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Teachers' Perception and Practice of Constructivist Approach of English Language Teaching at the Primary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

A special attention has been given to the primary education in Bangladesh since the inception of new education policy in 2012. The earlier behaviorist approach to learning and teaching has gradually changed to cognitive and constructivist approaches. Therefore, the present study investigates how constructivist approach of ELT has been practicing at the primary level in Bangladesh. The present study aims to respond to the research questions of qualitative nature. The survey research approach has been chosen as the methodology of this research. Teachers' perceptions were found through questionnaires. Findings show that, half of the teachers perceive the mentioned methods in line with constructivism while remaining teachers still perceive to use these methods as a traditional way of teaching. Furthermore, teachers' perception is not similar to their teaching practices considering constructivism.

Keywords: Constructivism, primary education, authentic learning task, meta-cognition and cooperative learning, individual & group-work, question-answer.

Introduction

In Bangladesh, formal schooling starts from Primary level in the public schools. In order to conform to the international requirement as well as to implement the constitutional provision of free, universal and compulsory education, the Government launched the compulsory primary education program during the early 90s. In 1991, the government declared primary education free for all children in government run schools. The directorate of primary education manages the primary level of education and National curriculum and textbook board design textbooks.

The curriculum of primary level in Bangladesh has been revised in the light of the National Education Policy 2012 which emphasizes learning English as an international language for communicating locally and globally. The *English for Today* textbooks have been developed to help students attain competencies in all four language skills in English through

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meaningful and enjoyable activities. Topics and themes have been selected in a way that helps students address the needs of real-life situations.

Earlier, teachers used only behaviorist approaches for learning achievement, generally based on traditional methods. In these methods, students were not allowed to actively participate in the learning process. This problem is still somehow seen in the remote areas. Therefore, student-centered and active learning became the buzzwords in education system in Bangladesh. That was why; the most talked about learning theory in the modern world, the constructivist theory has been introduced in the new curriculum. Therefore, the present study investigates the teachers' perception and practice of constructivist approach of English Language Teaching (ELT) at the primary level in Bangladesh.

What is Constructivism?

Constructivism is one of the modern learning theories and it argues that knowledge is constructed by learners themselves. The main theme of this theory is to develop ideas. It believes that learning takes place through continuous changes and development in our thinking brought by different types of tangible information. Every individual learner develops new knowledge and ideas in their own way according to his/her own experience and environment. If we encounter anything new, we compare and contrast it with our previous knowledge and experience. Thus, we acquire or develop our new ideas. In this process, if anything appears irrelevant, we discard it.

In constructivism, students explore learning environment in order to construct knowledge, they do not passively read or listen to the teacher (Schunk, 2012). Therefore, active learning, where students are responsible for their learning and construct knowledge is effective learning in order to get knowledge and understanding the concepts (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Constructivist learning environment is defined by Uredi (2013) as "an environment where active participation of students to real-life experiences have been provided and problem-based situation have been created to improve conceptual change" (ibid, p.50). There are many methods and models, which represent constructivist approach for learning. For example, discovery learning, inquiry-based teaching, peer-assisted learning, discussion and debates, reflective teaching, using feedback, and so on are the methods used in constructivist learning environment (Schunk, 2012).

David Jonassen (1999) emphasizes the role of a teacher in constructing learner's new ideas. He believes that a teacher will not only be a transmitter of theory and information, she/he will provide the learners with guidance to investigate or solve a problem. This will create opportunities for learners to experiment and conceptualize their own learning and to develop their own decisions, which they can share with others in an environment of group learning. In this process, the teacher inspires learners to decide on the benefits of the new learning.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to explore the perception of English subject teachers' about constructivist way of learning at the primary schools in Bangladesh. Another purpose of this study is to explore how far the teachers practice and ensure the constructivist learning environment, self-directed learning readiness, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills.

Research Methods

Since the present study aims to respond to the research questions of qualitative nature, data collection and analysis techniques from qualitative research has been implemented. Thus Survey research approach has been chosen as the methodology of this research. In this study, the following methods of exploratory research are used:

- Secondary data analysis
- Survey questionnaire

Target Population

For this research, as the target population that has been chosen is:

- Primary schools from both rural and urban areas in Bangladesh.
- All English teachers of the above selected primary schools in Bangladesh.

Sample Frame

The sampling frame is the representation of the teachers. However, 16 primary schools, and 32 teachers have been chosen to cover both rural and urban areas. It was expected that the teacher respondents were expected to have graduate degree and some experience in teaching English in primary schools.

Instrumentation

Questionnaire. In the present study, one questionnaire has been used to elicit information from the respondents on different issues of constructivism towards teaching-learning English as a foreign language. The contents of the questionnaires are crucial for the present research because they have direct relations to the research objectives.

In the present study, data has been collected through 37 items questionnaires adopted the models of Basheer (2014) with slight modification in Bangladesh perspective. Each of the questions explores particular Constructivist topic. The items of the present questionnaires are straight forward and the linguistic nature of each question is relatively easy and simple.

Research Results

The major findings of the research results are exhibited in the pie charts in percentage terms under the two research questions of the study and

described in a quantitative manner. Then they are interpreted with reference to their causes, effects and implications. The findings of the study are briefly presented below

Part I

Do you respect the ideas and opinions of your students?

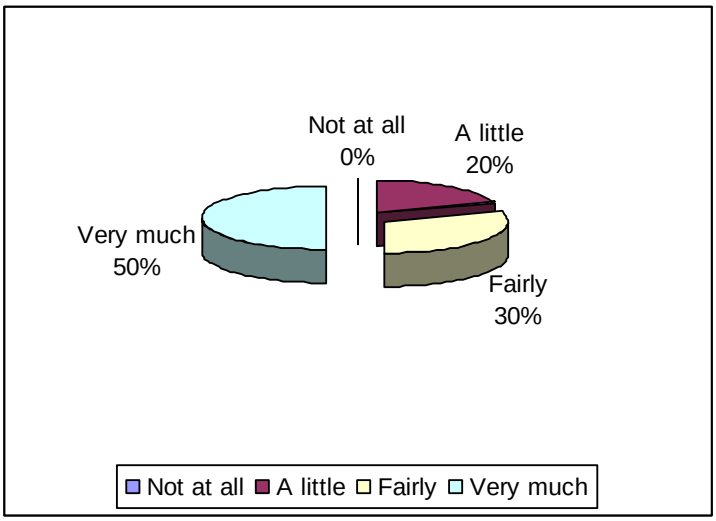

***Chart 1*: Respect the ideas of the students**

The pie chart shows that most (50%) of the teachers comment that they respect the ideas and opinions of their students ***very much***; whereas 30% comment that they respect ***fairly*** and 20% respect a little.

Do your students are encouraged to express their opinions, give ideas and comments?

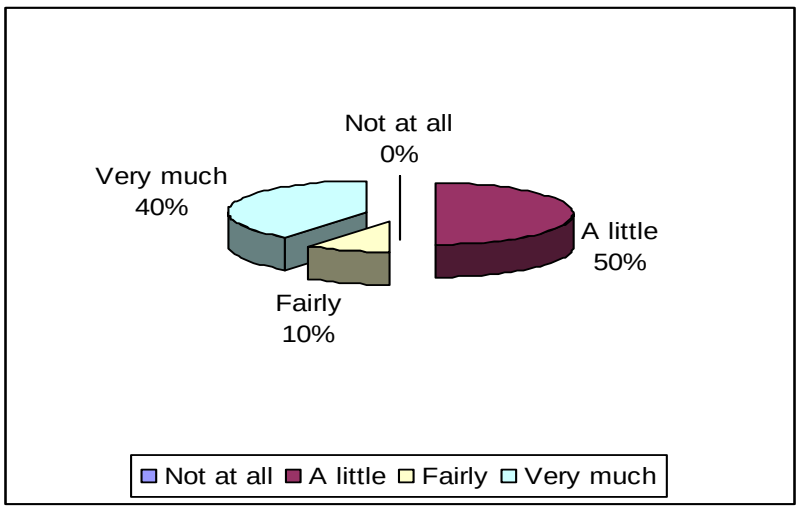

***Chart 2*: Encouraging the ideas of the students**

We have found a mixed response in case of encouraging the students. The chart shows maximum (50%) teachers put forward that they encourage their students ***a little*** to express their opinions, give ideas and comments. While 40% of them comment that they encourage their students ***very much*** and 10% comment for ***fairly***.

Do you ask questions to your students?

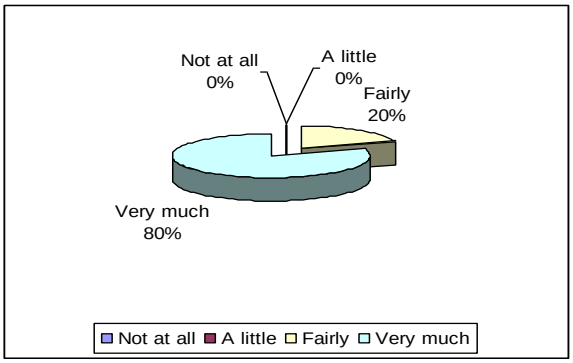

***Chart 3*:** Asking questions to the students

It is interesting to find that most (80%) of the teachers ask questions to their students ***very much*** and the rest 20% ask ***fairly***.

Do your questions are framed such a way that encourages students to reflect on their thoughts and attain their own intellectual identity?

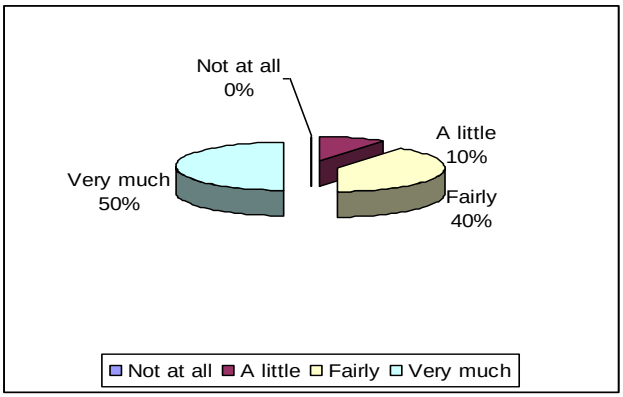

***Chart 4*:** Framing questions to encourage the students

The above statistics shows maximum (50%) number of teachers argue that they frame questions such a way that encourage their students ***very much*** to reflect on their thoughts and attain their own intellectual identity, while 40% comment for ***fairly*** and 10% teachers admit that they encourage ***a little***.

Do you give sufficient wait time for students to respond to questions?

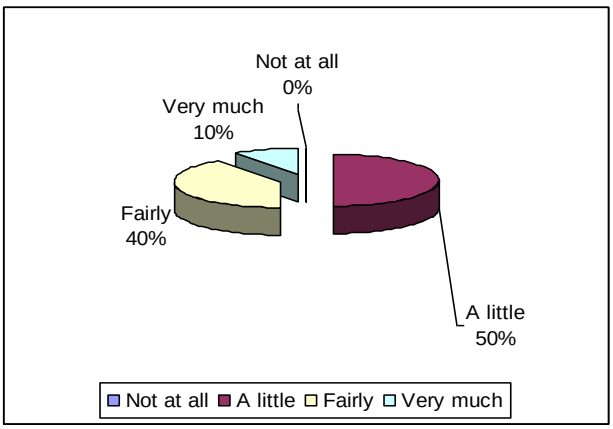

***Chart 5*:** Wait time to the students

We have found that most (50%) of the teachers admit that they provide ***a little*** wait time for students to respond to questions and 40% of them providing ***fairly*** time; while 10% provides ***very much*** wait time to respond to questions.

Do your students engage in dialogue with you?

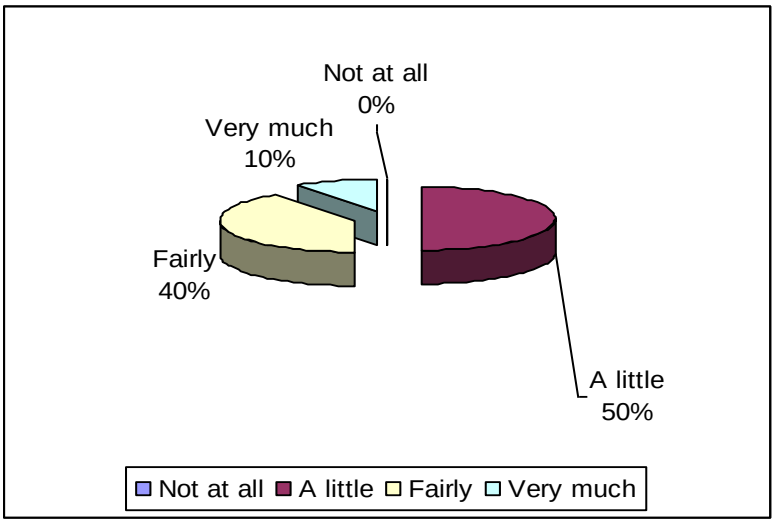

***Chart 6*:** Teachers engage in dialogue with the students

The statistics has found that most (50%) of the teachers engage in ***a little*** dialogue with their students, whereas 40% of them comment that they engage ***fairly*** and 10% ***very much*** in dialogue.

Do you encourage your students to engage in dialogue, both with you and one another?

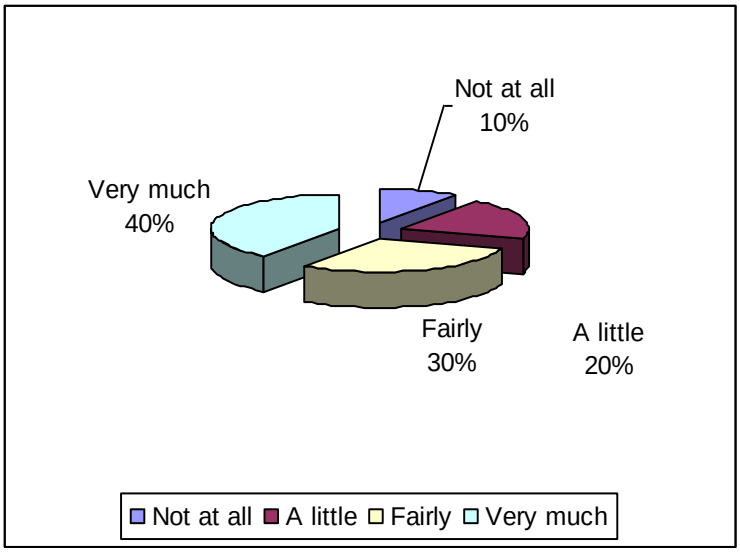

***Chart 7*:** Students engage in dialogue with their peers & teachers

The chart shows that most (40%) of the teachers encourage ***very much*** their students to engage in dialogue with their peers and teachers and 30% encourage ***fairly***; while 20% agreed that they encourage ***a little*** and 10% admit that they do not encourage ***at all***.

Do you discourage dialogue?

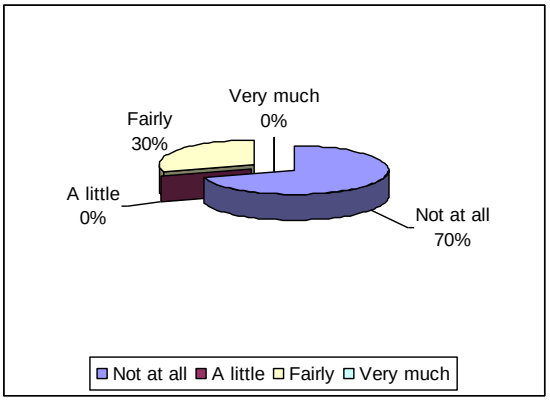

***Chart 8*:** Discourage dialogue

We have found that most (70%) of the teachers comment they do not ***at all*** discourage dialogue of their students; while 30% of them agreed that they ***fairly*** discourage dialogue.

Do you monopolise the talking?

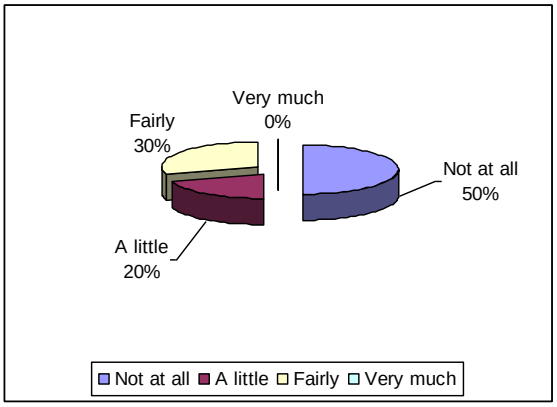

***Chart 9*:** Monopolise talking

The above chart shows that most (50%) of the teachers comment that they do not ***at all*** monopolise talking; while 30% agreed that they ***fairly*** monopolise talking and 20% stated ***a little***.

Do your teaching is a lecture?

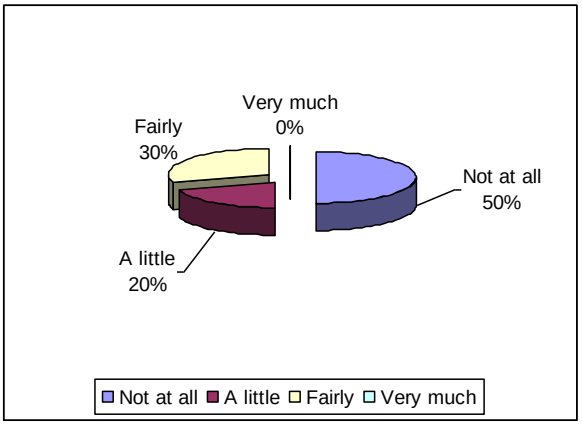

***Chart 10*:** Teaching as lecture

The above figure reflects most (50%) of the teachers comment that their teaching is not lecture ***at all***; while 30% ***fairly*** agreed that they teach as lecture and 20% admit their teaching ***a little*** like lecture.

Do you draw students especially those who are shy or inarticulate?

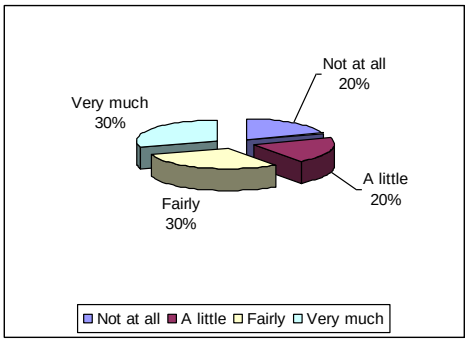

***Chart 11*:** Drawing shy or inarticulate students

It is found that though most (***30% very much & 30% fairly***) of the teachers comment that they especially draw the shy or inarticulate students, 20% of them admit that they draw ***a little*** or do not draw ***at all***.

Do your students discuss in groups or change or reinforce their ideas?

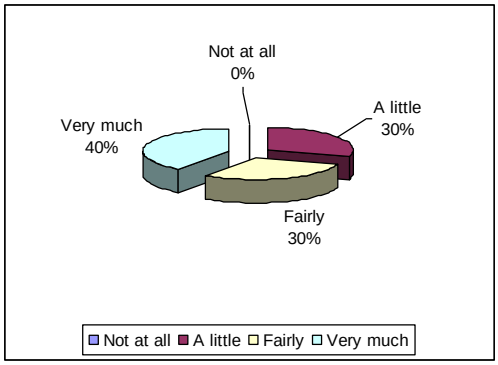

***Chart 12*:** Group discussion among students

The pie charts depicts that 40% teachers agree that their students discuss ***very much*** in groups and 30% comment that they participate ***fairly*** in group discussion; while 30% teachers admit that the students participate ***a little*** in group discussion.

Do the students feel comfortable enough to express their ideas?

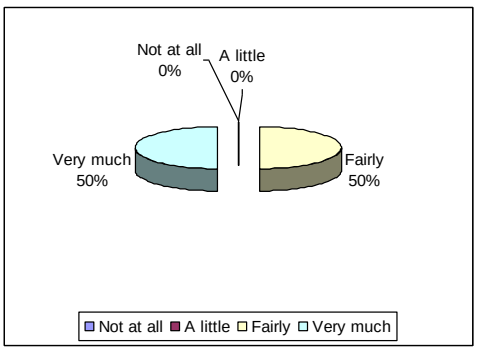

***Chart 13*:** Students feel comfortable to express their ideas

The above figure shows that all ***(very much 50% & fairly 50%)*** teachers admit that the students feel comfortable enough to express of their ideas.

Do your students prompt inquiry by engaging in tasks?

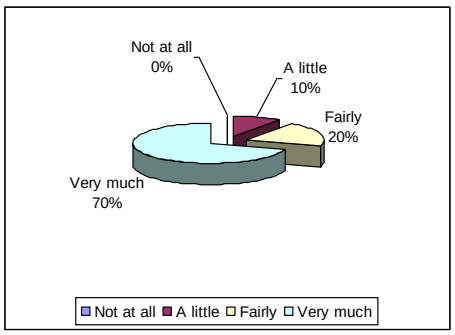

***Chart 14*:** Students promptness in inquiry

From the above pie chart, we have found that most (70%) of the teachers comment that their students prompt enquiry ***very much*** by engaging in tasks and 20% respond on ***fairly***; while 10% agreed that their students prompt enquiry ***a little*** by engaging in tasks.

Do you ask questions that go beyond simple factual response?

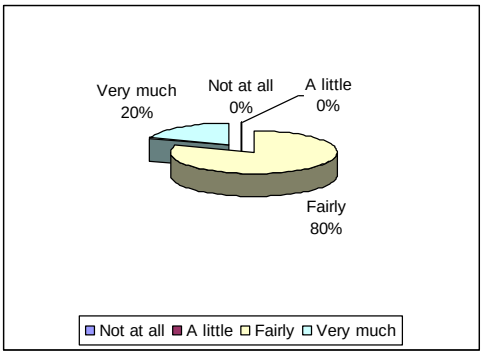

***Chart 15*:** Asking questions beyond factual response

It is found most (80%) of the teachers' comment that they ***fairly*** ask questions that go beyond simple factual response and 20% of them ask ***very much***.

Do you encourage your students to make connections, summarise information, analyse, predict and defend their ideas?

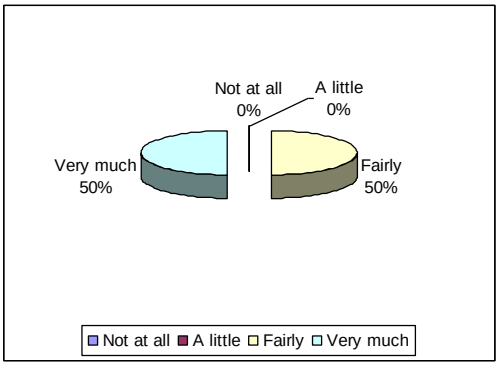

***Chart 16*:** Encourage students to defend their ideas

It is encouraging to find that all (***very much 50% & fairly 50%***) teachers' encourage their students to make connections, summarise information, analyse, predict and defend of their ideas.

Do your students generate and test their proposition by manipulating raw data, primary sources and physical materials?

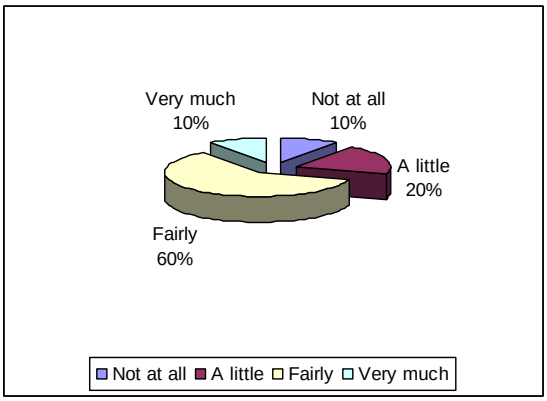

***Chart 17*:** Generate & test proposition by manipulating raw data

The above chart shows 60% teachers, the highest percentage, suggest that their students generate and test their proposition ***fairly*** by manipulating raw data, primary sources and physical materials; 10% comment that students generate ***very much***; on the other hand 20% teacher assess that the students generate and test their proposition ***a little*** while 10% comments that they do not generate ***at all***.

Part II: Teachers' View on Learning, Considering Constructivism

In the following section, tools of constructivism (authentic learning task, meta-cognition and cooperative learning) are presented.

Authentic learning task

What kind of relation should an individual and group work task have with students' real-life?

Options	Individual	Group-work
The task should have close relationship with real-life.	50%	50%
The task may or may not have relationship with real-life.	30%	70%
The task should be from the book and no matter if it has relationship with real-life or not.	70%	30%

Table 1: Relationship of task with student's real-life

Both half (50%) of the teachers answered that task given to students individually or in group should have close relationship with students' real-life. On the other hand, 70% of the teachers responded that task given to students in group may or may not have relationship with real-life. While, 70% teacher commented that for individual work, the task should be from

textbook and its relationship with real-life is not so important; see table 1. It indicates that in individual work method, most of the teachers do not connect the task to students' real-life. While, for group work method, maximum teachers relate the task to students' real-life.

Meta-cognition and cooperative learning

How should a student perform his individual task?

Options	Percentage
He should collaboratively work with fellow students and together complete the task.	20%
He should individually complete his work without any interaction with others.	30%
Student's personal experience is important; he personally regulate the way he performs the task; still he may interact with fellow student to complete his individual task.	50%

Table 2: Regulation of student task

Considering self-regulation of the task, half (50%) of all the teachers answered that, when students complete their work, they themselves have to regulate their work. After regulating their work, students can interact with fellow students to complete the task; see Table 2. So, half of all the teachers perceive that, students themselves should have control on their learning and they can interact socially with others too. This way of students' learning is partly related to meta-cognition.

Part III: Teachers' Perceptions about Individual & Group work

Group work

What is the main reason for your implementing group-work in the classroom?

SL.	Content	Percentage
a.	I heard in seminars that group-work is an effective method for student learning.	20%
b.	Teacher's task becomes easier when student learn from each other.	40%
c.	When student interact with each other they learn effectively.	40%

Table 3: Reasons for using group work in the classroom

The reasons selected most frequently by the teachers for using group work are:

a. Teacher's task becomes easier when student learn from each other. (40%)
b. When student interact with each other they learn effectively. (40%)
    a. It is found that teachers implement group-work in the classrooms based on a constructivist way of learning.

What kind of resources should be provided for students during group work?

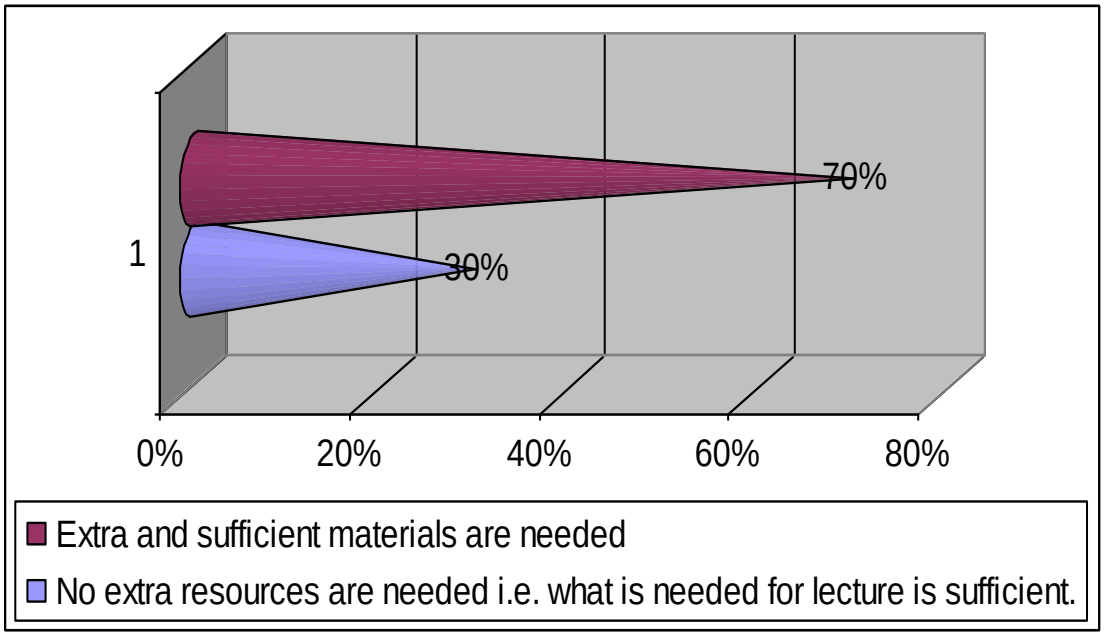

***Chart 18*:** Resources in group-work

The above statistics shows most (70%) of the teachers agreed that extra and sufficient materials are needed during group work. It indicates that teachers have a sound knowledge on constructivist way of learning.

Individual work

If you use individual work method, then specify why do you use individual work method in the classroom?

SL.	Content	Percentage
a.	It is tolled to me in teacher guider to use individual work. So, I use it.	40%
b.	When student perform a task by him/herself, learning occur better.	40%
c.	The job of teacher becomes easier and work is mostly done by student.	20%

Table 4: Reasons for using individual work in the classroom

The reasons selected most frequently by the teachers for using group work are:

- It is tolled to me in teacher guider to use individual work. So, I use it. (40%)
- When student perform a task by him/herself, learning occur better. (40%)

It is found that the teacher guide tolled the teachers to use individual work and a considerable number (40%) of the teachers have misconception of using individual work.

How do you help students in their individual work?

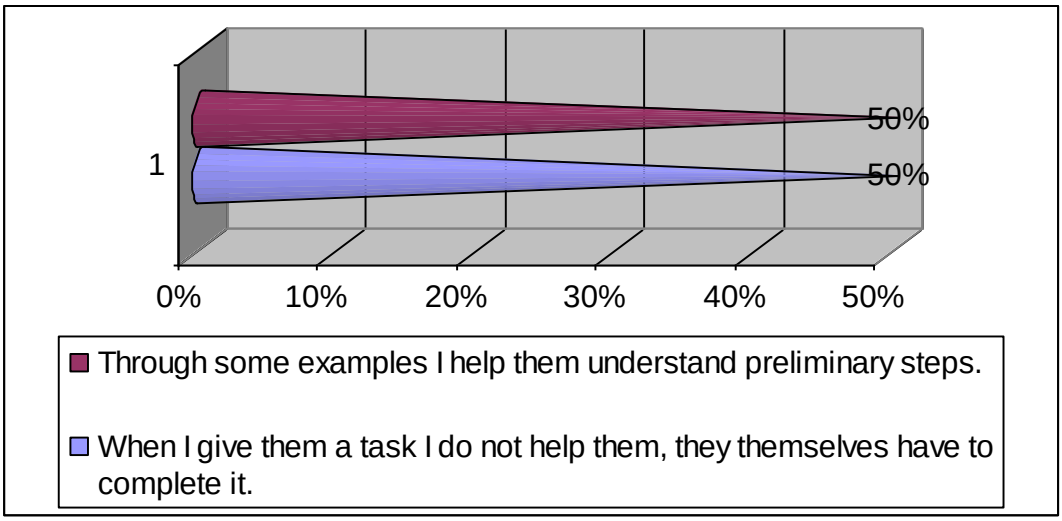

***Chart 19*:** How teachers help students in individual work

The above chart gives a mixed response from the teachers. It is found that 50% of the teachers have misconception about helping students in individual work.

How do teachers apply individual and group working methods?

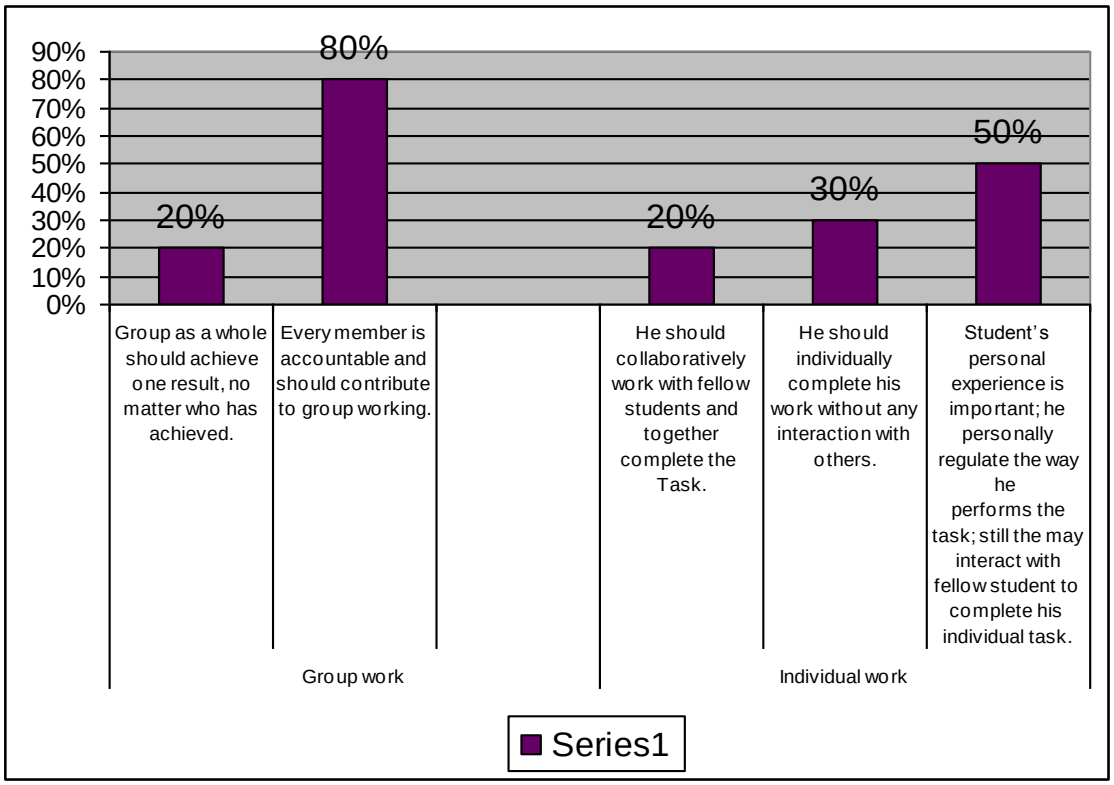

***Chart 20*:** How to implement individual and group work methods

Twenty percent (20%) of the teachers said that, during group work activities, the group as a whole should achieve the result. Conversely, 80% answered that every member should be accountable and contribute to group work activity for achieving the result. Additionally, 50% of all the teachers

answered that, students have to regulate the work when they perform their individual work. Cooperative learning, where every member of the group is accountable for achieving group working result is very essential in constructivism. It is hopeful that most of the teachers believe they implement group working in such a way that every student have to be accounted for achieving group working result. Moreover, half of the teachers thought they implement individual work method in such a way that students regulate their work and take the responsibility of their learning. But it is interesting to find that 20% of the teachers believed that for individual work, students should collaboratively work with fellow students and together complete the task and 30% of them expressed that students should individually complete his work without any interaction with others.

What kind of task teachers give to students to perform in both individual and group working methods?

Options	**Individual**	**Group-work**
Task that is totally new for students.	30%	70%
Task should be selected from textbook and no matter whether it is easy or hard.	50%	50%
Task to which student is somehow familiar with.	60%	40%
The task that is very easy for student to performed.	80%	20%

Table 5: Teachers' task selection for individual and group work methods

The above table shows for individual work most (80%) of the teacher select easy task; on the other hand for new task teachers mostly (70%) choose group-work. Similarly, for familiar topic, most (60%) of the teachers select individual task.

Part IV: Teachers' Perceptions about Question-answer Method

Question-answer method is also checked for the criteria of constructivist method as it has been done for individual and group work methods.

Outcomes of question-answer for students and teachers.

Options	**Percentage**
Students recall what they have learnt.	60%
To assess my students' pre-knowledge about a topic.	30%
To control the classroom.	10%

Table 6: Why is question answer method used?

Most (60%) of the teacher answered that, by implementing question-answer students recall what they have learnt in previous lessons. Additionally, 30% of them replied that, it is used to assess students' prior knowledge. Only 10% of the teachers comment that it is for controlling the class. Question-answer to assess students' prior knowledge about new topic is one of the criteria of constructivist method.

What do you ask in question-answer session?

Options	Percentage
I ask what is easy for students.	10%
I ask what I taught in previous lesson no matter whether it is easy or hard.	60%
I ask what is challenged for students and usually start from known to unknown.	30%

Table 7: What do you ask in question-answer session?

In above table, we find that most (60%) of the teacher ask question what they taught in previous lesson no matter whether it is easy or hard; while 30% of them ask what is challenged for students and usually start from known to unknown only 10% ask what is easy for the students. Asking questions on students' previous lesson is one of the criteria of constructivist method.

What is the main advantage of question-answer for student?

Options	Percentage
Increase confidentiality.	30%
Students recall what they have learnt.	30%
They actively participate in learning process.	40%

Table 8: What do you ask in question-answer session?

We find that most (40%) of the teacher answered that through question-answer method students actively participate in learning process. Additionally, 30% of them comment that question-answer tends students to recall what they have learnt and 30% told to increase confidentiality.

Findings & Discussion

Teachers' Perception on Constructivism

- The present study finds that most of the teachers respect the ideas and opinions of their students very much.
- Most of the teachers admit that they encourage their students a little to express their opinions, give ideas and comments.
- Majority of the teachers ask questions to their students.
- The study found that maximum teachers frame questions such a way that encourage their students ***very much*** to reflect on their thoughts and attain their own intellectual identity.
- The statistics finds that most of the teachers provide wait time for students to respond to questions.
- The statistics shows that most of the teachers engage in ***a little*** dialogue with their students.
- The study shows that most of the teachers encourage their students to engage in dialogue with their peers and with them; while a

considerable number of teachers agreed that they encourage ***a little*** and some of them do not encourage ***at all***.

- The study reveals that though most of the teachers do not monopolize their talking; a considerable number of teachers agreed that they ***fairly*** monopolize talking and some stated ***a little***.
- The study reflects that most of the teachers' teaching is not lecture; while a substantial number of teachers agreed that they teach as lecture.
- The study shows that majority of the teachers draw the shy or inarticulate students.
- This study reflects that most of the students discuss in groups ***very much***; however, a substantial number of students participate ***a little*** in group discussion.
- It reveals that if the students have been given the chance to present what they think and hear others ideas; they can build a personal knowledge based on what they understand.
- According to most of the teachers, the students feel comfortable enough to express their ideas.
- According to most of the teachers, the study found that students prompt enquiry ***very much*** by engaging in tasks.
- It is encouraging to find that most of the teachers' encourage their students to make connections, summarise information, analyse, predict and defend of their ideas.
- Most of the teachers suggest that their students can generate and test their proposition by manipulating raw data, primary sources and physical materials.

Teachers' Perception on Constructivist Learning

- Most of the teachers think, what students learn in school is important for their real-life. They understand that, learning English in school is what students have to implement in their life. It indicates that, when students cannot learn English, it is because they do not relate the topics of English to their real-life situation.
- The teachers involve students actively in learning process. When students actively engage in their learning they learn better and constructively. It is one of the purposes of MoE (2012) to promote active learning.
- Nearly all of the teachers believe that knowledge is constructed in group and individual working while they give more preference to group working compared to individual work. Learning is constructivist if there is more opportunity for students to learn (Baviskar et.al, 2009).

- Though most of the teachers believe to implement constructivist way of learning in their teaching; they do not implement as much as they perceive. The reason behind the difference between their view and practices might be lake of enough resources in their schools. For example, teachers and students use only blackboard, chalk, book and notebook in their classes. Conversely, constructivist-learning environment need enough resources that are needed for practical work to enhance students' learning (Baviskar et.al, 2009).

Teachers' Perception on Individual and Group-work Methods

- It is very important for student to relate new knowledge with prior-knowledge when she/he learns English language. English is such a subject that, it cannot be learnt when there is no connection between prior and new knowledge. Teachers have to equally consider this constructivist criterion for both individual and group-work methods. However, findings from questionnaire indicates that most of the teachers implement individual work method more in the field of making connection between prior and new knowledge as compare to group work method.
- Assessing students' prior knowledge, most of the teachers assess students' prior knowledge in both individual and group working methods. This idea is supported by Black et.al, (2003) who write that formative assessment has to be done in teaching.
- Findings from questionnaires show that, before teachers start new lesson or giving new topic to students, they first understand students' prior knowledge about new topic. However, very few teachers implemented the above criterion in their teaching practices found in the present study.
- Findings indicate that, most of the teachers think by implementing group-work method students will be more able to express what they learn as compared to applying individual work method.
- Teachers tend to perceive individual work constructivist than group work to students in the fields of connecting students' prior knowledge with their new knowledge, and think that, "prior knowledge will be altered in the context of new knowledge". Conversely, teachers do not concentrate more on above two criteria for group work. In case of third criterion i.e. reflection of students on their learning, teachers think that, "students can learn more in group work as compared to individual work". Therefore, teachers are more constructivists for group working in this case as compared to individual work method.
- To reflect, there is a contradiction between teachers' views and theory of constructivism. According to teachers' views, they consider most of the constructivist method's criteria for individual work method, but

learning occurs better in group-work method. In Bangladeshi context, this conflict might be because of not having enough time and resources available with Bangladeshi students to perform task individually as homework. The area where the study has been conducted; majority of the students work with their parents in order to support their family besides attending four hours school. Therefore, they might not find enough time to perform their individual work task constructively.

- Similarly, constructivist individual work activity needs enough resources like library or any other source of information. These are not available with a majority of Bangladeshi students and this might be another reason why students cannot learn individual work activity.

Teachers' Perception on Question-answer

- Similar to individual and group work methods, question-answer can also be used by teachers as a constructivist method for learning. Opposite to individual and group work methods, most of the teachers use question-answer as a constructivist method. Majority of the teachers agreed that, what they ask in question-answer is related to the students' real-life which is one of the criteria of constructivism, but they do not sufficiently wait for students' answer. What teachers say and what they apply in real teaching are different. Teachers claim that they ask those questions which are challenging and related to prior knowledge of the students.
- However, some of the constructivist method criteria are considered and implemented by the teachers. However, it cannot be said that teachers use these methods as constructivist method.

Overall, findings show that there is a big difference between what teachers perceive about constructivist learning and their teaching practices. It implies that, learning environment in Bangladeshi schools is still traditional. According to Schunk, (2012), traditional classroom is the one in which focus is on basic skills, teacher find correct answer for question and, assessment is separated from teaching and generally done by test. In Bangladesh, teachers have the authority to assess his/her students by giving exam but the exams given by teachers are not standard. Teacher can give exam without considering goal required for a specific level of education. For example, students who are passing the PSC (Primary School Certificate) have meager a knowledge of English. These are common factors which do not allow teachers implement constructivist way of teaching which leads to constructivist learning in schools. Still, some teachers are better in perception and implement constructivist way of learning in their teaching practices where possible.

Recommendations for the Implications of Constructivism

- To have constructivist learning in Bangladeshi schools; teachers should have conceptual knowledge of constructivist way of learning.
- Learning environment has to be changed from traditional to constructivist. Nowadays, nearly all school teachers can have access to Teacher Training College (TTC) where they can get training of constructivist learning.
- Constructivist learning can be achieved when students take the responsibility of their learning and they are given more opportunity to actively involve in their learning process through interaction with other students in the class.
- Teachers should be equipped with sufficient learning materials.
- To conduct teaching and learning effectively and fruitfully, textbooks should complement with audio-visual materials.

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