

# Constructivism and Teaching-Learning Process in Christian School: Case Study in a Christian School in Tangerang, Indonesia

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**Abstract**--Students are very excited and interested in the creative learning process. Students' interest in learning will increase if they study in a conducive environment, well-prepared learning resources, clear class rules and potential and enthusiastic teachers. Not a few students will return home with a disappointing story, if the learning process at school does not go well. It is not impossible if sad or annoying stories also occur in classes in Christian schools. Good memorable learning will be difficult to achieve if students are always asked by the teacher to memorize, repeat the subject matter, make presentations, plus attend additional classes after school hours. Learning portraits like this make learning tiring and pressing for students. If so, then the work ethic and professionalism of teachers will be questioned by school leaders, parents of students. One solution to an effective learning process is to rethink the approach used in the teaching and learning process. The world of philosophy offers several streams of educational philosophy that are often used as a basis and approach in the teaching and learning process. In this paper, one philosophy will be discussed, which is constructivism and its approach in relation to the teaching and learning process in Christian schools. Therefore, the issues are what is the view of constructivism towards education? Can constructivism be applied in learning in Christian schools? Christian school's classrooms cannot be the only location for knowledge transfer. Teachers must be able to balance the application of one-way learning and constructivism in their classrooms. Teachers cannot think that students are like empty vessels that need to be filled continuously, as the tabula rasa concept views humans. Student participation in class is also important to be concerned about, so students feel not pressured or too restricted when learning.

**Keywords**--constructivism, Christian school

## I INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to find education that is neutral in this world, because of course education is always carried out based on certain philosophies. Philosophy of Education is certainly the basis of the course of an Education. The direction of education will be very determined from the philosophy of education, its influence even to be able to influence the learning process and the implementation of learning itself.

In Indonesia, the ideology that allows religious freedom includes the inclusion of religious elements in the education system. This can be seen from the goals of national education, namely Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 3, the purpose of national education is to develop the potential of students to become people of faith and to fear God Almighty, have good morality, be healthy, knowledgeable,

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competent, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. Visible goals National education provides great opportunities for the existence of certain religious-based education and curriculum development that refers to the colored work frame of certain religions.

Making religion the basis of a particular education, making this process face various challenges that come from the nature of religious philosophy, especially in the learning approach chosen in class. The focus of this paper lies on the philosophy of Christian Education that is applied in Christian schools, specifically in the learning of citizenship in students' liberal arts classes. Christian philosophy has a profound effect on color in the class. Christian faith that already believes in the existence of a frame work about God as the source of every knowledge creates contrasting nuances of the philosophy of Education which is widely used in Education in this era, namely constructivism.

In the philosophy of constructivism knowledge is the result of social consensus, so students in the class can build their own knowledge and not like the concept of a blank paper that must be filled with information or knowledge from their school or teacher. In social education education with a constructivism approach pursues and respects student questions and curiosity rather than class calm and student passivity receiving waves of information from the teacher alone. This learning approach opens the door to opportunities for interaction. Christian education does have a certain frame work on the source of knowledge, this tends to show that social class approaches in Christian schools tend to be one-way from teachers who are trusted to understand the source of truth and knowledge. This paper is compiled based on research in Christian school social classes, both teachers and students are asked about their views on approaches used in teaching and learning and the reasons for applying approaches that tend to be passive in learning. In the learning design it is clear that the method and approach taken actually show the opposite of the application.

In the Christian perspective knowledge is absolute. Knowledge results from the revelation of God that is evident in Christ and is written in the Bible. For Piaget knowledge is produced from the construction of one's thought about a thing (Suparno, 2001, p. 122). Human senses are believed by constructivists to be the only medium for someone to gain knowledge. The sensation felt by the senses will make someone get a picture of something then will build their knowledge. Constructivism itself arises as the implication of Thomas Kuhn's central concept that identifies paradigms with schemes in knowledge, where learners construct their "schemes" into knowledge (Rijanto, 2008, p.392). Osborn and Feyberg suggest that knowledge is acquired not by the internalization of some outside given but is constructed from within (Osborn, Feyberg, 1985, p.82). Paul Ernest (quoted from Steffe, Gale, 1995, p. 485) also believes that knowledge is strictly subjective. That is why constructivists assert that "others have realities that are independent of ours". The opinions above lead to the conclusion that for constructivists knowledge is believed to be non-objective, uncertain and always changing depending on the aspects built by the learner. There is an extreme contrast between the Christian perspective and constructivism about knowledge.

Constructivism has begun to attract the attention of educational practitioners over the past 20 years. According to Paul and Norman, constructivism is a combination of Kant's thought and 20th century relativism (Paul, Norman, 1994). Constructivism is divided into three broad categories, namely cognitive constructivism related to the information process in the human mind. Another category is social constructivism proposed by

Vygotsky, namely knowledge generated from social interaction, use of language and the exchange of opinions between individuals. The last category is the radical constructivism proposed by Piaget, namely knowledge generated from the cognitive activity of the learner. Thus, it can be concluded, constructivism views the process of gaining knowledge cannot be done solely through one-way transfer of knowledge, for example the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. For constructivists, knowledge can be built from anywhere and learners are given free access to obtain knowledge.

Constructivism which is often used in education is radical constructivism and socialist constructivism. Radical constructivism tends to be personal, that is, students are more active in building their own knowledge. Socialist constructivism is often used in cooperative learning, which is a method of building student knowledge from group sharing or group material excavation. Both have the same goal, so that free knowledge is formed as a result of the student's own construction. Although free, but that knowledge must be true. Correct knowledge in constructivism according to Piaget (quoted from Suparno, 2001, p. 124) is knowledge that becomes viable (way) to explain related problems. The more knowledge can be used and useful, the stronger the truth.

Teachers who hold the view of constructivism position themselves as facilitators. Constructivism can dictate only guidelines for good teaching. We cannot derive specific teaching methods (Davis, Maher & Noddings, 1990, p.83). Brummelen argued that The teacher's main role is to facilitate learning. In other words, teachers provide the right environment and motivation for learning (Brummelen, 1998, p.30). It can be concluded, the teacher's role in constructivism is to help students in learning. Students are facilitated by a good environment, motivated and mediated in the process of students achieving knowledge.

Constructivism is considered good and appropriate to be applied in today's classrooms, but that does not mean there are no challenges in its application. The challenges faced are precisely focused on the teacher. Teachers need to really understand the basic knowledge of students, models of concepts taught and must be able to motivate students to think. Rosalind Driver (quoted from Matthews, 1998, p.8) revealed that the challenge for teachers lies in helping learners to construct these models for themselves, to appreciate their domains of applicability and, within such domains, to use them. Furthermore von Glasserfeld (quoted from Matthews, 1998, p.25) also stated that It is essential that the teacher has an adequate model of the conceptual network within which the student assimilates what he or she is being told. Without such a model as basis, teaching is likely to remain a hit-or-miss affair.

Furthermore Darma revealed that it was very necessary for constructivist educators to grow and develop student learning motivation, especially for those who are low motivated (Darma, 2008, p. 180). Thus, constructivist teachers need to think creatively, raise questions that stimulate students' reasoning, prepare interesting learning environments, and have adequate knowledge.

This review opens an understanding of constructivism and its application in the classroom. Constructivist learning such as cooperative learning or problem-based learning is not a bad thing to apply in classrooms including classrooms in Christian schools. Cooperative learning, for example, Van Dyk argues that cooperative community fosters, allows students to practice disciplined skills, and encourages them to take responsibility for their own and each other's learning (Van Dyk, 1997, p. 124). There is nothing wrong with constructivist application if the teacher does not take action as an extreme facilitator. Students are released to construct

subjective knowledge as well as views on knowledge by constructivists. The teacher needs to act more than just a facilitator. Teachers still need to provide boundaries in student understanding. This is necessary, because the nature of human sin also makes students not free from sins that try to mislead the direction of student knowledge. At this point the teacher's role must be balanced, that is standing on the side as a facilitator and role model. Students still need to be given clear examples and instructions, so that wrong interpretations are formed in the learning process.

The research question of this study could a constructivism approach be applied in social studies class of a Christian school? How does a Christian school adjust to a development of constructivism approach implementation in Indonesia? A narrative approach to semi-structured interviews was taken in order to capture the lives of experiences from students and educators at the school. The participants were drawn from five different classes and there were three lectures were interviewed in order to confirm each part of the representative's answer. These questions are suggested in an interpretive paradigm about the teaching and learning approach in the classroom from all the educators and from the views of their students as well. Several questions were raised to explore the approach applied in social learning at this institution. Questions for educators: How do you usually use directing students to achieve their learning goals? How do the lecturers prepare certain activities in class to achieve learning goals? Some questions for students are In your opinion, does the lecturer have directed learning properly (explain the learning objectives, convey the material clearly)? Do you think the lecturer has ever given direct questions along the learning process? How does the lecturer ensure understanding of your concept? Mention what are the learning activities in the class instructed by the lecturer to be done? How do these activities help you understand the learning topics on the meeting? What is your pleasant learning climate? Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed to be read carefully and sought the meaning behind those conversations. The information that is gathered is highlighted and ensured as confirmation to each other as well. Thus, writers put all together the information and are looking for some keywords for those answers.

From interviews with several instructors, it was found that in their social science learning, especially Pancasila, lecturers applied instructions directly in one direction. They explained the learning objectives for the meeting, then made use of the presentation slides prepared by the course coordinator and began explaining the contents of the presentation slides. The presentation slides used were arranged by the course coordinator without including the team to sit down and discuss together about aspects or knowledge that need to be included in the presentation slides. The slides presented are information-intensive and do not meet the standards of an ideal power point and enrich knowledge.

Teachers prepare their learning by re-reading the contents of slides then reading information from other sources then conveying various information that they get in class. The instructor reads and re-observes the contents of the lesson plan or syllabus before the class begins with the aim of not losing direction or target learning objectives. From the interview results it appears that the lecturer received the syllabus directly from the coordinator. There is no lecturer participation in the preparation of the syllabus, so it is not surprising when lecturers only feel put in a rigid system and are not given the space of freedom to explore the knowledge that will be taught to students. For sure this has a sustainable impact if the lecturer does not feel part of the Education

process, especially in the planning section. If there is participation from every teacher in the planning, the ideas that emerge will be richer and every planned development will be felt as a joint plan and carried out together. From this part it is still difficult to conclude that there is a constructive approach in the process of education at this institution, because in the planning of the material it also tends to be dictated and regulated according to the wishes of the coordinator or leader rather than considering the characteristics and needs of the students.

There are no specific activities that are prepared only to prepare material to be presented and explained in class, this happens because learning is only done in one direction and not centered on students but focused on the material to be delivered at the meeting. Imagine a learning that is only one-way, with presentations that are only read without a process of inquiry, questions and answers or examples of applicative problems that occur in the community, even though Pancasila is a subject that is closely related to problems in society. The lack of opportunities for students to participate in learning indicates the lack of application of constructivism approaches in the classroom.

To enrich the information obtained, interviews were also conducted with students as subjects who felt directly the learning process that occurred in the classroom. Some questions that I used were Do you think the lecturer has ever given direct questions along the learning process? How does the lecturer ensure understanding of your concept? Mention what are the learning activities in the class instructed by the lecturer to be done? How do these activities help you understand the learning topics on the meeting? What is your pleasant learning climate? From the first question about their views on the deployment of lecturers in classroom learning, it appears that students generally answer that the directions given are still one-way and tend to be minimal stimulation questions. From the perspective of students, they expect lecturers to share knowledge in ways that are interesting and truly hone students' analytical skills. But what happens is the opposite, classes are only guided by using guidelines in power points that tend to be passive without the selection of information tailored to the needs of students. In ensuring students' understanding, lecturers do not have a lot of assessment supplies that can ensure students' understanding. Evaluation is only done during the midterm and final semester exams. Questions to provoke student responses are very rare or even hardly happen in class. Classes tend to be passive and there is no room for critical thinking. Usually lecturers give quizzes that are uploaded to moodle and then ask students to work on them at home. The type of questions used are generally multiple choice or true-false. From the results of interviews with students it appears that students do not receive much benefit from learning situations like this. Students expect an active and participatory teaching and learning process. They want to be asked to go directly to the community to see clearly the problems that occur and the challenges experienced by Pancasila as the state ideology. They want to hear directly from the public through various observations that can be asked by lecturers to do. In reality the class experienced is very far from what they expected. Students want to actively speak out to express their opinions and also various questions in class, but there is no room for that to happen, because the class is dominated by lecturers.

In the process of education in the classroom, providing space for children to develop their own knowledge and find various important facts about the world around or the condition of the surrounding community will be a valuable learning experience. Christian institutions with a curriculum framework that is oriented to the perspective of the Christian world does not mean that they do not have the space to build knowledge with a

constructivism approach. Although the educator is considered as the person who best understands the purpose of Education and the source of knowledge, but that does not mean all can be presented from one source only, without giving scope for students to find their own knowledge. Verification from educators can be one solution so that students do not lose direction in the search for knowledge. Students need to be monitored but at the same time facilitated to find knowledge. Thus, the learning atmosphere will be alive and more meaningful for children.

In my estimation, this institution wants to maintain the quality of their curriculum so that it tends to be a one-way approach. This conjecture was confirmed through an interview conducted on a lecturer who revealed that it was true, the syllabus was prepared, a power point was prepared from the source or in the hope that it did not deviate from the established basis. Of course this is not a mistake because this institution has a vision and mission that needs to be achieved. But in learning to be able to achieve student learning goals or competencies, of course they can be actively involved so that they are not merely passive students and are unable to think critically.

Being able to think critically and build knowledge is one of the characteristics of constructivism learning and needs to be done by educational institutions in order to advance the tradition of thinking of each graduate. Questioning something that is considered as the truth is a right in the learning process. The teacher has the task to direct, provide restrictions so that students do not experience misguided thinking that can endanger students in the future.

Every teacher has a philosophy and point of view in teaching. One of them is constructivism which emphasizes the freedom of students to build their own knowledge. The knowledge formed can be subjective, as long as the knowledge can be used in community life. The process of building knowledge can be done personally, or in groups. This makes the class of constructivist teachers always dynamic and tend to not be bound. To be subjective knowledge certainly needs to be directed towards achieving objectivity or approaching objectivity. So as not to endanger students in the future. The way the constructivist teacher applies his teaching can be used by Christian schools. Christian teacher classrooms cannot be the only location for knowledge transfer. Christian teachers must be able to balance the application of one-way learning and constructivism in their classrooms. Christian teachers cannot think that students are like empty vessels that need to be filled continuously, as the *tabula rasa* humans' concept views. Student participation in class is also important to be concerned about, so students feel not pressured or too restricted when learning. It is hoped that classes in Christian schools can reach their vision and mission at the same time promoting the ability to participate and think critically.

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