

Activating constructivist learning through student presentations in university classrooms

Turyasingura Jane Byabagambi* 

Department of Public Health and Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara, Uganda

*Corresponding Author: janeturyasingura4@gmail.com

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Abstract

University classrooms are increasingly conceptualised as learning communities in which students actively construct knowledge through dialogue, collaboration, and shared inquiry rather than passively receiving information. Within this pedagogical shift, student presentations are widely used as instructional and assessment practices intended to promote engagement, communication skills, and constructivist learning. However, evidence suggests that the effectiveness of presentation-based pedagogy varies significantly across institutional, cultural, and technological contexts. This article presents a conceptual and critical literature review methodology that examines how student presentations activate constructivist learning communities in university classrooms. Drawing on constructivist learning theory, decolonial perspectives, and critical digital pedagogy, the review analyses global discourses promoting student presentations, their enactment within African higher education contexts, and their implications for classroom power relations, equity, and participation. The analysis identifies key tensions between the ideals of active learning and the practical realities of presentation-based assessment, particularly regarding cultural norms, linguistic diversity, and digital mediation. The article concludes by highlighting conditions under which student presentations can meaningfully support inclusive, dialogic, and collaborative learning communities in higher education and offers conceptual insights relevant to pedagogical design, academic development, and educational policy.

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1. Introduction

Higher education systems worldwide are experiencing a sustained pedagogical shift away from teacher-centred models of instruction towards approaches that emphasise student engagement, interaction, and the active construction of knowledge (Hmelo-Silver & DeSimone, 2013). This shift is commonly associated with constructivist learning theory, which conceptualises learning as a socially situated process through which learners construct meaning by engaging with ideas, peers, and their learning environments (Biggs & Tang, 2003; Prince, 2004). From this perspective, knowledge is not transmitted intact from teacher to student but is co-constructed through dialogue, collaboration, and reflection within particular social and cultural contexts (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2024; Ural & Nefayaz, 2024). Consequently, university classrooms are increasingly understood not merely as sites for content delivery, but as learning communities characterised by shared inquiry, participation, and collective responsibility for learning.

Global higher education policy discourses have strongly reinforced the reconceptualization of classrooms as learning communities. International reform agendas frequently promote "active learning," "student-centred pedagogy," and "21st-century skills" as essential responses to the perceived limitations of traditional lecture-based teaching (OECD, 2019; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These discourses position students as active participants who learn through interaction, problem-solving, and communication, rather than as passive recipients of information (Freeman et al., 2014). As a result, pedagogical practices that visibly demonstrate student activity and participation have gained prominence across universities worldwide, often serving as indicators of teaching quality and innovation.

Among these practices, student presentations have become one of the most widely adopted instructional and assessment tools in higher education. Presentations are commonly justified because they promote deep learning, enhance communication skills, foster collaboration, and prepare students for professional and civic life (Nicol, 2021; Papaleontiou-Louca et al., 2014). Across disciplines, presentations are embedded in curricula as routine forms of assessment, often serving as evidence of student engagement and academic competence (Kahu, 2013; Race, 2019). Their widespread adoption has contributed to a dominant assumption that presentation-based pedagogy is inherently aligned with constructivist learning and the formation of learning communities.

However, the increasing normalisation of student presentations has not been accompanied by an equally rigorous interrogation of their pedagogical assumptions or contextual implications. Critical scholarship cautions that pedagogical practices are never neutral; instead, they are shaped by historical, cultural, and political forces that influence how learning is defined, enacted, and evaluated (Biesta, 2021; Siebörger, 2020; Tabulawa, 2013). Practices that appear progressive or empowering in one context may operate very differently in another, depending on institutional conditions, cultural norms, linguistic expectations, and classroom power relations (Biesta, 2021; Bovill, 2020). Student presentations, in particular, are underpinned by expectations regarding confidence, verbal fluency, and individual performance that are often rooted in Western academic traditions (Coffey et al., 2023; Tran, 2013).

When presentation-based pedagogy is transferred across diverse global contexts without critical adaptation, it risks reproducing inequalities rather than fostering inclusive learning communities (Northedge, 2003). Research suggests that assessment formats privileging public speaking and individual performance may advantage students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds align with dominant academic norms, while marginalising those whose communicative practices are shaped by collectivist traditions or multilingual realities (Burke & Lumb, 2024; Orr & Hauser, 2008). In such cases, presentations may function less as tools for collaborative knowledge construction and more as mechanisms for disciplining students into particular modes of academic expression and participation.

These concerns are particularly salient within African higher education contexts. Universities across Sub-Saharan Africa operate at the intersection of colonial educational legacies, massification of enrolment, constrained resources, and culturally diverse student populations (Assie-Lumumba, 2024; Siebörger, 2020). Colonial education systems historically prioritised rote learning, examinations, and teacher authority, leaving limited space for dialogic or student-centred pedagogies. Contemporary pedagogical reforms, including the adoption of constructivist approaches, therefore represent not only methodological shifts but also deeper cultural and institutional transformations.

In many African universities, student presentations are increasingly introduced as markers of modern, learner-centred pedagogy and international alignment. However, these practices are often implemented in large classes with limited instructional time and uneven access to digital resources. Under such conditions, presentations may become performative exercises focused on compliance with assessment requirements rather than opportunities for meaningful engagement and shared learning (Alexander, 2018). Moreover, individualised presentation formats may conflict with communitarian educational philosophies, such as Ubuntu, which emphasise relationality, collective knowledge, and mutual responsibility for learning (Letseka, 2012). This tension raises important questions about the extent to which presentation-based pedagogy genuinely supports the development of learning communities in African higher education.

The rapid integration of digital technologies into university teaching further complicates this pedagogical landscape. Online platforms, presentation software, and collaborative digital tools increasingly shape how students prepare and deliver presentations. While these technologies offer opportunities for flexibility, accessibility, and innovation, they also introduce new forms of inequality and raise concerns about superficial engagement and epistemic disengagement (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023). The emergence of

generative artificial intelligence adds another layer of complexity, challenging conventional assumptions about authorship, assessment, and learning in presentation-based tasks.

Despite the centrality of student presentations in contemporary university teaching, the literature remains unclear about how these practices operate across global, regional, and local contexts, particularly in African higher education. Much existing scholarship either celebrates presentations as inherently constructivist or critiques them in isolation from broader institutional and cultural dynamics. There is limited work that situates presentation-based pedagogy within the intersecting forces of global educational discourse, regional educational histories, and local classroom micropolitics.

This article addresses this gap by offering a conceptual and critical literature review of student presentations as tools for activating constructivist learning communities in university classrooms. Drawing on constructivist learning theory, decolonial perspectives, and critical digital pedagogy, the review examines how global pedagogical norms, regional institutional realities, and local power relations shape presentation-based practices. By foregrounding context and equity, the article seeks to move beyond technical discussions of presentation skills and instead interrogate the conditions under which student presentations can meaningfully contribute to collaborative, inclusive, and dialogic learning communities in higher education.

2. Method: conceptual and critical literature review

This study adopts a conceptual and critical literature review methodology, a qualitative approach aimed at generating theoretical insight through the systematic examination and interpretation of existing scholarly work rather than through the collection of primary empirical data. Conceptual reviews are particularly appropriate for interrogating pedagogical practices that are shaped by theory, culture, and institutional context, especially where the purpose is to question dominant assumptions, surface underlying tensions, and propose alternative ways of understanding educational phenomena (Alexander, 2018; Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Grant & Booth, 2009). In higher education pedagogy, this approach enables critical engagement with widely adopted practices, such as student presentations, that are often under-theorised despite their prevalence across diverse educational settings.

Unlike systematic reviews that aim to aggregate empirical findings to answer narrowly defined research questions, conceptual and critical reviews focus on synthesising diverse bodies of literature to develop new conceptual linkages and interpretive insights (Papaioannou et al., 2016). This methodological orientation aligns with the present study's objective of examining how student presentations function within constructivist learning communities across global, regional, and local contexts. The review therefore prioritises depth of interpretation, contextual sensitivity, and theoretical coherence over exhaustiveness.

2.1 Review design and scope

The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, doctoral theses, and selected conference proceedings addressing constructivist learning theory, learning communities, student presentations as pedagogical and assessment practices, decolonial and sociocultural perspectives in education, and critical digital pedagogy. Literature was identified through targeted searches of academic databases and scholarly search engines, including Google Scholar and ERIC, as well as through backward and forward citation tracking of key publications. Priority was given to sources published within the last five to ten years in order to capture contemporary debates, alongside seminal theoretical works that provide foundational perspectives.

In line with the study's contextual focus, particular attention was given to scholarship on higher education in African and Global South contexts, where pedagogical practices are shaped by distinct historical, cultural, and institutional dynamics (Assie-Lumumba, 2024; Grant & Booth, 2009). Literature from Western contexts was also included, particularly where it informs global policy discourses and pedagogical models that influence higher education reform internationally. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the study's conceptual focus rather than on strict methodological criteria.

2.2 Literature identification and selection

The literature selection process was guided by thematic relevance to four interrelated areas: constructivist learning and learning communities; student presentations as instructional and assessment practices; culture, power, and inequality in classroom interaction; and the pedagogical implications of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in higher education (Snyder, 2019). Sources that provided

theoretical, empirical, or critical insights into these areas were included, while publications that treated presentations solely as technical communication skills without pedagogical or contextual analysis were excluded.

To ensure academic rigour and relevance, the review prioritised peer-reviewed journal articles from reputable publishers and indexed journals. Efforts were made to include diverse scholarly voices, particularly from underrepresented regions, while maintaining a focus on verifiable and high-quality sources. This approach supports a balanced synthesis of global and regional perspectives on presentation-based pedagogy.

2.3 Analytical framework

Three complementary theoretical lenses informed the analysis. First, constructivist learning theory provided a framework for understanding learning as an active, social, and dialogic process in which knowledge is co-constructed through interaction among learners and between learners and educators. This perspective foregrounds participation, collaboration, and shared meaning-making as central to the formation of learning communities.

Second, decolonial and sociocultural perspectives were employed to interrogate the cultural assumptions embedded in globally circulating pedagogical practices. These perspectives highlight how Western epistemologies are often normalised in higher education and how alternative educational values, such as communitarian philosophies, may be marginalised (Letseka, 2012). This lens was particularly important for examining the regional dynamics of African higher education and the tensions between individualised assessment practices and collective learning traditions.

Third, critical digital pedagogy informed the analysis of technology-mediated presentations and the role of digital tools and artificial intelligence in contemporary classrooms. This perspective emphasises the non-neutrality of educational technologies and highlights how digital infrastructures can both enable and constrain equitable participation and meaningful engagement in learning communities (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023).

2.4 Trustworthiness and limitations

As a conceptual review, this study does not claim empirical generalisability. Its contribution lies in theoretical synthesis and critical interpretation. To enhance trustworthiness, the analytical process is made explicit, and interpretations are consistently grounded in peer-reviewed literature. Reflexivity also informed the analysis, particularly by acknowledging the author's positionality within African higher education contexts and the implications this may have for interpreting pedagogical practices.

A key limitation of the review is its reliance on existing literature, which may reflect dominant academic voices and publication biases. Although deliberate efforts were made to foreground Global South scholarship, the availability of published research inevitably shapes the scope of analysis. Nevertheless, the conceptual and critical review methodology provides a robust and appropriate foundation for examining the contextual dynamics of student presentations and constructivist learning communities in higher education.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Thematic findings from the literature

In line with the conceptual and critical literature review methodology, the results are presented as thematically synthesised findings derived from the analysed body of literature rather than from primary empirical data. The analysis of the reviewed literature reveals four interrelated themes that characterise how student presentations function within constructivist learning communities in university classrooms. These themes reflect patterns that emerge across global, regional, and local contexts, highlighting both the pedagogical promise of presentation-based practices and the structural and cultural tensions that shape their enactment. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that student presentations are highly context-dependent practices whose outcomes are mediated by dominant pedagogical discourses, institutional conditions, classroom power relations, and technological infrastructures.

3.1.1 Global constructivist pedagogies and the hegemony of the "active" student

Across global higher education discourse, student presentations are closely associated with constructivist pedagogy and the broader ideal of "active learning." International policy frameworks and

pedagogical reform agendas increasingly frame visible student participation as an indicator of educational quality, positioning presentations as emblematic practices through which learning is made observable (Nicol, 2021; OECD, 2019). Within this paradigm, the "active" student is constructed as one who speaks confidently, articulates ideas publicly, and demonstrates individual competence through performance. The literature, however, indicates that this construction of activity is grounded in specific Western epistemological and cultural assumptions (Leask, 2015). Presentation-based pedagogy implicitly values verbal assertiveness, individualism, and public self-expression—traits that are not universally prioritised across cultures (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2024; Tran, 2013). When these traits are normalised as markers of engagement or learning, they function as a form of hidden curriculum that privileges students whose cultural capital aligns with dominant academic norms (Bourdieu, 1991; Freeman & Lib, 2019).

Several studies suggest that the global diffusion of constructivist pedagogies risks reproducing epistemic hierarchies rather than dismantling them. Practices framed as empowering may inadvertently reinforce inequality when they fail to account for differential access to linguistic, cultural, and technological resources (Burke & Lumb, 2024; Fernandez et al., 2024). In the context of student presentations, the emphasis on confident public performance may obscure deeper forms of learning that are less visible but equally significant, such as reflective thinking, collaborative sense-making, and silent participation. These dynamics have direct implications for the formation of learning communities. While constructivist theory emphasises learning as a collective, dialogic process, presentations are frequently enacted as individual performances assessed primarily by instructors. Under such conditions, presentations may limit opportunities for peer interaction and shared meaning-making, functioning instead as monologic events that sit uneasily with the theoretical foundations of constructivist learning communities. Table 1 summarises key differences between traditional presentation formats and decolonial/constructivist approaches, highlighting distinctions in pedagogical purpose, student and peer roles, assessment emphasis, and underlying knowledge assumptions.

Table 1. Contrasting traditional and decolonial/constructivist approaches to student presentations

Dimension	Traditional presentation formats	Decolonial/constructivist presentation formats
Pedagogical purpose	Demonstration of individual mastery and content recall	Collective knowledge construction and dialogic learning
Role of the student	Performer and information transmitter	Co-creator of knowledge and facilitator of dialogue
Role of peers	Passive audience	Active interlocutors and co-inquirers
Assessment emphasis	Fluency, confidence, and polished delivery	Conceptual engagement, collaboration, and reflective insight
Knowledge orientation	Knowledge is fixed and transferable	Knowledge is contextual, negotiated, and evolving
Cultural assumptions	Individualism, verbal assertiveness, public performance	Relationality, shared meaning-making, and epistemic plurality
Alignment with learning communities	Limited, often monologic	Strong, dialogic, and collaborative

3.1.2 Regional pedagogical friction in African higher education

Within African higher education contexts, the implementation of student presentations often generates significant pedagogical friction (Mamdani, 2007; Teferra, 2016). Universities across the region operate within educational systems shaped by colonial legacies that historically emphasised teacher authority, examination-oriented assessment, and rote learning (Siebörger, 2020; Tabulawa, 2013). The introduction of constructivist practices, such as student presentations, therefore represents not merely a methodological change but a more profound cultural and institutional shift.

The literature indicates that presentation-based pedagogy is frequently adopted as a marker of modernity or internationalisation, rather than as a practice carefully adapted to local conditions (Assie-Lumumba, 2024). In many institutions, large class sizes, limited instructional time, and heavy teaching workloads constrain instructors' ability to scaffold presentations effectively or to facilitate meaningful dialogue following student performances (Teferra, 2016). As a result, presentations may become procedural

tasks focused on assessment completion rather than opportunities for collaborative learning (Alexander, 2018).

Cultural considerations further complicate these dynamics. Communitarian educational philosophies, such as Ubuntu, conceptualise learning as relational and collective, emphasising interdependence and shared responsibility for knowledge construction (Letseka, 2012). From this perspective, individualised presentation formats may be misaligned with local educational values. Although group presentations are often introduced as a pragmatic solution in large classes, the literature suggests that such arrangements can introduce additional challenges, including uneven participation and intra-group conflict, particularly in contexts with limited instructional support (Burdett & Hastie, 2009).

These findings suggest that in African higher education, student presentations are embedded within layered structural, cultural, and historical constraints that shape their pedagogical impact. Without critical contextualisation, presentation-based practices risk functioning as symbolic gestures of pedagogical reform rather than as substantive mechanisms for activating constructivist learning communities.

3.1.3 Classroom micropolitics, identity, and inequality

At the university classroom level, student presentations are shaped by micropolitical dynamics related to language, identity, and power (Jowi et al., 2013; Norton, 2013). In multilingual educational environments, students who present in a second or additional language often face heightened cognitive and affective demands, diverting attention from conceptual engagement toward linguistic accuracy (Bourdieu, 1991; Freeman & Lib, 2019). This can undermine confidence and participation, particularly for students from non-elite linguistic backgrounds.

The literature also highlights how gender, socio-economic status, and prior educational exposure influence presentation experiences. Female students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds may encounter heightened scrutiny during public speaking or face constraints on access to technology and on prior training in academic presentation genres (Burke & Lumb, 2024; Fernandez et al., 2024). These inequalities can translate into differential assessment outcomes even when the underlying understanding is comparable.

To further illustrate how these micropolitical dynamics manifest in practice, recent literature documents recurring scenarios that illuminate student experiences of presentation-based pedagogy. One commonly discussed scenario involves multilingual students who demonstrate strong conceptual understanding but experience heightened anxiety when required to present in a second or additional language. In such cases, cognitive effort is disproportionately directed toward linguistic accuracy and accent management, limiting opportunities for spontaneous conceptual engagement. These students are frequently evaluated as less competent despite demonstrating comparable understanding in written or collaborative contexts (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

A second scenario concerns students from educational cultures that prioritise collective knowledge-building rather than individual public performance. For these students, individual presentations before large audiences may be experienced as exposure rather than empowerment. Silence or limited verbal participation may reflect culturally grounded communicative norms rather than disengagement, yet such behaviours are often misinterpreted within dominant assessment frameworks (Benjamin, 2016; Tran, 2015). A further scenario highlighted in recent equity-focused research relates to students with limited access to digital resources or prior training in academic presentation genres. These students may struggle to meet implicit expectations regarding technological fluency and visual design, resulting in assessment outcomes that privilege presentation form over conceptual substance and reproduce socio-economic inequalities (Burke & Lumb, 2024; Fernandez et al., 2024).

Collectively, these illustrative vignettes demonstrate how presentation-based assessment can shape inclusion, recognition, and belonging within learning communities, often in ways that are not aligned with constructivist and equity-oriented pedagogical intentions. Instructor positionality plays a critical role in mediating these dynamics. Educators' assumptions about participation, confidence, and competence shape how student performances are interpreted and evaluated (Ryan, 2011). Silence, hesitation, or collective forms of expression may be misinterpreted as disengagement rather than recognised as culturally grounded modes of participation (Benjamin, 2016; Tinto, 2017). When such misinterpretations occur, presentations can weaken trust within the learning community and discourage students from taking intellectual risks.

Overall, the findings indicate that student presentations often function as sites where existing inequalities are reproduced rather than mitigated. Assessment practices that prioritise fluency, polish, and

confidence risk privileging performance over understanding, thereby undermining the inclusive and dialogic foundations of constructivist learning communities.

3.1.4 Digital and AI-mediated presentations

Digital technologies have significantly reshaped the ecology of student presentations in higher education. Online platforms, presentation software, and collaborative digital tools enable new forms of participation, including asynchronous delivery, multimodal expression, and remote engagement (Gillett-Swan, 2017; MacKay, 2020). For some students, particularly those who experience anxiety in face-to-face settings, digital presentations can reduce affective barriers and support more considered engagement with content (Hofstede, 2011).

At the same time, the literature highlights notable challenges associated with digital mediation. Online environments may attenuate social presence, limiting the non-verbal cues that underpin trust and rapport within learning communities (Beins, 2016; Woodward, 2017). Fragmented attention and uneven access to digital infrastructure can further undermine collective engagement, particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence introduces additional complexity. While AI tools can support idea generation, organisation, and reflection, their use in presentation preparation raises concerns about superficial engagement and masked learning (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023; Zhao, 2023). Unequal access to advanced digital tools may also exacerbate existing educational inequalities. These findings suggest that digital and AI-mediated presentations amplify existing pedagogical tensions, underscoring the need for intentional, equity-oriented pedagogical design (Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

Recent scholarship highlights the need for intentional pedagogical design when presentation-based assessment is implemented in digitally mediated, massified higher education environments. In large classes, presentations can be reconfigured from extended individual performances toward shorter, collaborative formats supported by structured peer questioning or reflective response tasks. Such approaches shift emphasis from performative display to dialogic engagement and help mitigate participation inequalities (Bovill, 2020).

Regarding generative artificial intelligence, current research suggests that pedagogical transparency and design are more effective than prohibition. Presentation tasks that foreground process-oriented components, such as reflective commentaries, justification of conceptual choices, or critical peer interrogation, are less susceptible to superficial automation and more consistent with constructivist learning principles. Explicit guidance on ethical AI use within assessment criteria further supports academic integrity while recognising the realities of contemporary academic work (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023; Williamson & Eynon, 2020).

3.2 Discussion of thematic findings

The findings of this review demonstrate that student presentations are not inherently constructivist, nor do they automatically foster learning communities in university classrooms. Instead, their pedagogical value depends on how they are designed, facilitated, and assessed within specific institutional, cultural, and technological contexts. While presentation-based practices are frequently promoted as emblematic of active learning, the analysis reveals significant tensions between constructivist theory and the dominant enactment of presentations in higher education.

From a constructivist perspective, learning is understood as a social process grounded in dialogue, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning among participants. Learning communities are characterised by mutual engagement, shared responsibility, and trust, rather than by individual performance alone (Wenger, 1998). However, the findings indicate that conventional presentation formats often prioritise visible performance over dialogic engagement. When presentations are structured as monologic events assessed primarily by instructors, they risk reproducing transmission-oriented dynamics in which knowledge flows unidirectionally from presenter to audience. Such arrangements sit uneasily with constructivist principles that emphasise collaboration and collective inquiry (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2024). The global framing of presentations as indicators of student engagement further complicates this relationship (Bryson, 2016). As shown in the findings, the ideal of the "active" student is deeply embedded in Western educational discourse and is often operationalised through behaviours such as confident public speaking and assertive self-expression (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021). While these behaviours are frequently equated with deep learning, the literature suggests that they may reflect cultural norms rather

than genuine cognitive engagement (Tran, 2013). Consequently, presentation-based assessment can conflate communicative style with understanding, privileging students who possess the cultural and linguistic capital required to perform academic confidence (Bourdieu, 1991; Freeman & Lib, 2019).

These tensions are particularly pronounced in African higher education contexts, where pedagogical practices are shaped by colonial legacies, massification, and resource constraints (Felten, 2013). The findings indicate that student presentations are often introduced as symbols of pedagogical modernisation or international alignment, rather than as practices carefully adapted to local realities. In large classes with limited instructional time, presentations may become procedural assessment tasks rather than meaningful opportunities for collaborative learning. This supports earlier critiques that pedagogical reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa frequently falter when global models are transplanted without sufficient contextualisation (Siebörger, 2020; Tabulawa, 2013).

Decolonial and sociocultural perspectives further illuminate the cultural misalignments that may arise when presentation-based pedagogy is implemented uncritically. Communitarian philosophies such as Ubuntu conceptualise learning as relational and collective, emphasising interdependence and shared responsibility for knowledge construction (Letseka, 2012). From this standpoint, individualised presentation formats may undermine the social foundations of learning communities. The findings suggest that pedagogical designs that privilege collective dialogue, shared authorship, and reciprocal engagement are more consistent with both constructivist theory and local educational values.

Classroom micropolitics also play a decisive role in shaping the outcomes of presentation-based pedagogy.

Linguistic demands, gendered expectations, and socio-economic disparities intersect to shape who can participate confidently and whose contributions are recognised as legitimate. When assessment criteria emphasise fluency, polish, and confidence, they may reproduce existing inequalities and weaken trust within the learning community. Constructivist pedagogy, by contrast, requires learning environments in which students feel psychologically safe to take intellectual risks and to engage in exploratory dialogue, including forms of participation that are less visibly performative (Benjamin, 2016).

Digital technologies and generative artificial intelligence introduce further complexities. While online platforms and multimodal tools can increase flexibility and expand participation, they may also attenuate social presence and fragment collective attention if not carefully integrated (Gillett-Swan, 2017; MacKay, 2020). The findings indicate that digital and AI-mediated presentations can either support or undermine constructivist learning communities, depending on whether technology is used to scaffold inquiry or to substitute for cognitive engagement. These dual possibilities underscore the importance of pedagogical intentionality and ethical guidance in the use of emerging technologies in higher education understanding (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023; Zhao, 2023).

Taken together, the discussion highlights the need for a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of student presentations as pedagogical practices. Rather than treating presentations as universally beneficial or inherently constructivist, educators and institutions must critically examine the assumptions they embed, the inequalities they may reproduce, and the forms of learning they actually promote. Constructivist learning communities are not created solely through pedagogical techniques, but through sustained attention to dialogue, equity, and contextual responsiveness in teaching and assessment practices.

4. Conclusion

This conceptual and critical review examined student presentations as pedagogical practices for activating constructivist learning communities in university classrooms. Drawing on constructivist learning theory, decolonial perspectives, and critical digital pedagogy, the analysis demonstrates that student presentations are neither inherently constructivist nor universally effective. Their pedagogical value depends on how they are designed, facilitated, and assessed within specific global, regional, and local contexts. While presentations are widely promoted as emblematic of active learning, the review reveals persistent tensions between the ideals of constructivist pedagogy and the dominant enactment of presentation-based assessment in higher education.

At a theoretical level, the findings challenge the assumption that visible student activity, particularly public speaking, is a reliable indicator of deep learning. Constructivist learning emphasises dialogue, collaboration, and the co-construction of meaning, yet conventional presentation formats often prioritise individual performance, fluency, and confidence. When learning is evaluated primarily through performative displays, presentations risk reproducing transmission-oriented dynamics and privileging

students whose cultural, linguistic, or socio-economic backgrounds align with dominant academic norms. Such practices may undermine the formation of inclusive learning communities by conflating communicative style with understanding.

The review further highlights the importance of contextual responsiveness, particularly within African higher education. The uncritical adoption of globally circulating constructivist practices can conflict with local educational values, institutional realities, and communitarian philosophies such as Ubuntu, which foreground relationality and collective responsibility for learning. In resource-constrained and massified university systems, presentation-based pedagogy may become symbolic of pedagogical reform rather than substantively transformative. These insights underscore the need to adapt, rather than adopt, pedagogical practices in ways that are sensitive to cultural, historical, and institutional conditions. Digital technologies and generative artificial intelligence introduce additional opportunities and risks for presentation-based learning. While digital tools can enhance flexibility, accessibility, and multimodal expression, they may also weaken social presence, fragment collective engagement, and obscure shallow learning if used uncritically. The findings suggest that technology-mediated presentations can support constructivist learning communities only when integrated with clear pedagogical intent, ethical guidance, and attention to equity in access and participation.

Based on this analysis, several implications emerge for educational practice and policy. Educators are encouraged to reimagine student presentations as dialogic and collaborative learning events rather than as isolated performances. Alternative formats that emphasise collective inquiry, peer interaction, and shared authorship may better align with constructivist principles and diverse educational values. Assessment practices should prioritise conceptual understanding, engagement with ideas, and reflective dialogue over performative polish. Institutions, in turn, must provide structural support through faculty development, manageable class sizes, and clear guidance on the ethical use of digital and AI tools.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that educators and institutions should move beyond treating student presentations as neutral or universally beneficial pedagogical tools. Instead, presentations should be intentionally designed as dialogic learning events that prioritise collective inquiry, peer engagement, and reflective sense-making. Diversifying presentation formats and aligning assessment criteria with conceptual understanding rather than performative confidence can strengthen the development of inclusive learning communities (Biesta, 2021; Bovill, 2020).

In contexts characterised by large enrolments and increasing reliance on digital technologies, institutional support is critical. Professional development initiatives can assist educators in designing equitable presentation-based assessments and in navigating the ethical integration of generative artificial intelligence. Clear guidance on acceptable AI use, coupled with assessment designs that emphasise learning processes and reflective engagement, can help ensure that emerging technologies support rather than undermine constructivist pedagogy (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2023; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021).

This review is not without limitations. As a conceptual study, it relies on existing literature and does not offer empirical generalisation. The availability and visibility of Global South scholarship also shape the scope of analysis. Future research would benefit from empirical studies examining how redesigned presentation formats function across diverse higher education contexts, particularly within African universities. Comparative and participatory research approaches could further illuminate how students and educators negotiate presentation-based pedagogy within learning communities.

In conclusion, student presentations can contribute meaningfully to constructivist learning communities, but only under conditions of thoughtful design, contextual sensitivity, and equity-oriented pedagogy. By moving beyond performance-driven models and foregrounding dialogue, collaboration, and shared meaning-making, higher education institutions can genuinely harness the pedagogical potential of presentations to support inclusive and transformative learning.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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