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Teachers `Attitudes towards Constructivist Approach to Improving learning outcomes: The Case of Kosovo

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The constructivist approach aims at change, departing from the traditional teaching and improvement of learning outcomes in primary schools of Kosovo. Teachers' attitudes towards the constructivist approach play a crucial role in actively constructing knowledge through experience and reflection and are critical for improving learning outcomes. This study aimed to examine the teachers' attitudes to using the constructivist approach to improving learning outcomes. This research used a mixed research methodology. The research sample consisted of 40 teachers and 113 students in primary schools in Kosovo. The data were collected through a survey using questionnaires (for teachers and students) and semi-structured interviews. The study illustrated that most teachers' attitudes towards using the constructivist approach and its impact on learning outcomes are significant ($p < .05$). Based on the findings, one can conclude that constructing knowledge on existing experiences, involving students in discussions, reflection, authentic learning, and engaging students in research assignments result in better learning outcomes. The constructivist approach enabled the transition from traditional to student-centred teaching, and the teachers' attitudes towards implementing this type of teaching are positive. Teachers' attitudes towards the constructivist approach were significant ($p<0.05$) and determined how learning outcomes would be achieved.

Keywords: teachers` attitudes, constructivist approach, learning outcomes, students, teaching

INTRODUCTION

The efforts to improve the education system in Kosovo and provide good international education practices have been continuous during the past decades. One of the most significant reforms also representing innovation in Kosovar education is adopting the

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Curriculum Framework of pre-university education (2011). This document, among other developments, enabled the transition from the traditional teaching, whose purpose was the theoretical acquisition of the course contents, to a curriculum relying on the attainment of the learning outcomes that 'express a range of domains, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values' (MEST, 2016, p. 29). The theory of the new curriculum, based on the constructivist approach, creates conditions and opportunities for actualising knowledge and abilities in real-life situations (MEST, 2011). Teachers are expected to depart from the traditional approach and present new innovative ideas, beyond the framework of classical teaching ideas (Patil & Kudte, 2017). By using the constructivist approach, teachers will move their students away from mechanical memorising of facts, encouraging them to acquire their knowledge through independently discovering the information through in-class interaction (Sakshi & Gutpa, 2018). They should also use diverse activities in the classroom, developing cognitive processes (Ismajli & Neziri, 2019). Therefore, 'the design of the learning environment is one of the most important factors to support the constructivist learning' (Anagün, 2018, p. 827). The constructivist approach enables the transition from traditional to student-centred teaching, and the teachers' attitudes regarding implementing this type of teaching are positive (Krahenbuhl, 2016; Li & Guo, 2015). Constructivism is the 'knowledge gained through the results of human construction, both individually and social interactions based on experience' (Retnawati, 2020, p.837). Based on the requirements of the new curriculum and the context mentioned above, Kosovo must research implementing a constructivist approach in teaching practices. In the research conducted recently in Kosovo, it is ascertained that there are schools with varying degrees of constructivist approach in their daily practices (Rexhaj, 2019). The results of another research in our country depict that constructivist teaching practices were partially applied due to difficulties instructors face in understanding and implementing the constructivist approach in the primary education curriculum (Ismajli & Krasniqi, 2022). This research attempts to highlight teachers' attitudes regarding the use of the constructivist approach in improving learning outcomes. Based on the above results, this research has the following objectives: a) to examine teachers' attitudes in using a constructivist approach to primary school learning outcomes, b) to ascertain the degree of implementation of constructivist practices teachers apply in their classrooms; c) to determine whether significant differences exist between the implementation of the constructivist approach and learning outcomes.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the attitudes of teachers to use the constructivist approach in improving learning outcomes.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study were as follows.

1. What are the attitudes of primary school teachers in Kosovo regarding the constructivist approach to improving learning outcomes?
2. What is the implementation level of constructivist teaching practices in primary school?
3. Is there a significant difference between implementing the constructivist approach and improving the learning outcomes?

Literature Review

Learning Through the Constructivist Approach

In light of the facts provided by Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, a constructivist approach to education is the one in which students actively create, interpret, and reorganise knowledge in individual ways. Constructivism has its roots in Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, including the combination of both. In the 1970s and 1980s, Von Glasersfeld`s view helped develop radical constructivism, centred on the idea that knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the cognising subject (Shah, 2019; Aljohani, 2017; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). We live in a time when simply giving information to students is not enough; teachers need to change their roles and become diagnosticians and planners, understanding the learning process and knowing exactly which strategies to use to make teaching effective (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Schoen (2008) suggests that in this century, we should rethink the school concept and question whether the school experiences help develop skills for coping with real-life situations.

In contrast, Kumar and Gupta (2019) note that the education system now requires strategies emphasising student involvement in learning, focusing on knowledge building instead of knowledge transmission. Many researchers have shown that constructivist learning strategies can effectively encourage student interaction and achieve results. Today several education researchers have shifted their focus even more towards learners. Instead of discussing how knowledge is acquired, they speak of how it is constructed (Schnuk, 2012). According to this approach, learning is creating an understanding related to the world. In constructivist classrooms, the curriculum focuses on big concepts. Activities typically involve primary sources of data and manipulative materials. Teachers interact with students by seeking their questions and points of view. Assessment is authentic, interwoven with teaching, and includes teacher observations and student portfolios. Students do not come to class empty-handed. They have formed specific knowledge and experience based on their past life experiences and study, having their own ideas (Wang, 2014). Learning is achieved through self-directed learning, and the task of teachers involves facilitating the child's learning and acting as a guide (Ultanir, 2012).

Teachers' Attitudes Regarding the Constructivist Approach

Teachers' beliefs, practices, and attitudes are critical for understanding and improving educational processes. The attitudes are closely linked to teachers' strategies for confronting challenges in their daily professional life and their general well-being, and they shape students' learning environment and influence student motivation and achievement (OECD, 2009). In various studies, teachers' attitude towards work has been examined as attitude towards the teaching profession or as teaching attitude means teachers' attitude about their ability to teach and about students' ability to learn, sometimes referred to as teacher efficacy (Ispir, 2010). Thus, research has collectively supported a consensus that attitudes towards change encompass three dimensions, including cognitive, affective, and behavioural (Kin & Kareem, 2017). Positive attitudes are fundamental to effective teaching and attitudes are viewed as a learned

predisposition to respond to an object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2015). Therefore, the essence is having teachers with attitudes that can help students construct their own information towards practising teaching profession and constructivist approach. Constructivist learning environments should prepare teachers and students to become better diagnosticians and planners of activities (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Improving Constructivist Approach to Learning Outcomes

The teacher, through constructivist teaching, seeks to foster cognitive imbalance by setting up situations encouraging children to question their existing beliefs and ask what is going on. Children try to make predictions about the situation based on their prior understanding. When these predictions do not work, children question their previous beliefs. In the constructivist approach, the teacher is integral in encouraging students to expand their cognitive capacity (Martin, 2009). Moreover, it requires active learning, provides opportunities to solve real-world problems, answer real questions, address real needs, and offers the student an opportunity to perform as an expert or professional in their chosen field. Approaching instruction from the constructivist continuum reaches a broader range of students and increases all students' comprehension and self-confidence, teaching them to think for themselves, ask questions and seek answers (Akpan & Beard, 2016). This challenge encourages teachers to assume new roles to help students become challengers and activity creators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

METHOD

Our study used a mixed-research method defined as 'a database that can help explain and analyse different types of questions even when they are not appropriate for a sample or population' (Creswell, 2018, p. 49). This method produces qualitative and quantitative data (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Participants

The research sample comprised 40 teachers and 113 students of public primary schools in Kosovo. Participants were selected according to the simple sample -systematic sample (Crano et al., 2014). Below is the Table 1 in which the demographic data of the teachers' sample is presented.

Table 1
Distribution of the teacher sample according to demographic data

	Class	N =40	Percentage
Gender	Female	34	85%
	Male	6	15%
Age	Under 25	0	0%
	26-30	12	30%
	31-40	16	40%
	41-50	6	15%
	Over 50	6	15%
Education	Teachers' Faculty	3	7.5%
	Faculty of Edu.	29	72.5%
	Master in Edu.	8	25%
	PhD	0	0%
Environment	Urban	25	62.5%
	Rural	15	37.5%

From the table above (Table 1), one can observe that the teachers' sample comprised genders, respectively 85% female and 15% male teachers. Considering the age of the participants, 16 were 31–40 years old, six belonged to the age group of 42–50 years, whereas six others were over 50. According to their level of education, 72.5% have completed their Bachelor's studies at the Faculty of Education. However, based on the location of the school where they are employed, 62.5% belong to urban areas, while 37.5% work in rural areas.

Research Instruments and Design

Questionnaires for teachers and students were compiled to collect the quantitative research data, while the qualitative aspect of the study was realised through semi-structured interviews with teachers. The questionnaire for teachers was divided into two parts. The first part served to collect demographic data (gender, age, and education). In contrast, the second part of the questionnaire contained 14 items relating to teachers' attitudes regarding the implementation of the constructivist approach focusing on constructing knowledge based on previous experiences, engagement in discussion, reflection, authentic learning, the conduct of research tasks, and similar, contributing to the attainment of learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the students' questionnaire contained also 14 items intended to express students' points of view regarding the above-mentioned practices. The scale to measure both questionnaires (teachers and students) is based on a Likert scale with five choices (*always=1, usually=2, sometimes=3, rarely=4, and never=5*).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four primary school teachers. The interview questions clustered around three categories: 1. the level of the implementation of the constructivist approach, 2. improving constructivist approach to the teaching process, 3. the learning outcomes. The demographic characteristics of the interviewees were as follows: three participants were female, and one was a male teacher. Regarding the age of the participants, two teachers belonged to the age group 25, 26–30, while one was in the age group of 31–40 years old. From the overall number of the interviewed teachers, three were holders of the Bachelor's degree, while one was a Master's degree holder. Nevertheless, concerning the length of work experience, one of the teachers had 3–5 years of work experience, two of them 6–10 years, while another had 11–15 years of teaching experience.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data processing was performed through IBM SPSS Statistics 23. Descriptive statistical data analysis was based on the following characteristics: percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The reliability of the teachers' questionnaire with 14 items was verified with the Alpha Cronbach coefficient, depicting the reliability of $\alpha = .785$ and the standardised Alpha e Cronbach $\alpha = .776$. Inferential analyses were also conducted, including t-test and cross-tabulations (crosstabs). Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this data analysis method helps identify, analyse, and interpret the conception patterns (themes) within the qualitative data.

FINDINGS

Results from Quantitative Data

The results reflecting the statistical significance of the items for teachers, and the p-value are in the table below.

Table 2
Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire for teachers

Item	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*Mean*	*SD*	*p-value*
New knowledge is linked with life experiences	42.5	35	22.5	0	0	1.80	.791	0.002
Posing a question and exploring the answer	50	32.5	15	2.5	0	1.70	.823	0.000
Free collaboration relating to the manner of solving problems	70	22.5	7.5	0	0	1.37	.628	0.002
I plan the teaching considering individual differences	60	25	7.5	5	2.5	1.65	1.001	0.000
During group work, I encourage them to compare their ideas	70	27.5	2.5	0	0	1.33	.526	0.000
I adapt the lessons and literature based on students` interest	52.5	32.5	12.5	0	0	1.58	.712	0.000
Obtain information through independent exploration	15	27.5	37.5	13	8	2.70	1.114	0.017
Implementation of new strategies has broadened the opportunities for students inclusion	47.5	27.5	25	0	0	1.78	.832	0.016
Groups activities to practice what they are learning	60	35.5	2.5	2.5	0	1.43	.5490	0.001
I assess students' progress using group assessment and portfolios	87.5	12.5	0	0	0	1.12	.335	0.000
Self-evaluation is a constituent part of the final evaluation	50	30	15	2.5	2.5	1.77	.974	0.375
Perform in the role of experts	37.5	47.5	15	0	0	1.78	.698	0.036
I use technology for interactive teaching in activities with students	37.5	25	32.5	5	0	1.65	.802	0.000
I use new knowledge by evoking the previous experiences	67.5	30	12.5	0	0	1.55	.714	0.002

From the data presented above, almost all the independent variables influence the dependent variable and have a statistically significant ($p<.05$) correlation except for one

item. The results from the students' questionnaire, including the statistical significance of the teachers' items and the p-value, are in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive analysis of the students' questionnaire

Item	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*Mean*	*SD*	*p-value*
Collaborate with peers in tasks and projects	62.7	19.1	18.2	0	0	1.55	.785	0.001
I feel free to question the response that I hear	44	23.6	25.4	2.7	7.3	2.13	1.192	0.000
Apart from my teacher, I also ask my peers about the lesson	40.9	15.5	30	13.6	0	2.16	1.193	0.000
I express even opinions which oppose the class point of view	69.1	10	15.5	5.5	0	3.01	1.420	0.005
I learn only the lessons from the book	5.5	9.1	14.5	20.9	50	1.99	1.230	0.564
I express my opinions freely during the class, and the teacher praises me	69.1	10	15.5	5.5	0	1.57	.942	0.002
My ideas and suggestions are used during the class discussion	22.7	22.7	51.8	2.7	0	2.34	.861	0.000
The teacher assesses me continuously in different subjects	89.1	10	0.9	0	0	1.11	.351	0.000
The teacher allows me to plan the project/tasks that I am going to present	73.6	10	16.4	0	0	1.42	.759	0.000
I express the knowledge gained from daily life	56.4	20.9	14.5	2.7	5.5	1.80	1.131	0.000
I work in a group in solving problems in different subjects	55.5	20.9	17.3	6.4	0	1.74	.962	0.000
The teacher encourages me to pose a question	55.5	24.5	12.7	7.3	0	1.79	1.142	0.000
The teacher provides me an opportunity to correct mistakes	73.6	15.5	9.1	1.8	0	1.39	.730	0.002
I evaluate myself at the end of lessons	43.6	31.8	13.6	10.9	0	2.02	1.252	0.345

Table 3 depicts that almost all items have statistical significance higher than p=0.000. Only two of the students' items have different patterns since they are not statistically significant: the statement that the student conducts self-evaluation at the end of the activity has p=0.345, and the item that the student learns the lessons relying on only the book with p=0.564.

Table 4
Testing of independent samples from urban and rural areas

Independent – Sample T -Test	
During the teaching process, new information is linked with life experiences.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.017
In our classroom, there is more than one way of posing a question and exploring the answer.	Homogeneous groups: p = 0.346
Students are free to collaborate relating to the manner of solving problems.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.519
I plan the teaching considering individual differences of students.	Homogeneous groups: p = 0.201
During group work, I encourage students to compare their ideas about the topic.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.000
I adapt the lessons and literature in different subjects based on students' interest in the topic.	Homogeneous groups: p = 0.987
Students are responsible for obtaining information through exploration.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.036
I plan the teaching considering individual differences of students.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.030
I assess students' progress continuously using group assessments, portfolios, and evidence.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.812
Self-evaluation is a constituent part of the final student evaluation.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.000
Implementation of new strategies in the changes in the curriculum has broadened the opportunities for student inclusion in the learning process.	Homogeneous groups: p = 0.221
The constructivist learning approach enables students to perform in the role of experts.	Homogeneous groups: p = 0.980
I use technology for interactive teaching in activities with students.	Non homogeneous groups: p= 0.028
I use new information by evoking the previous experiences of students.	Non homogeneous groups: p = 0.029

To validate this hypothesis, we have used several independent variables related to or affecting the dependent variable of the research hypothesis. Therefore, the questions posed through the questionnaire are divided into independent and dependent variables. The dependent variable is the last question, while the independent variables are the other questions.

Based on the data presented in Table 4, one can conclude that all the results of the t-test in both groups displaying a significance value of <0.05 are not homogenous between them, while with significance value >0.05 are homogeneous. From the data, it can be concluded that, to a considerable extent, the groups (teachers working in urban or rural schools) have the same opinion regarding each variable in Table 4. However, the differences between the areas for no homogeneity, the variables 1–7 present an exception.

Qualitative data analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews with the teachers (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, and Teacher 4), divided into three categories, are in the Table below.

Table 5
The data from interviews with the teachers

Categories	
The level of the constructivist approach implementation	T1. I make attempts to apply the constructivist approach since I do not want to be the only source where students' knowledge focuses, but I require students themselves to become involved in discovering information; T2. If not in its entirety, the majority of the representative elements of this approach are part of my teaching routine. It is also the requirement set in the curriculum, and I believe that it helps increase the quality of the teaching process; T3. The new curriculum aims to attain the learning outcomes and the development of competencies requires a change of teaching methodology. I apply the constructivist approach since it has changed the way I teach and placed the student in the centre; T4. Seeing the curriculum changes in the past years, I have gradually started to replace the teaching method and techniques with creative work encouraging students to discover the message and meaning of lessons by themselves.
Improving the constructivist approach to the teaching process	T1. In traditional teaching, we used to assign students tasks that were not creative, students' responses were identical, and they did not go beyond the framework of contents of textbooks. Today they conduct research projects influencing the improvement of the results of their work; T2. I believe there is a substantial effect since the students can discuss and reflect on the obtained knowledge by shifting their role from passive to active learners. It also continuously challenges me as a teacher in terms of new expectations about my work; T3. The constructivist approach has challenged all the earlier traditional routines. The monotony of the same methods characterised teaching, and students mechanically memorise the lessons. By implementing the constructivist approach, knowledge is increasingly related to real-life situations; T4. With the constructivist approach, I have noticed the engagement of all students in the learning process. Students are not divided into strong and weak students during group work but are all engaged. It has resulted in a new dynamic, and its results are seen in all subjects.
The learning outcomes	T1. I have noticed from daily experience with students that implementing the constructivist approach enables the creation of personal responsibility for each student in the learning process. Authentic learning is created to find solutions; T2. Because I am more of a facilitator during the lesson, I encourage students to transition with higher levels of thinking. Hence they are more critical and are not just descriptors of events and phenomena; in this manner, they achieve the final outcomes targeted by the curriculum; T3. I fully agree that the constructivist approach has correctly oriented the way the teachers should approach teaching. -Useful results will only be achieved if we create a constructivist learning environment; T4. Interactive learning, involvement in discussions, and constant encouragement in performing research tasks cause an unbreakable connection between this approach and the results that the students will have.

The level of the Constructivist Approach Implementation – It is ascertained that considerably, the teachers implement this approach in their teaching practices. They refer to the new curriculum guiding the teachers in organising their teaching based on the constructivist approach. Additionally, they describe the constructivist approach as facilitating in comprehension of the lessons by students and that it has changed the routine of teaching and learning.

Improving Constructivist Approach to the Teaching Process –Teachers remarked that the constructivist approach has resulted in the placement of students in the centre, enabling them to express themselves freely, work in groups, use alternative sources, and relate theory to practice. Implementing this approach has brought a new spirit and challenged all the earlier traditional routines. Students demonstrate increased interest in new knowledge, being aware that they have the leading role and that they are not just passive listeners excluded from the learning process.

The Learning Outcomes– Although the new curriculum has brought innovation in many respects, the teachers suggested that, without implementing new methodologies corresponding to learning whereby students are integrated into the teaching process, satisfactory results will not be achieved. They also stated that using the constructivist approach motivates students towards higher levels of thinking, research work, and problem-solving. Thus, these activities yield high learning outcomes. The creation of the constructivist environment is crucial for developing knowledge and ensuring students' achievements.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results from quantitative and qualitative analysis, one can ascertain that most teachers in Kosovo have positive attitudes towards the constructivist approach and the learning outcomes. The findings of our study illustrate that achieving the desired results in all curricular areas is challenging for our curriculum, given the barriers present in school practice. These results are similar to the findings of other studies in which the effectiveness of constructivist instruction over the traditional concerning academic achievement is reported (Kim, 2005). With the realisation of the group and individual activities where the student is frequently the one who will perform a task, research, or project, the classes are transformed into working teams to build knowledge continuously. Additionally, students process their own thoughts and elaborate on their experiences (Driscoll, 2005). A constructivist approach is based on the assumption that learning occurs when students actively engage in a meaningful process of knowledge construction instead of passively receiving knowledge (Sjøberg, 2010; Selley, 2013). Furthermore, based on research findings applying the constructivist approach, teachers are more flexible in accepting the changes during the learning process. They adapt lessons and literature by responding to student requests. A favourable attitude towards the constructivist approach on the part of the teacher will contribute to the academic achievement of the students and the constructivist learning (Lyndoch & Sungoh, 2017). Teachers consider that the constructivist approach in the learning process enables students to achieve better results by creating a constructivist environment. These data indicate that instructors create the learning process and not the learning product

(Gunduza & Hursen, 2015) and that assessment occurs throughout the learning process, not just at the end of separate periods (Gulati, 2008). When applying the results for the curricular level, the teacher should decompose each result into five levels of achievement to accurately observe the achievement of each student for the given result (MEST, 2011) Teacher's approach during the learning process is one of the most contributing factors in transforming teaching to achieve high results (Yildirim & Kasapoglu, 2015). We need to look at those teachers and institutions that have been successful in the classroom and have a proven track record of student achievement and the approaches and methodologies they have used (Cunningham, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Referring to the obtained results, one can conclude that the constructivist practices, such as active construction of knowledge based on previous experiences, engagement in discussion, reflection, authentic learning, and the conduct of research tasks and projects, have impacted the attainment of learning outcomes. Kosovar teachers' attitudes concerning the constructivist practices frequently accentuate the teacher's role as facilitator in adapting the lesson and the literature to address students' needs. This approach strengthens the active role of students in constructing knowledge and not being a passive subject during learning activities. Other researchers also support this argument that teachers have a positive attitude towards the constructivist approach. The constructivist approach enables the transition from traditional to student-centred teaching and teachers' attitudes regarding the implementation of this type of teaching are positive. The constructivist approach has created broader opportunities for students' active engagement in relating the information with real-life situations, collaboration, working in groups on research tasks and projects, providing space for students to express their ideas and viewpoints, and problem-solving. It is recommended to educate and qualify pre-service teachers to create a favourable climate for constructivist learning and fulfil their needs per the implementation of the constructivist approach considering all these findings. It includes organising workshops and training in-service teachers regarding the constructivist strategies to enhance their knowledge and initiating and implementing projects focusing on attaining the learning outcomes through the constructivist approach in primary schools.

The findings implicate the curriculum of primary education, textbooks and ongoing professional development of teachers in Kosovo.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The limitation of this study is that it is based solely on identifying and examining teachers' perceptions using the questionnaire and interview of a limited number of participants in the Kosovo context. This study may have been followed by supplementing the findings by examining the perceptions of a higher number of teachers to have more representative outcomes and using the classroom checklist to observe the challenges in achieving student learning outcomes in class. Future studies may consider teachers' perceptions of the constructivist learning process and the students' results in curricular areas when teachers plan to engage in the development of activities.

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