

## **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM IN AN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Social constructivism asserts that learning should be collaborative with meaning negotiated from multiple perspectives. This study addressed the issues surrounding the design of learning activities in an online environment that can facilitate learning from a social constructivist perspective. The main objectives of this study were to apply learning principles derived from social constructivist theory into the design of an online learning environment and to investigate the effectiveness of the design on students' learning outcomes. Of interest also is their ability to construct knowledge, their participation and social interaction in the learning process. Twenty five students pursuing an undergraduate TESL programme in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak participated in this study. The data were obtained from semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaire and the analysis of the online postings in the online discussion forum during the learning activity. The effectiveness of social constructivism in facilitating meaningful learning was proven in this study. Participants indicated that the information shared in the discussions enabled them to understand more about the course content ( $M=2.96$ ). Follow-up interviews with selected participants confirmed this finding. The findings also indicated that social interaction and participation was limited in this study due to constraints such as time, a high workload and a discomfort with the online learning environment. The nature of the online interactions in this study was mostly for the purpose of clarification and confirmation of information rather than knowledge construction. Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations are made regarding the role of the instructor as well as pedagogical suggestions to enhance the ability to construct knowledge among students in online learning environments.

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