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Connectivism In Language Learning: A Case Study Of The English Department At Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar

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Abstract

This study investigates how connectivism is understood, applied, and evaluated by English Department lecturers at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. Although connectivism has been widely discussed as a digital-age learning theory, empirical studies in Indonesian EFL higher education still tend to emphasize the availability of digital tools rather than the pedagogical logic behind lecturers' decisions, classroom applications, and assessment practices. This qualitative case study involved five lecturers and collected data through in-depth interviews and classroom observation over four months. The findings show that lecturers generally perceive connectivism as relevant for promoting learner autonomy, collaborative knowledge building, and access to authentic English resources. In practice, connectivist principles were applied through Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, online articles, videos, collaborative tasks, and student-generated digital products. Evaluation of learning outcomes combined conventional assessment with performance-based indicators such as participation in online discussion, group projects, presentations, portfolios, and the ability to synthesize information from multiple digital sources. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated analysis of lecturers' perspectives, pedagogical enactment, and assessment practices within a local Indonesian EFL department. The study argues that connectivism is not merely the use of technology in language classrooms, but a gradual shift toward networked, participatory, and digitally mediated language learning.

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Keywords: Connectivism; online learning; digital platform; English courses; EFL higher education; networked learning

INTRODUCTION

The introduction should explain the background of the study, the research problem, and the importance of the topic being discussed. Include relevant previous studies to support the discussion and identify the research gap or novelty of the study. The section should end with a clear statement of the research objectives or research questions.

Digital technology has changed the ecology of language learning. Students no longer depend only on lecturers, printed textbooks, and classroom explanation; they also learn through search engines, social media, mobile applications, video platforms, online dictionaries, artificial intelligence tools, and peer networks. In English as a foreign language (EFL) context, this shift is especially important because digital spaces provide learners with authentic exposure to English, including spoken interaction, multimodal texts, and communities of practice that may not be available in the local classroom.

The expansion of digital learning has also changed the role of lecturers. In a traditional classroom, lecturers are often positioned as the main source of knowledge. In a digitally connected classroom, lecturers increasingly become curators, facilitators, and designers of learning networks. They help students decide which information is credible, how online resources can be used for language practice, and how collaboration can support deeper learning. This pedagogical shift is consistent with connectivism, which views learning as the ability to form, maintain, and evaluate connections among people, ideas, resources, and technologies (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2022).

Connectivism is relevant to contemporary EFL learning because language knowledge is no longer built only through individual memorization. Learners participate in digital networks, compare different sources, negotiate meaning with peers, and produce language through multimodal platforms. Bozkurt and Ataizi (2015) argue that the networked globe creates new possibilities for English learning because formal, informal, and non-formal learning environments can support one another. Similarly, Al-Shehri (2011) highlights mobile learning as a pathway for extending language learning beyond classroom boundaries.

State of the Art

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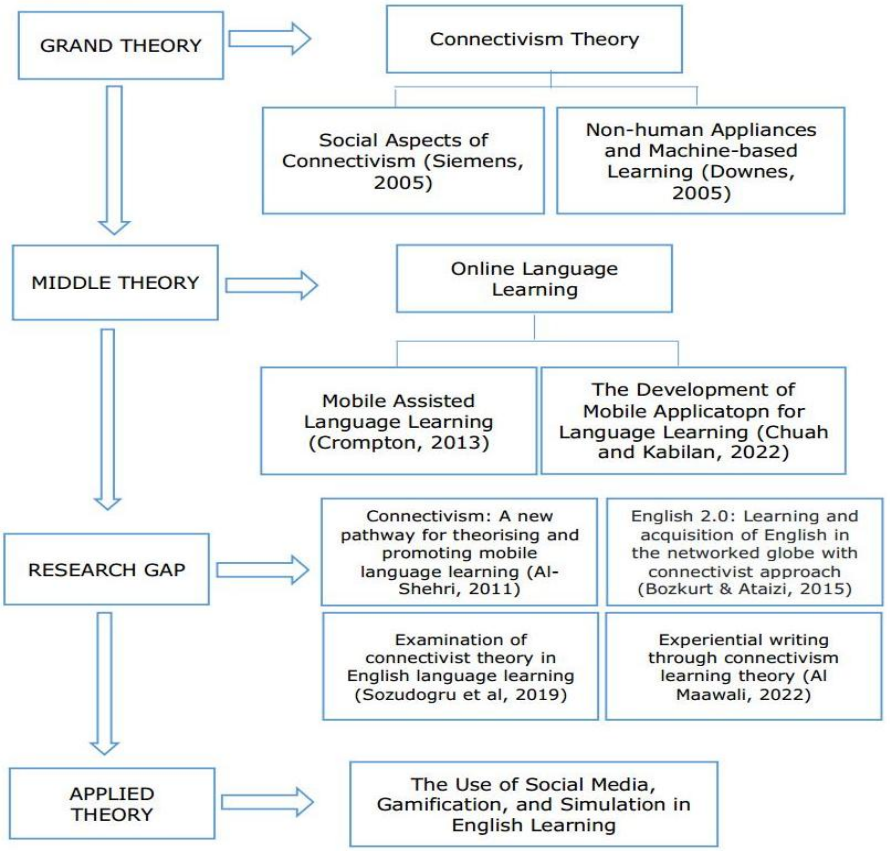


Figure 1. State of the Art of the Research

Connectivism was introduced by Siemens (2005) and further developed by Downes as a theory for learning in the digital age. Its central claim is that knowledge is distributed across networks and that learning involves the capacity to recognize patterns, connect with information nodes, and keep knowledge current. Kop and Hill (2008) acknowledge that connectivism has generated debate because it challenges earlier learning theories, but they also note its value in explaining learning environments shaped by digital connectivity. Goldie (2016) similarly argues that connectivism is useful when education is mediated by constantly changing information systems.

The theory rests on several principles: learning and knowledge rest in diversity of opinions; learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources; learning may reside in non-human appliances; the capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known; maintaining connections is needed for continual learning; and decision-making is itself a learning process (Siemens, 2005). These principles are highly applicable to English language learning

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because students must access, interpret, evaluate, and use language from multiple sources rather than simply receive fixed content from lecturers.

Previous studies have shown that connectivist learning can support collaboration, reflection, and knowledge construction. Sozudogru et al. (2019) found that online social networking tools can strengthen dialogue, negotiation, and collaborative learning in English language contexts. Al Maawali (2022) demonstrated that connectivism can help students reflect on their writing processes, while Shrivastava (2018) showed that technology-supported connectivist tasks can promote knowledge creation and cross-cultural understanding. More recently, Pandya et al. (2024) reported that connectivist learning increased students' willingness to apply knowledge in practical settings.

In Indonesia, the relevance of connectivism is reinforced by the growing use of digital platforms in EFL teaching and learning. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) documented how Indonesian EFL classes moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified both teaching opportunities and challenges. Rintaningrum (2023) further showed that technology integration in English language teaching in Indonesia offers benefits for access, flexibility, and engagement, but it is also constrained by infrastructure, readiness, and pedagogical competence. These findings suggest that the use of technology alone does not automatically produce meaningful learning unless it is guided by clear pedagogical principles.

Several Indonesian studies have also emphasized the importance of digital literacy in EFL learning. Pertiwi and Rojab Siti (2022) found that university students need information literacy, ICT literacy, and media literacy to participate effectively in technology-enhanced EFL learning. Rahmayanti et al. (2022) reported that students perceived online language learning both positively and negatively, appreciating flexibility while also experiencing reduced direct interaction. These findings are important for connectivism because networked learning requires autonomy, critical selection of information, and sustained interaction, not merely access to devices.

Despite this growing body of research, there remains a clear gap. Many studies discuss online learning, digital platforms, mobile learning, or students' perceptions of technology use, but fewer studies examine how lecturers themselves understand connectivism, how they translate it into classroom practice, and how they evaluate learning outcomes within the same empirical setting. The gap is particularly visible in local private-university EFL contexts outside major metropolitan centers, where digital adoption is often shaped by institutional infrastructure, students' economic backgrounds, and lecturers' pedagogical readiness.

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This study addresses that gap by focusing on the English Department at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. Its novelty lies in three aspects. First, it examines connectivism from lecturers' perspectives rather than only students' perceptions. Second, it links belief, practice, and assessment in one analytical frame, allowing the study to show whether lecturers' positive views are actually reflected in classroom activities and evaluation methods. Third, it contributes local empirical evidence from an Indonesian EFL higher education context, where connectivism is still developing as a pedagogical orientation rather than functioning as a fully institutionalized learning model.

Based on this gap, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive description of connectivism in English language learning at UHKBPNP. The study does not treat connectivism as synonymous with online learning. Instead, it investigates whether digital platforms are used to create learning networks, support collaborative meaning-making, develop learner autonomy, and assess students' ability to engage critically with distributed knowledge. The research questions are formulated as follows:

1) What are the lecturers' perspectives on the use of connectivism in English language classrooms?
2) How do the lecturers apply connectivist principles in their English courses?
3) How do the lecturers evaluate students' learning outcomes in connectivist-oriented learning?

METHOD

The method section should describe the research design, approach, participants or subjects, instruments, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures. Explain the research process clearly and systematically so that the study can be understood and replicated by other researchers.

This research employed a qualitative case study design. A case study is appropriate when researchers aim to explore a bounded program, practice, institution, or group in depth and within its real-life context (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the case was bounded by place, participants, and activity, namely the implementation of connectivist-oriented English language learning by English Department lecturers at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar.

The research was conducted for four months at UHKBPNP, located at Jalan Sangnaualuh Nomor 4, Kelurahan Siopat Suhu, Kecamatan Siantar Timur, Kota Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra. The participants were five English Department lecturers who had experience using online technology in their teaching. They were selected purposively because they were able to

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provide rich information about digital learning practices, connectivist principles, and classroom evaluation in English courses.

Data were collected through two techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore lecturers' perspectives and their ways of evaluating learning outcomes. Second, classroom observations were used to examine how connectivist principles were enacted in actual teaching practices. During observation, the researchers acted as complete observers and focused on the use of digital platforms, student interaction, task design, online resource use, and evidence of collaboration. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

RESULTS

The findings are presented according to the three research questions: lecturers' perspectives, application of connectivism, and evaluation of learning outcomes. Across these themes, the data indicate that connectivism has begun to influence the lecturers' pedagogical thinking and classroom practice, although its implementation remains uneven and is shaped by infrastructure, student readiness, and lecturers' digital pedagogical competence.

Table 1. Key Results

Research Question	Instrument Used	Key Results (Themes)
1.Lecturers' perspectives on connectivism in English classrooms	In-depth interview	Positive but critical perspectives. Connectivism was viewed as relevant for learner autonomy, collaboration, authentic English exposure, and digital literacy. Lecturers also identified obstacles related to internet access, uneven student readiness, and source credibility.
2. Lecturers' application of connectivism in their courses	Classroom observation	Use of Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, online articles, videos, and e-books. Learning activities included collaborative searching, group discussion, presentations, peer feedback, and student-generated digital products. Implementation was emerging but not yet fully systematic.

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3.Lecturers' evaluation of learning outcomes	In-depth interview	Combination of quizzes, written exams, assignments, presentations, group projects, portfolios, online participation, and digital products. Assessment increasingly valued collaboration, synthesis of sources, creativity, and participation, but explicit rubrics were still limited.

Lecturers' Perspectives

The interview data showed that all five lecturers generally viewed connectivism positively. They understood digital connectivity as a necessary condition for contemporary English learning because students now access language input from multiple sources, including online articles, YouTube videos, social media posts, dictionaries, grammar-checking tools, and peer discussion spaces. For the lecturers, connectivism helped shift the classroom from a lecturer-centered model to a more participatory model in which students could search, compare, discuss, and produce knowledge collaboratively.

Three subthemes emerged from the interviews. The first was learner autonomy. Lecturers believed that students should not wait passively for explanation, but should learn to locate relevant resources, evaluate their usefulness, and bring them into classroom discussion. The second was collaborative knowledge construction. Lecturers emphasized that group discussion, peer feedback, and online sharing made students more active in negotiating meaning. The third was authenticity. Digital materials were considered valuable because they exposed students to real English use, such as news reports, podcasts, online lectures, short videos, and public communication on social media.

However, lecturers also expressed critical awareness of several limitations. They noted that not all students had stable internet access, sufficient devices, or strong digital literacy. Some students were active in accessing information but weak in evaluating credibility. Others tended to copy online materials without sufficient synthesis. Therefore, lecturers did not see connectivism as a simple replacement for classroom teaching. Instead, they saw it as a framework that still requires guidance, scaffolding, and ethical use of digital information.

Application of Connectivism

Observation of classroom practices revealed that connectivism was applied through the

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integration of online platforms, authentic digital resources, and collaborative learning strategies. Google Classroom was used to distribute learning materials, collect assignments, and organize course communication. WhatsApp groups functioned as a fast and informal space for reminders, short discussions, file sharing, and peer support. Zoom was used when synchronous online meetings were needed, especially for explanation, presentation, and feedback sessions.

The most visible connectivist practice was the use of digital resources as learning nodes. Students were asked to read online articles, watch English videos, access e-books, explore websites, and compare information from different sources. In reading and writing courses, students used online texts to identify main ideas, analyze language features, and develop written responses. In speaking-related activities, students used videos and online examples as models before producing their own presentations. These practices showed that learning was not confined to one textbook or one lecturer explanation.

Collaboration was also central. Students worked in groups to search for information, prepare presentations, discuss vocabulary and content, and give peer feedback. Some lecturers asked students to produce digital outputs such as slides, short videos, online summaries, and group portfolios. In these activities, students were expected to connect ideas from different sources and transform them into communicative products. This indicates a gradual movement from technology as a delivery tool toward technology as a space for interaction, creation, and networked learning.

Even so, the observation also showed that the application of connectivism was not yet fully systematic. In several meetings, digital platforms were used mainly for distributing materials and collecting assignments. The deeper connectivist features, such as critical evaluation of sources, sustained online dialogue, and student-generated knowledge networks, appeared more strongly in some classes than in others. This suggests that lecturers had begun to adopt connectivist practices, but institutional support and pedagogical design still need strengthening.

Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

Interviews with lecturers revealed that evaluation of learning outcomes combined conventional assessment and performance-based assessment. Quizzes, written examinations, and individual assignments were still used to measure students' comprehension of course content. However, lecturers increasingly assessed students through presentations, group projects, portfolios, online participation, peer interaction, and the quality of digital products. This shift reflects an attempt to evaluate not only what students know, but also how they connect, use, and

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communicate knowledge.

Three indicators were commonly emphasized. First, lecturers assessed students' participation in online and classroom discussion, including their willingness to ask questions, respond to peers, and share relevant resources. Second, they evaluated collaboration through group tasks, presentation preparation, and peer feedback. Third, they considered students' ability to synthesize information from multiple sources, especially when students were asked to present an argument, write a response, or create a digital learning product. These indicators are closely related to connectivist learning because they require students to navigate networks and construct meaning through interaction.

Nevertheless, the assessment practices still need clearer rubrics. Some lecturers had begun to value creativity, collaboration, and digital participation, but these criteria were not always explicitly written in assessment instruments. As a result, the evaluation of connectivist learning sometimes depended on lecturers' judgment rather than standardized descriptors. A stronger assessment framework should include criteria for information credibility, quality of synthesis, originality, collaborative contribution, digital communication, and reflective learning.

The findings also show that connectivism at UHKBPNP is still in an emerging stage. Lecturers have moved beyond emergency online teaching and have started to see digital platforms as part of normal EFL pedagogy. However, the development of connectivism requires stronger digital literacy training, clearer task design, and more explicit alignment between learning activities and assessment criteria.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship among lecturers' perspectives, classroom application, and evaluation practices within the emerging connectivist learning model.

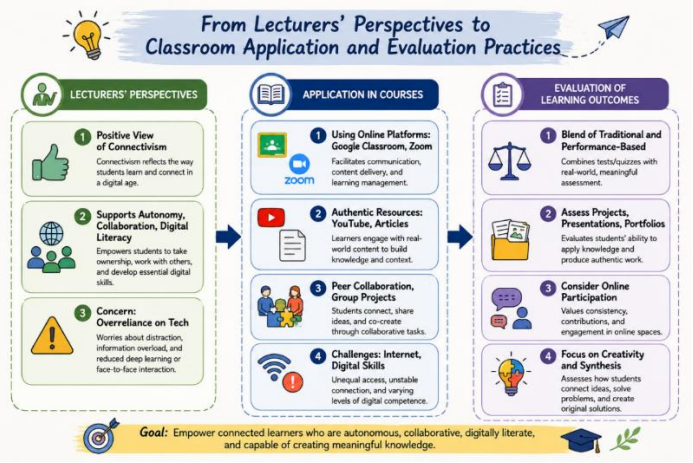


Figure 2. The Relationship among the Themes

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DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that connectivism has become an emerging pedagogical orientation within the English Department of Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. The lecturers' positive perspectives support Siemens' (2005) argument that learning in the digital age depends on the ability to connect information sources, people, and technologies. The findings also align with Downes (2022), who emphasizes that knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student but distributed across networks. In this study, lecturers recognized that students' English learning increasingly occurs through textbooks, lecturers, peers, online materials, and digital platforms at the same time.

At the same time, the findings support the critical position of Kop and Hill (2008), who argue that connectivism is valuable but should not be treated uncritically as a complete replacement for previous learning theories. The lecturers in this study did not abandon teacher guidance. Instead, they positioned themselves as facilitators who help students select credible resources, manage online interaction, and transform information into meaningful language practice. This confirms that connectivism in EFL classrooms still requires pedagogical structure, not only technological access.

The application of connectivism through Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, online articles, videos, and collaborative projects is consistent with previous studies on networked English learning. Bozkurt and Ataizi (2015) argue that English 2.0 connects formal, informal, and non-formal language learning spaces. Sozudogru et al. (2019) similarly found that online social networking tools can strengthen dialogue, reflection, and collaborative learning. The present study extends these findings by showing how such practices appear in a local Indonesian EFL department, where digital platforms function as both administrative tools and learning networks.(Zein, 2017)

The findings also resonate with Al Maawali (2022), who reported that connectivism can support reflective practices in writing, and Shrivastava (2018), who showed that technology-supported connectivist tasks can promote knowledge creation through collaboration. In this study, students were not only asked to receive information but also to search, compare, discuss, and present it. These practices indicate that connectivist learning becomes meaningful when students are required to transform online information into language output, such as presentations, written responses, and digital products.

However, the study also confirms the challenges identified in Indonesian EFL research. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) showed that online EFL teaching during the pandemic was shaped by

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both pedagogical creativity and practical constraints. Rintaningrum (2023) likewise found that technology integration in Indonesian English language teaching offers benefits but is limited by infrastructure, readiness, and competence. The present study supports these conclusions because lecturers reported unstable internet connection, unequal student access, and varying levels of digital literacy as barriers to more systematic connectivist learning.

Regarding evaluation, lecturers' adoption of both traditional and performance-based assessment indicates a transitional stage in pedagogy. Connectivist learning requires students to demonstrate not only content mastery but also the ability to connect ideas, evaluate sources, collaborate with peers, and communicate knowledge through digital media. This finding is in line with Pandya et al. (2024), who showed that connectivist learning can increase students' willingness to apply acquired knowledge in practical contexts. In EFL classrooms, this practical application can be seen in students' presentations, collaborative tasks, and digital language products.

Nevertheless, assessment remains the least developed component in this study. While lecturers valued collaboration, creativity, and online participation, these indicators were not always supported by explicit rubrics. This is important because connectivist outcomes are complex and cannot be measured only through quizzes or written examinations. Kop (2011) warns that connectivist learning requires autonomy, presence, and critical literacy; therefore, assessment should also measure students' ability to participate responsibly in networks, evaluate information, and construct knowledge with others.

The need for digital literacy is also supported by Pertiwi and Rojab Siti (2022), who found that EFL university students require information literacy, ICT literacy, and media literacy to function effectively in digital learning environments. Rahmayanti et al. (2022) also showed that students value flexibility in online language learning but may experience reduced direct interaction. These studies help explain why connectivism must be designed carefully: it can expand learning opportunities, but it can also weaken learning quality if interaction, feedback, and source evaluation are not intentionally structured.

Overall, the integration of perspectives, application, and evaluation shows that connectivism is gradually shaping the pedagogical landscape of the English Department. The contribution of this study is not to claim that connectivism has been fully implemented, but to show how it is emerging in lecturers' beliefs, classroom routines, and assessment preferences. The study adds local empirical evidence to the wider literature by demonstrating that connectivism in Indonesian EFL higher education is best understood as a developing pedagogical orientation that

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requires institutional support, lecturer training, digital literacy, and explicit assessment design.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that connectivism is beginning to take root in the pedagogical practices of the English Department at Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. Lecturers generally perceive connectivism as relevant because it supports learner autonomy, collaborative learning, authentic exposure to English, and access to diverse digital resources. However, they also recognize that connectivism requires guidance, source evaluation, and digital literacy.

In terms of application, lecturers have incorporated digital platforms, authentic online resources, and collaborative learning activities into their courses. Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, online articles, videos, and student-generated digital products were used to support interaction and learning beyond the physical classroom. These practices indicate a gradual movement from teacher-centered instruction toward networked and student-centered learning.

With regard to evaluation, lecturers used both conventional and performance-based methods. They assessed quizzes, examinations, assignments, presentations, group projects, portfolios, online participation, and digital outputs. This shows an encouraging alignment with connectivist principles because learning outcomes were not limited to remembering content but also included collaboration, synthesis, creativity, and digital communication. Even so, the evaluation of connectivist learning still needs clearer rubrics.

Based on these findings, several suggestions can be offered. First, lecturers should strengthen digital pedagogy by designing tasks that require students to evaluate, synthesize, and communicate information from multiple sources. Second, the institution should provide stronger infrastructure, professional development, and digital literacy programs. Third, assessment instruments should include explicit criteria for online participation, collaboration, information credibility, originality, and reflective learning. Finally, future research should include students' perspectives and learning products to provide a more comprehensive picture of connectivist learning outcomes.

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