

PROMOTING PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: WHAT, HOW, AND WHY

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Abstract. This present paper was aimed to promote problem-based learning in adult English language teaching. The change of curriculum that used scientific approach was asked the teachers to use the suitable method in teaching learning process. One of the methods can be used by teachers is problem-based learning. Problem-based learning took the problem as the core of the process. The teaching learning process shifted to be more students centered and the teachers just facilitated them. By applying problem-based learning, the teachers provided some skills needed by the students to face the 21st century competition. According to Pacific Policy Research Centre (2010), those skills are communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, and creativity and innovation

Keywords: problem-based learning, English language teaching

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays teaching learning process should teach the student not only to be smart in the classroom by mastering theory but also should teach them to be a good problem-solver in real world problem. This fact supported by Tan (2003) he states that education in 21st dealing with new real world problems. To meet this standard many countries try to develop their educational process to pursuit the creative learning that produces a student who merely knows about the fact or theory but also learning from the fact or theory.

On June 2013, the government started to implement curriculum 2013. This issue is being discussed on several occasions where people show their different points of view. Some people support this idea, while others strongly reject it. The announcement of Indonesia’s new curriculum (Curriculum 2013) has grabbed a lot of attention and is currently becoming a public debate particularly among education stakeholders such as teachers, experts, students, and parents. The change of curriculum in Indonesia is actually not something new. Basically, change in curriculum is normal and even is required as long as it makes the quality of education better to meet the global challenge of education which is growing rapidly from time to time.

The essentials of curriculum 2013 are every subject supports all competencies (attitude, skill, and knowledge) where the subject is designed tied one and another and it has basic competence which is tied by the core competence of each class. This new curriculum emphasized on scientific approach in teaching and learning models. The teachers should understand of scientific approaches; observing, questioning, associating, experimenting and networking.

By understanding those scientific approaches and know how to apply it in the classroom, the teachers can play their roles during teaching and learning process. Because curriculum 2013 is based on process oriented, not product oriented. In addition, problem based learning (PBL) is needed in order to develop meaningful learning. In PBL students integrate knowledge, skill, and attitude. It develops critical thinking, initiating, internal motivation and interpersonal relation. PBL is a kind of learning how to learn where students work in a team to solve the problem and develops curiosity. Tan (2003) states the goals of PBL are content learning, acquisition of discipline related heuristics and development of problem-solving skills. PBL also includes the life wide learning goals of self-directed learning, information-mining skills, collaborative and team learning, and reflective and evaluative thinking skills.

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

In a nutshell, PBL is an approach that involves no teaching; students learn by solving problems that are carefully constructed by the teacher according to the course syllabus assigned to them throughout the semester. The teacher facilitates the process by putting the students in groups, scheduling presentations and preparing evaluation forms for the students to evaluate themselves and their peers, in addition to teacher evaluation. In PBL, the problem comes first, and an essential element of PBL is that content is introduced in the context of complex problems that imitate real life (Boud and Feletti, 1997). In contrast, most traditional and current teaching approaches present concepts and rules first, usually in a lecture format. This is the standard technique of teaching in most contemporary classrooms in Malaysia as teachers adhere strongly to the priority of preparing learners for examinations.

The problem-solving tasks involve collecting data to solve the problem in the best possible manner. This involves a huge amount of reading by the students from every possible resource such as reading up books in the library and assessing databases. They may also interview experts in the field, and this would mean bringing the students closer to the real world. The PBL approach has become particularly convenient when advances in computing technology are accessible and a variety of reading materials are available online (Evensen and Hmelo, 2000). The Internet provides a wealth of information, and this makes it easier for the teachers to adopt the PBL approach in language learning and allow students to take control of their own learning.

The fundamental idea of PBL is to introduce new concepts by using complex real-world problems, to use problems to “motivate, focus, and initiate student learning” (Duch, 1996). The word “problem” here made PBL different from another group-based or student-centred methodology. In PBL the teacher provides a problem to the students after a concrete explanation about the concept of material. This process will ask students to solve the problem actively.

THE PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING PROCESS

Problem-based learning is different from another task-based methodology. The role of teachers in the problem-based learning is just to facilitate the students in teaching learning process. According to Mathews-Aydinli (2007) generally, in problem-based classrooms, the teacher acts as a coach for or facilitator of activities that students carry out themselves. The teachers do not deliver the material directly to the students. The teachers provide the students with some problems correlate to the materials then assist them in solving the problems. The teachers also give feedback and evaluation to strengthen the students’ knowledge. This is aimed to help the students to develop their problem solving ability as good as their literacy knowledge.

STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

Generally, there are four main stages in applying problem-based learning based on students’ role. According to Mathews-Aydinli (2007) the four main stages in applying problem-based learning are (1) being introduced to the problem, (2) exploring what they do and do not know about the problem, (3) generating possible solutions to the problem, and (4) considering the consequences of each solution and selecting the most viable solution, as you can see in figure 1. Figure 1 also completed the roles of the teacher in problem-based learning that will be elaborated in details.

If the students have four stages in implementing problem-based learning, the teacher has five stages. They are: pre-teach, introduce the problem and the language needed to work on it, group students and provide resources, observe and support, follow up and assess progress (Mathews-Aydinli, 2007).

Pre-teach

In this first stage, the teacher gives a brief explanation of problem-based learning. The explanation is important to make the students aware of their role in the problem-based method. Then the teacher ensures to the students about the beneficial of this method. The teacher also tells the students to use English during the whole class in this first stage.

Introduce the problem and the language needed to work on it

In this stage, the teacher gives some warm up exercises to the students. Those warm up exercises used to prepare the students for problem solving. The teacher also introduces the problem in this stage. There are some difficulties faced by the teacher in deciding the problem. According to Mathews-Aydinli, (2007), the problems should:

- be related to the students' lives to increase interest and motivation,
- require students to make decisions and judgments (the problem they work on should be an actual problem, not just an information-gathering task), and
- include a question or set of questions that are open ended and likely to generate diverse opinions.

Group students and provide resources

Problem-based learning can be done in a group. The teacher should divide the students into a group in this stage. The teacher should be objective in dividing the group. The group should accommodate the students actively during problem solving process. In this stage, the teacher also provides some references to assist the students in problem solving. The references provided by the teacher will make problem-based learning done effectively in the classroom.

Observe and support

This is the stage when the students working in a group to solve the problem given by the teacher. Some activities done by the students in this stage are collecting information, studying the information, pondering and deciding the best solution to solve the problem.

While the students doing group working, the teacher should observe and support them. In observing the students, the teacher should record some activities done by the students. In supporting the students, teacher assists the students when they get difficulties in doing their work.

Follow up and assess progress

After finishing doing their work in problem solving, the teacher allocates enough time for students to present their solution in front of the class. The presentation then can be followed up by their friends or their teacher. In this stage, it is the time for the teacher to gain score to assess the students' solution provided. According to Mathews-Aydinli, (2007), the assessment should cover two primary areas: teachers can assess students on the basis of their participation in the activity, and the activity itself can be assessed for effectiveness.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

As other teaching methods, problem-based learning also has some benefits and challenges in the implementation in the classroom. In this sub chapter, the writers will elaborate more on the benefits and challenges of implementing problem-based learning.

Benefits of problem-based learning

There are some benefits of using problem-based learning. According to Mathews-Aydinli (2007), the benefits or problem-based learning are as follows:

- Promote meaningful interaction in the second language classroom
Classroom situation will be more active by using problem-based learning. It will create more interaction between teacher and students and between students and other students in the classroom.
- Students will become more autonomous learners

Because problem-based learning shifts the emphasis on learning activity from teachers to students, it can also help students become more autonomous learners who will transfer the skills learned in the classroom to their lives outside of the classroom.

According to Larsson (2001), the advantages of problem-based learning are as follows:

- The communicative skills of the students are improved
By applying problem-based learning in the classroom, it will create a good atmosphere to support the students in communication. When the students have ample time in communication, it will give good impact to their communication skills finally.
- Encourages students to gain a deeper sense of understanding
In problem-based learning, the teacher always provides the students with some features of language that they will need in problem solving. Those features of the language are based on the real-situation that will be experienced by the students. By experiencing the use of certain features of the language in a certain situation, it will create students' sense of understanding in using those features of language appropriately.

Challenges to problem-based learning

Even though problem-based learning has some benefits in its application in the classroom, it also has some challenges. According to Mathews-Aydinli (2007), there are some challenges in applying problem-based learning in the classroom.

- The use of students' first language
When students are doing their work in a group, they tend to use their first language in communication. Because they think that their first language can be spoken and understood easily. The use of the first language by the students during their work group will lead them in poor communicative ability.
- Problem-based learning for beginner level students
Another challenge is dealing with the application of problem-based learning for beginner students. This problem-based learning needs communicative skill. When the student's ability in speaking and reading still in beginner level, they will face some difficulties that can influence the effectiveness of problem-based learning implementation in the classroom.

According to Larsson (2001), there are some challenges faced by a teacher in applying problem-based learning.

- Choosing a problem
The core element in problem-based learning is the problem itself. Sometimes teacher faces perplexity in forming and choosing a problem. It is however imperative that the problems are interesting, challenging and relevant to the students' reality or their educational value will be seriously decreased and the previously discussed advantages will definitely not be as apparent (Larsson, 2001).
- Group dynamic
Group work in problem-based learning should be effective. Effective means that every member of the group have an equal role to give good participation during solving the problem. There is no single student who controls the group absolutely. That's why it needs teacher's observation to make sure that group work done by the students effectively.

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING AND 21st CENTURY CRITICAL LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILL

According to Pacific Policy Research Centre (2010), to face the 21st century, students have to have some skills in:

1. Communication and collaboration
2. Critical thinking and problem solving

3. Creativity and innovation

Communication and collaboration

Dealing with the 21st century, students need to have the ability to communicate clearly and to collaborate effectively with others. It is caused by diversity as the effect of globalization. According to Trilling & Fadel (2009) (as cited in Pacific Policy Research Centre, 2010), state that today's students should be able to:

- Communicate clearly
 - Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts.
 - Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions.
 - Use communication for a variety of purposes (e.g., to inform, instruct, motivate and persuade).
 - Utilize multiple media and technologies, and know how to judge their effectiveness a priori as well as assess their impact.
 - Communicate effectively in diverse environments (including multi-lingual).
- Collaborate with others
 - Demonstrate the ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams
 - Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal.
 - Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value individual contributions made by each team member.

Critical thinking and problem solving

According to Pacific Policy Research Centre (2010), the critical thinking and problem-solving skills include:

1. Reason effectively
2. Ask pointed questions and solve problems
3. Analyse and evaluate alternative points of view
4. Reflect critically on decisions and process

Trilling & Fadel (2009) define critical thinking as the ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate, summarize, and synthesize information.

Creativity and Innovation

In the 21st century, there is rapid development in industry and business. In order to enhance their existence, students need to be creative and innovative. Creativity and innovation skills can be developed, like other skills, with practice and over time (Wegerif & Dawes, 2004). In this case, education can be the place to develop students' sense in creativity and innovation.

Dealing with those skills that students need in facing the 21st century, problem-based learning can be used to lead the students to gain those skills. In problem-based learning, students are doing the work in a group. That's why the ability to communicate and collaborate with others will be elaborated. By applying problem-based learning in the classroom, the students will get exposure to communicate actively and collaborate effectively with their friends. Mathews-Aydinli (2007) states problem-based learning can be applied to promote meaningful interaction in the second language classroom. Tan (2003) states that it appears to me, however, more mature students (e.g. postgraduate students) tend to view collaborative learning in PBL more positively.

The core of problem-based learning is a problem itself. The students are asked to solve the problem provided by the teacher. In solving the problem, the students will develop their critical thinking to come to the solution. This problem-based learning will provide a

good atmosphere to the students to train their critical thinking. Saeed and Rousta (2013) state that participation in problem-based learning class had a significant effect on EFL learners' critical thinking ability.

The result of problem-based learning is the solution which can overcome the problem provided by the teacher. Before the students come to the solution, they need to elaborate their critical thinking to create creativity in deciding the solution as their innovation result. That solution will be the best solution because it is derived from the critical thinking of the students that can stimulate their creativity to come to their final innovation. Huang and Wang (2012) state that this PBL learning atmosphere could stimulate students' creativity that helped them improve their translation skills effectively.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian curriculum changes need to be followed by some changes in other aspects of education. One of the aspects is in teaching method. By applying a scientific approach which consists of observing, questioning, associating, experimenting and networking, the teachers need to use a suitable method in teaching learning process to accommodate that approach. In this paper, the writers promoted problem-based learning to be implemented by teachers; especially English teachers in the teaching-learning process. This is the responsibility of the teachers to promote problem-based learning to their students because this concept is still unfamiliar yet. Problem-based learning will assist the teacher to facilitate the students in developing their critical thinking and communication skills then finally comes to meet the scientific approach. Problem-based learning also provides ample chances for students to develop their skills to face 21st century which full of competition and globalization.

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