

## **Chinese Students' Perceptions on EFL Classroom Learning Environments and the Use of Multimedia as a Constructivist Approach to English Language Learning**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this study was to achieve these two objectives; 1) To determine the Chinese students' perceptions on EFL classroom learning environments; and 2) to identify the levels of Chinese students' perceptions on the use of multimedia as a constructivist approach to English language learning in the EFL classroom. The study used a quantitative research design and used purposive sampling to choose the participants. There were 200 Chinese students participated in the study. A questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect the data while descriptive analysis using the Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) was used for the analyses.

The result indicated that the three domains of the process of the learning environment; 1) learning to communicate, M= 2.32 and SD= 1.20 interpreted as *low*; 2) learning to investigate, M= 4.04 and SD= .96 interpreted as *high*; and, 3) learning to think, M= 4.00 and SD=.96 interpreted as *high*. The implication is that among the domains of the learning process environment, the 'learning to communicate' domain should be the focus of teaching and learning as this domain needs to be improved. As for the Chinese students' perception based on the three domains of multimedia, with regards to 1) relevance, the M= 4.03 and SD=.96; 2) ease to use, M= 4.02, and SD= .95, and 3) challenge, M= 4.03 and SD= .95. This suggests that the three domains of multimedia are perceived by the Chinese students as 'high'. Thus, using multimedia in the EFL English classroom is recommended for teaching and learning in the future.

**Keywords:** Chinese Students' perception, Constructivist approach, EFL classroom, EFL learning environments, Multimedia

## Introduction

Perception affects students' interest in learning. Consequently, the learning environment has a significant influence on how students view their overall perception of teaching and learning. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the era where many changes happen. This is when technology dominates the world and everything becomes digital, even education. Multimedia as one of the products of technology becomes 'a knight in shining armor' which provides a sense of reality and a good experience that might cultivate students' interest, motivation in learning, and ability to participate in classroom activities. Xu (2010) explained that multimedia can assist students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Furthermore, students can gain basic knowledge in the target language such as English in the classroom through the use of multimedia learning. Sarowardy and Halder (2019) pointed out that the use of multimedia has been or has been claimed for a long time to be an indispensable part of the teaching.

## Review of Literature

Constructivism's central idea is that human learning is constructed, that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. This prior knowledge influences what new or modified knowledge an individual will construct from new learning experiences (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256) as constructivist teaching emphasizes student-centered teaching. The process of learning is the process by which individuals construct knowledge, in which students are the subjects of learning, cognition, and information processing as the teaching and learning is normally from the actual situation.

As Can (2009) pointed “constructivist approach is promising at promoting learner’ language and communicative skills as well as at fostering their autonomy, social and interactive skills contributing to their development into more confident, pro-active and responsible individuals by supporting incentives on diverse media in language learning and teaching” (p. 60).

There have been various studies (Cavalheiro, 2015; Khalid and Azeem, 2012; (Nguyen, Williams, and Nguyen, 2012) done on using a constructivist approach to ELT recently. According to them using a constructivist method to teaching and learning can help students perform better specifically if multimedia is integrated into teaching and learning. This view means that technology and its functions have an increasing influenced on English

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teaching and learning and are expected to shape the teaching model of the new era. As technology offers interminable resources that can be used in English classrooms, transmitting knowledge to learners can be attained easily.

Although the constructivist learning process includes individual or collaborative work that investigates a problem to work creatively, active learning utilizing multimedia may assist in providing motivational and promotional support to students of a wide variety of learning styles. While students' characters and personalities are among the factors in determining the level of engagement that previous knowledge can be built upon and new information used to understand new perspectives (Tse-kian, 2003). As multimedia assists, the development of these new paradigms, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), therefore a greater understanding is likely to develop. With this mindset, students can interact with other students depending on the level of their ability with the utilization of multimedia in the English classroom (Aljohani, 2017; Gul, 2016; Marlowe and Page, 2005).

In China, the characteristic of English in foreign language teaching is that teachers leave students limited space to play an autonomous role for learning (Hu, 2005) as EFL learning in China is based on examinations. This is the reason why the English classroom environment in China is dominated by the teacher's teaching and learning approach (Hu, 2016). Nonetheless, as China becomes the focus of the world with regards to the economy, the country, therefore, needs to make sure that education would be among the best in the world. This is when teaching and learning have been moving forward to be more communicative and moving away from a repeat-after-me approach. As Hallinger and Murphy (2015) argued, establishing a teaching model suitable for student learning levels often produce competent students. Therefore, the combination of multimedia and social constructivism is perceived to be a potential method to improve students' English ability specifically in communication.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The researcher conducted her study at Pu'er University, in China in the academic year of 2019-2020. To answer the research questions, this study used quantitative design to collect data using descriptive analysis, *Mean (M)*, and *Standard Deviation (SD)*.

The populations were freshman and sophomore English major and applied English major students in the School of Foreign Languages Pu'er University. This consists of 200 students, 150 females and 50 males. There were 100 freshmen and 100 sophomore students with 25 males and 75 females at each level. Their age was ranging from 18 to 25 years old. All information gathered was from the academic year 2018-2019 based on Pu'er university calendar year.

### Research Instruments

The questionnaire was used as the main tool for data collection adapted from Maor and Fraser (2005). As the level of students and the area where this study was held were different, the questionnaire had gone through the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) evaluation, using three experts in Linguistics with more than 30 years of teaching experience. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese to ensure that the participants could better understand the items from the questionnaire. The Chinese translation was checked and double-checked by Chinese native speakers' teachers who have a Ph.D. in Education and have more than 20 years of teaching experience in an international school.

The researcher used the 5-Likert Scales.

Table 1  
Criteria of Interpretation for a 5-point Likert Scale

Frequency	Rating	Range	Description
Always	5	4.51-5.00	Very high
Often	4	3.51-4.50	High
Sometimes	3	2.51-3.50	Moderate
Seldom	2	1.51-2.50	Low
Almost Never	1	1.00-1.50	Very Low

### Finding's Results and Discussion

#### The Chinese students' perceptions of EFL classroom learning environments

The Chinese students' perception of the EFL learning environment on the process of learning has three domains; *learning to communicate*, *learning to investigate*, and *learning to think*. Each domain has five items.

Table 2

Learning to Communicate

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1. I get the chance to talk to other students.	2.27	1.26	Low
2. I discuss with other students how to conduct investigations.	2.35	1.24	Low
3. I ask other students to explain their ideas.	2.21	1.17	Low
4. Other students ask me to explain my ideas.	2.49	1.16	Low
5. Other students discuss their ideas with me.	2.29	1.19	Low
Overall	2.32	1.20	Low

Table 2 indicated that the overall average score of the Chinese students' *Learning to Communicate* was 'low' with M= 2.32 and SD= 1.20. According to the standard of interpretation, this can be explained as that students' perception of their ability to communicate in English was not good at all. As illustrated, their perception of each item of this domain was relatively 'low'

This result had indicated that there is a need to provide students the opportunity to talk with their peers so that they can have time to discuss matters related to their work and so on. Thus, the school where this study was conducted needs to pay attention to this domain, 'learning to communicate' where their perception was relatively 'low.'

Table 3

Learning to investigate

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1. I find out answers to questions by an investigation.	4.22	.94	High
2. I carry out investigations to test my ideas.	3.86	1.00	High
3. I conduct follow-up investigations to answer new questions.	4.13	.88	High
4. I design my ways of investigating problems.	3.84	1.04	High
5. I approach a problem from more than one perspective.	4.15	.81	High
Total	4.04	.96	High

Table 3 illustrated that the overall average scores of students' perceptions 'learning to investigate' was 'high'. As indicated the M=4.04 and the SD= .96 according to the standard 56 of interpretation, this can be explained that Chinese students thought that they could find answers for investigation and carried out investigations on their own. As indicated in the table, Item 6 had M=4.22 and SD=.94 and Item 7 had M=3.86 and SD=1.00. The same as the Item 8-Item 10 in which the mean was ranging to M= 4.13 with the SD=.88, M=3.84 with SD=1.04 and M=4.15 with SD=.81 respectively.

From the five items, item 6 had the highest score (m=4.22 with SD= .94) while item 9, *I design my ways of investigating problems*, was a little bit lower (M=3.84 with SD=1.04). Based on the result above, this can be interpreted that Chinese students need others who would likely help them with their investigation. This corresponded with item 7; *I carry out investigations to test my ideas*, which had a lower *Mean* and *Standard Deviation*. This means, when investigating with your own ideas, someone would be needed to agree or disagree with the investigation otherwise you might not know whether your investigation would be right or wrong. Nevertheless, the result shows that as Chinese students, in general, are being trained to be investigative, this explains why they have had a relatively *high* perception of the second domain of the 'learning process environment'.

Table 4  
Learning to Think

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
11. I get to think deeply about how I learn.	3.89	.96	High
12.I get to think deeply about my ideas.	4.14	.96	High
13. I get to think deeply about new ideas.	3.89	1.03	High
14. I get to think deeply about how to become a better learner.	4.24	.82	High
15. I get to think deeply about my understandings.	3.87	1.02	High
Overall	4.00	.96	High

Table 4 showed that the overall average score of students' perceptions 'learning to think was 'high'. As indicated the M=4.00 and the SD= .96 according to the five standards of

interpretation, this can be explained as that Chinese students have a high overall view of what they want to study and think in class.

From the five items, item 14 had the highest score (M= 4.24 with SD= .82) While item 12, *I get to think deeply about my ideas*, was a little bit lower ( M= 4.14 and SD= .96). According to the result above, this result means that when thinking with your ideas, it is necessary to think deeply about your understanding. Show that students should further understand and absorb the knowledge they have learned.

The findings of the objective indicated that in the learning process environment, Chinese students' perception on their actual process reflected on the reality of the English classroom in China as they indicated, 'learning to investigate' and 'learning to think' was relatively *high* among Chinese students but 'learning to communicate' was *low*. This result reflected on the real situation in the classroom where students had little opportunity to communicate with each other (Bada and Olusegun, 2015). Thus, Chinese students' perception of EFL classroom environments indicated that there is a need to shift the teaching and learning to be more student-centered and provides students more opportunity to communicate using multimedia sensibly (Aljohani, 2017). What teachers and learners need for 21<sup>st</sup>-century English education is to have a more dynamic classroom where students engage and interact, hence create independents and self-learning individuals (Aljohani, 2017; Gul, 2016).

**The levels of Chinese students' perceptions of the use of multimedia as a constructivist approach to English language learning**

Chinese students' perceptions on the use of multimedia as a constructivist approach to English language learning has three domains; the 'relevance', 'ease to use' and 'challenge'.

The results of students' perception of EFL classroom learning environments are shown in Table 5-7.

Table 5  
Relevance

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
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16.Can show how complex real-life environments are	4.11	.89	High
17.Can present data in meaningful ways	3.89	1.06	High
18.Can present information that is relevant to me	4.20	.92	High
19.Can present realistic tasks	3.80	1.03	High
20.Can provide a wide range of information	4.14	.87	High
Total	4.03	.96	High

Table 5 lists the overall average score of students' perceptions on the use of multimedia was 'high'. As indicated in the table item 18, '*Can present information that is relevant to me*', had the highest M=4.20 and SD= .92 followed by the item 20, '*Can provide a wide range of information*' with M= 4.14 and SD= .87 and item 16, '*Can show how complex real-life environments are*' with M=4.11 and SD= .89. As shown, it can be inferred that among the 200 Chinese student participants, the students were viewed multimedia as tools with a wide range of information that could help them in different ways not only in their study but also in their day to day existence.

Table 6

Ease to Use

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
21. Seems to be an interesting screen design.	3.95	.99	High
22. Seems to be easy to navigate.	4.18	.90	High
23. Seems to be fun to use.	3.85	1.00	High
24. Seems to be easy to use.	4.21	.85	High
25. Takes only a short time to learn how to use it.	3.91	1.01	High
Total	4.02	.95	High

Table 8 illustrated that the overall average score of students' perceptions 'ease to use' was 'high'. Based on their scaling, item 24 had the highest rating among the five items in which stated that '*Seems to be easy to use*' with the M= 4.21 and SD= .85; this followed by item 22, '*Seems to be easy to navigate*' with M= 4.18 and SD= .90. The indication, therefore, is that, as Chinese students were more or less digital generation that was the reason why with the overall M=4.02 and SD= .95, they perceived this domain, '*ease to use*' as high.

Table 7  
Challenge

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
26. Can make me think.	4.13	0.88	High
27. Can be complex but clear.	3.86	1.01	High
28. Can be challenging to use.	4.14	.96	High
29. Can help me to generate new ideas.	3.86	.98	High
30. Can help me to generate new questions.	4.14	.91	High
Total	4.03	.95	High

Table 7 illustrated that the overall average scores of the domain ‘challenge’ with regards to the use of multimedia as a constructivist approach to English language teaching was ‘high’ with the overall scale of  $M = 4.03$  and  $SD = .95$ .

This can be explained as Chinese students perceived that although multimedia has relevant implications to their learning and easy to use, they understood that there would be a challenge in a way that it would be for the better or positive way. Therefore challenge in this particular context was not difficulties that they would face instead, a challenge that would help them to be 'resourceful', 'investigative' 'innovative', etc. For example, Item 28, 30, and 26, the statement stated that '*Can be challenging to use*' the indication was that as multimedia has unending features waiting to be discovered with regards to teaching and learning, resourceful students therefore who knows how to search the information they need, would likely to find them. The item 30, '*Can make me think*' and 26, '*Can help me to generate new questions*' these statements illustrated how multimedia allows you to be investigative and not just take yes or agree on everything you read or found using multimedia. Thus multimedia does not only provide information but also helps students to think further. As for the rest of the statements these inferred 'creativity', such as in item 29, '*Can help me to generate new ideas*'. Therefore, in terms of ‘challenge’ Chinese perceptions can be inferred as positively high.

The findings of objective two indicated that with regards to the use of multimedia with three domains: 'relevance', 'ease to use' and 'challenge', the Chinese students showed that their perception was 'high'. This indicated that Chinese students' perceptions were positively favorable specifically when it would be used in the classroom. As indicated in the findings

Chinese students manifested that using multimedia as a constructivist was relevant to their learning process (Cavalheiro, 2015). They also indicated that using this as a tool tended to be easy and would likely help them to be more resourceful, investigative, and creative. Thus, integrating multimedia in Chinese students English language classroom might have a big advantage as it can provide authentic learning materials which reinforce teaching and learning process (Ghasemi and Hashemi, 2011; Cavalheiro, 2015). As multimedia, in general, can help teachers and learners in creative ways, thus, integrating them to different activities that influence interaction might be able to help improve their communicative skills, the area where Chinese students perceive as a low part of their learning process environment (Aljohani, 2017; Gul, 2016; Marlowe and Page, 2005).

### **Pedagogical implications**

Although this study has found few pedagogical implications on the teaching and learning on using multimedia as the constructivist approach to teaching and learning in Pu'er University, China context, there are advantages and disadvantages the researcher would like to outline.

Multimedia provides a richer teaching method for university English teaching. With the help of various videos, audios, and images, teachers can collect various learning materials to help students learn authentic English. This can increase the charm of English teaching and improving the interest in college students specifically in Pu'er University EFL classrooms. This can allow students to feel the charm of language so that students' English language ability can be greatly improved with the integration of different multimedia materials. For this reason, this helps to achieve the purpose of constructing learning situations advocated by constructivism.

For teachers, teachers may help students deepen their understanding of knowledge, and reflect the cognitive subject status of students in classroom teaching. This is also the construction in which point of view emphasized the doctrine of letting learners construct their knowledge system. Letting students emphasize their self-learning, they might be able to change the existing knowledge structure of their understanding, which can eliminate the boredom of the learning on the process and the teaching drawbacks if the learning method is single.

Nonetheless, few disadvantages were found in using multimedia as a constructivist approach for English learning and teaching.

First for students, when teachers use multimedia for teaching, the teaching process can be faster than the previous teaching progress, which can make students unable to follow classroom learning. The teaching speed of the teachers and the students whose academic performance is lagging tends to not fully absorb the new information, and the quality of learning will likely be reduced.

Secondly, many teachers pay too much attention to the student's dominant position in the process of multimedia classroom teaching might ignore their leading role. Finally, as far as teachers are concerned, most college English teachers have not received network information technology training and education and may have insufficient understanding of computer software. In the process of making a multimedia part of teaching and learning, they only change traditional teaching notes and after-school exercises. In electronic form, this form of multimedia will not only improve the effectiveness of English classroom teaching but will also affect students' English learning enthusiasm.

## **Conclusion**

Although the use of multimedia in EFL classrooms can provide a meaningful and interesting process in the language learning, create an active classroom atmosphere, and promote learning, further study needs to be done to understand fully how this approach works in the context of Chinese English language classroom. Additionally, the use of multimedia in teaching and learning can be a distraction to learners' concentration in the classroom. Therefore, teachers should also pay attention to teaching materials that they want to supplement students' needs. Accordingly, teachers need to know how to use these different types of multimedia to function appropriately. As the learning of students depends on the knowledge and the teaching skills of the teacher, to integrate multimedia into teaching and learning, therefore, require some consideration, because of the different factors involved; teaching methods, students' abilities, and teachers' ability to use multimedia, all of which should be taken into consideration.

To conclude, since the use of multimedia as a constructivist approach is a new approach in Pu'er University for English teaching and learning, it is necessary to understand

how to integrate this method into the traditional English classroom. Teachers need to know how to combine multimedia with the content needed in teaching. Similarly, an understanding of what types of materials to be used in the classroom needs more consideration. In other words, teachers need teaching strategies that they can use if constructivism will be implemented in teaching and learning otherwise everything will be of no value. Then again, the most important thing is on the knowledge teachers impart to their students as this will be students' backbone for their future endeavors.

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