Constructive Approach and English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In 21st century, learning English language is need of the hour and has a vast horizon touching each and every field of academia. The Constitution of India (1950) suggested Hindi as the official language for the first time in India and it went supported by Official Language Act (1963).This brought a clash to continue or abolish English language for official purposes. India being a multi- lingual country, English plays a role of 'link-language'. Various approaches like Structural approach, Situational Approach and Communicative Approach has introduced different teaching methods to make learning of English language easy and effective. But paradigm shift from traditional teaching methods to constructivism can make teaching and learning process easier, interesting and more retainable. Constructive approach is historically based on Socratic Method of Dialogue (470-399 BC) in which student herself constructs knowledge connecting it with her previous knowledge. In such processes teacher's role is shifted from a teacher to a facilitator. Learning process is performed through students' active participation, interests, attitudes, aspirations and motivations. It encourages students to learn through personal experiences along with other's help and suitable learning material. The whole process of constructivism not only develops new concepts by altering their previous knowledge but also facilitates them in developing language and enriching their vocabulary. A country like India where dominance of rural area is still suffering from language issues, English teaching demands much more. A prosaic way of serving grammatical rules, translating literature and evaluation on the basis of it is futile. They can only get marks but so far as the applicability of this language is concerned they need to be naturally interested in it. Constructive approach serves this purpose by creating a fascination towards the language.

Key terms: *Constructivism, dialogue, communication, innate ideas, tabula rasa, Structural Approach, Situational Approach, Communicative Approach, Collaborative Approach.*

Full Paper:

Present paper is an attempt to understand English as a discipline, its demand and implications of constructive approach to fulfill it. In 21st century, learning English language is need of the hour and has a vast horizon touching each and every field of academia. No matter it is a class-room teaching, field work or a prescription of a medicine, English language is catering to the needs of all academic and non-academic disciplines.

The post-colonial India had a severe storm of conflict between two languages– Hindi and English with a viewpoint of preservation of Indian culture and language on one side and global development and industrialization on the other. The Constitution of India (1950) suggested Hindi as the official language for the first time in India and it went supported by Official Language Act (1963).This brought a clash between South Indian and North Indian approaches to continue or abolish English language for official purposes. This was the first time when country entered upon a sustained period of bilingualism. Radhakrishnan Committee (1948) pointed out that:

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> "…if under sentimental urges we give up English, we would cut outcomes off from the living streams of ever-growing knowledge''.[1]

India being a multi- lingual country, English plays a role of 'link-language'. It is commonly used by people all over India to communicate and disseminate knowledge. After being encrypted in Indian Constitution as the second language of class-room instruction, English language has not only unblocked the state-boundaries but also has aired the feeling of secularism, fraternity and national integration.

It is still a challenging issue mainly for government, primary schools and schools belonging to rural areas. Lack of awareness, proper utilization of teaching aids, ineligible and in proficient teachers or any other reason behind this problem is leading a huge amount of youth to disgust and depravity. The question 'How such issues can be tackled' needs a ton of brainstorming. Various may be the ideas but implication of these ideas is again a difficult task. If the implications like organization of awareness programmes, proper utilization of teaching aids, proficient teachers who have an inclination toward rural development, are based on the day-to-day life routine of the peasants and their future prospects, they will certainly prove to be more effective.

Even in urban schools, various innovations are implemented to teach English language in day-to-day class-room practices. Various approaches like Structural approach, Situational Approach and Communicative Approach has introduced different teaching methods to make learning of English language easy and effective. But paradigm shift from traditional teaching methods to constructivism can make teaching and learning process easier, interesting and more retainable. Instead of putting all stress on chalk-and-talk method, emphasis on constructive approaches through different modern teaching methods like programmed learning, blended learning, flipped and smart classes enhances students' participation.

Constructive approach is historically based on Socratic Method of Dialogue (470-399 BC) in which student herself constructs knowledge connecting it with her previous knowledge. In such processes teacher's role is shifted from a teacher to a facilitator. Learning process is performed through students' active participation, interests, attitudes, aspirations and motivations. It encourages students to learn through personal experiences along with other's help and suitable learning material.[2] The implication of this strategy in teaching English makes learning process more enjoyable. It develops confidence and enhances group learning.[3]

Quite contrary to John Locke's theory of *Tabula Rasa* (which considers child's mind as a blank slate), constructivism believes that some fundamental innate ideas are already implicit in human-mind.Descartes advocates this view on the ground of infant's sucking technique, recognition of mother etc. This approach allows learners to explore on their own rather than direct instructions. Ideal process of education, according to this approach is acquisition of new knowledge on the basis of their pre conceptions. This approach opines that:

> "… (every learner) comes into formal education with a range of prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts that significantly influence what they notice about the environment… new knowledge

must be constructed from the existing knowledge.''[4]

Socratic Dialogues (composed by Plato) presents a realistic picture of knowledge acquisition through one-to-one communication. Epistemologically speaking, the term Dialogue consists of two Greek terms 'dia' meaning two and 'Logos' meaning words. Though notion of logos had different meanings in different stages of development of Greek thoughts, Socrates used this method to find definitions for virtues like courage (in *Laches*), Soundness of mind (in *Charmides*), Piety (in *Euthypro*) or of Excellence in general (in *Meno*) and so on.

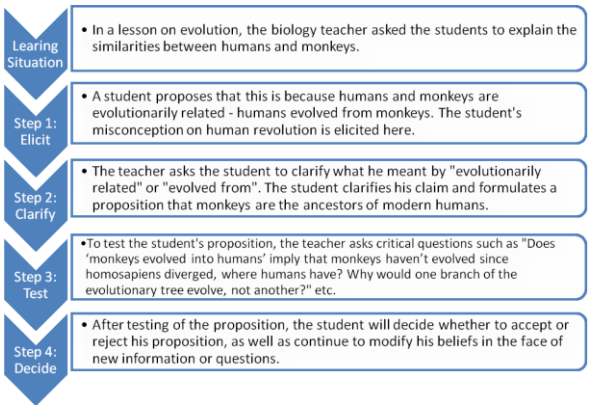
Later on in 19th century, Piaget and Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky contributed immensely to this approach. Piaget (1846-1980) presented this theory on the grounds of his concepts of Assimilation, Accommodation and Equilibration[5] Vygotsky (1896-1934), on the other hand, contributed constructivist approach with his emphasis on the social context of learning. His theory of ZPD (Zonal Proximal Development) supported the view that a child learns easily in presence of social constructs.

Apart from the zone of Psychology, philosophers like John Dewey, Immanuel Kant also contributed to this approach. John Dewey (1859-1952) proposed that education should work with student's current understanding, taking into account their prior ideas and interest.[6] While Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) advocated constructivism with a view that learner's perception of stimuli from their environment shapes their understanding of the world. Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* says that 'concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind'.

In a nutshell, constructivism opines that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meanings from their experiences (Forsnot, 1996, Steffe &Gale 1995). Other thinkers like Maria Montessori,(1870-1952), Wladyslaw Strzeminski (1893-1952), Hienz Von Foerster (1911-2002), George Kelly (1905-1967), Jerom Bruner (1915), Herbert Simon (1916-2001), Paul Watzlawick (1921-2007), Ernst Von Glaserfield (1917-2010), Edgar Morin (1921-) and Humberto Maturana (1928-) also contributed to the approach of constructivism.

A study conducted by Kim (2005) concludes that constructive approach is more effective to improve academic achievements, self concept and learning strategies of students of class 6th. Zehr found that a collaborative approach to teaching in an English language classroom was highly effective in helping Laotion first graders increase their English abilities and become more comfortable working in the inclusive classrooms.

Socratic approach of Constructivism based on preconceptions (previous knowledge) plays a vital role here. The true goal of this method is to help students to examine their own beliefs and new information they encounter. The whole approach moves around four steps– elicit, clarity test and decide.[7]:



Learners will either deal with an inquiry or is confronted by a proposition which is quite contrary to their own preconceptions. Provided that learners bring in

their preconceptions as they interpret new information, questions are asked to elicit their preconceptions. As the learners become aware of their preconceptions, clarifying questions can be asked so as to reveal to learners what their preconceptions entail. After fully eliciting and clarifying learners' preconceptions, learner will construct hypotheses or propositions based on their preconceptions. These hypotheses or propositions will then be tested by further fact check, critical questions, counter questions, counter arguments, fallacy check or check for contradictions etc. Hypotheses will be critically evaluated and students will reassess their views. This process helps learners to decide if the hypotheses, propositions, preconceptions are supposed to be accepted or rejected.

Social environment and learner's interaction with his surrounding determines their learning process. From Immanuel Kant to Lev Vygotsky, there are several thinkers and psychologists who emphasized constructivism on the grounds of social interaction. The protagonist of social constructivism Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) states that:

> "… 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)."[8]

Teaching English language is a blend of theory and application. More than the pages of books, English language works to interact at global level. To serve this purpose, constructive approach can be used as a powerful tool as it not only injects knowledge but also provides a wider scope of resources, consults and interactive processes. The elementary principles' of social constructivism i.e. Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate, if processed well, can be utilized well in collaborative teaching and social learning processes.

An example of teaching English (article writing) with the Constructivist approach is as follows:

	Teacher	**Students**
Engage	In this step teacher produces knowledge which has connections with learner's previous experiences and sets rules for the execution of the whole learning process. Teacher presents various current issues like corruption, child labour, eve teasing etc. and finds a common area of interest. Teacher asks students about various aspects of problem focusing on correct usage of language, writes the topic on blackboard for concentration and disciplined process of class.	Hear and present their preconceptions.
Explore	In this step extension of knowledge is kept on priority. Teacher tells about various sources like books, articles, online resources, newspapers and journals to extend the information. Students are provided ample time.	Students collect information from various resources and discuss findings among themselves. Here students generate ideas, plan, investigate, organize collected data and record observations and ideas.
Explain	Teacher hears patiently, records their responses and asks questions for justification.	Students come to know the recent implications in the relevant area by altering and adding to their previously existing knowledge .They explain their observations, findings and ideas.
Elaborate	Teacher motivates and appreciates students' efforts. Teacher guides students to analyze and apply their	Students are given a chance to use preconceptions as a tool for new information. Here

	understanding of new extended information in new situations.	new information is analyzed and encrypted into learner's behavior.
Evaluate	Teacher evaluates learners' views on a specific topic and examines if the students' concepts are extended towards the correct direction or not.	Learners come to know about various developments and remove their misconceptions about the topic.

The whole process of constructivism not only develops new concepts by altering their previous knowledge but also facilitates them in developing language and enriching their vocabulary.

Advantages of Constructive Approach in teaching English:

- English, being a foreign language, is still a tedious task for deprived areas. In such a situation, knowledge connected with learners' existing knowledge and social environment provides a wider scope to assimilate information realistically.
- Constructive approach develops capacity of logical thinking. Students' empirical knowledge develops confidence to assimilate, evaluate and apply knowledge.
- Disciplined questioning by teachers and peers can be used for many purposes to explore complex ideas, to arrive truth, to open issues and problems, to uncover subtle variants of intentions etc.
- Every difficult concept of English Language or literature can be solved with this approach, as learner develops his own concepts of content.

Conclusion:

English is the mostly used official language of this world. It is known as the language of opportunity which opens the door for knowledge, power and material possessions. Lack of this quality may prove the biggest shortcoming to one's talent. In such a scenario, it is important to bring up offspring who can logically think and effectively communicate with world at every level .A country like India where dominance of rural area is still suffering from language issues, English teaching demands much more. A prosaic way of serving grammatical rules, translating literature and evaluation on the basis of it is futile. They can only get marks but so far as the applicability of this language is concerned they need to be naturally interested in it. Constructive approach serves this purpose by creating a fascination towards the language. English language is not only the part of English as a subject rather all the disciplines are using it up to the best. Various theorists whether they support cognitive approach (Piaget), Social learning (Vygotsky) or communicative process (Socrates), firstly presume previous knowledge or pre conception as a main element of learning. Secondly, they believe in self learning and thirdly, they believe in a student-centered teaching- learning process where 5E'sprovide a stepwise construction of teaching learning process. When learners develop their own thirst for knowledge, it becomes easier for them to grab it interestingly. Now in the age of technology, it has become easier to create a virtual reality in front of students which easily and efficiently quenches their thirst for knowledge.

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