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Exploring the Theory-Practice Gaps in Implementing Constructivist Instructional Approaches: The case of College of Education and Social Sciences at University of Gondar

Muluken, Ayalew

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**Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum
Studies**

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Constructivist Instructional Approaches: The case of College
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**By
Muluken Ayalew**

January, 2026

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

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By
Muluken Ayalew

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree of doctor of Philosophy of Education in Curriculum and Instruction**

Principal Advisor: Mulugeta Yayeh (PhD, Associate Professor)
Co-advisor: Professor Amera Seifu

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January, 2026
Bahir Dar

Declaration

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Exploring the Theory-Practice Gaps in Implementing Constructivist Instructional Approaches: the case of College of Education and Social Sciences at University of Gondar”, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Education in Curriculum and Instruction of Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies, Bahir Dar University, is a record of original work carried out by me and has never been submitted to this or any other institution to get any other degree or certificates. The assistance and help I received during the course of this investigation have been duly acknowledged.

Muluken Ayalew

Name of the candidate

Date

Place

Bahir Dar University
College of Education
School of Educational Sciences
Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum
Studies

Approval of Dissertation/Thesis for Defense

I hereby certify that I have supervised, read, and evaluated this thesis/dissertation titled “Exploring the Theory-Practice Gaps in Implementing Constructivist Instructional Approaches: the case of College of Education and Social Sciences at University of Gondar ” by Muluken Ayalew prepared under my guidance. I recommend that the thesis/dissertation be submitted for oral defense.

Mulugeta Yayeh (PhD, associate Professor)

_____ Advisor’s Name	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Amera Seifu (Professor)	_____	_____
_____ Co-Advisor’s Name	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Abrham Zelalem (PhD)	_____	_____
_____ Department Head	_____ Signature	_____ Date

Bahir Dar University
College of Education
School of Educational Sciences
Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum
Studies

Approval of Dissertation/thesis for defense result

As members of the board of examiners, we examined this dissertation/thesis entitled “Exploring the Theory-Practice Gaps in Implementing Constructivist Instructional Approaches: the case of College of Education and Social Sciences at University of Gondar” by Muluken Ayalew. We hereby certify that the dissertation is accepted for fulfilling “Doctor of Philosophy of Education in Curriculum and Instruction.”

Board of Examiners

External Examiner Name	Signature	Date
Woudu Melese (PhD, Associate Prof.)		
_____	_____	_____

Internal Examiner Name	Signature	Date
Solomon Melese (Professor)		
_____	_____	_____

Chair Person’s Name	Signature	Date
Alemayehu Bishaw (Professor)		
_____	_____	_____

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Abstract

This study investigated the theory-practice gaps in implementing constructivist instruction at the University of Gondar, focusing on the Colleges of Education and Social Sciences. Using a qualitative research approach, specifically a single case embedded unit design, the study involved fourteen participants purposefully selected, including instructors, department heads, and college deans. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations and course plan reviews. To triangulate the data, eight classrooms were observed and four course plans were reviewed. The findings reveal that instructors possess sufficient theoretical understanding of constructivism, which they conceptualize as both a process of student knowledge construction and a student-centered pedagogical approach. However, this understanding is often undermined by their instructional practices, which remain predominantly teacher-centered, reliant on traditional lecture methods and behaviorist-oriented assessments. The study identified major challenges to implementation, including inadequate student prior knowledge, lack of instructor commitment, and insufficient materials aligned with constructivist principles. However, the study also noted opportunities for improvement, such as access to digital technology. The study concludes that this disconnect is not rooted in a lack of knowledge, but in systemic and contextual barriers that prevent the effective application of constructivist principles. The study suggests universities revise programs and offer professional development for educators. College deans and head of departments should support instructors better by creating space for practicing constructivist principles, and instructors should adjust their lessons in line with constructivist ideals.

Key words: Educators' views, Implementation of Constructivist instruction, Theory-Practice Gaps, Challenges, Opportunities, Higher Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
ACRONYMS.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	9
1.3 Basic Research Questions of the Study.....	13
1.4 Objectives of the Study	14
1.5 Significance of the Study	14
1.6 Delimitation of the Study.....	15
1.7 Operational Definition of Key terms	17
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	19
Introduction-----	19
2.1 The concept of constructivism in teaching	19
2.3 Forms of constructivism	25
2.3.1 Cognitive Constructivist Perspective	25
2.3.2 Social Constructivist Perspective.....	27
2.5 Principles of Constructivism.....	33
2.6 Constructivist Approach in Teaching in Higher Education	34
2.7 Theory-practice gaps in different professions and strategies to bridge the gaps	36
2.8 Theory-practice Gaps in the Implementation of Constructivist Instruction in Higher Education.....	38
2.9 Pedagogical Implications of Constructivism	40
2.10 Major Challenges associated with constructivist instruction	42
2.11 Opportunities for Instructors to embrace Constructivism in the Classroom.....	44
2.12 Constructivist Teaching Models	46
2.13 Misconceptions of Constructivism.....	48
2.14 Educators' views about the implementation of constructivist teaching.....	50

2.16 Theoretical Framework of the Study	53
2.17 Conceptual Framework of the Study	58
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	60
Introduction.....	60
3.1 Research Paradigm.....	60
3.2 Research Approach	62
3.3 Design of the Study.....	63
3.4 Research Setting.....	64
3.5 Study participants, Participants profile, and Sample Size and Sampling Techniques	67
3.6 Participants' Profile	67
3.7 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques	68
3.8 Instruments of Data Collection	69
3.9 Strategies for Trustworthiness and Authenticity.....	72
3.10 Methods of Data Analysis.....	75
3.11 Ethical Consideration.....	77
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE STUDY	78
Introduction.....	78
4.1 Findings	79
4.1.1 Educators' Views on Constructivist Instruction (Research Q1)	79
In line with this research question,	79
4.1.2 Instructors' Constructivist Instruction Practices (Research Q2).....	87
4.1.2.1 Findings from classroom Observation	97
4.1.2.2 Findings from Document Reviews	111
4.1.4 Challenges Affecting Implementation (Research Q3)	119
4.1.5 Available Opportunities (Research Q4).....	123
4.4 Cross-Case Analysis	125
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS.....	129
5.1 Educators' Views of Constructivism	129
5.2 Implementation of constructivism in the Classroom	131
5.3 Theory-Practice Gaps in the Implementation of Constructivist Instruction	134
5.4 Major Challenges of Implementing Constructivist Teaching-learning Approaches.....	135
5.5 Opportunities to Implement Constructivism in the Classroom.....	136
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS	138

Introduction.....	138
6.1 Conclusion of the Study.....	138
6.2 Implications of the study.....	140
6.3 Directions for Future Research	141
REFERENCES-----	144
APPENDICES	

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Summary of traditional and constructivist teacher characteristics-----	22
Table 2: Summary of the classroom observation-----	109
Table 3: Summary of course plan reviews-----	117

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: A framework that illustrates various positions within epistemological constructivism-----	31
Figure 2: The theoretical views of constructivism as the foundation upon which the study is built-----	58

ACRONYMS

FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
EdPM	Educational Planning and Management
ETP	Ethiopia Transformation Plan
HDP	Higher Diploma Program
IBL	Inquiry Based Learning
PBL	Problem Based Learning
PGDT	Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching
PHC	Public Health College
TC	Training Center
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UoG	University of Gondar
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter introduces the dissertation, which examines the gaps between theory and practice in implementing constructivist instructional approaches at selected colleges within the University of Gondar. It provides an overview of how instructors view and practice constructivist instruction, the opportunities and challenges faced with respect to the implementation of constructivist instruction. The chapter is organized into seven sections: introduction; research background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, delimitation of the problem, significance of the study, operational definition of terms, theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Teaching in this information era has become more demanding and challenging as teachers are expected to play more roles than knowledge transmission due to advances in social, political, technological, and economic areas, as well as the rapid accumulation of information (Liu, 2015). Supporting this idea, Darling-Hammond (2006) explained how social, economic, and technological changes require teachers to become learning facilitators. This means they must be equipped with the skills to design, communicate, and manage classroom activities efficiently using increasingly complex tools and resources.

To play those roles effectively, teachers of today are expected to put into practice the basic theoretical tenets of the constructivist learning theory in the classroom, as it supports the active involvement of students in the quest for knowledge. In line with this, Sjøberg (2007) states that constructivist teaching and learning promote students' active

participation in acquiring knowledge. Similarly, Wang (2014) argues that students arrive with knowledge and experiences shaped by their past, and therefore, they should be given ample opportunities to share their ideas in the learning process. Freire (1994) also noted that knowledge is gained when people collaborate to exchange ideas, articulate problems from their perspectives, and construct meanings that are relevant to them. In a similar vein, Gordon (2008) shares Freire's perspective, emphasizing that constructivism is a philosophy advocating that learners should be treated as human beings, not as machines waiting to be programmed.

As Krahenbuhl (2016) pointed out, constructivism is an epistemological perspective in which students are actively involved in building knowledge in their minds through their individual interpretations of experiences. Similarly, Tomljenovic and Tatalovic Vorkapic (2020) explained how transformational learning, based on cognitive and constructivist theories, emphasizes active student participation through problem-based learning. This is a shift from the traditional information transfer approach to teachers facilitating role. Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) also stated that constructivism highlights the learner's active role in creating meaning, moving the focus from knowledge as a product to knowledge as a process constructed by the learner.

The philosophy of constructivism emerged from dissatisfaction with traditional Western theories of knowledge, standing in sharp contrast to objectivist epistemology and positivism (Crotty 1998; Hendry, Frommer, & Walker 1999; Glasersfeld 1995). As Maclellan and Soden (2004) affirmed, the constructivist perspective claims that information is constructed by individuals or groups making sense of their experiential world. In conformity to this, Singh et al. (2012) stated that the assumption of constructivist

theory is not an objective reality that can be determined, but all reality is created by individuals instead.

Though often considered a modern development in cognitive science, constructivism has a direct link to the pragmatism of philosophers like Peirce, James, and Dewey. In Dewey's "laboratory school," for example, instruction was a "continual reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out in-to that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies" (Dewey, 1916). This progressive approach to education was also evident in Western European schools influenced by reformers such as Montessori (1870-1952), the Belgian psychologist Decroly (1871-1932), the French reform educator Freinet (1896-1966), and the German educator, Petersen (1884-1952). The philosophy behind the establishment of these schools traces back to the beginning of the 20th century, a period when the "progressive movement" in the U.S. and "reform pedagogy" in Western European countries gained significant influence in teaching and learning practices (Terwel, 1999).

The philosophy of constructivism has ancient roots, with early ideas emerging from great thinkers like Confucius (551–479 B.C.). The Socratic Method, exemplified by Socrates' dialogues with his followers, also paved the way by using specific questions to help students identify the flaws in their reasoning. The contributions of Plato, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), and Epicurus, who developed an early version of the Golden Rule, further contributed to the philosophical underpinnings of this theory (Zajda, 2021). The Socratic dialogue remains an important tool for constructivist educators to assess student learning and plan new learning experiences.

The evolution of constructivism as a learning theory was significantly advanced by Jean Piaget and John Dewey, who developed theories of childhood development and what we now call progressive education. Piaget, for instance, believed that humans learn by constructing one logical structure after another. Vygotsky (1978) also introduced the social aspect of learning by defining the "zone of proximal development," the space where students can solve problems beyond their current abilities with the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers. Phillips (1995) further conceptualized learning as an active social process where students construct new ideas based on their current knowledge. Similarly, Von Glasersfeld (1995) argued that "learning is not a stimulus-response phenomenon. It requires self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection." Fosnot (1996) affirmed that in constructivism, the focus of instruction is on concept development and deep understanding, rather than on behaviors or skills.

Despite the theoretical underpinnings, the importance of teachers' understanding of constructivist theory, principles, and pedagogy should also be given attention to have effective teaching and learning in the classrooms. Emphasizing this point, Olsen (1999) argued that because learning is a constructive process, teachers have vital roles: to create motivating conditions for students, design problem situations, foster the retrieval of prior knowledge, and facilitate the learning process itself, not just the final product.

Correspondingly, Rahimi and Hematiyan (2012) suggested that a great deal of responsibility lies with the teacher, who acts as a facilitator or a "movie director" to create a creative and motivating classroom environment. This modern perspective views learners as "architects building their knowledge structures" (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). The essence of constructivism is that students learn through direct experiences, interacting with

their environment, and actively constructing new understandings by integrating new information with their prior knowledge (Savasci & Berlin, 2012; Burnett, 2010; Lew, 2010; Beamer et al., 2008).

Constructivist teaching in higher education encourages students to move beyond rote memorization and surface-level learning, fostering critical thinking, questioning assumptions, and deep reflective learning. This approach develops essential skills like creativity, analytical thinking, and effective communication, promoting lifelong learning and preparing students for the challenges of a rapidly changing world (Alt, 2017; O'Connor, 2022).

Contemporary classroom instruction increasingly emphasizes active learning strategies, moving beyond the traditional teacher-centered approaches rooted in objectivism, and transmission models of teaching (Roessingh & Chambers, 2011). While active learning places students at the center of the learning process, effective teaching today integrates both student-centered and teacher-centered methods with purposeful teacher guidance to create a more balanced and responsive learning environment. Emphasizing this point, Niemi (2002) stated that active learning, based on constructivist philosophy, has become a necessity at all educational levels to help students acquire 21st-century skills. In a constructivist classroom, students interact with their environment and form their interpretations of the world, rather than simply receiving information from the teacher (Jonassen, 2000).

As Gray (2018) pointed out, a constructivist teacher and a constructivist classroom are distinguished from a traditional teacher and classroom by a number of identifiable qualities: the learners are actively involved, the environment is democratic, the activities

are interactive and student-centered, and the teacher facilitates a process of learning in which the students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous.-Spiro (2006) also noted that a constructivist classroom provides students with ample time to develop models of content, which helps them apply that knowledge beyond the primary subject area.

Many countries worldwide have embraced the principles of constructivism in their educational systems, though the degree of implementation varies significantly. First-world nations like the USA and Canada have adopted constructivist approaches at all levels, from elementary schools to universities (McMahon, 1997). In other parts of the world, constructivist ideas are also being applied. For instance, a study by Emily and Mangope (2012) showed that in Botswana and South Africa, constructivist approaches were widely used to improve mathematics performance among primary school students. Similarly, constructivism was introduced in Colombian primary schools to boost students' academic achievement, though the quality of education is still lagging behind in rural areas compared to urban areas (Colclough & Lewin, 1993). In low-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, challenges in improving education quality often stem from difficulties in fully implementing constructivist understandings of the learning process (Packer, 2008; Sanga, 2013). Efforts to move towards- more student-centered methods have been- observed- in countries like Kenya, where teachers- started utilizing students' prior experiences to prepare them for qualifying exams (Sifuna, 2007), and in Uganda, where- attempts were made to integrate children's out-of-school experiences into the learning process (Massey, 1987, as cited in Sanga, 2013).

In Ethiopia, the government has taken several initiatives to embed constructivist philosophy in its educational system. The Education Policy document (Education and

Training Policy, 1994) reflects a constructivist perspective by focusing on developing individuals' physical, mental, and problem-solving capacities. It also aims to cultivate citizens who are mindful of resource management, skilled in various areas, and capable of cognitive, creative, and productive thought. A review of Ethiopian education policy documents and strategies confirms that they are written in line with constructivist principles, encouraging learner autonomy, fostering natural curiosity, and recognizing the importance of students' beliefs, attitudes, and motivation (FDRE, 2009, as cited in Melese & Belay, 2022; MoE, 2019; MoE, 2012a & MoE, 2015).

Traditional lecture-based teaching continues to be prevalent at all levels of the Ethiopian education system, despite established policy directives aimed at promoting constructivist instruction (Abay & Marishane, 2023; Melesse & Belay, 2022; Serbessa, 2006). This reflects a significant theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction. A number of studies from various contexts confirm this challenge. For example, research by Mafumiko (2006) and William et al. (2014) found that "chalk and talk" methods still dominate, particularly in science education, where theoretical teaching prevails over practical, hands-on learning experiences. Although learner-centred approaches are applied to some extent in primary and secondary schools, findings from Msendekwa (2010) and Sanga (2013) indicate that many educators consider these methods time-consuming, and Msendekwa further found that some primary teachers lack the necessary training and expertise to implement such approaches effectively. Furthermore, Terwel (1999) argued that while constructivism is an inspiring theory, it does not provide explicit guidelines for creating communities of inquiry or avoiding ineffective interaction patterns.

The issue of assessment also contributes to the implementation challenges. Many educational institutions, including universities, still rely on standardized test scores to evaluate both student achievement and teacher performance. As Bahou (2012) and Williams (2017) contend, in school cultures where teacher performance is tied to these scores, educators often resort to the "banking method," where they simply "deposit" knowledge for students to later recall on a test. Goodman and Eren (2013) suggested that teachers may even "force-feed" information to ensure students succeed on tests. Bahou (2012) further noted that this top-down, authoritative approach has led many students to become passive learners, who do not seek knowledge, and limits opportunities for student expression. McLeod (2023) also highlighted a concern that because constructivist practices de-emphasize traditional grading, teachers might not easily identify struggling students potentially leading to some falling behind.

Limited research has been conducted regarding university instructors' understanding and implementation of constructivist instruction globally and in the Ethiopian context. For instance, a study by Nguyen & Le (2024) revealed that 120 EFL teachers in a private Vietnamese university encountered conceptual, cultural, political, and technological barriers when trying to apply constructivism. Most of them had only a superficial understanding of constructivist concepts, which was influenced by Confucian teaching traditions. Similarly, a study by Mdee, K. H., & Bertha (2021) found that a shift from a teacher-centered approach to collaboration with autonomy vested onto learners justifies the argument of liberating learners. However, its implementation is confronted by shortages of teaching and learning gears. Concerning the local contexts, few researches were done. For example, a study by Faro et al. (2024) on enhancing

student engagement in Ethiopian higher education institutions through a flipped classroom model revealed significant improvements in all aspects of student engagement. The findings indicated that the flipped classroom approach fostered active participation in class activities, enhanced interaction among students, teachers, and learning resources, and facilitated better knowledge construction. In the same vein, another study by Asfaw et al. (2025)-found that diverse conceptions of critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing, with two instructors emphasizing collaboration, creativity, and active participation, while the other adhering to a more traditional, accuracy-focused model, reflecting differing degrees of alignment with CP principles. Another study by Asfaw et al. (2025) explored various approaches to critical pedagogy (CP) in teaching writing. Two instructors emphasized collaboration, creativity, and active participation, while another instructor followed a more traditional, lecture-based model. The wide acceptance of theoretical benefits of constructivism, which offer students opportunities to solve problems and construct meaning, contrasts with the practical difficulties of its implementation. This persistent gap between theory and practice in constructivist instruction is what prompted this research in the context of our higher educational institutions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teachers are the hearts of the instructional process in the educational enterprise. Indisputably, whatever initiatives might be put in place by the government and other stakeholders, schools will not achieve their mission if they do not pay special attention to the actual classroom practices working collaboratively with teachers. To ensure quality teaching and learning, teachers are expected to employ varied instructional methods

combining teacher-centered and student-centered approaches based on the objectives of the lesson, the nature of the topic, students and teacher characteristics (Ahmad et al, 2011).

The advancement in science and technology, the economic, social and political changes coupled with students' diversity demands teaching geared towards producing students who are creatives and divergent thinkers to respond to those changes. This, therefore, entails employing constructivism philosophy guided classroom teaching in place.

In relation to curriculum content, teachers as facilitators are instructed to compare and analyze the curriculum standards and textbooks to confirm the teaching targets. As a consequence, classroom practices strive to eliminate the standardized curriculum inherent in traditional teachings (Aytaç & Kula, 2020; Jia, 2010). Supporting this idea, Brooks (1986) stated that if learners are not constructing knowledge as expected, the facilitators should quickly analyze the reasons and change the curriculum to suit their new needs. This implies constructivist approaches to curriculum development and delivery is contingent on the thoughtful mediation of the facilitator. Focused on this issue, Brooks (1986) further disclosed that the constructivist teachers resist being tied to fixed static curriculum sequences thus; they seek opportunities for developing a curriculum consistent with their expanding knowledge of learners.

Despite this fact, empirical studies indicate that teacher-dominated instructional methods are still prevalent in many educational institutions in Ethiopia. Serbessa (2006), UNESCO (2002a), and Teferra et al. (2018) have criticized the Ethiopian education system for its lack of student participation.

Furthermore, Gutek and Kopp (2013, as cited in Mercer, 2020) demonstrated that classrooms dominated by teacher-led instruction and lectures lack the engagement needed to prepare modern learners for a 21st-century society. These findings suggest that teacher-centered instruction is still widely used, despite the emphasis on constructivism in educational policy documents. Melese and Belay (2022) further supported this by noting that while notions of constructivism are stated in Ethiopian policy documents, their actual implementation in schools is not promising.

In my role as a lecturer and HDP leader in higher education, I have observed many classrooms rely heavily on lectures and lack student-centered discussions based on constructivist principles. This observation, coupled with a review of relevant literature, motivated me to undertake research the gap between theory and practice in implementing constructivist instruction. It is imperative to investigate this issue as contemporary teaching necessitates a blend of instructional approaches, with active student engagement at its core, as guided by constructivist principles. Constructivism emphasizes student-centered learning, collaboration and authentic assessment, but there is often a disconnect between theory and practice in classrooms, as highlighted by scholars like Brooks & Brooks (1999) and Savery & Duffy (1995). Despite its theoretical appeal and proven benefits for deep learning, studies show a consistent difference between constructivist theory and classroom implementation (Ertmer & Simons, 2006; Windschitl, 2002). Understanding and addressing this gap are essential for enhancing teaching effectiveness, refining professional development initiatives, and aligning educational policies with pedagogical research. To bridge this divide, it is crucial to understand teachers' beliefs and practices, identify challenges for implementation along

with potential opportunities. Therefore, studying this issue is crucial for teachers, department heads, and deans to gain a clear understanding of constructivist pedagogy and learn how to address the challenges of applying it in the classroom.

Researches on constructivist instructional practices have been conducted internationally and nationally, and related literatures have been reviewed on the topic. Some of them have examined aspects of the specific context of this study, such as Windschitl's (2002) theoretical analysis of dilemmas in constructivist teaching, Bishaw and G/Egziabher's (2013) quantitative study on the Comparison of traditional and constructivist teaching approaches in using English language learning strategies , and Melese and Belay's (2022) review of curriculum documents in Ethiopia. None have provided a comprehensive picture of the problem within the specific setting of the universities in our situation.

Similarly, in Ethiopia, existing studies have focused on related but distinct topics, such as the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model (Faro et al., 2024), instructors' varied approaches to critical pedagogy (Asfaw et al., 2025) and an empirical study by Jemberie (2021) also provided insights into teachers' perceptions and practices of constructivist teaching and learning approaches at Bahir Dar University using a survey research design.

An empirical study by Lantebye (2021) showed an insight about teachers' perceptions and practices of constructivists teaching and learning approaches in Bahir Dar University employing survey research design. It didn't, nonetheless, present teachers reflections about the constructivist instructional practices using qualitative descriptions based on cases. Moreover, studies by Nguyen and Le (2024) and Mdee and Bertha (2021)

in in a private Vietnamese university have shown that instructors encounter significant conceptual, cultural, and resource barriers in applying constructivist principles.

The aforementioned researches didn't give a comprehensive picture about the theory-practice gaps that may exist in implementing constructivist instructional practices in the universities setting in our situation. On top of this, the contexts of the researches, the research design and their scope is completely different from this study. As far as the researcher's capacity of search of literature is concerned, scant attention is given to look in to the problem in the study area. This entails the issue in the study area looks worth studying. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to explore the theory-practice gaps in implementing constructivist instructional practices at University of Gondar (college of Education and Social science in focus).

1.3 Basic Research Questions of the Study

This study aims to answer the following basic research questions.

1. How do educators (instructors, college deans and head of departments) view the current implementation of constructivist instructional practices?
2. How do instructors implement constructivist instructional approaches in the classroom?
3. Is there a theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction? How and why?
4. What are the challenges do instructors face related to the implementation of the principles of constructivism in the classroom?
5. What opportunities are available for instructors to implement constructivist instruction?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction in Education and Social Science colleges at the University of Gondar. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine educators' views on the current implementation of constructivist instructional approaches.
- Investigate how instructors apply constructivist instructional practices in the classroom.
- Examine the theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction.
- Identify the challenges instructors face in implementing constructivist instruction.
- Identify the opportunities available to instructors for implementing constructivist instruction.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes context specific insights into educators' views and practices of constructivist instruction within a single university setting. Although the findings are not intended to be generalized across higher education institutions, they show how constructivist principles are interpreted and implemented at the classroom level. These insights may inform institutional level discussions and reflective policy considerations regarding the implementation of constructivist-oriented curricula in similar higher education contexts. The study also encourage educators and curriculum developers to be mindful of constructivist teaching, shifting from lecture based teaching by designing and implementing more student-centered approaches to help learners acquire the 21st century skills. This study provides evidence-based information for instructors to re-evaluate

current classroom practices in universities based on constructivist philosophy and shape their teaching accordingly. Moreover, it informs academic leaders of higher education institutions to create a platform for faculty to have professional dialogues about constructivist instruction to enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers. The study findings identify gaps between education policy emphasis and classroom practices of constructivist teaching. Therefore, it reminds curriculum developers, book and course module writers to incorporate the tenets of constructivism in their work. The study further informs those who design training programs in higher education to consider the principles of constructivism while designing the program. This study also adds valuable inputs on in shaping professional development programs to target on enhancing teachers' professional knowledge and skills through implementing constructivist principles by identifying potential opportunities and gaps. Lastly, the study guides for future research by identifying gaps and areas for further exploration.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The scope of the study is delimited contextually, conceptually, theoretically, and methodologically to maintain analytical focus and depth. Contextually, this study was delimited to the University of Gondar, with a specific focus on selected academic units within two colleges: the College of Education (Departments of Educational Planning and Management) and the College of Social Sciences (Departments of English and Sociology). It investigates the theory–practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction within formal classroom settings, using cognitive constructivism and social constructivism as its guiding theoretical frameworks. Informal learning environments and non-instructional contexts fall outside the scope of this study.

Conceptually, the study was delimited to an examination of the theory–practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instructional approaches. The investigation was anchored in cognitive and social constructivism as the guiding theoretical framework, which fundamentally shaped the scope and focus of the inquiry. Drawing on cognitive constructivist theory, the study delimited its attention to instructional practices that support individual learners’ active construction of knowledge, including strategies that emphasize problem-solving, inquiry-based learning, scaffolding, reflection, and the integration of prior knowledge. This perspective informed the analysis of how instructors’ instructional decisions reflect an understanding of learning as an internal cognitive process and investigates how constraints such as curriculum demands, assessment practices, and classroom realities influence the enactment of these principles.

Informed by social constructivist theory, the study was further delimited to examining the social and contextual dimensions of instructional practice. The scope includes examination of: classroom interaction and dialogic teaching, use of collaborative learning and peer engagement, teacher scaffolding and guided participation. The study investigates how teachers facilitate or limit social interaction in constructivist classrooms and how social constructivist principles are translated into practice within real instructional contexts. The social constructivist lens also guided the exploration of institutional, cultural, and organizational conditions that enable or constrain instructors’ enactment of constructivist pedagogy within the selected departments. The scope does not extend to critical, radical, or postmodern constructivist perspectives; it remains confined to cognitive and social constructivist traditions as they relate directly to classroom instruction. Accordingly, the study focused on: (1) instructors’ actual classroom practices in relation

to cognitive and social constructivist principles; (2) instructors' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward the implementation of constructivist instructional approaches; and (3) the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing constructivist pedagogy in the given institutional context. The study does not aim to measure instructional effectiveness or student achievement outcomes. The study does not seek to generalize findings beyond the cases examined.. Instead, it seeks to generate an in-depth understanding of how and why gaps emerge between theory and practice from the perspectives of practitioners.

Methodologically, the study was delimited to a qualitative research approach employing a case study design, as this approach was deemed most appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of instructors' experiences, instructional practices, and contextual realities. The qualitative case study design allowed for a detailed exploration of how cognitive and social constructivist principles are interpreted, enacted, or constrained in real classroom settings, without attempting to generalize findings beyond the specific institutional and disciplinary contexts under investigation.

While the theoretical framework informs data analysis, the study allows themes to emerge inductively from the data, ensuring that practice remains central to understanding the theory–practice gap.

1.7 Operational Definition of Key terms

Instructional Practices	Teaching strategies, activities, and classroom interactions employed by educators during lessons These include (but are not limited to): use of open-ended questions, facilitation of student-led discussions and incorporation of collaborative group work.
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Constructivist Instruction	Classroom teaching and learning that are carried out based on constructivism philosophy orientation such as using active learning, problem-based learning, reflection, and collaboration.
Educators' Views	The combined views of instructors, heads of departments and deans towards the implementation of constructivist instruction in the classroom.
Theory-Practice Gap	The discrepancy between theoretical concepts of constructivism and their practical application in the classroom
Challenges	The difficulties educators face when trying to incorporate constructivist principles into their teaching.
Opportunities	The favorable conditions that enable instructors to apply constructivism in higher education settings.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed examination of constructivist theory and how it contributed to present understandings of educational approaches to teaching and learning. The review also includes the concept of constructivism in teaching, forms of constructivism, principles of constructivism, pedagogical implications of constructivism, teachers perceptions towards constructivist instruction, opportunities available for teachers to implement constructivist instruction, challenges teachers face while implementing constructivism in the classroom, constructivist teaching models, theory-practice gaps in different professions and strategies to bridge the gaps, theory-practice gaps in the implementation of constructivist instruction in higher education. The researcher also investigated studies examining constructivism in practice as well as the numerous benefits attributed to constructivist approaches specifically related to constructivism in University teaching.

2.1 The concept of constructivism in teaching

As Abdal-Haqq (1998) defined, constructivism is an epistemology or meaning-making theory that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn. A growing constructivist perspective emphasizes the cultural context of learning, using cultural anthropology to explore how learning and cognition are distributed in the environment rather than solely within an individual's mind (Duffy, 2006). Constructivism is a theory of knowledge (epistemology) that argues that humans

generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and reflections (Main, 2021).

Similarly, Fosnot (2013) viewed constructivism as the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves, each learner individually and socially constructs meaning as he or she learns. This implies that learners are not passive recipients of information; instead, they actively build their understanding through their own experiences and interactions. That is to say, each learner constructs meaning individually based on their prior knowledge and context, while also engaging socially with others to develop deeper understanding. Accordingly, instructors should create effective learning environments that support opportunities for learners to explore, reflect, and collaborate, recognizing that knowledge is personally and socially constructed rather than simply transmitted from teacher to student.

Learning activities in constructivist settings are characterized by active engagement, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Emphasizing at this point, Duffy (2006) stated that learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and instruction is a process of supporting that construction. Moreover, Wilson (1996) remarked that learning is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences according to the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism.

In conformity to Marlowe and Page's (2004) research, Pritchard and Woollard (2013) believed:

Constructivist teaching is based on the idea that learning occurs when the learner constructs his or her own knowledge and understanding. Learning is an active process; learning does not occur when the learner passively receives information. Learners are the makers of meaning and knowledge, not simply the receivers (PP 5).

According to Duffy (2006), learning based on the constructivist perspective involves activity and a context, including the availability of information in some content domain situations. Knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality (Hein, 2024).

In connection with the ideas of the above-mentioned scholars, Fosnot (1996) summarizes constructivism beliefs as:

A constructivist view of learning suggests an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience which they can search for patterns, raise their own questions, and construct their own models, concepts, and strategies (Fosnot, 1996, p.18).

As per the above scholars' perspectives, it is evident that the constructivists view learning as an active, contextual process that requires students involved in meaning making independently, with facilitating role of the teacher is mandatory.

2.2 Descriptions of the differences between Constructivist Classroom and Conventional Classroom

The table below highlights the primary distinctions between traditional and constructivist classrooms.

Constructivist Classroom	Conventional Classroom
Starting with the whole and progressing to the part, the curriculum emphasizes general observations.	Beginning with the part, the traditional constructivist classroom curriculum develops to include the whole.
Appreciating the worth of student-led inquiry.	Gives beginners' skills priority as well as the quest for teachers' questions and interests. Following a set curriculum strictly is much appreciated.
Interactive learning builds upon what students already know.	Learning starts with repetition
Incorporates primary sources and manipulatives	Employs handbooks and workbooks as the major instruments
Instructors transfer information to students. Students are recipients of knowledge while instructors are donors of knowledge.	Instructors engage in dialogue with students, fostering knowledge construction
Teachers inspire pupils to learn by interacting with them.	Directive and authority-based defines the role of the teacher. Instructor's part is interactive, focusing on negotiation
Assessment involves student work, observation, viewpoint, and tests; the process counts almost as much as the result.	Student work, observation, viewpoint, and tests are assessed using testing, correct answers, and grades.
Students work primarily alone.	Students primarily collaborate in groups.

Table 1: Summary of the differences between constructivist and conventional classroom
Source: (Brooks and Brooks, 1999; Khan &etal (2020)

The table above clearly shows the distinctions between the traditional, teacher-centered model and the constructivist approach to education. Instructors must design an interesting learning environment and adapt to their surroundings as this summary makes evident. This can be achieved by including pupils in hands-on learning and helping them recognize that their experiences and ideas shape their understanding of information. It is imperative to emphasize formative assessment techniques and feedback as the instructor changes from directing to facilitator. Furthermore, it means that educational institutions must develop flexible curricula that prioritizes the needs, interests, and inquiries of the students.

Gray (2018) distinguishes a constructivist teacher and classroom from traditional ones by highlighting key qualities: active learner involvement, a democratic environment, interactive and student-centered activities, and the teacher's facilitation of a learning process that encourages student responsibility and autonomy. Matthews & et al (2007) also emphasizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning, allowing learners freedom of movement, flexible time usage and evaluation focused on individual progress rather than peer comparison.

Marincovich (2000) cited in Shah & Kumar (2020) stresses the importance of learner-centered and process- oriented teaching, where students actively participate in knowledge construction. According to him, linking student-centered teaching with constructivist theories that place the learner at the center of classroom instruction is emphasized. Related to this, Brooks and Brooks (1999) provided major characteristics for implementing constructivist learning theory in the classroom, such as encouraging student autonomy, and fostering critical thinking through open-ended questions.

Hamid & et al (2024) discuss the implications of a constructivist approach, recognizing the value of curiosity, viewing science as a dynamic process, and emphasizing knowledge construction through interaction. The teacher following a constructivist approach largely functions as a facilitator of knowledge construction and takes the following alternative roles: presenter, observer, question asker and problem poser, environment organizer, public relations coordinator, documenter and theory builder. In the teaching and learning environment, learners' curiosity to learn should be aroused. This can be done by using attractive teaching and learning aids. As facilitators of learning teachers should guide learners to discover for themselves as they interact with the learning process. Knowledge can be regarded as an individual construction of reality through interaction with other people and the environment they live in (ibid).

Wilson, Barr, and White (2001) identify several characteristics of constructive pedagogy, including attention to individual backgrounds, facilitating group discussions, and helping students develop meta-awareness.

According to Schunk (2012) and Baviskar et al. (2009), constructivist teaching methods follow four guidelines: recalling prior knowledge, creating cognitive dissonance, applying knowledge with feedback, and considering students' learning outcomes and participation. It is crucial to apply these criteria to distinguish between a true constructivist approach and a basic classroom task.

From the above brief review of the concept of constructivism in the context of teaching, one can infer that classroom teaching goes beyond simply transferring information to students. Instructors especially in the higher education contexts need to provide ample opportunities with varied activities and contexts for learners to actively

participate in the instruction by constructing knowledge through relating the lesson to the experiences they gain in life.

2.3 Forms of constructivism

2.3.1 Cognitive Constructivist Perspective

As Von Glasersfeld (1989) pointed out, cognitive constructivism is the basis of the idea of constructivism and its principles are the root of constructivism. Cognitive constructivism originated from Jean Piaget (Dougiamas, 1998). This type of constructivism contradicts the traditional learning model in which knowledge transferred from a more knowledgeable person to the learners. In this perspective, learner is the one who actively construct the knowledge rather than the one who passively receives the knowledge from environment (Liu, and Chen, 2010).

According to Philips (1995), cognitive constructivism values and accepts a variety of psychological perspectives. The aforementioned points of view cover a spectrum from broad cognitive perspectives to particular hypotheses on how learning takes place in educational settings. Piaget describes the schema, which is the initial collection of elements in cognitive constructivism.

Piaget (1952) concluded that a schema is a collection of interconnected mental images of the environment that are utilized for both understanding and reacting to new situations, underscoring the significance of schemas. McLeod (2018) supported this inference. According to Macleod (2018), the fundamental premise of the idea was that we retain these internal cognitive symbols and use them as needed. Personal conceptions, prejudices, worldviews, and prior knowledge are a few examples of schemata.

Conceptually speaking, adaptation is the mechanism that allows the internal cognitive process to move from one stage to the next. According to Mcdevitt & Ormrod (2008), adaptation is the state of cognitive disequilibrium. In other words, learners experience a condition of disequilibrium when they are required to either create new schemas, adjust current ones, or accept new information. Assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration are three complementary processes that together constitute adaptation, which is necessary for any intellectual growth, according to Piaget (1952).

Assimilation is the cognitive process of integrating new information into an already-existing schema, whereas accommodation implies modifying the schema in response to newly acquired knowledge or experiences. As Piaget (1952) pointed out, assimilation and accommodation, both result in the development of new schemas. The force behind these modifications is called equilibrium. According to Piaget (1952), cognitive development happens quickly rather than steadily, a perspective supported by Wadsworth (2004) and McLeod (2018).

Authentic learning and active learning are the two pillars of cognitive constructivism. Brunner (1966) originally defined active learning as the idea that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals rather than passively received. Piaget (1952) and Harasim (2017) provide additional support for these claims.

Active learning focus on giving students opportunities to collaboratively construct their own knowledge during the learning process. Conversely, authentic learning connects education to students' real-world experiences. Studies revealed authentic learning mainly highlights addressing complex, real-world issues and finding solutions through methods such as role-playing, problem-based learning, case studies, concept mapping, and

involvement in virtual communities of practice (Burden & Kearney, 2016; Lombardi, Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007). Authentic learning demands individuals' involvement in diverse activities and techniques that are directly related to real-world experiences.

Key writers in the field presented the concept and main aspects of cognitive constructivism. It is evident from the above theoretical explanations that the roles of assimilation and accommodation are significant in shaping an individual learners mind to construct meaning from the lesson delivered by relating previous experiences with the new understanding. Additionally, cognitive constructivism contributes to active learning and authentic learning as fundamental features of student-centered teaching methods as opposed to the knowledge-transfer based teaching model. In my view, I see gaps between what the literature says about active learning and authentic learning and what is practiced in university classrooms. Instructors often follow the behavioral model of instruction, and lecture-based teaching methods are common practices. This implies that instructors should provide ample opportunities for students to assimilate and accommodate information based on the classroom contexts through employing active learning methods and encouraging them to consider real-life experiences.

2.3.2 Social Constructivist Perspective

Social constructivism theory is owed to Lev Vygotsky who set the foundation of this perspective in developmental cognition (Bay and et,al, 2012).His theories assert the pivotal role of social interaction in development of cognition. Vygotskey believed that community has an important role in the process of meaning making. Von Glaserfeld (1989) cited in Roustae, Abd and Asimiran (2014) highlighted that the individual's knowledge from the world is based on personal experience as well as interaction with others.

Vygotsky contends that children develop new concepts through interaction with others and feedback on tasks they attempt as they mature (Harasim, 2017; Vygotsky, 1962). Human mental processes do not develop in isolation or simply develop with maturation. Instead, the development of mental processes in children is influenced by their interactions with the environment specific to each stage of their life.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is described as the distance between what a learner can do on their own and what they can achieve with guidance from more knowledgeable individuals. Simply put, it is the range of tasks a person can't complete independently but can accomplish with support. This concept is important for understanding how cognitive development occurs in individuals through social interactions. To realize this, activities like peer discussions, group projects, and collaborative learning play key roles for they provide opportunities for students to be engaged in meaningful dialogues. For example, a student may find basic addition tasks easy with assistance from a more knowledgeable peer but may face difficulty when attempting the tasks independently (Armstrong, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978).

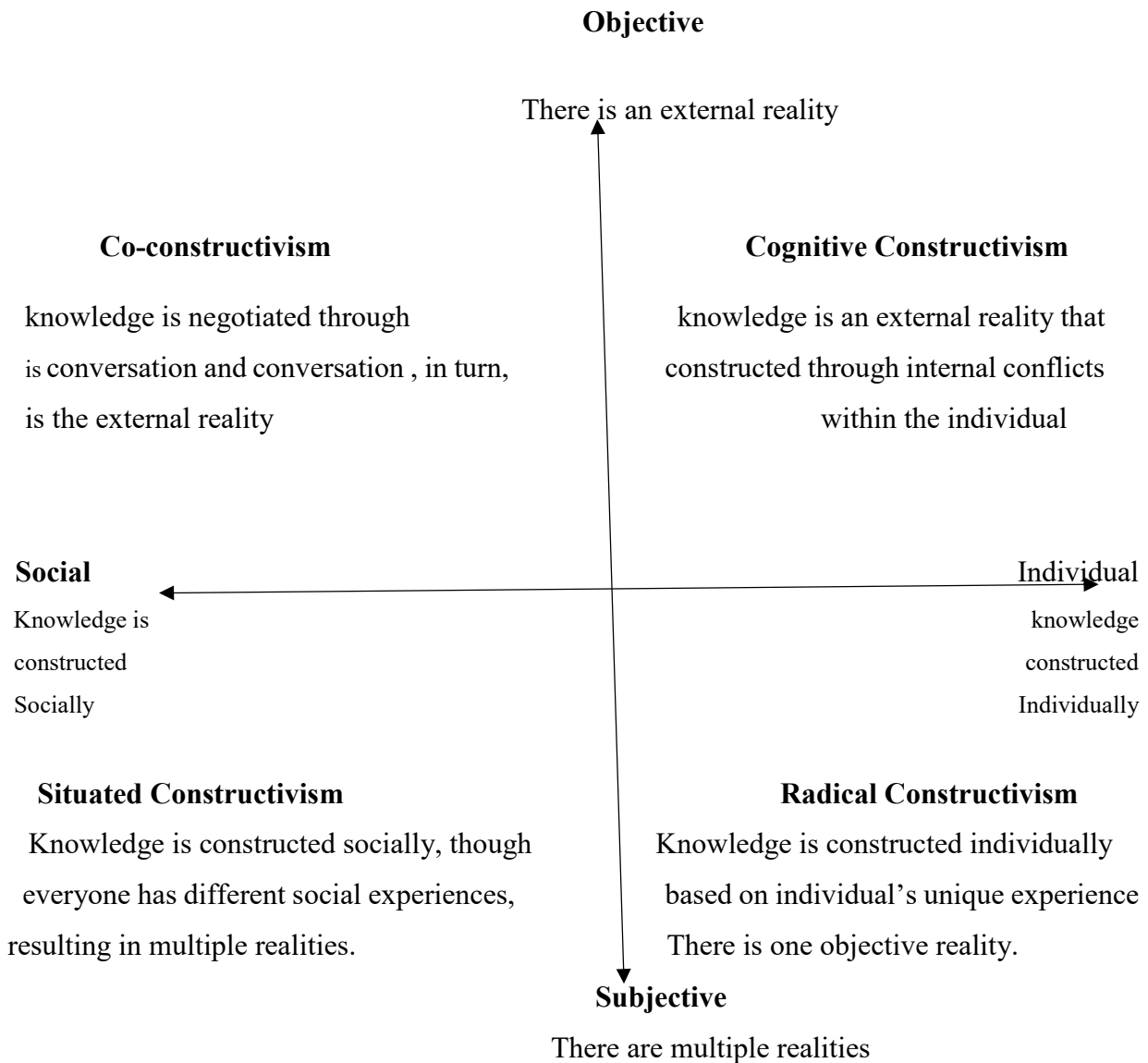
According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). That is to say, more knowledgeable individuals can help others understand concepts more effectively within the ZPD, in a social setting. This guidance allows learners to develop knowledge, skills, and strategies that they can later apply independently in different learning situations. Similarly, as revealed in further study, social engagement fosters language possibilities and integrates communication skills, which are the foundations of cognition (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

Additionally, scaffolding a key element within the ZPD. McLeod (2019) explains that scaffolding is a structured approach that allows instructors to provide tailored interactive support to learners, especially within the ZPD.

From the aforementioned illustrations of the literature, it can be noted that pioneers in the field contribute the idea of social constructivism, focusing on the role of learning collaboratively in pairs and groups taking into account the cultures and values of the community as source of knowledge to develop learners' cognition instead of emphasizing personal experiences. More specifically, the concepts the zone of proximal development and scaffolding are important for instructors to develop students' thinking skills by providing appropriate tasks and interactive support to them properly. Despite social constructivism being widely accepted in recent times and well addressed in the literature, the classroom reality showed it is not practiced adequately. This shows a gap between the theoretical aspects of constructivism and its classroom applications. In our context, project works and assignments were given to students on group basis, thinking that they learn collaboratively. In the real sense, however, the activities were not given to students considering the ideas of the zone of proximal development and scaffolding. Above all, the social foundations of learning are not well addressed in university teaching. In line with this, a recent study by Mulugeta (2021) underscored how teacher educators' experience of integrating instructional methods with societal problems was inadequate.

The researcher cites Kanuka and Anderson 1999 from Allen (2022) to readers, to have a clear grasp on constructivism and its forms (see figure 2) for their framework illustrating several viewpoints inside epistemological constructivism. They examined a wide range of research on educational technology and constructivism with four different

positions and two important dimensions. This structure attempts to clear contradictory data on constructivist learning theories from an objective perspective of reality to a subjective one that the first dimension spans. On the other side, the second dimension goes from socially to personally constructed knowledge. Furthermore, on top of these are the four positions found in constructivist theory: cognitive constructivism, radical constructivism, situated constructivism, and co-constructivism (Dennick, 2016; Holmes, 2019; Main, 2021; Mcleod. 2023; & Wijayanti, 2012). Constructivism is based on the idea that people are active builders of knowledge and that their experiences as students shape reality. According to western governors university 2020, learners start with what they know and add new knowledge to make their learning experience customized. Still, all constructivist views hold that learning is an active process and that knowledge is founded on previously established knowledge, not passive. Sharing the ideas of the above mentioned academics, Holmes (2019) noted how higher education is increasingly using these constructivist approaches citing the studies of Kanuka and Anderson 1999.



Source: Kanuka & Anderson, 1999

Figure 2: A framework that illustrates various positions within "epistemological constructivism"

2.4 The Practices of Constructivism in the Classroom

To effectively incorporate constructivist principles in your classroom or lesson planning, Baviskar, Hartle, and Whitney (2009) suggest key components to consider:

- a). Elicit prior knowledge: Recognize and build upon students' existing knowledge as a foundation for new learning. Utilize methods such as pre-tests, informal interviews, or

group activities to uncover relevant prior knowledge.

b). Create cognitive dissonance: Challenge students with tasks that push them to think critically and adjust their understanding. Encourage learners to confront new problems and revise their existing beliefs.

c). Apply knowledge through interaction: Offer opportunities for students to analyze new information and connect it to their existing knowledge. Activities like presentations, discussions, and quizzes can facilitate this process.

d). Reflect on learning: Allow students to demonstrate their comprehension through reflective tasks like essays, presentations, or creating guides for peers.

Constructivist classroom activities, such as cooperative learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and reciprocal teaching, can enhance student engagement and understanding. By integrating these elements, educators can cultivate a dynamic and interactive learning environment.

Zhu & Atompag (2023) further emphasize the application of constructivism in education by highlighting the importance of creating a positive learning atmosphere to stimulate students' curiosity. Group learning strategies, where students collaborate on challenging tasks, promote inquiry and problem-solving skills. Teachers can facilitate this process by posing thought-provoking questions and fostering a culture of shared knowledge and collaboration. Moreover, implementing an Information-Based Teaching Mode can enhance independent exploration and cooperative study. Utilizing platforms like WeChat or QQ groups to provide a wide range of informational resources can enrich the learning experience and promote active engagement among students.

In summary, higher education instructors are strongly encouraged to adopt innovative teaching methods to help students develop skills for the 21st century. One of these emerging methods is the constructivist approach to instruction. To effectively apply constructivist principles, teachers are expected to take on various roles, such as facilitating, guiding, and supporting student learning. They should create a supportive classroom environment that encourages students to realize their potential by connecting new knowledge with their previous experiences. Teachers are responsible for selecting and implementing appropriate teaching strategies aligned with constructivism, including group learning, problem-based learning, and reciprocal teaching.

Despite universities adopting constructivist teaching methods to cultivate active, independent, and creative learners, I believe current practices conflict with the literature. In other words, following the behavioral model, it seems teachers still control the classroom by delivering information. Holmes (2018) noted that, despite universities' claims to the contrary, undergraduate students still perceive the teacher as the source of "correct" knowledge. Various factors prevent students from valuing, trusting, or believing the knowledge they create themselves. This discrepancy highlights the need for universities to bridge the gap between theory and practice and fully embrace constructivism.

2.5 Principles of Constructivism

Constructivist learning is understood as a dynamic, multifaceted process in which knowledge is not passively absorbed but actively constructed through ongoing engagement with the world. It unfolds gradually and contextually, requiring learners to revisit concepts over time while engaging in reflection, experimentation, and real-world application to

deepen and refine understanding. Rather than receiving information inertly, learners actively negotiate meaning by interacting with sensory experiences, physical environments, and cognitive challenges, transforming raw input into personal insight. Central to this process is the role of prior knowledge, beliefs, and lived experiences, which serve as the foundation upon which new understanding is built; motivation and language further mediate this construction, enabling learners not only to acquire content but, more importantly, to develop the metacognitive capacity to learn how to learn. Moreover, learning is inherently social: meaning emerges and evolves through dialogue, collaboration, and participation in shared practices, underscoring that cognition is co-constructed in interaction with others rather than developed in isolation. Together, these dimensions position the learner as an intentional, reflective, and socially embedded meaning-maker (Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

2.6 Constructivist Approach in Teaching in Higher Education

Different educational paradigms offer distinct perspectives on how teaching and learning happen, outlining specific roles for both students and teachers while suggesting a variety of instructional methods and formats (Martin et al., 2000; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004; Trigwell et al., 2005; Prosser et al., 2008; Prosser & Trigwell, 2014). Among the many cognitive and social learning theories, constructivism stands out as especially significant (Fry et al., 2009).

Constructivist ideas have gained attention in university teaching discussions, advocating for a shift from content-focused to student-centered approaches. This perspective emphasizes active learning and the construction of knowledge by students

(Barr and Tagg, 1995; Biggs, 2014; Biggs and Tang, 2011; Porcaro, 2011; Prosser, 2013; Wiemer, 2013).

Currently, the academic community in the higher education is highly concerned with the remarkable shift in academic teaching paradigms, which is often expressed as “the shift from teaching to learning”. This change emphasizes the need to focus more on the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning (Barr & Tagg, 2000 as cited Wach-Kąkolewicz, 2016; Malewski, 2010). Scholars, who advocate this approach such as Ramsden (1992), Biggs and Tang (2007), Entwistle and Ramsden (1983), and Prosser and Trigwell (2014) emphasized on promoting instructional paradigms that prioritize student engagement. They suggest a transition from traditional theories rooted in behavioral paradigms and embrace constructivist, humanistic, or even critical-emancipation paradigms (Wach-Kąkolewicz, 2016).

Hussain and Sultan (2010) further suggested that higher education is institutionalized to prepare students with the skills and competencies necessary for success in the 21st century. To attain this, instructors need to actively engage students in the learning process through different activities.

From this, it can be deduced that constructivism in the context of higher education institutions is demanding to achieve the missions that they are established in producing learners, who are competent and equipped with 21st century skills by applying constructivism in the classroom effectively. Despite literature emphasis, constructivism in the classroom seems not implemented adequately. Consequently, university faculty

need to work collaboratively to address the principles of constructivism in university classrooms.

2.7 Theory-practice gaps in different professions and strategies to bridge the gaps

The theory-practice divide is a longstanding problem that affects many industries worldwide (Rolfe, 1993). Normand and Pereiro (2009) state that the ongoing issue of academics failing to connect theory and practice is slowly improving (Mallonee, Fowler, & Istre, 2006). It is essential to discuss research conducted to understand and address this problem. For example, Kislov (2014) identifies the translation of innovation and knowledge gaps as a reason for the theory-practice gap in healthcare, distinguishing between "know that" and "know-how" knowledge.

Furthermore, Benbarat and Zmud (in Fitzgerald, 2003) argue that many management studies lack relevance, contributing to the disconnect between theory and practice. Haines, Kuruvilla, and Borchert (2004) also elaborate on the challenges of effective communication between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, which delays research adoption.

Mallonee, Fowler, and Istre (2006) explain that the theory-practice divide is worsened by insufficient communication between researchers and practitioners, as well as a lack of public awareness and support. Specifically in teaching, Hutterlis & Prusse (2009) point out that teachers often reject certain tools for implementing educational innovations due to their lack of understanding of educational reforms. This rejection happens because innovations are introduced without adequate support from responsible individuals or organizations. The theory-practice divide is also apparent when student teachers report

difficulties in applying theory to practice, stemming from teacher educators' failure to effectively integrate theory and practice into their curricula (Wren & Wren, 2009).

Various methods have been proposed to close the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the training of both pre-service and in-service instructors (Korthagen, 2007). One effective method is using case studies, which help connect theoretical ideas with actual practice. For instance, an online forum showed how mathematics teachers in pre-service and in-service training could apply concepts from their university classes to real situations observed in a video of a classroom (Koc, Peker, & Osmanoglu, 2009).

Another specific video case-based intervention for pre-service teachers led to a better connection between theory and practice, evidenced by their improved ability to use theoretical frameworks for analyzing classroom situations (Eilam & Poyas, 2009). Research in teacher education has consistently revealed a gap between the theoretical knowledge that student teachers acquire during training and how they implement that knowledge in real classrooms (Allen et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2010). The term "performance paradox" describes this gap between what teachers know and what they do in practice (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000, cited in Carroll, 2013). Cheng et al. (2010) further elaborate on this "performance paradox" as the differences between selecting optimal teaching strategies and the strategies that teachers commonly use. Action research is a method that can enhance teachers' professional development by bridging theory and practice (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006; Halai, 2012; Roth, 2007). In many graduate-level teacher preparation programs, it may not always be practical to conduct in-depth research

projects. However, the teaching methods used in these courses can significantly influence outcomes.

While the theory-practice gap is a substantial issue frequently discussed in academic literature, there is limited coverage of this gap in teaching at large, particularly regarding constructivist teaching.

Those reviews make it clear that theoretical knowledge in various areas does not correspond with actual practices, highlighting the necessity to develop strategies to close these gaps. In my view, there is a significant divide between the theory of constructivism and its application in classrooms across different educational levels. Therefore, ongoing professional development training is needed to better understand and implement constructivist principles. The theory-practice divide presents a major challenge for professionals, especially in teaching, and the existing literature on this issue, particularly in constructivist education, is sparse. These reviews emphasize that theoretical knowledge across fields fails to align with real-world practices, necessitating the creation of plans to bridge these gaps. I believe there is a notable difference between the theory of constructivism and how it is practiced in classrooms at various levels of education. This implies the importance of ongoing professional development training in enhancing the understanding and application of constructivist concepts.

2.8 Theory-practice Gaps in the Implementation of Constructivist Instruction in Higher Education

Constructivist learning theory, grounded in the works of Piaget (1972), Vygotsky (1978), and Bruner (1996), emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through

interaction, experience, and reflection. In higher education, constructivist instruction is commonly associated with student-centered pedagogies such as problem-based learning, collaborative inquiry, authentic assessment, and reflective practice. Research consistently shows that there are significant gaps between constructivist principles and how they are actually used in university teaching.

A significant theory-practice gap exists in higher education, where instructors often claim to support constructivist ideals but primarily use lecture-based and teacher-centered teaching methods in practice (Kember, 1997; Norton et al., 2005). This discrepancy is due to entrenched disciplinary traditions, inadequate pedagogical training, and institutional priorities that value research output more than teaching innovation (Fanghanel, 2013). Consequently, constructivism is often discussed in theory but not effectively implemented in teaching practices.

Regarding curriculum coverage and structural constraints, constructivist pedagogy prioritizes depth over content. However, in higher education, curricula often have a lot of material to cover and strict learning goals. Research shows that instructors feel pressured to on covering content to meet accreditation standards and institutional requirements, leaving little room for inquiry-based or exploratory learning activities (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This situation limits students' opportunities to build knowledge over time, which is a key aspect of constructivist theory.

The other biggest challenge in applying constructivist theory in practice is in assessment. Constructivist assessment emphasizes giving feedback during the learning process, using real-world tasks, and evaluating how students et al., 2006). However, higher education assessment still relies heavily on final exams and standardized grading systems

that reward memorization and individual achievement (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner, 2004). Factors like large class sizes, concerns about consistency, and institutional accountability make it difficult to move away from traditional assessment methods and adopt more constructivist approaches to evaluation.

In summary, the literature suggests that theory-practice gaps in constructivist instruction are systemic rather than individual. Institutional structures, assessment methods, student expectations, and faculty development practices all limit the implementation of constructivist pedagogy in higher education.

2.9 Pedagogical Implications of Constructivism

To gain a better insight about the epistemological foundations of constructivism and its implications for classroom practices, it's helpful to look at the contributions of two significant scholars in the field: Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and American pragmatist John Dewey. Vygotsky's perspective on how knowledge is acquired is often referred to as social constructivism. Approaches based on social constructivism emphasize that knowledge arises from social interactions, meaning that "Words and ideas do not inherently possess meanings outside of those created and negotiated by individuals within specific contexts" Hughes & Sears (2004) cited in Hyslop & Strobel (2007). This perspective challenges the belief that individual thinking is the only driver of knowledge creation and advocate for the idea that knowledge is a collaborative construct shaped through cultural exchanges and shared understanding.

From a social constructivist viewpoint, the teacher plays a decisive role in the classroom by designing activities that guide students towards mastering the subject matter and fostering a level of cultural integration. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that

acquiring social norms and cultural tools is a fundamental goal of constructivist pedagogy and a defining aspect of human experience. By promoting language acquisition and providing guided support, Vygotsky's approach helps students achieve educational goals that equip them with vital social and cultural knowledge. While Vygotsky emphasizes cultural transmission in learning, Dewey emphasizes the importance of building personal knowledge through individual thought, aligning with his ideals of democracy and self-actualization. Dewey's constructivist approach is focused on creating learning conditions that permit students to pursue essentially independent objectives based on their own experiences, interests, and concerns than it is on providing students with social knowledge and cultural tools. Dewey's model of constructivism situates the teacher as a classroom facilitator whose role is to help students, as autonomous agents, design their own learning experiences in response to personal priorities and objectives. Although seemingly different, the combination of these perspectives enhances the implementation of constructivist teaching practices in the classroom

Although the contribution of constructivism as theory of learning and as philosophical assumptions to enhance students higher order thinking skills is witnessed by its proponents (Piaget, Dewey, Burner and Vigotsky), its application in the classroom is more difficult.

Emphasizing at this point, Windschitl (2002) identified four major dilemmas associated with constructivist instruction: conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political. Here is a brief overview of each challenge:

2.10 Major Challenges associated with constructivist instruction

Conceptual Challenges: Understanding Constructivism

Instructors often struggle with understanding constructivism due to their traditional education background, lack of comprehensible instructional models derived from constructivist principles, and the wider influences of instructional philosophy stemming from objectivism on schools of today.(Windschtil, 2002).

Pedagogical Challenges: Developing New Dimensions of Instructional Expertise

Implementing constructivist approaches requires a shift in instructional focus towards student-centered learning, which can be challenging for instructors accustomed to traditional methods. To bridge this gap, instructors need to develop new instructional methods and assessment strategies that are aligned with constructivism (Windschtil, 2002).

Cultural Challenges: Transforming the Culture of the Classroom

The classroom culture that teachers and students experienced is completely different from constructivist traditions. To explain, teachers had a culture of dominating the class by transferring knowledge while students were passive recipients of information. To address these challenges, instructors need to transform the classroom culture to support constructivist practices that foster active student participation and deep understanding of subject matter (Windschtil, 2002).

From this, it is logical to infer that the implementation of constructivist principles is hindered by a classroom culture that predominantly reflects teacher-centered instruction. Influenced by this teaching approach, students become passive recipients of information and resistant to learning through constructivist approaches. This continues to impact instructors in higher education today, as they are products of traditional schooling. Consequently, academia should create professional development platforms to facilitate

discussions, exchange information about constructivism and its practices, and work collaboratively to re-culture these types of classrooms.

Political Challenges: Confronting Controversy

The traditional power dynamics in education, with a hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students is one of the major challenges to adopt constructivist instruction. Additionally, resistances from policy-makers, conservatives, and parents can also be mentioned as challenges in implementing constructivist instruction. A joint effort should be made by instructors, policy-makers and parents towards policy adjustments, advocacy, and evidence-based demonstrations of constructivism's effectiveness to gain support and facilitate systemic change (Windschtil, 2002).

Other scholars also mentioned the major challenges that hinder the implementation of constructivist instruction. For example, a study by Letina (2022) found teachers' inclination toward the traditional/lecture method as a significant factor affecting effective classroom instruction. Similarly, recent local studies by (Dagneu, 2017; Melesse & Jirata, 2016; Tadesse et al., 2024; Tsehay et al, 2024) identified the problems that impede the successful implementation of constructivist teaching, such as teachers' insufficient commitment, large class sizes, limited time for active learning, educators' lack of proficiency in constructivist teaching strategies, and a shortage of educational materials.

In my perspective, to address these challenges in higher education contexts, working towards providing intensive professional development training, workshops and seminars to faculty; ensuring instructional resources are fulfilled, and collaborating with education stakeholders is commendable.

Other scholars have highlighted several significant challenges that impede the effective implementation of constructivist instruction. A study by Letina (2022) revealed that many teachers are inclined towards traditional lecture methods, which poses a challenge in classroom effectiveness. Besides, recent local research (Dagneu, 2017; Melesse & Jirata, 2016; Tadesse et al., 2022; Tsehay et al., 2024) has pointed to various obstacles that hinder the adoption of constructivist teaching practices. Some of these challenges include insufficient commitment from teachers, large class sizes, limited time available for active learning, a lack of proficiency in constructivist strategies among educators, and an inadequate supply of educational resources. From my viewpoint, to tackle these issues within higher education settings, it is important to focus on providing comprehensive professional development training, as well as organizing workshops and seminars for faculty. Furthermore, ensuring that instructional resources are adequately provided and fostering collaboration with educational stakeholders is essential.

2.11 Opportunities for Instructors to embrace Constructivism in the Classroom

Recent literature underscores that access to digital technology, highly qualified teachers with pedagogical expertise, supportive educational policies, and well-equipped classrooms are critical opportunities for effectively implementing constructivist instruction. Regarding technology, Becker and Ravitz (2001) and Judson (2006), as cited in Isik (2018) stated that teachers can ensure active learning strategies in the classrooms by using technology cleverly.

Jonassen (1999) further notes that classrooms with technology-enhanced learning use constructivist strategies, organizing problem-based activities that encourage students to actively construct information linking previous knowledge with new concept.

In relation to the issue of highly qualified teachers with pedagogical expertise as an opportunity, Darling-Hammond et al (2020), highlighted in their study findings the importance of teacher expertise in implementing inquiry-based, student-centered instruction.

Educational policies support is another good opportunity to implement the principles of constructivism in the classroom. For example, Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) and UNESCO's "International Conference on Education" (ICE) Reports as UNESCO frameworks, focus on learner-centered pedagogies, including constructivist strategies. In addition, the African Union Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25, 2016) advocates learner-centered pedagogies, including constructivist approaches, to improve quality education. At the national level, educational policies and initiatives, such as Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy, 1994 (revised in 2015), Ethiopia's General Education Curriculum (2010 & ongoing revisions); The Ethiopia Education Sector Development Program (ESDP I, II, III, and IV) (2005-2020) as evidenced in (MoE, 2010; MoE, 2015) advocate for the integration of active, participatory and constructive teaching methods in classrooms.

2.12 Constructivist Teaching Models

2.12.1 Problem Learning Centered Model

Wheatley (1991) introduced a constructivist teaching model focused on problem-centered learning. This approach encourages students to create their own understanding for effective problem-solving. The teacher's role is to provide engaging experiences and guide students throughout the process. The model integrates various tasks, group activities, and opportunities for sharing ideas. The tasks are designed to be accessible, promote decision-making, spark questions, and encourage meaningful discussions. Wheatley's method is straightforward and adaptable, making it easy for teachers to implement. It also allows students to reflect on their metacognitive skills in comparison with their peers.

2.12.2 Constructivist Teaching Sequence Model

As Scott, Dyson, and Gater (1987) pointed out, a constructivist teaching sequence consists of three phases as follows: Phase 1: Elicitation of ideas from students. The teaching proceeds with orientation or a question, which includes exploring student ideas, discussing the differences among ideas of students, carrying out experiments, and trying to explain the observed phenomena. Students usually become aware of their own and others' points of view. This really sets the scene for the work to come by introducing the context of the study and hopefully raising interest in what is to follow. Phase 2: Restructuring and application of ideas. During the restructuring phase, students' ideas can be clarified, challenged, and exchanged through discussion with others, or the teacher can promote conceptual conflict through the use of a disconfirming experiment or demonstration. Consequently, in this phase, students are given the opportunity to consolidate and reinforce new conceptions by using them in both familiar and novel situations. Phase 3: Review of change in ideas. The students are invited to reflect on how

their ideas have changed by drawing comparisons between their new thinking and their initial thinking at the beginning of the unit.

2.12.3 The Learning Cycle Model

Stepans, Dyche, & Beiswenger (1988) proposed the learning cycle model to enhance conceptual change, which consists of three phases: exploration, term introduction, and concept application. The authors advocated that this model should focus on four conditions for conceptual change to take place. There has to be dissatisfaction with existing ideas and the new conception must be intelligible, initially plausible, and fruitful (Puacharearn, 2004).

In connection with this, Gallos, Treagust, and Berg (2001) cited in Treagust & Tsui (2016) outlined six steps for teaching in science classes aligned with the learning cycle model: review, present new content, guided practice, feedback, independent practice, and reviews. The plenary lecture phase combines steps one and two, involving a brief review and presentation of new information. The seatwork activity phase includes guided student practice, feedback, and independent practice through homework assignments. The teacher monitors and assists students during the guided activity phase, fostering discussions and skill application. The seatwork phase can be cyclical and incremental developing on the level of difficulty of lesson content. The teacher concludes the activity with a closure or discussion of learning difficulties.

As per the scholars' perspectives in this part, it follows that instructors need to aware of the constructivist teaching models to make the application constructivist principles realistic in their classroom practices. To be specific, instructors can adapt the problem-learning center model by providing engaging experiences to students and guiding them

accordingly. Instructors can also customize constructivist searching sequence model to their classroom contexts by strictly adhering to three phases: elicitation of ideas from students, restructuring and application of ideas, and review of change in ideas. Using the learning cycle model, instructors can modify their teaching by providing activities for students that help them bring conceptual changes involving a brief review and presentation of new information, guided student practice, feedback, and independent practice through homework assignments.

2.13 Misconceptions of Constructivism

One of the most common ways in which educational theorists have misunderstood constructivism is to equate it with student-centered teaching approaches. Baines and Stanley (2000) write that ‘textbooks tell us that constructivism is student-centered and is on the opposite side of the continuum from subject-centered or teacher-centered instruction’. In its real sense, however, a constructivist classroom is one in which there is a balance between teacher and student directed learning and requires teachers to take an active role in the learning process, including formal teaching.

Another widespread misconception regarding constructivist teaching is the view that there is no body of knowledge associated with it and that, therefore, teachers do not need to be experts in a particular content area. Supporting this idea, Baines and Stanley (2000) asserted that in constructivist classroom, the teacher is supposed to set up the learning environment, know student preferences, guide student investigations, and then get out of the way’. However, theorists, such as Virginia Richardson and Mark Windschitl, correctly insist that constructivist teaching places great demands on a teacher’s subject matter understanding. Richardson (2003) also maintains that ‘research within the last several

years has indicated the importance of deep and strong subject matter knowledge in a constructivist classroom'. Windschitl (1999) adds that in these classrooms 'the teacher must not only be familiar with the principles underlying a topic of study but must also be prepared for the variety of ways these principles can be explored'. Another misuse of constructivist teaching is when teachers essentially require their students to teach themselves. Although the constructivist notion that students should be encouraged to create their own interpretations of the text is a sound idea, this is not the same as leaving students to their own devices and requiring them to teach themselves.

The last but not the least point related to the misuse of constructivist teaching happens when teachers communicate to students the message that there are no incorrect answers and that knowledge is in the eye of the beholder. In relation to this, MacKinnon and Scarff-Seatter (1997) cited in Gordon (2009) provide a quote from an elementary science methods student that illustrates this problem:

I am very anxious to return to my classroom and teach science. Constructivism has taught me [that] I do not need to know any science in order to teach it. I will simply allow students to figure things out for themselves, for I know that there is no right answer (Seatter, 1997, as cited in Gordon, 2009, p. 153).

Based on the above brief review, one can infer that teachers need to have a clear understanding of the concept of constructivism to apply its principles in the classroom effectively. To elaborate, constructivism requires teachers to possess adequate subject-matter knowledge, play active roles in the classroom by balancing teacher-led and student-directed activities, provide opportunities for students to learn independently with proper guidance and support, and communicate clearly to students

that interpreting knowledge from different perspectives does not mean there is no right answer to what they learn. This implies educational institutions in general and universities in particular need to provide intensive on-the-job-training to instructors about the notion of constructivism to bridge the knowledge gaps that exist.

2.14 Educators' views about the implementation of constructivist teaching

Research indicates that how teachers view learning and teaching plays a crucial role in shaping their attitudes and methods in the classroom (Borg, 2003; Trigwell et al., 1999). This perspective directly impacts their classroom practices (Borg, 2003; Sogutlu, 2015). Moreover, studies highlight the benefits of a constructivist learning environment and incorporating constructivist principles into teaching (Tynjala, 1998; Vijayakumari & Jinu, 2013). Consequently, it's essential to rethink teaching philosophies and enhance teachers' understanding of learner-centered instruction through constructivist approaches to effectively achieve teaching goals.

In exploring teachers' views about their teaching methods, researchers typically focus on two primary categories: (1) views centered on the subject or the teacher, and (2) views aligned with constructivist principles (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2001; Meirink et al., 2009; Valckx et al., 2021). The first category highlights the importance of content and teaching strategies with a more traditional, didactic approach. In contrast, the second category advocates for inquiry-based learning, underscoring a more constructivist approach (Hong et al., 2019a). Constructivist views emphasize student-centered teaching, equipping students with the skills to learn independently while focusing on their own knowledge construction (Waeytens et al., 2002; Bolhuis and Voeten, 2004).

Teachers' views have a significant impact on their attitudes and behaviors in the classroom (Roose et al., 2019); for instance, they can directly influence classroom performance (Hong et al., 2019a).

Recent reviews of related literatures in the area also indicate that teachers' understanding of constructivist principles is crucial for effective implementation. To mention, Bada & Olusegun (2015) stated that when educators fully comprehend the fundamental ideas like promoting student independence, supporting exploration, and enabling collaborative learning, they can create classroom activities that reflect constructivist approaches. On the other hand, misinterpretation of constructivist principles can lead to ineffective practices, such as over-reliance on student-directed activities without adequate guidance (Gordon, 2009; Shah, 2019).

From this section of the review of literature, it can be noted that teachers hold different beliefs about teaching that influences the teaching methods they employ in the classroom. The present study also identifies how the views instructors have towards constructivist teaching are critical factors that may shape teachers' effectiveness during classroom observations. It can be further noted that there are gaps between instructors' existing views about constructivism and current practices in the classroom.

2.15 Recent related literature reviews and research findings

Despite variations in scope, context and timing, a number of researches and reviews were carried out regarding the implementation of constructivist instruction. In this part, an attempt was made to present more recent systematic reviews and researches. To mention, a study by Musundwa (2025) focused on addressing how constructivist teaching methods could be applied to cultivate inclusive educational practices within accounting programs.

The results underscore the importance for educators to embrace constructivist-based teaching, where classrooms are student-led. This study relied on the oral histories of Black African accounting students who are now qualified professionals. The results showed the significant influence of social and identity factors on these students' educational experiences. The findings additionally emphasized how Black African students face barriers such as limited resources, cultural barriers, and language biases, which hinder their effective engagement with the learning process. The interviews with the more privileged participants revealed that their educational background, language proficiency, and familial education support provided advantages regarding resources, strategies for success, and a sense of belonging.

Another study by Kaymakamoglu (2018) explored the EFL teachers' beliefs, perceived practice and actual classroom practice in relation to traditional (teacher-centered) and Constructivist (learner-centered) teaching in Cyprus Turkish State Secondary Schools context.

The study found discrepancies between teachers' beliefs, perceived practice, and actual classroom practice. While some teachers claimed to adopt both Traditional and Constructivist roles, others preferred solely Constructivist roles. However, actual classroom observations showed that most teachers exhibited Traditional roles, with some incorporating both Traditional and Constructivist practices.

Furthermore, a study by Tegegne et al (2025) investigates the extent to which constructivist learning principles are implemented in actual classroom practices at upper primary schools in Ethiopia. The study uncovered a notable gap between policy goals and

actual teaching methods. Despite promoting active, student-centered, and inquiry-based learning, classrooms still primarily feature teacher-centered instruction.

Tefera et al (2024) studied the barriers to implementing problem-based learning at the school of medicine of Debre Berhan University, Ethiopia and identified student-related, tutor-related, case scenario-related, and assessment-related barriers as the most significant obstacles to implementing problem-based learning.

Similarly, a systematic review by Arega & Hunde (2025) identified seven broad instructional approaches with a wide range of specific implementation strategies, rooted in constructivist learning theory that revealed significant improvements in the various domains of learning.

Overall, the above studies issues related to the implementation of constructivist instruction, which is the focus of the present study. A study by Tegegne et al (2025) shared similar research approach with this study despite the setting and its scope is different. Moreover, the findings do not demonstrate cross case analysis among the selected departments. As compared to the present study, Tefera et al research didn't investigate educators' views towards problem-based learning and the opportunities available to implement PBL in addition to the challenges

2.16 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Constructivism emerged and progressive education share key principles, such as advocating for self-direction of learner, incorporating students' experiences into lessons, and contexts into their lessons, promoting critical and evaluation of new information ,and encouraging learners to question power dynamics and dominant ideologies. These

connections highlight the alignment between constructivism and progressive educational philosophies (Kohn, 2014; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006; Lipinski, 2016; Darder, 2013).

By synthesizing concepts from cognitive theory, situated learning, experiential learning, and critical theory, constructivism establishes a robust framework for creating effective educational practices that address the needs of diverse learners in ever-changing environments. Below is an outline of the foundational theories that underpin constructivism.

a). Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory supports constructivist thinking. Piaget's theory posits that learners advance through developmental stages to construct knowledge, while Vygotsky highlights the social aspect of learning and the importance of interacting with more knowledgeable individuals (Phillips & Soltis, 2018). The implications of cognitivism for classroom practices are aligned with constructivism. As it holds true in constructivism, teachers are required to create a classroom environment that promote learners active construction of knowledge through experiences gained in assimilation and accommodation; making instruction authentic and real, and planning and conducting teaching based on the needs, interests and background experiences of learners (Wadsworth 1996; Fenstermacher and Richardson 2005; McLeod, 2003).

Furthermore, Yilmaz (2011) stated the teaching methods based on the perspectives of cognitivism like cognitive apprenticeship, reciprocal teaching, anchored instruction, inquiry learning, discovery learning, and problem-based learning, that constructivism shared.

b). Situated Learning

This emphasizes that learning is shaped by the context and social environment, while constructivism stresses the importance of authentic tasks and social interaction is in the learning process (Garrison, D.R, & Anderson, T. 2020).

c).Experiential Learning

As described by Kolb, this focuses on the acquisition of knowledge through experience, reflection, and application. Constructivist principles support this approach by promoting hands-on learning experiences that enable learners to engage with and reflect on their learning processes (Kolb, D.A, & Kolb, A, 2021).

d).Critical Theory

This enhances constructivism by emphasizing power dynamics, inequality, and social justice in learning. Influenced by thinkers like Paulo Freire, this perspective encourages learners to challenge dominant narratives, analyze the social context of their learning, and engage critically with content. Constructivist approaches prioritize inclusive practices that empower learners to explore diverse perspectives and actively participate in their learning (Freire, P., & Macedo, D. 2020).

2.16.1 Cognitive and Social Constructivism Learning Theory

Constructivism is a theory of learning in which the students use prior knowledge in connection with current experiences to construct, elaborate or restructure their knowledge. The teacher's role is just a facilitator during teaching and learning so as to support that active process through exploration and dialogue (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). The

essence of constructivism theory is the idea that learners must individually discover and transform complex information and they are to make it in their own (Pouliot, 2004).

Piaget (1952) analyzed that two processes are responsible for how children use and adapt their schemas; assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation occurs when a child incorporates new knowledge into the existing knowledge, while accommodation occurs when a child adjusts to new information (they adjust their schemas to the environment). Conversely, Vygotsky viewed that cognitive skills of the child can be understood only when they are developmentally analyzed and interpreted, mediated by words, language and forms of discourse for facilitating and transforming mental activity (Santrock, 2004). Cognitive skills have their origins in social relations and are embedded in a socio cultural back drop. Vygotsky (1978) coined the term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which entails the difference between what the learners can do lonely and what they can do collaboratively.

Vygotsky suggests for a Zone of Proximal Development, where activities are made available with the aid of a facilitator or knowledgeable peers, learners will then be able to do what they cannot achieve alone (Vygotsky, 1986). In connection with this the notion of zone of proximal development, Wood, Bruner, & Ross (1976) asserted that scaffolding is a process in which the teacher assists the learner to solve a problem or carry out a task that he/she can't do it alone.

Despite differences, in both cognitive and social constructivism, it is assumed that the teacher's role is guiding students and facilitating their way of learning instead of acting as a director and transmitter of knowledge (Roustae & et al, 2014). In favor of this,

Jonassen (1994) argued that both cognitive and social constructivism construct knowledge instead of reproducing it.

Constructivism, a comprehensive learning theory, integrates insights from various theories and is guided by two perspectives: cognitive and social constructivism (Olsen, 2000; Powell & Kalina et.al, 2009). Cognitive constructivism focuses on students actively adjusting knowledge through personal experiences, formal education, and various stimuli for better understanding (Piaget, 1971; Liu and Chen, 2010). On the other hand, social constructivism underscores the significance of social interactions in cultural contexts, where culture and language are essential (Vygotsky, 1978; Cole, 1990).

Cognitive constructivism focuses on individual thought processes, while social constructivism underscores the role of cultural and social contexts in knowledge construction (Ismat, 1998; Wang, 2003; Dhindsa & Emran, 2006). Constructivism explains how learners develop their understanding of the world as unique individuals, with social dimensions emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal and collective knowledge (Cobb, 1994; Saxe, 1992)

In constructivist classrooms, students can learn individually or through interactions with peers and teachers, making it both cognitive and social (Kalina & Powell, 2009; Hartle, Baviskar, & Smith 2010). Constructivist theory underscores active engagement in cognitive processes like problem-solving and concept formation, considering learners as individuals rather than machines, who actively constructing knowledge (Liu & Zhang, 2014; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Gordon, 2008). This study used both cognitive and social constructivism as a theoretical framework.

2.17 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 2

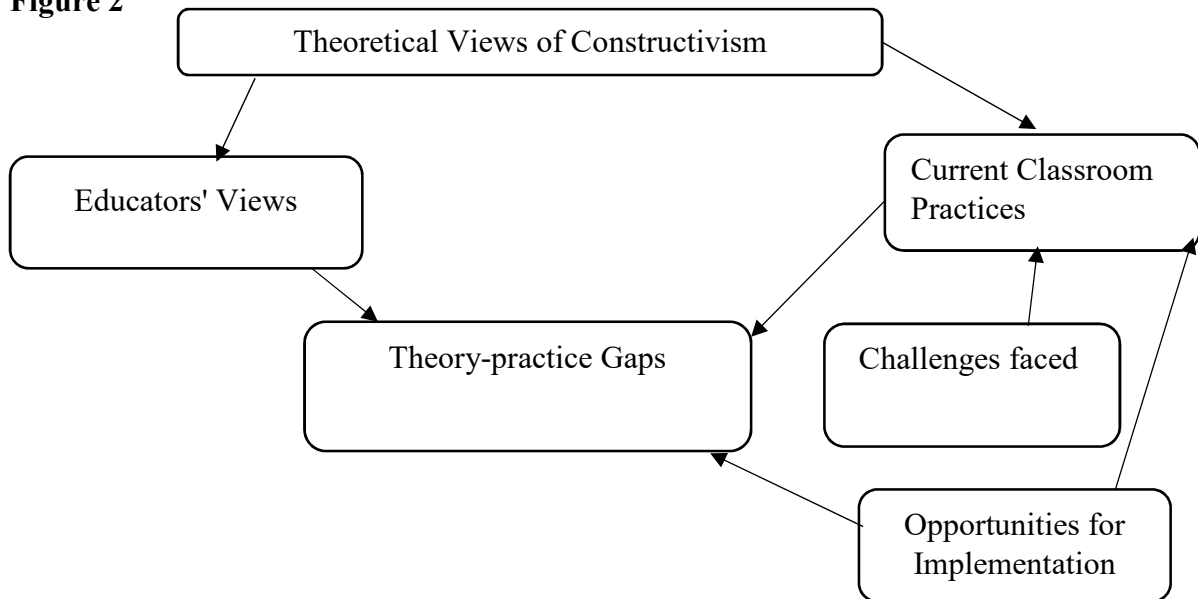


Figure 2 illustrates the theoretical views of constructivism as the foundation upon which the study is built.

As indicated in the Figure, the interrelationships among five major components that shape the study which involve: current classroom practices, educators' perceptions, theory-practice gaps, challenges faced, and opportunities for implementation are described.

Current Classroom Practice as a component represents the existing instructional approaches and learning environments observed in university classrooms. It focuses how teaching methods, student engagement strategies, and assessment approaches align with constructivist principles. Educators' Views in the figure explains how instructors', head of departments, and deans of college views about constructivist teaching play a central role. Their combined perspectives offer a comprehensive view of how constructivist theory is interpreted, valued, and implemented both at classroom and institutional levels. The 3rd component, theory-practice gap focuses on the differences between the ideal concepts of constructivism and how they are actually implemented in classrooms. The framework

recognizes that, despite constructivist theory being widely accepted in educational discussions, effectively putting these principles into consistent practice is still a considerable challenge. Moreover, the challenges faced as part of the figure include the practical, institutional, and pedagogical barriers that educators encounter when attempting to implement constructivist methods. Identifying these challenges is essential for understanding the contextual realities that shape instructional practice. Eventually, opportunities for implementation in the framework also recognize areas of potential improvement. It identifies conditions, supports, or innovations that can facilitate the successful integration of constructivist approaches into classroom practices. To sum up, the conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of constructivism, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through meaningful engagement with their environment and through interaction with others.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses about the research paradigm, approach, design, and rationale for the chosen research design. It also provides detailed descriptions of the participants, research setting, instrumentation development, data collection, and organization procedures. Data and analysis procedures including coding are also described. Trustworthiness issues related to enhancing the study's credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are addressed.

3.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is the conceptual lens through which a researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analyzed. In relation to this, Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a research paradigm as a basic set of beliefs or worldview that guides or shapes research action or investigation. Three components of a research paradigm are identified: Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology. Ontology deals with the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality or existence, answering the question: what is the nature of reality? The epistemological question asks, what is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the known or the knowledge? The methodological question asks; how can the knower go about obtaining the knowledge? A research paradigm explicitly states the researcher's positions on ontology, epistemology and methodology in their research work.

In Social Science, there are many predominant paradigms, each with its own unique ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives. Four common scientific paradigms were briefly discussed:

a). Positivism

This asserts that valid knowledge is based on empirical observation and logical reasoning. It assumes an objective reality that can be measured and predicted using scientific methods (Crotty, 1998). Positivist researchers prioritize controlled experiments, hypothesis testing, and quantitative data to uncover universal laws. According to Bryman (2016), "The positivist believes that social phenomena are amenable to the same kinds of investigation as natural phenomena" (p. 13).

b). Post-positivism

Post-positivism emerged as a critical response to the rigidity of classical positivism. While it acknowledges an objective reality, it recognizes researchers' biases and limitations in achieving perfect objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Post-positivists emphasize triangulation, replication, and transparency to approximate truth. This paradigm underpins much of contemporary social science research using rigorous quantitative or mixed methods. Creswell & Plano Clark (2017) state, "Post-positivists accept that all observations are theory-laden and that absolute certainty is unattainable" (p. 15).

c). Constructivism (Interpretivism)

Constructivism posits that reality is constructed through human interaction, language, and cultural context. Knowledge is subjective and co-created between researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This paradigm favors qualitative approaches like ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, or grounded theory to explore meanings,

experiences, and social processes. It is dominant in anthropology, education, and sociology. According to Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba (2011), "In the constructivist paradigm, truths are plural, socially constructed, and historically situated" (p. 103).

d). Pragmatism

This paradigm, rooted in the work of philosophers like Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, prioritizes practical consequences and problem-solving over abstract debates. It treats research questions as central real-world issues (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism is influential in applied fields such as public health, education policy, and implementation science. Feilzer (2010) notes, "Pragmatists ask not 'What is real?' but 'What works in addressing this problem?'" (p. 9).

The interpretivist /constructivist research paradigm was used to guide this research. The reason why this paradigm is chosen for it places emphasis on understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them.

In view of this, Reeves and Hedberg (2003) stated:

"The interpretivist paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. They use meaning (versus measurement) oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects" (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003, p. 50).

3.2 Research Approach

The purpose of this study was to explore the theory-practice gaps in implementing constructivist instructional practices in the case of college of education and social sciences at University of Gondar. Qualitative research approach which allows to have detailed understanding about the issue under investigation will be used in this study. In relation to

this, Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative methods assist the researcher seeking to gain a deeper understanding of a central phenomenon.

A qualitative research approach is chosen in order to explore understandings and descriptions of the participants' opinions and views. In favor of this, Creswell (2009) mentioned some characteristics of a qualitative research design such as natural settings, research being the instrument, having multiple sources, inductive data analysis, participants' meanings, and being interpretive. Hence, the researcher intends to collect data in the natural settings and face-to-face interactions with the participants, rather than sending some instruments.

3.3 Design of the Study

In this study, the researcher employed a single-case embedded unit study design. Embedded case studies involve multiple units of analysis that focus on different aspects of the case, with the evidence is explored in depth within various subunits (Scholz & Tietje, 2002).

According to Scholz and Tietje (2002), an organizational case study typically considers the entire company as the main unit of analysis, with departments or groups of individuals serving as smaller units of analysis. In this design, the researcher focused on the university of Gondar as the main case and then examine different sub-units (College of Education and College of Social Sciences) within the university. Yin (2014) also noted that a case study's unique strength is its ability to work with a variety of sources including observation notes, interviews, curriculum document reviews, etc. allowing investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective.

For a qualitative single-case embedded unit study examining a theory–practice gap in constructivist instruction, theory comes first conceptually, while practice comes first empirically. Theory must come first because identifying a *gap* requires an explicit theoretical reference point. In this case, cognitive and social constructivism That is, theory is needed to define what counts as “constructivist instruction” and to provide analytic sensitivity for interpreting meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In qualitative case study research, theory does not function as a hypothesis to be tested but as a conceptual lens that frames the study’s purpose, boundaries, and units of analysis (Yin, 2018). At the same time, practice necessarily leads the inquiry empirically: data collection begins with participants’ lived instructional practices, beliefs, and contextual realities, allowing meanings to emerge inductively rather than being imposed deductively (Stake, 1995). This ordering aligns with interpretivist qualitative traditions, which emphasize understanding how actors construct meaning in context while maintaining theoretical sensitivity without constraining participants’ voices (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, theory precedes practice in framing the study, but practice takes precedence in generating evidence and interpretation. Hence, there is a need to have an essential balance for examining a theory–practice gap without reducing the inquiry to either mere description or theoretical imposition.

3.4 Research Setting

This study was conducted at the University of Gondar (UoG) in Ethiopia. It is a higher education institution with a long-standing legacy in health sciences and a growing commitment to expanding quality education across disciplines. Originally established in 1954 as the Public Health College and Training Centre, UoG became an autonomous

university in 2004. By 2017, it had grown into a multi-campus institution with seven colleges, one institute, two faculties, and one school. The research specifically targets two academic units: the College of Education (formerly the Faculty of Education) and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH).

1. Institutional Context and Relevance to Constructivist Pedagogy

Both colleges are key players in teacher training and social science education, making them ideal settings for studying constructivist instructional practices. Constructivism, which emphasizes active learning, student-centered inquiry, collaboration, and contextual knowledge construction, is increasingly promoted in Ethiopian higher education policy. The College of Education, which was upgraded to a college in 2019, has expanded rapidly since its establishment in 2010. It offers three undergraduate departments: Educational Planning and Management, Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Life Long Learning and Community Development, and a Pedagogy Unit that runs PGDT program. The college also offers three MA programs, MA in Educational Planning and Management, MA in School Leadership, and MA in Special Needs and Inclusive Education, which attract both practicing educators and future academic leaders. This mix of pre-service and in-service training creates a dynamic environment where theoretical knowledge of constructivism can be applied in real classroom settings.

The College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), one of the largest colleges at UoG, houses 19 academic departments and offers over 27 postgraduate programs (MA/MSc) and 11 PhD tracks. Departments such as English and Sociology, which were selected for this study, have been operational for over 15 years and cater to large cohorts of undergraduate and graduate students. CSSH is known for its exemplary teaching

practices, research activities, community engagement, and technology transfer, indicating a supportive environment for innovative pedagogies like constructivism.

2. Instructor Profile: Training, Experience, and Exposure to Constructivism

The study includes nine lecturers, three heads of departments, and two deans from three departments: EdPM (College of Education), English, and Sociology (both under CSSH). These departments were chosen for their long years of establishment, and relevance to teacher education and critical social inquiry, where constructivist approaches are particularly applicable. Many instructors hold postgraduate degrees (MA or PhD) from Ethiopian or international universities where constructivist theories are part of the standard curriculum. The PGDT program in the College of Education aims to address the teacher's professional gap by providing pedagogical training, but the integration of constructivist principles varies among graduates. Senior faculty members bring years of teaching experience, but their instructional methods may still reflect traditional, lecture-based models due to institutional pressures such as large class sizes and exam-oriented assessment practices.

3. Institutional Opportunities and Constraints for Constructivist Practice

UoG offers structural opportunities that could support constructivist teaching, such as learner-centered and participatory curriculum frameworks in both colleges. Postgraduate programs promote research and reflective practice, fostering discussions on pedagogical innovation. However, significant constraints remain, including limited access to digital tools and teaching aids, and predominantly summative and content-focused assessment systems. Professional development opportunities on contemporary pedagogies are infrequent and not systematically integrated into faculty workloads.

4. Rationale for Site Selection

The study site was selected based on ease of access to information for the researcher due to its physical proximity. Connolly (2016) suggested that the researcher should consider physical access to the site, the variety of data sources available within the site, and the amount of time access to the participants and data can be granted within the site when selecting a research setting.

The setting offers diverse cases: the College of Education focuses on advancing pedagogical knowledge, including constructivist theory, while the CSSH departments (English and Sociology) demonstrate how constructivism is applied in non-education disciplines that emphasize critical thinking and student-centered discourse.

These contexts provide a detailed exploration of how institutional mission, faculty background, resource availability, and disciplinary culture influence the implementation of constructivist theory in university instruction

3.5 Study participants, Participants profile, and Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sources of the data for this study were instructors, head of departments and the deans of the college of Education and Social Science, at University of Gondar.

3.6 Participants' Profile

This section provides an overview of the participants involved in the study. To maintain confidentiality, each participant is identified by a numerical code (participant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, & 14). The participants teaching experience ranges from 10 to 35 years. Among them, five individuals are lecturers, one assistant professor without PhD, two hold the title of associate professorship, and three assistant professors have

obtained a PhD. The remaining members of the group also hold PhDs in their respective fields. Their areas of expertise include five participants taught courses in the department of Educational Planning and Management, four participants who instruct English as a foreign language, with one serving as the head of the department, and one taught Applied Linguistics courses. Furthermore, three participants specialize sociology, which includes the department chair, while one professor specializes in Amharic.

3.7 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

In the college of Education, there are about three Departments and a Pedagogy unit: Educational planning and management (EdPM), Special needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) and Adult Education and Community Development and a pedagogy unit.

Among the three departments, EdPM was purposively selected taking into account its historical precedence and hence the researcher believes that pertinent data could be accessed from experienced academic staffs of those departments. There are about 19 instructors in the EdPM department. Of these, the two are females while the remaining figure constitutes males. In the department of SNIE, there are about 14 teachers. Out of these, 3 of the teachers are females while the remaining are males. From EdPM department, 3 instructors were purposively selected to be participants of the study. The researcher selected three of the participants taking into consideration their good performance in teaching in the college and thinks that they are appropriate for the study to get relevant information. In the college of social science, there are about 19 departments. Of these, English and Sociology were purposely selected. From these departments, 6 teachers were taken as key informants of the study taking into account their good performance in teaching. The deans were also purposively selected for they are directly involved in

leading the instructional process of the colleges. Moreover, three head of departments were selected purposively.

3.8 Instruments of Data Collection

Interview, class room observation and document review were the data collection tools that the researcher used in this study.

Interview

Interview was used as the main tool in this study to get firsthand information and relevant data. Therefore, semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. The interview guide consists of 10 open-ended questions that call for elaborated response from the informants. It was prepared by the researcher based on the literature review and was conducted with each participant on one on one basis. The key informants of the interview session were instructors, the deans and the department heads. Before starting the interview, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Since the interview is conducted at university teaching setting, the researcher employed English language while interviewing the key informants. During interviews, all responses were recorded using hand written notes and audiotapes. All interviews were arranged to accommodate the participants' schedules and were conducted in locations selected by each participant. This is important in order to ensure that participants are as comfortable as possible during the interviews. The interview was conducted by the researcher. One interview took an hour although individual differences in articulating among the informants was noted.

The interview data were analyzed following the steps outlined by Rubin & Rubin (2011) for responsive interviewing analysis techniques, which begin with finding the concepts, themes, events, and topical markers from the interviews; then moving through

the process of clarifying and synthesizing the above data units, followed by elaboration, coding and sorting of the data units. Eventually, the responses of the analyzed interview data were transcribed and then analyzed to be incorporated in the final report.

Observation

In this study, the researcher conducted classroom observations based on criteria set in the field note to assess current classroom instructional practices focusing on the implementation of instructional goals, methods and assessment techniques based on the principles of constructivism. Besides having interviews as primary source of data collection for this study, the researcher carried out in-class observations as an additional data collection strategy in order to find additional evidence to support the analysis.

An observational protocol was designed to record notes in the classroom that included both descriptive and reflective points. During the class observations, the researcher actively observed the teacher's lesson presentation and took field notes. The researcher took detailed notes on anything observed, felt, thought, noticed, or deemed relevant to the study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). The focus of classroom observation was on how the instructor's lesson engaged students actively, how activities were structured to help students construct meaning, how teaching methods varied to provide opportunities for collaborative and independent work, and the teacher's facilitating role. The classroom observation would focus on the following units of analysis:

The researcher observed one classroom twice to minimize artificiality during observation. The classroom observation were conducted in classes where instructors were selected as key informants for the interviews. A total of eight instructors (whom the researcher interviewed) from both colleges were observed in the undergraduate program in first-year, third-year and fourth-year classes in the departments of Educational Planning

and Management (three instructors), English Language and Literature (three instructors), and Sociology (two instructors). While the study is bounded specifically to the observed classes of the undergraduate program, it introduces significant heterogeneity due to the nature of the courses offered, which was managed during data analysis. Observing undergraduate classes across different years of entry provides rich, contextualized data that directly informs the questions about how, why, and under what conditions constructivist instruction is implemented in this study.

Document Review

To increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, relevant documents were analyzed. In relation to this, Bowen (2009) disclosed the need for documents to be interpreted by the researcher to give meaning and voice around the case study. Similarly, Merriam (1998) pointed out, documents constitute easily accessible pieces of information that are not determinant on social settings or individual participants in the research. In this study, course plans were reviewed and analyzed. To make things at ease, the researcher selected some course plans and reviewed them. In this qualitative single case study, four course plans were selected and reviewed to support the data gathered from interviews and classroom observations from a constructivist perspective. The documents reviewed included course plans for "Introduction to Educational Leadership" and "Management of Change and Innovation" courses, a lesson plan for an "English for Remedial Students" course, and a generic course plan for "Social Problems and Intervention Methods." The units of analysis focused on instructional features associated with constructivist pedagogy, such as a learner-centered approach, collaboration and social interaction, active learning, real-world relevance, scaffolding

and support, open-ended questions and inquiry-based learning, and opportunities for reflection, emphasizing facilitation over direct instruction.

The units of analysis were categorized based on the emphasis of constructivism. The objectives of the course plans were examined to determine if they addressed higher-order learning outcomes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity skills. The content of the course plans was reviewed to assess if it reflected real-life situations, was authentic, relevant, and challenging to learners. The teaching methods used in the course plans were reviewed to see if they allowed for active learning, problem-based learning, student-centered approaches, and collaborative learning. Additionally, the course plans were checked to see if they included formative, diversified, and evidence-based assessment strategies.

This study employed triangulation to enhance credibility and trustworthiness by combining data from multiple sources. This approach, as explained by Patton (2015), allows for a better understanding of the results than using just one method. In this study, the data from interviews were triangulated with classroom observations and instructors' course plans data, giving a fuller view of the subject. Ultimately, this process improves the study's validity and trustworthiness while broadening researchers' understanding (Bryman, 2004).

3.9 Strategies for Trustworthiness and Authenticity

To ensure accurate data recording and representation of the overall picture, the qualitative researcher must clearly outline the methods used. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness in constructivist research is shown through four criteria: credibility

(internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity).

Credibility

This refers to the trust that the study's results reflect participants' opinions. Methods like participant observation, and triangulation help establish and maintain credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodwell, 1998; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The idea of internal validity is similar to credibility (Yilmaz, 2013). One way to increase credibility is by using member checking, which involves gathering feedback on the data, interpretations, and conclusions from the participants themselves. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility," despite its limitations. I built trustworthiness and authenticity by connecting with individuals and observing classroom instruction. I used a well-planned qualitative research strategy. I interviewed each participant with the same questions and kept their responses consistent. I also ensured that participants agreed with the accuracy of the data interpretation so that every answer accurately reflected their perspective. During data collection, I used probing questions such as, "Is there anything I am missing?" or "Is this how you would categorize this idea/concept/comment?" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

This is similar to reliability (Yilmaz, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The study must be conducted carefully and transparently (Yilmaz, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). To achieve highly verifiable results, objectivity is essential (Yilmaz, 2013). Researchers need to be objective, clear, and specific about the methods used to collect data and the reasons for those methods (Yilmaz, 2013). Reliability refers to the consistency of research

throughout all stages over time (Connelly, 2016). This study is reliable because it maintains its argument from the planning stage through methodology selection, design, and result analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, I provided detailed descriptions of its methodologies and showed how different elements were connected, making it a trustworthy academic resource for future researchers. To confirm dependability in my study, I used field notes in which I record detailed information about the classroom teaching activities, interview negotiations and participant comments.

Confirmability

This refers to the extent to which a researcher can demonstrate the neutrality of his or her research interpretations. Even though a researcher is the main human instrument in qualitative research, care must be taken to avoid biases that could distort results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To allow readers to trace every component of my arguments and data back to their sources, I included an audit trail with the draft case study and unprocessed data like process notes, personal notes, analysis notes, and raw data. To elevate this research to academic standards, I maintained an unbiased researcher mindset. I transcribed every interview after getting expert feedback, which helped me avoid bias.

Transferability

Transferability indicates how appropriate the research findings are in other contexts (Solomon & Amankwaa, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used the following methods in this study to ensure transferability: context description, multiple sources, detailed descriptions, and comparison and contrast in discussing the results. A thorough description of the circumstances under which the study occurred is one of the most important ways to guarantee transferability. This includes the sample plan, data collection methods, data

analysis techniques, and ethical issues. By doing so, I enable readers or users of the study to determine its relevance to their specific situations. Using multiple data sources and evidence to support conclusions is another way to ensure transferability. To enhance the credibility and validity of the results, I included interviews, classroom observations, and a review of course plans in this study. A third approach to ensure transferability is using thick descriptions to describe the results. In this investigation, I aimed to explain not only what happened but also why it happened, connecting the findings to the context to provide readers with a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

3.10 Methods of Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures were designed to generate an in-depth understanding of theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction. The selected analytic approach ensured a systematic process for deriving themes aligned with the research questions. The data from the interview, the classroom observation field notes, and instructional document reviews were categorized and described qualitatively using narration and thick descriptions by categorizing the data in to themes. This study employed Case Study analytic techniques (e.g., cross-case synthesis) to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within the interview data. The main purposes of cross-case analysis in embedded units design are to determine if findings are consistent or unique across cases and to ensure that the findings are robust and not skewed by a single subunit. A detailed analysis of the interview transcripts was made. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were reviewed alongside the recordings to ensure accuracy. Field notes were also organized chronologically.

As the first step in this sequential process, notes from each interview, made both during the interview and immediately after it, were reviewed; highlights or new concepts were identified. The researcher read each transcript multiple times to immerse himself in the data. Initial analytic memos were written to capture emerging ideas and potential patterns. . Initial codes were generated inductively through line-by-line examination of the transcripts. These codes were organized and refined manually. Codes were derived from the participants' stories and refined through an iterative process. Next, the transcript from each interview was reviewed and coded. Related codes were clustered to form preliminary categories. These categories were then reviewed, compared, and refined to produce overarching themes that captured the core patterns in the dataset.

The development of themes followed an iterative process of constant comparison. As the process continued, each new interview was compared to the previous ones for confirming or disconfirming evidence; earlier interviews were reanalyzed in the light of new concepts identified in later interviews. The emergent themes were examined for internal coherence and distinctiveness. The researcher revisited the raw data to ensure that the themes accurately represented participants' accounts and that no contradictions remained unresolved. The final themes were interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and previous empirical studies. Cross-case analysis of the data on the selected colleges and departments was made critically. In the course of forming themes, the researcher used data driven themes. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher maintained an audit trail documenting analytic decisions, used member checking to validate interpretations.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained consent from colleges and relevant stakeholders. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured that their data would be used solely for research. Confidentiality was maintained during data analysis to protect participant identities. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, addressing key considerations:

1. Informed consent: Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, methods, and roles before commencement.
2. Harm and risk: Participants were safeguarded from any potential physical or psychological harm.
3. Honesty and trust: Data collection and analysis adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure integrity.
4. Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity: Participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.
5. Voluntary participation: Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and for academic purposes only.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings derived from interviews, classroom observations, and course plan reviews. The results are organized based on research questions, integrating data from multiple sources. Data analysis was conducted within each case (College of Education and College of Social Science) and then across cases to identify patterns and variations. The findings were categorized into major themes based on the research questions. Regarding Educators' Views on Constructivist Instruction (Research Q1), the findings revealed diverse views of constructivist pedagogy among faculty. These views were categorized into three major themes: educators' views of constructivism as students' knowledge construction, educators' views of constructivism as student-centered pedagogy, and educators' views of constructivism as learning through social interactions. Concerning Implementation of Constructivist Instruction (research Q3), four themes were developed: teacher-centered instruction dominance, selective adoption of constructivist principles, prevalence of traditional assessment methods, and hierarchical vs dialogical relationships. With respect to theory-practice gap in constructivist instruction (Research Q3), a theme titled addressing theory-practice gap in implementing constructivist instruction emerged from the findings. Challenges in Implementing Constructivist Instruction (Research Q 4). This question focuses on analyzing two main themes that emerged from the findings: instructors' perspectives on the challenges they face, and the views of college deans and department heads on these challenges. Available Opportunities

(Research Q5). In this research question, a theme emerged titled "Availability of Instructional Resources."

In the College of Social Science, similar themes were identified, with an additional theme under the second research question: Implementation of Constructivist Instruction. i.e., selective adoption of constructivist principles. To avoid monotony in writing similar theme titles in each study unit and to simplify data presentation, results from the college of Education on each theme were presented followed by data from the College of Social Science. After completing the within-case analysis for each study unit (college), a cross-case analysis was conducted to compare and contrast the findings from both colleges followed by a whole-case synthesis, treating UoG as the main case.

4.1 Findings from College of Education and College of Social Science

4.1.1 Educators' Views on Constructivist Instruction (Research Q1)

In line with this research question, the findings revealed that educators hold diverse views of constructivism which were categorized into three primary themes: Educators' views of constructivism as students' knowledge construction, Educators' views of constructivism as student centered pedagogy, and Educators' views of constructivism as learning through social interactions

Theme 1: Educators' views of Constructivism as Students' knowledge construction

College of Education

The interview data indicated that instructors have varying views on constructivism. Constructivism is conceptualized as a learning theory where students are given the chance to create meaning from what they learn, with the teacher acting as a guide.

In relation to this, one participant stated,

I understand it as an instructional approach which states that students are not empty minded. They have their own ideas, experiences and outlooks and a teacher should give many opportunities to students in the classroom to construct meaning out of what they have learned (Participant 3, 24/8/2024).

Another participant commented,

I see constructivism as a learning theory in which knowledge is constructed by associating the previous knowledge with new insights. In the classroom, constructivist instruction requires students to explore knowledge with guidance from teachers (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

These reflections suggest that instructors understand constructivism as a theory that fundamentally calls for students to explore knowledge independently by connecting it with their prior experiences, with teachers serving as facilitators.

The finding also suggests that heads of departments and deans shared the ideas of instructors viewing constructivism as students' meaning-making based on prior experiences. In relation to this, one participant expressed:

It is an instructional approach where teachers are expected to know the baseline of their students and provide them with many opportunities to make sense of their learning (Participant 14, 28/8/2024).

Another participant added,

it is a learning theory by which instructors teach courses by providing opportunity for students to construct meaning rather than simply transferring content to students. (Participant 12, 25/8/2024).

From the participants' reflections, it is evident that constructivist teaching requires instructors to integrate students' ideas and experiences into their lessons enabling them to construct their own understanding actively.

Overall, educators viewed constructivism as a learning paradigm that allows students to actively build meaning from their experiences, with the teacher in a facilitating role.

College of Social Science

The interviews revealed that instructors understand constructivism in various ways. A common understanding is that it is a learning theory where students build knowledge by connecting new information to what they already know. This process is actively supported by teachers. For instance, one participant stated,

In my opinion, it is a learning theory which focuses on students' knowledge construction. In the classroom reality, the teacher ought to provide ample chances for students to construct and deconstruct knowledge and then associate it with their prior experiences using their own culture (Participant 7, 13/2/2024).

From the above interview excerpt, one can note that constructivism is a learning theory which enables students create or reevaluate knowledge based on their earlier experiences.

Another participant added that constructivism requires teachers to scaffold students as they learn. He noted that,

Constructivism is a learning theory that emphasizes student-centered learning, with teachers providing support as students construct their own understanding. In this approach, students actively engage with the material, collaborate with peers, and socialize ideas. Teachers act as facilitators to guide students through the learning process (Participant 8, 17/2/2024).

Overall, instructors perceive constructivism as an instructional approach that enables students to actively build knowledge by linking new information to their prior experiences. This approach gives value to every student's voice and encourages

participation in knowledge building. Similarly, in this unit of the study, the data from college deans and head of departments revealed that constructivism is interpreted as an instructional approach in which students construct meaning out of what they learn, Concerning this, one of the participants remarked,

I see constructivism as a theory of learning where students construct meaning by relating their prior knowledge to new information, with the teacher playing a supportive role. I think it requires using active learning methods in the classroom (Participant 13, 19/2/2024).

Moreover, another participant reported,

In my view, constructivism is a learning theory in which students need to be given many opportunities to incorporate their experiences in to learning process by integrating previous knowledge with new information (Participant 11, 17/2/2024).

From the above participants' suggestions, it has become evident that constructivism as a learning theory that emphasizes the importance of students' ideas and necessitates teachers to integrate students learning experiences into the new lesson, creating a flexible and inviting classroom setting that acknowledges knowledge exploration.

Theme 2: Educators' views of Constructivism as Students Centered Pedagogy

College of Education

Other interviewees defined constructivism as a way of thinking that emphasizes student-centered teaching strategies, where learners primarily construct new knowledge based on prior experiences, often through group discussions.

Concerning this, one informant asserted,

To constructivists, students should be at the heart of learning and the teacher should give chance for learners to accomplish activities by themselves putting their utmost efforts. The role of the teacher here is guiding and supporting while they learn (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

Furthermore, another interviewee emphasizing at this point said,

I believe that student-centered learning is one of the key aspects of constructivism. In the classroom, teachers are expected to create an interactive learning environment where students explore knowledge on their own with guidance from the teacher (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

These reflections indicate that constructivism promotes a shift towards student-centered pedagogy, where teachers facilitate opportunities for students to construct knowledge independently. This approach allows students to actively build new knowledge by connecting it to their past experiences and engaging in discussions with peers, with teachers guiding them to enhance their understanding

College of Social Science

This perspective directly opposes the traditional view that teachers are the sole providers of knowledge. One participant illustrated this point by stating,

I believe student-centeredness is the main aspect of constructivist thinking. In the classroom, a teacher first gives clue about the lesson and the activities given and the students are expected to construct meaning out of them by relating the previous knowledge with the new one under the teacher's guidance (Participant 7, 9/2/2024).

Reinforcing this idea, another participant affirmed,

In my view, constructivism places students in the driver's seat while the teacher takes on the role of a passenger. It demands student-centered instruction to be put into effect and encourages students to be more active during instructional time, with the teacher playing a facilitating role (Participant 4, 15/2/2024).

Similarly, another participant added,

I believe that constructivism is a learning theory that focuses on putting students at the forefront of the instructional process. In this approach, knowledge is constructed through discussions, reflections, and arguments, with the teacher guiding and supporting the learning process (Participant 9, 18/2/2024).

In light of the participants' remarks, it is logical to deduce that instructors view constructivism as a learning theory that places a strong emphasis on student involvement in the learning process, moving beyond traditional approaches that prioritize mere knowledge transfer.

Despite rooted in constructivist theory, both sub-themes reflect different ways teachers understand constructivism. The first sub-theme focuses on instructors' views about how learning happens, while the second focuses on instructors' views about how teaching should be conducted.

Description of sub-theme 1: Constructivism as Students' Active Knowledge Construction captures instructors' views that learning occurs when students actively make sense of ideas by connecting new information with what they already know and through interaction with others (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). It represents a pattern of meaning operating at the level of epistemological belief, reflecting teachers' assumptions about the nature of knowledge and learning. The central organizing concept is learning as an

internally driven process of meaning-making, consistent with constructivist learning theory. Instructors expressing this view tend to talk about students' thinking and understanding, but they do not always describe specific classroom strategies or teaching methods. This suggests that they are talking mainly about learning itself rather than about how to teach.

Description of sub-theme 2: Constructivism as Student-Centered Pedagogy reflects a more practical understanding of constructivism. It operates at the level of pedagogical enactment, with the central organizing concept being constructivism as a set of instructional practices and classroom arrangements. Instructors associated with this theme describe teaching approaches such as group work, student choice, discussion, and the instructor acting as a facilitator. In these cases, constructivism is understood mainly as a way of organizing the classroom and planning lessons (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). However, instructors do not always explain why these approaches support learning in terms of students actively constructing knowledge.

Treating these as separate sub-themes aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2019) emphasis on analytic distinction rather than surface similarity. Although both themes reference constructivism, they answer different analytic questions: Sub-theme 1 addresses what teachers view learning is, while sub-theme 2 addresses what teachers view teaching should look like. Collapsing these into a single theme would obscure this conceptual distinction and reduce analytic sensitivity. Research shows that instructors' views about learning and their teaching practices do not always develop together or align neatly (Pajares, 1992; Fives & Buehl, 2012). This pattern was also evident in the data. Some teachers talked about learning as an active process but did not describe student-centered

teaching practices, while others described student-centered classrooms without clearly explaining learning as knowledge construction. For this reason, the two sub-themes are treated as distinct but complementary. Keeping them distinct allows the analysis to better represent the different ways teachers make sense of constructivism, without assuming that holding constructivist beliefs about learning automatically leads to constructivist teaching practices.

Theme 3: Educators' views of constructivism as learning through social interactions

College of Social Science

Some participants viewed constructivism as a learning approach that emphasizes giving students the opportunities to learn collaboratively through discussions and knowledge exchange. In line with this, one of the participants asserted,

Constructivism is an instructional approach that emphasizes teachers understanding their students' backgrounds and providing opportunities for them to construct meaning based on prior experiences through knowledge exchange and social interactions (Participant 9, 28/8/2024).

According to the participant's perspective, one can note that constructivism is about teachers building on students' prior experiences and encouraging learning through discussion and collaboration. This reflects a learner-centered, pedagogical understanding.

Another participant further stated,

For me, constructivism acknowledges that knowledge is shaped by society, history, and power dynamics. Teachers in social sciences should encourage students to question whose voices are heard, whose experiences are overlooked, and how to challenge biased ideas. (Participant 11)

The second participant (Participant 11) elaborates the idea: constructivism isn't just *how* we learn. It's also about what gets learned and whose knowledge is valued. Here,

knowledge is seen as shaped by society, history, and power and adds a critical dimension that students should not only construct knowledge but also question whose knowledge is being constructed, and why.

Based on the participants statements, one can infer that constructivism in the College of Social Science goes beyond collaboration and prior knowledge. It is also about power, perspective, and responsibility. Ethical and reflective learning that challenges inequality and promotes social awareness is focused.

4.1.2 Instructors' Constructivist Instruction Practices (Research Q2)

This research question focuses on analyzing interview data about instructors' descriptions of their constructivist instruction practices. Four main themes emerged from the analysis: teacher-centered instruction dominance, selective adoption of constructivist principles, prevalence of traditional assessment methods, and hierarchical versus dialogical relationships.

Theme 1: Teacher-centered instruction dominance

College of Education

Most instructors reported that their classroom practices are dominated by teacher-centered instruction, with a heavy reliance on the lecture method. A few stated they use some student-centered strategies, but admitted that this is done to a limited extent.

Here are some excerpts from the interviews that illustrate this category:

One participant stated,

In my classroom, teacher-centered instruction is mostly employed. I rarely use some aspects of students-centered approach in my class. I couldn't say confidently that I am committed enough in implementing the principles of constructivism (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

Another participant shared a similar view stating,

I do not make use of the principles of constructivism effectively in my classroom as desired. I tried to use them rarely. I couldn't say I am highly committed in practicing it sufficiently (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

According to the participants' views, it is reasonable to infer that the student-centered approach, which is the main aspect of constructivism, is practiced in the classroom in a limited sense. This highlights the need for providing training on constructivism and how to apply it in the classroom context for instructors to fill the gaps.

Another informant further highlighted this, saying,

I personally do not dare to say that I teach courses based on the constructivist viewpoints. I stick to traditional teaching method so as to cover the course portions in that given time (Participant 3, 25/8/2024).

This reflects a common practice where instructors prioritize covering content to meet course objectives within a set timeframe, rather than providing opportunities for students to construct their own meaning. This is a clear indicator that constructivist principles are not effectively put into practice. The findings from classroom observations confirmed this, revealing a strong reliance on traditional methods like lectures and question-and-answer sessions, with minimal use of varied instructional strategies

College of Social Sciences

As the data from the interview revealed, two different views were reflected. Some participants stated that constructivist instruction was not implemented effectively as a result

of limited students' engagement in the classroom. They further suggested that the teacher simply gives lectures to the whole class many a time with minimal degree of students' involvement. To substantiate this, one of the key informants expressed:

In my opinion, constructivist instruction is not effectively implemented in classroom. This is primarily due to time constraints, students' limited inclination towards reflective learning, teachers' lack of commitment, and large class sizes (Participant 8, 17/2/2024).

Another interviewee also stated,

I couldn't say the principles of constructivism is implemented in its full range. Frankly speaking, a mix of the principles of both behavioral and constructivism theories of learning are practiced in the classroom (Participant 7, 13/2/2016).

The informants' statement clearly indicate that the fundamental principles of constructivism are not fully practiced, maintaining its true essence.

Similarly, participant further explained,

In my observation, most teachers are not in a position to allow students to give meaning to the lesson by creating contexts. Simply put, they transfer the contents of the course using the lecture method of teaching. I believe that the current implementation in our department is not effective (Participant 13, 19/2/2024).

This suggests that instructors do not contextualize their classroom teaching. Instead, lecture teaching method has become the predominant approach.

From the above excerpts, it can be noted that despite the intended use of constructivism, lectures remain the primary method of instructional message dissemination.

Theme 2: Selective Adoption of Constructivist Principles

In the college of Social Sciences, the only difference from College of Education is the addition of this sub-theme. Some key informants noted that they are making efforts to

incorporate constructivist principles. One participant, for instance, mentioned a shift in his teaching style, stating,

I tried to employ it as far as possible. I could say I move to constructivism-guided teaching recently. In teaching about conditional sentences for example I am not telling the students the rules as I did before. Instead, I set questions and lead students to generalize the rules by themselves (Participant 4, 15/2/2024).

This shows an effort to apply a constructivist approach in language teaching. Similarly, another participants expressed,

Constructivist instruction is mostly used in major courses, but its effectiveness can be improved. In these classes, the implementation appears stronger due to the extensive experience and solid academic backgrounds of our department's teachers. As the department head, I have noticed that many instructors grasp constructivist learning theory well (Participant 10, 17/2/2024).

This suggests that some instructors with more experience have been successful in applying constructivism for they had rich experiences and relatively better exposure to constructivism thinking.

From the perspectives of the participants, it can be inferred that there are instances where the principles of constructivism were applied in the classroom, even though direct instruction remains prevalent in the educational setting.

Theme 3: Prevalence of Traditional Assessment Methods

College of Education

Analysis of assessment practices revealed that instructors predominantly use traditional paper-and-pencil tests to measure student performance.

In connection with this, one participant noted,

To be honest, our assessment practice trend is giving paper and pencil tests to students and grading them accordingly. Though the time calls for using assessment for learning, we practice continuous summative assessment giving series of written tests at different times (Participant 10, 23/8/2024).

This suggests that written tests are the common practice, despite educational policy documents emphasizing formative assessment principles. Similarly, another interviewee also stated,

The current assessment practices in our case are a reflection of the principles of behaviorism, i.e., paper and pencil tests are excessively used. Conversely, constructivist assessments like self-assessment, peer-assessment and portfolio assessments are missed in the university assessment guideline, (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

This indicates that the university's assessment guidelines, which emphasize traditional methods, lead to a behaviorist-guided assessment culture.

Another participant comments,

written assessments in its different forms like mid exam, final exam, paper works are dominantly used. On the contrary, the constructivist assessments such as self-assessment, portfolio-assessment and peer-assessments are missed elements in the actual classroom scenario (Participant 3, 24/8/2024).

From the participants' remarks, one can infer that the widespread reliance on traditional written exams and quizzes shows a significant misalignment between assessment practices and constructivist principles.

College of Social Sciences

Analysis of the interview data revealed that instructors commonly used paper and pencil forms of assessments to measure students' academic performance. Supporting this claim, one participant stated,

In my view, the current classroom reality in our case focuses on paper and pencil tests which contradicts the view of constructivism (Participant 6, 5/6/2016).

The responses from the participants indicate that conventional assessment methods, such as written exams, and formal evaluations are still in use today. This approach to assessment distinctly aligns with the behavioral model of learning.

Similarly, another interviewee also expressed,

The way I assess students is based on the assessment guideline of the university. The guideline is not prepared incorporating constructivist principles. It rather reflects behaviorists thinking. I often use oral questions, written examinations, quizzes and assignments to assess students (Participant 8, 23/2/ 2024).

This perspective of the participants implies that instructors assess their students using traditional assessment tools based on assessment guidelines.

In line with the above views of the respondents, another participant stressed:

As the department head, I believe the assessment tools do not reflect constructivist principles. Instead, we mainly use traditional paper-and-pencil tests for final evaluations. There is very little room for formative assessments. Specifically, we lack self-assessment and portfolio assessment options (Participant 11, 18/2/2024).

From the above verbatim, one can deduce that there is a misalignment with constructivist assessment principles. That is to say, the participant perceives a disconnect between the current assessment practices and constructivist learning theory. Furthermore, overreliance on summative assessment is another point to be noted.

Theme 4: Hierarchical vs dialogical relationships

College of Education

Regarding teacher-student interactions, a theme of hierarchical vs. dialogical relationships emerged from the interview data. The findings indicated that a hierarchical relationship, rather than a collaborative one, is prevalent. In relation to this, one of the key informants expressed,

Theoretically, constructivism demands high interactions between the teacher and students as well as students among themselves. In practice, however, I couldn't see such interactions in my classroom. As far as my knowledge is concerned, our classroom culture does not prepare students to be expressive and self-reliant. (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

In a similar way, another participant said,

In principle, constructivism demands high teacher-students interactions having two-way communication between the teacher and students and among themselves. Conversely, the classroom reality shows students simply attend the teachers lecture and the class is not as such interactive (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

These views highlight a clear gap between the theoretical principles of teacher-student interaction in constructivism and actual classroom practices, where information is transmitted in a one-way, non-interactive manner.

College of Social Sciences

As the data from the interview indicated, the classroom teacher-student interactions were hierarchical with the teacher directly conveying the course contents.

Concerning this issue, one of the key informants expressed,

In my view, the constructivist approach of teaching involves a free two-way flow of communication between the teacher and students, and among students themselves, which leads high levels of interactions. In my classroom reality, however, I impart information to students dominating the class (Participant 8, 23/2/ 2024).

Another participant emphasized,

I could say the relationship between the teacher and students ought to be friendly and horizontal. Yet, the classroom reality is reversed with a hierarchical relationship between the teacher and students that doesn't create space for learners to be interactive (Participant 9, 18/2/2024).

Based on the participants' statement, it can be concluded that classroom interactions between the teacher and students are hierarchical, contradicting the principles of constructivism that advocate for dialogical interactions. In the same vein, another participant asserted,

Constructivism requires high interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. Students may lack necessary prerequisite knowledge skills for interactive learning, leading teachers to use traditional methods first (Participant 6, 15/2/2024)

According to participant's feedback, current classroom interactions in language teaching lack effective two-way communication due to students' limited background knowledge. This results in teachers primarily transferring knowledge to students, who passively absorb the information. Collectively, these illustrations show that a hierarchical classroom dynamic is prevalent, highlighting the need for professional training to foster open dialogues.

4.13 Theory-Practice Gap in Constructivist Instruction (Research Q3)

A theme titled "Addressing the Theory-Practice Gap" emerged from the research question.

Theme 1: Addressing the Theory-Practice Gap

College of Education

The interview results showed a significant gap between the theoretical framework, educational policy and the practical implementation of constructivism.

Related to this, one participants stated,

Although the education and training policy document stresses constructivism, its application in university classrooms is inadequate. Instead, a behavioral teaching model dominates, with teachers primarily using PowerPoint presentations. (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

This indicates a disparity between educational policy advocating for constructivist teaching methods and their actual use in university classrooms. This restricts students from fully participating in collaborative learning experiences. This gap between policy and practice underscores the difficulties in transforming theoretical concepts of constructivism into classroom teaching within higher education. Another participant provided a similar perspective, suggesting that

a disconnect between education policy, theory, and classroom practice exists. He cited an Amharic proverb, "ስንዴ ዘርተን እንዴት በቆሎ እንጠጥቃለን (How can we expect corn when we sow wheat?) (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

To illustrate, the teacher education system's focus on theory does not align with the practical skills needed for constructivist instruction. This is seen as a major reason for the ineffective teaching practice.

One of the informants confirmed this, saying,

I believe there is a significant gap between theoretical principles and the actual classroom practices. In our context, the Ministry of Education (MoE) promotes constructivist thinking in education policy documents, but there is little effort to ensure its consistent implementation in the classroom (Participant 3, 25/8/2024).

Participants agree that while constructivism is well-documented in policy and literature, it is not effectively implemented in classrooms.

College of Social Sciences

Correspondingly, the findings from interview within the same theme in this study unit revealed that although constructivism is extensively reviewed in literatures in terms of theory and described in policy documents, there are important differences between theory, policy, and the actual implementation of constructivist instruction. Pertaining to this, one of the participants commented,

I could say that there is a gap between the theory and the actual classroom practices. What is stipulated on the education policy documents is not practiced in the classroom as desired. Particularly, in some departments who do not take education courses, “No light, no class. “ (Participant 3, 15/2/2024).

According to participants, constructivist principles are not effectively implemented in classroom instruction, despite being emphasized in literature and education policy. In some university departments, instructors focus on subject matter expertise and use lecture-based teaching with PowerPoint presentations, neglecting pedagogy. This leads to a common practice of canceling classes due to lack of lighting, rather than using constructivist approaches like problem-based learning.

Furthermore, another participant stated,

The Ethiopian education system struggles to connect theory with practice and overlooks students' cultural backgrounds and skills. English language teaching materials do not consider students' understanding and local knowledge, making language teaching less effective. The content lacks effective structure for language instruction resulting in learning gaps (Participant 6, 15/6/2016).

From this, one can conclude that constructivist teaching is highly demanding for university teachers to contextualize the lesson considering students level of understanding, skills and feelings. It also requires educators to incorporate the local experiences in a form of indigenous knowledge in to the curriculum, and work collaboratively with teachers to boost students' problem-solving and critical thinking skills. In practice, however, this implies a gap between the theoretical aspects of constructivism, what is indicated in education policy and what is taught in the classroom.

4. 1.2.1 Findings from classroom Observation

College of Education

To support the findings from interviews, classroom observations were conducted. The classroom observations were conducted, guided by field notes. Three instructors who offer courses for 3rd and 4th year undergraduate students in the department of Educational Planning and Management were observed. The data from classroom observations are presented below.

Lesson Observation One

The first observation was conducted in a fourth-year undergraduate Educational Planning and Management class on the topic of Human Resource Management, specifically focusing on Recruitment. Participant 1 was the observed instructor and the

session took place at Maraki Campus in Room 1. The classroom was well-equipped with a smart board, a whiteboard, and a blackboard. It also had movable chairs, which would be ideal for group and pair activities. The instructor did not, however arrange the seating in a way that would facilitate dialogue among the students.

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretation

The instructor primarily used a combination of question-and-answer, lecture, and gapped lecture methods. The activities were minimally engaging and did not help students construct their own meaning. Although the instructor connected the lesson to real-world contexts by comparing recruitment at King's Academy and the University of Gondar, he did not provide opportunities for students to reflect or engage in self-assessment. The lesson was heavily reliant on a PowerPoint presentation, and other instructional resources, such as flip charts were not used to supplement the verbal communication. Teacher-student interaction was limited, with the teacher mainly presenting information from the slides and rarely using oral questions to encourage participation. Despite the presence of movable chairs, students were not arranged in a way that facilitated dialogue or collaborative work.

Reflection on Observation

The lesson delivery did not align with a constructivist teaching perspective. The instructor did not effectively facilitate student learning and the class lacked problem-based learning. While the topic was well-suited for case scenarios, the class was dominated by the PowerPoint slideshow. The use of the smart board was also limited to simply presenting content rather than being used as an interactive tool to engage students in discussions. There was no evident differentiation for students with special needs. Overall, the instructor should

consider improving his lesson presentation to better suit the classroom context, the nature of the topic, and students' readiness for learning.

Lesson Observation Two

The second observation took place in a third-year undergraduate class on Educational Planning and Management. The course, Management of Change and Innovation, focused on the topic of Leadership Styles. The observation was conducted with participant 3 in Room 2 at Maraki Campus. The classroom was well-equipped with a smart board, chalkboard, and whiteboard, and the movable chairs provided an environment conducive to student-centered activities.

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretation

The instructor began the lesson by connecting it to the previous one through revision. The purpose of the lesson was conveyed through a combination of traditional instructional methods, including Question and Answer, lecture, demonstration, and gapped lecture. The concepts were explained using diagrams on a PowerPoint presentation. Interaction between the instructor and students was limited to the lecture format and questions, with students primarily engaged in passive activities like listening, note-taking, and answering questions posed by the teacher. The lesson lacked opportunities for self-assessment and reflection, and no pair or group discussions were held.

Reflection on Observation

To improve instruction, I recommend that instructors incorporate real-life examples and problem-based scenarios into their teaching. The time dedicated to interactive activities like discussions and group work should be increased by reducing lecture time.

Finally, a better balance between theoretical explanations and practical application in instruction should be achieved.

Lesson Observation Three

The third observation was conducted in a 3rd-year Educational Planning and Management class on Introduction to Educational Leadership. Participant 2 was the observed instructor, in Room 3 at Maraki Campus. The classroom was well-organized with movable chairs, a smart board, a chalkboard, and a whiteboard, making it an ideal space for pair and group discussions.

What I observed in the classroom

The instructor facilitated a smooth transition between lessons through revision and engaged students using question-and-answer and group discussion methods. A two-way interaction between the teacher and students was evident, and students actively listened, took notes, and responded to questions. However, the learning activities lacked clarity, leading to confusion among students. The teacher's attempt at facilitating discussions was often teacher-dominated, and there was an absence of real-world problems and constructivist teaching approaches like problem-based learning, hands-on experience, and case scenarios. Additionally, no support was provided for group work, and no self-assessment activities were incorporated. Although students were able to complete their assignments, the lesson failed to utilize opportunities for student reflection.

Reflection on Observation

The lesson did not reflect constructivist teaching methods. Instead, the instructor dominantly employed direct teaching approach. With this in mind, I raised a question: “does simply dividing students into groups truly meet the criteria for student-oriented and

constructivist-oriented learning?" To fully align with a constructivist approach, I believe the lesson I observed could be enhanced by incorporating hands-on- activities, provide specific discussion questions, and use examples from students' real-life experiences.

College of Social Sciences

In this unit of the study, classroom observation is also conducted to crosscheck the data obtained from instructor interviews and to make the findings more reliable. This classroom observation was conducted in two-rounds based on field notes. A total of five instructors who offer courses for 1st year undergraduate students in the departments of English language and literature (three instructors) and sociology (two instructors) were observed. The data on classroom observations are presented below:

Lesson Observation Four

Observation: A one-hour and 30-minute Communicative English Language Skills course was observed with Participant 5 at Maraki Campus, Room 19. The classroom is a lecture hall with ample space but lacks technological resources like Smart boards, only having chalk and white boards. The fixed chairs forced a face-to-face seating arrangement due to the large class size of 80 first-year undergraduate students. The students faced the instructor in a front-to-back seating arrangement. The room was neat, well-ventilated, and well-lit. The lesson topic was "Listening Comprehension."

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretations

The instructor wrote listening comprehension questions on the white-board and instructed students to write them down before listening. Students actively listened as the teacher read the text and then answered the questions. The teacher emphasized the importance of listening attentively, taking notes, and organizing them for a complete

understanding. The instructor used reading aloud, dictation, lecture, question and answer, and active listening methods to convey the lesson's purpose and relevance. Students needed to focus on the listening text to engage in meaningful learning. I observed a large number of students in the class, which poses a challenge for the teacher. Specifically, this situation makes the listening activities not effectively completed by the students due to the difficulty of capturing their attention and engaging them. The listening text is too lengthy for the students to comprehend, and it was not chosen appropriately. During my stay there, I noticed some students not concentrating on the lesson because they were confused, despite proper highlights and guiding activities provided by the instructor. The teacher simplified the lesson by writing key words on the white board, but the listening activities were not differentiated.

Observation Reflection

In my opinion, the classroom environment is not conducive for carrying out pair and group discussions due to the large class size and fixed chairs. The teacher focused on individual activities, but struggled to engage all students during the listening text. More effort is needed to implement constructivist teaching methods like reflective learning and inquiry-based tasks.

Lesson Observation Five

Communicative English Language Skills course for Remedial students was conducted by Participant 6 at Maraki Campus in Room 21. The classroom, a lecture hall, had fixed chairs and basic teaching tools like a chalk-board and a whiteboard, lacking computers or other technological devices. The seating arrangement was face-to-face due

to the fixed chairs, accommodating the large class size. The lesson focused on "Jumble ideas to build a paragraph."

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretation

The instructor quickly outlined the main points on the board and used lectures as primary teaching method to communicate the lesson's objectives to students. The instructor's classroom sketches supported the lecture. The teacher assigned pair work to students, encouraging active engagement and meaning construction. The instructor's activities encouraged students to actively engage in the lesson and construct meaning to some extent. There was a lack of scaffolding activities to help students take ownership of their learning. Students were not given opportunities for self-assessment and reflection. Despite the challenges of a large class size and fixed seating arrangements, the instructor demonstrated strength in supervising students' work on the spot. The instructor did not present relevant real-world problems and authentic assignments to students. The entire instructional session relied on students working in pairs.

Reflection on the observation

While the instructor's effort to engage students was commendable, relying on a single task for the entire instructional session was a limitation. This approach raises the question of whether a single task can truly encourage active engagement and deep meaning construction for all students. Smart boards can enhance interactive instruction in the classroom, but in the class I observed, they were mainly used for PowerPoint presentations to cover course content. Real-world connections were lacking, such as incorporating critical global issues into writing tasks. To improve, the teacher should have

differentiated the tasks to address the diverse needs of the students. The lesson's flow and transitions also needs improvement.

Lesson Observation Six

The observation took place in a first-year undergraduate Communicative English Language Skills class taught by Participant 7 at Maraki Campus. The classroom was well-equipped with movable seats, a chalkboard, and a whiteboard, allowing for student movement. The students were seated in a typical face-to-face arrangement. The class had good lighting, ventilation, and cleanliness. It was one of the largest classes observed, with over eighty students. The lesson focused on the Present Perfect tense in grammar.

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretation

I noticed that a large number of students in the classroom put a burden on the teacher's work. The teacher maintained a smooth flow of the lesson by revising the previous lesson and introducing the new one. Following a brief lecture, students were observed discussing ideas in groups. The teacher's effort to monitor students learning progress is worth noting. Opportunities were given to students to learn by doing grammatical exercises on the board, and the teacher provided immediate corrections to them accordingly. A coaching role of the teacher was evident though it needs improvement. The teacher gave immediate constructive feedback to students. The activities designed by the teacher helped engage students in the lesson and encouraged them to construct meaning out of it to some extent.

Nevertheless, in this particular session I didn't see the teacher using authentic tasks and real- world problems to make the lesson active, providing self-assessment and reflective activities to students, and offering more scaffolding activities to help students take ownership of the learning process.

Reflection on the observation

The lesson encouraged individual student participation, particularly from those who were willing to write on the board, but it was not inclusive of all students. The activities were not varied enough to cater to the diverse learning styles and needs of such a large group. Although the class size was a significant challenge, the movable chairs and ample space offered an opportunity for the instructor to differentiate the instructional process by using methods like buzz group discussions. Overall, while the instructor's immediate feedback and effort to engage individual students were positive, the lesson could be enhanced by incorporating more authentic tasks, real-world problems, and providing students with opportunities for self-assessment and reflection.

Lesson Observation Seven

This observation was conducted in a first-year sociology class on Social Policy. Participant 8 taught in a lecture hall at Maraki Campus. The classroom is a lecture hall with fixed chairs. Students were seated in rows from front to back, which was a common arrangement in the classes I observed. The room had ample lighting, was tidy, and well-ventilated. Blackboards and whiteboards were mounted side by side on the wall, but there was no Smart board.

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretation

The instructor began the actual lesson by revising the previous lesson, which made for a smooth transition to the new one. Brief notes were given to students at the very start, followed by a revision of the previous lesson. The instructor also tried to probe students' responses by posing "what," "how," and "why" questions, allowing students to construct knowledge. The questions raised by the teacher motivated students to engage in the lesson

by exchanging ideas. The question and answer and gapped lecture teaching methods were employed. Classroom interactions were positive, and the instructor effectively communicated the lesson. However, there was a lack of variety in teaching strategies and learning activities, as well as insufficient scaffolding for students. Students were not given opportunities for self-assessment and reflection. To some extent, the instructor tried to give students chances to be actively involved in the lesson. Real-world scenarios related to the lesson were not given to students. The instructor's coaching role could be improved to better support student learning, and differentiated teaching strategies are needed.

Reflection on the observation

I found the lesson impressive in terms of imparting subject matter knowledge. However, the instructor missed opportunities for student engagement through pair and group discussions. Instead, the focus was on a few students responding to questions in a lecture format. It would have been beneficial if activities were designed ahead of the lesson session and students were given learning opportunities to share ideas among themselves, with the teacher playing a key role in facilitating. Presenting brief notes on the white board followed by detailed explanations is effective, especially when contextualized with examples and students through question and answer strategies.

Lesson Observation Eight

This observation was conducted in a first-year undergraduate sociology class on Social Problems and Intervention Methods. Participant 9 was the observed instructor in Room 9 at Maraki Campus. The classroom was well-equipped with a smart board, a chalkboard, and a whiteboard. It was also neat and furnished with movable chairs, providing ample space for student movement.

What I observed in the classroom and my interpretation

The instructor began the lesson with a revision of the previous topic, ensuring a smooth transition. The objectives of the lesson was conveyed through a combination of lecture, question-and-answer, and gapped lecture. The instructor attempted to make the lesson relevant by providing examples, but the learning activities themselves weren't well-framed to allow students to construct their own knowledge. There was a notable absence of scaffolding activities, preventing students from taking ownership of their learning. Students were also not given opportunities for self-assessment or reflection. The instructor primarily used the lecture method with good verbal communication skills. However, the activities were limited to taking notes, listening, and answering the teacher's questions. The instructor did not offer authentic assignments or real-world case scenarios.

Reflection on the observation

The lesson was dominated by direct teaching, with the teacher rarely using group or pair discussions. I did not see students actively discussing ideas be in pairs or groups during this session. The limited use of a gapped lecture alone raises the question of whether this method is sufficient for active student engagement and knowledge construction. It appears the classroom culture has not yet fully embraced a constructivist approach where the teacher acts as a coach. The observed practices suggest a need for a fundamental shift in instructional design to promote genuine student-centered learning.

A total of eight instructors from both colleges were observed in undergraduate classes (1st, 3rd and 4th year) in the departments of Educational Planning and Management (three instructors), English Language and Literature (three instructors), and Sociology

(two instructors). Despite the unique characteristics of each classroom, common pedagogical trends were observed.

Classroom observations basically reinforced the results of instructor interviews by disclosing a significant gap between conceptual understanding of constructivism and its practical application. In brief, a teacher-centered approach was the predominant instructional method, heavily reliant on one-way communication and the direct transfer of content.

The observations revealed that instructors primarily used direct teaching methods, such as lectures, often with the use of smart boards for delivering content rather than for interaction. Group discussions and question-and-answer sessions, which are considered interactive teaching strategies, were very rarely utilized. This teaching style resulted in low levels of student engagement and participation, and instructors often struggled to maintain students' attention, particularly in large classes. The findings also indicated a lack of pedagogical differentiation failing to address the diverse learning needs of students.

The assessment practices were also align with the interview findings, showing a heavy reliance on traditional, paper-and-pencil tests and oral questioning as forms of summative assessment. The lack of constructivist assessment methods, such as self-assessment, peer-assessment, or reflective activities, was noticeable. This limited students' opportunities to take ownership of their learning, as the emphasis was on evaluating knowledge acquisition rather than the process of knowledge construction. Furthermore, the interactions between instructors and students often demonstrated a traditional, hierarchical dynamic, which hindered dialogical exchanges and collaborative learning opportunities.

Despite some attempts to initiate group discussions in a few classes, they were not consistently incorporated into the lesson plan to promote collaborative learning. The classroom observations revealed that instructors may have a theoretical understanding of constructivism but struggle to apply it effectively in practice. The observed classrooms did not incorporate authentic tasks, real-world problem-solving, scaffolding, or consistent opportunities for collaboration and student ownership, which are essential elements of a constructivist- oriented classroom.

The key classroom observation findings are summarized in Table 2 below.

Category	Description	Areas for Improvement
Lesson Delivery/Teaching Methods	Most classrooms employed direct teaching methods mainly lectures. It was observed in few classrooms used interactive teaching such as group discussions, gapped lecture, question and answer to engage students actively in the learning process. In most observed classrooms, Smart boards were consistently used though was misused for course content coverage,.	Limited use of constructivist approaches, limited student engagement, teacher-student interactions often hierarchical
Student Engagement	Difficulty in maintaining students' attention in large class size and low levels of student participation were observed in most classes.	Limited interactions, Students disengagement during the lesson

	Diverse learning styles were not used to engage students of diverse needs.	
Real-World Connection	The lesson had limited real-world context and problem-based scenarios	Lessons lack connection to real-world contexts and student experiences by incorporating real-life examples and problem-based scenarios
Collaborative Learning	In few of the observed classes, students involved in group discussions	Limited opportunities for students to learn through collaboration
Differentiation & Support	Lack of differentiation in the given Activities	Limited support for diverse learners in a lecture hall
Teacher Student interactions	The observed classroom practices often reflected a traditional hierarchical relationship, which contradicts the principles of constructivist teaching	Heavy use of one-way communication, limited dialogues in the classroom interactions between the teacher and students
Assessment	During the observation sessions, instructors employed Paper and pencil tests and oral questions to assess students as a summative form of assessment. However, they didn't use Self-assessment, peer-assessment and reflections as formative, constructive assessment practices..	Dominant use of paper and pencil tests, poor use of constructivist assessment practices.

Table 2: summary of the Classroom Observation

4.1.2.2 Findings from Document Reviews

In this qualitative single case study, selected course plans were reviewed to support the data gathered from interviews and classroom observations from a constructivist perspective.

The documents reviewed included course plans for "Introduction to Educational Leadership" and "Management of Change and Innovation" courses, a lesson plan for an "English for Remedial Students" course, and a generic course plan for "Social Problems and Intervention Methods." The units of analysis focused on instructional features associated with constructivist pedagogy, such as a learner-centered approach, collaboration and social interaction, active learning, real-world relevance, scaffolding and support, open-ended questions and inquiry-based learning, and opportunities for reflection, emphasizing facilitation over direct instruction.

College of Education

Review of Course Plan I (Participant I's): Introduction to Educational Leadership

The learning outcomes of this course primarily emphasize lower-level cognitive skills, such as know, understand, and identify, rather than higher-order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis, or evaluation. Furthermore, the objectives do not appear to be specifically tailored to student interests or experiences, though they reflect some real-world applications. While the course content is both relevant and challenging, the plan falls short in connecting these topics to real-life contexts. The teaching strategies listed include some active learning methods, like collaborative group work and discussions, but they do not fully incorporate more advanced approaches such as problem-based or project-based learning. The plan also lacks specific scaffolding activities to help students build their understanding progressively. In terms of assessment, the plan relies heavily on traditional, paper-and-pencil assessments. With the final written examination weighted at 50%, there is a clear emphasis on summative assessment over continuous, formative

evaluation. While the inclusion of group and individual presentations offers some variety, there is a noticeable absence of authentic assessments that require the practical application of knowledge. The plan includes opportunities for collaborative projects, and it implicitly highlights the instructor's role as a facilitator rather than a lecturer; however, it lacks explicit strategies for guiding students on their learning journey.

Review of Course Plan II (Participant 2's): Management of Change and Innovation

The learning outcomes for this course show a partial alignment with constructivist principles, as they promote some higher-order thinking skills, particularly at the analysis level. The plan also emphasizes the affective domain, which is a positive aspect. However, similar to the first course, the learning outcomes are not aligned with student interests and experiences, despite a few objectives reflecting real-world applications. The course content is relevant and challenging, but it is heavily theory-laden and lacks clear connections to students' real-life scenarios.

The plan includes a variety of teaching strategies including lectures, group work, and practical tasks, which aim to promote active learning. However, the proposed methods do not appear to fully align with the theoretical nature of the course content. Moreover, the plan does not provide the necessary scaffolding or support structures for students to gradually build their understanding.

The assessment methods are heavily traditional, with a strong focus on written tests and examinations. With the final exam making up 50% of the grade, summative assessment is prioritized. While the inclusion of a group project encourages collaboration, there is a clear need for more authentic assessments that require practical application. Finally, the

instructor's role as a facilitator is only implicitly stated, with no explicit details provided on the specific roles of either the instructor or the students.

College of Social Sciences

Review of Course Plan III (Participant 6's): English for Remedial Students

The learning objectives in this course plan aren't clearly articulated using action verbs. Instead of providing specific, measurable goals like "Write a short paragraph of 5 to 8 sentences," the objectives are broadly stated. Furthermore, the objectives and content don't fully align with student interests or experiences, nor do they consistently reflect real-world applications. While the course content itself is important and challenging, the designers failed to connect it to real-life contexts or incorporate multiple perspectives. Although the plan includes some active learning strategies, such as pair and group discussions, and emphasizes individual writing, it lacks scaffolding activities to help students progressively build their understanding.

The assessment component isn't explicitly detailed, but it appears to be primarily summative with a few formative quizzes. While the plan mentions that feedback is a focus, the overall assessment strategy lacks clarity. However, the plan encourages collaboration through collaborative projects and peer learning opportunities. The instructor's role is framed as a facilitator, but the plan could be improved by providing clearer guidance on how the instructor should actively guide students' activities.

Review of Course Plan IV (Participant 8's): Social Problems and Intervention Methods

In this course plan, the learning objectives demonstrate a better alignment with constructivist principles, promoting higher-order thinking skills and reflecting cognitive,

psychomotor, and affective domains. The course content is both relevant and challenging, with the designers making an effort to connect the material to real-life scenarios and incorporate diverse perspectives. The plan also includes a variety of teaching and learning strategies, such as lectures, group work, case work, and practical tasks, which promote active learning. These methods largely align with the selected content.

However, the assessment methods are heavily traditional, emphasizing written tests and examinations. Written tests and examinations as traditional modes of assessment emphasized in this plan. The assessment components of this course are: Test1 (20%), Term paper (10%), Presentation (10%), individual assignment and attendance (10%), and Final written examination (50%). With a significant portion of the grade allocated to a final written exam (50%), there is a clear need for more authentic assessments that require the practical application of knowledge. While the plan encourages collaboration through group projects, its scope is limited. The instructor's role as a facilitator is only implicitly stated, and the specific roles of both the instructor and students are not clearly defined. Overall, while this plan shows greater alignment with constructivism than the English course plan, there is still room for improvement in assessment design and the explicit definition of roles.

The study found that the course plans did not adequately integrate the principles of constructivism. Despite some efforts by the designers to include aspects of active learning, the lesson content lacked variety and was not tailored to the university setting. Both plans heavily emphasized traditional paper-and-pencil tests, with no room for self-assessment or peer evaluation. Based on this data, it can be deduced that the university's course plans

should be revised to incorporate constructivist principles for improved classroom practices.

Taken together, while these documents varied in nature, their review revealed consistent trends regarding the integration of constructivist principles. The analysis of the course plans revealed a significant disconnect between the espoused principles of constructivism and their practical application in planning documents. As with the interview and observation data, a common finding was that the plans lacked variety in activities and failed to promote a truly self-directed learning environment. The review indicated that while some constructivist elements were present, they were overshadowed by more traditional, teacher-centered components. For instance, regarding learner-centered approach the selected course plans (Participant 1's, 2's, 6's & 8's) include active learning methods like group work and discussions, but they lack more advanced approaches such as problem-based or project-based learning. The plans did not explicitly prioritize students' interests or prior experiences. More specifically, Participant 8's course plan largely relied on direct instruction and lacked opportunities for student collaboration during class time. The plans (Participant 1's, 2's & 6's) lack clarity in demonstrating how the contents are connected to real-life situations. In contrast, plan (Participant 8's) incorporated open-ended questions and assignments with real-world relevance, it failed to outline how these would be implemented in a way that encourages active participation. While the instructor's facilitating role was noted, all plans lacked reflection opportunities and clear provisions for scaffold activities to support independent learning.

All the plans did not adequately integrate diverse assessment methods align with constructivist principles. The assessment methods outlined, such as tests, term papers, and final exams, predominantly reflected a traditional, behaviorist-oriented approach. Markedly, constructivist-oriented methods like self-assessment, peer-assessment, and portfolio evaluations were entirely absent from the plans. This finding reinforces the notion that institutional assessment guidelines may serve as a significant barrier to the effective implementation of constructivism, as instructors are constrained by predefined, traditional metrics. In essence, the document review confirmed that instructors' pedagogical planning, much like their observed classroom practices, does not effectively incorporate constructivist principles. Despite the clear emphasis on constructivism in educational policy, the reviewed course plans revealed a pervasive reliance on traditional approaches and assessment methods, which ultimately limits opportunities for students to actively construct knowledge.

The following table synthesizes key findings across four reviewed course plans: Introduction to Educational Leadership, Management of Change and Innovation, English for Remedial Students and Social Problems and Intervention Methods.

Constructivist Criterion	Common Strengths	Common Gaps / Areas for Improvement
Learner-Centered Approach	Occasional use of group discussions, brainstorming, and student choice (e.g., free paragraph writing) Some allowance for independent study and tutorials.	Students' interests, backgrounds, cultural experiences, and prior knowledge rarely integrated into lesson design.

		• Over reliance on lecture-based delivery (e.g., <i>Social Problems</i>).
Collaboration and Social Interaction	• Pair and group work included in most plans (e.g., discussions, assignments, presentations).	• Collaboration often confined to out-of-class assignments; limited in-class cooperative learning. • Minimal structured peer feedback or interdependent group tasks.
Active Learning	• Interactive methods used (Q&A, discussions, readings, individual/pair/group tasks).	• Lack of explicit hands-on, experiential activities (e.g., role-plays, simulations, field analysis, case-based problem solving). • Passive reception still dominates in segments.
Real-World Relevance	• <i>Social Problems</i> connects content to global issues and includes applied take-home tasks. • Some topics inherently relevant (e.g., leadership, social intervention).	• Weak or absent linkage to students' local contexts, professional aspirations, or community realities. • Few opportunities to <i>apply</i> theories to authentic leadership/change scenarios.

Scaffolding and Support		• Rarely addressed: no clear evidence of modeling, chunking tasks, guided practice, or adaptive support. • Missing strategies to bridge students' current and potential levels of understanding (ZPD).
Open-Ended Questions & Inquiry-Based Learning	• Some open-ended prompts used in assignments (<i>Social Problems</i>, <i>Remedial English</i>). • Topic choice in writing tasks encourages autonomy.	• Inquiry not embedded systematically in lesson flow • Few planned opportunities for student-generated questions, hypothesis testing, or sustained investigation.
Reflection Opportunities		• Consistently absent across all courses. • No structured prompts for students to reflect on learning processes, personal connections, growth, or application.
Facilitation over Direct Instruction	• Instructor roles as guide/monitor mentioned in <i>Educational Leadership</i> and <i>Remedial English</i>.	• Roles of instructor and students often undefined or implicitly teacher-centered. • Facilitation strategies (e.g., probing, wait time,

		redirecting) not specified in plans.
Diverse Assessment Methods	• Some use of group projects (25%), presentations (10%), and assignments.	• Heavy reliance on summative, paper-based assessments (final exams 50–60%, tests 15–20%). • Missing constructivist-aligned methods: self-assessment, peer assessment, portfolios, performance tasks, learning journals.

Table 3: Summary of the course plan reviews

4.1.4 Challenges Affecting Implementation (Research Q3)

This question focuses on analyzing two main themes that emerged from the findings: instructors' perspectives on the challenges they face, and the views of college deans and department heads on these challenges.

Theme 1: Instructors perspectives on the challenges faced

College of Education

The interview data indicated that instructors face numerous challenges in implementing constructivist instruction. Concerning this, one of the participants commented that,

Teachers lack of commitment, knowledge and skill gaps related to constructivism, students lack of attention, motivation and effort to learn, students' negative attitude towards constructivist instruction and inappropriate use of social media were identified as major challenges (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

Similarly, another participant stated,

Inadequate integration of constructivist principles in teacher education, classrooms with fixed chairs, lack of teacher commitment due to demotivation, politicization of education, and ineffective university leadership are major issues (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

Another informant further disclosed teachers' negative attitude towards constructivist thinking,

Many teachers do not believe students can learn on their own even with guidance. The curriculum is not aligned with constructivist principles. Students do not feel like learning through the constructivist teaching approach (Participant 3, 24/8/2014).

These insights imply that instructors' negative views, a lack of student interest, and a misalignment between the curriculum and constructivist principles impede successful implementation. The effective implementation of constructivist instruction in universities requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses teacher training, resource constraints, instructor motivation, political influences, and leadership issues. Professional dialogue among stakeholders is crucial for fostering competent individuals who can successfully implement constructivist principles in education.

College of Social Sciences

Concerning implementation challenges, one of the participants said,

In my opinion, instructors face several challenges when implementing constructivist principles in the classroom. These include a lack of adequate materials, a lack of motivation to teach in a constructivist manner, declining student readiness to learn, and a lack of trust from university management in assessing students using constructivist approaches (Participant 4, 15/2/2024).

Correspondingly, another participant stated the following as major challenges that hinder the smooth implementation of constructivism in the classrooms:

Students' lack of background knowledge in language skills, the course syllabus is not prepared maintaining the expected standard, lack of sufficient supplementary materials for language teaching and problem of coordinating human resources at department level (Participant 5, 9/2/2024).

Moreover, one of the participants remarked:

In my view, the following are the major challenges: lack of professional development trainings, rigidity of the available curricular materials, the university management is not supportive, teachers' professional development opportunities like mentoring are missed and the one-shot assessment modality that is being practiced (Participant 7, 9/2/2024).

To further emphasize this, a different interviewee added:

the administration interferences in the teaching profession, teachers lack of commitment and being reluctant to their profession, scarcity of material resources in language teaching and large class size in teaching common course students are case in points (Participant 6, 15/2/-2024).

Based on the participants' suggestions, challenges in implementing constructivist instruction include a lack of materials, university management reluctance, teacher and student demotivation, knowledge gaps, resource constraints, coordination issues, traditional assessment practices, and rigid curricular materials. To address these challenges, professional dialogues should be organized to raise awareness, build trust, redesign syllabi, offer faculty training, and implement educational reforms aligned with constructivist principles.

Overall, instructors believe that the challenges to implementing constructivist instruction are complex and require addressing issues related to educators, leaders,

students, curriculum, and resources that call for redesigning course syllabi, providing training on constructivism in particular and fulfilling materials.

Theme 2: College dean and head of department views on the challenges

College of Education

Interviews with department heads and the college deans revealed challenges that were both similar to and different from those mentioned by instructors. According to one of the interviewees, key challenges include:

the rigidity of the curriculum, students' lack of readiness to learn, students' excessive reliance on teacher lectures, large class size and the reduction of instructional time to 45 days due to the country's security problems as major challenges (Participant 12, 25/8/2024).

Another participant added a broader, more critical perspective, stating,

The situation of the country being in war for the last five years affects the academic activities, the budget and the calendar. To be honest, talking about using appropriate methods of teaching has become something luxury. Teachers are demotivated to teach as a result of poor living standard (Participant 14, 28/8/2024).

These perspectives highlight that the education system in our country is significantly hindered by a rigid curriculum, student unpreparedness, over-reliance on lectures, large class sizes, and reduced instructional time due to security issues. These challenges are worsened by ongoing conflict and poor living conditions for teachers, leading to decreased motivation, and, limited opportunities for students to practice on their learning. To address these issues, the government and stakeholders must prioritize curriculum reform, provide adequate support for teachers, and create stable environments conducive to learning.

College of Social Sciences

The results of interviews with educators (Heads of Department and Deans) revealed that they shared many of the same concerns as instructors.

One participant for instance, mentioned,

Political instability, students' resistance to learning through a constructivist teaching approach, and a bulky curriculum as major challenges (Participant 10, 17/2/2024).

In the same vein, another participant added,

Teachers demotivation, a shortage of instructional materials, and a lack of follow-up from the Ministry of Education are also significant obstacles (Participant 11, 18/2/2024).

Another participant further noted that,

Negative attitudes from both teachers and students, along with a bulky curriculum are hindering the successful implementation of constructivism (Participant 13, 28/8/2024).

Based on the above participants' statements, it can be concluded that the current classroom practices did not reflect the application of constructivism ideals due to the fact that there exist challenges associated with the instructor, students, leaders, the nature of the curriculum, and resources. The consensus is that a coordinated effort is needed among instructors, leaders, and students to transform the existing educational model into a more student-centered one and prepare students for the 21st century.

4.1.5 Available Opportunities (Research Q4)

In this research question, a theme emerged titled "Availability of Instructional Resources."

Theme1: Availability of some instructional resources

College of Education

Regarding the opportunities available to implement constructivist instruction some of the participants highlighted specific platforms that support the implementation of constructivist principles. One participant noted that,

technological platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok allow instructors to share professional experiences and customize their teaching based on diverse contexts (Participant 1, 22/8/2024).

This view suggests that technology facilitates a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching by enabling instructors to access and adapt new instructional methods.

Another participant pointed to existing university programs, stating that

the establishment of a pedagogy unit, an English Language Improvement Centre and the provision of HDP training are valuable opportunities within in the university setting (Participant 2, 23/8/2024).

This perspective suggests that these institutional initiatives provide valuable platforms for instructors to learn about constructivist teaching, alternative assessments, and other professional development skills. Effectively utilizing these resources could significantly enhance the implementation of constructivist instruction.

College of Social Sciences

Despite challenges, the interview data held with educators also revealed the opportunities available to implement constructivist instruction.

To substantiate this, one participant stated,

I am of the opinion that the digital technology platform can be taken as a good opportunity for teachers of the day to download interactive teaching videos across the world and make the instruction constructive (Participant 4, 15/2/2024).

Another participant asserted,

In my opinion, the availability of smart classrooms and language laboratory room could be mentioned as opportunities for teachers to implement constructivist instruction (Participant 10, 17/2/2024).

This indicates that effective implementation of constructivist instruction relies on having appropriate materials. The participant believes that technological advancements have significantly transformed the global education system. Utilizing digital technology can enhance constructivist instruction when applied effectively.

Additionally, another participant further expressed,

the class size in our department is manageable. The availability of smart classrooms and access to digital technology provide opportunities for teachers to implement constructivist instruction (Participant 11, 18/2/2024).

From the participant's perspectives, it is clear that an optimal class size, the availability of smart classrooms and digital technology promote a conducive classroom environment for implementing the principles of constructivism. These opportunities highlight the need for professional development training to help instructors effectively utilize these resources

4.4 Cross-Case Analysis

This section presents a cross-case analysis of the findings from educator interviews, classroom observations, and course plan reviews from both College of Education and College of Social Sciences. The analysis highlights key similarities and differences across four main themes: educators' understanding of constructivism, implementation of constructivist instruction, challenges to implementation, and opportunities for implementation.

A significant similarity between the two colleges is the educators' shared understanding of constructivism. In both cases, constructivism was seen as a learning theory that necessitates a classroom environment where students are actively engaged in constructing new knowledge based on their prior experiences. Educators at both colleges also viewed constructivism as a student-centered pedagogy, highlighting the importance of placing students at the center of the learning process. They acknowledged the role of teachers as facilitators and the need to provide scaffolding to support students learning.

The implementation of constructivist principles in both colleges showed mixed results, but with a general pattern of similarity. Teacher-Centered Dominance: In both Colleges, the dominant instructional approach was teacher-centered. Interview data from both cases revealed a heavy reliance on the lecture method and PowerPoint presentations. This resulted in a one-way, hierarchical communication style where instructors primarily transferred knowledge to students. This practice highlights a significant gap between the theory of constructivism, as emphasized in educational policy documents, and actual classroom practice.

While most instructors in both colleges used traditional methods, some participants in the College of Social Sciences actively integrated constructivist approaches, like guiding students to discover rules through questioning. This contrasted with the College of Education, where deliberate efforts to incorporate constructivist viewpoints were not mentioned in the interviews.

Regarding assessment methods, a major point of consistency was the reliance on traditional assessments. In both colleges, instructors primarily used paper-and-pencil

tests, written examinations, and quizzes to measure student performance. Assessments that align with constructivist principles, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and portfolio evaluations, were rarely used. This indicates a shared challenge in moving beyond conventional assessment tools.

Classroom observations in both colleges corroborated the interview data. Interactions were largely non-interactive and hierarchical, with teachers dominating the conversation and acting as direct sources of information. This lack of dialogue and student-to-student interaction further confirmed the limited implementation of constructivist instruction.

The challenges to implement constructivism were consistent across both colleges. The problems were attributed to a combination of factors related to instructors, students, educational leaders, curriculum, and resources. These included a lack of teacher motivation, students' resistance to new learning approaches, a lack of institutional support, and resource scarcity. The curriculum was also consistently described as being bulky and not aligned with constructivist principles in both cases.

The identified opportunities for implementing constructivism showed some differences between the two colleges. In College of Education, opportunities were linked to the availability of university-wide resources, such as internet access, the establishment of an English Language Improvement Center, and a dedicated pedagogy unit. However, this was contrasted with the challenge of political instability and civil unrest, which made focusing on educational reform difficult.

In the Social Sciences College, opportunities were closely tied to classroom and departmental resources, such as access to digital technology and smart classrooms. The presence of experienced academic staff and small class sizes in certain departments were also seen as conducive to implementing constructivist practices.

4.5 Whole-Case Synthesis

Treating the University of Gondar as a bounded, holistic case, this synthesis integrates evidence from interviews, classroom observations, and document reviews across two colleges. The data reveal a persistent reliance on teacher-centered instruction and traditional assessment methods despite educators (including instructors, department heads, and deans) demonstrating a generally better views of constructivist theory. Notably, classroom dynamics in both colleges remain hierarchical, directly contradicting core constructivist principles. Document reviews of course plans further shows that while semester-level course plans are routinely developed, detailed lesson or session plans aligned with specific content are typically absent. Overall, there's a clear gap between what educators say they view constructivist ideas and what they actually do in the classroom. This mismatch shows that real changes are needed in how teaching and learning happen at the university so that practice can better match the theory.

This summary counts as a strong “whole-case” synthesis because it treats the University of Gondar as a single, unified case; combines evidence from different sources; highlights the disconnect between beliefs and actions; and gives a clear, overall picture based on the data.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

This section presents a comprehensive discussion of the study's findings, aligning them with the basic research questions and relevant academic literature. The study's purpose was to investigate the gap between theoretical principles and practical application of constructivist instructional practices at the Colleges of Education and Social Sciences at the University of Gondar.

5.1 Educators' Views of Constructivism

The study found that instructors have a varied, yet generally sound, view of constructivism. Their interpretations fall into two main categories: viewing constructivism as a process of knowledge construction and as a student-centered teaching method. This shows that educators have different ways of understanding this educational idea, which can change over time.

Educators' views of constructivism as knowledge construction aligns with established literature. For example, Maclellan and Soden (2004) and Singh et al. (2012) argue that constructivists believe knowledge is not passively received but actively created by individuals or groups. Overbay et al. (2010) reinforce this by stating that constructivism promotes knowledge construction by linking new ideas to prior beliefs. Moreover, Dhindsa, & Emran, (2006) suggest that knowledge is constructed through observation, reflection and interaction with the environment including peers, teachers or technology. This process involves a continuous engagement in educational activities to build conceptual consistency (Zietsman, 1996) and relies on learners' efforts to develop

meaningful ideas (Gruender, 1996). The ultimate goal is to equip students to solve real-world problems through collaborative and cooperative methods (Keating, 2004).

The current study's findings on knowledge construction are consistent with other researches in the field. A local study by Jemberie (2021) examined how teachers perceive knowledge construction in individual versus group work. Similarly, Hussain's (2012) study on higher education in Pakistan revealed that constructivist approaches contribute to enhancing students' collaborative skills. These previous studies support the idea that teachers see knowledge construction as a key element of the constructivist framework.

The study also found that instructors conceptualize constructivism as student-centered teaching methods. This view is strongly supported by academic literature. For instance, Llewellyn (2005) & Majumder (2022) define constructivism as active learning, real world problem-solving, and engaging students directly with the subject matter. Similarly, Keating (2014) shared this idea stating that constructivism is a learner-centered theory that emphasizes student autonomy and active engagement.

Previous researches further validate the study's findings on student-centered methods. A study by Gibbons (2015) on "The Role of Knowledge Building in the 21st Century Classroom" found that teachers who used constructivist methods reported positive effects on student engagement, motivation, and achievement. In a similar vein, Rands and Gansemer-Topf (2017) found that flexible classroom designs in an active learning classroom (ALC) led to increased student engagement and a stronger sense of community.

The consistency between the study's findings and existing literature suggests that educators' understanding of constructivism is well-grounded in established theory. The

varying interpretations as both knowledge construction and student-centered pedagogy are not contradictory but rather different facets of the same overarching educational paradigm. Generally, these perceptions are crucial for creating a positive classroom environment and promoting quality instruction. By prioritizing students' knowledge construction and emphasizing student-centered approaches, instructors can effectively implement the core principles of constructivism.

5.2 Implementation of constructivism in the Classroom

Based on classroom observations, interviews, and course plan reviews, the study found that the implementation of constructivism in the classroom is limited. Instructors predominantly use traditional, teacher-centered methods like lectures and PowerPoint presentations, with minimal student engagement. This is supported by researches indicating that lecturing remains a common practice in higher education despite its known drawbacks, such as student absenteeism and lack of engagement (Gargallo-Lopez et al., 2017; Dosch & Zidon, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2015). While some instructors express a desire to use constructivist approaches, the actual practice often contradicts their beliefs. Supporting this, Shah (2019) reported that constructivist principles were not adequately applied in all aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment, leading to ineffective learning outcomes.

On the other hand, the instructors' interviews in some cases embrace using constructivist teaching approaches in the classroom. In light of this, Holmes (2019) suggested that constructivism in educational settings has been recognized for it considers learners active involvement in knowledge construction, by giving opportunity to be responsible for their own learning process and to develop their own understanding of the

subject matter through active engagement. Barron and Darling-Hammond (2013) further stated that students should be able to acquire the knowledge according to different ways and various activities in a stimulating and innovative learning environment with a proper balance between individual and group work, research and discovering, and the teacher's systematic guidance and moderating to achieve quality learning, yet this was largely absent.

In addition to the related literatures reviewed above, it is important to consider previous research that either supports or contradicts the findings of the present study. For example, a study by Johnson & Johnson (2015) on Cooperative Learning found that collaborative learning, a central tenet of constructivism, can enhance student engagement and comprehension. A study by Zhou & Brown (2015) on Educational learning theories also showed the disparity between teachers' beliefs in constructivist principles and their classroom practices highlighting the need for ongoing professional development to bridge this gap.

Contrary to the findings of the present study, Mayo (2004) mentioned a study on the applications of constructivism in a form of Case Based Instruction (CBI) in college classrooms. It was then found that CBI has proven effective in promoting the application of knowledge in areas like abnormal psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, and introductory psychology courses.

A major finding of the study is the widespread use of traditional assessment methods, such as written tests and examinations. This practice aligns with research by Rauf et al. (2014) and Carless (2015), which found that testing is the primary method of assessment in higher education, often leading students to focus on grades rather than

understanding. Conversely, constructivist learning advocates for a variety of assessments, including portfolios and authentic tasks that measure deep understanding and problem-solving skills (Paulson & Paulson, 1994). Previous research results partly support and partly contradict the findings of the present study. For example, Pereira et al (2022) conducted a study on assessment methods in the Portuguese context. They found that involving students in alternative assessment methods in higher education can enhance their perception of engagement and fairness. This supports the idea of diversifying educational assessment methods, as it can increase their validity and promote learning. On the other hand, Goubeaud & Yan (2004) and Iqbal, Azam, & Abiodullah, (2009) found that teachers used written papers frequently.

The classroom dynamics observed also revealed a departure from constructivist ideals. Interactions were largely hierarchical and one-way, with the teacher as the central source of information. While participants recognized the importance of dialogical relationships, their actions did not consistently reflect this ideal. This contradicts the principles of constructivism, which emphasize a more collaborative environment with two-way communication between teachers and students, and among students themselves (Crawford & White, 1999; Bawa & Zubairu, 2015). The concept of scaffolding also relies on this interactive dynamic (Appleton, 1997), underscoring the importance of dialogical relationships for effective knowledge construction.

A review of selected course plans further confirmed the lack of adherence to constructivist principles. The plans lacked a variety of activities and failed to incorporate elements that promote self-directed learning and collaboration. Although some plans mentioned group work, they did not provide a clear framework for its implementation.

This is contrary to models like the 5E Model, which emphasizes a sequential, experience-based approach to learning (Altun & Yücel-Toy, 2015).

The study also found a clear theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivism. Although educational policies and documents promote constructivist frameworks, the actual teaching practices often do not reflect these ideals. This discrepancy is not unique to this study; it has been observed in other contexts, where there's a gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in the classroom (Allen et al., 2010; Melese & Belay, 2022). This suggests that despite being a guiding principle in educational policy, constructivism has yet to be fully integrated into the daily practice of higher education in this context.

In conclusion, the findings from all data sources consistently show that the principles of constructivism, including teaching methods, assessment techniques, and student-teacher interactions, are not being effectively implemented. The reliance on traditional, teacher-centered approaches, combined with conventional assessment and hierarchical classroom dynamics, suggests that a significant shift in pedagogical practice is needed to align with the goals of constructivist instruction.

5.3 Theory-Practice Gaps in the Implementation of Constructivist Instruction

The present study's findings reveal a significant theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instruction. While constructivism is widely discussed in theoretical frameworks and educational policy documents, its actual application in the classroom was found to be limited. This is consistent with a study by Allen et al. (2010), which reported a similar discrepancy between the theoretical knowledge that student teachers acquire and their practical application of that knowledge. This gap is not an

isolated issue but a systemic problem that hinders the effective implementation of a student-centered approach to learning.

The research further notes that this disconnect is particularly pronounced in the Ethiopian educational context. Melese and Belay (2022) found that while constructivist principles are mentioned in policy documents, their practical implementation in Ethiopian schools is not promising. This aligns with broader criticisms of the country's education system, which has been described as being teacher-dominated with low student participation (Serbessa, 2006; UNESCO, 2002a; Tefera et al., 2018). These observations suggest that a long-standing culture of traditional, top-down teaching methods makes it difficult to adopt more modern, student-centered approaches.

The evidence from this study and related literature strongly indicates that the gap between constructivist theory and practice exists at all levels of the Ethiopian education system, including higher education. This implies that simply including constructivist ideals in policy documents is insufficient. Significant efforts are required to translate these principles into tangible classroom practices and to overcome the deeply ingrained tradition of teacher-centered instruction.

5.4 Major Challenges of Implementing Constructivist Teaching-learning Approaches

The interview data revealed that teachers in university classrooms face several challenges in implementing constructivist instruction associated with the instructor, students, leaders, the nature of the curriculum, and resources. This is consistent with related literatures reviewed. For instance, Windschitl (2002) and Oakes et al. (2000) noted the problems educators face in applying constructivism principles.

The findings of this study were also found to be consistent with previous studies (Ahmad et al., 2021; Amare, 2019; Corkin et al., 2017; Dagneu, 2017; Prawat, 1992) that inadequate teaching materials and training have a negative impact on classroom teaching and learning. This is supported by research from Rosenfeld and Rosenfeld (2006), which emphasized that limited participation in professional development activities impedes teachers' ability to acquire new skills for effective teaching. Additionally, studies by Nyamekye et al. (2023) confirm that limited resources and time constraints are significant barriers to the successful implementation of constructivist pedagogy.

The challenges are multifaceted, also including large class sizes, poor coordination, and rigid syllabi. These issues are often exacerbated by interference from top-level administrators. The present study comprehensively showed the various challenges instructors faced within the higher education context, providing a more detailed picture than previous studies. The combination of these pedagogical, institutional, and administrative hurdles created a difficult environment for instructors aiming to shift from traditional, teacher-centered methods to a more student-centered, constructivist approach.

5.5 Opportunities to Implement Constructivism in the Classroom

The study revealed that there are opportunities for implementing constructivism in the classrooms. One of the most significant is the availability of digital technology and sufficient resources. The presence of digital technologies, such as smart boards and internet access, creates an environment conducive to interactive and engaging learning experiences. As Jonassen et al. (1999) and Young (2003) note, these resources can be used

to create learning environments that align with unique learning goals and support knowledge construction. Similarly, Al-Huneidi and Schreurs (2012) affirm that blended learning, which combines traditional and online methods, enhances students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills through technology.

Another crucial opportunity lies in adopting collaborative learning activities. As Zhu and Atompag (2023) suggest, activities like project studies, field trips, and group work provide students with ample chances to construct knowledge through cooperation and engage in problem-solving through communication and discussion. These activities not only foster a sense of community but also allow students to learn from their peers. When students are provided with sufficient resources, such as a well-equipped library and network access, the implementation of constructivism becomes more feasible.

Finally, the presence of experienced academic staff and a manageable class size in some departments presents a valuable opportunity. These conditions enable instructors to effectively apply constructivist principles in the classroom. Experienced educators are more likely to have a deeper understanding of pedagogical approaches and the skills required to facilitate student-centered learning. Additionally, smaller class sizes allow for more personalized instruction, better supervision of group work, and more meaningful interactions between teachers and students, which are all essential components of a constructivist learning environment.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the study. It also outlines key implications for practice and suggests directions for future research. This information provides a comprehensive overview of the research, its implications, and potential next steps for the field.

6.1 Conclusion of the Study

This study investigated the theory-practice gap in the implementation of constructivist instructional practices at the colleges of Education and Social Sciences at university of Gondar. The findings showed that educators held a positive view of constructivism. They understood it as a new educational paradigm where students actively construct knowledge by building on their prior experiences and as a set of student-centered teaching methods. This positive perception of a student-centered approach is a crucial starting point for pedagogical reform.

Despite this understanding, a significant gap exists between what educators believe and what they practice. The research found that many instructors continue to rely on traditional, teacher-centered methods, such as lectures and PowerPoint presentations, with minimal student engagement. Classroom interactions remain largely hierarchical rather than collaborative, and assessment methods were found to be dominated by conventional

written tests and exams. This disconnection suggests that while constructivist theory is valued in principle, it has not been effectively translated into daily classroom practices.

The study identified several factors that could either facilitate or hinder the implementation of constructivism. On the one hand, opportunities such as access to digital technologies, manageable class sizes in some departments, and the presence of experienced educators were seen as valuable assets. These resources could be leveraged to promote more interactive and student-centered learning. On the other hand, instructors face significant challenges, including rigid curricula, a lack of readiness among teachers, poor support from educational leaders, and a lack of student commitment to new learning approaches. These obstacles collectively make it difficult to move away from traditional teaching methods.

In conclusion, the study confirms a notable gap between the theoretical aspects of constructivism and its actual applications in university classrooms. While the conceptual value of constructivism is recognized, its full-scale implementation is hindered by a combination of institutional, pedagogical, and cultural barriers. Bridging this gap is essential for enhancing student learning outcomes and aligning teaching practices with modern educational ideals. This will require not only addressing the identified challenges but also making use of existing opportunities to create a more supportive and conducive learning environment.

6.2 Implications of the study

The study's findings have important implications for education practice and policy. Regarding educational practices, the significant theory-practice gap highlights the need for a targeted approach to professional development. It is not enough for educators to simply be aware of constructivism; they must receive training that equips them with the practical skills to implement it. Institutions should develop and provide workshops, mentorship programs, and ongoing support to help instructors move beyond traditional lecture-based methods. This training should focus on designing active learning activities, fostering dialogical classroom relationships, and creating diverse, authentic assessments that align with constructivist principles. Departments should conduct continuous internal curriculum reviews rather than waiting for MoE mandates.

In terms of policy, the study contributes valuable insights for various stakeholders involved in educational program development at institutional levels. It suggests the importance of revisiting educational programs at university level to enhance student learning through the implementation of constructivist principles. This involves updating course guides and training manuals by incorporating constructivist perspectives. Universities need to invest in modernizing classrooms with smart boards, reliable internet access, and other resources that support interactive teaching methods. Providing a well-equipped learning environment is crucial for both instructors and students to engage in meaningful knowledge construction.

Concerning theory, the study offers valuable insights into constructivism and constructivist instruction for instructors, students, instructional leaders, and other

education professionals. It enhances the understanding of instructional designers, module writers, and educational quality auditors on constructivism, promoting them to adjust their plans accordingly. Specifically, it helps identify how constructivist principles are understood and enacted in real classroom settings, revealing potential gaps between theory and practice. This can lead to adjustments in the conceptual model to better reflect practical realities, and challenges faced by educators. Overall, this research serves as a feedback loop, grounding constructivist theory in actual teaching experiences and promoting its evolution toward more effective and applicable educational practices

Finally, the study's findings call for a shift in institutional culture. The prevalence of a teacher-dominated and hierarchical dynamic suggests that systemic changes are necessary to promote a student-centered approach. University administrators should encourage and reward instructors who adopt constructivist practices. By fostering a culture that values innovation, collaboration, and student engagement, institutions can create an environment where the principles of constructivism are not just theoretical ideals but a lived reality. This would also involve addressing the issue of large class sizes, as a more manageable student-to-teacher ratio is essential for implementing personalized and interactive learning methods.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

The study's findings also pointed to several areas for future research to further explore the implementation of constructivism in higher education. Future research could conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of professional development interventions aimed at improving constructivist practices. This would help determine the

effectiveness of specific training programs in sustaining change over time. A comparative study could be conducted across different universities or disciplines to understand if the theory-practice gap in the practice of constructivist instruction vary by context. This could provide insights into how institutional culture and disciplinary norms influence the adoption of constructivist approaches. This study examined educators' perspectives on constructivist teaching. Future research should explore students' views and experiences with active learning, collaborative work, and alternative assessments to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning environment.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

While the study was conducted at a single university, the findings may not be statistically generalizable. Additionally, relying on self-reported data from interviews can introduce biases, as is typical in qualitative studies. Furthermore, the study lacked longitudinal follow-up to assess implementation over time. In terms of transferability, the two academic units (Colleges of Education and Social Sciences) at UoG may not be representative of other higher education institutions at national and international levels. Lastly, the study did not include students' perspectives on constructivist instruction.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide (for Instructors)

1. What does teaching look like in your classroom?
2. What is your role as teacher in the classroom?
3. What instructional strategies do you use most often? Could you give me an example?
4. How would you describe student centered instruction?
5. Do you use student centered instruction in your class? If yes, How?
6. What is your idea about constructivism as a learning theory? How do you relate it with classroom teaching?
7. Do you think what you teach your courses based on the principle of constructivism? If so, how? How committed you are in implementing this theory in your classroom? Can you tell me more about this?
8. Do you believe that there is a theory- policy-practice gap with respect to constructivist instruction? If so, how?
9. How do you see the teacher-students interactions in the case of constructivist teaching? Could you tell me more what you feel about the principles and the actual class room practices?
10. How do you see the assessment practices in light of the principles of constructivism?
11. What do you think are the opportunities available (if any) and the challenges you may face while implementing constructivism guided teaching?
12. What possible solutions do you suggest to overcome the challenges associated with constructivism in teaching?
13. If you have something to add or comment on any topic covered in the interview or the interview itself you are welcome.

Appendix B

Interview guide (for College Deans/Vice Deans)

1. What is your idea about Constructivism? How about constructivist instruction?
2. How do you see the current practice of constructivism in the college you lead? Do you feel teachers implement this theory in the classroom as desired? Yes/ No? Why?
3. What roles do you play as a dean of the college to help teachers implement constructivism while they deliver the courses that they are assigned?
4. How do you view the current assessment practices in your college in light of the principles of constructivism?
5. Could you tell me in detail the opportunities available and the challenges that teachers face related to the implementation of the principles of constructivism in the classroom teaching context?
6. What do you suggest to curve the problems that teachers face while implementing constructivist instruction in the classroom?
7. If you have something to add or comment any topic covered in the interview or the interview itself you are welcome.

Appendix C

Interview Guide (for Heads of Departments)

1. What does constructivism mean to you?
2. How do you evaluate the current implementation of constructivist instruction in your department? Do you think teachers implement this theory of learning in the classroom teaching? If so, how?
3. How committed you are as a leader to help teachers implement constructivism in the classroom?
4. How do you see the assessment practices at present in your department in light of the principles of constructivism?
5. Could you tell me in detail the opportunities available and the challenges that teachers face related to the implementation of constructivism in the classroom teaching context?
6. What do you suggest to solve the problems that teachers face while implementing constructivism in the classroom?
7. If you have something to add or comment on any topic covered in the interview or the interview itself.

Appendix D

Field notes on Classroom Observations

Department: _____

Course: _____

Teacher Observed: _____

Location: _____

Leading questions about my observation:

1. What did the teacher expect the students to learn from the lesson? How did the teacher convey the purpose and relevance of the lesson to the students? In what ways did the students demonstrate that they understood what the teacher expected for them to learn?
 2. What instructional strategies did the teacher use during the lesson and how? Did the activities frame by the teacher engage the students and help them construct meaning?
 3. How did the teacher help the students take ownership of the learning (by making the learning relevant to the students (using scaffolding, providing opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment and reflection?
- i. Description of the classroom setting:
 - ii. Description of Observation including interpretations of what the researchers encountered in the field/ class room:
 - iii. Reflections on the Observation and the Session:
 - General Impressions/Feelings/Thoughts: reflective information includes recording of “my thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns as I conduct the observation.”

Classroom Observation Summary:

Category	Description
Classroom Setting	
Observed Activities	
Areas for improvement	
Reflection	

Appendix E

Course Plan Review Guidelines

When reviewing course plans with an emphasis on constructivist instruction, it is important to consider the following aspects:

1. Learning Outcomes
 - Do the learning objectives promote higher order thinking skills (analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating)?
 - Are the learning outcomes are not tailored to student interests and experiences? Do they reflect real-world applications?
2. Course Content
 - Are the course contents relevant and challenging to students? Do the course designers connect them to real-life contexts? Does the plan incorporate multiple perspectives when addressing the subject matter?
3. Teaching Strategies
 - What teaching strategies are included in the plan and how? Are they aligned with constructivist principles?
4. Assessment Methods
 - What assessment methods are included in the plan and how? Are they aligned with constructivist principles?
5. Collaboration
 - Does the course plan include collaborative projects and peer learning opportunities for specific assignments?
6. Role of the Instructor

Does the course plan clearly show the instructor roles in terms of facilitating learning? Yes/ No? How?