

Exploring Features of Constructive Learning Theory in EFL Writing Classrooms: in the case of Bahir Dar University

By: Ephrem Gebreselassie (PhD candidate at Bahir Dar University)

Abstract

Several language scholars and practitioners believe that constructive learning theory is the most applicable notion to enhance language proficiency, especially writing. The Ethiopian government and concerned stakeholders have gone long way in introducing this theory and approach in the actual language classes. However, though there have been practical attempts to integrate the approach, the status of manipulating this theory or approach is not as it is expected. Because of this, the study was conducted to explore if there is constructive learning theory elements at English language writing classes in Bahir Dar University. To gather valid and reliable data, questionnaire was administered on the whole fresh man English department students, 53 in total, and to refine and triangulate the self-responding data observation check-list was used. Moreover, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and using description and narration what teachers did in the class. Based on the data analysis result, it is concluded that major characteristics of constructive learning theory were not depicted in the English language writing sessions. It is recommended that since constructive learning theory is very crucial for improving writing proficiency, teachers should develop clear awareness for its implementation. Hence, English teachers should participate in teacher development programs and they should enhance their awareness how to implement constructivism theory in any language classrooms.

Key words: constructive learning, language learning approach, teaching writing,

1

1. Introduction

Writing is not simply a matter of translating preconceived ideas into text, but also involves creating content and translating it based on the needs of the reader. Writing is as much a matter of discovering or inventing the thought to be expressed in the text as it is a matter of expressing it in an appropriate and convincing way (Flower & Hayes 1980). Based on different scholars who study writing from cognitive perspective like Flower & Hayes (1980) and Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) writing involves a complex interaction between a wide range of different processes. When writers write a text, according to cognitive writing model, they translate/compose what they know/think differently. For example, Bereiter & Scardamalia, (1987) argue that expert and novice writers' way of processing writing and the quality the written product are quite different because these writers employ different strategies of retrieving, translating, and revising idea while writing. Bereiter & Scardamalia, (1987) also states that novice writers are assumed to employ a knowledge-telling strategy in which text production is guided by the direct retrieval of content from long-term memory and is organized solely by the associative relationships between content as it is stored in long-term memory. By contrast, more expert writers employ a knowledge-transforming strategy, which involves elaborating a representation of the rhetorical or communicative problem to be solved and using the goals derived from this representation to guide the generation and evaluation of content during writing. However, when the notions of knowledge telling and knowledge transforming are used in connection with learning, they may also refer to processes in which a person tells or transforms knowledge borrowed from others or from textbooks. Thus, knowledge telling and knowledge transforming may be inter- individual or social processes in learning situations. From this perspective, as forms of writing knowledge telling and knowledge transforming have an analogical conceptual pair in the field of learning. While some people consider learning a process of acquiring and increasing one's knowledge through acts of reproducing and memorizing ready-made information (knowledge telling), others think that learning is a constructive and creative process where a learner constructs meanings and transforms ideas, and that this process will change thinking (cf. knowledge transforming). Lonka, Maury and Heikkila (1997) showed that those university students who saw writing as knowledge transforming were also more likely to see learning as the active construction of knowledge. In contrast, those students who perceived learning as the intake of knowledge were likely to see writing as

knowledge telling. Interestingly, the way language teachers teach writing and the way students' learn writing also correlated with the constructivist approach to learning.

Thus, students' conceptions of learning are related to the way in which they see the aim of writing. The way in which teachers and students understand and conceptualize learning and in which they understand and conceptualize writing may also affect the way in which they use writing for learning. If teachers think that teaching and learning is about transmitting and reproducing knowledge, it follows that they will design their students' knowledge telling type of writing tasks. In contrast, if teachers consider learning a constructive and transformative process they probably seek to promote this process by assigning students' knowledge transforming tasks.

2. Approaches to the Teaching of Writing

Teaching writing passes through different approaches (product, process, and genre), and each of them emphasizes or attempts to develop specific feature of writing. As a result, writing teachers who are inclined to one of these approaches are always challenged to teach the whole elements of writing in the classroom. This challenge can be considered as a main obstacle in implementing effectively constructivism in writing classes. To make it clear the above argument, it is better to survey history of teaching writing approaches as follows.

Over the last 20 years, product approaches have dominated teaching writing in the EFL classroom, but genre approaches advocated by Swales (1990), Tribble (1996), Gee (1997) have put their stronghold in the last ten years. Considering the earliest work in the teaching of writing, it was based on the notion of controlled or guided composition. Pincas (1982) is one of the eminent adherents of product approaches, and she sees writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge with distinct focus on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices. This approach to writing consists of four stages: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. The aim of the familiarization stage is to make learners aware of certain features of a particular text whereas in the controlled and guided writing sections, the learners practice the skills with increasing freedom until they are ready for the free writing section, when they “use the writing skill as a part of a genuine activity such as a letter, story or essay” (Pincas, 1982:22). In this regarding, teaching writing through product approach does not have enough room for students meaning construction since most of the time spent in learning the

linguistic elements of the language. Moreover, even if students have got the chance to write, their primary concern is how much I produce error free text than the argument/idea they express. Consequently, it is very difficult to incorporate constructivism learning theory features in such kind teaching writing approach.

The other teaching writing approach introduced after product approach is process approach. Unlike product approach, the main focus of the writer in process writing is idea generation. Tribble (1996) asserts that “writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data to the ‘publication’ of a finished text” (p.37). Process approach predominantly deals writers cognitive activity while writing. Using different method like introspection, and think aloud protocol, writing scholars who favor the perspective of cognitive psychology studied the expert linguistic skills or writers strategies, and recommend them to be part of teaching writing in the classroom. As a result, teaching writing through process approach emphasizes to exercise writing strategies such as planning, drafting, and revising. Less emphasis is given to linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about grammar and text structure. In a nutshell, we can summarize that process approaches see writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills, and writing development as an unconscious process which happens when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing strategies. Hence, the principle of process approach has some commonalities with constructive learning theory because both of them primarily focus on learners’ idea generation, and meaning construction. At the top of this, both theories have an agreement on learners’ engagement to think and respond to the given tasks.

Next to the process approach, the method of teaching writing mostly adheres Halliday’s theory of linguistic function. Based on this theory, teaching writing based the genre of the text was introduced. Genre refers to abstract, and socially recognized ways of using language. In this approach, language is seen as embedded in (and constitutive of) social realities since it is through recurrent use of conventionalized forms that individuals develop relationships, establish communities, and get things done. Genre theorists, therefore, locate participant relationships at the heart of language use. They assume that every successful text will display the writer’s awareness of its context. Genre approaches are relatively new to the professionals of ELT; moreover, there are such strong similarities with the product approach that, in some ways, the genre approach is

considered to be an extension of the product approach. Keeping the likeness of product approach in mind, we see that the genre approach maintains writing as predominantly linguistic focus but unlike the product approach, the adherents of the genre approach emphasize that writing varies with the social context in which it is produced. So, we have a range of kinds of writing such as sales letters, research articles, and reports linked with different situations (Flowerdew, 1993). For genre analysts, the central aspect of the situation is purpose. Different kinds of writing, or genres, such as, letters of apology, recipes, or law reports are used to carry out different purposes. Therefore, this teaching writing approach also favors constructive learning theory because it gives due attention the social realities. In addition, this approach advocates bringing purposeful and authentic tasks to the classroom.

Based on the above explanations, it simple to understand that writing and teaching writing were seen from different perspectives, so teachers' approach of teaching writing is basically different and emphasizes different aspect of writing. Consequently, learners cannot be successful if teachers teach them by using only one teaching writing approach since all of the teaching writing approaches have their own drawbacks. So, it is better to integrate the approaches based on the need and the difficulty of students. Since constructivism adherently gives value to the whole pictures of concepts or skills than focusing on studying one aspect of them, this theory can be best learning approach to integrate all the teaching approaches of writing, and by implementing elements of constructive learning theory in writing classrooms, teachers can make their students successful writers. Flowerdew (1993) and Badger and White (2000) argue for a procedure which focuses on the process of learning about, and acquiring genres, rather than one which focuses solely on the end product, or specific variety of genre. Constructivism theory also suggests by designing purposeful, meaningful, and realistic writing activities tasks, teachers can make writing classes relaxed and stress free. Similarly, constructivists advocate consecutive and continuous assessments and its purpose is to facilitate learning not only recording results. Hand in hand, writing assessments should be purposeful, and its focus should be for all aspects of writing such as linguistic knowledge, content, organization and mechanics.

3. Constructivism learning theory

Constructivism as a theory of learning, or psychological constructivism, emerged from the work of cognitive psychologists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner (Richardson, 2003) and With the rise of cultural psychology, two perspectives became dominant: individual constructivism and social constructivism. According to (Richardson, 2003) and (Solomon, 1994) while these two schools of thought differ, perhaps as two ends of a continuum (i.e., one focuses on the construction of meaning inside a person and the other focuses on the construction of meaning among people), others have argued that all learners construct meaning socially as well as individually.

Constructivist theory of learning has several benefits for students learning. From those benefits (Dufresne, Gerace, Leonard, Mestre, & Wenk, 1996), it gives opportunity for the students to be participants in their learning, it promotes relating each lesson with their prior knowledge, it encourages peer and group discussion, it informs teachers to come with challenging activities, assessment also is not separated from learning, as a result, teachers know students development easily, and it creates relaxed environment. To confirm this, great deals of relevant research studies have been carried out on constructivist learning theory (Richardson, 2003), (Kiraly, 2014), (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002) and (Wudu M, 2009) . And they revealed that constructivist instruction contributes to development of higher learning outcomes, positive attitudes towards learning, decreases anxiety, and enhances collaboration and interaction (Cobb et al., 1991; Thomaz and Gilbert, 1989).

In a constructivist classroom the teacher's role is mainly to guide, facilitate, focus, suggest and evaluate the learning process in order to encourage the students to construct knowledge. The teacher is (Bamgbose, 2004) also a co-explorer who encourages learners to question, explain, challenge, discuss, evaluate and formulate their own ideas, opinions, solutions and conclusions. 'Correct' answers, single interpretations, rigid standards and criteria are deemphasized (Bean, 2011), but diversity in knowledge construction is accepted. Teachers also function as initiators of activities that will evoke students' interest and lead to new constructions (Airasian and Walsh, 1997; Marlowe and Page, 1998) instead of telling them what to know about specific content areas. The effective teachers are considered to be those who do not believe that students' learning can be controlled absolutely and respect students as human beings (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Airasian and Walsh, 1997). Moreover, in constructivist terminology, *encouraging* rather than *teaching* is used

more frequently because the individual development cannot be forced (Selley, 1999). It is also essential for the teacher to teach several cognitive strategies to students to help them learn about and gain control over their own activities. These include teaching skills in problem-solving, controlling anger, self-monitoring and assessment, managing stress, cognitive restructuring of students' beliefs about themselves and the world, and training for self-instruction and resolving conflicts (Dollard, 1996).

Following the advocacy of constructivist learning theory, like other countries, the Ethiopian MoE has indicated this theory at its policy as a paradigm shift from traditional education to modern education ETP (1994). The implied message the 1994 education policy is the approach of teaching and learning is changed from teacher centered to student centered. For this reason, the MoE under its guiding document has stated that the teaching and learning process in any institution should, whatever the methods of delivery employed, promote students interaction, and participation (MoE, 2009).

On the basis of these essence and contribution of constructivist learning theory, the Ethiopian government introduced how this theory is implemented at the classroom level to all higher education in the country. Therefore, the implementation of constructivism learning theory was further promoted as student centered teaching approach and student network, five in one organization, to mention few. However, even if there are efforts for its implementation here and there, it is too difficult to say there is real implementation of this theory in our country language classrooms. Moreover, the researchers' informal observation also a good evidence for most teachers are still dominated in using the traditional approach which is behaviorism than constructivism. There for, in this study the researchers are interested to explore some of the elements constructivism learning if they are implemented in Bahir Dar University writing classes. As a result, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions.

1. Do writing teachers allow students to construct their knowledge with their peers?
2. Do writing teachers provide adequate opportunity to students to express their thoughts through varied writing activities?
3. Do writing teachers bring purposeful and authentic writing tasks to the classroom?
4. Do writing teachers provide constructive and timely feedback to the students?

5. Do writing teachers create relaxed and stress free classroom environment for their students?

4. Research Methods of the study

Mixed research method (concurrent triangulation model) was employed to address the research questions posed. Based on the development of research methodology and perceived legitimacy of both quantitative and qualitative approach, researchers in educational, social and human sciences increasingly adapt the mixed methods approaches which employ strategies to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data (Cresswell, 2003). As Denzin (1978) noted, any single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors and each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality. As a result, quantitative survey and qualitative observation design were employed in an attempt to achieve the very purpose of this research and answer the research questions formulated.

5. Participants and participant selection procedures

The study was undertaken at Bahir Dar University. This university was selected because it is convenience for the researcher since the researcher is PhD candidate in the university. To assess the practice of constructivism learning theory, the study relied on Bahir Dar fresh man English major students and English as foreign language instructors of the university. Two English instructors who teach writing for first year English major students were participants of the study because they were already assigned to teach the course, and 53 students of first year English department students were also participants of the study directly. In other words, available sampling was employed to select the participants of the study.

6. Instruments and procedures of data collection

Two data collection instruments were employed to gather data. The first one is questionnaire for students, and the other one is an observation checklist for actual class room observation. The questionnaire (Constructivist Classroom Characteristics Questionnaire) was designed to explore how much Bahir Dar University instructors implement constructivist philosophy in their language classrooms. Similarly, the purpose of the observation checklist was to explore to what extent Bahir Dar University language instructors manifest the basic features of constructivist

philosophy in their language classroom. To develop the questionnaire, previous literature on constructivism language teaching classroom including guiding documents were consulted (Powell & Kalina, 2009); (Prince, 2004) and (Richards & Rodgers, 2014); (Marlowe and Page, 1998;) and(Taylor and Maor, 2000). Then, the questionnaire was developed by the researcher. The self-developed questionnaire and checklist were commented by researchers and expertise in field to ensure its content validity. Accordingly, the comments obtained from colleagues were included in the questionnaire and checklist. Furthermore, to check the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted and Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Calculated Cronbach's alpha was found as of 0.67. From this, it is possible to confirm strongly, the questionnaire is reliable enough to collect the necessary data from the participants. Accordingly, 20 items were developed and distributed to all respondents of 53 fresh man English major students who were going to take writing course in Bahir Dar University. The items were developed in a yes evidenced or not evidence categorical scale.

Moreover, The checklist consisted of statements for noting down the time of each observation, the task or the activity that was being done, what the instructor and the students were doing and the learning aids that were being used at that time.

9

7. Data analysis procedure

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Frequency, percentage, and mean), and the two observations were analyzed qualitatively by describing and narrating what the teachers were doing and what the students were doing at the real classroom setting, then the data analyzed using the two instruments was again scrutinized comparatively based on what the theory demands in its implementation.

8. Results

The data which were found in questionnaire and observation were analyzed and interpreted. The questionnaire was analyzed in percentile and the data found in observation were analyzed qualitatively which means it was attempted first to narrate what both teachers did in their

classrooms after that it was attempted to did comparison and contrast from real implementation of constructivist learning theory point of view.

9.1 Analysis of the questionnaire

Data regarding if constructive learning theory elements or characteristic were found in language classes especially in basic writing course were collected via questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed for 53 students. It was analyzed using percentile. The analysis is as follows.

Table 1: the table shows constructive learning elements which have positive response from students

No	Item	No of students who said yes in percent	No of students who said no in percent
1	Relating the lesson with the big picture or general objective of the course	86.7	13.3
2	Relating the lesson with students prior knowledge	73.6 80	26.6 20
3	Motivating students	90	10
4	Giving ample thinking time	76.7	23.3
5	Giving high value for students idea	80	20
6	Adequate support for the students	83.3	16.6
7	Group discussion	96.7	3.3
8	Constructive assessment	80	20

Based on the data which is found in the questionnaire, most of the students believed that some of the constructivist elements were found in their classes. For instance, we can take some elements which most students agreed as they were elements of their daily lessons. The first characteristic of constructive learning theory which they believed as the element of their daily lesson was relating daily lesson to the general picture/objective of the course that is 86.7% of the students agreed as their teacher relate the main idea of the lesson with the general picture/objective of the course. Secondly, the element which is considered as feature of constructivist was motivation. Similarly, most of the students above 80% had common idea as their teacher motivate them to do

writing activities. Thirdly, students were asked if their teacher had started the lesson by relating to their prior knowledge or not and it was found that most of them (90%) answered as their teacher relate the lesson with their prior knowledge. The other issue which they responded were related to thinking time. In other words, the students were asked whether their teacher gave them ample time to think on the question, and most of them about 76% agreed as the teacher gave them adequate time to think on activities. The other element of this theory is valuing students' idea and again most of them (80%) said yes indeed. Regarding whether their teacher gave them adequate help in the classroom, 83.3% of the students' believe as their teacher gave them sufficient help while learning. Related to assessment, the students were asked if they observed their teacher assessed them while doing activities and most of them (80%) agreed as their teacher assessed them while doing activities. The last question they were asked were if there was relaxed/stress free environment in the classroom and half of them agreed and half of them did not agree with this idea.

Table 2: the table shows constructive learning elements which have negative response from students

No	Item	Yes	NO
1	Relating the lesson to their immediate life experience	10	90
2	Challenging activities	30	70
3	Learning by doing	23.3	76.6
4	Taking learning responsibility	26.6	83.3
5	Strong relationship with the teacher	13.3	86.6
6	Relaxed environment in the classroom	20	80

As the above table shows, On the other hand, based the questionnaire, the students reported as some critical constructivist elements were not found in their classes, for instance they were asked whether their teacher asked them or came up with challenging activities and 90% of the students respond negatively as their teacher did not come up with challenging activities. They were

witnesses as they were never challenged by the teachers' activities. The other issue students respond negatively was related to relating the lesson with their immediate life experience. 70% of the students agreed that the teacher did not relate the lesson with their immediate life experience. The other concern which students respond negatively was the issue of making the lesson practical. In other word, they were asked if their teacher taught them practically for example for this course if they learn writing through writing. Most of them (76.6%) respond negatively and they showed as the learned theoretically instead of practically. The other question was if the teacher encouraged them to be responsible for their learning and 66.6% of them disagreed and responded negatively as teacher did not encourage them to be responsible for their learning.

To sum up, based on the, questionnaire it can be concluded that the students were witnessed for some of the elements were found in their classrooms like relating the lesson with the big picture of the course, motivating the students to do tasks, relating the lesson to their prior knowledge, ample thinking time, valuing students' idea, giving adequate time for the students. On the contrary, they reported as some of the constructivist elements were not depicted in their classrooms. Some of critical elements like bringing relatively challenging activities, relating the lesson to students immediate life experience, making the lesson practical, and encouraging students to be responsible for their learning were not reported as they were features of their classrooms.

12

9.2 Analysis of the observation

To support the questionnaire, two observations were conducted. The items of the observation check list were relatively similar with the questionnaire items. Two teachers were observed but the two teachers did relatively similar things in their classes. What each teacher did in their writing classroom was described and narrated as follows.

The first writing teacher started the lesson by reviewing the previous lesson orally, and at the time of the revision, he asked students different questions related to type and usage of coordinating conjunctions. Some of the students answered the questions. After he heard the answer, then the teacher himself immediately revised the previous lesson, after that he passed to his next lesson that is how to join ideas/sentences using subordinate conjunctions. In his presentation, he gave detail

lecture and in the middle of his talk, chances were provided for students to ask questions, then first he forwarded the questions to the students. After that he went back to the started lecture. When he finished what he would like to say, he asked the students to join sentence using subordinate conjunctions. However, the activities were done individually and at that time the teacher tried to look some of their students work by chance, and hand in hand he was observed when he helped his students. The teacher was not observed when he encouraged his students to work in group. When the students finished doing the activities, then he did the activity together with his students. It was also observed that most of the teacher's communication was with better students than the whole class. For each question, the teacher was observed when he gave detail information by himself. After doing some questions, the teachers finished his lesson.

And below this, the researcher describes and narrated how the second writing teachers handled his lesson.

The second writing teacher started the lesson by giving back the written assignment which was given in the previous session, and then he explained to the students as they committed several errors while writing sentences. After that he started the lesson by identifying common errors and explained the causes of the errors and suggested how students should correct them. Then, he started lecture how to use relative pronouns to join sentences. After the extended lecture, he asked the students to join sentences using appropriate relative clauses. Students did the activity individually. Then, he did the activity together with the students. At the end of the class the teacher asked students to rewrite the previous paper correctly and resubmit it.

When the writing teachers observation were analyzed based on constructivism learning theory, it is very difficult to say basic characters of constructivism were implemented by these writing teachers. According to Brooks and Brooks (1993) main features of constructivist teacher are teachers posed questions to check students' understanding of concepts before sharing their own understandings of those concepts. Teacher encourages students to engage in dialogue, both with the teacher and with one another. Teachers Encourage student asked thoughtful, open-ended questions and encouraging students to ask questions of each other. Teachers also asked students to do purposeful and realistic tasks in a group. Teachers encourage students assess their peers work

and give feedback. However, the observed writing have not observed when they implement the above features of constructivism. To discuss in detail, both of them did not give time to the students to do activities together but constructivism adherently believe that knowledge is constructed socially; as a result, the theory encourages peer and group work. In addition, the other basic feature of the theory is assigning purposeful, realistic and meaningful tasks to the students. In contrast, the observed writing teachers were not observed when doing this in the writing classroom. Even though they gave activities, the activities were sentence level, and they were not authentic.

Even if it evaluated from teaching writing approaches, the observed writing teachers were not observed when they implement by integrating the writing approaches. Instead, they only teach writing based on the traditional method that is product approach. However, teachers were not observed when they ask students to write a paragraph or an essay because of this students were not observed when they use different writing strategies like planning, composing, and revising. Again students were not observed to study different genres and attempt to write independently. However, through observation the researcher came with different data from what the students responded to the questionnaire. For instance, the students reported that constructive learning theory elements like relating the lesson to their prior knowledge, relating the lesson with the general objective of the lesson, and others were found in their classes. But these elements were not observed by the researcher because the teachers were not observed when they gave tasks to know their students prior knowledge or to understand where the students writing label is.

Secondly, the teachers were observed only when they give detail information at the time of their presentation, but they were not observed when they attempted to relate the lesson how it can be work with the general picture of the lesson.

Even though, different data were found through these two data gathering instruments, the researcher tried to narrow the gap by taking the common data which were found by the two data gathering instruments and concludes that the major elements of constructive learning theory elements were not explored at Bahir Dar university language classes especially in Basic Writing course.

9. Implication for Practice

Constructivism has demonstrated great explanatory power about what happens in language classrooms. While it does not answer all of the questions about teaching writing and certainly does not provide a prescription for what we ought to do in the writing classrooms, it does offer solid evidence in supporting learning writing in the language classrooms. The intention of this study is to emphasize and remind the contribution of constructivism learning theory and to make it easier for writing teachers to begin applying these ideas in a more deliberate, self-conscious manner.

There are several implications of constructivism learning theory about teaching writing. To enhance learning writing in language classrooms, firstly, writing teachers should understand what the students already know. Without an understanding of the input state of the students, it is impossible for writing teachers to set realistic goals for their students and impossible to plan activities that will help the students reach those goals. Secondly, it must be stressed that language teachers need to know what misconceptions their students exhibit and teacher should take necessary measures to correct students' misconceptions. Thirdly, writing teacher should realize that practice and appropriate feedback are the keys to enhance writing skill. Thus, writing learning environment must provide ample opportunities for students to solve problems or practice language skill and receive appropriate and timely feedback. On top of this, establishing collaborative or cooperative learning environment is basic tenet of this theory and this provides for language teachers opportunity to interact with students in a manner that is profitable to both teacher and students. Another basic task of this theory is supporting students to articulate their knowledge which means students should get time to write and communicate each other related to what and how they understand related to the given language skill and feature.

10. Conclusion

Now days, most of the scholars believe and recommend teachers especially language teachers to incorporate constructive learning theory in their classes. Not only the literature but also the government of Ethiopia advocates the implementation of this theory in every class. Based on this, this research was conducted to explore if there is constructive learning theory characteristics in Bahir Dar university writing classes especially in basic writing course. However, this research shows as there is no major constructive learning theory element in our language classes. From

this research, it is concluded that major constructive learning theory elements like social learning, facilitating learning by bringing relatively challenging activities to the students, relating the daily lesson to the general picture of the course, and to their immediate life, and learning by doing were not explored in the language classes. Based on this finding, it is possible to conclude that most teachers are not in the mode of helping students to learn by themselves. As a result, by implementing constructive learning theory, teachers should make students learning nearer to their life experience, concert and motivating. For the future career it is good if researchers give emphasis for questions like:

1. How much do language teachers aware of about constructive learning theory and its implementations?
2. What challenges and opportunities do Ethiopia language classes have in the implementation of constructive learning theory?
3. What is students' attitude for group work or peer work?
4. How can group work or peer work be implemented to the best effect in students learning a language?
5. What is the effect of implementing constructive learning theory on the students writing proficiency?

Reference

- Abdal-Haqq, I. (1998). Constructivism in teacher education: Considerations for those who would link practice to theory. (Report No: SP038284). District of Columbia: Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No: ED 426986).
- Airasian, P. W., & Walsh, M. E. (1997). Cautions for classroom constructivists. *Education Digest*, 62 (8), 62-69. Retrieved November 26, 1999.
- Akar, H. (2001) Impact of constructivist teaching and learning process on preservice teacher education students' performance and attitudes in classroom management course. Unpublished doctoral dissertation proposal. Middle East Technical University, Ankara.
- Badger, R., & White, G. (2000). A process genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal*, 54(2), 153-160.
- Bereiter, Carl; Scardamalia, Marlene (1987) *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32, 347-364.
- Brooks, M., & Brooks, J. (1995). In search for understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Caverly, D. C., & Peterson, C. L. (1996). Foundations for a constructivist approach to college developmental reading. Retrieved November 19, 1999 from http://www.school.edu.swt.edu/Dev.ed/PLAN/Plan_text.
- Cobb, P., Wood, T., Yackel, E., Nicholls, J., Wheatley, G., Trigatti, B., & Perlwitz, M. (1991). Assessment of a problem-centered second grade mathematics project. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 22 (1), 3-29.
- Crowther, D. T. (1997). The constructivist zone under construction. *Electronic Journal of Science Education*, 2 (2), 1-9. Retrieved November 11, 1999 from <http://unr.edu/homepage/jcannon/ejse/ejsev2n2ed.html>.

- Dana, T. M., Campbell, L. M., & Lunetta, V. N. (1997). Theoretical bases for reform of science teacher education. *The Elementary School Journal*, 97 (4), 420-430.
- Erdem, E. (2001). Program geliřtirmede yapılandırıcılık yaklařımı. (Constructivist approach in curriculum development). Unpublished master thesis. Hacettepe University, Ankara.
- Flowerdew, J. (1993). An educational, or process approach to the teaching of professional genres. *ELT Journal*, 47(4), 305-316.
- Linda S. Flower and John R. Hayes, "*The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem*," CCC, 31 (February, 1980), 21-32.
- Marlowe, A. B., & Page, L. M. (1998) *Creating and sustaining constructivist classrooms*. California: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Pincas, A. (1982). *Teaching English writing*. London: Macmillan.
- Richardson, V. (1997). Constructivist teaching and teacher education. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Constructivist teacher education: Building a world of new understandings*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.
- Selley, N. (1999) *The art of constructivist teaching in the primary school*. London: David Fulton Pub.
- Swales, J. M. (2004). Research genres: *Exploration and applications*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- Taylor, P. C., & Maor, D. (2000). Assessing the efficacy of online teaching with the constructivist on-line learning environment survey. In A. Herrman & M.M. Kulski (Eds.), *Flexible futures in tertiary teaching*. Proceedings of the 9th annual Teaching Learning Forum. Perth: Curtin University of Technology. Retrieved June 09, 2001, from <http://cleo.murdoch.edu.au/confs/tlf/tlf2000/taylor.html>
- Tribble, C. (1996). *Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von Glasersfeld, E. (1990). Constructivism in education. In A. Lewy (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of curriculum*. (pp. 31-32) Oxford: Pergamon.

Appendix 1
Questionnaire for the Students

The aim of this questionnaire is to explore to what extent constructive learning theory is implemented in writing classes. This questionnaire has a number of questions which are related to features teaching writing. Students are expected to be eyewitnesses if the following classroom activities are implemented in their writing classrooms. It is accordingly important that you should answer each question as honestly as you can.

Please tick the *one* most appropriate response to each question.
Your answers are CONFIDENTIAL.

Thank you for your cooperation.

No	Items	<i>Yes</i>	<i>NO</i>
1	Your writing teacher encourages you to practice writing through writing.		
2	The writing teacher instructs you to write error free sentences.		
3	The writing teacher creates suitable classroom environment to the students to plan and revise the written texts with their peer/within group.		
4	The writing teacher assigns purposeful and meaningful writing tasks.		
5	Writing tasks which you are going to write in the classroom or outside the classroom have clear instruction.		
6	The writing teacher assigns writing tasks which are related to the content of other courses.		
7	The writing teacher gives you constructive and timely feedback on your written work for the content, organization, and text type.		

8	The writing teacher asked you to write and submit the final draft.		
9	The writing teacher asked you to do grammatical exercises in the classroom.		
10	The writing teacher asks you to write texts based on your real life experience and your prior knowledge.		
11	The writing teacher gives you constructive and timely feedback on your written work for the content, organization, and text type.		
12	The writing teacher creates relaxed classroom environment to ask and discuss with him/her freely.		
13	The writing teacher motivates you to write dairies or journals outside the classroom.		
14	Your writing teacher brings model text to the classroom and asked you to discuss on the strong side and weak side of the text.		
15	The writing teacher evaluates your writing skill continuously.		
16	The writing teacher encourages writing a text for specific audiences like your parents, for the local newspaper editor, or friends.		
17	The writing teacher encourages you to evaluate and monitor your writing by yourself.		
18	The writing teacher spends most of the time by teaching grammatical aspects of the language.		

19	Writing tasks which you are going to write in the classroom or outside the classroom have clear instruction.		
20	The writing teacher gives sufficient time to think on the topic which you are going to write.		
21	Most of the comments and feedback which are given on your written work focuses on grammatical errors, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.		
22	The writing teacher assigns writing tasks which are related to the content of other courses.		

Appendix 2

Observation check list

The aim of this observation check list is to explore to what extent constructive learning theory is implemented in writing classes. This observation check list has a number of statements which are related to the implementation of elements of constructive learning theories in writing classrooms. The researcher is expected to be eyewitnesses if the following classroom activities are implemented in writing classrooms.

Please tick yes or no the *one* most appropriate response to each statement.

Thank you for your cooperation.

No	Items	Yes	No
1	The writing teacher encourages students to practice writing through writing.		
2	The writing teacher instructs students to write error free sentences.		
3	The writing teacher creates suitable classroom environment to the students to plan and revise the written texts with their peer/within group.		
4	The writing teacher assigns purposeful and meaningful writing tasks.		
5	The writing teacher gives clear instruction before students are engaged in doing Writing tasks.		
6	The writing teacher assigns writing tasks which are related to the content of other courses.		
7	The writing teacher gives constructive and timely feedback to students' written work for the content, organization, and text type.		

8	The writing teacher asked students to write and submit the final draft in the classroom.		
10	The writing teacher asks students to write texts based on their real life experience and prior knowledge.		
11	The writing teacher gives constructive and timely feedback on students' written work for the content, organization, and text type.		
12	The writing teacher creates relaxed classroom environment to ask and discuss with him/her freely.		
13	The writing teacher motivates students to write dairies or journals outside the classroom.		
14	The writing teacher brings model text to the classroom and asks students to discuss on the strong side and weak side of the text.		
15	The writing teacher evaluates students' writing skill continuously.		
16	The writing teacher encourages writing a text for specific audiences like your parents, for the local newspaper editor, or friends.		
17	The writing teacher encourages students to evaluate and monitor their writing by themselves.		