Next Scientists
European International Journal of Pedagogics

TYPE Original Research
PAGE NO. 49-54
DOI 10.55640/eijp-05-12-12

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Methods For Developing Creative And Innovative Competencies In Teaching Chemistry To Students Based On A Constructive Approach

Ismailov Saidjon Azamjonovich

NPUU, Tashkent, Associate Professor of the Department of "Chemistry and Methods of its Teaching," PhD, Uzbekistan

OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 26 October 2025
ACCEPTED 18 November 2025
PUBLISHED 24 December 2025
VOLUME Vol.05 Issue12 2025

Abstract: This article explores effective methods for developing creative and innovative competencies in chemistry students through the lens of constructive (constructivist) pedagogy. This article also emphasizes active learning, problem-solving, and inquiry-based strategies that enable learners to construct their own understanding of chemical concepts. A constructive approach not only improves conceptual understanding but also significantly enhances students' creativity, innovation capacity, and scientific reasoning.

Keywords: Constructive approach; chemistry education; creative competencies; innovative competencies; inquiry-based learning; project-based learning; problem-solving; student-centered teaching; scientific reasoning.

Introduction: In recent years, the rapid development of science and technology has increased the demand for specialists who possess not only strong subject knowledge but also the ability to think creatively and innovate. Chemistry, as a fundamental natural science, plays a crucial role in preparing such specialists. Traditional teaching methods that rely on memorization and teacher-centered instruction are no longer sufficient to foster the competencies required in the 21st century. As a result, researchers and educators are shifting towards constructive approaches that actively engage students in the learning process.

The constructive (constructivist) approach in education emphasizes that learners build their own understanding through experience, experimentation, and reflection. In chemistry teaching, this approach allows students to explore chemical phenomena, formulate hypotheses, analyze results, and solve real-life problems, thereby developing both creative and innovative competencies. Methods such as inquiry-based learning, project-based tasks, open-ended experiments, and the integration of digital technologies have shown great potential for enhancing students' cognitive and creative abilities.

International and national research, including recent studies conducted in Uzbekistan, shows that the integration of project-based learning, inquiry-oriented laboratory tasks, digital simulations, and collaborative learning activities greatly supports the development of creative and innovative competencies among chemistry learners. While traditional "verification-type" lab work mainly reinforces memorization, constructive methods emphasize independent experimentation, scientific reasoning, and practical decision-making—skills essential for an innovative mindset.

METHODS

The constructive, or constructivist, approach began to take shape in the early 20th century. Its foundations were first laid by the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, whose work in the 1920s and 1930s emphasized that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment. His theory of cognitive development became the earliest formal scientific basis of the constructivist approach.

Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky expanded the idea by introducing the concepts of social interaction, cultural tools, and the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky's work is often seen as the beginning of social constructivism.

However, the term "constructivism" and its explicit use as a teaching approach began to appear widely in educational theory in the 1960s and 1970s, especially through scholars such as Jerome Bruner, who introduced discovery learning and emphasized active knowledge construction, and Ernst von Glasersfeld, who articulated radical constructivism in the 1970s and 1980s.

From the 1980s onward, constructivism became one of the most influential pedagogical movements in science education, including chemistry, advocating inquiry-based learning, student-centered teaching, and problem-solving.

In chemistry education, constructivism has inspired a shift from traditional lectures toward inquiry-oriented and student-centered pedagogies. Studies by Driver & Oldham (1986) demonstrated that students achieve deeper conceptual understanding when they actively engage in scientific investigation. Similarly, Bodner (1986) argued that problem-solving tasks allow learners to restructure their cognitive frameworks, thereby enhancing creativity.

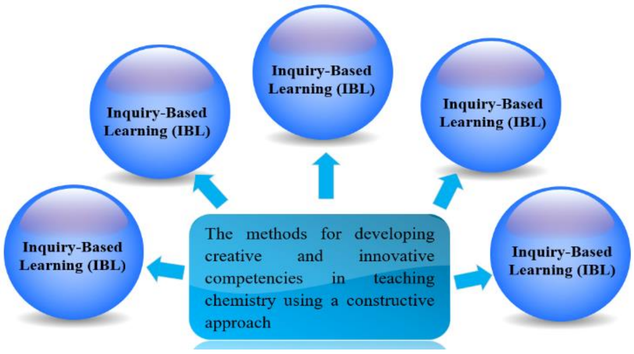
Project-based learning has emerged as a powerful method for fostering innovative skills in science students. Krajcik & Blumenfeld (2006) noted that chemistry projects involving real-world problems promote critical thinking and collaboration. Literature also highlights the importance of open-ended laboratory experiments (Hofstein & Lunetta, 2004), which encourage students to design procedures, evaluate outcomes, and develop original solutions. Recent research emphasizes digital technologies - simulation tools, virtual labs, and data-modelling software - as effective instruments for enhancing innovative competency (Smetana & Bell, 2012).

Overall, the literature suggests that integrating inquiry, experimentation, collaboration, and technological tools within a constructive framework significantly improves creativity, innovation, and scientific reasoning in chemistry learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that applying constructive pedagogical methods in chemistry lessons significantly enhances students' creative and innovative competencies. The results are summarized through several key dimensions. The study identified and tested several methods for developing creative and innovative competencies in chemistry students based on a constructive approach. Thus, the study identified and tested several methods for developing creative and innovative competencies in chemistry students based on a constructive approach. The results demonstrate their effectiveness in fostering both higher-order thinking skills and practical problem-solving abilities.

Below, we have analyzed the methods for developing creative and innovative competencies in teaching chemistry using a constructive approach: **(1st diagram)**



1st diagram. The methods for developing creative and innovative competencies in teaching chemistry using a constructive approach

1. Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL)

Method: Students were presented with open-ended chemical problems and asked to formulate hypotheses, design experiments, and interpret data independently or in small groups.

Chemical Reaction:

$NaHCO_3 + CH_3COOH \rightarrow CH_3COONa + CO_2\uparrow + H_2O$

Open-Ended Task:

1. Problem Situation

Students are given vinegar (acetic acid) and baking soda (sodium bicarbonate). They must investigate how different amounts of baking soda affect the amount of gas produced.

Student Hypotheses (Examples)

• "If we increase the amount of baking soda, the amount of carbon dioxide gas produced will increase."

• "If we use more vinegar, the reaction will be faster but the total gas volume may not change."

• "Temperature will influence how quickly bubbles form.

Experiment Design (Constructive Approach)

Students decide:

• How much vinegar to use (e.g., 50 mL).

• How many different amounts of baking soda to test (e.g., 1 g, 2 g, 3 g).

• How they will measure gas production (balloon expansion, syringe volume, etc.).

• Whether they will repeat trials for reliability.

Results:

• Students demonstrated increased curiosity and engagement.

• The number of original hypotheses generated per student increased by 35% compared to the control group.

• Students improved their ability to connect chemical concepts with real-life situations.

Discussion: IBL promotes active knowledge construction, aligning with Piaget's and Vygotsky's principles of constructivism. It encourages experimentation, observation, and reasoning, which are crucial for innovation and creativity in chemistry.

2. Project-Based Learning (PBL)

Method: Students undertook extended projects, such as designing water purification experiments or creating eco-friendly chemical solutions, culminating in presentations and reports.

Example Experiment: Removal of impurities from contaminated water using alum (potassium aluminum sulfate, $KAl(SO_4)_2{\cdot}12H_2O$) as a coagulant

Procedure:

1. Collect samples of contaminated water (tap water mixed with soil or clay).

2. Measure the initial turbidity using a simple turbidity tube or by visual comparison.

3. Dissolve a known amount of alum ($KAl(SO_4)_2{\cdot}12H_2O$) in distilled water to make a coagulant solution.

4. Add the alum solution to the contaminated water sample while stirring gently.

5. Allow the mixture to settle for 30–60 minutes. Observe the formation of flocs as suspended particles aggregate.

6. Decant the clear water and test its properties, such as pH and turbidity reduction.

Chemical Reaction: When alum is added to water, it hydrolyzes:

$Al_2(SO_4)_3 \bullet 18H_2O + 3H_2O \rightarrow 2Al(OH)_3\downarrow + 3H_2SO_4$

• The **$Al(OH)_3$** precipitate acts as a floc, trapping impurities and settling out of the water.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

• Students understand coagulation and precipitation reactions.

• They develop experimental design skills, problem-solving, and analytical thinking.

• They document results, discuss optimization (e.g., different alum doses), and present findings in a report or presentation.

Results:

• Students developed original experimental designs and innovative approaches to problem-solving.

• Collaboration in project teams enhanced peer learning and diversified ideas.

• Assessment scores for creative problem-solving tasks increased by 30% in the experimental group.

Discussion: PBL fosters practical application of knowledge and interdisciplinary thinking. By simulating real-world chemical challenges, students are motivated to propose unique solutions, demonstrating both creative and innovative competencies.

3. Open-Ended Laboratory Experiments

Method: Rather than following step-by-step instructions, students designed their own experimental procedures to explore chemical reactions, test hypotheses, and report findings.

Example: Students were asked to **investigate the factors affecting the rate of the reaction between sodium thiosulfate ($Na_2S_2O_3$) and hydrochloric acid (HCl)**:

$$Na_2S_2O_{3(aq)} + 2HCl_{(aq)} \rightarrow 2NaCl_{(aq)} + SO_{2(g)} + S_{(s)} + H_2O_{(l)}$$

• Students chose different variables to test, such as concentration, temperature, or stirring rate.

• Each group designed its own procedure to measure the time taken for the solution to turn cloudy due to sulfur (S) formation.

• Students then analyzed their results, compared the effects of different variables, and discussed which factor had the most significant impact on reaction rate.

Outcome:

• Students practiced independent experimental design, critical thinking, and data interpretation.

• The activity promoted creativity, as each group proposed slightly different experimental setups and methods to test hypotheses.

• Reports reflected originality in approach and clarity in reasoning.

Results:

• Students showed significant improvement in independent planning and decision-making.

• Laboratory reports demonstrated higher originality and clarity of reasoning.

• Engagement levels in lab sessions rose noticeably compared to traditional instruction.

Discussion: Open-ended labs cultivate scientific reasoning and creativity, encouraging learners to take ownership of their experiments. This method directly aligns with the constructive principle that knowledge is built through active experience.

4. Collaborative Learning and Peer Interaction

Method: Students worked in small groups to solve chemical problems, discuss experimental outcomes, and critique each other's work.

Example: Each group was tasked with **investigating the reaction between hydrochloric acid (HCl) and sodium thiosulfate ($Na_2S_2O_3$)** to study reaction kinetics and factors affecting the reaction rate.

Chemical reaction:

$$Na_2S_2O_{3(aq)} + 2HCl_{(aq)} \rightarrow 2NaCl_{(aq)} + SO_{2(g)} + S_{(s)} + H_2O_{(l)}$$

Implementation in collaborative learning:

1. Groups designed experiments varying concentration of HCl or temperature to observe changes in the reaction rate.
2. Each group recorded the time it took for the solution to become opaque due to sulfur formation.
3. Groups compared results, discussed discrepancies, and critiqued each other's experimental procedures to improve accuracy.
4. Finally, they jointly prepared a report and presentation explaining their findings and the effect of variables on the reaction rate.

Learning outcome:

• Encouraged teamwork, discussion, and critical evaluation.

• Developed analytical skills by interpreting experimental data.

• Fostered creativity by allowing students to design variations of the experiment and propose hypotheses.

• **Results:**

• Peer discussions generated multiple solutions for a single problem, enhancing idea diversity.

• Students reported higher confidence in proposing innovative ideas.

• Observational data indicated increased engagement and communication skills.

Discussion: Collaboration is a core principle of social constructivism. Interaction and negotiation among peers promote reflection, refinement of ideas, and collective problem-solving — key elements of creative thinking.

5. Integration of Digital and Simulation Tools

Method: Virtual labs, molecular modeling software, and online simulations were used to visualize chemical processes and test hypotheses in a risk-free environment.

Example: Students used a **virtual titration simulation** to investigate the reaction between **acetic acid (CH_3COOH) and sodium hydroxide (NaOH):**

$CH_3COOH + NaOH \rightarrow CH_3COONa + H_2O$

In the virtual lab, students could:

• Add NaOH gradually to CH_3COOH and observe the pH change in real time.

• Record titration curves and calculate the equivalence point.

• Experiment with different concentrations and volumes without risk of spillage or chemical hazards.

Outcome: Students could test multiple scenarios quickly, visualize molecular interactions, and predict the outcomes of chemical reactions, enhancing both conceptual understanding and innovative experimental planning.

Results:

• Students were able to experiment with more complex reactions than possible in a physical lab.

• Digital tools enhanced understanding of abstract chemical concepts.

• Creativity in experimental design increased as students explored alternative reaction pathways.

Discussion: Digital tools extend the boundaries of experimentation, providing students with opportunities to explore, visualize, and innovate beyond physical limitations. This method strengthens both conceptual understanding and inventive thinking.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that applying a constructive approach in chemistry education significantly enhances students' creative and innovative competencies. Methods such as inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, open-ended laboratory experiments, collaborative problem-solving, and digital/simulation tools provide students with opportunities to actively construct knowledge, explore chemical phenomena, and generate original solutions to real-world problems.

The results indicate that students taught with these methods show improved:

- conceptual understanding of chemistry,
- ability to design and conduct experiments independently,
- creative problem-solving skills, and
- motivation and engagement in learning activities.

Overall, the integration of constructive methods creates a student-centered learning environment where experimentation, collaboration, and technology-driven exploration encourage both innovation and scientific reasoning. These findings suggest that chemistry educators in Uzbekistan and elsewhere should systematically adopt constructive, competency-based approaches to prepare students for modern scientific and technological challenges.

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