Constructivism and Instructivism: Opposition or Unity

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Abstract

Contemporary pedagogy and didactics apply a lot of new technologies and methods of teaching. The dominating approach to the educational environment is based on the principles of constructivism. Constructivism theory and its application can be found in a number of fields of social life such as science and art. In philosophy constructivism is closely connected with the idea of a person's active participation in cognition, in creating a personally significant model of the world. In pedagogy constructivism is studied as a theory of perception, learning and teaching. Pedagogical constructivism examines the process of knowledge acquiring as an active process when its participants create their knowledge on the basis of their own cognitive and social experience.
But to develop the cognitive process independently any learner should get some instructions what to do and how to realize this or that task. So the opposite approach i.e. Instructivism or Instructional theory cannot be avoided completely. Basic information as well as the rules of any subject from the curriculum can be obtained only with the instructor's assistance. So the interconnection of constructivism and instructivism approaches is supposed to be essential. The interdependency of these theories will be studied. The application of the constructivism and instructional theories into practice of learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language will be examined.

1. Introduction

Constructivism unites different tendencies in philosophy, art and science which are focused on an active part of an individual in cognition of the social environment, in creating personally essential model of the world.

In pedagogical constructivism learning is considered as a process where students take an active part in the knowledge acquisition using their experience but not just get the knowledge passively.

Though some proponents of radical constructivism insist on the idea of low efficiency of the pedagogical impact in general (Von Glasersfeld E), nevertheless quite a lot of ideas of pragmatic constructivism that try to unite the concepts of construction and instruction are worth being discussed[4]. J. Piaget wrote that knowledge, personal values, ways of thinking, independence and other personal characteristics of an individual are developed in the conditions of close interconnection of the objective world and socio cultural environment Perception and interpretation of the external information on the basis of personal knowledge and experience characterize the level of assimilation. Then a learner transforms his knowledge on the level of accommodation. As a result new experience is developed [6]. In this aspect the ideas of constructivism coincide with the principles of the theory of activity" developed by A.N. Leontiev and P. Galperin.

2. Development of pedagogical constructivism

Constructivism didactics is developed in XX century. It is based on the idea of learning while interacting with the social environment and making the learning environment by a student himself [3]. Some researchers unit the idea of constructivism and pragmatism the latter considers an action forming a notion and knowledge as the main way of existence of an individual and his interconnection with the world. The first attempt to apply the ideas of constructivism and pragmatism to the practice of pedagogy was made by J. Dewey. He was sure that a learner's independent activity based on his individual needs to get and create knowledge makes the foundation of the constructivism learning [2].

At this time many researchers insisted on the issue that the main purpose of learning is to develop the skills on independent thinking. L. Vygotsky thought that to teach a child thinking is more important than to convey him knowledge [1, c.181].

Studying pedagogical views of contemporary researchers on constructivism approach we can generalize the main issues of learning based on the principles of constructivism.

Learning unites cognitive and social constituents of the educational process. The personality of a student, his needs and interests predominate in education.

An individual's cognitive activity as well as social and research ones make the core of learning.

Any process of learning is based on the student's previous cognitive and social and cultural experience. Teaching English as a foreign language in a higher educational institution an instructor should take into account the communicative competences level achieved on the previous level of education, e.g. secondary school. This level makes the foundation for streaming students into different groups for learning English and for selecting the main student's books for studying. For example, lawyers-to-be in Peoples' friendship university of Russia can study English as the language for specific purposes (LSP) applying one of the following student's books (Brieger N. "Professional English. Law' Pearson Education Limited-2002; William R. McKay, Helen E. Charlton "Legal English", Pearson Longman, 2006 or Gillian D. Brown, Sally Rice "Professional English in Use. Law", Cambridge University Press, 2009). Besides video files of different complexity at the "You tube" site and "BBC Learning English" can be used for the purpose.

The purpose of education under the circumstances is to develop learners according to individual educational trajectories that help learners to realize their abilities.

Educational environment integrates various sources of learning, kinds of practical activity and ways of communication with representatives of different ethnical and cultural groups.

Content of learning in a higher educational institution implies integration of different subjects. Learning a foreign language in a nonlinguistic university implies its integration with learning other subjects. The situations and cases studied in a foreign language should be of great practical interests for the specialists to be. Integration of professional subjects in the process of English learning develops professional way of thinking, outlook, and behavior of the students.

One of the main principles of communication in the educational environment is the principle of cooperation. A teacher is no longer an instructor but a companion, a team-mate in educational activity. A student is not an object of teaching and educating but an independent person who realizes his professional interests while studying different subjects.

Particular emphasis is placed on the teacher's ability to manage and coordinate task based and research activity of learners, to support their critical thinking development. For this purpose different projects, case analysis, communicative training, solving problems connected with the students' profession are applied.

Motivation to learning is supported by investigation and research activity, problem solving in the situations of interpersonal, social cultural and professional interaction. To enhance the students motivation Foreign Languages department of Law faculty in Peoples' friendship university of Russia holds different contests and conferences in foreign languages (English, German, Spanish, Chineese), so a foreign language studied is a language of professional communication.

Knowledge assessment in constructivism is complex and is aimed at the development of reflection and self-development skills, at feedback realization.

The main principles of constructivism mentioned above are very essential for the development of the theory of teaching foreign languages and for the general theory of learning.

3. Impact of instructivism

According to the main principles of constructivism mentioned above a student is better to be taught how to use contemporary ICT as sources of new information than to be informed with definite data. He is better generalize a new rule himself than learn it with the help of an instructor and a lot of exercises. But to realize the practice of teaching English as a foreign language successfully we cannot completely reject the ideas of another philosophical approach, namely instructivism or the theory of instructions with a directive and supervising role of an instructor.

The main issues of the theory of instructions are: the emphasize is made on the development of basic skills; the instructor conveys and students receive the information they need.

To manage the self-learning process efficiently a student should get information and instructions what to do with it and how to apply it. Any knowledge even if it was acquired in a passive way results in self-development. It goes without saying that contemporary ICT is the source of very essential and topical information. But to apply this technology in a proper way and to get the necessary information a student should be able to ask a question in a correct way, to analyze and generalize the information acquired, to compare it with other data and finally to solve the task. All these skills cannot be developed independently without an instructor's guidance.

Primary knowledge of the foreign language, its phonetic characteristics, grammar structure, lexical components, and other issues are conveyed by an instructor. He also corrects the mistakes made by the students and such correction can be fulfilled only by an instructor. On the basis of these facts a student starts to design and to create his individual knowledge. In this case an instruction is a basis for creating students' knowledge. A student cannot solve any problem connected with his future profession if he does not have both sufficient knowledge of the particular subjects and foreign language communicative competences at a definite level.

Consequently, the more a student knows the better he will solve the professional problems. On the other hand foreign language professional needs of the learners can be determined with the help of constructivism, and instructivism develops the approaches that tend to realize these needs more efficiently. So constructivism and instructivism are closely connected and intergrated.

4. Conclusion

Philosophical ideas of constructivism are topical for contemporary education and the theory of teaching foreign languages. Principles of constructivism are the foundations of different teaching technologies and the process of learning in general. In practice constructivism cannot be separated from another philosophical approach the so called instructivism. Both approaches are united and equally important for both the educational process as a whole and for teaching foreign languages in a nonlinguistic university in particular.

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