential core of constructivism is that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning from their experiences (Fosnot, 1996; Steffe& Gale, 1995). Some other philosopher such as Maria Montessori(1870-1952), WladyslawStrzeminski (1893-1952),Heinz von Foerster (1911–2002),George Kelly (1905–1967), Jerome Bruner (1915–), Herbert Simon (1916–2001), Paul Watzlawick (1921–2007), Ernst von Glasersfeld (1917–2010), Edgar Morin (1921–) and HumbertoMaturana (1928–) also contribute in the history of constructivism.

Many studies have been conducted in the field of constructivism since it came into practice in the field of education. A study was conducted by Santmire, Giraud, &Grosskopf (1999) and compared learning achievement of two groups of elementary school students. The researchers found that students who learned through social-constructivist approach to education and took a standardized test secured higher grades than their counterparts who were instructed traditionally in the classroom. The students' participation in such projects enhanced their academic performance as well. John Suck, Kim (2005) investigated the effectiveness of constructivist teaching approach on students' academic achievement, self-concept and learning strategies of 6th grade students. Kim found that constructivist teaching is more effective than traditional teaching in terms of academic achievement. Similarly, Dhindsa, &Emran, (2006) asserted that "knowledge is constructed through observation, reflection and interaction with the surrounding environment such as their peers, teachers or technology". Zehr (2006) found that a collaborative approach to teaching in an English Language Classroom was highly effective in helping Laotian first graders increase their English abilities and become more comfortable working in the inclusive classroom. Mostly these studies suggest that constructivism plays a positive role in promoting activities and initiatives of student and teaching effect in English class.

2.3 Assumptions of constructivism

Merill (1991) outlined the following assumptions of Constructivists theory:
1) Learning is a personal interpretation of the world.
2) Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience.
3) Learning should be situated in realistic setting; testing should be integrated with the task and not a separate activity.
4) Conceptual growth comes from the negotiation of meaning, the sharing of multiple perspectives and the changing of our internal representation through collaborative learning.

2.4 Types of Constructivism

Cognitive constructivism

It is based on beliefs, previous knowledge, values and self-concept and deals withhow an individual constructs hisunderstanding of the world around him. This type of constructivism is found in Piaget's work. He advocates that knowledge is constructed by mapping external reality.He was not interested in knowing only the right answer to a question rather he was more inclined to find out how did students arrive at a particular answer or how information is interpreted and processed by the learner. He concluded that children's plays were an important part in their intellectual development.Theory of cognitive Constructivism was pioneered by Jean Piaget, mastermind of this theory of learning. This theory is also known as "Genetic Epistemology". This theory argues that people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences. Key **components** of this theory are:

Schemas

According to Piagetevery individual has his own previous knowledge and pattern of behavior when he deals with objects, individuals and situations in life. These are called schemas. For example, a child may have a schema about a type of animal, such as a dog. If the child's sole experience has been with small dogs, a child might believe that all dogs are small, furry, and have four legs. Suppose then that the child encounters an enormous dog. The child will take in this new information, modifying the previously existing schema to include these new observations.
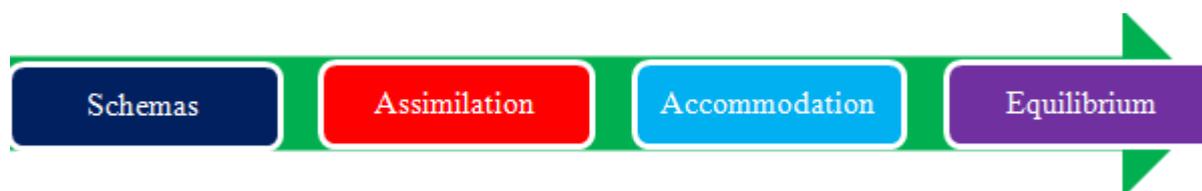
Fig: Component of Theory of Cognitive Constructivism

Assimilation

It means to adjust new information in the existing schemas in the mind. This concept of Piaget comes into operation when the child uses his schema already present in his mind over a new problem, subject or situation.

Accommodation

It means to change in the existing schemas to fit in new ideas. This concept of Piaget comes into operation when the old schema does not work and the child has to adjust the new with the old.

Equilibration

Piaget believed that all children try to strike a balance between assimilation and accommodation which is achieved through a mechanism. Piaget called this process equilibration. As children progress through the stages of cognitive development, it is important to maintain a balance between applying previous knowledge (assimilation) and changing behavior to account for new knowledge (accommodation). Equilibration helps explain how children can move from one stage of thought into the next.

Social constructivism

It states that individual learns through social interaction, activities and cultural tools. It holds that knowledge is existed in social environment and individual internalizes it through working together and through interactions.The teacher's role is to be a collaborator who participates with the children in constructing reality by engaging in open-ended inquiry that elicits and addresses student conceptions. Social constructivism was developed by post-revolutionary Soviet psychologist LevVygotsky (1896-1934).This theory emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. He states: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978).

3. Role of 5ESConstructive Instruction Model (CIM) in Promoting Basic Communication Skill in the English language

3.1 Engage

In the very first phase of 5E Model of Constructivism i.e. Engage, an attempt is made to activate prior knowledge of students by engaging them in a problem which have connection with their previous knowledge. In this phase, students are engaged by asking a question, defining a problem and showing a surprising event. Here, the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator where he/she will create interest, generate curiosity, raise questions and encourage the students for response. He also sets the rules and procedures for the activity. The students try to solve their problem by listening, reading books, searching other source of knowledge such as internet, interacting with each other and writing. In this way, involving themselves in these activities, they will develop their all basic communication skills which are required to communicate in the English language. For example: Write names of each article which you are seeing in your classroom. Expected Response: Blackboard, Bench, Table, Computer, Book etc.

3.2 Explore

In the second phase of 5E Model of Constructivism i.e. Explore, an opportunity is given to the students to extend the knowledge of the first phase. Students are provided enough time to think freely, generate their own ideas, plan, investigate and organize collected information and record observation and ideas. They work together in teams.Here, the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator where he/she

will observe, listen to students as they interact, encourage to work together and ask probing questions to redirect the students' investigation when necessary. As they work together in teams, students will build a base of common experience which assists them in the process of sharing and communicating in English. Example: Can you give synonyms of any five articles which are available in your classroom. Expected response: Book – Handbook, Table – Bench, Blackboard – Chalkboard, Notebook – Copy.
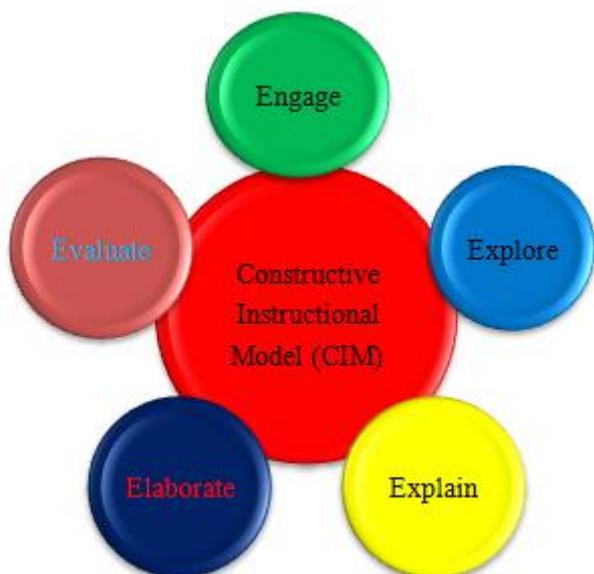

Figure: Component of Constructive Instructional Model

3.3 Explain

In the third phase of 5E Model of Constructivism i.e. Explain, students are encouragedto explain their observation and findings in their own words in the learning cycle. Teacher will also ask for justification and clarification from students. In this phase, communication will occur between peers, the facilitator, or within the learner himself. This phase is also student-centered because students are given opportunity to discuss, listen critically the explanations given by the teacherand their peers, raise questions about what they hear and add their own explanations so as to engage in active learning. Example: Explain the uses of any two articles in your own words?

Expected Response: **Blackboard** - A blackboard is defined as a flat surface feature, it can be a board made of wood, fiber or sometime made plastered on the wall of the class.It as teaching aids is very important tools used by a teacher to facilitate learning and improve reading and others skills. It is used to reinforce skills or facts and relieve anxiety, fears or boredom because teaching aid is like a game. It is also used for highlighting the main heading of the passage.

Computer – It as an aidto the instructional process are the latest arrival in the field of education. It makes teaching-learning process enjoyable by including audio-visual skills. All types of relevant knowledge and information regarding the teaching and learning of the topics of school subject can be easily available through the service of computer technology. As a perfect tutor, it can very well maintain a perfect interaction with the individual students. In its tutorial capacity, it provides instructions, asks and answers questions, assigns and checks the homework.

3.4 Elaborate

In the fourth phase of 5E Model of Constructivism i.e. Elaborate, an opportunity is given to the students to use their previous learned information as a vehicle to enhance a deeper and broader understanding and investigate new ideas. They can practice learned skills, refine them and change their behavior. Teacher encourages the learners to apply and extend their understanding into new contexts. In this phase, Students will extend their knowledge by reading, writing and interaction with each-other. Thus, they will develop all basic skills of communication which are required in English through these activities.
Example:
1. Students understand the term 'Articles'.
2. Students can discriminate between blackboard and computer.

3.5 Evaluate

The final phase of the 5E model of constructivism is Evaluate. This phase allow the teacher to determine if the learner has attained understanding of concepts. Evaluation can occur at all points along the continuum of the instructional process. The teacher may evaluate the learners' achievement by asking open-ended questions, observation structured by checklists and students interview. Students may evaluate their progress by interaction to each-other in this phase. Concrete evidence of the learning is most valuable in communication between students, teachers, parents and administrator. Example: 1. Write names and synonyms of each article which are available in your classroom? 2. What is the difference between blackboard and computer? 3. What is portfolio? Define uses of it? 4. What are similarities between overhead projector and computer? 5. Define any five articles with their uses?

4. Conclusions

The conventional approach lays more emphasis on teacher. Repetitive practice, mechanical drills and memorization are the hallmarks of the traditional methods. Since English is the official language of this world, it is of utmost importance that this language has to be taught in such a way that it will help us not just to speak and write and listen but to communicate with others. Hence innovative methods help in bringing a change and most of the times for the better. It helps the students learn faster and in an efficient, interesting and an interactive manner and it is the teacher's responsibility to leave the traditional methods and adopts innovative strategies such as cooperative learning, smart classroom, interdisciplinary approach and flipped classroom.Among these; constructivism is such approach which engages the learners in such a way that they construct their new knowledge by correlating it with their previous experiences (Vitthal, 2015). 5es of this approach are very helpful in developing basic communication skills which are required to communicate in the English language.Therefore, constructivism approach has become an indispensible tool in the English language classrooms to find the best ways for

Paper ID: ART20162198

both students to learn effectively and teachers to teach efficiently.

References

[1] Beck, C., &Kosnik, C. (2001). *Innovations are teacher education: A social constructivist approach*. New York: State University of New York.

[2] Babaee, N. (2012). Motivation in Learning English as a Second Language: A Literature Review. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 4(1).

[3] Bhattacharjee, Jayeeta (2015). Constructivist Approach to Learning – An Effective Approach of Teaching Learning. *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS), Volume-I, Issue VI, Page No. 65-74.*

[4] Dhindsa, H. S., &Emran, S. H. (2006). Use of the interactive white-board in constructivist teaching for higher student achievement. *METSMaC, pp:* 175-188.

[5] Grabe M, Grabe C. (1998). Integrating technology into meaningful learning, (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

[6] Gulati, S. (2008). Compulsory participation in online discussions: Is this constructivism or normalization of learning? Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 45(2), 183-193. Retrieved May 20 July, 2016, from Pro Quest database.

[7] Hmelo-Silver, C. (2004). Problem-based Learning: What and How Do Students Learn? Educational Psychology Review, Vol. 16, No.3.

[8] Merrill, M. D. (1991). Constructivism and Instructional Design. Educational Technology, May, May (1991, pp 45-53).

[9] Madhavaiah G., Nagaraju Ch. & Peter S. (2013).Innovative Methods in Teaching English Language and Communication Skills. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Reviews (IJSRR),2(3), 141-145.*

[10] Masrom, U.; &Yusof, D. S. M. (2013). English Games as a Constructivist Approach in Project Based Learning. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research (IJSSHR),* Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp: (21-25).

[11] National Knowledge Commission (2007). *Report to the nation 2006*: Government of India.

[12] Rummel, Ethan. (2008). Constructing cognition. American Scientist, 96(1), 80-82.

[13] Santmire, T. E., Giraud, G., &Grosskopf, K. (1999). An experimental test of a constructivist educational environment. *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research As sociation*, Montreal, 19-23 April 1999.

[14] Slavin, R. (2000). Cooperative learning: Theory, research and practice. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice.

[15] Sharma, H. L. (2014). Innovative Inputs in ICT. Publication: Jalandhar city.

[16] Sharma, H. L., &Pooja (2016). Enhancing Students interest in English language via Multimedia Presentation. *International Journal of Applied Research*. 2(1): 275-281.

[17] Sharma, H. L., & Rani, Kiran (2016). Tracing the Conceptual Framework of Multimedia-based Instructional Package for Enhancing English Language Skills. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), vol 5,Issue 2.*

[18] ThrouVineyKirpal&Shridhar B. Gokhale (2011). Unlock Their Future: A Skills based approach to teaching and learning English, Sterling Paperbacks, page 13.

[19] Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development.Readings on the development of children, 23(3), 34-41.

[20] Vitthal, V. P, (2015). Innovative Techniques, Methods & Trends in English Language Teaching. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities & Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), Volume 20, Issue 6, Ver. I, PP 40-44.*

[21] Walia, J. S. (2011). Learner, Learning and Cognition. Jalandhar: Ahompaul Publishers.

[22] Zehr, M.A. (2006). Team-teaching helps close language gap. *Education Week,*26-29.