

Inductive Grammar, Student-Centered Reading, and Interactive Poetry: The Effects of Teaching English with Fun in Schools of Two Villages in Lebanon

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Abstract—Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is a common practice in many Lebanese schools. However, ESL teaching is done in traditional ways. Methods such as constructivism are seldom used, especially in villages. Here lies the significance of this research which joins constructivism and Piaget's theory of cognitive development in ESL classes in Lebanese villages. The purpose of the present study is to explore the effects of applying constructivist student-centered strategies in teaching grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry on students in elementary ESL classes in two villages in Lebanon, Zefta in South Lebanon and Boqaata in Mount Lebanon. 20 English teachers participated in a training titled "Teaching English with Fun", which focused on strategies that create a student-centered class where active learning takes place and there is increased learner engagement and autonomy. The training covered three main areas in teaching English: grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry. After participating in the training, the teachers applied the new strategies and methods in their ESL classes. The methodology comprised two phases: in phase one, practice-based research was conducted as the teachers attended the training and applied the constructivist strategies in their respective ESL classes. Phase two included the reflections of the teachers on the effects of the application of constructivist strategies. The results revealed the educational benefits of constructivist student-centered strategies; the students of teachers who applied these strategies showed improved engagement, positive attitudes towards poetry, increased motivation, and a better sense of autonomy. Future research is required in applying constructivist methods in the areas of writing, spelling, and vocabulary in ESL classrooms of Lebanese villages.

Keywords—Active learning, constructivism, learner engagement, student-centered strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

CONSTRUCTIVISM is a learning theory that views learning as an active process. In classrooms where teachers apply constructivist methods of teaching, students are guided to construct their own knowledge and understanding by observing, questioning, exploring, and reaching conclusions on their own [1]. Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that children are active learners, and therefore teachers should focus not only on the content of learning but also on the process; teachers should also use active methods that increase learner engagement [2]. Both theories have implications on teaching and learning and require teachers to use student-centered strategies that allow the learners to actively construct knowledge [2].

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The present study joins constructivism and Piaget's theory of cognitive development in teaching ESL in two villages in Lebanon. It discusses the application of constructivist methods in teaching grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry. It investigates the effects of applying such student-centered strategies on students' engagement, academic achievement, attitude towards the lesson, role in the classroom, and motivation. These effects are explored by the reflections of teachers of English from the two villages who participated in a training program in which they learned constructivist methods of teaching grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry. Afterwards, they applied these methods in their ESL classes and reported the results.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory in psychology, but it has implications in education because it is mainly about how people learn. Constructivism views the student as playing an active role in acquiring knowledge. A constructivist classroom is where students discover patterns, check new understanding against old, modify information, and challenge their views. Unlike traditional classrooms, in a constructivist classroom the main focus is on the student constructing knowledge [1]. Constructivism has transformed the old-style view of teaching, where the teacher was the transmitter of knowledge and the student was a passive recipient. The teacher in the modern constructivist classroom acts as a facilitator and a guide and creates an environment that encourages active learning. The role of the students in the modern constructivist classroom is to practice, question, and construct knowledge through interactive methods. Thus, the student's role has changed to being autonomous, to thinking for themselves, to developing their potential, and to taking initiative [3].

Constructivist theory states that learning is an active process of knowledge construction; hence teachers should use student-centered strategies to design a student-centered environment. Such an environment is also considered process-centered, where the emphasis is on the learning process, as opposed to a content-centered environment where the teacher provides all the information and students simply receive it. Students learn more and enjoy learning as a result of increased engagement and autonomy in the constructivist classroom [4].

Prior knowledge plays an important role in knowledge construction; students build new knowledge on the

foundations of previous knowledge. This idea of constructivism highlights the active role of students in the classroom [1]. The constructivist view that learning is based on prior knowledge emphasizes the importance of using student-centered strategies to reach all learners because not all of them will understand the new information in the same way. To handle prior knowledge effectively, teachers should present students with tasks that have real-world significance and encourage interaction in the classroom to provide an opportunity to share ideas and learn from each other [4]. All these features of constructivism promote student engagement.

Constructivism entails many benefits; two important benefits are evident in a study that was conducted to explore the attitudes of students towards science and their science achievement in teacher demonstrations versus student-centered learning classrooms [5]. This study was done on seventh- and eighth-grade students in middle school science classes. Teachers agreed to take part in an action research; they participated in professional development which focused on constructivist techniques. Later, they were asked to implement those techniques over a period of three weeks. In some classes, student-centered techniques were implemented, while in other classes, teacher demonstrations were delivered with minimal student interaction. Results showed that student-centered learning was positively associated with attitude towards science, and both attitudes towards science and student-centered learning were positively associated with science achievement [5]. This study shows that constructivism enhances academic achievement and improves students' attitudes towards the lesson.

Another benefit of constructivism includes increasing student autonomy. The term "flipped classroom" is synonymous with a constructivist classroom. In a flipped classroom, traditional teaching methods are discarded. The teacher is not a mere lecturer who transmits knowledge; instead, students are active learners who work with materials and resources on questions and tasks, and collaborate with each other, and eventually construct their own knowledge. In a flipped classroom, students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning process, thus increasing autonomy and competence [6].

In the constructivist classroom, students learn how to think and understand instead of depending on rote memorization. They learn to question everything and to apply their natural curiosity in understanding the world. Sometimes, they even take part in designing their assessments. Constructivist assessment allows students to express their knowledge in different ways, such as writing research papers and journals, preparing demonstrations, and making models. This type of assessment aids in the retention of information, in the transfer of knowledge to new contexts outside of the classroom, and in the development of students' creativity [1].

B. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist whose work has made great contributions to the field of the cognitive development of children. He identified children as being active and

constructive thinkers. Piaget's theory can be classified as constructivist because of his proposition that children construct knowledge and understanding from their own experiences [7].

According to Piaget, children are active and motivated learners. They have a natural curiosity about the world, and they search for and find information in order to be able to make sense of their world. They observe and explore the things around them, and they experiment with objects and observe the effects of their actions on those objects. This active experimentation helps them learn [8]. Piaget stressed the importance of children's interaction with their physical and social environments for cognitive growth. By exploring and manipulating objects, children acquire an understanding of how things work. Children do not learn by merely listening to information. On the contrary, they construct knowledge from their experiences. By observing objects and by interacting with people, children develop knowledge and understanding of how the world operates [8], [9].

Piaget said that children's developing brains create mental representations, known as schemas, which help in organizing knowledge. In this way, children construct an understanding of the world. When encountering new information and experiences, children either fit them into their existing schemas, or adjust their schemas to integrate the new information and experiences [7]. This view of Piaget suggests that children actively construct knowledge.

Piaget's theory has several implications for classroom instruction. The teacher should use student-centered strategies, such as hands-on experiences, inquiry-based learning, and experiments, and provide a classroom environment in which students can explore and experiment. Students should be actively engaged in the learning process by asking questions, discussing concepts, and solving problems [9]. Moreover, the application of Piaget's theory necessitates focusing on the process of learning instead of only the content and implementing group activities in which students can collaborate, share knowledge, and learn from each other. The teacher is required to act as a facilitator and lead the students to discover knowledge themselves [2]. All these methods would promote active learning and student autonomy.

C. The Inductive Model in Teaching Grammar

The Inductive Model views the student as an active constructor of knowledge. In this model, instead of explaining the rules and then giving examples to the students, the teacher presents students with examples about the content being taught and then guides them with questioning techniques to help them reach conclusions. Students observe the examples, notice, compare, contrast, find relationships, detect patterns, and draw conclusions about the rules. For this reason, the Inductive Model is called "guided discovery." This model gives students an autonomous role in the classroom as they form their own understanding of classroom topics. Furthermore, the Inductive Model increases motivation since it ensures high levels of student involvement. And when students are involved, it means they are actively participating,

which keeps their interest high [10].

To explore whether the deductive approach or the inductive approach is more effective in foreign language teaching, a study was conducted in teaching grammatical structures in college French classrooms. This study compared the traditional deductive approach, where students are given the grammar rule before the structural forms, to the guided inductive approach, where students practice examples of grammatical structures before inferring the rule. The results showed statistically significant evidence of the superiority of the inductive approach in teaching grammar. Quiz scores of students in the class in which the inductive method was applied were higher than the scores of those in the class in which the deductive method was applied. The results also showed an overall improvement in grammar knowledge of the students who were in the inductive class throughout the whole semester [11].

D. Student-Centered Strategies in Reading Classes

The interaction between the student and the reading text plays an important role in understanding the text. Therefore, it is necessary to use prereading strategies to activate the readers' background knowledge and to ensure better comprehension of texts. Activating background knowledge plays a crucial role in reading comprehension in ESL classes. Prereading strategies provide both cognitive and emotional benefits; cognitively, these strategies help students understand a text better, and emotionally, these strategies increase their engagement in the classroom and give them confidence that they know something about the text before reading it [12].

Students' interaction with the text can be achieved through a variety of activities, such as reading a text aloud in class, making connections with the text, conducting group discussions, listening to a story being read, and writing about their understanding after a story. One way of making connections with the text is to make text-to-self connections. This happens when students relate what they are reading to what they already know, and it is a good way to activate prior knowledge and to construct meaning [13].

Activating background knowledge through prereading strategies has positive effects on students' reading achievement and comprehension of the text. These effects are evident in a research study that was conducted in upper-intermediate ESL classes in Sudan. The students were divided into two groups; in part one of the experiment, prereading strategies were used before beginning to read a text with Group 1, but similar strategies were not used with Group 2. In part two of the experiment, prereading strategies were used with Group 2 but not used with Group 1. The prereading strategies included examining the title of the text, going over the headings, studying visuals like pictures and graphs, getting acquainted with the vocabulary words, and reading the summary at the end of the chapter to activate prior knowledge. The results of this study showed that using prereading strategies before reading a text activated the prior knowledge of the students, and this enhanced their comprehension of the text and increased reading achievements. In contrast, reading a

text without using prereading strategies to activate background knowledge led to low achievement in understanding the text [12].

Teaching students to use strategies before, during, and after reading a text can help students to become better readers. Interacting with the reading text enhances reading comprehension, promotes learning of the material, ensures active involvement in class, and increases intrinsic motivation to read [13].

E. Interactive Poetry Teaching

In the English classroom, poetry has often been neglected as an effective means of language teaching. Teachers of English often find it hard to dedicate time to teach poetry or implement poetry-writing activities in their tight schedules [14]. However, teachers should be aware of the academic benefits of integrating poetry into English language classes. Poetry teaches sounds, rhyme and rhythm. Through poetry, students can also learn figurative language. Poetry teaches students how to express their feelings through words, and thus improves their vocabulary. Reciting poetry gives students a chance to express their feelings and helps enhance speaking and communication skills, while implementing poetry-writing activities can foster writing skills. With the help of poetry, students can enjoy learning the English language [15].

To examine the benefits of integrating poetry into English language classes, a study was conducted at a university's English Language Teaching department [14]. In this study, 21 student teachers at an English Language Teaching department in a university were given a poetry-teaching framework which included step-by-step procedures on how to incorporate poetry into the English language classroom. The framework also contained ideas and materials on how to implement interactive poetry activities. The student teachers were given the chance to apply the poetry-teaching framework in a micro-teaching context; they acted both as students and teachers while implementing the steps of the framework, and later they provided reflections of their experience and answered interview questions about the effects of their implementation of the poetry-teaching framework. The student teachers were given different poetry activities to do in class, such as creating a piece of art to describe a certain poem and writing their own poems. Creating something of their own led them to have fun in the poetry class and to enjoy poems. Also, when poems were incorporated in the English language classroom in an interactive way, students enjoyed reading poems and working with poetry and were able to relate poems to real life. The results of this study show that integrating poetry into English language classes has a number of benefits. It cultivates creativity, increases motivation, and promotes self-expression. Incorporating poems in the language class also enhances linguistic awareness, fosters an appreciation of poetry, and promotes personal involvement [14].

F. Research Question

This study seeks to examine the effects of applying constructivist teaching strategies in ESL classes in two

villages in Lebanon. Based on the review of literature about constructivism, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the Inductive Model in teaching grammar, student-centered strategies in teaching reading, and interactive poetry teaching, the following research question was developed: What are the effects of applying constructivist strategies in teaching grammar, reading, and poetry, on students' engagement, academic achievement, attitude towards the lesson, role in the classroom, and motivation in ESL classes in two Lebanese villages?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

20 teachers of English coming from two villages in Lebanon, Zefta and Boqaata, and their surrounding areas, participated in a training program entitled "Teaching English with Fun". Zefta is a village in the Nabatieh district in South Lebanon, and Boqaata is a village in the Chouf district in Mount Lebanon. The teachers who participated in the training program comprise 19 females and one male. During the training program, the teachers learned constructivist strategies to teach English. Afterwards, they applied these strategies in their respective ESL classes. They were later required to answer questions to provide their reflections on the effects of the application of constructivist strategies in their ESL classes.

Out of the 20 teachers who attended the training, ten answered the questions of the researcher about the effects of applying the constructivist teaching methods they learned in the training in their ESL classes in the domains of grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry.

The ten teachers who answered the questions are females. Their age range is 20-41 years old. Three of them are in their last year of university studies majoring in English Literature, and they also work as teachers of English in schools. Among the seven who are teachers, three of them have a Bachelor's degree in English Literature, three have a Bachelor's degree in Teaching English, and one has a degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). These teachers work in schools in the villages of Zefta and Boqaata and their surrounding areas. They teach mostly at the elementary level, i.e., grades 1 to 6, and some of them teach grades 7 and 8 in addition to elementary classes. The total number of students in the classes of ten teachers is 275.

B. Procedure

Research that is based mainly on practice is called practice-based research; this type of research produces new knowledge through practice and the outcomes of that practice. It is conducted by practitioners in the field that is being studied, and it provides new concepts and methods in the production of original knowledge [16]. The current study employed the practice-based research method. The researcher conducted a training program entitled "Teaching English with Fun" in the villages of Zefta and Boqaata in Lebanon. The participants, teachers of English from the two villages and their surrounding areas, attended the training program that was

given in their village.

The training program covered three main areas in teaching English: grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry. The main point of this training was that teaching English with "fun" does not mean only playing games and laughing in class; it means teaching English using methods and strategies that increase student motivation, arouse curiosity, and promote discovery. The researcher defined "fun" classroom as a student-centered classroom where authentic learning takes place and there is increased student engagement and autonomy. Teaching with "fun" means conducting interesting and enjoyable activities and making learning an active process.

The training program comprised three sessions. The grammar session emphasized the advantages of using the Inductive Model in teaching grammar. In this model, instead of simply stating the grammar rules, the teacher provides the students with examples to observe; the students notice and detect patterns in the given examples and discover the rules themselves. This method increases student autonomy and self-reliance as students construct their own knowledge by playing an active role in discovering the grammar rules [10]. The teachers who participated in the training program did activities through which they discovered the definition and the stages of the Inductive Model. They were also given a chance to practice presenting a grammar lesson using the Inductive Model.

The researcher dedicated the second session of the training program to exploring the effective use of prereading strategies. In this session, the researcher presented the importance of using such strategies to help students prepare for reading the text. Prereading activities can take several forms, such as looking at pictures or watching a video, answering questions, analyzing the title of the text, role playing, having group discussion, and others. The researcher also presented the strategy of making text-to-self connections in reading a text. Text-to-self connections comprise making relations between the ideas and events in the text and a personal experience or prior knowledge that students have. Reference [12] states that using prereading strategies to activate prior knowledge is of the utmost importance in text comprehension. Therefore, ESL teachers would benefit from receiving training programs where they can be made aware of the crucial advantages of prereading strategies and learn the proper methods of using such strategies in their language classes.

In prereading strategies, it is important to get students acquainted with the vocabulary words that they will encounter in the text; these may be new words, words related to the main idea of the text, and words and concepts that are from a different culture and hence unfamiliar to the students. Familiarizing students with the vocabulary words results in a better understanding of the text [12]. The researcher emphasized that there are four necessary components that any pre-reading activity should include: explaining key vocabulary words, giving background information, relating the theme to students' lives, and involving the students in the activity.

ESL teachers should teach their students how to apply

several strategies to enhance their reading ability, strategies such as activating prior knowledge, answering questions, writing comprehension questions of their own, discussing different perspectives, and applying peer collaborative approaches [13]. During the reading comprehension session, the researcher introduced interactive techniques that a teacher can implement in class while the students are reading the texts. The purpose of these techniques is to keep the students actively involved while reading. Five interactive techniques were introduced. The first one is assigning roles to students and having them read parts of the text as the characters in the story. The second one is to have students make face expressions and perform the actions of the parts being read. The third one is to ask students to invent a dialogue that is not included in the text; this technique fosters creative thinking. The fourth one is to ask students to prepare comprehension questions about the text, exchange their questions with a partner, answer each other's questions, then correct each other's paper; this technique enhances writing and comprehension skills. The fifth one is to ask students to choose a character from the text and write questions to interview that character, then let different students from class assume the different characters found in the text and answer the interview questions; this technique develops speaking skills. The advantage of using these strategies and techniques before and during reading texts is that students are actively doing something with what they are learning, and this makes reading class fun. The teachers who participated in the training were given comprehension texts; they came up with pre-reading activities and devised interactive techniques to be used with the texts they were given.

The third session of the training program was about poetry. The educational benefits of poetry include developing vocabulary and pronunciation, improving grammar knowledge and language skills, and enhancing self-expression [14]. The poetry session encompassed using poems educationally by highlighting the multitude of skills that can be taught through poems such as reading skills, speaking skills, listening skills, grammar, creativity, expressiveness, and a passion for poetry. This session also included interactive activities and student-centered techniques to teach poems with fun. Finally, participants discovered simple types of poems that students can write in class, such as color poems, shape poems, bio poems, and acrostic poems. Student work can be displayed on the classroom bulletin board. By giving students a chance to write their own poems and present them in front of their classmates, the ESL classroom can become a small community of poetry writers. At the end of the poetry session, the teachers who participated in the training wrote and presented acrostic poems.

After the training program, the teachers of English applied the constructivist strategies and methods that they learned in their respective ESL classes. Later, they reported the effects of applying these strategies by answering questions sent to their e-mails by the researcher.

C. Materials

In this study, the researcher employed the qualitative method to collect data. Therefore, a list of questions was sent to 20 teachers of English by e-mail. They were first asked about what they learned from the training program entitled "Teaching English with Fun." Then the questions were divided into three main parts: part one was about teaching grammar using the Inductive Model, part two was about using prereading strategies and interactive techniques while reading a text, and part three was about implementing student-centered poetry-teaching and poetry-writing activities. In each part, the participants were asked about the effects of applying the constructivist strategies on students' engagement, academic achievement, attitude towards the lesson, role in the classroom, and motivation. The questions also required the participants to share stories about their application of the strategies they learned, and to report how much they were able to apply the methods and strategies to teach grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry in their classes. Out of 20 teachers, ten answered the questions (see Appendix).

In addition to the questions, a consent form was sent to the participants. The consent form introduced the purpose of the study and notified the participants of the procedures. It also stressed confidentiality, explaining that their answers will be stored by using codes rather than participant names, and that their answers will be presented anonymously in the research paper. Finally, the consent form informed the participants that their participation in the study is voluntary, and that they have the freedom to refuse to participate.

IV. RESULTS

The researcher compiled the results after receiving the participants' answers to the questions. The participants were first asked about what they learned from the training program entitled "Teaching English with Fun." Generally, they listed the things they learned, such as the importance of using student-centered strategies; not telling students about the grammar rule directly; engaging all students in class by using active techniques, so even the low achievers are given a chance to participate; the inductive and deductive ways of teaching; student-centered learning; the importance of poetry in the classroom; the importance of authenticity in designing a student-centered lesson; pre, during, and post reading strategies; using the Inductive Model to introduce a grammar lesson; using strategies to introduce comprehension texts; and using poems educationally. Here are some of their specific answers. Participant 1 said, "I learned how to include fun activities in all stages of a reading lesson to involve students and motivate them." Participant 4 said, "I should not just be spoon-feeding my students when I can simply come up with a certain activity that would make them discover answers themselves."

Regarding the participants' answers to the questions about the effects of teaching grammar, reading, and poetry using constructivist methods, a thematic analysis was conducted, and the following themes emerged.

Student engagement – The teachers reported that students were more engaged than they previously were since they were applying critical thinking skills. Engagement increased by teaching grammar inductively since students were involved in noticing patterns and coming up with the rule. Many of them said that their students were more involved in the lesson as they were given the chance to communicate and share their thoughts. Students were suggesting answers and sharing opinions through the activation of prior knowledge, and hence were more engaged than before. Engagement increased because even low achievers began to participate in the active teaching methods. Participant 3 said, “They were extremely engaged since they were relating the lesson to prior knowledge, their own experiences, thoughts, and points of view.”

Academic achievement – A few teachers reported that achievement improved in the sense that their students got higher grades than before, and most of them said that their students remembered the material more after constructivist approaches were applied in teaching. Participant 2 said, “There is an obvious change in their way of reading but not a great increase in their grades.” Most teachers reported that the students could remember what was discussed in class more, but there was no significant increase in grades. Students remembered the grammar rules better in the days following the explanation of the lesson. Also, when students related to the topic of reading texts emotionally and personally, their memory of the material was enhanced. Some teachers said that their students improved in reading aloud.

Attitude towards the lesson – Teachers reported that using student-centered methods aroused students’ curiosity and relieved boredom. Students were happy figuring out how to get the answer and felt proud of themselves. Many students said they find grammar easier now. Students were excited to talk about their own experiences regarding the topic discussed before reading a text. They started looking at reading as more than just a subject they are supposed to study. Many teachers stated that poetry is not usually interesting for students, but implementing fun poetry activities made the students enthusiastic about poetry. One teacher reported that her students do not hate poetry anymore, after she introduced fun poetry-writing activities in class. Participant 8 said, “The students were making connections with the lesson, especially as I focused on authenticity. Therefore, these connections created a positive attitude towards grammar. Regarding reading lessons, the best and the most enjoyable part was the prereading stage which set the mood and opened a positive attitude towards the lesson, so students became interested and intrigued by the reading selection.”

Students’ role in the classroom – Most teachers reported that students’ role changed from passive to active. Participation in class increased as students were given opportunities to express themselves. Students became more autonomous in reading class as they would survey, question, read, and act. Their self-confidence increased since they became the ones doing the majority of the work in class. Participant 1 said, “Students now feel as if they are detectives

while trying to conclude the grammar rule, and they feel like heroes when they reach the conclusion.” Many teachers stated that as a result of using constructivist strategies, everything was coming from the students, thus making them play an important role in the classroom. One teacher said the roles in class were switched: students started taking more initiative. Finally, students started to believe more in themselves as they took part in writing poems.

Motivation – Using the Inductive Model in teaching grammar aroused students’ curiosity and presented them with challenges, and hence it increased motivation. In reading classes, when the teachers applied interactive reading techniques, students felt excited and wanted to continue learning and reading. Students were more driven to learn when learning involved sharing personal stories and giving their opinion. Hence, motivation increased. Allowing students to share their ideas during reading lessons made the reading class authentic and increased motivation to participate and to also start reading the text; interestingly, even the quiet ones were motivated to participate. Making the lesson authentic played a substantial role in increasing motivation. Participant 8 said, “They became extremely motivated when they realized that they are doing everything and their contribution to the lesson is crucial.”

After discussing the effects of the constructivist methods, the participants were asked to share stories about their application of these methods. Here are six success stories.

Participant 1 said, “Explaining verb endings to grade 3 was a blast! We shed light on the spelling issues of when to remove the ‘e’ and add ‘ing’ and when to double the last consonant. Of course, all this was done in an inductive way by giving students a set of examples to observe, and students were always playing the role of detectives and inferring the rule themselves.”

Participant 2 said, “While teaching adding -s, or -es to nouns in Grade 2, students were providing examples of nouns in singular then changing them into plural, and I was listing all the nouns they’ve picked on the whiteboard. Then they started noticing that for words that end with sh, ch, x, ss I have added -es while the rest I have added only -s. This way felt like we are explaining the lesson together.”

Participant 4 shared, “I asked the students for examples in their real life related to the reading theme, and I showed some pictures to try and clarify some of the vocabulary words before reading the text. This made it easier for them to grasp the context and ideas before I even explained what it is about.”

Participant 6 said, “I gave them a task to write an acrostic poem in groups. I guided them through finding words relevant to the theme. They enjoyed coming up with words and working in groups. Most of all, they enjoyed creating their own poem and later coloring it.”

Participant 8 said, “The most recent lesson that I taught was about the simple future tense. I started by asking some students to choose a country they would like to travel to. I elicited a few ideas about preparation or what would you like to do there. Students threw sentences that were written on the board. They started bickering about which country is nicer

which created a nice atmosphere of sharing personal experiences. The students were asked to find similarities between the sentences. They deduced the form and use of the tense through a student-focused questioning session. Students were engaged and interested in the lesson, since it was their own sentences and ideas on the board, and we were talking about travel which is a dream for most young students.”

Participant 9 said, “To teach my Grade 4 students a poem, I tried the approach of reading it and asking them to remember more and more words each time. After a few times they were acquainted with the poem and could learn it more easily. This was better than the approach of repeating each sentence 3 times for them to learn.”

In the end, participants were required to report to what extent they were able to apply the methods and strategies to teach grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry in their classes by rating their application of the objectives covered in the training on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least and 5 being the most. Their ratings show that they were able to apply the Inductive Model in teaching grammar the most, followed by applying prereading and interactive reading strategies. Implementing poetry-teaching and writing activities received the lowest ratings, meaning that these teachers were not able to apply poetry activities as much as they were able to apply constructivist strategies in teaching grammar and reading comprehension.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study sought to explore the effects of applying constructivist teaching strategies in ESL classes in two villages in Lebanon and their surrounding areas. The results of this study are consistent with previous findings about the positive effects of constructivist student-centered instruction [1], [3]-[6].

Participants in this study generally perceived that using constructivist strategies in teaching grammar, reading comprehension, and poetry increased *student engagement* in the classroom. They reported that students participated more, asked more questions, shared more, and in general were more active and involved in contrast to their passive state before. The activation of students' prior knowledge through student-centered strategies contributed to increased engagement. Reference [3] states that in the constructivist classroom, learning takes place through the interaction of students' prior knowledge with new knowledge. Learning is never just external; students process information and generate knowledge based on their former knowledge, experiences, and ways of thinking. This view of learning highlights the importance of student engagement and involvement in the learning process. Reference [1] shows that in the constructivist classroom, there is a shift of traditional roles; the role of the student changes from passive to active, and the role of the teacher changes from an expert to a facilitator. The teacher guides and encourages, and the students apply prior knowledge, explore, notice, hypothesize, and reach conclusions. This new role of students promotes increased engagement.

Concerning *academic achievement*, most of the participants did not report an increase in the grades of their students. What they reported was better memory and improved reading ability. Their students showed an increased improvement in remembering the grammar rules and the themes of reading texts. But exam grades did not increase to the extent of considering it a major change from before. This can be explained by the results of a previous study done to investigate the role of background knowledge activation through prereading strategies on student learning and achievement. Although the majority of the students who used prereading strategies before reading a text had a better comprehension of the text and scored higher on the test given after reading the text, a few students scored higher when they did not use prereading strategies than when they used them, and a few other students got equal scores with and without using the prereading strategies. This can be explained by these students' level of proficiency in English as a foreign language [12]. In Lebanese villages, the level of proficiency in English is not adequate; this might be a reason why the use of constructivist strategies might not have given the desired increase in academic achievement. Another explanation might be that for students who are already high-achievers, there was no room for an increase in grades. Hence, there were not many reports about improved academic achievement.

Reference [14] shows the influence of constructivist teaching strategies on generating a positive *attitude towards the lesson*. This study showed that using poetry in the English language classroom resulted in positive attitude towards using literature in language study, and giving students opportunities for first-hand experiences with poetry led to an appreciation of poetry in particular and literature in general. Most importantly, implementing student-centered poetry activities helped student teachers to change their negative beliefs about poetry into positive ones. In the Lebanese context, the participants of this study reported a change in attitude of their students towards grammar, reading, and poetry after the application of constructivist teaching strategies in class. Their students were happier, more interested and excited, and less bored. Most teachers reported a positive change in attitudes towards poetry classes; especially that poetry is the least liked among other classes in the English subject.

Regarding the effects of constructivist teaching strategies on *the role of students in the classroom*, the participants of this study reported that their students started to assume a more active role in class. In other words, students started to take more initiative, and hence became more autonomous. There was a clear shift in the roles of teachers and students. The teacher's role changed into that of a facilitator, and the responsibility to learn and construct knowledge was now mainly on the student. This result is supported by published literature about constructivism [1]. The teacher's responsibility in a constructivist classroom is to use student-centered strategies and provide the necessary environment and materials that allow students to practice problem-solving, pattern detection, and knowledge construction, thus encouraging student autonomy. In the constructivist

classroom, students assume ownership of their own learning; they ask questions, perform experiments, interact with the material, and develop their abilities [1].

Finally, it can be assumed from the participants' reflections that *motivation* increased as a result of applying constructivist teaching strategies. Motivation increased mainly due to the strategy of introducing authentic activities that relate the lesson to the students' real lives, thus encouraging participation and sharing of ideas with classmates, which contributed to giving them a reason to be interested in the lesson. Reference [6] states that in a constructivist classroom, active participation and collaboration satisfy students' needs for autonomy and relatedness, thus increasing motivation. In addition to authentic activities, the participants reported that using the Inductive Model in teaching grammar also increased motivation; giving students examples and asking them to infer the rules posed a challenge which made them want to continue learning and find out the conclusion. This is in line with findings in literature on the Inductive Model: since the students are playing the active role of finding patterns to reach conclusions on their own, the Inductive Model induces feelings of curiosity, challenge, and a sense of the unknown. These feelings greatly increase student motivation [10].

VI. CONCLUSION

The results of this study were in line with previous research on constructivist teaching strategies: when student-centered strategies are used in ESL classes and active learning takes place, student engagement improves, motivation increases, attitudes towards the lesson become more positive, and students become autonomous [4]-[6], [10], [13], [14].

The major findings of this study bear three important applications to teachers of ESL classes in Lebanese villages: applying the Inductive Model in teaching grammar, designing prereading strategies and interactive techniques to teach reading, and implementing student-centered poetry activities.

A major limitation of this study is that it focused only on grammar, reading, and poetry. This limitation calls for further research to be done on constructivist teaching strategies in ESL classes in Lebanese villages. It would be valuable to explore the effects of constructivist strategies on areas such as writing, spelling, and vocabulary. Another helpful suggestion would be to conduct a similar study in villages of other Lebanese districts as well.

APPENDIX

Teaching English with Fun – Questions for the Teachers

Below you will find questions about the effects of applying student-centered strategies in your classrooms.

Please answer the questions. Elaborate as much as possible.

Results will be reported in an anonymous format (participant names will not be used).

Age:

Gender:

Profession:

Education:

What grades do you teach?

How many students did you apply the strategies on?

1. Please list the things that you learned from the training program "Teaching English with Fun."

2. a. What were the effects of applying the Inductive Model in teaching grammar? Please answer regarding the following aspects:

- effect on students' engagement:
- effect on students' academic achievement:
- effect on students' attitude towards grammar:
- effect on students' role in the classroom:
- effect on students' motivation:

b. Please share a story about your application of the Inductive Model in teaching grammar.

3. a. What were the effects of applying prereading strategies and interactive techniques while reading a text? Please answer regarding the following aspects:

- effect on students' engagement:
- effect on students' academic achievement:
- effect on students' attitude towards reading comprehension:
- effect on students' role in the classroom:
- effect on students' motivation:

b. Please share a story about how you applied prereading strategies and interactive techniques in reading comprehension texts.

4. a. What were the effects of implementing student-centered poetry-teaching and poetry-writing activities? Please answer regarding the following aspects:

- effect on students' engagement:
- effect on students' academic achievement:
- effect on students' attitude towards poetry:
- effect on students' role in the classroom:
- effect on students' motivation:

b. Please share a story about how you implemented a fun poetry-teaching activity.

c. Please share a story about how you conducted a student-centered poetry-writing activity.

5. Is there anything you would like to add regarding your application of the strategies you learned in the training program in your classroom?

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least and 5 being the most, how much were you able to apply each of the objectives that you learned from the training program "Teaching English with Fun"?

Applying the Inductive Model in teaching grammar

1 2 3 4 5

Preparing authentic activities to start a grammar lesson

1 2 3 4 5

Designing strategies to introduce comprehension texts

1 2 3 4 5

Applying interactive techniques to make reading fun

1 2 3 4 5

Implementing fun poetry-teaching activities

1 2 3 4 5

Conducting student-centered poetry-writing activities

1 2 3 4 5

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