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Exploring instructional leaders' perceptions on the use of constructivist theory to promote the implementation of entrepreneurship education curriculum

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of constructivism as a tool in promoting the implementation of the entrepreneurship education (EE) curriculum in the senior phase (SP) in Ngaka Modiri Molema District (NMMD), North-West Province, South Africa. Despite implementing the EE curriculum in the NMMD, this paper advocate for more effective execution, recognising the impact constructivism could have in improving learners' entrepreneurial thinking and creativity. This teaching method effectively increases EE learners' creativity and thinking processes because it allows learners to construct their knowledge. This study's theoretical underpinning is grounded in constructivism, emphasising learners' active knowledge construction based on their experiences. It elucidates the translation of learning into practical application through constructivist theory, highlighting its positive impact on learning processes and outcomes. This study employed a quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional design. The study encompasses all public SP schools (grades 7, 8, and 9) in the NMMD, totalling 437 schools, of which 51 were conveniently selected for participation (n=51). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, and the subsequent analysis used descriptive statistics. The key findings indicate a limited engagement by instructional leaders in fostering a constructivist learning environment for EE learners, resulting in a predominantly passive learning experience. Additionally, the study unveils the benefits derived from constructivist approaches, offering insights into how this method can effectively promote EE in the SP. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on instructional practices, reflecting a theoretical emphasis in EE towards a more balanced integration of practical applications through constructivist principles.

Keywords: Active learning, constructivism, curriculum, entrepreneurship education, instructional leadership

Introduction

Entrepreneurship education (EE) instils entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and knowledge in learners so that they can implement their ideas (European Commission, 2013). Ndedi (2012; p 128) describes EE as the type of education that prepares individuals, "particularly youth, to be responsible, enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers by exposing them to real-life learning experiences where they can take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes". In a society with few job opportunities, learners must have entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to generate income and develop new skills (Du Toit, 2016). Due to the crucial role of entrepreneurship in society, EE has become one of the fastest-growing fields in education worldwide (Sirelkhatim & Gangi, 2015). Hence, many countries are integrating EE into the school curriculum, beginning from high school (April, 2015; Steenekamp, 2014). Despite its importance and benefits, the pedagogical correctness of its content delivery in schools is crucial. The literature indicates that teachers in

South African schools still adopt the traditional (teacher-centred approach) instructional delivery method instead of a learner-centred approach (Du Plessis, 2020; Sakata, 2023). The teacher-centred approach undermines the potential of EE in fostering entrepreneurship intention and skills among learners, particularly in the senior phase (SP) of South African schools.

Background to the study

Since the advent of an all-inclusive democracy in South Africa in 1994, the South African education system has experienced significant transformations. The reforms have brought substantial changes to teaching, learning and assessment practices. Implementing the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) led to the reconceptualization and redesign of subjects offered across all grades, including Grades 7–9. The inclusion of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) as an integrated subject in the SP was driven by the introduction of the NCS in 2003, followed by the updated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in 2010, where EMS was introduced as an integrated school subject to equip learners with entrepreneurship skillsets (Department of Education (DoE), 2002; Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2012). EMS integrates disciplines such as accounting, EE, and Economics and was developed to provide learners with critical thinking, communication, mathematics, data collection, analysis, and organisational skills (DBE, 2012).

However, teaching EMS became a herculean task for teachers due to the unique teaching methodologies required to teach the subject. For instance, through a qualitative case study, Qoyi and Mpiti (2022) explore Grade 7 EMS teachers' pedagogical practices in teaching financial literacy (FL). Two schools in the Chris Hani District were purposefully selected, with six participants observed and interviewed over six months. The findings revealed that:

(i) teachers' practices are based on experience and subject knowledge, (ii) experienced teachers deliver learner-centered, creative lessons, while newer teachers rely on textbooks and teach in a teacher-centered manner, and (iii) a lack of training on EMS content, resources, and the complex language of EMS concepts leads to standard pedagogical practices (p. 359).

Buttressing Qoyi and Mpiti's findings, Ngwenya and Nzuza (2022) explored teachers' perception of the role of EMS in preparing learners for the accounting subject (one of the components of EE integrated into EMS) in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. The study found that Grade 9 EMS teachers and Grade 10 accounting teachers faced significant difficulties in delivering EMS as an integrated subject. Despite understanding the integrated nature of EMS, these teachers struggled to implement it effectively, particularly in teaching FL. The study identified critical issues, such as inadequate pedagogical strategies and insufficient subject knowledge. Consequently, learners were not adequately prepared for accounting in the FET phase, reflecting broader challenges in effectively teaching EE.

Drawing from the above, it is evident that many teachers still rely on traditional teacher-centred teaching approaches to teach EE in South African schools, particularly in the SP (Du Toit, 2016; Enebe et al., 2024). Noteworthy is that teaching EE with a teacher-centred approach comes with disadvantages and consequences, including a lack of learner-centred learning, which is essential for developing entrepreneurial mindsets among learners (Sioukas, 2023). In other words, using the teacher-centred approach in teaching EE denies learners the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial mindsets. Furthermore, using a teacher-centred approach in EE classes negatively impacts learners' creative thinking and entrepreneurial tendencies (Pizarro, 2014). EE teaching requires that learners be active and exposed to real-world experiences and opportunities that give them a feel of what it takes to be an entrepreneur. Unfortunately, this is lacking in the teacher-centred learning approach.

Given the lapses characterising traditional teaching methods via instructional delivery in EE, we argue that substituting teacher-centred for learner-centred approaches enables learners to maximise the benefits of the experiential components of EE. This approach prioritises an active learning environment where learners construct personal mental models of the real world from their perceptions and interpretations of entrepreneurship realities (Olusegun, 2015). It also allows them to mentally construct and develop an entrepreneurship mindset, an idea that resonates with the core tenets of constructivism theory.

Constructivism draws its theoretical foundations from the seminal works of Jean Piaget, John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky and the contributions of Jerome Bruner. The theory concerns the intellectual transformation that occurs as learners harmonise formal instructional knowledge with their experiences within the social and cultural contexts in which knowledge occurs (Lobler, 2016). In this study, the learner-centric core tenet of constructivism theory allows learners to be creative and innovative using their experiences to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset. Moreover, incorporating principles of constructivism into instructional delivery in EE would enable teachers to function as mentors, guides and catalysts that facilitate learning by encouraging learners' reflection and providing feedback on EE (Mueller & Anderson, 2014). This statement resonates with the notion that constructivist learning is associated with entrepreneurial awakening in learners (Bell, 2019; Mueller & Anderson, 2014; Tan, 2017).

Extant literature indicates that much has been researched in the domain of EE and its importance in high school. For instance, Morgan (2020) examined the philosophical underpinning of implementing EE in high schools via EMS in South Africa. The study found that EE materials promote a narrow view of entrepreneurship and lack equitable pedagogy that inspires all learners, which should prepare them for diverse entrepreneurial roles. The findings underscore the pedagogical challenges in teaching EE in South African schools.

Using a quantitative method, Ntsanwisi and Simelane-Mnisi (2024) investigated entrepreneurial education in South African primary and secondary schools. The findings underscore teachers' deficiencies in EE-oriented pedagogical skills and best practices required to implement entrepreneurship education. Castro and Zermeño (2021) identify entrepreneurial interest and skills among university students, showing that they were interested in social entrepreneurship and developing companies based on the knowledge acquired during their studies.

Despite the findings in these studies, none examined the inclusion of constructivism in EE instruction to promote its curriculum implementation in the SP. Hence, this study aims to fill the identified gap by examining instructional leaders' perceptions on the use of constructivism as a tool to promote the implementation of the EE curriculum in the SP. In line with this broad aim, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What is the extent of using constructivist practices in entrepreneurship instruction in the SP?
- What are the perceptions of instructional leaders on what constitutes a constructivist classroom in the SP?

Problem statement

Studies have shown that EE instructional delivery in the SP (Grades 7, 8 and 9) in South African schools is primarily passive and does not create an atmosphere for using learners' experiences (Du Toit, 2016; Author et al., 2024). Learners' experiences that facilitate inquiry-based learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are the building blocks of EE, are lacking. Most EE teachers in South Africa have not fully imbibed constructivist teaching practices, rendering learners' active involvement minimal (Booyse & Chetty, 2016).

Despite the increasing recognition of EE as a catalyst for advancing entrepreneurial mindset among learners, majority of South African schools, especially in the SP, continue to rely on traditional teacher-centre pedagogical approaches (Du Toit, 2016; Enebe et al., 2024). Such approaches often limit learner creativity, engagement, and exposure to authentic entrepreneurial experiences essential for cultivating entrepreneurial tendencies (Sioukas, 2023). Teacher-centred instruction in EE hinders learners' ability to actively construct knowledge, develop problem-solving skills, and connect theoretical concepts to real-world entrepreneurial contexts (Olaniran, & Mncube, 2018). This misalignment between instructional practice and the experiential nature of EE diminishes its potential to equip learners with the skills and mindset required for entrepreneurial success.In contrast, learner-centred methods, grounded in constructivist theory, emphasise active participation, reflection, and the integration of personal and social experiences into learning (Otache, 2019; Lobler, 2016). These methods position teachers as facilitators and mentors, fostering creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial awareness among learners (Bell, 2019). However, limited empirical understanding exists regarding how shifting from teacher-centred approaches in EE can be effectively implemented within the South African SP context. This gap underscores the perception of instructional leadership in the use of constructivism to inform pedagogical strategies that genuinely support entrepreneurial mindset development.

Traditional teacher-centred teaching methods involve direct instruction and the question-and-answer approach, and teachers rely on them due to their teaching stance and classroom conditions (Du Plessis, 2020; Sakata, 2023). This reliance on traditional methods does not allow effective learner engagement in active learning nor foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for developing entrepreneurship intention and skills (Sentsho & Mudau, 2023).

Given these challenges, a pressing need exists to explore how constructivist theory can be leveraged to promote the effective implementation of the EE curriculum in the SP. Constructivist approaches emphasise active learning, contextual learning, and the importance of learners' beliefs and attitudes, which could address many pedagogical shortcomings in the current EMS curriculum. By adopting constructivist strategies, teachers can better equip learners with the entrepreneurial skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a complex economic environment.

Constructivism as a learning theory

The CAPS promotes problem-solving skills, independent enquiry and active participation to encourage real-life situations in the classroom (DBE, 2012). A constructivist perspective on learning is predicated on the idea that learners construct knowledge as they work to make meaning of their surroundings (Piaget, 1972). Spivey (1995) depicts constructivism as a dynamic process of understanding development through building, moulding and configuring meaning. Thus, learners construct information actively. The ideas expressed by these scholars might be relevant in addressing the concerns highlighted about teacher-centred versus learner-centred approaches to EE instruction. Constructivism is a learning theory where learners actively construct knowledge from experiences (Zaida, 2021). The environment where learners find themselves consciously or unconsciously gives them an idea of entrepreneurship. For instance, learners are surrounded by private and public businesses. In one way or another, they might have had transactions with these ventures, giving them a glimpse of entrepreneurship. Therefore, their experiences in the reality are foundations for learning (Pillay, 2019). Constructivism is a learning strategy based on the belief that people actively construct or make their own knowledge, and that reality is determined by the learner's experiences (Elliott, Kratochwill, Littlefield Cook, & Travers, 2000). It is therefore argued that a constructivist approach in teaching entrepreneurship may activate learners towards a more entrepreneurial approach in their own lives.

Constructivism maintains that the learner forms knowledge through experience, and the interaction of knowledge and novel conditions shapes this knowledge (Arends, 1998). It is therefore that the learning experiences provide sufficient experience, which was the approach for the research, namely, to determine if there is sufficient experiential learning included in teaching entrepreneurship. This prior knowledge influences the new or changed information a person develops from fresh learning experiences (Phillips, 1995). Active knowledge building is based on previous knowledge of physical and social environments (Jaworski, 1994), enabling learners to harness their ideas, thoughts and creativity. It is therefore important that constructivist teaching of entrepreneurship includes the community; learners can learn and experience entrepreneurship in and through he community.

Contrary to classic behaviourist models proposing that learning should be a one-way flow of information from instructor to learner, constructivist learning theory contends that children learn best when they actively create knowledge structures (Kundi & Nawaz, 2010). The basic stimulus–response conditioning method is the foundation of behavioural learning (Chou, 2020), emphasising memorising basic abilities through repetition (Ahmad, Sultana, & Jamil, 2020). Fairbanks (2021) states that behaviourism learning theory is built on repetition or routine and is more of an observable stimulus–response behaviour, frequently used in psychology and more teacher-centred than learner-centred. Notwithstanding, some scholars criticized constructivism on the grounds that it lacks structure for some learners and could be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Kirschner et al. (2006) argue that the constructivist approach does not provide learners with enough guidance, especially those who lack previous knowledge. Taber (2024) opined that constructivist learning requires extended projects, exploration or real-world problem solving, which may not be adequate in a resource-constrained school environment or rigid curriculum. On the contrary, these critiques do not undermine its relevance to the present study. Constructivism is adopted as an appropriate theory for this study as it fosters a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning of EE, where learners are guided and allowed to discover opportunities and make practical meaning of their environment.

Constructivism as a way of thinking in EE

In many countries, according to Hernández-Torrano and Ibrayeva (2020), contemporary education curricula are geared towards acquiring life skills (problem-solving and critical thinking) to enable learners to adapt to the 21st-century world of creativity. Creativity and innovation are a person's highest and most complex mental activities (Hernández-Torrano & Ibrayeva, 2020), which are the primary goals of education and training. Creative individuals who rely on their abilities can address the confronted problems of life (Pickering, 2001). Creativity is an ability that undeniably exists in every human's life; however, it must be cultivated and strengthened (Hernández-Torrano & Ibrayeva, 2020). Spivey (1995) depicts constructivism as a dynamic process of understanding through building, moulding and configuring meaning, which lends itself to learners' thinking and creativity. Thus, learners construct information actively. Drawing from Spivey (1995), learners must think creatively when engaging with more complex economic issues in this fourth industrial era. Schools and their leaders are under increasing pressure to establish a favourable learning environment to generate school-leavers equipped creatively for the world of work through EE (Hassi, 2016; Kunene, 2007).

Attention has been drawn to the need to educate learners in entrepreneurship to boost their entrepreneurial aspirations (North, 2002; Solesvik, 2013). These authors propose that EE empowers individuals to discover their innate potential by applying the constructivist approach. EE in the SP should include practices that translate into the real world to increase the discovery of learners' innate abilities.

The literature highlights challenges with curriculum implementation at the school level. Poorly identifying learning theories negatively affects curriculum implementation challenges; thus, poor achievement, and this might also be said of EE (Karakuş, 2021). Ramchander (2019) states that the South African educational system is not raising enough entrepreneurs, which could be due to how EE is designed and delivered in the SP at school. This study proposes that applying constructivism could better promote EE teaching and learning.

Various research papers highlight that constructivist learning is pivotal in nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset. Constructivism emphasises the active role of learners in constructing knowledge, which aligns with the entrepreneurial trait of recognising opportunities in changes and acting in uncertain environments (Jia, 2022). Studies have shown that applying constructivist approaches in EE can lead to value creation and innovation among learners, promoting a shift towards learner-centred learning in entrepreneurship classrooms (Kayii & Akpomi, 2022; Man, Berger, & Rachamim, 2024). Additionally, research on entrepreneurial learning within technology-based business incubators reveals that novice entrepreneurs benefit significantly from socially constructivist systems that facilitate learning through networking and support mechanisms, enhancing their entrepreneurial skills and mindset (Sioukas, 2023). Therefore, integrating constructivist principles into educational settings can significantly contribute to developing an entrepreneurial mindset, enabling individuals to think proactively and better shape their future and society. EE's problem is fostering learning to assist the entrepreneurial process, which conventional techniques do not provide (Heinonen & Poikkijoki, 2006). While the lecturing method has its place in the EE curriculum, Zahra and Welter (2008) propose that training prospective entrepreneurs requires action-oriented and interactive techniques. EE in the SP requires constructivism as a learning theory because it allows the learner to participate actively in EE instruction (Du Toit, 2016).

Jones and Iredale (2010) opine that EE incorporates experiential learning, creative problem-solving, innovation and learning-by-doing. Arranz, Ubierna, Arroyabe, Perez, and Arroyabe (2017) highlight action-oriented instruction, group collaboration, self-learning and project-based learning as interactive teaching techniques. This is seen in the CAPS curriculum, where provisions are made for Entrepreneur's Day. Thus, this day is mapped out in the curriculum as a day for learners' small-scale production and sales, which inculcates an entrepreneurial mindset. According to Bell (2019), some instructors have pushed for experiential methods, such as computer simulations, business trips and realistic class exercises. Constructivist active learning strategies, such as experience-based learning, are increasingly being added to traditional educational techniques to support students in becoming more enterprising and entrepreneurial (Bell, 2019). Diverse instructional methods are essential for EE development (Lourenço, Taylor, & Taylor, 2013).

Much of the doing in EE is essentially modelling entrepreneurship (Neck & Corbett, 2018). These simulations foster an entrepreneurial mindset by bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world. One strategy is involving learners in activities that combine social and individual learning components to benefit people or communities (Lackéus, Lundqvist, & Williams-Middleton, 2016). Entrepreneurship is defined as acting on opportunities as an approach to EE. Learners gain experience by making mistakes and changing their ideas to create valuable results. An individualised, cooperative, experiential and multi-disciplinary constructivist method differs from classic behaviourist approaches (Morselli, 2018b), whose pedagogy is rooted in repetition by the educator.

Further, the seven pedagogical goals of constructivist learning environments which differ from behaviourist ones are as follows: they give learners experience with creating knowledge (they decide how they will learn); they help them appreciate and gain experience with different viewpoints (by evaluating potential and alternative solutions); they authenticate (embed) learning tasks in a real-world setting; they promote learner-centred learning, where learners take ownership of their learning and have a voice in the process; they embed learning in social experiences (through collaboration); they encourage using various modes of representation (video, audio text); and finally, they promote metacognition, the process of knowing how knowledge is constructed (Kayii & Akpomi, 2022).

Consequently, the dearth of entrepreneurial intentions, innovativeness and creativity among learners for an entrepreneurial future requires a constructivist classroom where the focus shifts from the teacher to the learners. Hence, this subject must occur in an environment where learning involves the above pedagogical processes of an active classroom. It is imperative to emphasise constructivism for improved implementation of EE in the SP because this is the first stage where EE is introduced. Thus, the initiative is to investigate constructivist theory to foster the implementation of the EE curriculum.

Methods

This study used the quantitative approach using a cross-sectional descriptive design and structured questionnaires to collect data from principals, department heads (DHs) and educators on their perceptions of instructional leaders on the use of constructivism in enhancing the implementation of the EE curriculum. The study lend itself to a positivist paradigm and targeted Grade 7, 8 and 9 EE instructional leaders in the NMMD. Although the quantitative, positivistic approach and the constructivist learning seem to be from different methodological approaches, it is possible to use them together. Cupchik (2001) refers to constructivist realism, which is a kind of finding the middle ground; to use the strengths of both approaches to answer specific research questions. The positivistic approach, which indicates the measurable, or counting of responses, focused on basic descriptive data. It gives an indication of the experience and perception of the respondents about the specific issue in these sections of the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics, therefore, can be used to interpret the responses since it is not exactly measured activities; there were examples not asked: How many entrepreneurial days do you have per semester? Constructivist principles such as learner-centredness, experiential engagement, and collaboration were captured by the questionnaire. Permission to conduct this research was obtained from the Department of Education, after which the letter was presented to the School Governing Body of each participating school, and ethical consent was sought from the respondents.

The study population comprises all public primary and secondary schools (437) offering Grades 7–9 in the NMMD of North-West Province. The five sub-districts in the NMMD, with the number of schools attached to them, form the clusters for this study: Ditsobotla (82), Mahikeng (150), Ramotshere-Moilon (92), Ratlou (68) and Tswaing (72). Fifty-one schools were conveniently selected. The study engaged three instructional leaders per school (one principal, one DH and one teacher). A structured questionnaire was used to collect data and was distributed to 153 respondents. In total, 148 questionnaires were received from 51 principals, 37 DHs and 60 teachers;five (5) questionnaires were not returned, indicating a response rate of 96.7%. The distribution and collection of the instrument were challenging because some schools were in remote locations. The researcher visited the schools and distributed the consent forms and questionnaires to the respondents, mostly during break times, and the researcher waited to collect them before the break was over. There were exceptions because some respondents did not complete the instrument within this time frame, resulting in the researcher having to repeat the school visits; for some schools, more than three times. The overall distribution and collection of the instrument took four months. Afterwards, a descriptive data analysis was conducted to ascertain and describe instructional leaders' perspectives. The researcher's choice of a descriptive statistics was to summarise the data through mean and standard deviations, describe patterns, and to compare groups to show similarities and differences. The questionnaires were personally handed to the respondents. All respondents and their details remained anonymous throughout. The questions on the questionnaire were short to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation and were relevant to the aim of the study.

Results

The tables present the instructional leaders' perceptions on promoting the implementation of the EE curriculum through the constructivism approach. The study used percentages (where 50% is considered acceptable) and calculated means (averages) to gather the respondents' responses. The calculated means relate to the 4-point Likert scale of 1.0–1.5 = strongly disagree, 1.6–2.5 = disagree, 2.6–3.5 = agree, and 3.6–4.0 = strongly agree. Tables 1 and 2 present the results of the extent of using constructivism and the instructional leaders' perceptions on what constitutes a constructivist classroom in the SP for promoting entrepreneurship instruction.

Table 1 presents the extent of using constructivist instructional activities in the SP to promote the implementation of the EE curriculum. Item 1 shows that 54.7% of the instructional leaders host Entrepreneurs' Day in their various schools, whereas 45.3% do not. However, the margin between those who host Entrepreneurs' Day and those who do not is small, indicating that Entrepreneurs' Day is not properly implemented in schools. Item 2 shows that most respondents (64.2%) allow their learners to develop some form of business plan and implement it, whereas 35.8% do not. In item 3, 84.5% of the respondents do not invite entrepreneurs to talk with learners, whereas only 15.5% admit they do. Item 4 shows that a greater percentage (60.1%) of the respondents do not teach or encourage their learners to undergo small-scale production and sales, whereas only 39.9% do. Lastly, item 5 depicts that 92.6% of instructional leaders do not engage learners on field trips and excursions to better understand EE, whereas only 7.4% admit that they do.

Table 1: Extent of using constructivist practices in entrepreneurship instruction in the SP

Item no	Item	Yes (%)	No (%)
1.	Do you host Entrepreneur's Day?	54.7	45.3
2.	Do learners develop some form of a business plan they must implement?	64.2	35.8
3.	Do you invite entrepreneurs to talk with learners about the importance of EE?	15.5	84.5
4.	Do learners undergo any small-scale production and sales?	39.9	60.1
5.	Do you engage learners on field trips and excursions so they will understand EE better?	7.4	92.6

Conclusively, the items in Table 1 are practical exercises that enable learners to be actively involved in entrepreneurial exercises, which, if adequately imbibed and practised in schools by instructional leaders, will enhance the practicality and creativity of EE learners. A balance between theory and practice will be created, emphasising learners' active and physical engagement to enhance experiential learning, which will promote implementing the EE curriculum in the SP.

Table 2 shows the findings on the constructivist learning theory and promoting the implementation of the EE curriculum in the SP. The findings show that the instructional leaders in this research strongly agree, leaning towards disagree, that the constructivist learning theory promotes the implementation of the EE curriculum but disagreed on engaging learners in experiential learning. The findings show the means and their respective items: 3.70 (6), 3.64 (7), 3.61 (8) and 3.60 (9), indicating that the instructional leaders strongly agree that real-life experiences, innovative and learner-centred instruction, collaboration and exchange of ideas, and visual contexts promote the implementation of the EE curriculum. The findings also show the means of 3.59 (10), 3.53 (11), 3.41 (12), 3.39 (13) and 3.38 (14), revealing that the instructional leaders agreed that constructivist teaching strategies are innovative, previous experiences and use of experiment on tasks, interactive and dynamic learning, which comes with constructivist approaches, improve the implementation of the EE curriculum. However, behaviourist learning theory in teaching and learning should be curtailed because it is educator-centred. Conversely, the mean of 2.24 (15) shows disagreement by the instructional leaders because they do not engage learners in experiential learning to encourage the implementation of the EE curriculum. The findings indicate that using teaching methods guided by constructivist theory can promote the implementation of the EE curriculum if infused into EE teaching and learning. Therefore, the constructivist theory teaching approach is necessary for enhancing the implementation of the EE curriculum.

Table 2: Instructional leaders' perceptions on what constitutes a constructivist classroom in the SP

Item no	Item	Mean	St. D.
6.	A learner-centred approach is crucial for learners to link their classroom experiences with real-life experiences.	3.70	0.459
7.	Innovative and learner-centred instruction is better than traditional instruction in determining the effective learning of EE.	3.64	0.481
8.	In constructivist learning, learners are encouraged to work in groups, collaborate and exchange ideas.	3.61	0.504
9.	Visual contexts, e.g., films, bring a new dimension to learners' learning experiences.	3.60	0.491
10.	Constructivist teaching methods are innovative (e.g., simulation and role-play).	3.59	0.494
11.	Learners can develop their knowledge using experiences in the constructivist theory.	3.53	0.527
12.	In this theory, learners experiment on tasks individually and come together to discuss the results.	3.41	0.520
13.	Interactive and dynamic learning is practised in the classroom to promote the improved implementation of the EE curriculum.	3.39	0.490
14.	Other learning theories, e.g., behaviourist, centred more on the educator than learners.	3.38	0.643
15.	Instructional leaders engage learners in experiential learning to demonstrate the concepts and ideas discussed in the classroom in the real world.	2.24	0.893

Discussion

Extent of Using Constructivist Practices in Entrepreneurship Instruction in the SP

The research question explores the extent to which constructivist theory is used in entrepreneurship instruction in the SP. The data shows that while there are instances of constructivist practices being implemented, these are not consistently or widely adopted, reflecting a gap between the theoretical potential of constructivism and its practical application in the classroom.

Constructivist theory emphasises active, contextual and social learning, where learners build knowledge through experiences and interactions (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 2012). Hosting Entrepreneur's Day events (54.7%) and having learners develop business plans (64.2%) are positive indicators that some constructivist elements are being integrated into the curriculum. These activities align with the constructivist emphasis on experiential learning, where learners engage in real-world scenarios to enhance their understanding of entrepreneurial concepts (Kolb, 2014). Developing business plans fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are crucial for entrepreneurship (Bruner, 1966). However, the infrequent use of other constructivist strategies, such as inviting entrepreneurs to speak to learners (15.5%) and organising field trips (7.4%), highlights significant shortcomings. Interaction with entrepreneurs and field trips provide contextual and authentic learning experiences that can deeply enrich learners' understanding of entrepreneurship (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). The limited use of these strategies indicates that many learners miss out on opportunities to connect classroom learning with real-world applications, a core tenet of constructivist theory.

Furthermore, the moderate engagement in small-scale production and sales activities (39.9%) reveals a partial adoption of hands-on, practical learning experiences. These activities can help learners understand the processes involved in running a business, making the learning experience more relevant and engaging (Dewey, 1938). The lack of widespread implementation of such activities signifies a reliance on traditional, less interactive teaching methods, which might not fully leverage the benefits of constructivist learning. The findings indicate that teachers need greater support and professional development to integrate constructivist approaches into their teaching practices effectively. Studies have shown that teachers who are well-versed in constructivist methods and have the necessary resources can create more engaging and effective learning environments (Jonassen, 1991; Moloi & Molise, 2021). Professional development programmes focusing on project-based learning, collaborative activities and experiential learning could help bridge this gap. Moreover, the curriculum should include more constructivist-oriented activities. By incorporating activities that promote active and contextual learning, learners can better develop the skills and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship (Du Toit & Kempen, 2018). Ensuring teachers have access to adequate training and resources is essential for successfully implementing these activities.

Instructional Leaders' Perceptions of What Constitute a Constructivist Classroom

The second research question aims to understand the instructional leaders' perceptions regarding what constitutes a constructivist classroom in the SP. The data reveal an inclination towards adopting constructivist principles, highlighting the significance of learner-centred approaches and innovative instructional methods.

Instructional leaders strongly agree that a learner-centred approach is crucial for linking classroom experiences with real-life contexts (mean = 3.70, standard deviation (SD) = 0.459). This result aligns with the constructivist belief that learning is most effective when learners connect new knowledge to their existing experiences and understanding (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 2012). By prioritising learner-centred methods, instructional leaders acknowledge the importance of making learning relevant and meaningful. The preference for innovative and learner-centred instruction over traditional methods (mean = 3.64, SD = 0.481) further supports the constructivist paradigm. Traditional instruction relies on rote memorisation and passive learning, whereas constructivist methods emphasise active participation and critical thinking (Jonassen, 1991). This shift towards innovative instruction indicates a recognition of the need for pedagogical practices that engage learners more deeply and foster a deeper understanding of EE.

Group work and collaborative learning are also essential components of a constructivist classroom (mean = 3.61, SD = 0.504). Constructivist theory posits that social interaction is critical in cognitive development, as learners construct knowledge through dialogue and collaboration (Vygotsky, 2012). By encouraging group activities, instructional leaders support the development of communication and teamwork skills, which are vital for entrepreneurial success. Using visual contexts, such as films, to enhance learning experiences (mean = 3.60, SD = 0.491) reflects an understanding of the importance of multimodal learning. Visual aids can provide concrete examples and bring abstract concepts to life, enriching the learning experience (Paivio, 1990). This approach is particularly effective in constructivist classrooms, where diverse learning modalities help cater to different learning styles and preferences.

Instructional leaders also perceive constructivist teaching methods, such as simulations and role-plays, as innovative (mean = 3.59, SD = 0.494). These methods allow learners to immerse themselves in real-world scenarios, facilitating experiential learning and enhancing their problem-solving and decision-making skills (Kolb, 2014). Such activities are central to constructivist pedagogy, which advocates for learning through experience and reflection. The belief that learners can build knowledge from their experiences (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.527) underscores the constructivist emphasis on the continuity of learning. By drawing on prior knowledge, learners can better integrate new information and develop a more cohesive understanding of complex concepts (Ausubel, 1968).

Experimentation and subsequent group discussions (mean = 3.41, SD = 0.520) are valuable in constructivist learning environments. This approach aligns with Dewey's (1938) notion of learning-by-doing, where students engage in hands-on activities and reflect on their experiences to solidify their understanding. Interactive and dynamic learning practices (mean = 3.39, SD = 0.490) are highlighted as crucial for effectively implementing the EE curriculum. These practices foster active engagement and adaptability, essential qualities for entrepreneurial thinking (Kolb, 2014). However, the data indicate that instructional leaders need improvement in this area, revealing that more dynamic and interactive methods could be integrated into the curriculum.

The perception that other learning theories, such as behaviourism, focus more on the educator than the learner (mean = 3.38, SD = 0.643) contrasts sharply with the constructivist emphasis on student agency and active learning (Skinner, 1965). This comparison underscores the shift towards learner-centred approaches, considered more effective in fostering entrepreneurial skills and mindsets. Interestingly, the low mean score for instructional leaders engaging learners in experiential learning (mean = 2.24, SD = 0.893) indicates a significant gap between recognising its importance and its actual implementation. Experiential learning is a cornerstone of constructivist theory, allowing learners to apply theoretical knowledge in practical, real-world contexts (Kolb, 2014). This finding advocates a need for targeted professional development and resource allocation to support instructional leaders in integrating more experiential learning opportunities into their teaching practices.

In summary, the extent of using constructivist theory in entrepreneurship instruction in the SP is currently limited and inconsistent. Enhancing the application of constructivist principles could significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of EE, preparing students better for the complexities of the economic world through critical thinking. Moreover, the data strongly align with constructivist principles among instructional leaders, who recognise the value of learner-centred, innovative and experiential learning approaches. However, a notable gap exists in the consistent application of these principles, highlighting the need for ongoing support and resources to realise the full potential of constructivist pedagogy in EE.

Conclusion

This study presented constructivism as a veritable tool for promoting the implementation of the EE curriculum in grades 7, 8 and 9. Imbibing a constructivist pedagogic approach to EE would meet the educational objectives stated in CAPS: “identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking; work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team; encouraging an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths” (DBE, 2012). EE in the SP should include practices that translate into the real world to increase the discovery of learners’ innate abilities. The literature highlights challenges with curriculum implementation at the school level, such as the poor identification of learning theories, which negatively affect curriculum implementation and, thus, poor learner achievement.

Hence, constructivism was advocated to enable the active participation of learners in teaching and learning to reconcile their experiences with the new information and concretise learning. The results showed that instructional leaders agreed that implementing the learner-centred approach embedded in constructivism is crucial to promoting EE curriculum implementation to link their classroom and real-life experiences. This study investigated only the impact of constructivism on EE in the NMMD of North-West Province. Therefore, future similar studies should be conducted in other provinces. More so, similar research can be conducted with independent schools to determine whether the situations found in the public schools also apply in such schools. Furthermore, in this era of technological advancement, new research can be performed to establish how technological use could enhance a constructivist learning classroom to improve EE in the SP.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The result of this study showed that instructional leaders support the idea of experiential and learner-centred methods to EE, yet these approaches are not often in practice. For instance, only 7.4% of the respondents engage learners in fieldtrips, and only 15.5% of the respondents invite entrepreneurs to their instruction. Small-scale production and sales projects occurred in less than 40% of the cases which instructional leaders could run at low cost within the school premises. Addressing these shortcomings does not require complex programs or large amount of funds. Simple strategies that is well structured can make a significant difference. For example, instructional leaders can introduce a hands-on project where learners design a small business idea, execute it, and discuss the insight gained. Entrepreneur's day which is active in over 50% of the schools could be redesigned to include market research, prototyping, and budgeting and reflection on lessons learned. Instructional leaders could engage local entrepreneurs in person or through online sessions, costly excursions can be replaced with short walking trips to nearby businesses. These activities can enhance pertinent entrepreneurial skills that links classroom theory to practice.

In policy, this study lends itself to professional training and policy development. Professional development programs should aim at fostering practical skills such as promoting teamwork, designing EE projects, and examining outcomes of learner activities. Department of Basic Education could assist with funds to actualise the professional development programs and integrate clear practical projects, trips and allocate more time for preparations and activities in CAPS, this will strengthen the link between policy and practice.

Limitations

Although the study offered a valuable insight into the integration of constructivist approaches in EE classroom, it is not without limitations. The results are based on data collected at one point in time, which cannot capture how instruction might change over time. While the sample is large with a response rate of 96.7%, was restricted to schools within NMMD district, which may not be representative of other districts and cannot be generalizable. Furthermore, data was based on individual-reported practices from instructional leaders and may reflect what respondents believe should be happening in the classroom and not actually the classroom situation. This could lead to a potential gap between perception and reality. Finally, the questionnaire only stressed the frequencies with which certain activities were carried out, instead of exploring the depth or quality of such activities. This makes it difficult to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategies implemented.

Ethics Guidelines

This study followed the ethical standard of obtaining approval from the Education Ethics Research Committee at North-West University. The study also sought for permission from the Department of Basic Education, the School Governing Body and Principals from each selected school. The researchers adhered to the ethical guidelines as they relate to paraphrasing by making sure that all sources used were adequately acknowledged. The study credited original authors for their contributions to theories and concepts used in the study.

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