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Application of the Constructivist Method and Its Implementation in Christian Religious Education at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta

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Abstract

This study examines the application of constructivist pedagogy within Christian Religious Education at Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Paulus Jakarta. Constructivism rooted in the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky posits that knowledge is actively built by learners through experience, reflection, and social interaction rather than passively transferred from instructors. In theological education, this shift reframes lecturers as facilitators who scaffold students' personal and communal engagement with Scripture and Christian doctrine. Employing a qualitative descriptive design that integrates literature review, non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with lecturers and students, the study finds that constructivist practices at STT Paulus Jakarta promote higher-order thinking, contextual biblical interpretation, and collaborative learning. Notwithstanding these benefits, challenges persist in lecturer readiness, student self-regulation, and resource availability. The paper argues that constructivism is both relevant and effective for Christian education, provided it is supported by institutional commitment to professional development and pedagogical innovation.

Keywords: Constructivism, Christian Religious Education, Theological Education, STT Paulus Jakarta, Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, pedagogical discourse has shifted from a transmission paradigm to a knowledge-construction paradigm. Constructivism emphasizes that learners actively develop their cognitive schemas through the processes of assimilation and accommodation, integrating new experiences into pre-existing knowledge structures (Piaget et al., 2001). Within the Vygotskian tradition, learning is also inherently social: knowledge is deepened through interaction and cultural mediation, particularly within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which requires the presence of a facilitator to provide scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), this paradigm shift is of critical importance. CRE is not merely about transferring theological propositions but about shaping ways of living out the faith amidst pluralistic, digital, and complex realities (Groome, 1998). A constructivist approach enables students to connect biblical texts with lived experiences, local culture, and contemporary ethical challenges in a reflective manner, while still upholding the authority of Scripture and church tradition. Consequently, the role of the lecturer shifts from being a “transmitter of truth” to a “facilitator of theological dialogue,” who structures learning experiences, stimulates inquiry, and evaluates students' theological reasoning (Palmer, 2017).

As an institution preparing future ministry leaders, Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta requires a pedagogical model capable of integrating biblical competence, theology, spirituality, and ministerial praxis. The implementation of constructivism in CRE classrooms has the potential to strengthen students' hermeneutical skills, ethical reasoning, and collaborative capacity. However, its effectiveness largely depends on task design, forms of assessment, and the readiness of both lecturers and students to transition away from one-way lecturing toward dialogical learning (Slavin, 1997).

Research Questions. What are the theoretical foundations of constructivism relevant to Christian Religious Education (CRE)? What forms of constructivist implementation are applied in CRE at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta? What are the benefits, challenges, and institutional prerequisites of its application? To describe the key principles of constructivism (cognitive and social) that are relevant to Christian Religious Education (CRE). To analyze strategies for implementing constructivism in CRE at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta. To identify the impacts, obstacles, and institutional support required for its implementation.

Research Significance. First, theoretical: to enrich the discourse on Christian Religious Education (CRE) pedagogy through a synthesis of Piagetian and Vygotskian constructivism, complemented by Bruner's concept of discovery learning and Biggs & Tang's constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Second, practical: to offer instructional designs, assessment models, and faculty development strategies for CRE classrooms that are dialogical, contextual, and student-centered.

Cognitive constructivism focuses on the internal processes of assimilation and accommodation, which are relevant for designing learning experiences that challenge students' initial schemas (Piaget et al., 2001). Social constructivism emphasizes the role of language, culture, and collaboration as mediums of meaning-making; this underpins dialogical discussions, peer instruction, and collaborative projects in Christian Religious Education (CRE) (Vygotsky, 1978). Bruner (1977) highlights the spiral curriculum and discovery learning, which encourage students to negotiate meaning through inquiry and guided discovery. Biggs and Tang (2011) propose constructive alignment, namely the alignment of learning objectives, activities, and assessments to ensure deep learning. Specifically in religious education, the literature shows that constructivism enhances engagement and the depth of faith reflection when combined with liturgical practices, contextual ministry, and dialogical pedagogy that honors the authority of Scripture (Groome, 1998).

Context of Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta. The diverse denominational backgrounds and ministry experiences of students at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta make Christian Religious Education (CRE) classes a rich space for dialogical meaning construction. The main challenges generally include: (1) reliance on rote-learning habits; (2) expectations of lecture-based teaching; (3) limited access to licensed digital resources; and (4) varying levels of academic literacy. Therefore, the design of constructivist implementation needs to incorporate advance organizers, contextual case studies, think-pair-share strategies, reflection papers, and authentic assessments based on ministry projects. This article employs a framework that synthesizes four key dimensions:

1. Cognitive activity (Piaget) → fostering productive cognitive conflict.
2. Mediated learning (Vygotsky) → scaffolding, zone of proximal development (ZPD), and socio-cultural dialogue.
3. Guided discovery (Bruner) → Socratic questioning and spiral curriculum.
4. Constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang) → consistency between learning outcomes, activities, and assessment.

This framework guides the analysis of constructivist implementation at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta, including indicators of success (e.g., depth of theological argumentation, contextual hermeneutical competence, and collaboration) as well as challenges (e.g., lecturer workload, student readiness, and learning infrastructure).

Research on constructivist pedagogy has been extensively developed in general education; however, its application in Christian Religious Education (CRE) within Indonesian theological schools—marked by unique ecclesial, denominational, and ministerial contexts—remains relatively limited. This study offers several contributions: (a) translating constructivist principles into concrete instructional strategies for CRE; (b) mapping institutional prerequisites, including faculty training, learning resource repositories, and assessment policies; and (c) providing constructive alignment recommendations for the CRE curriculum at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta.

Constructivism is a learning paradigm that views knowledge as being actively constructed by learners rather than passively transferred from teachers (Slavin, 1997). Jean Piaget (2001) emphasized internal processes through the mechanisms of assimilation and accommodation, which form new cognitive schemas. Meanwhile, Lev Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the social dimension of learning, stressing the role of interaction and language as primary tools in the construction of meaning.

In addition to Piaget and Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner (1977) underscored the importance of discovery learning, where learners are guided to uncover principles or concepts through exploration and open-ended questioning. John Biggs et al (2022) later developed the concept of constructive alignment, which involves aligning learning objectives, classroom activities, and assessments to ensure that students truly achieve the intended learning outcomes.

In its ideal form, the implementation of constructivism in theological seminaries faces several challenges. First, the persistence of traditional lecture-based pedagogy remains strong (Palmer, 2017). Second, students are often accustomed to rote memorization and objective examinations. Third, there are limitations in digital learning resources, access to international theological journals, and the availability of literature in the Indonesian language (Dockery, 1995). To address these challenges, initiatives are required such as faculty training in innovative pedagogy, the provision of digital repositories, and the adoption of project-based and portfolio-based assessments.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the processes and experiences of implementing constructivism in the context of Christian Religious Education, rather than merely measuring quantitative outcomes (Moleong, 2012). The research was conducted at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta, a higher education institution in theology that focuses on the formation of church leaders and Christian ministry. The subjects of this study are CRE lecturers and students at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta. Lecturers were selected because they serve as the primary facilitators of learning, while students were chosen as they are the active participants in constructing knowledge.

Data were collected using three main techniques:

- a. Literature Review: examining theories of constructivism, theological education, and Christian pedagogy.
- b. Non-Participant Observation: observing the CRE learning process in the classroom, particularly lecturers' strategies and students' responses.
- c. Semi-Structured Interviews: conducted with several lecturers and students to explore their direct experiences with the implementation of constructivism. Data were analyzed using the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification as outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014). The validity of the data was strengthened through source triangulation (literature, observation, and interviews) and methodological triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Constructivism in the Context of Theological Education

The literature review indicates that constructivism is not a single theory but rather an overarching learning paradigm that integrates the contributions of Piaget (individual cognitive), Vygotsky (socio-cultural), Bruner (discovery learning), and Biggs & Tang (constructive alignment). At Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta, CRE lecturers practically understand constructivism as a method that emphasizes students' active engagement in interpreting biblical texts and reflecting on their faith experiences.

From the initial interviews, one lecturer stated: "We do not want students to merely listen and take notes. They must be willing to ask questions, engage in dialogue, and even critique, so that they can truly understand the Word of God in the context of their ministry." This statement reflects an awareness that constructivism requires lecturers to function as facilitators rather than merely providers of information (Piaget et al., 2001).

Forms of Constructivist Implementation in CRE Learning

1. Teaching Strategies

The observations revealed several constructivist strategies employed by CRE lecturers at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta:

- a. Biblical Text Discussion: Students were divided into small groups to interpret a passage of Scripture and then present their findings to the class. This process created space for the social negotiation of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).
- b. Contextual Case Studies: Lecturers introduced current issues, such as digital ethics or interreligious relations, and students were asked to relate them to biblical principles. This strategy connects theory with real-life realities (Slavin, 1997).
- c. Written Reflections (Reflection Papers): Students were assigned to write personal reflections on their ministry experiences and link them with CRE course content. This aligns with Groome's (1998) principle of shared praxis.
- d. Ministry Projects: In some classes, students were involved in ministry projects within local churches or communities, after which the outcomes were critically discussed in class.

These strategies demonstrate the application of constructivist principles: active, collaborative, reflective, and contextual learning.

2. The Role of Lecturers

Lecturers function as facilitators who design learning experiences. They do not merely deliver information but more often pose open-ended questions, provide scaffolding, and encourage students to discover understanding on their own. This role is consistent with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978).

3. The Role of Students

Students are positioned as active subjects. They are required to interpret, engage in dialogue, write reflections, and connect course material with their ministry experiences. This shift is significant, as many students were initially accustomed to rote memorization and multiple-choice examinations (Palmer, 2017).

Impact of Constructivist Implementation

Findings from observations and interviews indicate several positive impacts:

1. Improved Hermeneutical Skills

Students became more critical in reading the Bible. They not only quoted passages but also interpreted the texts by taking into account cultural and social contexts.

2. Development of Critical Thinking

Open discussions trained students to listen to different arguments, construct theological reasoning, and engage in debate in an academic manner.

3. Strengthening of Contextual Faith

Through reflective practice and ministry projects, students learned to connect faith with real-life realities, making faith not abstract but relevant (Groome, 1998).

4. Enhancement of Collaborative Skills

Group work fostered mutual respect across denominational lines and diverse ministry backgrounds.

Challenges in Implementing Constructivism

Nevertheless, this study also identified several obstacles:

1. Lecturer Resistance

Not all lecturers are accustomed to constructivist approaches. Some feel that discussion-based methods are time-consuming and reduce the depth of content coverage (Dockery, 1995).

2. Student Readiness

Some students struggle to adapt to active learning models. They tend to wait for answers from lecturers rather than seeking understanding independently.

3. Resource Limitations

Access to international journals, digital books, and learning technologies remains limited, thereby hindering students' exploration.

4. Assessment

The assessment system is sometimes not aligned with constructivist principles. Final examinations are still predominantly in the form of closed essays, while projects and reflections do not yet receive sufficient weighting.

Critical Discussion

The findings above demonstrate that constructivism can enrich Christian Religious Education (CRE) by fostering hermeneutical, critical, and contextual competencies. However, constructivism is not merely a technical method; it requires a paradigm shift on the part of both lecturers and students. According to Palmer (2017), teaching is a spiritual act that arises from the wholeness of the teacher's identity.

Thus, the application of constructivism in CRE demands that lecturers dare to "release full control" and trust the learning process as guided by the Holy Spirit within the community of faith. Furthermore, the implementation of constructivism at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta should be directed toward constructive alignment:

1. Learning Outcomes: the ability to interpret Scripture contextually, engage in critical faith reflection, and develop ministerial skills.
2. Learning Activities: discussions, case studies, ministry projects, and written reflections.
3. Assessment Tasks: portfolios, ministry reports, and open examinations based on argumentation rather than memorization.

When these three aspects are aligned, constructivism ceases to be a mere slogan and becomes a lived reality within the praxis of CRE learning.

Recommendations

1. For Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta

- a. Organize pedagogical training for lecturers to become more accustomed to using constructivist methods.
- b. Provide access to digital literature (journals, e-books) to enrich student discussions and reflections.
- c. Develop an assessment system based on portfolios, projects, and reflections, rather than relying solely on written examinations.

2. For CRE Lecturers

- a. Integrate methods such as discussion, case studies, and ministry projects into every course.
- b. Act as facilitators who encourage students' questions, critiques, and discoveries.
- c. Develop creative and contextually relevant instructional strategies tailored to students' needs.

3. For Students

- a. Shift learning patterns from passive to active, reflective, and critical.
- b. Utilize ministry experiences as material for reflection in the learning process.
- c. Develop the habit of reading academic literature to deepen theological understanding.

4. For Future Researchers:

- a. Conduct comparative studies on the implementation of constructivism in other theological seminaries in Indonesia.
- b. Examine more deeply the impact of constructivism on students' spirituality.
- c. Investigate the integration of constructivism with digital technology in theological education.

With these recommendations, it is expected that Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta will continue to develop CRE learning that is dialogical, contextual, and relevant to the challenges of the times.

Examples of Implementation in Classroom Learning

The application of constructivism in Christian Religious Education (CRE) classes at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta can be illustrated through actual instructional designs carried out by lecturers. This section provides concrete examples of how constructivist principles are translated into everyday teaching practices.

1. Learning Design

A CRE lecturer at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta designed a course using a spiral constructivist model. Each session began with an advance organizer in the form of a guiding question, followed by text discussion, personal reflection, and concluded with a collaborative assignment. For example, in a course on Christian Ethics, the lecturer opened with the question: "How should Christians respond to the phenomenon of hoaxes on social media?" (Piaget et al., 2001).

This question required students to think critically and then connect their reasoning with biblical principles. The process reflects Piaget's principle of cognitive conflict, which encourages students to restructure their thinking schemas.

2. Classroom Activities

The learning activities were carried out through three main stages:

- a. Exploration: Students read biblical texts (e.g., Ephesians 4:25–32) alongside Christian ethics literature. Working in small groups, they identified the ethical principles contained therein.
- b. Meaning Construction: Each group presented their discussion results and compared findings with other groups. The lecturer did not provide immediate answers but instead posed follow-up questions such as: Is this principle still relevant in the digital era?
- c. Application: Students were asked to write personal reflections on how they would apply the biblical principles in their daily use of social media.

3. The Role of the Lecturer as Facilitator

In this approach, the lecturer functions as a facilitator of dialogue. Instead of giving long lectures, the lecturer:

- a. Posed Socratic questions.
- b. Provided scaffolding for students struggling to understand the texts.
- c. Supplied additional resources (articles, journals, videos) relevant to the discussion.
- d. Motivated students to connect theory with their ministry experiences.

This role is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), wherein the lecturer helps students move from simple to more complex levels of understanding through appropriate guidance.

4. The Role of Students as Active Subjects

Students are no longer positioned as mere recipients of information but as producers of knowledge. They:

- a. Read texts and sources independently.
- b. Engage in discussions with peers to interpret meaning.
- c. Deliver presentations that connect theory with real-life experiences.
- d. Write reflections or essays as a form of internalizing faith values.

In this way, students experience learning not as rote memorization of concepts but as a collective construction of meaning.

5. Forms of Authentic Assessment

Assessment within the constructivist approach is not limited to written examinations but incorporates various forms of authentic evaluation, including:

- a. Portfolios: collections of personal reflections, ministry reports, and group discussion notes.
- b. Ministry Projects: students are required to carry out ministry programs in churches or communities and produce a theological analysis report.
- c. Group Presentations: evaluating students' collaboration and communication skills.
- d. Critical Essays: measuring students' ability to analyze texts and apply Christian ethics.

These assessments emphasize process and applied competencies rather than mere memorization of facts.

6. A Case Study at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta

In one observation of a Basic Christian Religious Education class, the lecturer presented a case study on conflict among congregants in a local church. Students were asked to analyze the case based on Scripture (Matthew 18:15–17) and the doctrine of reconciliation. The discussion was lively, with several students even sharing real experiences from their ministry. The session concluded with a shared understanding that conflict resolution must be carried out with love and forgiveness while remaining grounded in the principles of church discipline. This process illustrates the effectiveness of constructivism, as students did not

merely learn theory but also constructed new understandings based on real-life experiences (Groome, 1998).

7. Classroom Dynamics

The dynamics of a constructivist classroom are often more vibrant than those of a traditional class. Students speak more frequently, ask questions, and respond to their peers' opinions. Although discussions occasionally digress, the lecturer ensures that the focus is maintained.

8. Student Reflections

From the interviews, several students shared their experiences: a. Learning through discussion made me more confident in expressing my opinions. I also gained a better understanding of how to connect God's Word with real-life issues. b. At first, I was confused because the lecturer did not give direct answers. But over time, I learned to think independently, search for answers, and then discuss them with my peers. These statements indicate that constructivism has successfully transformed students' learning patterns from passive to active.

CONCLUSION

The application of the constructivist method in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a paradigm shift that transforms learning from a monological tradition into a dialogical one. This paradigm emphasizes that theological knowledge and Christian faith are not only transmitted through lectures but are actively constructed through reflection, dialogue, ministry experience, and communal interaction. Thus, students are not merely recipients of the faith tradition but subjects who live, reflect upon, and actualize that faith within the context of their times. Based on this research, it can be concluded that constructivism is capable of enhancing students' hermeneutical skills, critical capacity, and the practical relevance of their faith. Group discussions, case studies, personal reflections, and ministry projects serve as concrete means through which students construct new meaning derived from Scripture and simultaneously connected to social realities. This approach also cultivates collaborative attitudes, tolerance, and openness to diversity, qualities that are essential for future church leaders in an era of pluralism. Nevertheless, the success of constructivism depends heavily on lecturer readiness, student motivation, and institutional support. Without institutional commitment to provide training, resources, and evaluation systems aligned with constructivist principles, constructivism risks being reduced to a mere method without transformative power. Therefore, shared responsibility among lecturers, students, and the institution must be continuously strengthened to ensure holistic and sustainable learning. Furthermore, constructivism in theological education reminds us that learning is not merely an academic activity but also a spiritual process. True meaning-making takes place not only in the classroom but also in the struggles of daily life, guided by the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the application of constructivism in CRE can be regarded as a pathway toward transformation not only intellectual but also spiritual leading to a living faith and contextual ministry praxis. Ultimately, this study is expected to contribute significantly to the development of Christian

education theory and practice in Indonesia. The findings may inspire Paulus Theological Seminary Jakarta and other theological institutions to continue developing models of learning that are participatory, relevant, and liberative, thereby producing graduates who are firm in faith, critical in thought, and capable of becoming transformative servants for both church and society.



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