

MAPPING FEATURES OF CONSTRUCTIVIST ACTIVITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Educational practice is continually subjected to renewal needs. The accelerating rate of social change puts a premium on adaptability to the emerging requirements of present society, such as cooperation skills, and ability to critically select, acquire and use knowledge. These types of renewal needs require developing updated instructional practices that could integrate knowledge with the personal transferable skills. In order to bridge the gap between current educational goals and instructional methods, the creation of learning environments, based on constructivist pedagogy, is suggested to engage learners in knowledge construction carried out by social negotiated tasks in real-world contexts, while enhancing students' ability to regulate their learning. This study aimed at mapping features of constructivist activities in higher education settings, as well as constructing and validating a new scale for measuring their presence in lecture face-to-face based environments (LBE), seminars (SM), and distance learning environments (DLE).

A mix-method approach was implemented in two phases. The first phase included a qualitative content analysis involving both deductive and inductive category applications of students' observations. The results foregrounded eight categories: knowledge construction, authenticity, multiple perspectives, prior knowledge, in-depth learning, teacher-student interaction, social interaction and cooperative dialogue. The students' descriptions of their classes were formulated as 36 items. The second phase employed structural equation modeling (SEM). The scale was submitted to 597 undergraduate students. The goodness of fit of the data to the structural model yielded to sufficient fit results. Multivariate analysis of variance findings indicated that the LBE were generally less consistent with the examined constructivist features compared with SM and DLE. Nevertheless, LBE and DLE were perceived by the students as equally consistent with the authenticity and cooperative dialogue constructivist features.

This research elaborates the body of literature by adding a category of in-depth learning which emerged from the content analysis. Moreover, the theoretical category of social activity has been elaborated into two distinctive factors: cooperative dialogue which refers to dialogical activities during the lesson in which students can express opinions and original ideas; and social interaction which includes a variety of learning activities with other students, not necessarily during a lesson. Although the quantitative analyses have revealed that LBE are generally less consistent with other examined constructivist features compared with SM and DLE formats, the findings may imply that some constructivist features can be applied in lecture based environments, such as authenticity and cooperative dialogue.

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