INSTRUCTORS' APPROACHES RELATED WITH THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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In order to increase students' success and present a teacher model it is of great importance for lecturers training teachers at the Faculties of Education to provide for a multi learning environment in their classes and make use of a wide range of methods, strategies and material. No matter which learning approach accepted, a teacher should always try to enrich the learning and teaching environment both quantitative and qualitative. The way the lecturer uses in presenting his subject matter and creating a multi learning environment increases the quality of the learning environment. Data presented in a monotonous mode with insufficient stimulus is not acquired adequately by students and results in failure in learning. Lesson environment created by using rich stimulus not only offers a good learning environment to the students but also enables the teacher to create an image of a model teacher.

Keywords: Learning environment, constructivism, instructors, student-centered learning

At Educational Institutions programs have been designed in accordance to constructional understanding recently. For such programs to result in success, the acceptance of the new roles foreseen for the teachers plays a more important role than using material, methods and strategies. With the latest trend in education the role of the teacher changed from a person holding a lesson and providing data to a person designing or creating a learning environment and guiding students. The role "teacher" left its place to a tutor designing and managing a learning environment.

This research is a qualitative study. In our study the ideas of lecturers- at the Faculty of Education at Erciyes University- about learning environment have been collected using constructional interviews and have been evaluated using descriptive analysis methods. This constructional interview consisted of five questions aiming to find out what learning activities teachers design and what they think about learning environment.

All the lecturers who took part in the research reported that their classrooms were adequate both in size and shape. Eight of the lecturers expressed that they personally did the lesson , eleven of them reported that they make use of student presentation in their classes and three of them said that they use both teacher and student presentation in their classes. Classrooms are usually preferred as learning environment. Nine of the lecturers expressed that school experience and teacher training classes provide students with a good model for being a teacher. Nine of them think that students are able to present lessons they are assigned by their teachers

whereas nine of the lecturers think that students can only assist their teachers and thus contribute to the lesson.

The size and shape of classrooms should be appropriate for students to do group work as advised by cooperative learning approaches. Student should be able to make use of information technologies and real learning environments. At faculties classrooms should be designed for each special lesson .While designing an active learning environment the reference to constructional learning concept should be kept in mind. The principles necessary for cooperative learning environment should always be under consideration.

Introduction

In education programs, which based on student centered approach, instructor's adoption to their new roles are more important than the factors such as material, method or strategy in order to be successful. With the new tendencies in education, instructor is not the one who gives lesson and transfers information but the one who is an organizator and a guide of learning environment. 'Informative role of instructor' gives its place to the manager of learning environment and the consultant manager role.

In these new approaches, student is the one who takes the responsibility of learning, makes plan to solve problems, configures and interprets the information. Learning mainly depends on individual's configuration, interpretation of information and being active. Reaction with physical and social surroundings in learning environment gives the opportunity of configuration of information to individual by his/her own. This approach forms the main idea of the student centered learning models.

Lefoe (1984), points out that there is a quite new approach on the designing of learning environment, the choosing learning environment to support learning and the planning of suitable educational surroundings. On the other hand, Verschaffel et al. (1999) list that students can be more active, configures their own information, and gain cognitive skills as the most important features of learning environments.

Traditional educational approach emphasizes easy-to-memorize factual information without concerning too much if students have been able to connect what is currently learned with of their previous knowledge. This will lead an artificial learning as students will not be able to develop a sound conceptual understanding of topic at hand (Mayer, 2003). As a result, students will likely sustain their (mis)conceptions regarding the topic as "most of what we learn is learned through the framework of what we already know" (Leat, 2000:139). "Students learn things from books, films, parents, friends, tradition, and culture at large that they grown into so they come to the classroom with partial schemata" (Bennett & Dunne, 2002). This is to say that students do not come to class as "tabula rasa" state and for an effective learning one need to find what is studied as meaningful for that a link with previous knowledge should be provided.

Preceding paragraph in fact describes the main tenets of constructivism (Bruner, 1996) whose assumption is of that knowledge is personally and socially made and of that theories that students construct of the world are provisional (Bennett & Dunne, 2002; Mayer, 2004). Teachers have a role of a mediator who mediates the evolution of the students' meanings until they develop into a sound and acceptable understanding (Wood, 1988). However, as Liu and Matthews (2005) points out such construction of knowledge is subject to the constraints and offerings of the learning environment. Design

of the learning environment particularly with regard to support provided by the teacher in the learning environment play a crucial role for allowing students to construct knowledge.

Then, a problem of how much guidance or support should be given to students arises. As Kirschner et.al. (2006) and Liu and Matthews (2005) asserts, there is little evidence to promote minimum support and guidance from teachers in learning environments. On contrary, the body of research on scaffolding suggest that appropriate support should be provided students to the extent of their individual needs (Hmelo-Silver, 2006; Quintana et al., 2004; Reiser, 2004; Toth et al., 2002). Scaffolding is a term fashioned by Jerome Bruner and he used this concept to explain how to carry out an appropriate support to students in inquiry and problem-based environments. Here teacher is to coach students giving them gradually more structured support (teacher gives more structure to less able students and less structure to more able student) on both how to and why to do the task (Hmelo-Silver, 2006; Reiser, 2004; Puntambekar, 2005) Constructivist learning theory also values inquiry-based and problem solving activities in learning environments as these are main means to engage students actively to construct knowledge.

According to Fraser, it is established with many researches that learning based on learning environment is also related to students' attitudes and behaviors about the learning environment. Individual's positive attitude to the learning environment effects his/her success (Fraser & Fisher, 1982; Simpson, 1987).

To the student centered approach physical facilities and technological devices of learning environment largely enrich the learning environment and give opportunity to make a lot of activities. Materials used in learning environment help to students for their active participation to learning, by making abstract information embodied with trials or visuals their perception.

As the learning environment is being designed with the equipments such as computer, overhead projector, slide machine, trial devices (models such as globe, human skeleton, live plants) and some measurement tools, students use them personally and learning is being made easier.

Hannafin and Peck (1988) suggest that "computer-aided education reached with the new information technologies personalizes the learning, motivates student, can give the control of learning activities to student, causes student to gain rapid and various feedbacks about learning activities, makes learning environment more interactive, allows to make the trials and observations which are dangerous, expensive or impossible to make in real environment, can record detailed student performances and can offer adaptive learning material" (Hannafin & Peck 1988:27).

Instructors' thoughts on learning environments are important to reach the goal of student-centered education programs. Achievement in learning is connected with the quality of the learning environments designed by the instructor. Learning model is chosen by the instructor with its every kind of technological equipment and techniques used as part of learning methods and strategies are important factors of learning environment.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the views and perceptions of instructors in teacher education programs about learning environments. In recent years, after the move of Turkish Education System toward a constructivist approach, the instructors have started to redesign students' learning environments based on this approach. Consequently, the tendency

of instructors to redesign the learning environments based according to constructivist approach is based on their perceptions about this approach. Thus, this study found crucial to explore instructors' views and perceptions about learning environments.

Those teachers who have a student-centered teaching approach design interactive learning environments. They support students to have initiative on their learning and construct knowledge. Design of the learning environment should be interactive, multi dimensional and inquiry-based in the learning environment for a constructivist learning However, traditional teachers have control of learning environment in that they place themselves in the role of giver controlling what students should do and learn. In this respect, this study tries to answer the flowing research questions.

Research Questions

1. What are instructors' perceptions and thoughts related with the learning environment?
2. What are the instructors' thoughts and perceptions about student centered learning in learning environments?
3. To what extent instructors have a student-centered approach in their practice?
4. What is the perceptions and practice of those instructors who have an teacher-centered approach in learning environment?

Method

This is a qualitative study that tries to understand the meanings the participants have concerning the topic at hand (Bryman, 2002). A semi-structured interview schedule is developed to collect data. Semi-structured interview allows some kind of structure that allows the researcher to obtain data relevant to his/her area of study (Robson, 1993). It also gives some freedom to interviewees to talk about the issues that are not covered by the researcher (Robson, 1993). Interview schedule had five questions but the participants were asked more questions when it was necessary. Participants' expressions were also noted. Interviews lasted about twenty to thirty minutes and recorded by the permissions of participants. All data then were transcribed and coded. When necessary quotations were taken from the interviews as explained by Yildirim (2006).

Sample of the research is constituted by twenty-six instructors who study in Erciyes University, Education Faculty, Kayseri, Turkey. For the data collection instrument, semi-structured interview consists of five question roots developed as instrument is used.

Findings and Interpretation, Evaluation of the Data

Physical Qualities of Learning Environment

What should be the Classrooms size and how should be organized the sitting arrangement? *In this context is it enough for the learning environment*?

Instructors who participated the interview had different thoughts about sitting arrangement. The nine of the instructors who assisted the interview think that there is not any problem in the arrangement of the students' sitting order in classrooms and they accepts that sitting arrangement in the form of one after the other is enough. From this point of view, they want to have the

control. They want to be face to face with students and they hope the students listen them during the lesson. Instructors who are in favor of this vision defend a more authoritarian thought.

Some instructors explained that they disapprove the arrangement of the students' tables and chairs. Instructors who think that the sitting arrangement is not suitable are asked with the Question: "How should be the most suitable sitting arrangement to you?". There are some different responses to this question; "It can be in U form, Circle Form…"etc… The Instructors who are in favor of these different kinds of sitting arrangement hope that students will be in interaction when they are face to face with each others. Instructors in this manner seem to think student centered.

The instructors participated in the interview are asked with the question: Can the Students' tables and chairs be disorganized? And the seven of them replied the question by telling that "yes, maybe, sometimes moving tables and chairs can constitute an altered environment to apply the active learning techniques". As for the eleven of the instructors "it causes disorder and discipline is spoiled in classroom."

Instructors are also asked about the number of students in the classes. To the question that ; " How does the number of the students in the classes effect learning activities?" Nineteen instructors' reply is that "the classrooms are not crowded and there is nothing to be harmful for the process of the lessons." As for the question " Can you leave time to converse with all of the students in your classes?" nearly all of the instructors gave the answer that they have to give too much course to leave time and the number of the students are also not allow to free time for making conservation with the students.

It is not compatible with the student centered approach that the instructors can not find extra time to see their student one by one. The number of the students in student centered approaches should be organized in a suitable way to find a convenient time that the instructors can see their students.

Learning Equipments

What should be the standard of getting benefit from learning technologies? *What kinds of learning environments are created at your lessons with the help of informatics technology*?

All of the instructors attending the meeting say that the classrooms of their schools are appropriate in terms of largeness and shape. Science instructors say that the experiments made in laboratories make student's learning easy. Most of the instructors say that the projections and computers in classes are used by both instructors and students, and by this way, the interaction between the subject and the students is raised. As a respond to the question: "How do students benefit from the computer technology?" the instructors say that they generally prepare slides, and sometimes develop materials at the Special Education Techniques and the Science Education lessons. Plus this fact, seven of the instructors say that they generally do not use computers at their lessons, usually present the lessons themselves.

These explanations mean when needed, informational technologies are used at an enough rate. It seems that the lessons which need application and technology design include mostly active learning processes. Theoretical lessons are more teacher-centered. In such an environment, every person will believe that he or she is the active participant of his or her own learning environment, and he will compete to realize himself, and interact with the education materials developed in lessons; the information technology will be

used, and the demonstrations including conjectural learning experiences, and various instructive games activate students in these learning environments.

Learning Activities

How do you perform your lessons? *What kind of activities do the students participate in order to learn the lesson*? *Could you claim that there is a homogeneous participation at your lessons*?

Eight of the instructors say that they present lessons themselves; eleven say the students make presentations at the lessons, and three of them say that they use both methods; and also use drama and micro applications at their lessons. Two of the instructors say that the students develop materials at the Instructional Technology and Materials Development lesson, and they are interested in the discussions and the evaluations of the materials.

In the environments of learning designed, the instructor should develop some activities which will help students gain acquisition. When the students come across with problems in the learning environment, and make self dispositions about the solving of the problem, they take the responsibility of learning. They participate in the activities such as investigation, debate, project working, etc… The students develop projects sometimes individually, and sometimes as a collaborating group; and make evaluations of these projects. These types of activities help students gain high-level cognitive skills, and positive attitude against learning.

Learning Environments

Which places can be evaluated as a learning environment except classrooms? *In which places will you make your learning activities except classrooms*?

Most of the time, classrooms are selected as a learning environment. Nine of the instructors say that the schools where school experiment and school applications are done could be an example of learning environment. Three of the instructors say that the students reach teacher gains by doing the micro applications in demonstration schools.

In addition to this, one of the instructors say that he sends his students to demonstration schools at the Classroom Management lesson to make observations; but in case of this condition, faculty and school administrations raise difficulties. And, one of the instructors say that he realized the micro applications of Special Education Techniques lesson at elementary schools, so the faculty of Science Education students get aware of the function of what they produced as an activity and the applications.

At the science lessons, the laboratory; and at the physical training lessons, the gym should be counted as a complete learning environment from the perspective of students. It is so interesting that the lessons of music, creative drama and picture at the Faculty of Science Education do not have a saloon. The instructors say that the learning activities of these lessons raise so much noise at school. In this context, the instructors are interrogated: "Will you direct your students to learning aimed trips, conferences and symposiums?" An instructor says, at the geography lesson, he and his students participated in such a learning aimed trips for the sake of learning. Some of the instructors say that the university clubs organize conferences and panels, but students are not interested in such activities. Also, one of the instructors says that he organized a poem concert as an activity of Speaking and Writing lesson, and made students evaluate themselves by recording

their own voices. What's more, it is stated that it will be useful to organize reading activities, such as reading tales, poems and stories at local radios and television channels in order to develop reading skills. Also, one of the instructors say that he directed his students to investigate the business names and the language errors in the newspapers of the city.

It is not sufficient to minimize the learning places to classrooms in order that students construct the knowledge. While designing learning environments, the out of classroom activities, environment and society, and real people and environments should not be disregarded. Learning aimed nature trips, observations, investigations, research trips to covered places, camps, interviews made by students individually or as a group, intellectual debates; a poll about a topic could be organized.

Conclusion

As it is not possible that all individuals have the same knowledge and skills, learn in the same period of time, and give the same reaction for events and situations in the learning environment, instructor takes into consideration the students' interests, knowledge, background, and maturity and gives the opportunity to them to use various learning models, to make research, experiment, observation and practice. The students are provided to have a learning life to gain high-rate mental profits with the in school and out school activities by means of instruction materials. Students' researches, experiments and observations personally or within groups provide them learning by doing and living.

With the learning environments designed for student-centered approach, students develop their scientific and critical thinking, solving problem and creativity skills. They improve their academic skills by planning projects in the branches of science, social arts and visual arts. They also improve many emotional skills in learning by making and therefore their learning become more meaningful to their learning life.

However, as it would be seen in the findings, currently the practices of participants who took part in this study do not reflect above depicted way of approaching teaching. But this is not a problem endemic to Turkey, as Szekszárdi (2007) also points out, this is a problem in Hungary too as according to her survey traditional educational approaches still dominates the teaching and learning process.

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