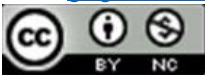


THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH AS THE MOST
CRUCIAL PRINCIPLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
CURRICULUM FOR STUDYING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC
PURPOSES IN A MODERN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

The article explores the specifics of the constructivist approach in education and discusses the objectives of learning a foreign language. Constructivism is an educational theory and approach to learning that suggests learners actively construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world through their experiences, interactions, and reflections. The key principles of constructivism emphasize the learner's role in the learning process and the importance of meaningful, rich experiences. The constructivist approach emphasizes active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. In the context of developing a curriculum for studying English for specific purposes (ESP) in a modern university, the constructivist approach would involve: *contextualized learning*; designing the curriculum based on the specific needs and contexts of the learners. For English for specific purposes, this could mean tailoring the content to the professional or academic fields relevant to the students, such as business, science, or technology; *interactive learning activities*; integrating activities that encourage students to actively engage with the material. This could include group discussions, case studies, real-world

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projects, and simulations relevant to their specific field; *authentic materials*: using authentic materials like industry reports, academic journals, or workplace documents to expose students to the language they will encounter in their future professions; *student-centered learning*: shifting the focus from the teacher as the sole source of knowledge to students taking an active role in their own learning. This might involve projects, research, and presentations related to their specific field; *assessment for learning*: implementing assessments that measure not only language proficiency but also the application of language skills in real-world situations. This could involve practical tasks, presentations, or portfolios demonstrating their understanding in a professional context. The application of the constructivist approach in ESP aims to make the learning experience more meaningful and relevant to students' future endeavors, fostering a deeper understanding of the language within the specific context in which they will use it.

Key words: *constructivism, constructivist approach, communicative competencies, professional communication, student-centered learning, authentic material, critical thinking*

РЕЗЮМЕ

КОНСТРУКТИВИСТСКИЙ ПОДХОД КАК САМЫЙ ВАЖНЫЙ ПРИНЦИП ПРИ РАЗРАБОТКЕ ПРОГРАММЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ЦЕЛЕЙ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

В статье раскрыта специфика конструктивистского подхода в обучении, рассматриваются цели изучения иностранного языка. Конструктивизм как образовательная теория и подход к обучению английскому языку для специальных целей предполагает активное участие студентов при формировании знаний и познания мира посредством собственного опыта, общения и мышления. Ключевые принципы конструктивизма подчеркивают роль учащегося в процессе обучения и важность значимого, богатого опыта. Конструктивистский подход делает упор на активное обучение, критическое мышление и решение проблем. В контексте разработки учебной программы

изучения английского языка для специальных целей (ESP) в современном университете конструктивистский подход предполагает: *контекстуальное обучение*: разработка учебной программы с учетом конкретных потребностей учащихся. В контексте курса английского языка для специальных целей это означает адаптировать учебный контент к профессиональным или академическим целям студентов, таким как бизнес, наука или технология; *интерактивная учебная деятельность*: интерактивные учебные мероприятия, поощряющие активное участие учащихся в процессе обучения: групповые дискуссии, тематические исследования, реальные ситуации, связанные с конкретной областью деятельности; *аутентичные материалы*: использование аутентичных материалов, таких как отраслевые отчеты, научные журналы или рабочие документы, с целью ознакомить студентов с языком, с которым они столкнутся в своей будущей профессии; *обучение, ориентированное на учащихся*: смещение акцента с учителя как единственного источника знаний на учащихся, принимающих активную роль в собственном обучении. Это может включать проекты, исследования и презентации, относящиеся к конкретной деятельности студентов. Применение конструктивистского подхода в ESP направлено на то, чтобы сделать опыт обучения более значимым и актуальным для будущих усилий учащихся, способствуя более глубокому пониманию языка в конкретном контексте, в котором они будут его использовать.

Ключевые слова: *конструктивизм, конструктивистский подход, коммуникативные компетенции, профессиональное общение, студенто-ориентированное обучение, аутентичный материал, критическое мышление*

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

ԿԱՌՈՒՑՈՂԱԿԱՆ ՄՈՏԵՑՈՒՄԸ՝ ՈՐՊԵՄ ԿԱՐԵՎՈՐԱԳՈՒՅՆ ՄԿԶԲՈՒՆՔ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿԱԿԻՑ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆՈՒՄ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆԻ ՀԱՏՈՒԿ ՆՊԱՏԱԿՆԵՐՈՎ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ԾՐԱԳԻՐ ՄՇԱԿՄԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՐ

Հոդվածում բացահայտվում են դասավանդման կառուցողական մոտեցման առանձնահատկությունները և ուսումնասիրվում են

օտար լեզու սովորելու նպատակները: Կոնստրուկտիվիզմը որպես կրթական տեսություն և անգլերենի հատուկ նպատակներով ուսուցման մոտեցում ներառում է ուսանողների ակտիվ մասնակցությունը գիտելիքների ձևավորմանը և աշխարհի ըմբռնմանը սեփական փորձի, հաղորդակցության և մտածողության միջոցով: Կոնստրուկտիվիզմի հիմնական սկզբունքները ընդգծում են սովորողի դերը ուսուցման գործընթացում և իմաստալից հարուստ փորձի կարևորությունը: Կառուցողական մոտեցումը շեշտը դնում է ակտիվ ուսուցման, քննադատական մտածողության և խնդիրների լուծման վրա: Ժամանակակից համալսարանում անգլերենը հատուկ նպատակներով (ESP) ուսուցման ծրագրի մշակման համատեքստում կառուցողական մոտեցումը ներառում է՝ *համատեքստային ուսուցում*՝ ուսումնական պլանի ձևավորում՝ հիմնվելով սովորողների հատուկ կարիքների և համատեքստերի վրա: Հատուկ նպատակներով անգլերենի (ESP) ուսուցման համատեքստում սա նշանակում է ուսուցման բովանդակության համապատասխանեցում ուսանողների մասնագիտական կամ ակադեմիական ոլորտներին, ինչպիսիք են բիզնեսը, գիտությունը կամ տեխնոլոգիան; *խնդրակալի ուսումնական գործունեություն*, որը խրախուսում է ուսանողների ակտիվ ներգրավվածությունը ուսումնական գործընթացին՝ խմբային քննարկումներ, դեպքերի ուսումնասիրություններ, կոնկրետ ոլորտին վերաբերող իրական իրավիճակներ; *վավերական նյութերի օգտագործում*՝ ինչպիսիք են ոլորտի հաշվետվությունները, ակադեմիական ամսագրերը կամ աշխատավայրի փաստաթղթերը՝ նպատակ հետապնդելով ուսանողներին ծանոթացնել այն լեզվին, որին նրանք կհանդիպեն իրենց ապագա մասնագիտության մեջ; *ուսանողակենտրոն ուսուցում*՝ ուսուցչից, որպես գիտելիքի միակ աղբյուր, ուշադրության տեղափոխում դեպի ուսուցման մեջ ակտիվ դեր ստանձնող ուսանող՝ հիմնվելով կոնկրետ ոլորտի հետ կապված նախագծերի, հետազոտությունների և ներկայացումների վրա; *գնահատում*, որը նեռարում է ոչ միայն լեզվի իմացությունը, այլև լեզվական հմտությունների կիրառումը իրական իրավիճակներում, հիմնվելով գործնական առաջադրանքների, շնորհանդեսների կամ պրոտֆոլիոների վրա, որոնք արտացոլում են իրենց մասնագիտական գիտելիքները: Կառուցողական մոտեցման

կիրառումը ESP-ում նպատակ ունի ուսուցման փորձն ավելի բովանդակալից և համապատասխան դարձնել ուսանողների ապագա ջանքերին՝ խթանելով լեզվի ավելի խորը ըմբռնումը կոնկրետ համատեքստում, որտեղ նրանք այն կօգտագործեն:

Բանալի բառեր *կոնստրուկտիվիզմ, կառուցողական մոտեցում, հաղորդակցական կարողություններ, մասնագիտական հաղորդակցություն, ուսանողակենտրոն ուսուցում, վավերական նյութ, քննադատական մտածողություն*

Modern education is experiencing substantial transformations due to its innovative character. The evolving educational paradigm, emphasizing that "knowledge is formed in the minds of students" (Zhilin, 2011), takes precedence as it fosters the growth of both professional and communicative competencies. The pervasive adoption of the Internet, media, and mobile communication by students has become so widespread that educators find themselves obligated to explore pedagogical and methodological strategies for incorporating these technologies into the academic milieu.

Designing a course for teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in a contemporary university demands meticulous planning and thoughtful consideration of students' requirements. Several principles need to be considered when developing such a course. From our perspective, these principles can be organized in the following sequence:

1. The examination of the audience should commence by exploring the distinct features of the target group, namely, students who will be acquiring English for particular professional or academic objectives. This will assist in assessing the students' language proficiency, learning

preferences, specialized vocabulary, and the forms of communication essential for their prospective professional engagements.

2. The second stage involves defining the goals of the course. At this point, clear and specific course objectives are formulated. The language skills and areas of specialization that will be the main priorities are identified.

3. The third stage concentrates on authentic professional scenarios, devising practical situations and assignments that students are likely to confront in their future careers. Utilizing materials and tasks pertinent to their specialized field can aid students in grasping the practical application of language skills.

4. The fourth stage underscores the enhancement of students' communicative skills, encompassing speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Instruction should focus on actively using the language, prioritizing practical application over the mere memorization of grammar rules.

5. The fifth stage incorporates the utilization of genuine materials, including articles, videos, audio recordings, and presentations linked to students' professional domains. This aids in familiarizing them with the authentic language they will employ in their future careers.

6. The sixth stage entails organizing the curriculum. The entire course is segmented into coherent modules, with each lesson building upon the preceding one, enabling students to consolidate the knowledge they have acquired.

Implementing these principles in the development of the educational course should help students create an effective and practical program for learning English for specific purposes, fully aligned with their needs and future professional tasks. Thus, the implementation of these principles will introduce a competent approach to the process of learning English, which, as we see it, is crucial in the development of language courses.

The need to reconsider strategies in creating educational materials for higher education is substantiated by the trends of internationalization in higher education and the heightened demands for the professionalism of academic practitioners. The broadening scope of scientific endeavors underscores the necessity for unimpeded collaboration among scholars globally, underscoring the importance of improving proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, as the primary language of international communication.

Constructivism as an approach in teaching a foreign language for specific purposes.

Currently, both in national and international academia, there is a dynamic evolution of methods and instructional strategies rooted in constructivist perspectives on education (Fosnot, 1996). Constructivism, within pedagogical philosophy, centers around the core concept that providing pre-packaged knowledge to learners is ineffective. Instead, the focus is on establishing educational conditions that facilitate the independent construction of an individual's worldview through active

engagement. According to the constructivist theory, everyone shapes their personal understanding of the world, and each person is distinct in their perceptions, beliefs, and overall worldview.

Constructivism is associated with influential educational theorists, including Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey. While there are variations in how constructivism is applied in different educational contexts, the core idea remains centered on the active, participatory role of learners in the construction of their own understanding. It's crucial to emphasize that educators aren't simply transmitting knowledge to students; rather, students actively construct it within their own minds. They engage in discovering and transforming information, comparing new information to existing knowledge, and revising outdated rules. The constructivist approach to learning views the learner as an active participant in the knowledge acquisition process. Over the past three decades, constructivism has developed into a distinctive teaching concept, emphasizing the holistic development of the creative aspect in the learner. (Wang, 2014).

Examining the works of M. Driscoll (2000), D. Jonassen (1994), and E. Von Glasersfeld (1995) dedicated to the application of constructivism in foreign language education has facilitated a clear definition of what constitutes a constructivist approach to language learning. We align with the definition put forth by O. Tarnapolsky (Tarnapolsky, 2012, 2016), who interprets this approach as the specific development of a professionally oriented foreign language course in a non-language university. This approach provides students with opportunities to spontaneously acquire

skills and abilities in foreign language professional communication through instructional activities that simulate professional practice, with the latter being carried out using the language being studied.

The constructivist approach is considered one of the most effective in modern teaching methodology for a foreign language for professional purposes for several reasons:

- Students subconsciously acquire the language through communication in simulated professional situations.

- Such communication not only allows students to unconsciously develop English language skills for professional purposes but also enables them to gain professional knowledge and skills through this type of communication (Polenova & Postukyan, 2014).

- It facilitates the integration of the study of English for professional purposes into other university courses with a professional focus.

- This integration enhances students' motivation to learn a foreign language for professional purposes because they recognize and realistically evaluate the utility of language knowledge for professional development and future careers (Polenova & Pshugusova, 2015).

- The constructivist teaching and learning model is based on the principle of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981), which, during professional communication, even in simulated situations, transforms into a creative process because professional interaction is always associated with problem-solving.

- The principles of problem-based learning and learner autonomy keep students constantly engaged in the process of seeking professionally relevant information, crucial for accomplishing their creative professional learning tasks. Since such research is conducted using professional sources in English, it becomes extremely important for mastering the language of professional communication.

An important component of the learning process is active cognitive activity – students will continually update their own mental models to reflect new information and, consequently, construct their interpretation of reality. This allows them to demonstrate their unique abilities and chart their own educational path. To stimulate students, it is necessary to create conditions for learning where they directly interact with the study material. Only direct contact will allow them to extract meaning from the provided information. This provides a basis to assert that constructivist learning should take place in a corresponding environment that allows for active learning. The works of M. Tam (Tam, 2000) and P. Honebein (Honebein, 1996) present the key characteristics of constructivist learning environments that should be considered when implementing constructivist teaching strategies:

- Relationships between teachers and students are built on principles of collaboration and the possibility of delegating authority.
- The role of the teacher is reduced to that of a coordinator and mentor.
- Instruction is conducted in real contexts using authentic materials.

- Student-centered learning predominates.
- Various formats of presenting information are employed, including video, audio, text, and so forth.
- Teaching is customized to meet students' needs, providing alternative options and formats to enhance flexibility and optimize learning outcomes.

According to researchers, integrating learning into realistic and meaningful professional contexts is considered one of the main goals of constructivism. Therefore, authentic learning emerges as a key concept in constructivist theory because authentic teaching methods help achieve the main objective of connecting new knowledge with existing knowledge, encouraging students to acquire an authentic educational experience. According to the Language Education Implementation Program, which encompasses language instruction in bachelor's and master's courses, authentic General English courses, professionally oriented courses for economists, lawyers, etc., video materials, as well as websites, are actively incorporated with a reliance on the needs of the students.

In the constructivist approach, educational content relies on authentic material with thematic relevance to students, suitable for application in a professionally-oriented context. The utilization of this content takes different forms, including both group and individual activities, fostering the construction of fresh, independent knowledge.

A fundamental principle of constructivism asserts that the relationships between teachers and students are rooted in collaborative principles. In this

framework, the teacher's role goes beyond being a simple conveyor of pre-determined knowledge; instead, they serve as coordinators and mentors in joint educational ventures. Their primary duty involves creating scenarios that encourage cognitive engagement. Simultaneously, the learner's role undergoes a qualitative shift as they pursue their professional interests through the learning of a foreign language.

Educators adhering to the constructivist approach are held to particular standards, which encompass their capacity to coordinate project-based initiatives, analyze scenarios through case studies, engage in professionally-oriented debates and discussions, and establish an environment conducive to expressing diverse perspectives on a given issue. The objective is to accomplish a distinct communicative task.

Implementing the Constructivist Approach to Teaching Specialized Foreign Languages in Higher Education.

Practical Principles:

Systematicity of professionally relevant information A textbook or course in ESP shouldn't just be a mix of professional topics, random materials, and exercises. Instead, it should be a thorough and informative summary in English, presenting the fundamental and organized aspects of the student's future profession or specialty, covering key aspects of the future specialist's professional activities. The lack of a well-organized, comprehensive grasp of professional communication in a student's awareness impedes the efficient development of foreign language professional communication skills. This contributes to the prolonged and

challenging process of acquiring adept professional communication skills, particularly in ESP courses. This difficulty could be mitigated if these skills were initially cultivated through a systematic understanding of professional knowledge.

Authentic content Utilizing real materials thematically linked to students' professional fields to ensure the practical applicability of the language being studied. The instructional approach should serve as a platform for English communication among students within a targeted professional context. This communication should be facilitated through educational activities that accurately replicate real-world professional practices and authentic communication among future specialists. In this context, professional communication aims to reflect scenarios where prospective specialists are likely to exchange information in English to address professional tasks. Educational materials, especially speech samples and models, should be authentic. The authenticity of materials is considered a crucial prerequisite for the successful teaching of ESP because, otherwise, students miss the opportunity to learn from authentic examples in a professionally oriented context. Educational materials are deemed authentic when they are created by native speakers for native speakers and were not originally intended for foreign language learning purposes. Therefore, professionally-oriented materials for an ESP course can be considered authentic if they were prepared by native speakers or experts in the field for other native speakers, as well as professionals in that field.

Integration of all types of speech activities into the educational process

The four primary types of speech activities are naturally integrated into the professional setting. For instance, drafting a contract (writing) may require reviewing additional documentation (reading), consulting with business partners during negotiations, phone conversations (speaking and listening), and exchanging email correspondence (writing).

Collaboration Between Teachers and Students Building relationships based on collaboration, where the teacher acts as a mentor, encouraging learning through joint educational activities.

Project-based Activities Organizing learning in the form of projects, allowing students to apply language skills in real scenarios relevant to their future professional activities.

Discussions and Debates Conducting discussions and debates on professionally-oriented topics to develop language skills and stimulate critical thinking.

Individualized Approach Considering individual needs of students and providing opportunities for independent research and development of language competencies.

Assessment Based on Production Activities Assessing students' language proficiency based on their ability to apply language skills in professional situations.

Technological Support Using modern technologies, such as interactive online resources and communication platforms, to enrich the learning process. Informational competence in English for students encompasses the

abilities and skills of future specialists to locate and effectively utilize necessary professional information across diverse English-language information channels, facilitated by modern information technologies. This competence is intricately linked not solely to students acquiring the target language within an ESP course but also to the reality that a substantial amount of global professional information, particularly on the World Wide Web, is presented in English (Graddol, 2006)[†]. Consequently, only professionals equipped with informational competence in the English language can tap into the wealth of the most recent and crucial advancements in their respective professional domains.

Development of Communicative Skills Emphasizing the development of effective communication skills in a professional environment, including written and oral communication.

Real-life Language Use Scenarios Creating situations that simulate real-life language use scenarios in students' professional activities.

Formation of Professional Literacy Striving to develop language skills necessary for successful functioning in a specific professional field.

Designing a curriculum for studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in a modern university with a constructivist approach can be highly

[†] Graddol, D. (2006). English Next. Why Global English May Mean the End of English as a Foreign Language. British Council.

beneficial. Here's how the constructivist approach can be a crucial principle in the development of an ESP curriculum:

1. Relevance and Authenticity:

Constructivist Principle: Constructivism emphasizes the importance of connecting new knowledge to existing understanding and real-world experiences.

ESP Application: In an ESP curriculum, the constructivist approach can ensure that content is relevant and authentic to the specific needs and contexts of the learners. English language skills are taught in the context of the students' future professional or academic pursuits.

2. Active Learning and Engagement:

Constructivist Principle: Learners actively construct their knowledge through hands-on experiences, inquiry, and problem-solving.

ESP Application: Incorporating active learning strategies in the ESP curriculum, such as case studies, simulations, and project-based assignments, allows students to engage with language in meaningful ways related to their specific fields of study or professions.

3. Collaborative Learning:

Constructivist Principle: Collaboration is essential in constructivist classrooms to promote diverse perspectives and shared understanding.

ESP Application: ESP often involves communication within specific professional or academic communities. Collaborative activities in the curriculum, such as group projects or discussions, can mirror the

communication patterns students will encounter in their future workplaces or academic settings.

4. Individualized Learning Paths:

Constructivist Principle: Recognizing and accommodating diverse learning styles and individual differences is a key constructivist principle.

ESP Application: ESP students in a modern university are likely to have varied linguistic backgrounds and career goals. A constructivist ESP curriculum can allow for some degree of individualization, enabling students to focus on language skills that are most relevant to their specific needs and interests.

5. Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:

Constructivist Principle: Constructivism emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to solve real-world problems.

ESP Application: An ESP curriculum designed with a constructivist approach can incorporate activities that require students to analyze language use in their specific fields, solve language-related challenges, and think critically about effective communication within their professional or academic domains.

6. Assessment for Understanding:

Constructivist Principle: Assessment in a constructivist approach focuses on understanding and application rather than memorization.

ESP Application: Assessment methods in the ESP curriculum can include authentic tasks, presentations, and projects that demonstrate the practical application of language skills in the students' chosen fields.

In summary, the constructivist approach can be a crucial guiding principle in developing an ESP curriculum in a modern university. By promoting relevance, active engagement, collaboration, individualization, critical thinking, and authentic assessment, this approach can better prepare students for effective communication in their specific professional or academic contexts.

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