

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND COLLABORATION AT ESP UNIVERSITY COURSES

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The latest approaches to EFL/ESP teaching and learning is based on the theories of constructivism and social development.

Constructive approach views knowledge as being constructed by learners through social interaction with others. The main emphasis in this theory is made on the prior knowledge of learners and their ability to construct new knowledge on its basis. The methods of constructivism are aimed at development learners' ability to solve real life problems. Being actively involved in the process of problem solving, students could discover new knowledge for themselves that may result in their cognitive development.

Being a foundation of constructivism, Vygotsky's theory of social development is focused on social interaction as a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. This theory emphasizes the importance of socio-cultural context in which learning takes place and how context has an impact on what is learned (Vygotsky, 1978). That is why social interaction between learners especially while learning EFL/ESP should be paid special attention to.

All these theoretical issues have found their implication in EFL teaching and learning. Teaching ESP as a means for communication of students in different specialism areas is based on language learning activities and tasks focused on communication while solving real life problems of future professionals. Tasks aimed at problem solving are widely used through the courses that result in the discovery new knowledge by students and development of their language and cognitive skills necessary for their further professional development.

The best practices of using close to real life tasks and situations, designed by ESP teachers of the National Mining University for students of different specialism

areas, are reflected in an ESP coursebook for mining engineers “English for study and Work” (Kostrzytska, Zuyenok, Shvets, Poperechna: 2010).

Each unit of *In-classroom Activities* (Part I of the coursebook) starts with the discovering student’s prior knowledge on the topic to be learnt by the series of tasks used as Lead-in to the unit and done in groups or pairs. Brainstorming, mindmapping and discussions widely used for this purpose allow to fix where students were at the beginning of the unit that can be later used by students’ for their reflections on the knowledge of the unit obtained and skills developed. Besides, such activities help teachers to identify students’ gaps and lacks at the beginning of the unit that contributes much to their further facilitation of students’ learning process.

The texts used for input also contribute to students’ discovery of the topic of the units, which have been agreed with the subject teachers, experts in the area of students’ study. Using the interactive reading tasks which are based on highlighting main ideas, filling in tables, worksheets, graphs and diagrams etc. contributes to students’ interaction with the text and their further social interaction with the peers when comparing the results of their individual work. Therefore, ‘learning by doing’ leads to students’ experiential learning from the EAP/ESP lessons.

While doing a series of tasks through the units, which are of multidisciplinary nature, i.e. are not limited to the use of English as a foreign language only, students gain experiential learning of EFL as a means of communication and at the same time they construct their own knowledge of the subject based on their peers’ knowledge and theoretical knowledge got from the texts they are working with.

Project works proposed in Part II *Self-study Resources* are based on collaboration of students and presuppose students’ sharing and exchange of knowledge on the topic explored. The result of the collaborative work is a project, which reflects constructive knowledge of the group of students involved in it.

Various inputs got from peers, teacher and/or from the theoretical knowledge and experiences described in various sources of information result in new knowledge about both English speaking environment and student’s future specialism in addition to general and communicative language competence developed.

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