

Understanding the Determinants of '*Shared Control*' in Early Childhood Education in Ghana

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Abstract

Developing children who are autonomous learners and able to contribute constructively to decision-making, forms part of the reasons why the Ghana Education Service, in the year 2019, introduced the Standards-based curriculum for basic education in Ghana. Teachers were, thus, tasked to adopt the constructivist instructional philosophy to help realize this educational goal. Using a sequential mixed method, this research involved basic schools in the Sunyani-west municipal of Ghana as cases. The current study investigated the practice of shared control as a way of developing children's autonomous learning abilities. The results of the study indicate that teachers hardly allowed learners to contribute to the management and planning of instruction. Teachers' perception of the learners' limited cognitive ability, policy constraints (lesson planning system, examination-driven nature of the curriculum), and some socio-cultural factors significantly contributed to the minimal practice of shared control during instruction. Further results show that the GES, ironically, worked against the possibility of ensuring shared control. Recommendations have, therefore, been offered for the consideration of policymakers and curriculum implementers.

INTRODUCTION

The development of children as autonomous learners and responsible citizens capable of making constructive contributions to the development of a better Ghana seems to be a crucial concern to the Ghana Education Service (GES). Such a vision is one of the major reasons why the GES charged the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) to revise the basic school curriculum which was grounded on the behaviourist teaching philosophy. The erstwhile basic school curriculum, according to the GES, was handicapped because its products were rote learners who were good at nothing but the passive reception of knowledge. Thus, as a product of the erstwhile basic school curriculum, it was an honour to hear that it has been replaced with a new curriculum (Standards-based) which is grounded in the constructivist teaching philosophy; a teaching philosophy capable of producing autonomous learners and responsible citizens as the GES aims at. This instructional philosophy requires teachers to put the learners at the centre of learning. It advocates for a learner-centred form of education where the teachers serve only as navigators of the children's learning process (Adams 2006, Aljohani 2017, Alt 2014). Since constructivist instruction expects children to take absolute responsibility for their learning, *shared control*—i.e., children's ability to take an active part in instructional decision-making—is considered a prerequisite (Taylor, Fraser, and Fisher 1997, Aldridge et al. 2000).

Teachers' willingness to embrace such an instructional task is a suspicion that provoked my interest in this study. The rationale behind this suspicion is that, throughout my educational journey in Ghana, I never encountered a situation where teachers grant learners the opportunity to contribute to instructional planning. The hypothesis that grounds the conduct of this study, therefore, is that since shared control had never been a classroom culture of most Ghanaian basic schools, teachers'

willingness to embrace and practise such an instructional approach could be minimal. To confirm this hypothesis, the current study seeks to (1) investigate willingness to practise shared control in the classroom, and (2) investigate possible determinants of teachers' willingness to practise shared control in the classroom. In the subsequent section (2) of the study, I will provide more reviews on the practices of constructivism especially in the context of Africa and offer insight into shared control as a way of ensuring autonomous learners. Section three of the paper will highlight the methods and material employed for the study, while sections four (4), five (5) and six (6) will be a presentation of results, discussions, and recommendations, respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Constructivist Practices in Africa

Constructivism is a theoretical approach to understanding how prior information in human memory serves as a basis for gaining new knowledge (Doorslaer 1988, Anderson and Piazza 1996). It objects to the goals and practices of 'the traditional learning environment' which focuses on the linear transmission of knowledge from the class teacher to the students. To proponents of this theory of knowledge acquisition, the transfer of knowledge from a knowledgeable person to the learners is not the best way of acquiring knowledge; thus, learners learn better when they are actively involved in the construction of their knowledge. Constructivism advocates for a learner-centred approach to education while limiting the role of the teacher to that of a facilitator or an educational guide (Dejong and Groomes 1996, Kroll and Laboskey 1996, Baysen and Baysen 2017, Kosnik et al. 2018). Although most cognitive theories of learning emphasise active learning among students, the constructivist theory places a premium on learners constructing their own understanding of a particular educational issue in a learning environment.

The literature suggests, however, that constructivism as an educational practice is yet to be fully embraced in most educational systems in Africa, despite the various recent educational reforms emphasizing the vital role of the instructional approach in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Koranteng et al. 2020, Asamoah and Oheneba-Sakyi 2017, Annafo et al. 2018, Ampadu and Danso 2018, Mayombe 2020, Sakata, Candappa, and Oketch 2021, Gyan et al. 2021, Blignaut 2014). In a reflective case study, Blignaut (2014) shared his experiences on the challenges faced while trying to enlighten his students using constructivism as his teaching philosophy in a South African university. The study took into consideration 67 students. Data were obtained through field notes, interviews and focus group discussions. Blignaut reports that it was extremely difficult for the students to take responsibility for their learning. It was, therefore, concluded that the constructivist form of education was not straightforward but an entirely difficult endeavour for students. Students in Blignaut's class felt that the form of education they were receiving was substandard. They felt like they had paid tuition to be taught but not to learn by themselves. The revelations in this study show that the teacher's effort to implement constructivism was impeded by students' resistance to change. Blignaut further shows that adopting the constructivist form of education in teaching earned him low student evaluation at the end of the course. Some students even complained about their dissatisfaction with the constructivist form of education adopted. Sakata, Candappa, and Oketch (2021) embarked on a study similar to that of Blignaut (2014). These researchers investigated the experiences of pupils regarding learner-centred pedagogy in Tanzania. The aim was to ascertain whether pupils appreciate the idea of taking full responsibility for their learning. Using focus group discussions and classroom observations, a total of 1024 pupils in 13 schools took part in this survey. The result of this study shows that students initially indicated their preference for constructivist/learner-centred instructional methods like classroom discussions, pupil-initiated questions and answers, and group work, nonetheless, the classroom observations show no form of learner-centred pedagogy in practice. From the analysis of pupils-teacher interaction in the classroom, it was revealed that factors such as pupils' fear of corporal punishment and their respect for teachers as the major source of knowledge inhibited the independent construction of knowledge among the

pupils. In other words, the kind of fear pupils had for their teachers disabled them from giving constructive contributions in the classroom thereby reducing them to passive receptors of knowledge. It was therefore concluded by these researchers that policies of constructivism/learner-centred pedagogy may not be a possibility in the Tanzanian context any time soon.

Jemberie (2021), also examined how the constructivist learning approach was perceived and used at Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia. Half of the 82 teachers who were randomly chosen to participate in the survey, according to this author, were still adopting the teacher-centred approach. Even those who had favourable opinions of constructivist teaching methods tended to choose cognitive constructivism over social constructivism. It is important to emphasize that while the researcher made few attempts to monitor the actual practice of the teachers who believe they are better aligned with constructivist pedagogy, this study did not provide a thorough picture of the truth. Ampadu and Danso (2018) assert that one of the key impediments to implementing a new curriculum is bridging the gap between the existing conventions of society and the underlying principles of the new curriculum. In this regard, they embarked on a study that aimed to unearth how the cultural and social orientations of both teachers and students can affect the implementation of constructivist curriculum, especially, in mathematics education. They engaged 250 students and 41 mathematics teachers in this study using questionnaires, observations, and interviews. Results from this study show that even though teachers and students acknowledge the significant role of constructivist instruction such as teamwork and active learner participation, they are yet to fully incorporate these instructional approaches in their academic activities. The study revealed two major cultural factors that impede the adoption of constructivism in mathematics instruction – these are the culture of acknowledging only correct answers and the culture of independent learning. Observations in the classroom show that students are found to ridicule students who provide wrong answers. Also, there was no sign of solid teamwork among students because students hardly accepted diverse views from their colleagues. The recommendations, therefore, was that teachers must work on creating a classroom environment that is free of fear and intimidation to promote group learning and acceptance of diverse views from students. Annafo et al. (2018) revealed similar findings in a study that aimed at unveiling factors that hindered the use of constructivism in science teaching in some selected junior high schools in Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana. A total of 200 junior high school teachers undertook this survey. Teachers in this study revealed that the practice of constructivism is usually thwarted by factors such as a large class population, inadequacy of instructional materials, and the nature of the nationwide examination questions. Though this study did not identify low teacher knowledge of the constructivist pedagogy, researchers recommended that educational institutions must educate prospective teachers on how well they can execute constructivism in teaching.

Constructivism and Shared Control

In a constructivist learning environment, learners' autonomy is prioritised. Creating opportunities for learners to have a say in what to learn and how to learn is, thus, considered one of the major means of ensuring knowledge construction. This concept is what Taylor, Fraser, and Fisher (1997) term as shared control.

Shared control, as already discussed, is considered one of the major means through which constructivist educational goals could be realised (Taylor, Fraser, and Fisher 1997, Aldridge et al. 2000). It is concerned with the extent to which opportunities are created for the learners to contribute to the planning of instructivism. This concept is quite significant as far as the implementation of constructivist instructional pedagogy is concerned. This argument is based on the fact that student involvement in instructional decision-making and planning is somewhat of a perfect way of making a particular lesson relevant to the experiences of the learners (Aviram 2000, Hunt 2003). Hunt (2003) has shown that learners approach learning with three major strategies: the surface strategy—the one in which learners strive to achieve the minimum academic requirement usually through a rote learning approach; the achieving strategy—a strategy in which learners strive to achieve excellence even if the subject is of no interest to them; deep strategy —the strategy in which learners develop an intrinsic

motivation to achieve competence by attempting to relate previously acquired knowledge to a new one. To Hunt, the latter learning strategy could be successfully achieved in a classroom environment where there is a sort of shared control among learners. In other words, learners get to develop the motivation to achieve competency-based performance rather than marks-driven performance when they are involved or guided to make instructional decisions for their own learning. The aforestated assumption lend weight to the claim that sharing control with teachers is an effective way of ensuring self-regulated learning which eventually leads to increased academic achievement (Kingir et al. 2013). Despite the opportunities shared control offer for the enhancement of learners' independent learning abilities, concerns have always been raised about the actual practice of shared control. In subsequent paragraphs, I discussed previous findings related to the practice of shared control among teachers.

Though shared control has been lauded by scholars for its potential role in promoting constructivist teaching, several concerns have been raised as possible factors that militate against teachers' willingness to practise it. Concerns about learners' maturity and experience, examination concerns, as well as time concerns have been raised by most scholars. This could, possibly, be one of the major reasons why most studies discovered minimal practices of shared control among teachers (Kim, Fisher, and Fraser 1999, Savasci and Berlin 2012, Haney and McArthur 2002, Kwan and Wong 2014, Beck, Czerniak, and Lumpe 2000). In a study of science teachers' beliefs and their practice of constructivism, Savasci and Berlin (2012) found that, among the various constructivist instructional practices—i.e., personal relevance, student negotiation, critical voice—shared control was the least preferred and practised instructional approach. During the several classroom observations, the scholars hardly got any evidence of the practice of shared control in the classroom setting. This indicated that all decisions regarding the direction of classroom instruction was initiated by the teachers with minimal or no student involvement. They further showed that teachers' autonomy regarding classroom decision was a way to ensure that their professional duties aligned with the state-mandated content standards. It could thus be inferred from their findings that ensuring shared control could affect the feasibility of accomplishing the overall goal of the curriculum; the need to ensure that students can, at the end of the academic journey, be able to succeed in standardised assessments. An earlier study by (Aldridge et al. 2000) substantiates the findings of Savasci and Berlin. This study was a cross-national investigation of constructivist instruction in Taiwan and Australia. They argue based on their findings that shared control was absent in the science classroom, especially among the Taiwanese schools. From the series of interviews conducted, these scholars concluded that the absence of shared control and other constructivist practices in the classroom could be attributed to the examination-driven nature of the curriculum. Like the study of Savasci and Berlin, teachers in this study also expressed concerns about the need to cover the overload curriculum content. This, therefore, indicates that involving students in the planning and management of instruction would set back the completion of the curriculum.

In a more recent study, McCauley, Martins Gomes, and Davison (2018) also found that shared control is the least preferred constructivist practice among teachers. From most of the literature reviewed, the shared control dimension of constructivist instruction was the less preferred constructivist instructional practice for most teachers. However, since most of these studies adopted the quantitative approach to investigate the practice of all the dimensions of the constructivist learning environment, investigation concerning teachers' rationale behind the minimal practice of shared control is quite minimal. This therefore calls for further investigation on the range of factors that could contribute to the minimal practices of shared control. Moreover, the available literature concerning constructivist practices is centred more on the science classroom. Its application in other disciplines, especially in the Arts and Social Sciences, tend to be scarce. More so, the studies on the constructivist practices in Ghana are quite scarce, especially concerning the practice of shared control is sparse. In light of this, the current study attempts to contribute to the literature by investigating the practice of shared control among language teachers at the basic level of education in Ghana.

METHODS

This explanatory sequential mixed method study involved a total of 109 basic school teachers of the Akan language in the Sunyani-West Municipal of Bono Region, Ghana. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques were employed for the study. The data collection for the study was done in two separate phases. In this phase of the study, quantitative data were collected and analysed. After reflecting on the direction of the quantitative results, the researcher embarked on qualitative data collection to explain the direction of the quantitative findings. For quantitative data, the researcher adopted the census survey technique. This technique for selecting research subjects is considered appropriate when the researcher intends to include all participants in a given population (Zhang et al. 2007).

The constructivist learning environment survey (CLES) of Taylor, Fraser, and Fisher (1997) was adapted for the survey. The CLES has several dimensions of a constructivist learning environment including 'personal relevance, student negotiation, critical voice, uncertainty of knowledge, as well as the shared control scale. Nonetheless, only the shared control scale was considered as it is the only dimension of constructivism relevant to the study's focus. Items on the shared control construct were measured on a five-point Likert scale of frequency ranging from 'never' to 'always.' The validity and reliability of the items were assessed. Foremost the content validity of the items was assessed by my supervisors. Moreover, the reliability was also assessed using Cronbach's alpha procedure for establishing internal consistency. A Cronbach's Alpha of .813 was obtained for 7 items in the shared control scale. As a general rule of thumb, the .813 coefficient exceeded the requisite threshold of .70 (Taber 2018, Hair et al. 2019). This, thus, indicates that the items measuring shared control were reliable.

Out of a total of 397 teachers of Akan in the municipal, a total of 109 filled out and returned the questionnaire. With regard to the qualitative data, 11 conveniently sampled teachers took part in a one-on-one interview. The convenient sampling method was used because the researcher reached out to participants who expressed interest and willingness to participate in the data collection. It allowed the researcher to gather data from participants who were willing to participate in the research. The number of participants for the qualitative data was not predetermined; the researcher engaged as many as possible till data saturation was reached. Data saturation – a situation where themes recur in the information given by subsequent respondents (Fusch and Ness 2015) –, usually occur after interviewing 6 to 12 people (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006).

Ethical issues regarding the conduct of the study were ensured. The conduct of this study was in line with all ethical protocols established by the University of Cape Coast (UCC). Foremost, since this research involved human participants an ethical approval letter was obtained UCC's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before visiting the research site, the researcher also obtained a letter of introduction from the Department of Arts Education (DASE) which enabled him to seek permission from the respective heads of the institutions involved in the study. Moreover, the researcher obtained an approval letter from the Ghana Education Service at the Sunyani-West District office in the Bono Region of Ghana. Since the research participants' consent to participate in the study was deemed important, the researcher also presented a consent form for all the participants to sign to indicate that they were not coerced under any circumstance to respond to any of the interrogations. Most importantly the respondents were given a thorough description of the purpose of such academic research. The respondents were also assured of the confidentiality of the information they gave in the research. They were assured that whatever information they gave regarding the instructional practices and their views on educational issues would not be used against them and would only be used for academic purposes. Thus, they were given the assurance that their identity would be kept concealed in the research report.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The data presented in Table 1 is the demographic characteristics based on the respondents' gender, age group, and academic qualification.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic characteristics

Subgroups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	48	44.0
Female	61	56.0
Age Group		
Below 30	7	6.4
30-34	46	42.2
35-39	31	28.4
40-44	25	22.9
Academic Qualification		
Diploma	21	19.3
Bachelor's Degree	74	67.9
Master's Degree	12	11.0
others	2	1.83
Total	109	100.0

As indicated in Table 1, a total of 109 teachers of the Akan language participated in the study. In terms of gender distribution, 56% were female teachers, while the remaining 48% identified as males. In terms of age, 6.4% were below the age of 30, 42% were within the age range of 35–34, 28.4% were in the range of 35–39, whereas 22.9% fell within the range of 40–44. With respect to teachers' highest educational qualifications, 19.3% had a diploma certificate in education, 67.9% had a bachelor's degree, and 11% had a master's degree. Two participants, representing 1.8%, had other qualifications not specified.

Research Question One: To what extent do basic school teachers practise shared control in the language classroom?

The objective of this research question was to investigate the extent to which language teachers practised shared control in the classroom. The quantitative data gathered to answer this research question was measured on a five-point Likert scale of frequency ranging from never to always. Thus, in line with Asare (2021), the means scores of the items are interpreted as follows: 1.0 to 1.49 represent 'never'; 1.50 to 2.49 represents 'rarely'; 2.5-3.49, 'occasionally'; 3.50-4.49 represents 'frequently'; 4.5—5.0 represents 'always'. Table 1 presents a summary of the statistical results.

In consonance with the results of previous studies (Kim, Fisher, and Fraser 1999, Savasci and Berlin 2012, Haney and McArthur 2002, Kwan and Wong 2014), the statistical results on the practice of shared control among language teachers in the current study seem quite minimal. Per the overall means and standard deviation score ($M=2.65$; $SD=0.80$), it could be inferred that teachers occasionally shared control in the language classroom. In other words, they occasionally invited learners to take part in the management and planning of instruction. More specifically, learners' involvement in planning what they would learn ($M=3.20$; $SD=1.22$) as well as giving learners the privilege to decide on instructional activities that are best for them ($M=3.03$; $SD=1.07$) was barely practised among the teachers. Moreover, the decision on how much time to spend on a particular instructional activity ($M=2.63$; $SD=1.14$) as well as the decision on what instructional activities to

include in a lesson ($M=2.35$; $SD=1.13$) was often dictated by the teachers. Decisions on the assessment of student learning ($M=2.38$; $SD=1.18$) were frequently decided by the teachers. Teachers further indicated in the study that in terms of lesson planning, the views of the learners were not often taken into consideration ($M=2.76$; $SD=1.23$). In terms of classroom rules and regulations, teachers barely invited their learners to have a say. It could be inferred from the results discussed that teachers were autonomous as far as instructional decisions in the classroom are concerned. However, the larger standard deviation on the means scored indicates a degree of discrepancy in teachers' responses concerning the practice of shared control. In other words, there seem to be several extreme responses among teachers. There is the need to gain in-depth insight into why there could be extreme responses and, most importantly, why teachers frequently dictated the management and planning of instruction. This, therefore, called for the qualitative investigation that addressed this in the second research question.

Table. Descriptive statistics of shared control among language teachers

Shared Control	N	M	SD
I involve my students in planning what they are going to learn	109	3.20	1.22
I involve my students in deciding which activities are best for them.	109	3.03	1.07
I involve my students in planning how much time I spend on learning activities	109	2.63	1.14
Students help me to decide which activities to include in a lesson	109	2.35	1.13
I involve my students in deciding the best way to assess their learning	109	2.38	1.18
I take views of my pupils when planning my lessons	109	2.76	1.23
I involve my students in setting classroom rules and regulations	109	2.24	1.20
Mean of Means	109	2.65	0.80

Source: Field data (2023)

Research Question 2: What are the determinants of shared control in language classrooms?

The objective of this research question was to gain further insight into the potential factors that impeded the rare practice of shared control among teachers at the basic level of education in Ghana. Eleven conveniently sampled teachers of Akan participated in this qualitative inquiry. Using inductive analytical strategy, issues that emerged as factors contributing to the practice of shared control among teachers are (1) perceived limited cognition of the learners, (2) sociocultural concerns, and (3) policy constraints. The issues are discussed in detail in the next section.

Perceived Immaturity among Learners

As previously discussed, the various ways through which learners develop their independent learning abilities through the constructivist instruction paradigm also involve teachers' ability to share classroom control with the students. In this dimension of constructivist teaching, learners can contribute to learning by having a say in instructional decisions. This aspect of the investigation, therefore, sought to investigate the extent to which learners are invited to play an active part in the design and management of instruction, assessment decisions, and the articulation of their learning goals. When asked whether the pupils are involved in instructional planning, a teacher responded:

As I said they won't add anything. I have already indicated that their learning abilities are low. It is even hard to get them to understand what you are teaching them. How can you tell them to contribute to planning a lesson?

This is a submission from an early-grade teacher. Since her subjects are young, she is of the view that they are too young to make any constructive contribution to instructional planning. Several teachers interviewed on the reasons why they barely invited their learners to take part in planning lessons expressed similar concerns. It appears from this and other submissions of the teachers that the pupils are considered immature beings who have not reached the requisite maturation level at which they could be called upon to contribute to instructional decision-making. This has something to do with the cultural construction of childhood in most African cultures. Her opinion provides enough support for scholars' argument that Africans conceive childhood as an immature stage for decision-making, especially in an adult-related discourse (Ndofirepi and Cross 2015, Nthontho 2017). Teachers seem to consider their learners as *tabula rasa* who must submit to adult wisdom.

Sociocultural Concerns

Further concerns raised on the practice of shared control as a dimension of constructivist teaching of Akan in the Sunyani-West municipal is that such a principle conflicts with the established educational norms of Ghana. In a cross-national study on the constructivist learning environment in Taiwan and Australia, (Aldridge et al. 2000) raised similar concerns about Taiwanese teachers' unwillingness to embrace the idea of sharing instructional decision-making authority with pupils based on the notion that the teachers are expert authorities and their decisions regarding instruction are perceived absolute in the school. Correspondingly, this inquiry unveiled similar cultural issues. The views expressed by R11 buttress this assumption:

That is not how it is done. Throughout our educational journey, I have never seen a teacher asking learners to make decisions on which instructional technique to employ.

Teachers' perception of shared control in the classroom seems to suggest that they are yet to fully comprehend the various facets of constructivism. It also creates the impression that most of the teachers are still in the entanglement of the traditional teacher-centred instructional philosophy where teachers are perceived as the custodians of knowledge. Shared control as an aspect of a constructivist learning environment is usually rated the least in most quantitative studies (Kwan and Wong 2014, Beckett 2013, Nix, Fraser, and Ledbetter 2005, Ozkal et al. 2009). Some scholars usually attribute the low rating of shared control to socio-cultural factors (Ozkal et al. 2009, Aldridge et al. 2000). Most cultures would, ideally, not invite children to contribute to decision-making. Adults are usually perceived as custodians of knowledge due to the many life experiences they have gained. It is therefore not surprising that most of the teachers argued that what to learn and how they will learn is the responsibility of the teachers. Some of them ground their argument on the fact that they are the authority in the classroom, and it is inappropriate to offer toddlers of such age to determine what to learn or what not to learn.

Policy Constraints

Aside from the teachers' misconception of pupil's immature cognition, other practical issues related to policy and practice significantly affect the possibility of ensuring shared control in the classroom. Prominent among these issues is the lesson planning system as practised in most of the basic schools. Lesson planning, especially the mandatory writing of lesson notes for every subject seems to be an extreme burden for teachers. At the lower primary level, for instance, it was observed that a teacher is assigned to handle an entire class; that teacher is supposed to teach all subjects, including, Mathematics, English, Science, French, Computing, Ghanaian Language, History, Physical Education. Teachers would therefore be overburdened if they were to solicit the views of pupils in the preparation of lesson notes for all the subjects within a week. Given the perceived difficulty in lesson note writing, some teachers stated that they cannot spend time much on such an arduous task; rather, they download templates that have been written for every topic in the curriculum. This is evident in the excerpt below:

Of late we no longer write our lesson notes. There are approved lesson notes samples. Even if you print those samples and you want to copy them into your lesson notes, you have to copy exactly what you see in the sample.

The lesson planning system, as she claims, does not favour the practice of shared control among teachers and pupils. It appears that most of the teachers avoid the writing of lesson notes because templates of lesson notes for all subjects for the basic education level have been made available online for teachers. They therefore download these templates to guide their instructional activities. In this case, the views of the pupils concerning the direction of learning are considered irrelevant because the teachers tend to follow the prescription by the NaCCA. Some teachers expressed worries about how head teachers' and some school improvement officers (SISOs) demand them to reproduce exactly what has been written in the so-called approved templates in their lesson notes. This therefore suggests that they barely take into consideration contextual issues and, most importantly, the unique needs of the learners while preparing their lessons, let alone the sharing of control.

Further revelations from teachers suggest that their learners do not have any prior knowledge of the structure as well as the goals of the curriculum. Lessons are abruptly presented to learners in each episode of classroom instruction. The excerpt below confirms this:

The learners may not have any idea of what they are going to learn the next day.

They wouldn't know, for example, that they will learn 'libation', hence they cannot tell me that madam let use this particular method. Even before the child can make decisions on using a particular method, they should have in-depth knowledge of what such a method entails

From the above, it does seem clear that at the beginning of each academic year or term, teachers do not take the learners through the entire curriculum or syllabus to enlighten them on the aims and objectives of the entire subject, the areas to cover, instructional material to use, as well as the instructional activities they would be required to engage in. Teachers see student involvement in the planning of instruction quite hectic because, as this respondent rightly stated, before the learner could offer any useful contribution to the lesson planning, s/he must, for instance, have prior knowledge of the structure of the syllabus. Teachers act as though students' knowledge of the structure of the syllabus is someone else's responsibility. They are, however, not to blame because, to them, shared control is not part of their accountability as professional teachers. They argue that their headteachers and the SISOs assess their efficiency based on the number of topics covered but not the extent to which they encourage shared control in the classroom. The views expressed by a teacher below lend weight to the above argument:

The GES does not seem to value it. What they care about is the writing of lesson notes, output of work, and other issues. Those are their major concern. What happens in the classroom is none of their business

It, thus, seems obvious, from the perspective of teachers, that the GES are ironically part of the many impediments of constructivist instructional practices including the idea of learner autonomy. The overwhelming emphasis on the supervision of teachers' lesson notes and output of work without considering another equally important aspect of teaching seems to compel teachers to give less consideration to some important practices that latently contribute to the development of the learners' growth as a person. This revelation is quite obvious because a social media sensation, popularly known as 'Teacher Kojo' publicly announced on TV that one of the major reasons why he got fired from the teaching profession by the GES is that he constantly condemned the overwhelming emphasis the GES placed on the writing of lesson notes at the expense of other equally important practices that greatly contribute to student learning on social media (Sheldon 2021). Similar concerns were raised by the teachers in this study. It could be inferred, therefore, that the difficulty involved in writing lesson

notes for the various subjects by a single teacher (i.e., in the case of the class teachers) makes shared control less important to the teachers because their accountability as teachers is not contingent on shared control but on the output of work and lesson notes writing.

Another concern raised by the teachers regarding factors that impeded the practice of shared control in the classroom is the examination-driven nature of the Standards-based curriculum. As a teacher argued,

we don't get the chance to set our own questions for the students during examinations. We are always told that examination questions will come from the education office. In that case, you do everything possible as a teacher to expedite the completion of the curriculum

Teachers seem to be also concerned about the need to prepare students to pass examinations. Making good grades is the manifest goal of the school curriculum. Since the best evidence of learning is the academic achievement of students in exams, teachers would always make sure their students excel in this respect. Because examination questions are extracted from the content of the curriculum, the teachers claim that sharing control with students on instruction would hamper their efficiency. Such a centralised examination system does not seem to allow teachers to teach at a conducive pace. As such, practices that are important but lag the delivery of curriculum content are usually given no or less consideration in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

As already discussed, ensuring the development of children who possess the skills to contribute to discourses on matters of national interest was one of the basic reasons for the introduction of NACCA's Standard's based curriculum. It therefore made much sense that the current curriculum was underpinned by the constructivist teaching philosophy. Constructivism ultimately aims at a holistic development of the child as a person. It follows, therefore, that assessment of children trained in the constructivist learning environment should focus not only on their ability to recall facts in examination but on their ability to exhibit traits of a holistically developed products of education. Regrettably, findings of previous studies and that of the current study seem to suggest that teachers' instructional practices do not approximate ideal constructivist practices that can lead to the realisation of the ultimate goals.

Investigating the most overt aspect of constructivism— i.e., the construction of knowledge based on prior experience—was not the prime concern for the current study, it rather aimed at investigating one of the latent yet important aspect of constructivism—shared control. The ultimate goal for the interest in investigating shared control was that constructivism advocates for learner autonomy, and this can be realised fully if learners are given the privilege and freedom to take ownership and responsibility of classroom activities. The findings regarding this aspect of the constructivism among basic school teachers align with the prevailing discourses on how much of attention teacher dedicate to the realisation of this important aspect of teaching (Savasci and Berlin 2012, Kwan and Wong 2014). Evidence from this study provides support to the existing view that shared control is the least practised aspect of constructivism among teachers. The qualitative inquiry unveiled three important themes worthy of discussion. These include learners' cognitive maturity level, policy constraints, and cultural issues. The subsequent paragraphs discuss these in detail.

Per the aims outlined in the Standards-based curriculum, children are to develop holistically. However, the teachers tasked to ensure the development of children in this respect tend to be quite primitive in nature. They consider the child as immature being who has not reached a stage required for engaging in discourses that demand high order thinking. Such perception of the teachers presupposes that they see their learners as empty slates. In other words, they tend to consider children as organisms whose brains are not developed enough to process information. Even if that is the case, it could be inferred also that the teachers are refusing to accept that reawakening the dormant cognition of the toddlers, as they claim, is part of their responsibilities as teachers. Perhaps,

it is time for teachers to agree that the children's ability to share control with teachers on instructional decisions is part of the innate traits that could be uncovered through training. Without a deliberate attempt to uncover such potentials, students are more likely to stay dormant when it comes to sharing control.

Children are born with the question-asking instincts. They are naturally active explorers of knowledge, and are always eager to contribute to any discourse around them once given the opportunity (Ruggeri et al. 2021). Hence, children's inability to contribute to a discourse about how to manage or plan instruction, as the teachers claim, could rather be attributed to cultural restrictions. Perhaps these children would not want to offer suggestions in instructional planning because in almost all African cultures, children are, right from infancy, denied the chance to give directions or offer suggestion in situations that requires adult wisdom only (Ndofirepi and Cross 2015, Nthontho 2017). It is, therefore, not surprising that some of the teachers argue that allowing children to contribute to decision making has never been a school culture. This suggests that teachers are less likely to promote this aspect of constructivist learning until they are given the right orientation on its relevance in the development of the learners autonomous learning abilities

Constructivism as a philosophy of education and its associated practices always present teachers with two main responsibilities in the classroom: the development of the full potential of the child and the responsibility of completing the entire educational syllabus. The conflict between these responsibilities always present implementation challenges to teachers. From the perspective of the teachers, it could be argued that the GES are only concerned about one aspect of education—that is, performance. This deviates from the ultimate goal of constructivism—i.e., learning (Adams 2006). From the teachers, dedicating their time to see to the realisation of constructivist goals limits their chances of fulfilling their professional requirements. The GES do not seem to care much about the holistic development of the children, they are rather interested in the output of the teachers as well as the learners' examination. It follows, therefore, that the GES compel teachers to engage in practices that do not align with the goals of the constructivist philosophy. The overwhelming emphasis on the lesson notes and centralised examination compel teachers to adopt strategies that would expedite the completion of the school syllabus.

Limitation of the Study

The current study offers several limitations that give directions for further research. Foremost the study focused solely on teachers, students were not given the chance to share their views on the issues concerning the practice of shared control. It would therefore be appropriate if further studies are conducted to examine students' perspectives on the issue of shared control. Also, the study focused only on one dimension among the range of several constructivist-oriented practices. The limited scope of the study therefore calls for the need to conduct further studies that give a comprehensive picture of constructivism in basic education. Methodologically, the study was limited. Getting a better picture of teachers' classroom practices requires observation, however, the study dwelled on interviews and surveys. Further studies should, therefore, employ observations to provide a better picture of the nature of constructivist practices in the classroom setting.

Disclosure statement

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability Statement

The data for this study is available. The researcher is willing to provide it upon reasonable request

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