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TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE APPLICATION OF CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODS IN KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT
Purpose: The objective of this research study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the application of constructivist methods during the teaching and learning process in primary school. Methods: In this study, the qualitative research method was used. A semi-structured interview was used as an instrument for data collection. The interviews were conducted with the teachers of grades I to V. The study was conducted in four primary schools of the municipality of Vushtrri, with a total of 20 teachers of grades I to V. The analysis of qualitative data was done through thematic analysis. Results: The analysis identified several key themes, including the perceived benefits of constructivist methods in increasing student engagement and understanding, the challenges of implementing these methods in the classroom, and the need for ongoing professional support and adequate resources. Educators emphasize the need to create conditions for the use of constructivist methods by education policy makers. Furthermore, the research has contributed to increasing the awareness of teachers for the application of constructivist methods regardless of the challenges they encounter during their application. **Conclusion:** Based on the findings, this study proposes a constructivist approach, challenging teachers who focus on the traditional approach.

Key words: application, constructivist methods, perception, teaching

INTRODUCTION

Education is generally considered as the most powerful pillar of a society (1). In order to make education at a better level and suitable for society and to stay relevant with time and generations, changes in education systems are constantly being made around the world, and Kosovo is no exception. The most important changes in education are those made in the teaching and learning process. There is an increasing shift towards methods that are more suitable for students to achieve better results, among which are constructivist methods. Constructivist teaching fosters critical thinking and creates motivated and independent learners (2). Constructivism dates back to the time of Socrates, but its founders are Piaget (1954), Dewey (1929), and Vygotsky (1978), according to whom students arrive in any learning situation with a range of prior knowledge and experience that influences how they respond to new information (3-5). Constructivism is a view that emphasizes the active role of the student in building understanding and in deriving meaning from the information they receive (6). In implementing a constructivist classroom the teacher should: a) influence or create motivating conditions for students; b) take responsibility for creating problem situations; c) foster acquisition and retrieval of prior knowledge and; d) create the process of learning, not the product of learning (7, 8).

Constructivist methods are numerous among them are problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, case-based teaching, and discovery based learning promote active participation in the classroom (8). One of the learning approaches that reflects the theory of constructivism is project-based learning or PBL (9). According to Gangwar (2017) PBL approach results in positive outcomes related to student learning in science. Students who participated in PBL, also benefited from improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills (10). PBL has been shown to benefit a

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variety of students in developing collaborative skills. Kemp (2011) concludes that having an understanding of the constructivist underpinnings of PBL methods enables teachers to reflect on the goals of teaching, how the classroom is organized, and the pedagogical strategies and methods adopted to promote learning (11).

Action learning and problem-based learning also help students find the most optimal solution for a problem through activities in small groups of five or six persons. The difference between action learning and problem-based learning lies in the type of case scenario adopted. In action learning, students solve real problems from real situations, while in problem-based learning, they solve artificial, model problems developed by the teacher (12). Regarding inquiry based learning, the authors include different models, among 5-stage levels of inquiry recommended by Wenning is observation, manipulation, generalization, verification, application (13). The use of cases in education is an effective pedagogical strategy because cases provide an opportunity for understanding the multifaceted nature of teaching and learning (14). With case-based learning (CBL), students develop higher-order thinking and reflection skills by reading and discussing complex, real-life scenarios (15). Discovery or constructivist learning is an active learning process where students develop higher-level skills to build a deep understanding of major concepts (16).

The advantages of using constructivist methods are many, but the application of these methods for teachers often presents challenges, including the lack of adequate training and physical conditions in the school environment.

Therefore, there is a need to understand more about the perceptions that teachers have about constructivist methods, what they have faced during the application process and the factors that influence their approach to constructivist methods. Teachers' perceptions regarding constructivism are very important, this has been pointed out by various authors, among them Azizinezhad & Hashemi (2011) who note that teachers' perceptions are an important part of the equation in changing pedagogy towards constructivism (17).

The objective of this study is to understand more about teachers' perceptions, the opinions that teachers have about constructivist methods, how the application of constructivist methods affects their work, as well as the factors that can hinder or help in the application of constructivist methods.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative study that employs interviews as a data collection tool. The nature of the interview is semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews allow a range of personal ideas and opinions to be expressed within given parameters. The interview guide was designed by the authors, who focused on the interview and reasoning behind the participants' reflections (18). The final interview guide contains four sets of domains with a total of eight questions. Participants were 20 teachers who work with grades I-V, in the urban and rural part of the municipality of Vushtrri **(Table 1).** The sample selection was random, and the data collection happened throughout the month of November, 2023. Interviews were carried by an experienced researcher, face-to-face in the Albanian language. Notes have been taken during the interviews as recording was not allowed. Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided with a consent form and participant information sheet, providing all the necessary information and ensuring that every interview is anonymous and the decision to take place is completely voluntary. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. It provided clear and systematic procedures for extracting codes and themes from qualitative data (19). After transcribing the interviews, the data were coded in relation to the purpose of the research. These codes were then grouped into themes to draw conclusions about the teachers' perceptions.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of the participants*

Participants	Gender	Age	Location
Teachers	18 F	< 25 (0 teacher)	10 Urban
	2 M	25-29 years (2 teachers)	10 Rural
		30-39 years (9 teachers)	
		40-49 years (4 teachers)	
		50-59 years (4 teachers)	
		60-65 years (1 teacher)	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After following the thorough thematic analysis process, this research has identified six important themes: Developing student skills, Difficulty in implementing methods, Encouraging discussion and collaboration, Lack of adequate training, Changing teaching practices and Improving student results. The emerging themes and codes are presented in **Table 2.**

Table 2. *Codes and Themes Derived from the Thematic Analysis of Interview Data with Teachers*

Codes	Themes
Increasing student engagement Improving critical and creative thinking Greater involvement in the learning process Building knowledge through practical experience Developing skills for applying knowledge in real life Development of social and interactive skills	Development of skills of the students
Difficulties in implementation Lack of resources and time Lack of didactic materials Lack of technological equipment, such as projectors and laptops Resistance of some students to new approaches Changing the pace of the classroom Time management challenges	Difficulties in applying the methods
Stimulating classroom discussions Cooperation and communication between students	Encouraging discussion and collaboration
Lack of previous experience of teachers Mainly used in specific subjects (eg man and nature, mathematics) Lack of training during professional development	Lack of adequate training
Changes in teaching practices Increasing self-confidence and job satisfaction Stress and challenges of classroom management The impact of support from supervisors and peers	Changing teaching practices
Improving results Acquiring new concepts in a deeper way Transferring knowledge to other situations	Improvement in results

TEACHERS' OPINIONS ABOUT CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODS

There is a difference in the levels of preparation and training among different teachers. Some of them have received specific training in constructivist methods, while others have received limited knowledge through faculty programs or general seminars emphasizing a need for further and ongoing training related to constructivist methods. Some of the teachers attribute their knowledge of constructivist methods to their studies at the Faculty of Education, underlining the importance of the academic basis for their preparation. Universities are key points in the implementation of constructivist practices in

education, moving away from stagnation in traditional teaching practices (20). Teachers use a wide range of constructivist methods, such as project-based teaching, problem-based teaching, research, experiments, and classroom discussions. These methods represent constructivist principles that emphasize active learning, experiential learning, and solving problems related to real life emphasizing the necessity of a learning environment that encourages student expression and meaningful discussions (21). Some teachers emphasize that the choice of constructivist methods depends on the subject and the specific situation of the lesson. This suggests a flexible approach, where methods are adapted based on learning and student needs. For example, one teacher mentions the use of the projector and experiments in the subject "Man and Nature" (a foundational biology class, designed for primary school), which are methods that help in the practical and visual understanding of the concept. Other teachers mention the use of different experiements, question games and learning/ teaching activities.

Teachers seem to have a strong orientation towards methods that encourage active and autonomous learning. Methods such as project-based learning, research, and problem solving involve students actively in the learning process and help them develop critical and creative thinking skills.

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AS A RESULT OF THE APPLICATION OF CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODS

Teachers have a clear consensus that the application of constructivist methods is necessary in the teaching process. One of the main reasons mentioned is the fact that these methods place the student at the center of the learning process and the ability of these methods to make students independent thinkers. Teachers note that constructivist methods help improve students' communication skills and self-confidence. These methods prepare students to learn throughout their life, developing not only academic knowledge, but also personal and social skills.

The application of constructivist methods is very necessary, students are getting better skills with the communication, self-confidence, then the emotional side and communication skills that prepares students for lifelong learning (Teacher 7).

One of the most important changes mentioned is the transformation of the teacher's role. Instead of being mere transmitters of knowledge, teachers now focus more on building knowledge in students. This includes creating an environment where students are active participants in the learning process, taking responsibility and asking questions. Teachers have experienced major changes in the way they approach teaching, including the use of more interactive and learner-centered methods and techniques, and empowering them to identify students with learning disabilities in a variety of classroom contexts (22).

Some teachers mention that the application of constructivist methods has helped to fulfill the learning outcomes foreseen in the Kosovo Curriculum Framework.

The application of constructivist methods has helped us achieve the learning outcomes that are foreseen in the Curricular Framework of Kosovo. This shows that these methods are suitable for achieving educational objectives and preparing students for academic challenges (Teacher, 1).

Most teachers feel satisfied and fulfilled in their role as facilitators when applying constructivist methods. Seeing students achieve good results and expand their knowledge is a source of great satisfaction for them (Teacher 3, Teacher 4, Teacher 5, Teacher 16). This means that teachers find value and strong motivation in the success of their students.

Although constructivist methods emphasize the active role of the student, teachers do not feel less important or passive. On the contrary, they continue to play an important role in facilitating the learning process, helping students to understand concepts, stimulating discussions and posing appropriate questions.

During the application of constructivist methods, despite the change in the role, I don't feel less important or more passive in class. But I help the students to understand the concepts, direct the interactivity in class discussions, then ask the right questions, stimulate and engage the students, etc." (Teacher 2).

This shows a good balance between student engagement and teacher direction.Teachers appreciate the dynamism and change that constructivist methods bring to the classroom. They experience a more active and enlivened learning that differs from their experience in the

past, where traditional methods may have been more rigid and less engaging. The role of facilitator allows teachers to awaken students' curiosity and expand their knowledge. They feel good about being able to help students go beyond the basics, encouraging them to think critically and creatively.

FACTORS THAT TEACHERS THINK CAN HELP OR HINDER THEM IN APPLYING CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODS

Teachers emphasize the importance of the flexibility offered by constructivism in the preparation of lesson plans and programs. They feel freer to remove or add learning materials, adapting the content according to the needs and interests of the students. This flexibility allows teachers to create a more appropriate and engaged learning process.

During the application of constructivist methods, students use knowledge acquired in other fields, develop social and interactive skills with others, use skills to apply new knowledge in real life (Teacher 2).

This help has made teachers feel more confident in the effectiveness of these methods for preparing students for life outside the classroom. An important aspect of helping when applying constructivist methods is student interest. Some teachers (Teacher, 13, Teacher, 14) mention that they no longer fear that students will lose interest in learning, as these methods make the learning process more attractive and connected to real life. Constructivist methods have encouraged discussions in the classroom, where each student has the opportunity to express his opinion and develop new habits in communication and cooperation (Teacher, 5). This has helped to create a more open and cooperative environment in the classroom, pushing students to reflect and be more deeply involved in the learning process, even though in rare cases we also encounter the resistance of some students to new approaches.

Some students who have learned to immediately receive the assessment with numerical grades are not enthusiastic in class when I used constructivist methods during the teaching process (Teacher 20). One of the main obstacles that teachers have encountered is the lack of didactic materials and other school tools.

The main obstacle is the lack of projectors and other technological devices that are necessary for the implementation of constructivist methods effectively (Teacher 4).

This absence limits opportunities to create a learning environment that supports active student engagement. Some teachers feel burdened by the large number of textbooks and the time demands that the application of constructivist methods requires, and although teachers were aware of their roles in the constructivist approach, they could not always fulfill these roles because of the content intensive and lack of time (23). These methods often require multiple sources of information and time to prepare and implement lessons, which can be challenging in current school conditions. Another important obstacle is the lack of technological resources, such as laptops and cabinets, which are necessary to support constructivist methodologies. Without these resources, it is difficult to create learning activities that help students actively participate and engage in the learning process. Some teachers have been forced to provide some work tools themselves to support the implementation of constructivist methods, due to the lack of necessary equipment in the school. This can be an added burden for them and an obstacle to the effective implementation of these methods.

CONCLUSION

From the data we can conclude that there is a variety in the level of preparation among teachers for the implementation of constructivist methods, with a general perception that additional training and continuous support are necessary to improve skills and effective implementation of these methods in practice. Teachers use a variety of constructivist methods, which they select and adapt depending on the subject and the learning situation. This diversity of methods reflects a flexible and focused approach to active learning, giving priority to practices that increase student engagement and autonomy. This shows the commitment of teachers to implement methods that give students the opportunity to learn in a deeper and more connected way to real life. Teachers consider the application of constructivist methods as very necessary because in their view, these methods put the student at the center of the learning process, develop independent and critical thinking skills, improve students' communication and self-confidence, and foster a greater interest in learning. These methods are considered the most effective means of

preparing students for the challenges of lifelong learning.

The application of constructivist methods has brought great and positive changes in teaching practice. Teachers have changed their role from transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of active learning, improved teaching methods and techniques, and noticed an increase in student engagement and cooperation. These changes have contributed to the fulfillment of curricular goals and have made the learning process more effective and student-oriented. Teachers feel satisfied and fulfilled in their role as facilitators when applying constructivist methods. They appreciate the dynamics and changes that these methods bring to the classroom and feel important in leading the learning process. Their role includes stimulating students' curiosity and developing knowledge, making them feel engaged and motivated in their work. The application of constructivist methods has provided a number of benefits to teachers, including flexibility in preparing the lesson plan, increasing student interest and engagement, developing skills for applying knowledge to real life, and encouraging discussion and collaboration in the classroom. These elements have helped teachers to create a more adaptable, dynamic, and student-oriented learning environment.

The application of constructivist methods faces a number of obstacles on the other hand, mainly due to the lack of didactic materials and technological tools in schools. The textbook load and additional time demands also present challenges for teachers. These limitations negatively affect the possibility to implement these methods fully and effectively, pointing out the need for improvements in the infrastructure and resources available to teachers. This study proposes a constructivist approach, challenging teachers who focus on the traditional approach. Furthermore, it suggests a wider policy context to define a manageable policy and practice for the appropriate integration of constructivist methods in teaching and learning processes in primary school and generally to develop policies that support and promote the use of constructivist methods in the classroom.

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