Enhancing EFL Teaching Curriculum in a Vocational College in Central China Using Constructivism

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Abstract: This action research is a study on how the constructivist learning principles came into practice in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum reform. A comprehensive literature review on English education reform in China, the concepts of constructivism and needs analysis, and their applications in EFL education is provided. Through a case study of a vocational college in central China and using survey analysis, the paper describes how each component of a new curriculum and a new curriculum called 211 Module was successfully implemented. The paper also evaluates the curriculum efficacy through the judicious reviews and reflective feedbacks from the faculty focus groups and data collected from students' questionnaires. Strategic plans are proposed in favor of the further enhancement of the curriculum to ensure the best possible constructivist language teaching and learning.

Keywords: constructivism, curriculum enhancement, EFL, needs analysis

Introduction

The study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is increasingly becoming a priority in mainland China. With the ever increasing need for a more skilled workforce to fit into the rapidly industrializing economy, more emphasis is being laid on promoting the learning of English as a foreign language. In this regard,

many changes are taking place and more still poised to occur as education reforms become a priority in China. In the past, EFL has been taught with little emphasis on the learners' role in the teaching process. In this case, the traditional approaches used in EFL teaching have been concerned more with the delivery of a pre-planned curriculum, which is prescribed to learners. However, this approach to teaching EFL has been criticized by most education reformists who argue that a system of learning needs to be sensitive to the needs of learners, and their comprehension levels (Lei, 2020). In this regard, the teaching methodology should acknowledge the learners' social, cultural, technological, and political backgrounds so that it is more responsive to their learning needs. In this case, the learners will be more actively engaged in their learning processes using the new constructivist teaching approach.

This approach aims at creating an environment to accommodate knowledge concerning the subject, students' perceptions, and comprehension levels. Besides, students' cultural backgrounds, philosophical ideologies, and cultural perceptions will be incorporated into the learning process to create a student centered approach to education (Bawa and Watson, 2017). Therefore, the constructivist learning approach focuses on teaching whereby the content of learning is supplemented by what is inherently known by the learners, which advances knowledge and teaching. To better understand the new paradigm of learning in China, it is necessary to evaluate the history of education reforms and identify the existing gaps concerning EFL education's constructivist approach.

The traditional Chinese education has perceived learning as a process of knowledge accumulation rather than its construction and application. Knowledge is believed to be transmitted to the students through textbooks by teachers. Correspondingly, notetaking, attentive listening to teachers in class, and accurate reproduction of learned knowledge are considered necessary and essential steps for deeper comprehension and better learning. This traditional

value of learning inevitably exerted a great influence on pedagogical practices in the EFL classroom as well. The pedagogical practice in the Chinese learning context embodies the educational philosophy of "learning to use rather than learning by using". Classroom practice in the Chinese context is still teacher dominated, textbook focused and exam oriented rather than student centered and communicative oriented (Yu and Wang, 2009).

Constructivism has a wide range of implications for language educators, both in terms of its significance for research and its relevance for pedagogical practice (Reagan, 1999). In this action research, the authors laid the theoretical foundation on constructivism to display the guiding significance it has provided to EFL teaching: learners construct knowledge inwardly through a mental process in a social context or communication setting. There has been an attempt to consider the potential contributions of constructivism to EFL teaching and learning, exploring the ways in which constructivism can inform and promote effective pedagogical practice, and gain a better understanding of its practical uses in the EFL context.

This action research is conducted based on an EFL curriculum reform embarked in Shaanxi Youth Vocational College, a state run post-secondary institution located in Xi'an, the capital city of Shaanxi province, in central China. High school graduates who are enrolled receive vocational trainings for three years, and are enabled to work in different industries based on the disciplines they are in. Since founded in the 1950's, the institution has remained heavily centralized due to its nature of being state run and funded. Standard curriculum and syllabus, as well as assessment methods, are implemented across the country and exert strong power over the years (Zhao, Y., 2011).

This research study provides a comprehensive literature review on English education reform in China, the concepts of constructivism and needs analysis, and their applications in EFL education. Through a case study of the curriculum

reform in Shaanxi Youth Vocational College, the paper describes how each component of a new curriculum and a new education module called 211 was successfully implemented. The paper also evaluates the curriculum efficacy through the judicious reviews and reflective feedbacks from the faculty focus groups and data collected from students' questionnaires. Strategic plans are proposed in favor of the further enhancement of the curriculum to ensure the best possible constructivist language teaching and learning.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 1 provides an introduction and a comprehensive literature review. Section 2 describes the methodology utilized for this study. The findings and results are presented in Section 3. Section 4 analyzes the results through discussion and provides further modification to improve the curriculum. Finally, Section 5 concludes this paper.

English education system and reforms in China

The English education system changes can be traced to the time of education reforms in China during the 1985 period. During this era, China experienced a cultural revolution during which there was a shift from its traditional communist approach to a more modern way of approaching education (Badran and Toprak, 2020). Consequently, there were massive reforms to remain relevant in the ever changing global economy. For instance, due to the increasing globalization trends, specific traditional practices in education had to be challenged to pave the way for a new paradigm of learner oriented (Liang and Li, 2018). In this case, students' training was more focused on industrial and vocational applications rather than memorizing or test based teaching.

Based on this new approach, learning became more modernized to accommodate the international trade needs of China. Particularly, China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) meant that the country had to improve its trade negotiations with other nations, hence improving its communicative competence

during international trade activities (Hu and Li, 2017). Furthermore, over the last two decades, China has experienced an increase in students' enrollment rate into higher education institutions and many graduate with little knowledge and experience in speaking English. This, coupled with a lack of professionally trained English teachers, saw a decrease in the quality of EFL learning in most colleges in China (Qi, 2018). For instance, the ratio of English teachers to students increased from 1:50 in 1998 to 1:130 in 2001 (Sun, Hu, and Ng, 2017). As a result, there was a need to improve professionalism in learning EFL within China's higher education institutions. Therefore, through the government of China, the ministry of education came up with a College Teaching Quality Reform Project in 2003 to bridge the gaps in teaching quality of EFL in China.

In addition, the education reforms focused on developing a learning framework that would accommodate all cultures. Therefore, the EFL reforms aimed to improve the curriculum for learning and make it more accommodative of learners' cultural and knowledge backgrounds. For instance, according to (Yu and Wang, 2009), college curriculum reforms in China were influenced by multiple contextual factors, including social, cultural, and educational considerations (Doman and Bidal, 2016; Yang, 2016). In this regard, the curriculum was developed to focus more on the individual and not a homogenous community of learners. Therefore, the development of EFL learning was carried out both at the national and individual levels. This focus on the individual is motivated by the fact that different learners are from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, (Deng and Poon-Mcbrayer, 2016) have proposed an inclusive educational model based on the learners' practical needs (Dagistan, 2019; Pecorari, 2018). Also, (Li, 2020) affirms this argument by suggesting that the teaching of EFL in China should be cognizant of the ethnographic backgrounds of the Chinese people. In this regard, it should be based on an understanding of the concept of phenomenology, which should inform EFL teaching and research.

Additionally, there has been an increase in policy efforts towards expanding English learning provision in academic institutions. For instance, these proposals are contained in (He, 2020), who suggest that key changes in the EFL curriculum should be enforced through policy frameworks that facilitate institutional reforms. Also, (Taysum, 2020) supports this notion by suggesting that the governance of educational changes should use decision making models based on socio historiographical approaches to teaching and learning. In this case, learners' history will be incorporated into the teaching process to achieve a constructivist goal and a better learning outcome (Deocampo, 2020; Luo, 2016). Furthermore, by incorporating the learners' history and culture into the teaching process, an individualized approach to learning will be achieved, which will be consistent with the constructionist approach.

The English language's Internationalization was a key driver in the EFL teaching reforms in China. In this case, more emphasis was laid on professionalism concerning teacher training and institutional reforms. For instance, China emphasized the learning of English as a foreign and as a second language to achieve its strategic objectives (Li, 2020). According to (Hu and Li, 2017), the Chinese government steered the Learn English movement to popularize English as a dominant international language. Consequently, with these key changes, China was positioned to strengthen its international dominance, especially regarding trade, hence achieving its strategic objective.

*Module: a curriculum reform*

Faced with the requirement for a change from the policy making level, as well as having realized the drawbacks of the long practiced traditional teaching method have become more and more obvious, the English Teaching and Research Department of Shaanxi Youth Vocational College decided to launch an EFL curriculum reform in 2016.

Rationale

The new curriculum, which was named 211 Module, (meaning 2 hours of general English training, 1 hour of listening and career English training respectively) aims at training skills for communicative purposes, takes English practicality into consideration, and offers the students an opportunity to do trial and error practice in listening and speaking class. This was inspired by Vygotsky's and Dewey's social constructivism theory which sees knowledge building as the result of an individual's interaction within a sociocultural context (Dewey, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Based on this theory, teaching objectives should be attained through interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, teaching content and class activities are designed to facilitate such interactive teaching/work environments. The main objective of this project was to improve students' language, communication, and interpersonal skills based on the needs of the industry. Positive changes towards testing and assessment procedures are adopted so each module can be assessed correspondingly.

Time allocation

Prior to the reform, compulsory English course was provided to freshmen and sophomores from all disciplines as a 4 hour (2 hours per class) per week course (mandated by the Ministry of Education) on text based lexical and grammar training. The newly adopted curriculum, with the total amount of 4 hours remains unchanged, allocates 2 hours on general English training (reading, writing and translating),1 hour on listening training, and 1 hour on speaking training, and therefore was named "211 Module". General English training is followed by speaking and listening training so the students will be able to construct new knowledge and skills by correlating it with their previous experiences (Figure 1).
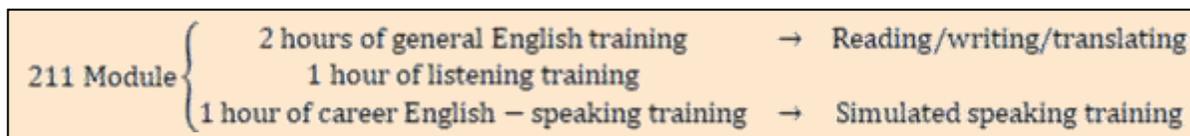
Figure 1. The 211 Module

Teaching content

The traditional text based lexicon and grammar teaching is no longer the dominant teaching content. Instead, more materials such as video clips, newspaper articles, and the podcast from the English speaking countries are introduced into the classroom to ensure diversity as well as the authenticity in language input. Teachers' goal is to ensure that the students maintain their understanding.

The textbook used for the course (Smith and Moore, 2013) focus on developing workplace listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. This textbook is accompanied with activities and exercises that have been formulated specifically for vocational students.

Instructions

The traditional teacher centered lecturing has been replaced by a more task based, student centered instructional styles. Class activates are designed such that the student opportunities to work within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) are increased. The teachers incorporate hands on class activities such as mini project, role playing, group presentation, field trips, and job shadowing into the class. The language input to a large extent is from the classroom activities that allow interactions to happen among students and students with the teacher.

This new curriculum made significant changes to the traditional EFL teaching method: the classroom environment transited from teacher centered to student centered; the emphasis of the course shifted from a focus on grammatical and lexical accuracy toward practicality and fluency in communicative abilities.

Literature Review: Constructivism in EFL Context

The notion of constructivism denotes the ability to engage learners in the learning process from their perspectives. It also implies that there should be a recognition of the learners' knowledge levels so that learning proceeds from what they are familiar with. Furthermore, constructivism in EFL learning means that learners are active content shapers based on their philosophical, social, and cultural perspectives (Harfitt and Chan, 2017). For instance, the training of Chinese students should start by first recognizing their cultural perspectives concerning the specific content of training or approaches used. Also, the level of technological advancement of the learners determines the constructivist approach used (Gu, Zhang, and Gu, 2020). According to the cognitive theories of learning, a student learns best when both the internal and external mental processes are attuned to the learning processes (Zhao and Dixon, 2017). A situational approach to teaching should be adopted in which the trainers will use a methodology that best suits the students' levels of comprehension and learning needs. In addition, by collaborating with the learners, the new constructionist approach will diffuse any differences in the perspectives and the culture shock between teachers and students, which reduce barriers to learning EFL in China (Dagistan, 2019). Furthermore, collaborative learning promotes interaction between teachers and a learner, which leads to an appreciation of each other's perspectives, hence enhances a constructionist approach to education.

Constructivist learning involves a task based approach to training. In this case, the students are equipped with practical skills to develop their communicative competence. For instance, in a task based learning approach, learners are taught to spell words through audio lingual training (Yang and Lai, 2020; Wen, 2018). This practical approach to training improves the learners' communicative competence and makes them acquire a second language with ease through practice. The reading speed should also be measured against the expected

curriculum coverage to achieve learning objectives (Entigar, 2016). In addition to training students on audio lingual skills, English teachers also need to be trained to have more self-efficacy to achieve constructivist learning's practical goals.

According to (Hymes, 1972), communicative competence is a learner's pragmatic ability of using language in the social contexts in which it is performed, therefore cannot be taught in isolation. Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their language use has on other participants in the act of communication. (Kasper, 1997) asserted pragmatic competence cannot be taught. "Competence is a type of knowledge that learners possess, develop, acquire, use or lose;" therefore, pragmatic competence "is not teachable." (Taguchi and Kim, 2018) discussed the implications of task based language teaching for the teaching of pragmatics and assessing L2 pragmatic competence.

The current dilemma with the EFL curriculum in Chinese post-secondary education setting is that communicative skills are not set in the social interactive contexts inside or outside school. Theoretically speaking, competence cannot be taught, and there is not explicit framework to lead the way out.

Cognitive constructivist Jean Piaget argued that knowledge is the result of the accurate internalization and reconstruction of cognitive meaning. "When a student encounters new information, they compare it to the knowledge and understanding they already have for accommodation or assimilation (Piaget, 1985). Social constructivism sees knowledge building as the result of an individual's interaction within a sociocultural context. This has largely originated from Lev Vygotsky's and John Dewey's theories.

The general theoretical and practical constructivist consensus, however, across all types of constructivism, indicates that eight factors are essential in constructivist

pedagogy, they are (Dantas-Whitney, 2003; Dewey, 2008; Oxford, 1997; Richardson, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978):

• Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments;

• Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation;

• Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner;

• Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge;

• Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future learning experiences;

• Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware;

• Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors;

• Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

Why and how

In the study of this curriculum reform, the cognitive constructivism answers the question "why" the theory was adopted and social constructivism answers "how it was put into use."

As discussed above, since communicative competence is not teachable; and as cognitive constructivism believes, knowledge is not something that is passively received by the learner; rather, the result of active mental work on the part of the learner. "Learning a second language is ultimately learning to be another social

person" (Crookall and Oxford, 1988). It is this process of reconstruction, rather than merely learning vocabulary and grammatical forms, that constructivism became most meaningful. Students should be given the autonomy to construct knowledge through the self-regulated process of resolving cognitive conflicts.

Social constructivism sheds light on how classroom can be shaped. Social constructivism, in essence, is about collaborative learning, which requires learners to develop skills while doing team works. Individual learning is essentially related to the success of group learning. Social constructivism encourages interactions through learning activities such as mini project, role playing or situated learning, which are proportionally incorporated in the reformed curriculum.

Methodology

The purpose of this action research is to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of the "211 Module" and gain insights in the pedagogical practice and assessment methods that influence the Chinese EFL curriculum, as well as the factors that affect the curriculum implementation in the Chinese EFL context. The evaluation is based on a mixed method approach by conducting focus group interviews for qualitative data and questionnaires for quantitative data. Some evaluations of language programs have utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Such approaches aim to describe from multiple perspectives the context of the program being evaluated (Lynch, 1990).

Focus group interviews

The qualitative use of the interview was adopted, developing an in depth analysis of a case (Creswell and Poth, 2017). The interviews were conducted in the form of focus group among nine EFL teachers. Participants provided feedback on each module at the end of the academic year. Quality of the curriculum, course content, instructors' general experience, and learning

outcomes were analyzed through the focus group interviews.

Questionnaires

The second part of the evaluation focuses on the students' perceptions of the 211 Module. A set of questions were sent out and collected via WeChat, an instant messaging application widely used among people in mainland China. Relying more on the quantitative methods, the efficacy of the 211 Module and to what extent it has been useful to students were evaluated.

Findings

Focus group interviews: Overall, the focus group interviews revealed some positive aspects of the 211 Module. Unlike the traditional teacher centered classroom in which teaching and learning are guided by the requirements of high stakes standardized tests such as National College Entrance Exams and College English Test (CET), which focus mainly on learners' lexicon, gramma knowledge and reading abilities, the 211 Module, whose objective is to equip the learners with general English skills as well as necessary communication skills for the purpose of career use, has taken consideration of the "four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing" (Aydogan and Akbarov, 2014).

Student participation: The current trends in language program evaluation vary in the degree to which they are outcomes focused, but most tend to focus on indicators of student involvement as a key criterion for desirable educational processes (Ross, 2003). Based on (De Jong and Ferguson-Hessler, 1993), it was found that students, who are active participants, tend to have better academic achievement.

Because in the traditional EFL classroom, students were not provided with many opportunities to be actively involved due to the exam oriented teaching approach, students' participation was decided to be the first indicator to evaluate

the effectiveness of the Module. All nine interviewees in the focus group reported an increase in students' class participation. The acts of asking questions, giving opinions or simply answering questions posed by the instructor or fellow students are examples of the types of active classroom participation (Abdullah, Abubakar, and Mahbob, 2012). Interviewees came to the agreement that the increase in class participation resulted from changes in the teacher's role. The traditional teacher centered classroom has been slowly transforming into student centered where they are given more opportunities (sometimes mandatory tasks) to ask/answer questions, to do role play, to discuss, to form study groups. Some students verbalized that when participation is required, they prepare more, and this preparation increases the learning. Active participation is important for achieving effective learning and plays an important role in the success of education and personal development of students in the future (Tatar, 2005).

Learning outcomes

The second indicator in this study to measure the effectiveness is the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes, "specify precisely what a student shall know or understand, and what skills or capacities they will have at the end of a specific period of learning" (Hussey and Smith, 2002).

The 211 Module provides an assessment tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning outcomes based on the following principles:

• Formulate a clear and concise learning goal.

• Focus on the vocational applications of knowledge and skills.

• Observe students' actions to assess the fulfillment of lesson objectives.

• Develop an assessment tool (test, essay, project, assignment, etc.) and a scoring rubric.

• Develop strategies to support students who need more support.

Overall, interviewees gave positive responses to the learning outcomes of the 211 Module. In the past, we would set a number of course objectives based on the syllabus provided by the school and teach accordingly. But, with the 211 Module, we see a clear relationship between the teaching activities and the 3 modules (general English, listening, and speaking), and can tell if the activities implemented are appropriate and effective in helping students achieve the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes before were all about how many news words they memorize, how they can express their ideas on the paper, but now they can take away with them the communicative skills that might be truly useful in their future workplace.

Needs analysis

The various reforms in EFL teaching in China have been geared at addressing specific needs. In this regard, certain gaps have been identified as posing challenges to this new pedagogy's advancement. Therefore, a needs analysis helps identify these gaps and the suggested ways of addressing them (Czerniawski, Guberman, and Macpail, 2017). Among the identified needs include moving from theory to practice. In the past, English teaching in China predominantly concentrated on training students to pass the test by simply memorizing content without any practical application of the knowledge to real life (Kwan, 2020). Additionally, the teaching approaches did not bridge the gap between what was taught and the students' actual practical needs. In this regard, (Harfitt and Chan, 2017) propose that the cognitive theory of learning should inform the development of content for teaching EFL in China. In this case, the learners' cognitive abilities should inform the teaching approaches.

Moreover, the genre of teaching the English language is a major concern to the advancement of the new pedagogy of English learning. For instance, when it

comes to giving instructions for EFL learners, (Yang, Q., 2020) suggests that different English language genres such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing can form the basis for teaching the English language to be more effective. In this case, training can be focused on the specific genres by infusing cultural components into listening, speaking, writing, or reading during the learning process (Sadeghi, Adel, Zareian, and Davoudi, 2020). This genre based learning provides a simplified approach to teaching and produces better outcomes.

Still, as a part of institutional reforms, there is a glaring gap in the curriculum used to teach EFL in China. In addition to a lack of self-efficacy skills among the teachers to deliver the training, the curriculum has a lot of fixing regarding its relevance to the Chinese learners (Arslan, 2020). In addition, the curriculum fixing should focus on challenging the traditional approaches used in the past in giving instructions. For instance, there exist different perceptions of English as a foreign language among the learners and teachers, which requires the professional training of a community of teachers with the skills to address the learners' needs (Zheng, Hongbiao, and Liu, 2020).

There are certain technological gaps concerning the development of the new pedagogy. For instance, technology has been advocated as crucial in improving the learning process in 21st century education (Procknow, 2019; Yang and Lai, 2020). In this case, EFL teachers need to utilize the resources available due to technological advancement to enhance the teaching of EFL. There is currently a gap in the levels of technical knowledge of most teachers in terms of using technology to provide instructions to EFL learners in China (Stockwell, 2016; Zhang and Yuan, 2020). Use of technology in passing instructions may be an additional challenge to these instructors. Nonetheless, the new pedagogy needs to incorporate a new learning method in which technology is used to deliver a learner centered approach to education (Wang, 2020). Therefore, this method will achieve a constructionist approach to learning EFL in China.

Needs analysis is described by (Jordan, 1997) as the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities. A considerable amount of research and study were performed during the formation phase of the 211 Module. A survey conducted to target student's needs suggested the main objective of the students for learning English was communication. The interviewees were confident that the 3 modules that cover the 4 language skills were able to bridge the gap between the learners' present command of English and that of their future needs.

It can be said that in the deigning phase of the 211 Module, the needs analysis helped with the design of the syllabus and the selections of the appropriate materials and teaching methods. But whether the students' needs were met or not presumably would be shown more objectively in questionnaires. Due to the time constraint, no survey was conducted during the focus group interviews, and those findings are the result of a qualitative research.

Questionnaire

The Questionnaire was designed to provide judgments on the quality of the Module as well as the students' satisfaction level. The questionnaire was distributed to 30 students from five disciplines in three faculties at the end of the school year. 26 valid samples were collected. Questions are as follows:

1. Compared with the traditional teaching methods (e.g., lecturing), the 211 Module is more beneficial to me in my English learning.

2. I am satisfied with the teaching content provided in the 2 hour General English, 1 hour listening and 1 hour career English Speaking class.

3. I find I can put into practice in my career the language skills I picked up at school.

4. Please state your industry, and name the most useful skill among reading, writing, speaking listening, based on your personal experience at work (Figure 2).
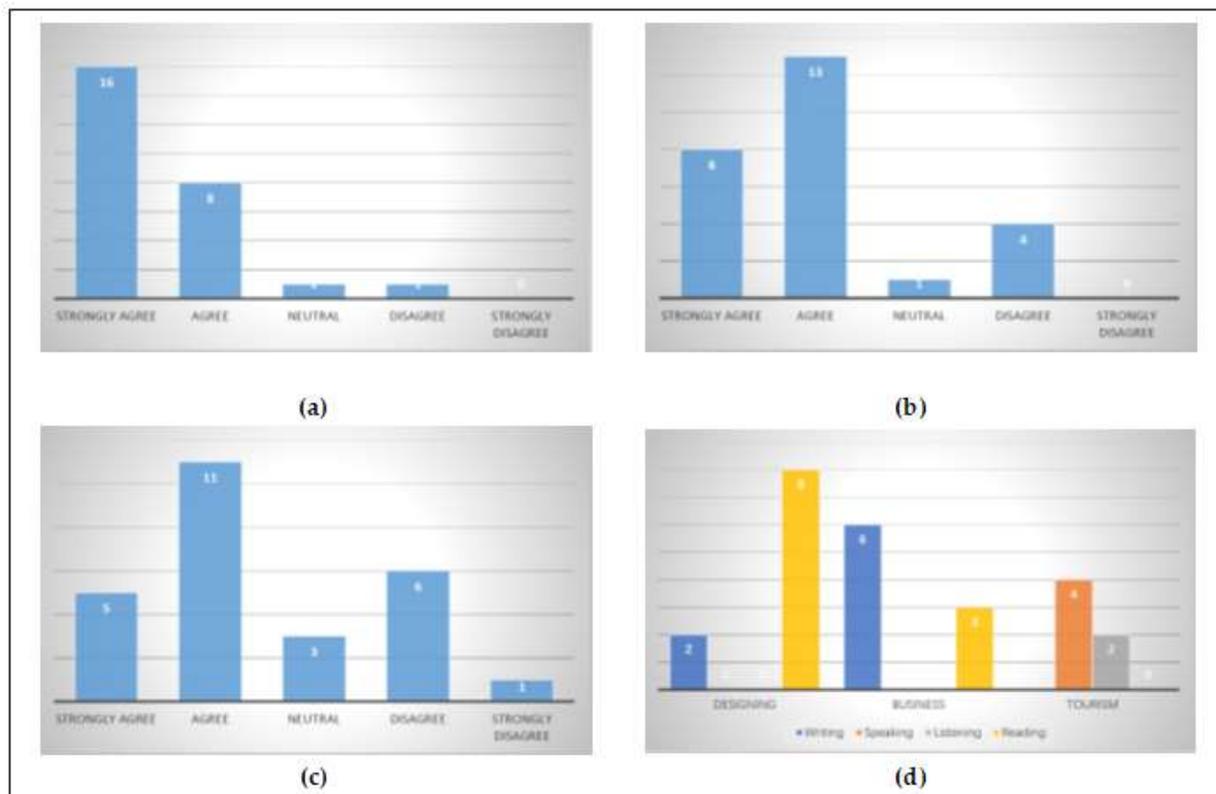
Figure 2. (a) Students' General Satisfaction Level, (b) Teaching Content Satisfaction Level, (c) English Practicality, and (d) Rank of the 4 English Skilled in Terms of Industries.

This evaluation tool assesses the overall student's satisfaction with the 211 Module. As it is shown in Figure 2(a), the majority found the new method beneficial compared with the traditional ways of lecturing. Figure 2(b) assesses if the students are happy with the teaching content provided by the 211 Module. The result shows that half of the participants (13) agree that the Modul has provided them with an abundant amount of information; 30% show a high level of satisfaction, which confirms the efficacy of the module. The results revealed in Figure 2(c) seem promising with 19% and 42% of participants strongly agree and agree that the knowledge they learned at school is of practicality. Figure 2(d)

provides the discipline background of the students. Interestingly, compared with the first two questions, there is a rise in the number of disagreements and strong disagreements. This presumably could be attributed to the English use in different industries.

Cluster sampling was used to generate a clearer and optimal result. 26 participants were grouped into three clusters: the industry of Designing (11 participants from Interior Designing and Animation), Business (nine participants from Accounting and Marketing) and Tourism (six participants). One participant from Deigning left this question unanswered. There is an obvious uniformity in the ranking within the same industry. For example, 8 out of 10 participants from the deigning industry rank reading as the most important English skills. While six participants from Tourism rank communication skills (listening/speaking), the top one, the discrepancy possibly results from the different English skills needed in different industries.

**Results and Discussion**

Improvements

As the first attempt to reform the EFL curriculum in the institution, the evaluation of the 211 Module reveals that significant improvements have been made in terms of encouraging student participation, innovating learning outcomes and meeting the students' language needs. The results collected from the questionnaire also indicate that students find it preferable to traditional teaching methods.

Defects

However, despite the general positive views regarding the effectiveness of the Module, the focus group interview acknowledged the shortcomings that emerged during the implementation.

First, the challenges and obstacles for preparing effective classes reside in teachers' lack of certain industrial knowledge. For example, an effective speaking class for students majoring in Automotive Marketing would require the teachers to familiarize themselves with the terminology that prevails in this industry before they step into the classroom. This for sure has made teaching more labor intensive.

Second, despite striving to change the exam oriented status quo, the written test in the current student assessment system still accounts for a large portion. This has led to the students' lack of incentive to better the listening and speaking skills after class. Figure 3 summarizes the details of students' assessment mark distribution (Figure 3).
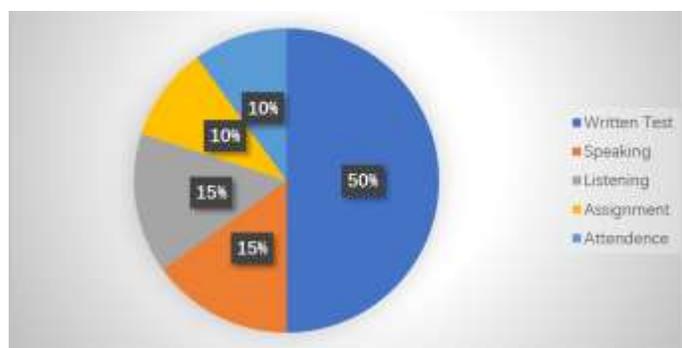
Figure 3. Student Assessment System.

Constructivism: Why It Works?

Base on the principles of constructivism and how Vygotsky viewed effective learning, the 211 Module features the following characteristics:

• For constructivists, social relationships in a learning setting are of central concern. The curriculum rationale puts emphasis on enhancing employability skills through the integration linguistic study with teacher supervised social, educational, or cultural activities inside and outside of the class premises. For example, students are given profession related situations (mostly in the 1 hour speaking course), based on the disciplines they are in, to practice language use in

the various simulated social contexts. By being exposed in the language, the situated learning serves to increase students' awareness and engagement of English communicative skills in the discourses.

• Class activates are designed to give prominence to increase the opportunities opened to students to work within the ZPD where students, through the interaction amongst each other, as well as with the teacher, make meaning based on their prior knowledge. Teachers facilitate, mediate, and supervise, providing support when needed. For example, in the weekly speaking class, students find themselves engaged in brainstorming, group discussions and presentations where collaboration with peers is essential. This type of student centered activities acts as a catalyst to stimulate the students' engagement in class and play an essential role in constructing and internalizing the knowledge and skills they may need for working in the future industries.

Constructivism: Challenges

The results derived from the research on the 211 Module shows the constructivist principles are the key to reforming contemporary education. However, in the process of implementing the module, some innate limitations unveiled during the practice of the theory.

First, there are, no explicit principled ways in constructivism to deal directly with subject matter to estimate and adjust the level of a specific domain to cater to individual students. Attentiveness to student's cognition construction is one of the defining features of constructivist learning, but curriculum designers are not likely to customize the curriculum to each student as the prior knowledge varies. There is a lack of practical guidelines to create a community where effective social interaction happens, as teachers might find it struggling since the time for students to maser the same notions differ. It is also unlikely to consider every student since it can affect the learning process of the entire team.

Second, the absence of evaluation through testing and other external criteria in the constructivist curriculum would give teachers difficulties in assessing the learning outcomes in terms of adjusting teaching content and class activities. Assessments are tailored to specific modules and teaching situations, which requires the teachers to implement considerably more assessment strategies than in the standard teaching system to serve the purpose of improving students' learning.

Constructivism: What is Next?

Constructionist learning involves training learners from their perspectives and knowledge levels. These unique characteristics of learners should be the concern of all EFL teachers to enhance the learning process. Learning, according to the constructivist approach, should be conducted within a specific context of earning. In this case, learning should acknowledge the social, cultural, and philosophical perceptions of the learners. Also, a curriculum should be developed that responds to the individual needs of the learners. To achieve this individualized approach to learning, different methodologies can be used to deliver the curriculum, such as video learning and social media based education. In this case, technology can be useful in enhancing the constructivist learning approach since technology creates a personalized experience during training. Furthermore, professionalism can be attained through the implementation of enabling policy frameworks to strengthen existing structures. Furthermore, teacher training can help create a culture of professionalism by training them on self-efficacy, which is an important aspect of constructivist learning. Learners, too, can be pro-active in the education process through practical and action based learning approaches. Task based instruction, which is a part of constructivist learning, helps learners develop practical communicative competences.

As (Trewel, 1999) argued, no single theory can provide an adequate foundation for the design of curricula. Educators need multiple perspectives, multiple

research findings and, especially, practical experiences and extensive deliberations to change classes into communities of inquiry. Based on our observations and experience in class, we suggest the following changes be made to the 211 Module.

• First, regarding the discrepancy among students' current knowledge and how they construct new knowledge, it is vital to strategically enhance peer interaction to fit in the constructivist framework. The learning of skills and concepts occur within meaningful and integrated contexts instead of an isolated and hierarchical manner. When grouping the students, acknowledging each student's knowledge level and their personalities and characteristics. A study showed when high and low-achieving students were mixed in classes; both the recipient and the helper learn more. The low-achievers benefit from the high achievers' new information; the high-achievers, on the other hand, revisit and reorganize their understanding by elaborating and explaining ideas to the classmates, resulting in their own improvement (Chiu, Chow, and Joh, 2017). Therefore, strategically group students: high achievers with low-achievers, extrovert students with introvert students, to enhance effective and positive classroom interactions could be an effective way to address the different student's levels.

• Second, evaluation methods must be adjusted since constructivist learning is subjective. As (Jonassen, 1991) asserted: "If constructivist environments are created to engage learners in relevant and meaningful knowledge construction, then as designers we are obligated to implement alternative methods for evaluating learning from them." Therefore, teachers need to evaluate their students in such a way that multiple perspectives presented by the students are reflected and accepted in the evaluation process. In practice, the following methods can be adopted:

• Oral presentation: allow students to present their knowledge verbally. This

can be used as a formative evaluation to help evaluate understanding. The presentation can be done individually or by groups. In a listening class, for example, asking students to provide the gist of a listening material can assess if and how much the material is understood.

• Portfolios: A portfolio records and demonstrates a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities (Agrawal, 2007). Students' portfolios can be used to assess their mastery of the curriculum objectives. For instance, in a writing class, it is an effective way to ask the students to include examples of each type of writing in their portfolio after the curriculum is designated to introduce persuasive, narrative, and descriptive writing.

• Peer Assessment: peer assessment is beneficial for students to develop judgment skills, critiquing abilities, and self-awareness through interactions, which fit the basic constructivist principles. In class discussion and peer feedback can be done openly after a group role play, which is conducted every week in speaking class, or peer editing each other's paper in a writing class.

Conclusion

This action research studied how constructivist learning principles come into practice in the context of EFL curriculum reform through a case study of a vocational college in central China. In this paper, we described how each component of the new curriculum was successfully implemented; further evaluated the efficacy of the curriculum through judicious reviews and reflective feedbacks from the faculty focus group and data analysis from students' questionnaires. By reviewing how constructivism theoretically supported the shift of curriculum from the traditional way to the existing one, we drew the conclusion that although there are certain limitations to the constructivist theories when applied to practice, they did show promising outcomes.

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