The Implementation of Constructivism in Teaching Reading to Kurdish EFL Students at Salahaddin University-Erbil

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Abstract :
This study investigates the effectiveness of implementing constructivist principles in teaching reading to Kurdish EFL students. The study employs a quasi-experimental design, which involves a control group and an experimental group. The former group was taught traditionally, while the latter was taught in accordance with constructivist pedagogy. The results revealed that the constructivist intervention positively affected the students' reading skill in the experimental group. They outperformed their peers in the control group who were taught traditionally. These results testify the assumption that the application is expedient to cultivate students' reading skills. The study ends up with putting forward some conclusions.

تطبيق النظرية البنائية في تدريس القراءة للطلاب الكورد الذين يدرسون اللغة الأنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة صلاح الدين-ـأربيل

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الخلاصة :

تبحث هذه الدراسة فعالية تطبيق النظرية البنائية في تدريس القراءة للطلاب الكورد الذين يدرسون اللغة الأنكليزية كلغة أجنبية. تستخدم الدراسة تصميم شبه تجريبي والتي تتضمن المجموعة الضابطة والمجموعة التجريبية. يتم تدريس المجموعة الضابطة حسب الطريقة التقليدية أما المجموعة التجريبية فيتم تدريسها حسب مبادئ النظرية البنائية . أظهرت النتائج أن النظرية البنائية أثرت ايجابيا على مهارة القراءة لدى طلاب المجموعة التجريبية حيث فاقوا أقرانهم في المجموعة الضابطة. هذه النتائح تثبت الفرضية القائلة أن تطبيق النظرية البنائيةملائمة لتنمية مهارة القراءة لدى الطلاب الكورد . تنتهي الدراسة بطرح بعض الاستنتاجات من قبل الباحثين.

1. Introduction

Teaching EFL at university level in Kurdistan Region (henceforth KR) is still suffering from the deep defects of traditional lecturing system. Broughton et al (1994: 22) assert that a typical feature of traditional methodology is that teaching is deeply teacher-dominated and it breaks course content into sequenced components which are presented to students through lecturing and route exercises. This idea corresponds to the metaphoric description provided by Scrivener (2011:16-17), he likens traditional teaching to "jug and mug" with an emphasis on "chalk and talk".

Conforming to this method, textbook strapped instructors, total reliance on teacher-centred classes, the absence of group work/project, teachers disregarding students′ choice and voice and many other negatives are not unusual to the Kurdish scene.

Advocating the traditional instruction in KR is affirmed by Wahab (2017) when he pointed out that although some reforming attempts have been made as to change the content and design of textbooks, the methodologies and approaches employed in teaching have stayed irrelevant to those changes.

The aforesaid traditional teaching encourages knowledge transmission to the students without visualizing or

contextualizing it; it does not approach knowledge in a critical way and does not allow students to be engaged in critical analysis or contestation with the information dictated to them. It is worth mentioning that teaching EFL in our universities is not exempt from this danger. Hence, we find that reading lessons are conducted in a relatively monotonous way which in turn led to make Kurdish EFL learners passive readers; poor at using their higher levels of thinking in reading appropriately, and having poor skills in reading comprehension.

Keith and Helen (1999) contend that the generally approved view of reading is that it is an 'interactive' process whereby bottom-up processes (e.g. the physical text on the page, such as letter and word recognition) interact with top-down processes (e.g. prior knowledge of the text type or topic). Accordingly, deficiency at one level is likely to be compensated for by proficiencies at another.

Similarly, Harmer (2001, p.70) well depicts reading as an "incredibly active occupation". He describes successful readers as being able to understand the meaning of the words, having an imaginative mind to see the pictures the words are painting, understand the argument and what is hidden between the lines, and provokingly engage with the text and the language. If readers fail to do this, then they only scratch the surface of the text and immediately forget what they learn.

Duke and Pearson (2002) acknowledge that reading is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity which needs to be tackled skilfully. Hence, they make an urgent call for a balanced comprehension instruction. They propose two significant components of their approach: supportive classroom context and a model of comprehension instruction. They emphasize the vital role of collaborative work inside class in supporting the development of skilful readers through cooperative learning environments.

Unlike traditional instruction, which is teacher-centered and non-interactive, constructivism often refers to student-centered, interactive, and meaning based classroom procedures. Wang (2014) maintains that constructivism supports the claim that in

reading classes, teachers should use appropriate teaching methods so as to activate students' prior knowledge and direct students to establish the connection between the old and new knowledge and come to the conclusions on their own instead of being told. Knowledge construction is not extracted directly from the text; instead, it is based on students' existing information, knowledge, emotion, experience and cultural background. Generally speaking, constructivism views reading as a process of "communication between readers and writers but not face to face". This leads teachers to have an insight into the origin of students' ideas and acknowledge the diversity of thinking.

Similarly, Huang (2016) argues that in a constructivist instruction, reading is regarded a dynamic process, where all activities should be designed flexibly. Furthermore, in the reading class, teachers do their utmost to direct the class towards a "learning of reading" process rather than a "teaching of reading" process. With this intention, constructivist approach considers students as the most important part of reading instruction and teachers guide them to explore knowledge on their own and achieve the preinstalled targets.

To sum it up, The significance of constructivist approach to reading lies in the fact that it provides teachers with tools and principles which can help them to lead their students into energetic participation in text events, entering into active dialogue with texts, and eventually thinking of reading as an authentic and meaningful activity rather than as a classroom exercise (Wilson and Lianruiwe, 2007).

1.1 The Problem

Traditional approach to teaching reading almost does nothing to improve students' communicative ability in the language. Whereas, constructivism puts the target language into practice from the beginning to the end of instruction and exerts everyday English language to help the learners improve their target language by exposing them to authentic materials and real life

contexts to use the language interactively (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

Wahab (2017) confirms that the traditional approach to schooling prevails in Kurdistan Region, with its ultimate aim to transfer knowledge, culture, and foundational values to students. The current situation of Kurdish EFL is not promising. The traditional approach proved to be deficient in improving students' foreign language (especially reading skills) and increasing their acquaintance with English language and its culture. Traditional approach is teacher-centered which makes students passive onlookers of the whole teaching process. The traditional approach to teaching reading adopts a bottom-up process (emphasizing on words and expressions that are explained precisely in great details) disregarding the fact that the whole passage conveys a bigger message than its individual word or expression. Laying too much stress on parts tends to be a hindrance to the understanding of the whole. Consequently, Kurdish students are not able to read effectively, think independently, and develop their reading sub-skills.

Based on the researchers' experience as university instructors at Salahaddin University, the teaching process in general, especially teaching reading, seemed to be the same type and teachers conducted their lessons in a relatively monotonous way. This situation led to undesirable consequences where Kurdish EFL learners are described in general as passive readers, their reading skills are poor and far from being satisfactory. They are poor at using their higher levels of thinking in reading appropriately, having difficulties in decoding meaning of a word in a text, and having poor skills in reading comprehension, especially in determining the exact meaning of words and predicting (Brime, 2012; Ismael, 2015)

As regards English majors in the College of Basic Education, they have a three-hour course per week in reading, which is not enough for teaching the basic components of reading knowledge which needs a considerable amount of time. Therefore, reading teachers encounter the problem of too much content, but too little time to teach it. They cover the content on the expense of

teaching the sub-skills appropriately. They are burdened with mandatory prescribed textbooks. Added to this, Kurdish EFL students lean to be passive and reluctant in reading. Yet, the nature of the reading process is an active one rather than being passive and mechanical, which requires readers utilize what they have learned to process the reading material.

Generally speaking, in their trial to improve students' poor reading skill, some educators and researchers for instance Huang (2016) and Ardiansyah and Ujihanti, (2018) expressed the need for employing the constructivist approach in teaching reading to EFL students. They attributed this decision to the fact that the social constructivist approach views reading not only as a passive decoding process, but also as a social interaction in real life situations. The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a constructivist model in teaching reading to Kurdish EFL students at university level.

1.2 Research Question
The present study attempts to answer the following question:
1-Is there any significant difference in the students' reading (and its sub-skills) after manipulating constructivist principles in teaching reading?

1.3 Hypothesis
It is hypothesized that:
1-Kurdish students' reading comprehension will be improved after the implementation of the principles of constructivism (after the experiment).
Note: In the current study, the level indicating a significant difference in results had been set at 0.05.

1.4 The Limits
This study is confined to exploring the effectiveness of implementing constructivism in teaching EFL to Kurdish university students. Within the field of teaching EFL, the current study will be more limited to study the impact of constructivism on the development in reading skill only, apart from the other

three skills. Another limitation of the study is identifying the setting of the study, third year students at English department/College of Basic Education/Salahaddin University-Erbil in the academic year 2016-2017.

1.5 Significance of the Study

It is important to mention that a coherent understanding of EFL reading instruction in the Kurdish context does not exist and the theory itself (constructivism) has not been tackled in Kurdish classrooms. As a result, this study seeks to bridge the oft-noted gap between research and practice and bring together EFL reading teaching and constructivist theory of learning. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no empirical study that combines these two together in the Kurdish context.

2. Constructivism

Candy (1991), as cited in Benson (2011:38), depicts constructivism as a cluster of approaches which share a core belief that knowledge cannot be taught but it is constructed on the part of learners themselves.

According to Aviram (2000), constructivist school of thought derives from many disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, and pedagogy.

Fox (2001) describes constructivism as a "metaphor for learning", where he likens the acquisition of knowledge to a process of building or construction.

Constructivism is "a pattern of learning in terms of active participation and process evolvement" (Lin: 2003).

Kaufman (2004) views constructivism as "a philosophy, epistemology". Further, it has recently 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 learner-centered approach that centres on cognitive and social processes in learning.

Fosonot (2005) delineates constructivism as a theory of learning, not a theory about teaching, "but when one analyzes the theory, one can begin to formulate a reformed practice that supports rigor, empowerment, and the construction of genuine understanding".

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.

Richards and Schmidt (2010: 123) view constructivism as "a social and educational philosophy"

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

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.

It has been admitted by many researchers that the term Constructivism is in itself very broad, embracing many diverse approaches and schools of thought, with a various implication for the educational process (Aviram, 2000). Similarly, Jordan, Carlile, and Stack (2008:56) hold the same view and cite "Rather than one unified theory, constructivism is a broad group of theories that explains knowledge acquisition and learning".

The current study is built on implementing the main principles of constructivism in teaching reading to EFL students. The key principles of constructivist teaching and learning according to Jonassen (1999) and Brooks and Brooks (1993) are as follows:

1- Learning is an active process

Kudryashova et al (2016) assert that active learning methods are often associated with constructivism. They further affirm that some scholars even hold the belief that "constructivist learning is a more appropriate name for active learning".

According to Bull (2009), the principles of using discovery learning and active learning pervade constructivist-informed teaching and learning. Integrating experiential learning into the teaching and learning process is another manifestation of the constructivism, i.e., students' attempt to draw meaning from experience is regarded a significant step for learning. Constructivism appreciates students' active participation in the learning process by building knowledge and understanding in response to learning opportunities created by their teacher. As a consequence, students take greater responsibility for their learning and the teachers are facilitators and activators of learning, rather than deliverers of ideas.

2- Learners actively engage in their knowledge building based on prior experiences.

Cey (2001) proclaims that active learning inherently implies a "doing". Hence, a constructivist-directed classroom is expected to be based on performance and persistence on the part of the students. They are inspired to generate their own ideas and knowledge through execution, exertion, and expansion of their prior knowledge. The emphasis of instruction must be directed towards the creation of meaning and understanding while encountering new information or new contexts. Therefore, students must be given opportunities to be active in ways that will promote profound learning which results from acting in situations. Accordingly, we can regard active learning as an amalgam of activities that makes knowledge to be owned by the student.

This requires the use of active learning strategies to foster deep understanding. Faust and Paulson (1998) define active learning as "any learning activity engaged in by students in a classroom other than listening passively to an instructor's lecture".

The importance of active learning strategies was emphasised by Bernstein et al (2010), they state "By making students active

learners, we motivate them to learn the material and succeed in the class. They also learn to view the material with a more critical eye as they make decisions themselves rather than passively accepting those made by others."

Similarly, Rowell and Palmer (2007) maintain that the use of active learning strategies actually serve as a "catalyst" for more effective independent learning of the content intended as well as related content. The students became very resourceful in finding ways to present their ideas comprehensively and critically.

3- Knowledge is socially constructed. Cooperative work is encouraged.

Cooperative learning can be defined as an approach to teaching and learning in which classroom organization is designed in a way that students work together in small co-operative teams. (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:124) maintain that this approach to learning promotes students' learning due to the following reasons:

(a) it allows for a less threatening environment inside the class,

(b) it furthers students' participation in the classroom,

(c) the need for competitiveness diminishes, and

(d) teacher's dominance in the classroom is reduced.

Rowell and Palmer (2007) describe cooperative learning as a teaching strategy "where constructivism reaches its pinnacle". They hold the belief that cooperative learning fosters the process of "meaning-making" in the classroom because of the active nature of the assignment. To put it differently, working in cooperative groups helps students to cognitively rehearse and restructure information and incorporate it into the existing cognitive structures.

Similarly, Schell and Janicki (2013) describe the cooperative model of teaching and learning as "an offspring of and closely related to the constructivist model".

Compared to individualistic and competitive types of learning, cooperative learning brings forth the creation of more positive attitudes toward learning. Moreover, cooperative learning practices accommodate students' individual differences by exploiting the different strengths of each member of the group;

thus, more capable members are positioned to scaffold others as needed (Rowell and Palmer, 2007).

4- Multiple representations of content is favoured

Researchers who show adherence to constructivism concentrate on the use of multiple modes of learning and on the importance of encountering multiple perspectives. This is based on their belief that using multiple modes of representation paves the way for students to view the same content through different modes such as visual and auditory. Consequently, this would broaden their thinking and allow them to evaluate alternative solutions to problems as a means of testing their own understanding (Chieu, 2005)

Sankey, Birch, and Gardiner (2011) are of the belief that multimodal learning environments provide opportunities for instructional elements to be presented in a variety of presentation modes. Accordingly, this may lead learners to learn and improve attention rates, i.e., they outperform students who learn through conventional approaches with single modes. Utilising multi source materials allows students to experience learning in ways in which are preferred to them and increases their self-directedness and control over the way that they progress through their materials.

Giselle and Kniep (2000:1) assume that textbook strapped instructors make school/university a chore for many students because they find much of what is taught senseless, irrelevant, and devoid of any meaningful context. This is doubled with the pressures teachers exert to cover the curriculum or to prepare students for standardized tests which is based on a curriculum that is content-driven rather than learner-based. When adopting such a curriculum, it seems difficult to mediate the needs and interests of the students while attending to the pressures of the curriculum. These curricula are "logical, organized, crisp, and in black and white. Students' needs and backgrounds, on the other hand, are extraordinarily diverse and complex".

Further, Wilson and Lianruiwe (2007) argue that teachers should evade teaching reading through the kind of disembodied texts which are so common in EFL classrooms. These texts are often

selected by teachers to demonstrate a grammatical point rather than to engage students in meaningful and purposeful reading practices. They describe these disembodied texts as having no context, not bearing particular relevance to students or their broader learning aims. Reading without a purpose yields in mute outsider readers rather than meaning-maker readers.

To overcome this defect, teachers can incorporate some extra materials and use essential questions to engross students in the curriculum. These questions aid teachers to tackle the curriculum while helping them treat it as something to be discovered and negotiated. Hence, teachers can promote the level of discourse in a classroom by enabling everyone to question and investigate, to discuss and to debate. As a result, teachers remind students that learning is a journey, that the quest to know is continuous and never-ending.

5- Assessment is authentic and interwoven with teaching. Dynamic assessment is encouraged to assess students learning in the context of teaching.

Sengupta (2016) maintains that assessment is viewed from different angles by behaviourists and constructivists. Behaviourists assume that "knowledge exists separately from the learner; therefore, students work to accumulate knowledge rather than to construct it". They consider content as the only component of the curriculum upon whish assessment is based. This type of assessment encourages rote learning or "mugging" disregarding any intellectual skill. The questions are closely connected to the material covered in the course and students tend to memorize and reproduce without any deep understanding. On the other hand, constructivists regard this view as "incomplete and short-sighted position". They believe that curriculum consists of four parts: content, process, product, and environment. This view implies that how students learn, how they show what they have learned and the circumstances in which they learn are as essential as what they learn. Accordingly, this paradigm necessitates alternative testing to assess student learning. This alternative assessment is a process by which teachers collect information that they will use to make

instructional decisions that enables them to adjust their practice so that it addresses students' needs. Nomnian (2002) confirms that paper-based language assessment system completely contradicts constructivism since they discourage students to think and move them only to remember the lecture for getting high grades. Marlowe and Page (2005), cited from Büyükdumana and Şirina (2010), assert that the most significant question to be asked about testing student learning is not 'how' assessment should be done but 'why' it is done. If the answer has more to do with comparative judgements and less to do with student learning, then the process of assessment is on the wrong track.

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.

3. Previous Studies

Constructivist pedagogy is achieving increasing prominence recently, especially in the field of EFL teaching. In this respect, the researchers put forward the following studies:

Reza and Mahmood (2013) attempted to investigate the possible impacts of sociocultural-based teaching techniques on Iranian EFL learners reading comprehension. 95 EFL learners from Mazandaran University participated in the study. Based on the results obtained, there was a significant statistical difference in reading comprehension of the students which indicates that the sociocultural teaching techniques resulted in better reading comprehension for EFL students. This revealed that sociocultural teaching techniques provide a better learning

context for EFL learners' reading comprehension compared to those of the traditional method. This, in turn, backs up the superiority of using social and collaborative techniques in EFL learning contexts.

Mahmoud (2014) carried out a study to explore the effect of using the constructivist learning strategy on developing some of reading and thinking skills of first year general secondary stage students in Egypt. He inferred that constructivism has significantly impacted developing reading and thinking skills among first secondary Egyptian students.

Jubran (2016) made an attempt to investigate the effect of the social constructivist approach on teaching reading on Jordanian university students. 66 juniors at Princess Alia University College were the subjects of the study and they were divided into an experimental group (33 students) and a control group (33 students). Two different instructors taught them; the experimental group was taught in accordance with the social constructivist approach while the traditional approach was used by the instructor of the control group. The adjusted mean score was significantly in favour of the experimental group. Therefore, she concluded that the constructivist approach was more effective than the traditional approach in developing her students' reading skill.

In his study, Huang (2016) tried to explore the efficient ways of constructivist English reading teaching on Chinese senior high schools students in an attempt to eliminate the drawbacks of traditional teaching of English reading. By analyzing the results of the research, he inferred that students who were taught under the instruction of constructivism had better performance and were superior to those who were taught traditionally. A negative point to mention is that the researcher neither explicated his experiment nor presented a satisfying analysis of his results. He just mentioned the problems of Chinese students and how teachers should teach reading.

In another study conducted on 148 Indonesian students (non-major English classes in the colleges of Computer Engineering, Education, and Business Administration), Ardiansyah and

Ujihanti (2018) investigated students' reading comprehension achievement, vocabulary mastery, and social values among their students who were taught in accordance with constructivism. The results verified the efficacy of the constructivism in teaching reading comprehension. They found out that there was a significant improvement in their students' reading comprehension achievement and vocabulary mastery. What's more, there was a considerable improvement in students' moral values towards their friends such cooperation, showing respect, and holding responsibility, which in turn made their reading process more genuine and interesting.

4. Methodology and Design

The aim of the current study is to examine the effectiveness of constructivism in improving Kurdish EFL students' reading skill. To this end, the following methodology and design of study are adopted:

4.1 The Sample

This study was carried out at the College of Basic Education/English Department at Salahaddin University-Erbil during the academic year 2016-2017. The third year students (102 students) were the population of the study. Their age approximately ranged from 20 to 24 years old. The researcher used intact groups, actual university classes: group A and group B. One of the groups, namely group A (51 students) was chosen randomly to be the subjects of the experiment. Then, this group was sub-divided into two groups of participants, control and experimental. The reason behind choosing only one of the groups to be exposed to the experiment was the large class size. The key principle of constructivism to be employed was the emphasis on social learning; thus cooperative work was the essence of the researcher's work. Accordingly, this principle required sub-dividing the experimental group into smaller groups of three students. As a matter of fact, handling a large group like group A (51 students) was not an easy job to manage. However, some of the students did not take part in the pre or

post-test, some others did not attend the class sessions appropriately, and others were not required for reading module; hence, the final pool of participants consisted of 42 students. Then, the participants were respectively divided into two groups of participants, control and experimental each containing 21 students. Then, the researchers sub-divided the experimental group into seven smaller groups, each containing three students. The control group received traditional teaching while the experimental group was taught in compliance with constructivism.

4.2 Research Design

Reviewing previous researches on measuring the impact of a treatment on an outcome lead the researchers to decide on conducting an experiment. In this respect, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) highly recommend to use an experiment in educational research when investigating the effectiveness of utilising specific techniques/strategies on students' progress. Correspondingly, the students in this study are prepared to receive a treatment in order to explore the relationships between the independent variable the 'implementation of constructivist principles', and 'students' progress in reading skills' would be the dependent variable on which the independent variable is acting.

For the purpose of deciding on which design to follow, the researchers reviewed the literature in order to reach a sound decision. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007: 274) maintain that empirical studies in education tend to be quasi-experimental rather than experimental and in most cases these studies depend on pre-existing intact groups. Hence, the researchers adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test, 20 weeks treatment, post-test design in their study.

4.3 The Instrument

The main instrument of the current study is a pre/post-test. The researchers used a reading comprehension test as an instrument to collect data (see appendix 1). In designing the reading test, they referred to many resources via reviewing the related literature in addition to their own experiences.

The test was administered to students at the beginning of the course (pre-test) to determine their reading comprehension ability prior to the experiment. The same test was given to students at the end of the experiment to determine their improvement after the accomplishment of the experiment. The researchers tried to let the questions go beyond simple comprehension to address the main reading sub-skills. The present study aims at assessing students' development in their sub-skills of reading, namely:

- answering questions
- generating questions
- identifying the main theme in the reading
- guessing new words/ chunks meanings
- confirming predictions/ inferences
- summarising a text

In developing the test, the researchers tried to well align it to serve the instructional objectives which have been emphasized during the experiment, i.e., to accomplish the main aim of the study that is assessing the development of reading sub-skills between the control and experimental groups. To achieve this aim, the researcher used a set of different tasks in their test to ensure that these sub-skills were successfully measured.

4.4 Validity and Reliability of the Test

In order to evaluate face validity of the test, a penal of experts was selected as jury members based on their relevant knowledge and experience. To determine the content validity of the test, the researchers tried to make certain that the elements of the main issue in the test (reading and its sub-skills) are being covered in the test. They ensured the reading sub-skills are being examined in the reading test whether through allocating an entire section in the test or through a single item or a combination of test items in the reading test.

For the purpose of calculating the reliability of the test, the researcher used split half and inter-rater scoring in her study. She used the former to check the reliability of the first question which is an objective question, and the latter was used to check

the reliability of the second question which is a subjective question scored according a rubric designed for this purpose.

The reliability coefficient was calculated by using the statistics package SPSS, i.e., the correlation coefficient for the two halves was found by computing the Spearman-Brown coefficient. It was estimated as 0.82, which indicated that the test enjoyed a good reliability in terms of internal consistency. To check for reliability as equivalence, inter-rater reliability was used. It was used to examine the degree of agreement among raters. The correlation between the researchers' and a second rater's scores calculated as 87.4%; it confirmed a high agreement correlation.

4.5 Data Analysis and Discussion

To answer the research question, the steps are as follows:

The researchers started with comparing the mean scores of the students' results on the pre- and post-administration of the reading comprehension test to investigate whether the students in the experimental group (henceforth ExG) improved their reading ability after receiving the treatment through constructivist-based instruction. They used the dependent t-test to determine whether there was a significant difference before and after the treatment. The results are described statistically in terms of: Mean, T-test, and P-value. The results are presented below.

Table (1) Dependent paired sample statistics of the Ex group (pre-total and post-total)

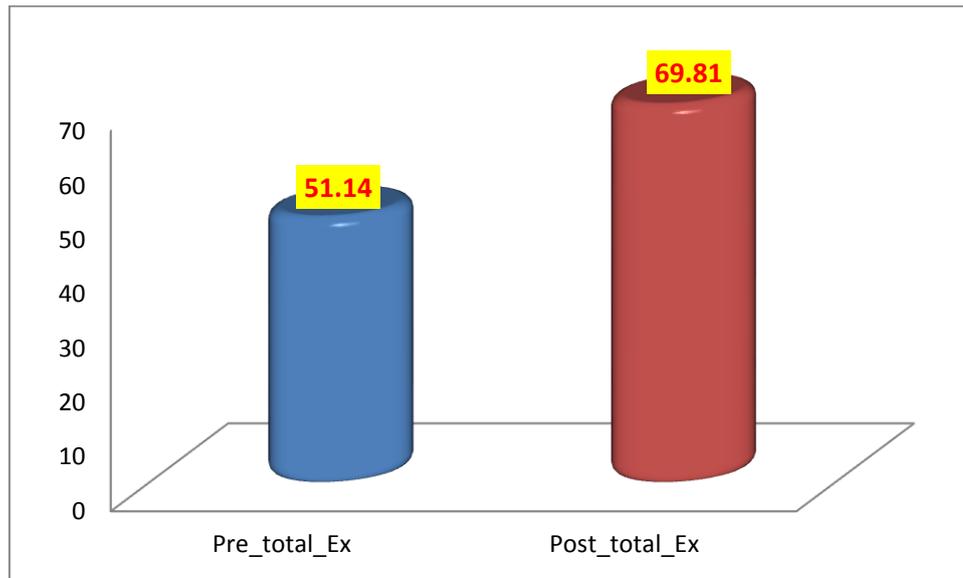|	Type	N	Mean	T-test	P-value
Pre-test (total)	ExG	21	51.14	11.41	0.000
Post-test (total)	ExG	21	69.81		

Sig. if P<0.05

Figure (1) Experimental pre-post total scores

As illustrated in Table (1), the post-test mean score (69.81) of the students who were taught in accordance with constructivist principles (the experimental group) is significantly different from their pre-test mean score (51.14), at a level of 0.05. The P-value is equal to (0.000); hence, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in their achievement in the reading comprehension test before and after the treatment.

This result constitutes a strong argument in favour of the constructivist-informed instruction in enhancing students' all reading sub-skill (their total score) in the experimental group. This result confirms the hypothesis of the study: Kurdish students' reading skill will be enhanced and improved after conducting the lesson in accordance with the principles of constructivism (after the experiment).

Furthermore, an independent sample T-test was used to compare the pre-post test scores of the control group (henceforth CG) with that of the experimental group, as is shown in the table (2) and figure (2) below:

Table (2) Control G and Experimental G total scores in the reading test

	Type	N	Mean	SD	T-test	P-value
Achievement in the Pre-test (total)	CG	21	60.619	13.944	2.584	0.014
	ExG	21	51.143	14.827		
Achievement in the Post-test (total)	CG	21	53.238	16.155	3.363	0.002
	ExG	21	69.810	15.772		

Guided by the results presented in table (2), the mean score of ExG total score in the pre-test, is 51.143 with a standard deviation of 14.827; while the mean score of CG total score in the pre-test is 60.619 with a standard deviation of 13.944. This result indicates that prior to the experiment, the CG's mean score is higher than that of ExG. This result, the CG obtaining significantly higher results in the pre-test than the ExG, can serve as a good indicator that the researcher succeeded in equalising the two groups (CG and ExG) and the process of assigning students to the experimental group was free from bias. Furthermore, it certifies that any observed progress in the ExG's reading skill results from the effectiveness of the experiment itself and it cannot be attributed to the high level of ExG.

In the post-test, we find that the ExG's responses register different results. The mean score of the ExG's responses has risen to (69.810) with a standard deviation of 15.772; while, the mean score of the CG's responses has fallen in the post- test to (53.238) with a standard deviation of 16.155. The results points out a statistical difference between the ExG and CG students' mean score in their post-test with a P-value 0.002, which indicates a significant difference in the mean score of ExG post-test in favour of the constructivist-informed teaching to which the ExG was exposed to during the experiment. In other words, this increase in the post-test mean score of the ExG reflects the

effectiveness of implementing constructivism in teaching reading skill. This difference is clearly illustrated in figure (2).
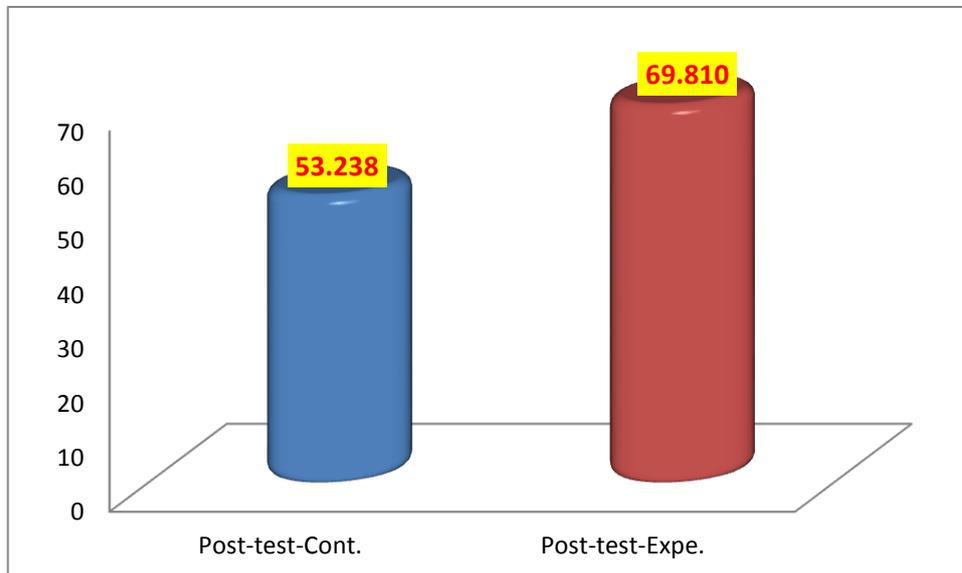

Figure (2) Post-test total score

In sum, greater progress in the total score of the reading test is seen in the results of experimental groups' responses in the post-test as compared to the results obtained by the participants in the control group. Due to the assessment level at $\alpha < 0.05$, the result is sig. Therefore, the hypothesis which reads "Kurdish students' reading comprehension will be improved after the implementation of the principles of constructivism (after the experiment)" is accepted.

To sum up, the results proves that constructivist-based approach, to which the ExG has been exposed to, is better and more efficacious than the traditional one in promoting students' reading skill. This result is in line with what Jubran's (2016) study, that the constructivist instructional model was more effective than the traditional model in developing the English majors' reading skill at Al-Balqa' Applied University. Yet, this researcher did not tackle the individual sub-skills of reading in her study; she only judged on her students' progress by analysing the total scores of her students.

Finally, it can be said that the results of the post-test give empirical evidence added to the theoretical one supporting the effectiveness of implementing constructivism in improving EFL students' reading skill (and its sub-skills). These effective results can be ascribed to the following reasons:

1- The smooth and ample implementation of constructivist principles during the experiment has led to the distinct improvement in their reading sub-skills.

2- The authenticity and the variety of the instructional material prepared by the researchers had a profound impact on students' progress. Employing different types of materials from authentic sources including relevant articles, caricatures, photos, and relevant videos have created a context conducive to meaningful learning.

3- Incorporating cooperative work in teaching the experimental group helped them to successfully manipulate group discussions and improve their reading in an adequate way.

4- With reference to the activation of the students' prior knowledge, the pre-reading activities prior to the presentation of materials have assisted them in constructing their own expectations of the reading texts. Consequently, this led to better comprehension of these texts

5- The experiment yielded important results in terms of students' interest and willingness to improve their English. The researchers deduced this through the students' continuous research, punctual attendance of the lectures, commitment to delivering assignments, and their increased participation in the lessons.

5. Conclusions

Taking into account the empirical evidence revealed in this study and with reference to the researchers' own observations during the experiment, the researchers have come to the following conclusions:

1- The students in the experimental group outperformed their peers in the control group after the treatment. The researchers witnessed a great progress in the students' academic knowledge and social skills.

2-The implementation of constructivist principles has proven to be a key feature of effective teaching especially teaching reading comprehension. Thus, teachers are invited to reconsider the ordinary methods and adopt new ones that depend on support and assistance.

3-Implementing constructivism in teaching EFL is theoretically acceptable and practically feasible in the Kurdish context.

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Appendix (1)
The reading comprehension test

Read the following passages and then choose the best answer to the questions. Respond to the questions on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passages:

Who Is ISIS Human Trafficking Survivor Nadia Murad? Amal Clooney's Client's Harrowing Story

by Lindsay Kimble

Nadia Murad is only 23, but she's already been **nominated** for the Nobel Peace Prize, and was named a UN Goodwill Ambassador on Friday.

Her journey, however, has been **traumatic**: in 2014, Murad was taken by ISIS for human trafficking, while her mother and brothers were **executed**. Now, with the help of her lawyer Amal Clooney, she's speaking out about the **plight** of the Yazidi people, a group native to Northern Iraq.

In August 2014, Murad was living with her family in northern Iraq as a student and **aspiring** history teacher when ISIS fighters entered their town, separating the men from the women, she told Time last year.

A U.N. spokesperson told Time that 312 men were murdered within an hour, including six of Murad's brothers and stepbrothers. Later, her mother was among 60 other

women murdered by the militants. Following the **massacre**, Murad and the other gathered young women were taken to be distributed to ISIS fighters for enslavement.

The Yazidi do not practice Islam, but rather, a combination of several belief systems. This has made them a target for ISIS. After being selected by a fighter, Murad was kept in a room, where she was beaten and raped by numerous men until she was "unconscious," she told Time.

Murad finally escaped in November 2014, running to safety after the house was left unlocked. After being moved to a refugee camp, she was chosen for a program that **relocated** her to Germany.

Still, Murad told Time in August, "more than 6,500 women and children were taken into captivity, about 1,200 children boys were taken to be trained to be future jihadists"

"From the total captives about 2,648 have managed to escape, more than 3,500 remain in captivity," she continued. "Our estimate is that hundreds have committed suicide, or been killed by airstrikes."

"My message received some attraction from the international community and the media," Murad said of testifying. "Since that date, I have been on an international campaign to raise awareness about the Yazidi genocide, the plight of Yazidi women and girls, and speaking against ISIS, a group that continue to threaten the entire world."

On Saturday, Clooney slammed the world response to what she called the genocide of the Yazidi people while introducing Murad ahead of her speech at the UN in New York City. She warned the assembly to "make no mistake" that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidis, further explaining how the terrorist group has systematically established a "bureaucracy of evil" to accomplish their ends.

"I wish I could say that I was proud to be here. But I am not," Clooney asserted, "I am ashamed, as a supporter of the UN, that states are failing to prevent or even punish genocide, because they find that their own interests get in the way. I am ashamed, as a lawyer, that there is no justice being done and barely a

complaint being made about it. I am ashamed, as a woman, that girls like Nadia can have their bodies sold and used as battlefields. I am ashamed as a human being that we ignore their cries for help."

Speaking further about Murad in an interview that aired on Today, Clooney revealed that her client has been subject to "very specific threats" from ISIS, saying "we will get you back."

"She made me make the decision [to take her as a client] because I met her and I just thought, I can't walk away from this," Clooney said.

On Monday, Murad and Clooney will further speak about ISIS during a ministerial side event at the UN.

On her website, Murad's goals remain clear: "I am **committed to** leading a campaign to prompt peace through de-radicalization. I will focus my power to deliver a message to the Muslim world to condemn extremism, particularly against children and women, carried out in the name of Islam."

"We must work together to counter terrorism and **deter** the youth from joining or supporting radical groups and united to teach all youth the importance of **tolerance** towards the beliefs of others."

(Word Count : 691)
available at www.people.com
 retrieved on 23-Sept-2016

Q1// A. Choose the most suitable completion based on what is said/ implied in the above mentioned text:

1- The main theme of the text is encouraging people to have
a) high personal morality
b) tolerance towards different religions
c) honesty in their behaviours

2- Clooney's statement "I can't walk away from this" means she cannot
a) come out of the case without being harmed
b) win the case easily

c) leave the case without defending it

3- Clooney felt ashamed to be at the UN because

a) the states are busy with international commerce

b) the states are deaf to the cries of Yazidi people for help

c) the states financially assist ISIS

4- Murad managed to escape in November 2014 after

a) the house owner helped her

b) the house was left unlocked

c) the weather was foggy and nobody noticed her as she was leaving the house

5- We deduce from the passage that

a) Murad is the elder daughter in her family

b) Her father married twice

c) Her mother is still alive

Q1//B. Answer the following questions on the basis of the information found in the text:

1) What has made Yazidi people a target for ISIS?

2) What is meant by human trafficking?

3) What do you conclude from Clooney's speech, which is put between { } in the passage?

4) Why are Yazidi children boys (who are captivated by ISIS) in danger?

5) What is the main aim of Murad's international campaign?

Q1/ C. Circle the best meaning or synonym for the underlined words as they are used in the text:

1) **nominated**   a. showed b. chosen c. advertised

2) **traumatic**   a. psychologically painful   b. causing embarrassment   c. tiresome

3) **executed**   a. carried out   b. put to death   c. punished

4) **plight**   a. promise   b. catastrophe   c. unrest

5) **aspiring**   a. intuitive   b. having high goals   c. requiring great effort

6) **massacre**   a. total defeat   b. butchering an animal   c. slaughtering people indiscriminately

7) **relocated**   a. refilled   b. resettled   c. reordered

8)**committed**   a. performed b. feeling obligated to do something c. consigned to a hospital
9)**deter**   a. inhibit   b. reject   c. advise
10)   **tolerance**   a. indulgence   b. quietness   c. broad-mindedness

Q1//D. Reflect on and summarizethe main points of the text in not more than five sentences.

Q2. Read the following passage carefully:
The attraction of gold is as old as history. Since ancient times, gold has been the object of dreams and obsessions. Societies change over time, customs and currencies evolve, but gold remains. A wedding ring, for example, must be gold. Why is gold so valuable? True, it is shiny, durable,' and rare, but it is far less useful than many other minerals or metals. It is also not like stock in a company, where the value of the stock depends on the performance of the company. Gold, on the contrary, like any currency, is valuable precisely because people believe it is valuable. That is, if people were willing to accept seashells for their labour and could use them to pay for food, fuel, and other commodities, then seashells would become a valuable currency. Thus, the value of gold depends on the collective belief that gold will continue to be valuable. As long as demand for gold remains steady, the price will hold steady; if demand is high, it will continue to increase in value. But if people should someday lose faith in gold, the price of gold could fall sharply.
Adopted from Reading Power series- the advanced level (p. 121)

A. Write five questions about the above mentioned paragraph.

Thanks for your time