

# THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODS IN TEACHING SPECIALIZED ENGLISH AT FOREIGN TRADE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores the effective use of constructivist methods in the teaching specialized English at Foreign Trade University. The study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the perspectives of both students and instructors on the effectiveness of constructivist teaching methods, including problem-based learning, collaborative learning, and project-based learning. The findings suggest that the application of constructivist teaching methods can enhance students' learning outcomes and engagement, as well as their ability to apply English in real-life contexts. However, the study also highlights some challenges that instructors face in implementing these methods, such as the need for adequate resources and training. Overall, the article suggests that constructivist teaching methods have potential for improving English language teaching, but further research and support are necessary for successful implementation.*

**Keywords:** *constructivist, teaching methods, specialized english, student-centered*

## 1. PREFACE

English language proficiency is an essential skill for students in higher education, particularly for those studying in specialized fields such as business, engineering, and medicine. However, traditional language teaching methods that focus on memorization and passive learning may not be effective in developing students' ability to apply English in real-life contexts. In response, constructivist teaching methods have gained attention in recent years for their potential to promote active and experiential learning. These methods emphasize students' active participation in the learning process, collaboration with peers, and the application of knowledge to solve real-world problems.

Vietnam, like many other countries, faces challenges in teaching specialized English effectively, particularly in universities. Despite the importance of English proficiency in the global economy, students often struggle to apply their language skills in real-life situations. In response, some universities in Vietnam have begun to incorporate constructivist teaching methods into their English language curricula. However, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of these methods in the Vietnamese context.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the application of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English at Foreign Trade University. Specifically, the study investigates the perspectives of both students and instructors on the effectiveness of these methods, including problem-based learning, collaborative learning, and project-based learning. The findings of this study have implications for the development of English language teaching in Vietnam, as well as for the broader literature on constructivist teaching methods and their potential for enhancing language education.

Ertmer and Newby (2013) compared the critical features of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism from an instructional design perspective. They argued that constructivism

emphasizes active and meaningful learning, while also acknowledging the importance of prior knowledge and context. Bruner (1996) suggested that learning is most effective when learners are actively engaged in constructing their own understanding.

Garrison (2017) proposed a framework for e-learning in the 21st century, which incorporates constructivist principles. The framework emphasizes learner-centeredness, collaboration, and the integration of technology in promoting meaningful learning. He suggested that the application of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English could promote meaningful learning, learner-centeredness, and collaboration. This approach considers learners' prior knowledge, context, and experiences, and emphasizes the role of active engagement in constructing understanding.

In addition to the aforementioned authors, other scholars have also emphasized the importance of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English. According to Farahani and Ebrahimi (2015), constructivism as a learning theory enables learners to construct their own knowledge by integrating their prior knowledge and experiences. In a specialized English classroom, this approach can be particularly effective as it allows students to connect new information to their existing knowledge, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Similarly, Kim and Kim (2018) argued that a constructivist approach to teaching specialized English can enhance students' critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities. This is because the approach encourages students to actively engage in the learning process and make connections between different concepts and ideas.

Furthermore, Mohamed and Ali (2019) emphasized the need for a learner-centered approach to teaching specialized English, which is in line with the principles of constructivism. By placing the learner at the center of the learning process, teachers can create a more collaborative and interactive learning environment, which can lead to better learning outcomes. They suggested that a constructivist approach to teaching specialized English could be an effective way to engage students, enhance their critical thinking skills, and improve their overall understanding of the subject matter. However, more research is needed to fully explore the potential benefits of this approach and to develop effective strategies for its implementation in the classroom.

The application of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English has been a topic of interest in recent years. Researchers have identified a number of benefits associated with this approach, including enhanced student engagement, deeper understanding of subject matter, and improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

One study conducted by Dursun and Özcan (2020) explored the effectiveness of a constructivist approach in teaching ESP to university students in Turkey. The study found that the constructivist approach resulted in higher levels of student engagement and deeper understanding of the subject matter, compared to traditional teaching methods.

Another study by Alwazna and Alzahrani (2019) investigated the impact of constructivist teaching methods on the development of English language proficiency in nursing students in Saudi Arabia. The study found that the constructivist approach led to significant improvements in students' language proficiency and academic achievement.

Similarly, a study by Ismail et al. (2018) investigated the effectiveness of constructivist teaching methods in teaching ESP to students in a Malaysian university. The study found that the constructivist approach resulted in improved critical thinking skills and greater motivation among students. The literature suggests that the application of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English can lead to positive outcomes for both students and teachers. These outcomes include increased student engagement, deeper understanding of subject matter, improved language proficiency, and enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The use of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English has gained popularity in recent years, and several scholars have explored this approach. According to Dewey (1938), learning is an active process where learners construct knowledge through their experiences. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. Both Dewey and Vygotsky's theories are consistent with the principles of constructivism.

Jonassen (1994) proposed a constructivist design model that emphasizes the role of technology in promoting learners' understanding. Kinchin and Hay (2000) applied constructivist principles in a case study on physics problem-solving and concluded that understanding is crucial in solving problems. Nunan (1989) suggested that designing communicative tasks that reflect learners' needs and interests can promote learner-centeredness, which is an important aspect of constructivist teaching.

Vygotsky (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Despite the potential benefits of constructivist teaching methods, implementing this approach can pose some challenges. One of the key challenges is the need for teachers to shift from a traditional teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered approach. This shift requires a change in the roles of both the teachers and the students, with the teacher becoming a facilitator and the students taking a more active role in their learning.

Another challenge is the need for teachers to design and implement activities that promote active student participation, collaboration, and inquiry-based learning. This can require more planning and preparation on the part of the teachers, but can lead to more meaningful learning experiences for the students.

Despite these challenges, the application of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English holds great potential for improving student learning outcomes and preparing students for success in their future careers. As such, it is important for language educators to consider incorporating constructivist teaching methods into their teaching practices and to continue to explore innovative ways to engage and motivate students in their language learning.

Moreover, the use of technology can also be a valuable tool in implementing constructivist teaching methods in specialized English classes. Technology can provide a platform for collaborative and inquiry-based learning, facilitate communication and feedback, and enable students to access and analyze authentic materials related to their field of study.

In summary, the literature review indicates that constructivist teaching methods have the potential to enhance student learning outcomes in specialized English classes in universities. These methods emphasize student-centered and inquiry-based learning, promote active student participation and collaboration, and can lead to improved language proficiency and critical

thinking skills. However, implementing constructivist teaching methods requires a shift in the traditional roles of teachers and students, as well as careful planning and preparation. By exploring the potential of constructivist teaching methods and incorporating them into their teaching practices, language educators can better prepare their students for success in their future careers.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method for the article is a qualitative case study. The study aims to explore the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education at the Foreign Trade university and to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with this approach.

Data collection methods include the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews with 3 teachers and 200 students, classroom observations, and document analysis of course materials and assessments. The sample for this study consists of teachers and students who have experienced the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education at Foreign Trade university.

The research aims to contribute to the understanding of the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education and to identify best practices and recommendations for effective implementation. The study also aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities associated with this approach and to provide insights for future research and practice in the field. The questionnaire includes the following: (a) Demographic Questions: To gather information about the background of the participants, questions such as age, gender, educational level, and experience with constructivist teaching methods could be included; (b) Perception of Constructivist Teaching Methods: Questions could be designed to gauge the participants' perceptions of constructivist teaching methods, such as how effective they think it is, their level of engagement, and the impact it has on their learning; (c) Challenges and Opportunities: Participants could be asked to identify and describe any challenges or opportunities they have experienced with the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education in Vietnam; (d) Teaching and Learning Strategies: Questions could be asked to identify the specific teaching and learning strategies used in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods, such as problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative learning; (e) Assessment: Questions could be designed to assess the effectiveness of the assessment methods used in evaluating student learning outcomes in the constructivist teaching approach; and (f) Overall Satisfaction: Participants could be asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the constructivist teaching approach in specialized English education in Vietnam and to provide reasons for their rating.

These are just some examples of the types of questions that could be included in a questionnaire for this study. The specific questions would need to be tailored to the research questions and objectives of the study.

### **Specific Questions**

- a) Demographic Questions:  
What is your age? What is your gender? What is your educational level?  
Have you had any previous experience with constructivist teaching methods?
- b) Perception of Constructivist Teaching Methods:

- How effective do you think the constructivist teaching approach is in teaching specialized English?
- To what extent do you feel engaged in the constructivist teaching approach?
- What do you think are the benefits of the constructivist teaching approach?
- What do you think are the drawbacks of the constructivist teaching approach?
- c) Challenges and Opportunities:
- What challenges have you experienced in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education in Vietnam?
- What opportunities have you experienced in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education in Vietnam?
- d) Teaching and Learning Strategies:
- What teaching and learning strategies are used in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods?
- How are problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative learning used in the constructivist teaching approach?
- To what extent do you feel these strategies are effective in facilitating learning in specialized English education?
- e) Assessment:
- How effective are the assessment methods used in the constructivist teaching approach?
- What types of assessments are used to evaluate student learning outcomes in specialized English education?
- Do you feel that the assessment methods used in the constructivist teaching approach are fair and accurate?
- f) Overall Satisfaction:
- On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with the constructivist teaching approach in specialized English education in Vietnam?
- What factors contribute to your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the constructivist teaching approach?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education in Vietnam?

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The majority of students (95 %) reported that written exams are the main method used to evaluate student learning outcomes in the constructivist teaching approach, with 5 % reporting group projects as the method of evaluation. When asked about challenges experienced in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education, the response was a lack of participation from classmates (2%), followed by difficulty working collaboratively with others (3 %). Only 4 % of students reported difficulty understanding the course material as a challenge. The majority of students (91%) reported that there are not any difficulties. The overall satisfaction with the constructivist teaching approach in specialized English education in Vietnam was very high, with 95% of students reporting feeling very satisfied. Benefits experienced as a result of the constructivist teaching approach in specialized English education included improved critical thinking skills (5%), enhanced problem-solving skills (5%), and increased engagement with the course material (3%). The majority of students (87%) reported experiencing all of these benefits.

When asked about drawbacks of the constructivist teaching approach, the most common responses were no difficulty (86%), followed by difficulty staying focused during class (2%) and difficulty keeping up with the pace of the course (2%). The majority of students (92%) felt that

the constructivist teaching approach is much better than traditional teaching methods. Additionally, 94% of students reported feeling that the constructivist teaching approach has helped them to apply their knowledge to real-world situations.

Finally, the majority of students (87%) reported that they are more active and engaged in their own learning as a result of the constructivist teaching approach, with 7% reporting a preference for group work over individual work. Only 6% of students reported no change in their learning style. Based on the findings from the study on the application of constructivist teaching methods in teaching specialized English in universities, it appears that the majority of the respondents are very familiar with constructivist teaching methods, and they view it as effective method in teaching specialized English. The respondents also reported feeling engaged during constructivist teaching sessions.

The teaching and learning strategies that were most commonly used in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education were problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, task-based learning and collaborative learning, and the vast majority of respondents (91%) reported that all of these strategies were used. Regarding student learning outcomes, the most commonly used method for evaluation was written exams, and the majority of respondents reported that they have not experienced any significant challenges in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods in specialized English education.

When asked about their recommendations for improving the implementation of constructivist teaching methods, some respondents suggested that there should be more opportunities for group work. Respondents also reported benefits such as improved critical thinking skills, enhanced problem-solving skills, and increased engagement with the course material. The respondents interactions with their classmates and teacher have also changed as a result of the constructivist teaching approach, with the majority reporting that their teacher now acts more as a facilitator rather than a lecturer.

Overall, most respondents believe that the constructivist teaching approach is much better than traditional teaching methods, and they feel that the constructivist teaching approach has helped them to apply their knowledge to real-world situations. The majority of respondents also reported that they have become more active and engaged in their own learning as a result of the constructivist teaching approach.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

To address the challenge of difficulty working collaboratively with others, it is recommended that teachers provide guidance and support for students in developing teamwork and communication skills. To address the challenge of difficulty understanding the course material, it is recommended that teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and provide scaffolding to support student learning. To improve overall satisfaction with the constructivist teaching approach, it is recommended that teachers actively solicit feedback from students and use it to make adjustments to the implementation of the approach. To explore the impact of the constructivist teaching approach on long-term learning outcomes, it is recommended that future research incorporate measures of retention and transfer of knowledge, as well as follow-up surveys to track students' experiences and perceptions over time.

The majority of respondents reported that the constructivist teaching approach was very effective in teaching specialized English and that they were deeply engaged during constructivist teaching

sessions. Problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, task-based learning, and collaborative learning were the most commonly used teaching and learning strategies in the implementation of constructivist teaching methods.

Despite this challenge, the vast majority of respondents reported experiencing improved critical thinking skills, enhanced problem-solving skills, and increased engagement with the course material as benefits of the constructivist teaching approach. The majority of respondents reported that their teacher acted more as a facilitator than a lecturer, and they had more opportunities to work with their classmates, which indicates that the constructivist teaching approach emphasizes a student-centered learning environment.

Overall, the respondents were very satisfied with the constructivist teaching approach, and the majority reported that it was much better than traditional teaching methods. The constructivist teaching approach was also perceived to be helpful in applying knowledge to real-world situations, and the majority of respondents reported being more active and engaged in their own learning as a result of the constructivist teaching approach.

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