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Loghman Ansarian · Teoh Mei Lin

Problem-based Language Learning and Teaching

An Innovative Approach to Learn a New
Language

 Springer

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Dedicated with love to my wife, Mohaddeseh.

Loghman Ansarian

To my late parents.

Teoh Mei Lin

Foreword

In the contemporary world, globalization is more than ever showing its growing impact on many aspects of our society, such as culture, education, communication, economics, and politics. One prominent feature of globalization is the dominant role of English as an international language, creating special pressure for English language education in contexts with English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). English language teaching and learning is high on the agenda of many countries; it is regarded as crucial for their national development and their integration into the highly globalized world. The advent of the Internet, which speeds up the globalization process, facilitating the sharing of English language resources and communication in English beyond the restrictions of physical borders between countries, has challenged the ways English has been, can be, and should be taught. Against this backdrop, a few pedagogical questions have been raised for English language education: What are some innovative pedagogies that take into account current developments in information communication technology and educational resources to promote students' deep learning of English as a Second or as a Foreign Language? What else to offer beyond the traditional grammar–translation method? What is next after communicative language teaching? These questions are at the heart of the agenda to optimize English language education worldwide. This book *‘Problem-Based Learning and Teaching: An innovative Approach to Learn a new Language’* is a timely contribution to the literature on second language teaching and learning in general, and the teaching and learning of EFL and ESL in particular.

The first thing special about this book is its multi-disciplinary perspective on reviewing problem-based learning (PBL) approach, instead of the common approach of housing second language education only in subject matter-related fields such as applied linguistics, psychology, and second language acquisition, alongside theories of learning. This book provides an account of the history of problem-based learning across several disciplines, such as medicine and science, and in various educational contexts, including Canada, the USA, and Australia, before zooming in to the adoption and development of problem-based learning in language education.

Second, this book draws on a diversity of the literature on problem-based learning in English language education across many countries, as would be expected. Moreover, courtesy of the location of its authors, Loghman Ansarian and Teoh Mei Lin, this book also provides an in-depth and interesting comparison and contrast between the adoption of problem-based learning in English language teaching in Iranian and Malaysian contexts, representing EFL and ESL contexts, respectively.

Through this book, a fresh and comprehensive view of multiple factors contributing to successful implementation of problem-based learning is depicted. These include the theoretical underpinnings of problem-based learning, drawing on Dewey's experiential learning, Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), Kumaravadivelu's postmethod in language education, while taking into consideration contemporary aspects, such as the role of technology, i.e., blended learning, and the impact of globalization on learning and teaching. Not only being theoretically well-grounded, this book also provides a useful and practical perspective to practitioners and researchers when distinguishing problem-based learning from other related approaches, such as task-based learning and project-based learning, to avoid confusion to novices in the field. Each chapter is structured in a way that concludes with an '*Exercise*' section providing opportunities for readers to reflect and discuss further the key contents introduced in each chapter and to link to their own practice. With an aim to inform PBL implementation in language education, this book discusses conditions for PBL to work successfully in classroom and provides concrete examples and illustrations of adoption of PBL in language education. In my view, it is a great contribution to the present book to balance both theoretical and practical aspects of problem-based learning approach in language education within its scope.

Finally, co-authored by one researcher and one Ph.D. candidate, this book is the outcome of admirable effort in putting this book nicely together. It is a welcoming volume for practitioners interested in exploring this PBL approach to language teaching to incorporate it into their repertoire of pedagogies and for researchers and postgraduate students in the area of English language education who wish to investigate problem-based learning in depth. In this case, it may generate new questions and conversations regarding problem-based learning, ones for which this book provides an important set of starting points.

Melbourne, Australia
March 2018

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Preface

A telescopic view at the past, as suggested by Tan (2003), sheds light on what we can and should do for future in the sphere of education. The traditional three-dimensional educational paradigm which viewed teachers as ‘knowledge providers,’ content as ‘knowledge,’ and students as ‘knowledge recipients’ has posed limitations on learning (Gordon, Gordon, Aber, & Berliner, 2012). This has prompted a paradigm shift centered on procedures for both teaching and learning which is based on well-established psychological, social, emotional, and educational foundations (Kasim, 2014). In line with this change, language learning and teaching approaches and methods were re-examined and amended. The shift from the grammar–translation method (GTM) to the recent task-based and inquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning is evidence of this endeavor.

This then begs the question, following this switch in trends from the traditional and didactic to the constructivist (Banning, 2005), does the teaching approach used in language classes satisfy the needs of the learners? Put simply, are we doing the right thing correctly? Assuming that language educators are doing their best seems to be overly optimistic. A more realistic plan would be to look at education in other disciplines and to borrow innovative and successful approaches to learning from them. One approach which has been observed to be successful across several disciplines is that of problem-based learning. Thus, this book will elaborate on problem-based learning as a viable educational method within the sphere of language teaching and learning.

Research from various parts of the world including Canada, Brazil, Switzerland, and Malaysia has shown that the problem-based learning approach has been successful in the teaching of different fields, among them medicine, chemistry, engineering, geography, etc. However, one area has still remained, to some extent, untouched and that is language education.

The assumption is that problem-based learning enhances students’ social and communicative skills (Abdullah, 1998), and considering that communication is the core of language, it is then not uncommon to think that problem-based learning can be applied in language classes. Thus, focus has been accorded to this issue in the last two decades.

This book shall elaborate on the implementation of problem-based learning in language classes and will suggest methods and approaches, following prior study of both theory and practice, to conducting problem-based learning within language classes in practicum.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Loghman Ansarian
Teoh Mei Lin

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Contents

1 Introduction	1
1.1 The History of Problem-Based Learning	1
1.1.1 ‘Why PBL’	4
1.2 Theories in PBL	6
1.2.1 Thinking in a PBL Process	6
1.2.2 Collaboration in PBL	9
1.2.3 Constructivism	10
1.2.4 Postmethod Era	10
1.2.5 Globalization	11
1.2.6 Blended Learning	11
1.3 Conclusion	12
References	12
2 Problem-Based Language Learning	15
2.1 Creating the Problem: The Main Problem	15
2.2 Self-Direct Learning	18
2.3 Collaborative Learning in PBL	19
2.4 Facilitation in Problem-Based Learning	20
2.5 Reflection	21
2.6 Integration	22
2.7 Self-Assessment	22
2.8 Learning Outcome	23
2.9 Conclusion	23
References	24
3 Models in Problem-Based Learning	25
3.1 Introduction	25
3.2 Problem-Based Learning Models	26
3.3 Savery and Duffy (1995)	26
3.4 Hmelo-Silver (2004)	27

3.4.1	3C3R model	28
3.4.2	Content	28
3.4.3	Context	29
3.4.4	Connection	30
3.4.5	Researching	31
3.4.6	Reasoning	31
3.4.7	Reflecting	32
3.5	Problem-Based Language Learning Model	32
3.6	Conclusion	36
	References	37
4	Challenges of Implementing PBL in Language Classes	39
4.1	Introduction	39
4.2	Challenges to Tutors	40
4.2.1	Lack of Resources	40
4.2.2	Tutor Hesitancy	41
4.2.3	Controlling the Class	42
4.3	Challenges to Students	43
4.4	Appropriateness of Teaching Materials	44
4.5	Suitable Assessment Methods	45
4.6	Perception and Its Role in PBL	46
4.6.1	Students' Perceptions of PBL	46
4.6.2	Tutors' Perceptions in PBL	48
4.7	Conclusion	49
	References	49
5	A Review of PBL in Language Classes	53
5.1	Studies on PBL in Language Learning	53
5.2	PBL on EFL Learners' Speaking Proficiency	57
5.3	PBL and English Writing Skills	60
5.4	Areas for Further Research	61
5.5	Conclusion	62
	References	63
	Appendix A	65
	Appendix B	67