

Lifelong Learning in Applied Fields (LLAF) Tempus Funded Project: Assessing Constructivist Learning Features in Higher Education Settings

Authors : Dorit Alt, Nirit Raichel

Abstract : Educational practice is continually subjected to renewal needs, due mainly to the growing proportion of information communication technology, globalization of education, and the pursuit of quality. These types of renewal needs require developing updated instructional and assessment practices that put a premium on adaptability to the emerging requirements of present society. However, university instruction is criticized for not coping with these new challenges while continuing to exemplify the traditional instruction. In order to overcome this critical inadequacy between current educational goals and instructional methods, the LLAF consortium (including 16 members from 8 countries) is collaborating to create a curricular reform for lifelong learning (LLL) in teachers' education, health care and other applied fields. This project aims to achieve its objectives by developing, and piloting models for training students in LLL and promoting meaningful learning activities that could integrate knowledge with the personal transferable skills. LLAF has created a practical guide for teachers containing updated pedagogical strategies and assessment tools based on the constructivist approach for learning. This presentation will be limited to teachers' education only and to the contribution of a pre-pilot research aimed at providing a scale designed to measure constructivist activities in higher education learning environments. A mix-method approach was implemented in two phases to construct the scale: The first phase included a qualitative content analysis involving both deductive and inductive category applications of students' observations. The results foregrounded eight categories: knowledge construction, authenticity, multiple perspectives, prior knowledge, in-depth learning, teacher- student interaction, social interaction and cooperative dialogue. The students' descriptions of their classes were formulated as 36 items. The second phase employed structural equation modeling (SEM). The scale was submitted to 597 undergraduate students. The goodness of fit of the data to the structural model yielded sufficient fit results. This research elaborates the body of literature by adding a category of in-depth learning which emerged from the content analysis. Moreover, the theoretical category of social activity has been extended to include two distinctive factors: cooperative dialogue and social interaction. Implications of these findings for the LLAF project are discussed.

Keywords : constructivist learning, higher education, mix-methodology, lifelong learning

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