Students' Perspectives towards the Implementation of Constructivism at the College of Basic Education- Salahaddin University

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Abstract

The current study starts with a description of constructivism and its importance in foreign language teaching. Further, it explicates the principles of constructivism. It aims to investigate Kurdish students' perspectives as regards the implementation of constructivist principles in teaching EFL in Kurdish university classes after the theory has been practically put into practice in these classes. To this end, the researchers present an overview of the experiment and explain its pedagogical design.

To obtain the required data, the researchers developed a questionnaire for their students after the experiment eliciting their perspectives regarding constructivism. The results revealed that Kurdish EFL students have a positive perspective towards the implementation of constructivism.

Key Words: constructivism, perspectives, Salahaddin university

1. Introduction

It is of great importance to help university students to develop their potential as individuals and enable them to make informed and responsible decisions for living and working in the 21st century. The society today needs young individuals who are flexible, creative, and able to solve problems, make decisions, think critically, communicate ideas effectively and work efficiently

within teams and groups. "To know knowledge" is no longer enough to be successful in the increasingly complex, fluid, and rapidly evolving world in the 21st C. Hence, it has become an imperative to optimise life-long learning and provide young people with opportunities to develop personal abilities and effective thinking skills. Hence, education must concern the ability to discern useful new knowledge from a ceaseless flow of contemporary information. The goals of education should be extended to impart this ability, and constructivist pedagogy may propose a framework for doing this.

Kaufman (2004) asserts that constructivism has come into prominence in recent years as "a dominant paradigm in education" and has resulted in a major intellectual impact on the development of pedagogy. Meanwhile, Mahmud (2013) affirms that constructivism made the first breakthrough against conventional teaching and put forth the idea of learner-oriented teaching and then reflective thoughts. It came up with a wider vision of the role of the teacher and clearer strategies for developing teaching and learning. In the college classroom, instructors and students' can shape the pedagogical landscape by framing their understanding of the teaching learning process in accordance with constructivism.

Kurdish universities have started to recognize the need to honour new methods of teaching and abide by its rules rather than sticking to the traditional model of teaching in which teachers are the sole source of knowledge. The implementation of constructivist ideals into the context of Kurdish universities may contribute in changing the already formed habits and pave the way for young people to derive benefit from classes which prepares them for lifelong learning.

Suffice it to say that the didactics the researchers were acquainted with lately intrigued them and caused them to seek remedies for our current educational dilemma. The idea of this research was basically motivated by the idea of creating a new vision of teaching and learning, and implementing a new theory in the Kurdish context.

This experiment seemed to us like an invitation for both teachers and learners to travel together to an undiscovered, fascinating place where possibilities are limitless. It invited learners to embark on a journey which required the researchers to be best acquainted with the theory's principles and underpinnings taking into consideration the critical aspects and challenges for the journey to be rewarding for both teachers and the learners. As an aside, perhaps one of the most overwhelming tasks was the researchers' successful

and accurate integration of theory into their practical instructional methodology.

2. Constructivism

Walker and Lambert (1995) define constructivism as a theory of learning and also a theory of knowing. They conceive constructivism as an epistemological concept that originates from a variety of fields, including philosophy, psychology, and science. Constructivism is "a pattern of learning in terms of active participation and process evolvement" (Lin, 2003).

According to Gül (2016) constructivism is portrayed as a "lens" that lets people see and interpret the world in many various ways based on their own experiences.

Kaufman (2004) argues that constructivism has emerged as "a dominant paradigm in education having a major intellectual impact on the development of pedagogy" that played a major role in systemic changes in education, principally in the field of instructional designs. Therefore, pedagogy witnessed a shift away from traditional teacher-centered models toward knowledge-centered and learner-centered approaches that centre on cognitive and social processes in learning.

Heard (2007) asserts that constructivism is a viable theory that appears to have a natural fit and that empowers further research towards effective implementation within different disciplines in classrooms. Building on the principles of constructivism, teachers may create supportive learning environments designed to cater students with more in-depth, individualized approaches to learning.

From the above-mentioned definitions one can detect the common threads of constructivism that gathers all these definitions is the idea that constructivism as a learning theory emphasizes two core points: first, students actively control their own knowledge and learning by integrating their own experience to the new situations they encounter, rather than being fed by teachers. Second, it prepares students to be capable in socially expected skills.

3. The Experiment

This section is dedicated to describe the researcher's experiment (the implementation of the principles of constructivism in teaching EFL) and which

constitutes the main tool of the first researcher's ongoing PhD study. It lasted for a whole academic year (20 weeks) in the academic year 2016-2017.

This study was carried out at the College of Basic Education/English Department at Salahaddin University-Erbil. The third year students were the population of the study (group A and B). Their age approximately ranged from 20 to 24 years old. Group A was chosen randomly to be the subjects of the experiment. Then, this group was respectively divided into two groups of participants, control and experimental each containing 21 students. Since cooperative learning is a key principle of constructivism, the researchers sub-divided the experimental group into seven smaller groups of 3 students each. The control group received traditional teaching while the experimental group was taught in compliance with constructivism.

The main aim of the current study is to investigate Kurdish EFL students' perspectives towards constructivism after being exposed to constructivist teaching for a whole academic year.

3.1 The Pedagogical Design of the Experiment

Prior to presenting the practical framework of the experiment, the researchers will explicate a little more some of their pedagogical beliefs that are the foundations of this study.

Dewey exposed the importance of learning by and through experience. Further, he regarded it as a momentous stepping stone to the democratization of learning. Accordingly, projects and activities are situated in the heart of the rich and open pedagogical scenario of constructivist instruction. This stems from the conviction that meaningful learning necessitates engaging in interactive tasks and creating a supportive stress-free environment where students can discuss in a larger scope, i.e. to develop projects where students work cooperatively. The provision of divergent projects and tasks enable students to face the task of formulating their own problems informed by the goals they set, and inspired by their interaction with such stimulating educational environment.

Project work and assigning tasks are good indications of student-centeredness. If appropriately chosen or designed by teachers, they motivate students to use language in real life situations and can encompass a great number of students' feelings, skills and knowledge in the education process.

Projects include multi-skill activities which focus on themes/topics in addition to handling specific language aims which are prescribed prior to tasks/projects. While students concentrate their efforts on reaching an agreed goal, a project work can "provide students with opportunities to recycle known language skills in a relatively natural context" (Supe, and Kaupuzs, 2015). Every time, the researchers explained the projects/tasks in the form of a sequence of clearly identifiable phases to narrow the students' attention on a small number of tasks simultaneously and make sure that they will not go astray during implementing tasks.

Supe, and Kaupuzs (2015) maintain that project-based learning on different topics, especially in teaching EFL, arouses students' motivation since it affords opportunities to make the language use in the class real and active. Besides, it makes the learning process authentic and more exciting. Doing projects in EFL classes is helpful to improve the students' communicative, cooperative and creative skills. Moreover, when students feel themselves secure and interact with each other in positive atmosphere, their self-confidence as a language user increases and their autonomy will be promoted.

Applefield, Huber and Moallem (2000) emphasize the importance of cooperative work in motivating students to work harder and creating a positive atmosphere in which learning is shared gained and discussed interactively. They recognize that thinking aloud is very advantageous for groups as they struggle to understand and solve problems. Accordingly, the students were structured into groups with defined roles for each student and a task for the group to accomplish. It needed advanced planning on the part of researchers, which was demanding and time-consuming. They did their best to familiarise their students with effective group work mechanisms, e.g., trust, respect, and skills to plan and organise their group work and make considered group decisions. It is worth mentioning that cooperative work caused to create classroom norms for social inclusion which fostered peer cooperation and interdependence among students.

Seifert (2009) hold that students are more likely to achieve considerable progress if teachers make use of a wide variety of resources. Accordingly, this requires teachers to look for materials and experiences that supplement or even replace the most traditional forms of information, such as textbooks. The type of resources to be utilised depend on factors unique to each class level or

community, but inevitably, they might include the Internet as a learning tool. Needless to say, the Internet has become a fixture of not only the modern society, but of the educational scene as well. It has the capability to offer a huge variety of information on any subject and any possible grade level throughout the learning process. In addition to providing supplementary materials, the researcher encouraged her students to search the net for relevant and extra materials. These materials were included in students' portfolios for the purpose of counting at the end of the course.

Further, Schcolnik, Kol, and Ababanel (2006) maintain that "constructivist approach can facilitate language learning by giving students choices and by providing language practice that is interesting and meaningful".

Adams, Haute, and Ray (2016) define active learning strategies as instructional activities which involve students in "doing things and thinking about what they are doing". They are of the belief that when students learn, their role is not restricted to just listen; instead, they should be engaged in reading, writing, researching, discussing, or solving problems. Most importantly, it is crucial to engage students in reflective activities, application activities, and higher-order thinking activities as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. On the same line of thinking, Altun and Yucel (2015) emphasises the need to design relevant activities, choose and use suitable and practical equipment and materials, apply varied learning-teaching methods, and above all to implement appropriate measurement and evaluation tools. Based on this, the researcher used a portfolio to assess her students' progress throughout the experiment. Stiggins (2002), cited from Dunn and Mulvenon (2009), recommends viewing assessment through new eyes if we intend to connect assessment to school improvement in meaningful ways. Formative assessment embraces assessment tasks that are designed to promote students' learning. Cohen et al (2010, p.309) argues in favour of formative assessment and describes it as "assessment for learning". Formative assessment provides both teachers and students with feedback; hence, teaching and learning activities can be altered according to the results. The significance of formative assessment lies in that it informs teachers/students with the current performances, achievements strengths and weaknesses in such a way that empowers them to suggest and shape the contents and processes of future plans for teaching and learning.

Another principle of constructivism emphasises the social nature of knowledge construction. Applefield, Huber and Moallem (2000) emphasize the importance of cooperative work in motivating students to work harder and creating a positive atmosphere in which learning is shared gained and discussed interactively. They recognize that thinking aloud is very advantageous for groups as they struggle to understand and solve problems. Accordingly, the students were structured into groups with defined roles for each student and a task for the group to accomplish. It needed advanced planning on the part of researchers, which was demanding and time-consuming. They did their best to familiarise their students with effective group work mechanisms, e.g., trust, respect, and skills to plan and organise their group work and make considered group decisions. It is worth mentioning that cooperative work caused to create classroom norms for social inclusion which fostered peer cooperation and interdependence among students.

Throughout the experiment, the researchers endeavoured to put into practice the main principles of constructivism. These principles played a fundamental role in designing the constructivist setting and arranging the experiment. Eventually, the researchers perceived that their role in this teaching method was not that of someone who assesses the capacities of her students in terms of a final product but in terms of the process. In our class, the teacher converted into a friend who guided students to refine their newly constructed knowledge and acted as a coordinator, as a facilitator, as a director who guided the actors how to perform well on the stage and as an advisor in the academic tasks and activities.

4. Previous Studies Reviewed

The researchers reviewed a plentiful number of researches about constructivism in order to gain a profound insight about their PhD study. Concerning students' perspective towards constructivism, the examined these two studies:

Beyhan and Köksal (2013) investigated Turkish learners' perceptions of building constructivist learning environments in secondary schools. They aimed to examine the suitability of learning environments in classes for constructivist learning based on students' perceptions. The study was a descriptive one since it tried to visualize the situation as it is. General survey model was used as the

research methodology in this study. Survey models as research approaches intend to describe past or current situations as they are. The researchers developed a questionnaire for this purpose. It consisted of 20 Likert items. They found out that most students agree that classrooms should be developed to create better constructivist learning environments. The study recommended adding constructivist instruction and creating appropriate environments to the programs of teacher training institutions to teach this issue at the practical level.

Mensah (2015) carried out a study to investigate college students' and instructors' perspectives (University of North Dakota, USA) of constructivist learning environment through using questionnaires. Results indicated positive perspectives on the part of both students and teachers regarding constructivism. The students specifically preferred two constructivist principles: collaboration and negotiation experiences.

Hence, this paper is necessary since it examines the development of the understanding of constructivist theory among Kurdish EFL students at university level. It attempts to elicit Kurdish students' perspectives towards implementing constructivism. In fact we need to know their viewpoint of the implementation and incorporation of these new approaches and methods to our teaching to judge on their readiness for accepting these new methods. The results of this paper enable us to compare our students to their counterparts elsewhere and contribute in making generalisation and decisions for any future reform.

5. Data Collection Tool

This work is a part from an ongoing PhD study. It is being carried out at the college of Basic Education/English department at Salahaddin University-Erbil during the academic year 2016-2017. The participants of the study consisted of 42 third year students. They were sub-divided into two groups: the control and the experimental group.

To obtain the required data, the researcher employed a questionnaire to investigate the students' perspectives towards the implementation of constructivism in EFL classes. The designed questionnaire was administered to all the students in the experimental group (21 students) after accomplishing the treatment. It is worth mentioning that the students' questionnaire was administered after the experiment. This could be an advantage since the

questionnaire allowed to collect students' opinions timely instead of their perspectives from memories. It was composed of 20 Likert scale statements. The participants were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement using

(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

No dimensions were identified for the questionnaire but the items sought to elicit students' perspectives about the learning process in general and specifically their reflections of the experiment. The constructivist principles were used as lens to design the questionnaire items, namely these principles included:

1- Using active learning strategies (concept mapping, role playing, debates , macro tasks, and project learning),
2- Cooperative work (working cooperatively in small groups),
3- Multi source materials (using journalistic texts, autobiographies, audios, videos, caricatures in addition to the assigned text book),
4- Using alternative assessment tools (portfolios), and
5- The supportive constructivist classroom environment.

In order to evaluate construct validity of the questionnaires, a penal of experts was selected as jury members based on their relevant knowledge and experience. On the basis of their recommendations, the researcher carried out slight amendments (item rewording, item deletion, items blending and item addition) in the instruments and adopted them for collecting data for the purpose of the study.

To determine the existence of possible problems in advance and to amend the tool before it was used in the actual study, the questionnaire was piloted on 10 students from the experimental group. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was estimated. Namely, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was .77. Compared with the standard value of Cronbach Alpha, the researcher's result value is above 7, hence it is considered acceptable in the literature. Although the analysis results for the scale was not perfect, it was within acceptable limits.

Table (1) The Standard Value of Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach's alpha	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

Table (2) Reliability Analysis

Students' questionnaire – reliability analysis	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
.77	20

After the researcher made sure that her questionnaire enjoyed satisfactory reliability and validity, the final version was employed for the main study.

6. Results and Discussion

SPSS 24 was used to carry out statistical procedures to analyse the results. Descriptive statistical data were examined to answer the study question: What are the Kurdish students' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the experiment (applying constructivism) in teaching EFL (reading)?

The statistical description of the mean scores, standard deviations, and agreement percentage for the items illustrating Kurdish EFL students' perspectives towards constructivist learning are found in Appendix (1).

Investigating students' perceptions of the experiment gives insight in the extent to which the constructivist instructional design is successfully implemented. In other words, it can reveal the successfulness or unsuccessfulness of the factual implementation of constructivism as compared with the ideal description of constructivism as a learning theory. Moreover,

students are a vital source of feedback for teachers and educational designers; because having a negative perspective towards a particular aspect of the theory could mean that it is not workable in practice in the Kurdish setting.

The statistical description of the questionnaire shows Kurdish EFL students' perspectives towards the implementation of constructivism in teaching reading. The researcher will analyse each item in terms of its mean score and percentage of agreement among the students. When Table 3 is examined, it is observed that most of the students' views are in favour of the implementation of constructivism in teaching reading (the experiment).

The researchers commence their analysis from the first item, which concerns students' hesitation during classroom interaction. As item 10 and 16 are relevant to the first item, these three items are analysed simultaneously. These three items are as follows:

1-I do not hesitate in sharing my experiences and opinions with classmates.	**4.24**	**0.44**	**84.76**
10-Feeling shy and embarrassed prevented me from interacting and exchanging ideas.	**2.19**	**060**	**43.81**
16-I do not feel more self-confident as a language user and my reading skills have not improved satisfactorily.	**2.13**	**0.98**	**41.81**

As the statistics show, 84% (M=4.24) of the students agree with item No1 and confirm that the do not hesitate in sharing their experiences and opinions with classmates. Being able to overcome their hesitation and shame barriers appears as a significant indication of the students' personal progress. They have come to a degree of self-confidence and tolerance of comments, which might make them less prone to get annoyed by negative comments/feedbacks more inclined to hold responsibility of their own actions and even to take risks.

This result is even more confirmed by the students' low percentage of agreement with item 10, in which only 43% (M=2.19) of the respondents report that feeling shy and embarrassed prevented them from interacting and

exchanging ideas. In other words, the majority of the students (57%) disagree with this item.

In item No16, 41% (M=2.13) of the students maintain that they do not feel more self-confident as a language user and their reading skills have not improved satisfactorily. This means that 59% of the students disagree with this item, i.e., the majority of the students declare that they feel more confidence and that there is a satisfactory improvement in their reading skills.

Strikingly, this finding stands in contrast with Qadir's (2014) finding who indicated that the majority (81%) of the Kurdish EFL students agreed or strongly agreed with a statement that some psychological factors such as shyness, fear of making mistakes and anxiety hinders them from practicing their English language inside class. Having the students overcome this shame barrier in the current study suggests that the teacher has succeeded in creating a friendly environment in class to accommodate the needs of shy students which in turn will allow them to minimize their shyness and feel less worried of making mistakes. Similarly, Juhana (2012) asserts that students are affected by the classroom climate which, if approvingly created, can positively impact students' participation and speaking in English.

This discloses the fact that the healthy environment and the rich academic experience to which the students were exposed to during the experiment nurtured their character and acquired them a strong belief of self-perceived ability. Consequently, this is the positive role of constructivism.

As aforementioned, in the second part of item 59% of the students disagree that and their reading skills have not improved satisfactorily, i.e., they noticed improvement in their reading skills. This finding accords with Akar and Yildirım's (2005) statement that due to the constructivist instructional design of their course, the participants felt a need to do the readings regularly. Further, some participants reported that the constructivist course helped them gain good reading habits and started to question whatever they read.

2-The course enhanced my motivation and created desirable attitudes towards reading.	**4.14**	**0.36**	**82.86**

As for item No2, 82% (M=4.14) the majority of the students agree that the experiment enhanced their motivation and created desirable attitudes towards

reading. This is a pivotal finding because motivation is inseparable from the instructional process and part and parcel of the classroom environment. This is the consequence of the safe and supportive environment created during the experiment where the researcher provided positive reinforcements. Furthermore, she offered varied experiences and mixed up her lessons in order to make students with different preferences each get time focused on the things they like best.

This finding is on line with Cetin-Dindar (2016), who asserts that there exists a positive relation between constructivist learning environment and students' motivation to learn. She found out that her students were more motivated to learn science in a constructivist environment because they had more opportunities in relating science with the real world issues.

4-I can use what I have learnt in the classes in new situations.	**3.90**	**0.44**	**78.10**

Concerning item No4, 78% (M=3.90) agree that they can use what they have learnt in the classes in new situations. This item is concerned with the transferability of constructivist-based knowledge. This percentage of agreement assures that the knowledge transferability to new situations, which is an inherent factor of constructivist learning, has been achieved via the experiment.

In the same token, Cadorin et al (2014) hold that constructivism constitutes the conceptual framework of meaningful learning. Hence, constructivist learning is both active and meaningful in the sense that it can be transferred to future situations since this type of learning arises from individual experience. Furthermore, they assert that "the main pedagogical objective is not that of supplying individuals with chunks of new and diverse knowledge, but rather that of reworking and transforming already-acquired knowledge". Similarly, Akar and Yildirım (2005) inferred that their students could adapt the particular activities they did in constructivist classes as models for future practices.

5-The optional topic was very beneficial.	**4.57**	**0.51**	**91.43**

The percentage and mean scores of item No5, as can be seen in the table above 91% (M=4.57), indicates that there is a strong agreement about it. The majority of them deem the optional topic to be very beneficial.

In this respect, Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) highlight the importance of making students feel they have a stake in their own learning and consider it as a powerful tool to promote their engagement. As a result, this would develop their sense of identity when they have the opportunity to affect decision making. They hold the belief that taking students' voice into account, results in greater investment of the students' own sense of purpose, interest, and desire.

6-I do not refrain from asking help and assistance from other classmates.	**3.95**	**0.38**	**79.05**

As for item No6, the students expressed their agreement 79% (M=3.95). Reporting that they do not refrain from asking help and assistance from other classmates shows their strong interpersonal relationship. Students' agreement with this item also reveals their strong team spirit because they do not consider it face threatening to ask for help from their peers. They seem to apply the saying 'All for one and one for all'. Moreover, the students' agreement with this item can be regarded as an indication of their reassuring abidance of their mutual interdependence and cooperative work; they might ask for help in order to keep track of others' work and ensure tasks are running as expected.

7-I am more aware of my strengths and weaknesses.	**4.10**	**0.30**	**81.90**

Concerning item No7, 81% (M=4.10) agreed that they became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses after the experiment. It is a good progress that the majority of students acknowledged that they came to know their weaknesses since this would give them a clearer understanding of things that may be holding them back. This can be the first step to work on finding ways to not let their weaknesses pull them behind any more. Besides, if they get acquainted with what they can excel at (strong points), this would enable them to aim higher and achieve much more. Therefore, it was of equal importance to know their weaknesses as much as knowing their strengths. The researcher used to inform them that knowing one's own weakness does not mean that

they are inferior as compared to others; instead, she told them that it means that there are areas they need to improve on. As a result, the students naturally started to focus on the positive things that they had and became more resourceful in making decisions.

8-Handling multisource materials was time consuming and overwhelming.	**2.19**	**0.87**	**45.81**

Approximately, half of the students 45% (M=2.19) agreed with item No8. They reported that handling multisource materials was time consuming and overwhelming. Standing midway in this item demonstrates that the students are diverged into two parts, the first part has profited from the implementation of constructivism and the experiment upheld them to get integrated into the new experience. On the other hand, the second group seem to be still suffering from being accustomed to studying only one textbook and cannot easily adjust to the new study style.

19-The use of multisource materials aroused my reading interest and inquiry.	**4.62**	**0.50**	**92.38**

In spite of the fact that item No8 has a counterweight, in item No19, we find that the students strongly agree 92% (M=4.62) with the statement that the use of multisource materials aroused their reading interest and inquiry. This strong agreement means that the majority of the students regard multisource materials as beneficial and interest arousing; yet, half of them tend to prefer studying a prescribed textbook due to their indifference or the ease of reliance on a single textbook. Undoubtedly, most of the students have enjoyed the multi-source materials and share the belief that the introduction of discrepant and novel materials motivated them to engage in their reading lessons. While others might have sought for the comfort and need of more transparent and concrete material.

9-I can search for relevant materials.	**4.10**	**0.44**	**81.90**

As for item No9, 81% (M=4.10) of the students believe that they can search for relevant materials. This item seems to indicate that students were able to take responsibility for their learning since it was reported that most of the students could find appropriate articles/photos/videos related to the chosen topic. This implies that the course was able to gear them towards being accountable for their learning. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the students have monitored and benefited from their metacognitive skills for setting their own learning goals. In turn, it seems logical to call them researchers and self-regulated students. It is worth mentioning that feeling responsible for one's own learning lies at the heart of constructivism.

11-Traditional paper-based tests do not give students the chance to correct their mistakes.	**3.76**	**0.54**	**75.24**

Leading students to revise their work is another determinant of constructivist learning, in item No11, 75% (M=3.76) of the students are of the belief that traditional paper-based tests do not allow students correct their mistakes. This suggests that the opposite of traditional assessment, namely alternative assessments, allow students revise their mistakes and make corrections in the edited version. This comes in line with Xamani's (2013) assertion that a portfolio is an assessment and a learning tool at the same time. Generally speaking, portfolios promote active learning and self-assessment. However, some students 25% might express disagreement with alternative assessment due to the competitive university culture that prevails in most Kurdish universities.

18-The flexibility of portfolios was excellent for relieving exam stress.	**4.19**	**0.60**	**83.81**

Item No18 is related to alternative assessments, 83% (M=4.19) of the students decided in favour of alternative assessments and voiced that the flexibility of portfolios was excellent for relieving exam stress. This result is compatible with that of Cetin-Dindar (2016), who confirms that students' anxiety decreases with the use constructivist assessment tools. She attributes this to the fact that students have more opportunities for personal relevance and shared control.

Being a significant principle of a constructivist teaching and learning, assessing students' learning in the context of learning process seems effective in assessing students' progress throughout their learning process.

12-The macro-tasks were useful and interest arousing.	**4.52**	**0.75**	**90.48**

As regards to another vital aspect of constructivist-informed instruction, learning from projects and macro tasks in item No12, 90 % (4.52) of the students expressed their strong agreement that the macro-tasks were useful and interest arousing. Utilising this type of materials can make the students less prone to the occasional boredom of the rigidity of lecture-based teaching methods dominating higher education.

This result agrees with that of Jumaat et al's (2017) who assert that project based learning in a constructivist environment paves the way for students to engage in a real-world problem, allows them to work on minimal guidance, and trains them to become more independent.

Similarly, the result coincides with that of Sungur and Tekkaya (2006) who confirmed that students working on projects demonstrated genuine willingness towards learning and had higher levels of intrinsic goal orientation as compared with students who were traditionally taught.

13-I can take part in my own assessment and my classmates' assessment.	**4.00**	**0.45**	**80.00**

As for item No13, most of the students 80% (M=4.00) agree that they can take part in their own assessment and their classmates' assessment. In fact, the researcher was really surprised by this high percentage of agreement. Throughout the experiment, the most troublesome part of the implementation was self-assessment and peer assessment. It took many sessions to familiarise them with these two new concepts and instruct them on how to conduct these evaluations. It was difficult for them to evaluate the contribution of a peer and oneself to the production of a group. Besides, some students could not be critical about a peer's production because they tended to misunderstand such criticism, and felt reserved to express their true assessments/feedbacks about

their peers' work. Generally speaking, self-observation, self-assessment, and self-reinforcement, although important for learning, impose a substantial burden on students and calls for a great responsibility of them. Devolving the responsibility for one's own assessment and peer assessment can help students to relate learning to their individual needs and make them more honest and self-reliant.

15-I have not profited from my classmates' feedbacks and assessments.	**2.57**	**0.98**	**51.43**

In item No15, we find that nearly half of the students, 51% (M=2.57) agree that they have not profited from their classmates' feedbacks and assessments. On the other hand, the other half 49% admit that they have found their peers' feedbacks beneficial.

3-I think that the feedbacks and evaluations made in the classroom enrich my learning.	**4.19**	**0.60**	**83.81**

Another relevant item is item No3, where the majority of the students 83% (M=4.19) agree that the feedbacks and evaluations made in the classroom enrich their learning. This elucidates the positive relationships between receiving feedbacks and students' progress.

Amazingly, this finding is at some variance with the finding of the result of item No15 discussed above where only half of the student admitted that other students' feedbacks were beneficial. This can be ascribed to the fact that some students were preservative and did not share ideas and comments frequently. Whereas, other students tried to seek others' advice when their ideas did not work out or when they did not know if they did right or wrong. Hence this difference can be explained in terms of individual differences among students themselves.

14-Working with more capable peers was encouraging and helped to improve my level.	**4.43**	**0.51**	**88.57**

In constructivist-directed instruction, the role of peers (especially the more capable ones) is to act as a guide and facilitator. In item No14, the majority of the students 88% (M=4.43) acknowledged that working in groups (especially with the scaffolding they get from more capable peers) encouraged them and led to considerable improvements in their level. As mentioned earlier, cooperative learning is regarded as a key feature of constructivism due to the fact that social interactions effectively contribute to the construction of knowledge.

This finding comes in accordance with that of Akar and Yildirım (2005) who maintain that dealing with activities in small groups appeared to be "very educative, especially, in terms of learning from a peer" in their research.

20-Group-work was interesting and helpful in discovering and utilizing other students' methods of study.	**4.48**	**0.51**	**89.52**

Related to cooperative work, in item No20 the majority of the students 89% (M=4.48) agree that group-work was interesting and helpful in discovering and utilizing other students' methods of study. This high percentage of agreement shows that the cooperative experiences were positive ones since they helped learners to understand learning processes more deeply, found grounds to exchange experiences and be open to new ideas

17-Participating in different activities was useful and increased my self-confidence.	**4.14**	**0.65**	**82.86**

Active participation is the driving force behind students' progress. In this regard, the high percentage of the score in item No17 shows that the students 82% (M=4.14) tend to agree with the questionnaire's statements No17 and believe that participating in different activities was useful and increased their self-confidence. This indicates that if knowledge is put it into a more lifelike context then it stimulates the student to progress smoothly and promotes their self-confidence.

In fact, this item confirms that the students' belief about being the prime agent for their own knowledge construction is the consequence of the actual learning activities they have undertaken during the experiment.

7. Findings and Conclusions

This study tries to reveal researchers-initiated efforts to implement constructivism for improving classroom practices. The experiment was intentionally designed to improve EFL Kurdish students' academic skills and foster their personal and interpersonal skills via the implementation of constructivism. Overall, the results of the current study indicate that the constructivist model implemented in the experiment yielded good improvement in students' skills and potentials. Furthermore, it indicated that there was a statistically significant degree of agreement in students' opinions, including an increase in students' self-regulation, self-assessment, peer-assessment, social skills, researching abilities, and above all improvement in their reading skills. In response to our research question, most of the respondents voiced their satisfaction with the experiment they were subjected to via their agreement with most of the items, which in essence reflected the main principles of constructivism. Eventually, the findings confirm the effectiveness of the constructivist principles implemented during the experiment.

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Appendix (1) The statistical description of students' questionnaire

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Mean	SD	% of agreement
	fi	%	Fi	%	fi	%	fi	%	Fi	%			
1-I do not hesitate in sharing my experiences and opinions with classmates.	0	0,0%	0	0.0%	1	4.8%	15	71.4%	5	23.8%	4.24	0.44	84.76
2-The course enhanced my motivation and created desirable attitudes towards reading.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	4.8%	17	81.0%	3	14.2%	4.14	0.36	82.86
3-I think that the feedbacks and evaluations made in the classroom enrich my learning.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	9.5%	13	61.9%	6	28.6%	4.19	0.60	83.81
4-I can use what I have learnt in the classes in new situations.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	14.3%	17	81.0%	1	4.8%	3.90	0.44	78.10
5-The optional topic was very beneficial.	0	0.0%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	9	42.9%	11	52.4%	4.57	0.51	91.43
6-I do not refrain from asking help and assistance from other classmates	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	9.5%	18	85.7%	1	4.8%	3.95	0.38	79.05
7-I am more aware of my strengths and weaknesses.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	19	90.5%	2	9.5%	4.10	0.30	81.90
8-Handling multisource materials was time consuming and overwhelming.	4	19.0%	9	42.9%	4	19.0%	2	9.5%	2	9.5%	2.19	0.87	45.81
9-I can search for relevant materials.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	4.8%	17	81.0%	3	14.3%	4.10	0.44	81.90
10-Feeling shy and embarrassed prevented me from interacting and exchanging ideas.	1	4.8%	16	76.2%	3	14.3%	1	4.8	0	0.0%	2.19	060	43.81
11-Traditional paper-based tests do not give students the chance to correct their mistakes.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	28.6%	14	66.7%	1	4.8%	3.76	0.54	75.24
12-The macro-tasks were useful and interest arousing.	0	0.0%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	7	33.3%	13	61.9%	4.52	0.75	90.48
13-I can take part in my own assessment and my classmates' assessment.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	9.5%	17	81.0%	2	9.5%	4.00	0.45	80.00
14-Working with more capable peers was encouraging and helped to improve my level.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	12	57.1%	9	42.9%	4.43	0.51	88.57
15-I have not profited from my classmates' feedbacks and assessments.	0	0.0%	15	71.4%	1	4.8%	4	19.9%	1	4.8%	2.57	0.98	51.43
16-I do not feel more self-confident as a language user and my reading skills	4	19.0%	14	66.7%	0	0.0%	3	14.3%	0	0.0%	2.13	0.98	41.81

e-ISSN (2522-7130) p-ISSN (2410-1036)

have not improved satisfactorily.													
17-Participating in different activities was useful and increased my self-confidence.	0	0.0%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	15	71.4%	5	23.8%	**4.14**	**0.65**	**82.86**
18-The flexibility of portfolios was excellent for relieving exam stress.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	9.5%	13	61.9%	6	28.6%	**4.19**	**0.60**	**83.81**
19-The use of multisource materials aroused my reading interest and inquiry.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	8	38.1%	13	61.9%	**4.62**	**0.50**	**92.38**
20- Group-work was interesting and helpful in discovering and utilizing other students' methods of study.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	11	52.4%	10	47.6%	**4.48**	**0.51**	**89.52**