

Chapter 9

Role of the Social Constructivist Theory, Andragogy, and Computer–Mediated Instruction (CMI) in Adult ESL Learning and Teaching Environments: How Students Transform Into Self–Directed Learners Through Mobile Technologies

Seda Khadimally

North American University (NAU), USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explore whether social constructivism promotes mobile technology rich, student-centered learning/teaching practices, leading adult English as a second language (ESL) students to transform into self-directed learners. Under this theory, a shift from teacher-centered English language learning to a student-oriented approach to how students acquire basic English skills is promoted and students' possible transformation into independent and autonomous learners is fostered because, by use of mobile technologies, they may successfully transfer information from their previous experiences to their current knowledge. Incorporating mobile learning (m-Learning) into their instruction and making social constructivism an integral part of their curriculum, ESL teachers can contribute to their students transformation into self-directed learners as an active, knowledge-building community and in charge of their own learning processes, which explains that this theory is highly compatible with the principles grounded in what Knowles proposed as a progressive learning approach for adult education: andragogy.

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INTRODUCTION

Much of research on student learning ties to the importance of student experiences in engaged learning. Through their experiences, students see value in the information being taught and learn how to transfer the knowledge to real-world practice. Therefore, the learning process emerges as an active one especially in learning environments where adult ESL learners and teachers are actively engaged in the learning and teaching process, which helps students autonomously build bridges between their past and present experiences. By integrating technology into their instruction and making social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) an integral part of their curriculum, ESL teachers can help their students transform into self-directed learners as a knowledge-building community. Learning process is made active, and scaffolding is fostered. Use of cultural and verbal symbols is promoted as necessary tools for learning and teaching. Authentic activities, cooperative learning via interactive class discussions, technology-mediated learning, guided participation, cognitive modeling, inner-speech, self-talk, reciprocal teaching, and peer tutoring (Ormrod, 2008) can also be practiced through this learning pedagogy. With regards to the implementation of social constructivism in adult ESL classroom applications, the non-traditional group of linguistically and culturally diverse ESL students' learning can be improved and their self-efficacy can be enhanced during the learning process by constant use of handheld, mobile devices. When mobile technologies are integrated into the content in a consistent manner, students become more likely to direct their own language learning activities in a way that they take individual initiatives, making informed decisions to acquire vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills with higher order critical thinking skills and collaboratively with their peers. This type of learning not only leads up to a second language learning process that is social, collective, and networked, but also mature, autonomous, confident, and intrinsically motivated, all of the learning principles that are highly conducive to what Knowles (1970) described as andragogy, or self-directed learning. It is through these learning principles that andragogy is an emerging learning pedagogy which can be linked with the constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Andragogical learning approach can be used in the language acquisition and improvement of adult ESL learners rather than on younger ESL students or adolescents. According to Knowles (1970), andragogy includes the following four assumptions: 1) self concept; 2) experience; 3) readiness to learn; and 4) orientation to learning. Democratic participation is another critical component of andragogy. Considering all of these foundational elements of the theory, andragogy can be regarded as yet another approach to learning in the design and delivery of effective instruction. Therefore, drawing on both the andragogical approach to learning and social constructivist pedagogy, this chapter aims to lead instructional designers to develop instructional products and/or training programs in adult ESL learning and teaching contexts in order to enhance students' self-directed learning with a student-oriented approach. In the process of designing such instructional modules or programs, these instructional/curriculum designers can find the integration of language learning technologies into second language classes immensely helpful.

POPULATION SELECTED FOR THIS STUDY: WHO ARE ADULT ESL LEARNERS?

Today's student profile has immensely evolved when compared to that of twenty years ago. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) indicated that students have considerably changed over the course of years because

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