

Dilemma of Teaching Chinese Abroad: Constructive Teaching Strategies for TCSL Teachers

Tianzi Huang*

Faculty of Arts, Zhuhai College of Science and Technology, Zhuhai, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 1910821105@mail.sit.edu.cn

Abstract. Research on constructivism's teaching methodology and efficacy in the classroom has been conducted in a wide range of domains, but it has mostly concentrated on two areas - the learning of scientific and engineering majors and the acquisition of English as a second language. There are limited research studies on the influence of constructivism on international Chinese education. In the context of China's pursuit of international cultural and educational cooperation, international Chinese education has gradually entered the international public's vision. Constructivism's research on language teaching mainly focuses on English and general second foreign language learning and rarely focuses on the perspective of Chinese as a second language classroom. In this context, the purpose of this study is to explore how constructivism affects the teaching and learning of Chinese in both China and international Chinese teaching environments, and some suggestions for improvement based on constructivism are put forward for the Chinese international classroom. The constructivism teaching method is expected to be beneficial to Chinese learning, improve students' self-learning awareness and learning motivation, and have a positive impact on Chinese learning outcomes. This study will make a minor contribution to the research of constructivism in Chinese teaching and learning.

Keywords: Constructivism, international Chinese education, teaching Chinese as a second language, teaching strategies.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, more and more people around the globe choose Chinese as a second foreign language, and the international demand for Chinese language teachers is also increasing. Teaching international students in classrooms such as "Confucius Institutes" are quite different from teaching native speakers of Chinese. Therefore, how to help teachers in such a diverse teaching environment has become a concern in recent decades. Scholars inquired about diverse teaching strategies. Among them, whether constructivism can play a role in promoting the international Chinese teaching mode has gained increasing attention, which is also a focus of this paper.

Constructivism is the idea that students construct their knowledge by linking current knowledge to existing or previous knowledge, emphasizing the role of students in the learning process [1]. Constructivism, which draws on the theories proposed by Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and others, is based on the premise that individuals must participate in social learning and actively create knowledge from the existing knowledge base, beliefs, and personal experience [1]. Nowadays, the constructivist teaching model has been gradually implemented in domestic education. However, because of the unique abstractness, philosophy, and poetry of the Chinese language, the constructivist teaching effect is not as prominent as that of the learning of scientific and engineering majors and English language majors.

The theory of constructivism has been spreading in China since the 1980s and has gradually become one of the important Western educational trends affecting the theory and practice of Chinese education. At present, domestic researchers have explored the role of constructivism in Chinese teaching concepts, teaching design, teaching effect and so on. However, little research has addressed constructivism's efficacy in the context of international Chinese language education classrooms. The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of constructivism on the international Chinese teaching context and to explore the help and significance of constructivism on Chinese learning from the perspective of students and teachers. On the basis of literature review, this study makes an analysis

and deconstruction of constructivism in Chinese teaching classrooms and makes a brief overview of domestic and international constructivist education.

2. Dilemma in TCSL Context

At present, most of the studies on international Chinese are concentrated on teaching adult or young adult learners in Confucius Institutes and teaching younger learners in international primary and secondary schools. Compared with teaching first-language learners, teaching Chinese to international students aims to help them achieve fluent communication using this second language. Systematical teaching of the four skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing - becomes the core of the teachers who target pragmatism as their ultimate goal. However, as Julie Hsuan-Hsun Wang pointed out, this pragmatic approach made international Chinese teachers pay more attention to students' use of Chinese pronunciation and vocabulary, but little to their learning motivation [2]. According to Ying Yue's research, the problems faced by Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (TCSL) teachers are not limited to the pedagogical strategies, but how teachers adapt to new educational beliefs and values so as to better motivate the students [3].

In Julie Hsuan-Hsun Wang's research, she found that direct teaching method can improve students' learning motivation, and interactive group conversations can also bring a good Chinese learning environment [2]. The direct teaching method is a compound systematic teaching method which integrates accurate course design, efficient teaching skills and serious educational supervision. To examine her idea, she used the questionnaire to investigate students' opinions on the teaching methods of TCSL, including grammatical translation, direct teaching method and the cultivation of oral ability.

Table 1. Students' Motivation in the TCSL Classroom

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
8. I like a lot of oral work at the beginning of the Chinese learning.	5.00	.94
9. I gain a lot benefits when teacher is using Chinese to teach in class.	4.70	1.16
10. The interesting activities (pair group work) will help a lot in Chinese speaking skill.	4.45	1.23
11. I like Chinese to be taught only in Chinese.	4.18	1.59
Average	4.58	1.23

N=33

In the questionnaire data of Table 1, the item that the students felt most motivated by the direct method was that they liked to do a lot of oral exercises at the beginning of the class (M=5.00, SD=0.94) [2]. The second important factor in favor of the direct method is that students get a lot of benefits when teachers teach in Chinese in the classroom (M=4.70, SD=1.16) [2]. The third important factor is that students like more interesting activities that can help them develop Chinese speaking skills [2]. The teaching mode of the direct teaching method is in line with the teaching concept of constructivism. For example, a large number of teaching practices are adopted to improve students' learning enthusiasm. A large number of exercises can also help students consolidate existing knowledge and learn new knowledge in practice.

Ying Yue pointed out that classroom practice is influenced by the complex interaction of many factors such as teacher cognition, student cognition, research community and institutional variables [3]. If the doctrinal teaching method is simply adopted in the classroom, the cognitive difference between teachers and students may greatly reduce students' learning motivation, and students cannot construct their own thinking framework based on teachers' theoretical instruction [3].

Therefore, international Chinese teachers are facing a great inherent conflict between the beliefs and practices of the Chinese teaching style and the international educational system. The traditional Chinese teaching method is based on grammar teaching, sentence pattern exercises and grammar translation, which is not suitable for education in countries like the United States. Since international

basic education is based on edutainment, students may be demotivated by the traditional Chinese single-line teaching system. Hence, this paper aims to analyze this problem using the constructive teaching approach and adopt the domestic scholars' ideas on first-language Chinese teaching and international scholars' concepts on second language teaching to find a way for constructive TCSL teaching.

3. Previous Studies on Constructive Chinese Teaching

3.1. Domestic Scholars' Views on Chinese Language Teaching

He Kekang, who has been engaged in theoretical and applied research of educational technology for a long time, introduced the construct of constructivism to China's education research. He proposed three constructivist teaching modes - scaffolding teaching, anchor teaching, and random entry teaching [4]. Different teaching modes share similar characteristics as they all involve context creation and collaborative learning as teaching linkages. Then in 2000, He Kekang, Yu Shengquan, and Yang Juan designed a constructivist teaching model, which was the same as Xiao's theory. According to the constructivist view of learning proposed by Xiao Chuan, learning is an active construction process [5]. Learners' knowledge construction process is two-way. They actively construct the meaning of current things through their previous cognitive structure and choice perception of external information, and the prior knowledge can be reconstructed according to the variability of examples [5]. In order to achieve this kind of two-way construction, students' learning process must be diversified, so students' meaning construction of things has its own uniqueness [5]. Several scholars all emphasized the importance of giving full play to the initiative and constructivism of learners in the learning process, building constructivist classrooms, and bringing effective schemes for constructivist teaching design. Future scholars also refer to the constructivist teaching model provided by these three articles in Chinese teaching classroom design and put forward their own creative ideas.

For instance, Zhang Min believes that teaching ideas should be innovated in class, teaching practice should be more interesting to stimulate students' enthusiasm, and efficient group mode should be used for learning, at the same time, students' ability to digest and summarize knowledge should be cultivated, and proficiency in knowledge framework and knowledge overall application should be increased [6]. However, Zhou Xiaoxue and Yang Jilin adopted the two constructivist teaching modes proposed by He Kekang, advocating the setting of curriculum objectives, allowing students to learn together with classmates and teachers while achieving goals, mobilizing students' learning subjectivity, changing the single-line interaction mode in the classroom, creating teaching situations, and providing teaching evaluation [7].

3.2. International Scholars

Reinfried summarized three constructivist principles, including action-oriented, creation-focused, and learner-centered learning. Accordingly, constructivist language learning should be holistic, content-oriented and conversational [8]. Constructivist language teaching holds that learning is a process of constructing meaning in a positive way, and the role of the language teacher is as a facilitator rather than a knowledge transmitter [9]. Teaching is the activity of showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding the learning progress, and making someone learn to understand. In this regard, Bruner proposed a theoretical teaching provision that teachers needed to cultivate students' learning progress considering their individual differences, construct the knowledge framework for students in the easiest way, display the instructional resources in the most efficient order, and monitor students with proper rewards [10].

In the second language teaching sector, Jin proposed five foreign language learning strategies based on constructivism [11]. The classroom should be student-centered to provide students with more real-life situations and encourage students to participate in discussions and consultations, taking into account their learning interests, motivations and attitudes. In language learning, students should

be helped with vocabulary and encouraged to use their second language in communication. It is essential to make full use of class time to expand extra-curricular language learning and improve students' knowledge of the culture of the target language to facilitate the learning progress.

Yang & Wilson found that constructivism in the classroom is relevant in many ways, and they provide useful instrumental principles for foreign language teachers [12].

4. Suggestions for International Chinese Teaching

Combined with the research on Chinese teaching by domestic and foreign scholars, it can be found that the diversified teaching mode based on constructivism can cultivate students' initiative and improve their independent learning motivation. In constructivist learning theory, knowledge is never acquired passively, and its novelty cannot be processed except by absorbing cognitive structures that the subject has already experienced. Both domestic and international teachers should first respect students' subjectivity and diversity, and international Chinese teachers should pay more attention to this point. When tutoring students in different countries and different educational environments, they should adapt to local conditions and improve the existing infusion teaching mode in Chinese teaching. Second, more attention needs to be paid to the interactive and contextual nature of the classroom. In the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, how to integrate Chinese history and traditional Chinese culture into the teaching of Chinese, and whether there are conditions to provide students with an environment for learning in the experience culture are the directions for researchers to study in the future. Teachers can also think about how to integrate written knowledge with life situations to make it easier for students to understand and think. At the same time, with high classroom interaction and a strong sense of situational substitution, students' interest in class and love for Chinese will be enhanced, and students' initiative in independent learning will be enhanced, which is more conducive to students' lifelong learning of Chinese. In China, nowadays, the form of group cooperation learning is very common, but the frequency of use in China is not too high. Teachers should pay attention to how to control the time and efficiency of group learning, and gradually expand the time of students' independent learning, so as to gradually cultivate students' ability of independent learning. In addition, understanding Chinese culture is also very helpful for Chinese students to learn Chinese. It is also a worthy direction to organize more extracurricular activities related to Chinese traditional culture, integrate the difficult Chinese knowledge in them, and learn the foreign education mode of entertainment.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays, with the rapid development of globalization, education is widely available in different countries and different fields. Constructivism has a strong adaptability in its teaching mode, both in the field of mother tongue learning and in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. In this paper, through the analysis of existing data and results, the constructivist teaching model can achieve remarkable results and be more helpful to students' future learning. How to adapt to the development of globalization and innovate the application of constructivism in Chinese teaching is a new topic for future scholars to study. It is believed that Chinese, with its unique language characteristics, can bring new perspectives and new directions for constructivism research. Constructivism plays a similar role in Chinese classroom teaching and teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and the two can learn from each other. Some suggestions put forward in this paper can also provide a reference direction for the subsequent research.

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