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An evaluation of the classroom management approaches of the class teachers implementing “Constructivist Learning Approach”

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Abstract

In this study, the classroom management approaches of the class teachers implementing “Constructivist Learning Approach” was evaluated and 15 class teachers were asked about their thoughts. As a result, the comparison of the attitudes towards the classroom management of the class teachers who implemented “Constructivist Learning Approach” in the Turkish lessons revealed that, in general, in respect to classroom management applications, and in specific means, in respect to Classroom Organization, Learning Climate, Learning Duration and its Evaluation, Using Educational Technology and Learning Environment out-of-School, Multiple Intelligence Areas, Learning by Implementation, Questioning Learning, Student Growth, the teachers developed positive attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Constructivism is a learning approach where the students construct their own knowledge and mental models as a result of their own experiences and thinking by means of interacting with their environments (Gagnon, et al., 2006).

A way of learning and knowing, constructivism insists that knowledge is built on the learners’ experiences and lives by the students themselves. In this sense, the students, themselves, form and construct the new knowledge that they come across in the light of their existing knowledge and experiences. Constructivism shapes new learning by means of relating the new knowledge with the previous one (Sherman & Kurshan, 2005).

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To this approach, learning is an active process, and the students produce new meanings by handling the new thoughts that they make in relation with their previous knowledge (Naylor & Keogh, 1999). Brooks & Brooks (1993) puts forward that constructivism is not a teaching theory but a learning theory.

Orlich, et al. (1998) lists the general principles of the “Constructivist Learning Approach” as follows:

1. Learning is related to previous thoughts and ideas. Learners ought to form their own meanings.
2. Learning is shaped by the results negotiated and agreed on after the debates learners have.
3. Efficient learning requires knowing learners’ existing cognitive constructs and providing the learning activities convenient for these constructs.
4. The teacher accelerates students’ conceptual change by means of using one or more strategies.
5. The key factors of the conceptual change can be addressed to by means of special teaching approaches.

The overall aim of in-class educational and teaching activities is to help young generation, the future of a country, grow up healthily and fruitfully in terms of knowledge, skills and benefits. The in-class educational teaching activities are designed and directed by teachers, who are educational leaders and classroom administrators. The knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that teachers possess and their reflections affect first their students and then school administration, students’ parents and the school environment. Thus, teachers are supposed to be well-equipped with specific characteristics and adequacies. In addition, Arslan (2007) cites Hanley (2005) saying that the main of the classroom should be saved against teacher domination and, by means of constructivism approach, should become a learner-centered one.

The ways to obtain knowledge, methods and understandings constantly change. As in all fields, in the field of administration as well, what is more functional, more efficient and more fruitful is being sought… The future’s society will be shaped in accordance with the type of individual brought up by the educational system. Nations are trying to adopt the educational systems and to activate education convenient for global values of the world (Çelik, 1995).

According to the "Constructivist Learning Approach", one of the those to be used in order to bring up individuals well-equipped for the needs of the contemporary society, the administration of the classroom, the planning and implementation of teaching activities and the implementation of the teaching principles depends on the personalization of the philosophy and mentality of this approach by teachers.

Hence, in the larger scope, the Ministry of National Education (MEB), and in the smaller scope, Board of Education, have launched a project incorporating all the critical factors of the system spontaneously. Since the academic year 2005 – 2006, the educational programmes, the core of which is the "Constructivist Learning Approach," has been implemented (MEB, 2005). This study aims at determining the effects of the "Constructivist Learning Approach” on the classroom management according to the teachers’ views. In the study, the dimensions of the classroom management have been high lightened as follows: Classroom Organization, Learning Climate, Learning Duration and its Evaluation, Using Educational Technology and Learning Environment out-of-School, Multiple Intelligence Areas, Learning by Implementation, Questioning Learning, Student Growth. These dimensions were stated briefly below:

1. **Classroom Organization:** According to the "Constructivist Learning Approach,” teachers should skillfully rearrange the classrooms again and again in accordance with the occasions. What is aimed at by means of a good classroom management helping students get benefits and reinforce them by changing the learning environment. The physical design of the classroom and all the variables related to this affect education either positively or negatively. One of the conditions of effective classroom management is the pre-arrangements in connection with the physical and thinking constructs. As Başar (1999) puts it students are observed to be ready for behavioral changes in different classroom constructs.

2. **Learning Climate:** the "Constructivist Learning Approach” prevents communication cuts in the classroom. For instance, along with this approach, the teacher’s mostly tutoring in a monologue is replaced by dialogues between the teacher and the students, and between the students. That the communication process within the classroom through this approach provide with a healthy classroom affects the learning climate both within the school and the classroom in a positive way.
3. **Learning Duration and its Evaluation:** Since the "Constructivist Learning Approach" highlights the process more than the product, it helps multiply the measurement and evaluation instruments and carry out evaluation objectively.

4. **Using Educational Technology and Learning Environment out-of-School:** The "Constructivist Learning Approach" foresees employing educational technologies in the in-class activities more frequently. It causes more efficient and constant learning. For students make use of more senses in the learning process. These novelties contribute to the learning environment. Meanwhile, to this approach, the out-of-school learning environments are seen as complementary and reinforcement agents for the in-class learning, which broadens the learning environment. Vural (2004) puts forward that new technologies in the education enhances the learning environment.

5. **Multiple Intelligence Areas:** The reasons such as that the "Constructivist Learning Approach" is learner-centred, and that every individual owns his own learning style and multiple intelligence require that the classroom organization implementations be adopted in accordance with the multiple intelligence implementations.

6. **Learning by Implementation:** The "Constructivist Learning Approach" proves that, in the learning process, students should switch into an active role from a passive one. On their own and/or under the guidance of a teacher. The stage of the implementation of whatever has been learned by personalizing and by implementation is a criterion of being active. Due to this, students do not forget what they have learned and learn in the most efficient way.

7. **Questioning Learning:** According to the "Constructivist Learning Approach," should not be learned or personalized right away without questioning or criticizing. On the contrary, the students should focus on the events and facts seriously, look into the actual reason underlying these and criticize. It is this that provides with efficient and constant learning.

8. **Student Growth:** The "Constructivist Learning Approach" insists that students develop in accordance with the capacity that they have. Teachers should take into consideration this fact while organizing the classroom. This will help every student use his/her capacity at the highest level.

   It is obvious that renewal and developmental movements based on teaching programmes incorporating the "Constructivist Learning Approach", especially their being learner-centered and teachers’ supervising students during the teaching process, will affect the classroom organization process and will change teachers’ traditional roles. Hence, it will be helpful to handle the effects of the teaching programmes on the classroom organization which are in progress.

2. **Purpose**

   This study, aiming at evaluating the classroom organization approaches of the class teachers implementing the "Constructivist Learning Approach", seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Classroom Organization”?

2. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Learning Climate”?

3. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Learning Process and Its Evaluation”?


5. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Multiple Intelligence Areas”?

6. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Learning by Implementation”?

7. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Questioning Learning”?

8. How does the "Constructivist Learning Approach" influence the class teachers’ implementation concerning “Providing Student Growth”?
3. Method

3.1. Research model

This study aims at evaluating how the teaching programmes based on the "Constructivist Learning Approach", which has been used by means of the changes in the teaching programmes since the academic year 2005 – 2006, influences the class teachers’ thoughts related to the classroom organization. Thus, a study to find out the thoughts of the primary school class teachers was carried out.

In this study, “Case Study” pattern and various data were used. The data gathered by means of the technologies of semi-constructed interview, observation and document analysis.

3.1.1. Sampling

The sampling of the study was formed by the class teachers teaching at primary schools in the Central Gaziantep Province in the academic year 2006–2007. For this reason, 15 fifth grade class teachers received semi-constructed interviews. The effects of the "Constructivist Learning Approach" on classroom organization according to the teachers were aimed to be determined. One-hour Turkish lessons of each teacher, which means 15 hours of lessons in total, was constructively observed.

![Graphic 1. Sampling of teachers who were interviewed and observed](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Level</th>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CLASS TEACHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>ŞAHİNBEY</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ŞEHİTKÂMİL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE</td>
<td>ŞAHİNBEY</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>ŞAHİNBEY</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The observation form developed by the researcher in accordance with the quantative research techniques was used in order to observe the Turkish lessons of 15 class teachers. This helped understand if the teachers’ thoughts in connection with the "Constructivist Learning Approach" could be turned into behaviors. The average number of the students in the classrooms where the study was conducted was 40. that of the classrooms throughout the Gaziantep Province was 45 (http://www.gaziantep. meb.gov.tr/). What was aimed at by employing typical case sampling was to gather information concerning a specific field by dealing with the averages (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). The populations of the classrooms in the selected schools, and the parents’ socio-economic and educational levels were close to that of the whole city.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data gathered from the interviews, observations, and document analysis were dealt with. By means of the related knowledge, the thoughts and the experiences of the educators whose main duty is to implement the educational programmes, a great amount of data were collected. For “quantitive research techniques”are the best way of investigating a quantitive subject
4. Findings

The findings of the research were dealt with in a way about the subject. They were divided into eight subjects which are related to the classroom management dimension obtained through the factor analysis implemented to the answers to the "Constructivist Learning Approach Instrument".

4.1. Dimension of Classroom Organization

This subject was handled under three sub-subjects. The class teachers stated the following:

- **Usage of Materials:** After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to enrich the classroom library (f:5 - %33). I use the internet as a material and encourage the students to do the same (f:5 - %33). I try to provide the students with the internet access available in the ITCs at school for the assignment requiring internet access (f:1 - %7). I summarize all the tales, stories, novels added to the library. In this way, I determine which work is suitable for which student, which helps me deliver appropriate books to the students (f:1 - %7). In order to understand whether or not the books are read, I prepare some critical questions that I ask to the students in the book-reading hours (f:5 - %33). I make the students act in dramas concerning the book read (f:5 - %33). We have dictionaries, spelling guides, and similar books available in the classroom library. I try to make the students have and use dictionaries and spelling guides (f:1 - %7). I make the students write short summaries of the books they read in their own words (f:5 - %33).

- **Sitting Plan:** After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I pay attention to the lightening, the refreshment of the air, the cleanliness and care, the colors of the walls and belongings and the sitting plan in the classroom (f:5 - %33). I negotiate with the students on the classroom setting (f:5 - %33). I try to reduce the noise in the classroom (f:5 - %33). I realize that the classroom needs rearranging in accordance with this approach (f:5 - %33). I pay attention to the classroom setting since these learner-centered teaching programmes can reach their aims within a classroom setting which makes the student activities and learning easier (f:1 - %7).

- **Exhibition of the Students’ Products:** After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I help the students get informed about the books by means of having the ones who read the books present their summaries in front of the classroom. This draws the students’ attention to the other books (f:5 - %33). I exhibit drawings, poems, compositions, etc. about the related subjects (f:9 - %60). I exhibit the projects made out of the assignments delivered to the groups on the notice board (f:1 - %7). I keep the students’ products in the students’ folders (f:5 - %33).

- **The observation data and that of the interviews with the teachers support each other.**

4.2. Dimension of Learning Climate

This subject was handled under four sub-subjects. The class teachers stated the following about this:

- **Providing with a Democratic Environment in the Classroom:** After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to provide with a democratic environment in the classroom (f:9 - %60). I try to give everybody equal chance to speak (f:9 - %60). I respect to everybody’s thoughts (f:5 - %33). I do not get angry with the students even if they say something wrong or lacking (f:5 - %33).

- **Providing with Communication and Motivation:** After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to get a two-way communication with the students (f:9 - %60). I try to take into consideration the students’ needs (f:5 - %33). By means of empathy, I try to listen to and understand the students (f:5 - %33). I change the classroom setting so that communication and motivation can be better (f:9 - %60).
Helping Learn in Teams: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I emphasize the importance of learning in groups to the students (f:5 - %33). I explain the importance of learning in cooperation (f:5 - %33). In order to make the cooperation between the team members strong, I keep the channels of communication as much open as possible (f:5 - %33).

Helping Think Critically: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I emphasize the importance of handling the subject in details (f:10 - %67). I highlight that there is no certain and absolute correct (f:5 - %33). I explain that there may be alternative ways to get the result (f:7 - %47). After collecting all the information about the subject, I tell the students to make decisions without any exposures from others (f:6 - %40).

4.3. Dimension Learning Duration and its Evaluation

This subject was dealt with under six sub-subjects. The class teachers stated the following about this:

- Using Appropriate Methods and Techniques for Personal Diversities: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I accept that every classroom is a little model of the society. Thus, I find it natural that there are personal diversities. I conduct my studies in accordance with this (f:5 - %33). I consider individual diversities as opportunities and richness (f:5 - %33). I make use of the methods of explaining, question – answer, and discussion in the lessons (f:5 - %33).

- Harmonizing Learning with Life: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to harmonize what is learned with life so that it can be constant (f:10 - %67). By means of explaining where in life the things learned can be used, I try to motivate the students and draw their attention to the lesson (f:8 - %53). I ask the students where they can use the information that they learn (f:7 - %47).

- Supplying Student Interaction: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to supply student interaction (f:9 - %60). I try to adopt the students to the groups suitable for their abilities so that they will interact (f:6 - %40). I emphasize the importance of the interaction within the group (f:7 - %47). I would rather successes of the groups than individual successes (f:7 - %47). I pay attention to the increase of the student involvement while making decisions within the groups (f:6 - %60).

- Getting Active Implementation Made: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to prevent the students from being passive listeners (f:9 - %60). I try to make the students get involved in the lesson actively (f:8 - %53). In the preparation stage for the lesson, I assign the students for the implementations which will prepare the students for the lesson (f:7 - %47).

- Raising Parents' Consciousness: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I inform the parents about the "Constructivist Learning Approach" as well (f:7 - %47). I try to make the parents get involved in the students' learning process (f:7 - %47). I ask the parents for a supporting home environment for the education allocated at school (f:11 - %73).

- Assessing the Students: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", It will help assess the students more objectively to give up the understanding of measurement and evaluation based on the result (f:11 - %73). It is very important to assess the students’ products for the assessment method based on the process (f:8 - %53). Assessing by means of mind-maps, worksheets, performance and project assignments provides with a more objective way of assessment (f:5 - %33).

4.4. Dimension of using educational technology and learning environment out-of-school

This subject was divided into two sub-subjects. The class teachers put forward the following views:

- Using Educational Technologies: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I use educational tools and devices employing more senses. (f:10 - %67). I organize the teaching process using tools and devices easy to find in the existing environment instead of expensive ones (f:9 - %60).

- Using Learning Environment out-of-School: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", the "Constructivist Learning Approach" breaks down the walls of the classrooms, and also those of the schools (f:6 - %40). I try to use learning environment out-of-school as complementary and reinforcement agent for the in-school learning (f:7 - %47). I encourage the students to go to the library while assigning them with homework (f:6 - %40). I encourage them to go to the theatre (f:6 - %40).
4.5. Dimension Multiple Intelligence Areas

This subject was divided into two sub-subjects. The class teachers put forward the following views:

Using Teaching Methods and Techniques in Relation with Different Intelligence Areas: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", when compared to the previous approach and one-dimension planning, it is seen that the teaching process switched into another dimension with multiple intelligence areas and that it started to incorporate the students with different intelligence areas (f:5 - %33). In the new approach, the teachers do not have to be bound to a single method (f:5 - %33).

Planning in Accordance with Different Intelligence Areas: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I know that intelligence does not consist of one dimension. Thus, I do the planning in accordance with this (f:8 - %53). I do the planning in accordance with such intelligence areas as visual, verbal, logical, etc. (f:10 - %67).

4.5. Dimension of learning by implementation

This subject was handled with two sub-subjects. The class teachers stated the following points of view:

Work-Share among the Students: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I define what work is (f:5 - %33). I get the students to share the work (f:5 - %33). I tell the aim of the work (f:6 - %40). I express the responsibilities of those who are in charge (f:6 - %40). I get the students in charge to share the power (f:7 - %47). I state the conditions of the work (f:6 - %40). I emphasize the importance of the cooperation (f:6 - %40). I take into consideration the personal diversities while sharing the work (f:5 - %33).

Assigning the Students with Homework in Accordance with Their Abilities: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I do not assign all the students with the same homework (f:5 - %33). I assign the students with homework in accordance with their levels (f:7 - %47). I assign the students with homework in accordance with the aim (f:9 - %60). I control the homework (f:6 - %40).

4.6. Dimension of questioning learning

This subject was dealt with two sub-subjects:

Teaching the Students Learning to Learn: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I mention that learning should change behaviors of the student. Without achieving this, it is impossible to get benefits (f:5 - %33). I highlight that frequent exercises and repetitions increases the level of learning (f:9 - %60). Implementation is very important in education (f:6 - %40).

Temptation of What is Learned: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I control to what extent the student learn what they were taught (f:5 - %33) The control of what is learned functions as a feedback for the teacher (f:9 - %60). I re-teach the subjects taught in order to complete and reinforce the lacking points (f:6 - %40). I try to find out the reasons why the subject was not learned (f:7 - %47).

4.7. Dimension of student growth

This subject was divided into three sub-subjects. The class teachers put forward the following views:

Rewarding the Students: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I try to reward the students in every occasion (f:6 - %40). I pay attention to rewarding to make benefits be constant and to encourage the students (f:10 - %67). I make use of rewarding as a means of reinforcement agent for the benefits (f:6 - %40).

Assigning the Students with Research Projects: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I assign the students with research projects in order that reality is seen better (f:6 - %40). I assign the students with research and investigation projects to reinforce the theoretical knowledge (f:5 - %33).

Keeping the Students' developmental Records: After starting to implement the "Constructivist Learning Approach", I evaluate the in-class performances of the students and record the findings (f:9 - %60). I collect information concerning the benefits the students’ got by means of the projects that they prepared (f:7 - %47). I try to evaluate the students within the process (f:8 - %53).
5. Discussion

The effects of implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach" on the “Classroom Organization” are as follows: This approach enriches the resource diversity to be used and requires the usage of the internet as a resource. Teachers should model students in how to use the resources. This approach requires paying attention to the lightening and refreshing the air, cleanliness and care, and the colors walls and the belongings in the classroom. The classroom needs rearranging again and again in accordance with this approach. The classroom setting gains importance since this learner-centered approach can achieve its aim by means of a classroom setting to make the students’ activities and learning easier. This approach requires a classroom setting suitable for group work. A good classroom setting reduces the teacher’s responsibilities concerning the classroom management. The exhibition of the works raises the learner motivation, and, thus, it affects the students’ learning directly. Yıldırım and Dönmez (2008) put it that the “Constructivist Learning Approach” is one requiring rearranging the classroom setting in different ways and making use of every part of the classroom.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach" on “Classroom Climate” can be listed as below: The implementation of this approach requires a democratic atmosphere. A two-way communication with the students is necessary for the "Constructivist Learning Approach". The students should be motivated by means of rewarding. In addition, students should be taught to learn in teams and think critically. Yıldırım and Dönmez (2008) got similar findings in the research that they carried out.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach" on “Learning Duration and its Evaluation” can be put into order as follows: This approach requires using appropriate methods and techniques for personal diversities harmonization of learning with life, getting the students interact with each other, getting the students implement actively, making the parents conscious and the evaluation of the students in accordance with new measurements. Yıldırım and Dönmez (2008) state that the communication between the teachers and the parents occupies a crucial part in the students’ success. Additionally, the parents are seen as an important part of the learning – teaching process.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach" on “Using Educational Technology and Learning Environment out-of-School” are stated below: This approach requires more usage of the educational technologies in the teaching process. The "Constructivist Learning Approach” breaks down the walls around the classrooms and the schools.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach" on “Multiple Intelligence Areas” can be listed as below: In the plans done in accordance with the "Constructivist Learning Approach”, Multiple Intelligence Areas cover a large ground. This is very fruitful for the involvement in the teaching process of the students with different intelligence types. Teachers are not bound to a single method in this approach.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach” on “Learning by Implementation” are listed below: This approach provides with a ground for the students’ more constant learning by means of involving them in the work by the work-share and of experiencing the process.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach” on “Questioning Learning” are stated as follows: In this approach, learning should take place by questioning. In addition, constant feedback regarding the students’ levels of learning the subject matter is of crucial importance.

The effects of the implementation of the "Constructivist Learning Approach” on “Student Growth” can be explained as below: This approach states the importance of that students should be assigned with homework in accordance with their performances. Even very little developments of students should be monitored.
6. Recommendation

The recommendations of this study concerning the research findings and conclusion are as follows:

1. All kinds of feedback to be gathered from the implementations related to the "Constructivist Learning Approach" by the Ministry of National Education should be evaluated and employed in the development of the system.

2. The research findings show that the studies related to the "Constructivist Learning Approach" does not suit those related to the ordinary one and that parents do not know how to help their children. It is because of this that, in order to increase parents’ awareness of the "Constructivist Learning Approach", activities such as conferences, seminars, etc. should be held.

3. The cabinet system where learning by implementation activities incorporating the basic philosophy of the “Constructivist Learning Approach” will be possible should be employed in every sort of school at once. This kind of an application will prevent students from behaving badly.

4. For the implementation of the educational programmes including the “Constructivist Learning Approach” has just been launched and has not been piloted for long, feedback about the implementation of the educational programmes from the educational administrators, teachers, students and parents should be received periodically. The evaluation findings of the feedback and the decisions made should be shared with the related authorities.

5. In the study, it is seen that the implementation of Multiple Intelligence Areas increases the quality of teaching. Teaching by means of using methods and techniques appropriate for individual diversities will help more students learn.

6. The learning environment out-of-school should be employed as the complementary, the reinforcement agent and the implementation field for learning in-school. Keeping this in mind, it should be looked into how to make use of the environmental facilities. Students should be assigned in this issue as well.

7. The “Constructivist Learning Approach” insists that students can learn not only from teachers but from each other as well. Hence, the classrooms should be turned into learning organizations.

References


