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## Strategies for Effective Application of Situated Learning in the Teaching Learning Process

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### ANNOTATION

This paper examines strategies for effective application of situated learning in the teaching learning process. The concept of situated learning accounts for the dynamic and changing nature of knowledge as a product of ongoing systems of activity that are socially, historically and culturally constituted. Furthermore, humans as a social being learn mostly through social interaction with others. However, such knowledge usually resides or situates in the content in which participation of individuals to the community of practice plays a vital role on situated learning process. No situated learning takes place when learning is static to the situation in which it is learned. This paper was discussed under the following subheadings, clarification of concept, theoretical frame work, features of situated learning, why situated learning, classroom application of situated learning, challenges of situated learning implication for effective learning, conclusion and suggestions. Furthermore, one of the features of situated learning revealed that situated learning is based on social cultural theory however why situated learning in the classroom, it is also noted that situated learning focuses on social learning, on its application in the classroom. The authors opined that it can be achieved through school excursion and learning by doing on its implication to classroom learning, and that learning can only occur when individuals are members of a particular community in which they are acculturated and at the same time participate actively in the transmission and propagation of knowledge among the communities of practice. In conclusion it is stressed that situated learning gives students the opportunity to engage themselves with group task assignment, project and such likes. It was therefore suggested that enough time should be allocated to subjects that are practically oriented, this will help accommodate teachers' preparedness in arranging the students and reorganization of the classroom for active engagement of students in the learning process.

**KEYWORDS:** Situated Learning, Constructivism, Community of Practice, Learning.

## Introduction

The concept of Situated learning theory was first proposed by Jean Lave and Wenger in the year 1991. It was seen as a model of learning in a community of practice usually through apprenticeship. Situated learning showcase or brings to the limelight the power of social interaction, learning by doing through active participation in the community of practice. This however takes as its focus the relationship between learning and social interaction in which it occurs. Thus, Contu, (2003) argued that learning that is usually embedded in the social and physical context is more effective than non-situated learning. Looking at the instructional model developed by Wenger and Lave (1991), it is interesting to note that students are more relatively to learn if they become active participants in the learning experience drawn from communities of experts. In situated learning as opined by Lave (1988) it is believed that learning is the outcome of social interaction process which comprises ways of thinking, perceiving, problem solving etc. which cannot be separated from world of action but exist in robust social environment made of actors, actions and situations. Therefore, according to Clancey (1995) in situated learning, learners adopt the strategies of co-operation and active participation as a means of acquiring knowledge, skills, ideal from the community of practice. This however means skills and knowledge acquisition can be facilitated through social interaction between the learner, mentor/guide and the social environment.

As maintained by Wenger and Lave (1998) for learning to be termed effective it must be situated within the community of practice. Situated learning cannot occur in an abstract manner rather through the process of interaction within the community of practice. Thus, learning can be encouraged by learning from the experience people who are experts and professionals in the said profession (Mills, 2013). This however infers that learners acquire knowledge, skills, competence through their encounter with the experts/professionals. In other words, social interaction, active participation, observation, learning by doing forms part of situated learning and this corresponds to collaborative, active participation and inter-personal relation which is part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century instructional system. According to Onyeji, et al (2023), the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher is one who is able to apply his practice based on in –depth knowledge of instructional content. He known the needs of the learners and centers his teaching on their needs and interest.

## What is Situated Learning

Situated Learning, according to Wikipedia is a learning theory that centres on an individual's acquisition of professional skills which includes research in learning through apprentice into how legitimate peripheral co-participation leads to membership in a community of practice. Furthermore, according to Farmer and Hughes (2005), situated learning can be seen as a process or function of activity within a community of practice. In other words, the importance of participation in authentic social interaction in other for learning to occur is usually unarguable. While Besar (2008) maintained that in situated learning, for the learner to receive effective education, it requires learning that is embodied in an authentic context in practice, where students or learners will be faced with more complex cases within the social communities of practice.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the theory of constructivism, championed by Vygotsky (1978) which emphasized that learning will be efficiently carried out if the learner is given the opportunity to discover the fact by himself. In other words, the learner is self-directed, creative and innovative. Thus, as opined by Onyeji et al. (2023) the general purpose of education in the contemporary society is to enable students become transformers of the society. This infers that students are made to be critical thinkers who are able to make decisions and take

actions that will better the society. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher refers to modern day innovative teachers or educators with the most current knowledge in the teaching/learning process. Achuonye (2022) stressed that the teacher facilitates learning, he creates enabling environment and directs the learning activities so that effective teaching and learning goes on for a better academic achievement. Here, the constructivist theorist sees human or learners as "observers, participants and agents who actively generate and transform the patterns through which they construct knowledge and realities that fit them.

Jing (2017) agreed with the views shared by constructivists theorists has made the educators to believe that the best way to learn or acquire knowledge and skills is by having students construct their own knowledge. The constructivist believe that learning is an active process of acquiring skills, knowledge, idea and meaning from different experiences. Fenwick 2001; and Sansome, 2016) however stressed that learners begin to participate consciously in the learning culture. In other words, students learn best if the teachers, experts and professionals, technicians serve as a guide to the learner and also to help the learners or get them deeply involved in the art of constructing their own knowledge. Supporting the above assertion, Maxine (2022) was of the view that 21<sup>st</sup> century education is all about giving students the skills they need to succeed in the new World and help them to develop the confidence to practice those skills. However, as noted by Vygotsky (1978) emphasizing the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition, Vygotsky believes strongly that community plays a central role in the process of learning, acquiring skills and knowledge. Thus, Vygotsky ideas were as follows:

- Vygotsky theory focusses on the role of culture in the development of mental abilities.
- Adults helps children develop cognitively by engaging them in challenging and meaningful activities.
- The adult provides the children with what to think and how to think, and the tool to think with.
- That interactions with others significantly increases not only the quantity of information and the number of skills a child develops. Vygotsky however, argued that higher mental abilities could only develop through the interaction with more advanced others.

On the role of the teacher in a constructivist classroom, it was revealed that the teacher's role is that of a guide. However, the teacher is expected to create a collaborative problem-solving environment where the students become active participants in their own learning. Furthermore, the following can be considered as teaching strategies that must be implemented by the teacher:

- Knowledge will be shared between teachers and students.
- Teachers and students will share authority.
- Teachers' role is that of a facilitator.
- Learning groups will consist of small members of heterogeneous students.

In summary, constructivist theories maintained the following as the guiding principle as:

- Learners determine how they learn.
- Learning must be embedded in a realistic context.
- Social interaction in the community of practice must be encouraged.

### Features of Situated Learning

Situated Learning is characterized by the following features according to Lave and Wenger (1991), thus;

**1. Situated learning is based on socio cultural theory.** Situated learning theory is the product of socio-cultural learning. They believe that the acquisition of knowledge, skills must be agreed upon by the community of experts. For them, if you want to become a physician, you must learn from a professional physician and not learning on your own. Again, if you want to become a metal fabricator, you must be guided by a metal fabricator for you to possess the skills of fabricating metal and not learning on your own. However, on the socio-cultural learning, skills can be gained through social interaction and discovery. This invariably means that situated learning theory argues that for the trainee to become effective and active, participants the trainee must participate in learning task.

**2. Learning should take place in communities of practice.** Delivering knowledge is socially constructed by a community, the only way to learn is through social interaction, active participation, observation, group discussion, interaction with others learning by doing. However, listening can help the trainee learn information that is so crucial to the society and how society views certain topic. Lave and Wenger (1991) opined that, there are some communities of practice who share the same knowledge.

**3. Learning starts out as legitimate peripheral participants:** At this level of apprenticeship, learning should take place systematically. Furthermore, Lave and Wenger maintained that, the trainees should actually follow their mentors around to observe their work and learn from them through guided practice. The trainees are what Lave and Wenger regarded as a legitimate peripheral participant. This means that as a legitimate peripheral participant, you are not fully regarded as a full member of the central community. Also, Lave and Wenger opined that at this level of apprenticeship, you are to perform 'low risk 'easy, achievable tasks that are also valuable to the community but not the most complex or difficult tasks. They maintained that as the trainee develop and builds more confidence as he overcomes more tasks given, gradually he will be indoctrinated into the community of practice.

### Why Situated Learning

The following are the reasons why situated learning should be encouraged in the teaching learning process as opined by Handley, Clark, Finchman, and Sturdy (2006)

- It focuses on social learning; in situated learning, it is believed that learning usually occur through social interaction in the midst of community of practices.
- It helps students learn skills that are required in the work force, thereby meeting experts in their chosen areas of specialization.
- It helps students learn through being active participants in their area of practices.
- Knowledge, skills acquisition and competence can be facilitated through encounter with the professionals or experts in the community of practice.
- Co-operative learning, collaborative learning and peer teaching helps in encouraging the fast learners, the average and the slow learners along in the classroom activities.

### Classroom Application of Situated Learning

Clancy (1995) maintained that the following should be considered for effective application of situated learning in the classroom.

**1. Through school excursion:** One of the ways to apply Situated Learning in the classroom is by taking the students to excursion, even the internship programme carried out by students especially the medical and nursing students. Also, Industrial training (I.T.) been carried out by engineering students, accounting students, teaching practice for education students amongst others would help the students have a background knowledge of the task ahead of them after graduation from school. Such programmes like excursion, internship and such like would help the learner have an opportunity to interact with the professionals or experts one on one.

**2. Through school incursions:** As a classroom teacher, you know when it is necessary to invite professionals, experts, technicians to come share first-hand information and what professional ethics means to the community of practice. Through talk show or speech, workshop and seminars students will be acquainted with the language of the community of practice.

**3. Learning by doing:** This means exposing and engaging the students to learn through solving real-world problem, sharing tasks and being active participants rather than learning through books. The constructivism theory comes handy here where the learner can construct his own knowledge and actively involved in lesson planning.

**4. Act as Mentors:** When the teachers act as mentors by giving students projects or assignments and ask them to come and teach their fellow students on how they arrive at their findings.

**5. Through teaching practice (Field work).** In this situation, students are allowed to practice on their own thereby equipping them with knowledge and skill they need to thrive in times of need.

Some key issues the learner should focus on for effective learning in Situated Learning are;

- **Task:** This means overcoming difficult tasks which will help the trainee build skills and competence.
- **Vocabulary:** The trainee "learning and understanding the language of community of practice e.g., medical language or medical terms.
- **Organized principles:** here, this means each community of practice has different ways of organizing themselves. For example, in the field of academia, the Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer III, II, I, Senior Lecturer, Reader, Associate Professor, Professor and Emeritus Professor etc.
- **Learners slowly become full members of the community of practice:** Each community of practice has its own rules attached to the progression of the trainee to the lower rank of peripheral to full participation. Just like in this informal way of education, through the apprenticeship - mentor training, it is the mentor that has the progression control over the apprentice. Here, the mentor determines the pace, he has control over gradual release of responsibility and participation of the apprentice. However, same is applicable in formal context where progression may be surrounded through formal test, duration of years and the age of the trainee as a determinant factor.

### Challenges of Application of Situated Learning in the Classroom

The following are some of the challenges facing implementation of situated learning in the classroom teaching and learning as noted by Harris, Jones, and Coutt, (2010)

- Knowledge does not transfer between tasks/context. This is one of the notable challenges of situated learning since it does not make provision for transfer of knowledge to be applied in another content. This however affirms that situated learning is learning that takes place in the same context in which it is applied.



- It requires a high level of creativity and perseverance by the teacher especially when he/she is faced with students with special needs in the classroom.
- It requires a lot of preparation from the teacher. This has to do with the re-arrangement of the classroom especially, to depict it exact classroom environment.
- It is cost effective; especially on the procurement of adequate or needed educational resources that will help enrich the classroom environment.
- Time consuming: Time is one of the major challenges of implementing situated learning in the classroom especially during the course or learning in the classroom. Here, 45 minutes scheduled for classroom activities may not be enough for the teacher to use prepare the students, re-organize the classroom to look like real-life environment based on when the teacher intended to achieve.
- Specific objective is not spelt out especially when comparing specific objective and assessment of the learner based on the information or skill acquired or gained.

### **Implication for Effective Learning**

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), they opined that learning can only occur when individuals are members of a particular community in which they are acculturated and at the same time participate actively in the transmission, propagation of knowledge among the communities of practice. They however, maintained that to know is to be capable of participating with the requisite skills in overcoming complex tasks. While Victor-Ishikaku (2014) opined that in skills acquisition learner' active participation equally compliments efficient and effective learning. This however implies that constant practice enhances effective learning and mastery of skills. Furthermore, situated learning theory according to Kakavelakis and Edwards (2012) maintained that learning can only be experienced and mediated through relationships within the community of practice. In other words, within community of practice, members usually come together to share and develop practices, learn from each other through social interaction among themselves, through which they gain experiences, offering themselves the opportunity to develop skills, personally, professionally and intellectually. While Tomadaki, Scott (2006; and Jing 2017) believed that learning and learning situation are inseparable. By implication, this however, means individuals learn as they participate by interacting within the community, for example, the history, assumption/ethics, and cultural values, patterns of relationship, the tools at hand, including objects, technology, languages and images amongst others, stressing that acquisition of knowledge, skills work simultaneously. However, this agrees with the gospel of knowing by doing.

Another implication of situated learning is that it encourages students' team spirit and team work. This would enable each person to work actively and collaboratively in a team or group thereby promoting Active Learning Participation (ALP) (Ifegbo et al., 2022). This therefore can be termed beneficial when students help one another with tasks given by teacher which benefits weak students, by enabling them to contribute more, develop new understanding and acquire knowledge by experiencing and participating in real life situation.

Oregon Technology in Education Council (2007) were of the view that students be involved in discussing, applying, analyzing and practicing what was taught by their teacher. By implication, learning must be participatory in nature. However, working at the Socratic method of learning through active participation, this involves the students using the technique of social interaction/learning process. This entails that teacher can give the whole student the opportunity to interact, deliberate on certain task. This can help students think critically and increase their level of intellectual engagement thereby making learning more interactive (Stein,

1995). As noted by Weisman (2012), learning can be achieved in many ways as long as it covers the entire context, tasks or assessment in the teaching and learning process. This in essence means that it is important that this interaction exists in the mentoring process. This however encourages the learners and it helps them to build more confidence and abilities.

Furthermore, Weisman (2012) opined that application of what has been taught should be enhanced by giving assignment to allow the students brainstorm and apply the understanding to real life situation. However, educators believed that learning is situated in the centre of the learning process and acquisition of practical knowledge becomes embedded part of the learning activity, its context and culture in which it is used and developed. This implies that the teacher and the learner are encouraged to work together in achieving a high level of learners' interests and engagement. In today's context, what is important is that the learner must see the benefit of the outcome of his/her learning almost immediately which is possible only with hands on practice learning (Suchman 1988). As opined by Oni, and Anyikwa (2018) on seeing teachers as mirrors to learners, they believed that learners should be allowed to approach knowledge carefully, objectively and rigorously by expressing themselves in the context of the classroom. Here, it is expected that the instructors to make use of more of participatory method inquiry and role plays and tasks in fostering learners' creativity and self-confidence.

Furthermore, McLellan (1995) maintained that when learners participate actively in a group or team, there is need to sustain such behavior through reinforcement or motivation. This would help promote in the life of the learner confidence and sustainability of good behavior as learning by doing helps students acquire or gain more knowledge. As an instructor, you are expected to actively engage your students during and after the lesson. This can be achieved using concrete examples in form of either real life objects, visual, or audio and or audio-visual teaching materials. By implication, as stated by Herrington, et al (2006) stressed that, the use of these resource materials will definitely arouse the curiosity of the students thereby reducing boredom as the lesson is going on. It will also help to break the barriers between abstractions and realities thereby making teaching and learning a real-life situation and very interactive. Studies have shown that students sustained interest throughout a lesson when it is fun-filled. In other words, the level of student's interest is determined based on participation in the classroom activities.

## Conclusion

Situated learning gives students the opportunity to engage themselves with real life, problem-solving approach especially when group task, assignment, project and others are given to them. This in essence means, as a teacher when you are designing instruction, you are expected to focus your lesson on how to engage the students since learning occur when students are given a group task. As argued by Lave and Wenger (1991), if you separate learning process from its application in the real world, that knowledge will remain unused. Rather they were of the opinion that learning situated in the environment transfers more frequently if applied in the context in which it is used or learned (practice). This is actually learner centered approach to instructional delivery which Situated Learning approach has come to support as it corresponds to the 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching or learning process.

## Suggestions

Based on the discourse so far, the following suggestions were made:

- Enough time should be allocated to subjects that are practical oriented, this will help accommodate teacher preparedness and active engagement of the students in the learning process

- Adequate educational resources such as computers should be made available in the various schools to help compliment teachers' effort.
- Provision should be made in the school curriculum especially for invitation of professionals, experts and technicians to help the classroom teacher and the students have a firsthand information in their subject areas.
- Consistent power supply should be maintained by the education providers to help put to use all the computer and other educational materials that needs power supply to function in the classroom.
- Government should adequately fund education at all levels of our school system.

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