

Original Paper

A Study on English Fragmented Learning Through Short Videos from the Perspective of Constructivism

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Received: March 22, 2025

Accepted: April 17, 2025

Online Published: April 29, 2025

doi:10.22158/eltls.v7n2p191

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v7n2p191>

Abstract

This study explores the integration of short videos into English fragmented learning from the perspective of constructivism. It examines how short videos, as a modern learning tool, facilitate the process of fragmented learning, enabling learners to actively construct knowledge through real-world, contextualized language experiences. The study underscores the potential of short videos to optimize English language learning in the digital age, suggesting that when thoughtfully integrated into educational frameworks, they can significantly improve learners' acquisition of both language skills and deeper understanding.

Keywords

Fragmented English Learning, Short Videos, Constructivism, Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

In today's era of rapid advancements in internet and new media technologies, people have more convenient and diverse channels for expression and communication. The continuous development of technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, big data, and algorithmic recommendations has unlocked vast growth potential for the short video industry. A wide range of self-media creators and professional teams are utilizing various platforms and formats to present and share educational resources. The integration of these digital technologies has profoundly transformed the landscape of language learning and teaching. With the increasing prevalence of mobile devices and online platforms, learners now have access to a wide variety of resources, including short videos, which have become a prominent tool in modern education.

A video is a moving image that lasts for a specific duration. At present, there is a wide range of videos containing educational content, making learning through short videos a very useful way for English

learners to note (Syamsiani & Munfangati, 2023). More and more students are turning to short English learning videos as a way to supplement their fragmented learning outside the classroom. These videos not only help pass the time and provide relaxation, but also serve as an effective tool for improving their English skills (Yuan & Hashim, 2022). Therefore, this paper aims to examine how short video-based fragmented learning can enhance English language acquisition through a constructivist lens, focusing on the active role of learners in constructing knowledge.

2. Understanding Constructivism in Learning

Constructivism, a theory of learning, asserts that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, rather than simply absorbing information passively. Piaget emphasized that cognitive development unfolds through a dynamic interplay of accommodation and assimilation, where learners adapt their mental frameworks to integrate new experiences. In contrast, Vygotsky underscored the crucial role of social interaction in cognitive growth, highlighting how culture and historical context shape and influence the learning process. (Vygotskii & Cole, 1978).

A central concept in constructivism is the schema, which refers to the mental frameworks or cognitive structures individuals use to perceive, understand, and interpret the world (Doolittle, 2014). Schemas act as both the foundation and the core of cognitive development, shaping how we process and respond to new information and experiences. They provide the mental scaffolding upon which all further learning is built.

Constructivism also asserts that knowledge is not static or fixed; rather, it is continuously evolving. Instead of simply storing and retrieving facts, learners' knowledge is constantly refined and extended through an ongoing process of revision, adaptation, and integration (Yurtseven & Bademcioglu, 2016). This dynamic process is influenced by real-life experiences and contexts, which lead to the continuous restructuring and reorganization of existing knowledge. In this way, learning is seen as a fluid, ever-changing process shaped by interaction with the world around us.

In the context of language learning, constructivism posits that learners acquire language by actively constructing meaning from real-world contexts, rather than relying on memorization or rote learning. Learners benefit from a variety of approaches and a wide range of resources (Suhendi, 2018)). Constructivist approaches emphasize learner autonomy and critical thinking, encouraging students to engage with authentic materials and reflect on their own learning experiences.

3. Short Videos as a Learning Tool

According to Vygotsky, social interaction and collaboration play a vital role in cognitive development, underscoring the importance of peer-based learning. This is particularly relevant in group learning activities, where tools such as short videos can facilitate peer interaction and provide opportunities for language practice. By using such authentic resources, students not only develop language skills but also engage in meaningful social exchanges, reinforcing both language acquisition and collaborative

learning (Vygotskii & Cole, 1978).

Short videos have become a popular tool in language learning due to their ability to distill complex information into engaging, digestible segments. Platforms such as Bilibili, YouTube and TikTok, offer vast libraries of educational content, from vocabulary exercises to grammar explanations, often incorporating humor, storytelling, and real-world contexts that appeal to learners (Syamsiani & Munfangati, 2023). The visual and auditory stimuli provided by these videos significantly enhance comprehension and retention (Erlangga, 2021). Additionally, the flexibility of short videos allows learners to tailor their learning experiences, controlling the pace and frequency of exposure, a feature well-suited to fragmented learning approaches (Seidel, 2024).

Research has shown that short videos, particularly when used with self-regulation strategies, can optimize learner engagement and retention. The brevity and flexibility of these videos align with modern learners' preferences for bite-sized content that supports both formal and informal learning environments (Mazlan et al., 2023).

4. Fragmented Learning and Its Connection to Constructivism

Fragmented learning refers to the practice of breaking information into smaller, more manageable chunks that learners can process incrementally (Seidel, 2024). This approach contrasts with traditional, longer forms of instruction, which may overwhelm learners and fail to accommodate their shorter attention spans. Fragmented learning supports the construction of knowledge by gradually introducing concepts that build on prior understanding. In language learning, this method allows students to focus on specific language elements—such as vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation—at their own pace. By doing so, it reduces cognitive overload and improves retention.

Constructivism provides the theoretical foundation for fragmented English learning. Chinese scholar Wang Zhuli effectively uses the metaphor of “three broken vases” to illustrate the fragmentation of knowledge (Tan, 2019). The internet represents the first broken vase, symbolizing the vast, fragmented information available online. The fast-paced lifestyle is the second, reflecting the limited time and attention that individuals can devote to traditional, continuous learning. Constructivism, as the third broken vase, offers a framework for how knowledge can be actively constructed within these fragmented conditions. According to constructivism, knowledge should not be passively transmitted through lectures; instead, it is actively constructed by learners through autonomous engagement. Learners synthesize new information by drawing on their previous experiences. This approach places the learner at the center of the learning process, allowing them to choose content that is both interesting and meaningful, thereby building a personalized knowledge system. Fragmented English learning allows learners to transcend the limitations of time and space, making it possible to engage in learning during brief moments throughout the day. By selecting videos that align with their interests and proficiency level, learners gain more control over their learning process, which enhances both motivation and engagement. Whether expanding vocabulary, practicing sentence structures, or

exploring other language elements, learners can gradually piece together their own English knowledge system, one fragment at a time.

Fragmented English learning is a practical application of constructivist principles. Constructivists argue that learners can only truly “accept” knowledge by actively constructing it themselves. Learning is not merely about understanding new information; it also involves analyzing, testing, and critically evaluating that information. Learners are not passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they are active builders of their understanding. Learning is an ongoing, dynamic process in which learners must actively select, process, and integrate information. Fragmented English learning perfectly aligns with these principles.

In contrast to traditional classroom instruction, fragmented English learning allows learners the freedom to choose content that interests them. Learners can filter, analyze, and connect this content with their prior experiences, facilitating the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge. This process encourages the integration and synthesis of new information into their personal knowledge system, allowing learners to build their understanding in a more individualized and meaningful way.

5. How Short Videos Facilitate Constructivist fragmented Learning

Active Engagement and Interaction

In the constructivist learning paradigm, active engagement is fundamental to the learning process. Short videos, when designed with interactive elements, encourage learners to actively engage with the content. This engagement may involve activities such as answering questions, repeating phrases, or mimicking language patterns. Such interactions require learners to process and apply information, facilitating deeper understanding and retention. By actively participating in the construction of meaning, learners are more likely to internalize knowledge effectively. Therefore, short videos that incorporate interactive components align with constructivist principles by promoting active learning and cognitive engagement. Research indicates that interactive elements—such as quizzes or challenges embedded within videos—reinforce learning and provide immediate feedback, promoting deeper understanding.^[11] For example, language learners engaging with a video might be prompted to pause and reflect on a grammatical point or cultural reference, further engaging them in the learning process. Such strategies align with Vygotsky’s notion of “scaffolding”, where learners build on their current knowledge with support from instructional materials and peers (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978).

Constructiveness and Flexibility

Constructiveness is about actively connecting new knowledge to what we already know. When we learn something new, like a word, we often think about its root, prefix, synonyms, or similar words we’ve encountered before. By making these connections, we can remember information better and more easily. This method also encourages flexible thinking, as learners can sift through information and add only what is meaningful to their existing knowledge, without being confined by rigid thinking patterns. Learning English through short videos makes this process even easier and more effective.

This approach offers several key advantages, including flexibility in time, space, tools, and access to resources. First, short videos allow learners to take advantage of spare moments—whether during work, daily activities, or while commuting. This flexibility helps them incorporate learning into even the busiest schedules. Second, learning is no longer confined to the classroom. With short videos, learners can study in various environments, turning almost any place into a learning space. The tools available today make learning even more convenient. Learners can access video content on smartphones, tablets, or computers, enabling them to study anytime, anywhere. Additionally, in the digital age, learners can easily discover and save educational resources, providing unlimited access to materials. This constant availability of content enhances both efficiency and flexibility. These benefits make learning English more effective and adaptable. Learners can seamlessly integrate new knowledge into their existing understanding, all while enjoying the flexibility and convenience that modern technology offers.

Diversity and Contextualized Learning

One of the most significant advantages of short videos is their ability to offer contextualized learning experiences. These videos expose learners to real-life language usage, such as ordering food at a restaurant or daily English at home. This exposure allows learners to understand how language functions in authentic contexts, helping them use language in a meaningful way. For example, a video showing an English conversation at an airport not only teaches vocabulary but also introduces learners to cultural nuances and situational appropriateness. Such contextualized learning encourages learners to view language as a practical tool for communication, rather than just a set of isolated rules to memorize.

Unlike traditional classroom teaching, which often tries to address the common needs of all learners, learning through short videos is highly personalized. The range of resources, content, and formats available for video-based English learning is vast and diverse. With various mobile devices as learning tools, learners can access an array of resources, including audio, text, and video. This variety allows learners to choose learning methods that match their cognitive styles and preferences, enabling more targeted and selective learning. This approach not only keeps learners engaged but also ensures their learning is tailored to their individual needs.

Additionally, learners can create personalized learning plans, adjust the content they study, and build a “knowledge checklist” that aligns with their specific learning goals. This level of personalization further enhances the learning experience and makes it more flexible and effective. Besides, constructivism places a strong emphasis on reflection, where learners critically assess what they have learned and how it connects to their prior knowledge. After engaging with a short video, learners can reflect on the content, identify areas for improvement, and make adjustments to their learning strategies. Short videos are particularly conducive to this process, as they can be paused, replayed, or revisited at any time, giving learners the opportunity to self-regulate their learning. This reflective process fosters self-directed learning, a crucial component of constructivist theory.

6. Challenges and Suggestions

The brevity, flexibility, convenience, and variety of short videos in English teaching provide them with distinct advantages in language education. Despite the advantages, the use of short videos in language learning also presents challenges. One of the primary concerns is the potential for information overload. With an abundance of content available online, learners may struggle to identify relevant videos that align with their learning goals, leading to superficial learning. Furthermore, the absence of direct feedback from instructors may hinder learners' ability to identify and correct errors, limiting the depth of their engagement with the material. Moreover, without active engagement, learners may fall into the trap of passive consumption, which can impede learning. It is essential for both educators and learners to adopt strategies that encourage active interaction with the video content to maximize its effectiveness. To fully leverage the benefits of short videos and enhance language acquisition, several key suggestions can be made:

Appropriateness Over Formalization

Currently, some fragmented learning formats attempt to capture learners' attention and stimulate their interest by focusing on immediate effects, often without considering the substance of the learning content. These formats commonly incorporate a variety of sensory elements—such as sound, light, electricity, images, shapes, and colors—transforming everything into dynamic, visual, and auditory content. However, this approach can cause the form to overshadow the substance, turning fragmented learning into something that is overly superficial and entertainment-focused. Although learners may seem engaged, constantly bombarded by sensory information, they often retain only fragmented, disconnected, and shallow impressions. This focus on short-term excitement rather than deep thinking undermines the true understanding of knowledge and mastery of skills.

Effective fragmented learning should eliminate unnecessary gimmicks and attention-grabbing formats. Instead, it should adopt methods tailored to the nature of the content, prioritizing precision, focus, and accessibility. The presentation of content can be diverse—using formats like PowerPoint explanations, animated demonstrations, video displays, or case studies—but the key is to avoid overwhelming learners with a clutter of forms and excessive complexity. The selected formats must be scientifically sound, appropriate for the learning content, and facilitate independent learning while helping learners achieve their goals.

Hierarchical and Systematic Fragmented Learning Materials

When selecting fragmented learning materials, it is crucial to consider the individual learning differences and personal needs of learners. The materials should cater to a variety of learners, accommodating different proficiency levels and providing multi-layered resources that learners can choose from according to their preferences. For instance, when addressing a particular topic, learners can be offered several parallel learning modules, such as an explanation of key vocabulary usage, a background introduction to the topic, extended readings, and writing exercises. These resources should

vary in length and format, enabling learners to target specific areas for review, consolidation, or enhancement based on their own learning level and needs.

Considering the nature of English language learning, fragmented content should be rich and diverse but not chaotic. It is essential to establish a logical and coherent structure between the various learning components, ensuring that while each module may stand independently, they are logically connected and together form a cohesive knowledge system.

With the rise of new platforms and channels for English teaching in the context of new media, fragmented learning has become almost an inevitable choice in the era of big data. Short video learning, in particular, has emerged as a powerful method in this context. However, the goal should not be simply to increase the amount of information available, but to effectively organize and manage it to maximize its value. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of this learning method, we can help learners build a solid knowledge framework, guiding them from general concepts to specific details, and back to a comprehensive understanding. This approach enables the optimization and enhancement of both knowledge and skills in a holistic manner.

7. Conclusion

In the context of new media and big data, new platforms and channels for English teaching have emerged, making fragmented learning an inevitable choice. Short video learning has become a key model in this shift. However, the focus should not be on simply increasing information but on effectively organizing and managing it to maximize its value. By analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, we can help learners build a cohesive knowledge system, refine their frameworks, and facilitate the progression from broad concepts to specific details, ultimately leading to comprehensive understanding and skill mastery.

When integrated into a constructivist learning framework, short videos offer a dynamic and flexible approach to English language acquisition. They promote active engagement, contextualized learning, social interaction, and reflection, enabling learners to construct meaningful knowledge. However, the successful integration of short videos requires careful attention to content quality, learner engagement, and feedback mechanisms. As digital technology continues to evolve, short videos will likely remain a vital tool in both formal and informal language learning.

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