

TEACHER'S PERCEPTION OF THE PROBLEM-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *This paper presents the teachers' perception of implementation of Problem-based language learning in ELT classroom and its challenges. The method used is a naturalistic case study. The data obtained from the interview, classroom observation and the document analysis. The interview was conducted to explore the perception of English teacher on the implementation of Problem-based language learning. The result of the study shows that the teachers perceive the implementation of Problem-based language learning as one way of preparing vocational students' awareness of the disruption technology era. From the teachers' point of view, it is challenging to make the students be a critical thinker. The classrooms' implementation employs four main steps in which students are; 1) being introduced to the problems, 2) exploring what they do and do not know about the problem, 3) identifying the problems and producing possible solutions to the problem, 4) considering the implications of each solution and selecting the most feasible solution. The research suggests that to face the challenges and maximize the benefits of Problem-based language learning, teachers and students' awareness and understanding of Problem-based language learning should have risen.*

Keywords: *Problem-Based Language Learning, Critical Thinking, Teacher-Centered Approach, Constructivist Learning*

Introduction

Students' centred approach has long been tried to be implemented in Indonesia. Especially in ELT classroom, teachers are pushed to spend less time lecturing students and more time teaching through inquiry. Stated curriculum also implies that the objective of English language teaching is not only a matter of students' content knowledge but also the students' professional attitude. It tends to be more active and away from traditional teacher centred classroom. Due to the active participation of the students, it is suggested that teaching materials have to support

and inspire students to be critical in thinking and analyzing. There are some language teaching methodologies which are well-known and be implemented. The objective of English language teaching is not only about students' communicative competence but also their soft skill. Meredith and Steele (2011: ix) explain it as acquiring critical thinking; that students are best prepare for the 21st century while they become critical thinkers in all aspect of their life. This critical thinking skill will be required for developing their professional competence in relation to his/ her carrier goal in education.

Agreeing that teaching is not merely as a way of transferring knowledge; Indonesia has launched the latest curriculum which en-touched students' critical thinking as one the learning outcomes. Therefore, forcing students to be a critical thinker is believed as one of way of preparing them to be successfully facing such disruption technology era. Teacher as one of students' source of knowledge become as one who will be a factor to determine the success of that learning outcome. What the teachers' perceive of teaching methodology will be break down in their implementation in the classroom in the form of teaching materials and assessment. Due to many educational problems such as a smaller number of skill full graduation facing with the work field requirements, it is assumed that challenging student's critical through problem-based language learning is one of teaching methodologies that she believe to prepare students' skill. From the teachers' point of view, implementing problem-based language learning to stimulate students' critical thinking is demanded due to the students' readiness face the world of work. As it is examined that 4,2 jobs advertisement in Australia between 2012 and 2015 reveals that demand of employees who have critical thinking has risen by 158 % (Foundation for Young Australian, 2016). How teachers' perceives about its importance, hence influence their way of teaching and determine the success of the learning outcome.

That phenomena brings about opportunities to search for best effective way in teaching and education. Especially in ELT Classroom, teacher perceives Problem-based language learning (PBL) as a new expectation of students-centred learning implementation. Despite it is stated on the curriculum; teacher believes that through PBL students have more opportunities to play active roles in the learning process. By taking the real problem as the core of learning, the teacher believes that the students will be active, motivated and be critical. Applying student-centered learning, students are triggered to test, search, investigate, reflect and understand knowledge in the context which is more relevant to their profession. Furthermore, discussion in small group enables students to enhance their collaboration skills.

This paper will present the teachers' perception of implementation of Problem-based language learning in ELT classroom of a secondary school and also the teaching steps by which shown teacher-students interaction.

Problem Statements

The research questions in this study are:

1. What is teacher's perception about the implementation of problem-based language learning?
2. How is Problem-based language learning is challenging to stimulate students' critical thinking in ELT classroom?

The main aim of reviewing those questions are to identify the successful of implementing problem-based language learning based on the vocational secondary teachers' perception; and also, it's procedure of challenging students' critical thinking in ELT classroom.

Literature Review

Teacher's Perception

Teacher perceptions are the thoughts or mental images that teachers have regarding teaching issues in the classroom. It shaped by their background knowledge and life experience. Teacher's beliefs have powerful impact on their willingness to adopt new teaching strategies. Regarding to the explanation, the teacher assumes that implementing PBL as a way of challenging students' critical thinking will be beneficial for the students' career.

Problem-Based Language Learning (PBL)

PBL is a learning approach that has been around since the late 1960s. It is argued that PBL is rooted in pedagogical concept put forward by John Dewey in the early 20th the century. In the last 30 years varieties of PBL has been emerging; however, the main elements of PBL have not changed. As one of the approaches in learning, PBL has its own distinct characters.

To begin with, PBL is a learning method in which students are challenged with problems followed by the process of searching information. PBL also focuses on both content and learning process. This uniqueness affects such areas as evaluation, research and comparison of the programs with other learning approaches.

Within the context of second language learning and teaching, instead of presenting students with predetermined language structures, PBL aligns with approaches in which students learn the target language by using it. Several approaches share similar bases with PBL including the Task Based-Learning (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996); Content-Based Learning (Garner & Borg, 2005; Rodgers, 2006), and Project-Based Learning (Alan & Stoller, 2005; Lee, 2002; Moss & Van Duzer, 1998). Compared to these approaches, the uniqueness of PBL lies in its core focus on learning through solving real, open-ended problems to which there are no fixed solution (Ertmer, Lehman, Park, Cramer & Grove: 2003). This necessitates students to work alone or in groups first to understand a particular problem followed by finding possible solutions to the problem.

In the PBL classrooms, the accountability and roles of both teachers and students do differ from the more conventional types of school-based learning. Commonly, in the PBL classrooms, teachers act facilitators and coaches of activities that students carry out. Based on the perspective that teachers are not the purveyor of knowledge, they do not simply transfer facts and information to students. Instead, teachers in PBL create problems and trigger students to work on them, assist them in identifying and accessing the materials and equipment necessary to solve the problems, give necessary feedback and support during the problem-solving process, evaluate participation and products of the students as well as helping them develop their problem-solving and their language and literacy skills (Mathews-Aydinli: 2007).

Students in the PBL classrooms are no longer 'pupils' passively listening to the teachers' talk. Instead, they are the active participants of the class. Together with teachers, students become subjects in the learning process. What become objects in the PBL class are the scenarios designed for triggering students to achieve the aims of the study. In the PBL class, the students study in small groups guided by teachers. Additionally, they are expected to have and develop several skills in order to participate in the group discussion such as being able to collaborate in group discussion, leading groups, listening to others' opinion, being able to critically review the literature, studying independently, respecting others' perspective, using the learning resources effectively and being able to make a presentation.

PBL leads to the implication in the teaching and learning process, namely the adult learning and self-directed learning. Central to the process of adult learning is the concept of andragogy put forward by Knowles (cited in Kaufman 2003). For Knowles, andragogy is the art and science of helping adult learn and the concept Andragogy is based on the 5 assumptions; 1) adults are the people who are independent and self-directing; 2) adults can use their experience and resources for learning; 3) for adults, learning is integrated in their daily life and needs; 4) adults are generally more interested in the problem centered approach than subject centered; 5) adults are more motivated to study through internal motivation rather than the external one (ibid, 2003). PBL necessitates students who have characteristics as adult learners. Therefore, the process of acquiring the competences of adult learners can be triggered by the groups' dynamic.

Integrated in the concept of andragogy is the self-directed learning (SDL). SDL can be defined as a method to organize teaching and learning process where learning is controlled and directed by students. Armed with SDL, students are able to be responsible for their own learning, thus enabling them to be autonomous learners. Operationally, SDL involves students' methodological, logical, analytical and collaborative ability. SDL also triggers students' curiosity, motivation, responsibility, confidence and reflection (Candy, 1991). To achieve the SDL, students are to develop several skills including asking questions, critiquing the new information, identifying gaps between knowledge and skills and reflecting the learning and outcome critically.

As the name implies, PBL encourages students' autonomous learning facing students with real life problems. Challenged with problems, students identify the main issues of the problems. The main issues help students develop their understanding of various concepts underlying the principles of knowledge. The discussed issues are in the form of written problems called phenomena that needs explanation. Activities to obtain knowledge and new understanding through problem solving are called problem first learning (Dolmans & Schmidt, 1996).

Criteria for Critical Thinking

The ideal of critical thinker can be characterized not merely by her or his cognitive skills but also how she or he approaches life and living in general. Critical thinking goes beyond the classroom. It came before schooling was ever invented. It lies in every roots of civilization (Facione, 2007:9). In short, Facione (2007:9) lists some characteristics of critical thinking, those are as follows:

- a. Clarity in stating the questions or concern,
- b. Self-confidence in one's own abilities to reason,
- c. Diligence in seeking relevant information,
- d. Open mindedness regarding different world views,
- e. Understanding of other's opinion.

The first criterion is that critical thinking must be reasonable as opposed to arbitrary or unreasonable thinking. It must rely on the use of valid supporting evidence and appropriate inference from which, in general, the best conclusions are drawn. Secondly, critical thinkers must be reflective. They must consciously evaluate their own and other's thinking in an effort to improve it. Third, critical thinking is focused thinking. It is thinking with a purpose. That purpose is to make the best decision about what to believe or do.

Another expert, Chaffee (2012: 53) has also formulated criteria for those who are called critical thinkers.

- a. Open-minded: in discussion, they listen carefully to every point, evaluating each perspective carefully and fairly.
- b. Knowledgeable: When they offer an opinion, it's always based on fact or evidence.
- c. Curious: they explore situations with probing questions that stimulate the issues instead of being satisfied with superficial explanation.
- d. Independent thinkers: They are not afraid to disagree with the group opinion.
- e. Creative: they can break out established patterns of thinking and approach situations from innovative directions.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that critical thinking is the ability to give a suitable response toward phenomena that comes up in circumstances. The response that can make us aware and survive in life. Thinking critically also makes us able to distinguish whether the information is valid or not.

Research Methodology

This study used naturalistic case study. It was conducted in a vocational secondary school in Surakarta, Indonesia. It takes two vocational secondary schools as representatives of all the Vocational secondary school in Surakarta. The reason why the researcher chooses this site was primarily because the setting is accessible and manageable to collect the data; otherwise those school place as excellent schools. The data was taken through the interview with the two English teachers. The teachers were selected based on their implementation of Problem-based language learning in their class. In collecting the data, there were three steps: data of how teaching and learning is conducted has been obtained from being passive participant observed; interviewing teachers, students and school decision makers and also the documentations. The document such as teaching syllabus, lesson plan, teaching material were collected to obtain the data. In the data analysis, it involves: the data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The Teachers' Perception

The government policy about the school curriculum and the needs of the students become two of teacher's consideration to stimulate students' critical thinking through Problem-based language learning. In relation to the Indonesian Minister Regulation, the school accommodates scientific-based learning in the syllabus model, which the teacher uses as the reference to implement PBL as the method of teaching be implemented in the English classroom. The key principle in every stage of learning is motivating and activating learning, manifested in details into: (1) lesson opening which motivates and focuses students' attention to participate actively in the learning process, (2) a systematic lesson body where interactive, inspiring, interesting and challenging learning process is broken down into scientific-based learning steps, (3) a lesson closing which includes summary, conclusion, assessment, reflection, feedback, and follow-up activities. The stages of opening, main-scientific learning, and closing activity and the key principle of motivating and active learning in the Minister Regulation Number 41/ 2007 are well reflected in the teacher's effort in teaching English using Problem-based language learning. The teacher believes that the application of PBL can also build the students' curiosity

in reading English text. Teacher also argues that she tries to encourage students' motivation of reading English text by delivering issues or problems which are close to the students' world. In the teaching and learning process, teacher arouses the students' critical thinking in reading class through questioning strategies. From this questioning strategies, the students are engaged to be active and be curious. From this phase, the teacher able to diagnose the students comprehension of the materials provided. It prompts the students' critical thinking and adjust the level of questions according to Blooms Taxonomy.

The Learning Process

Based on the document analysis and classroom observation, the learning process in PBL has implemented by the teacher. The following shows the detail finding of the research:

Stage 1: Opening

Teacher always starts the teaching and learning process by greeting the students. Then, she asks the students about the material already learned the day before. She reviews and gives feedback to the previous material by giving questions to the students. Most of the students give attention to what the teacher says in front of the class. Therefore, the students are able to think of what will be learned in the classroom. This is not because the teacher is unprepared well for that day, but she makes a good interaction although it is just a simple question in the beginning of the class. After that, she checks the students' attendance, states the objective of the lesson and also explains the importance of learning current material. In this phase, the teacher made a good opening class.

Stage 2: Main activity

In main activities, the teacher takes three sub steps; pre-reading activities, while-reading activities, and post reading activities. In the pre-reading activities, she gives some stimulus toward the material. Continuing with the materials, teacher provides stimulus as problem orientation which drive to the students' motivation. The teacher tries to relate a problem and activity which is related to the students' real life, besides giving the students background knowledge of bullying. It is also raising the students' curiosity and interest. Afterwards, the students are asked to pay attention on the short film and discuss in groups the characters of the film and what happen to the characters. In this phase, teacher asks some questions leading to the students' understanding of the teaching material. The students answer the teachers' question enthusiastically. Most of the students give full attention to the teachers' activity. It can be concluded that the teacher succeeds to involve the students to learn to the new materials.

Teacher then continues with the problem being discussed and gives students questions to check the students' activity. In doing the tasks, the students are divided into some groups. It is in line with the teacher's belief that learning is done in small groups. Students in their groups are searching for understanding, meaning, or solutions or create an artifact or product of their learning. While the teacher acts as a facilitator to facilitate student-students interactions and teacher-students interactions. On the stage, the teacher should involve students in finding information about the problem encountered. It is also supported by relevant technique, media, and other sources.

The next phase, while-reading activity, is called exploration phase. While exploring to the text, the students are still in small group discussion, where there is a leader in each group. The teacher as a key person has a very important role in this stage. She uses some media to support the implementation of PBL such as picture and short film. Furthermore, she also uses

discussion, question-asking and problem solving as her strategy to stimulate the students' idea. The teaching and learning process tend to be student-centered.

The next step is the teacher discusses the main idea, specific information, guessing meaning of vocabularies of each paragraph. To prove whether students give correct answers, the teacher asks the students to read aloud and get the main idea of paragraph one to see what the purpose of the text is. She asks questions on how to get the main ideas of a text and guides them to do so. Still in this phase, teacher also gives feedback orally as well as using body language toward the students' success, such as saying very good or showing two thumbs up for the students. Moreover, she facilitates the students to make reflection on the learning experience. She also acts as problem solver. She helps to solve the problem faced by the students. In addition, she acts as motivator. She gives motivation towards students doing low participation.

Stage 3: Closing

In the closing steps, teacher together with the students makes summary of the material. Table 1 presents teacher's teaching and learning activities while implementing PBL.

Table 1: Teacher's Teaching and Learning Activities on PBL Implementation

PBL phase	Teacher's Activities	Students' Activities
Opening	opening the class reviewing previous lesson checking the students' attendance	Listening and giving necessary response
Main Activity		
Understand the problem	playing a short film and pictures facilitating students to work in group to discuss about the short film (a model relating to the problem)	Watching, listening, taking notes or giving other necessary responses Listening to the teacher's guidance/instruction attentively
Know/ Need to know (define the issue)	Questioning to promote exploration of the issue through a short film and pictures (what the students' know and don't know about the issue)	Listening to the teacher's guidance/instruction attentively, giving necessary response, taking notes
Define the problem statement	Explaining the problem and the objectives learning	Listening and giving necessary response (taking notes, etc.)
Research the knowledge	giving a text model as a means for searching the knowledge of the issue/ problem Facilitating finding the main idea of paragraph and vocabulary meaning in context	listening, taking notes, or giving other necessary response listening, answering the teacher's questions, asking and answering the meaning of vocabulary, doing highlighting

	Facilitating reading comprehension exercises	Reading, paying attention, and accomplishing exercises
	Questioning to promote text exploration while explaining the text's outlining	Exploring a text, answering teacher's question actively, taking a note, highlighting
Investigate the solution	Reviewing the text, making summary and checking the students understanding facilitating small group task and small group discussion	listening to the review and giving necessary response working in group, giving contribution to the discussion, and presenting the result/solution
Evaluation and reflection	giving conclusion about the solution of the problem, certain text purpose, structure and language features	listening attentively to teacher's explanation, giving appropriate respond, taking a note

Challenges Using PBL

Challenges for Teacher

The first challenge for teacher is related to introducing problems. The research participant said that creating scenarios is one of the most difficult parts in PBL. For example, it is difficult to prepare a scenario that is related to students' life; and is difficult to select the actual problem; and the last challenge in preparing the text is adjusting to the English level of the students.

The second challenge for the teacher is related to grouping and provides resources for students. The teacher mentioned that the difficulty stemmed from the diverse English level of the students: "In one group some students speak English fluently, but some don't. So, students who are not fluent oftentimes are silent, they do not speak". It is also expressed that the students having higher English proficiency will tend to dominate the discussion. In addition, in grouping students, providing resources are regarded as a problem by the teacher. For example, the teacher expressed: "The number of computers for internet access is limited so that it sometimes becomes a problem".

The third challenge for teacher in applying the PBL process is observing and supporting students. Concerned with observing and supporting, the teacher generally considered the number of students as the main problem. As the teachers acknowledge, since there are 32 students in the class, the teacher encounters difficulty when required to observe students individually when they discuss in the groups.

Challenges for Students

According to the teacher, students confront two problems in the practice of PBL in the reading class. The first problem mentioned by the teacher is that when students discuss in groups, they are tempted to use Indonesian language. The following are the typical comments from the teacher: "The students often switch from English to Indonesian when they discuss"; "When I am not observing them nearby, they speak Bahasa Indonesia"; "They switch to Bahasa Indonesia a lot when they are supposed to discuss in English".

The other challenge faced by students, according to the teacher is that the students frequently ask the lecturers to solve the problem in the scenario. The following comments encapsulate this problem: “Students often ask me to help them answer the questions”; “They rely on me in solving certain questions”; “Their questions direct me to solve the problems”.

Further Discussion

There exists a perception that teachers in the PBL feel more comfortable as they ‘do not teach’. In fact, teachers in PBL or generally called tutor, do not act as ‘experts’ like those naturally used in the teacher-centered who are ready to transfer information to students. The function of teacher in PBL, however, changes to become facilitators.

Roles of the teachers in PBL vary. The fundamental paradigm shift is that teachers in PBL are no longer ‘dictator’ figure in the class. In the nutshell of the teachers’ expertise in the PBL class is their ability to cultivate ‘process expertise’ rather than ‘content expertise’ (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). The process expertise refers to teachers’ ability to facilitate and activate groups to ensure that students are able to make meaningful progress through the problems discussed. In other words, in a PBL setting, teachers need to de-center their roles as the source of knowledge by consciously refraining from giving only right-wrong answers and assisting the students to observe how other resources can help them enhance their knowledge. Being facilitators and cognitive coaches, instead of content-laden questions, teachers need to challenge students by questions such as why? what do you mean? And how do you know that it is correct (Duffy & Cunningham, 1997). The aim of such questions is to challenge the student’ critical thinking and to help them consider carefully each stage they take in their inquiry. Teachers can also facilitate students through asking specific and general questions, encouraging reflection, giving suggestions and challenges. However, teachers cannot assist their students to solve the problems nor can they interfere in the problem-solving process (Mayo, Donnelly & Schartz 1995).

The increasing challenges of teachers’ responsibility in the PBL setting. As facilitators, teachers are required to facilitate students to go through at least four stages in the learning process, namely, being introduced to the problems, exploring what they do and do not know about the problem, identifying and producing possible solutions to problems and considering the implications of each solution and selecting most feasible solution. These stages reflect the fundamental changes from conventional teachers into the PBL teachers as seen in the following table 1.2.

Conclusion

PBL has much to offer in the ELT particularly in ELT classroom. As one of the student-centered approaches, it has given both linguistic and effective advantages. The former relates to the opportunity of students to interact in English in PBL setting which promotes the students activeness. The latter is concerned with the increase of students’ motivation, and autonomy. As seen from the PBL stages done in the reading class, students engage with steps which require them to collaborate, share and think critically. All of these skills are highly needed in the knowledge society and in the professional life.

Teacher and students at the school cannot avoid problems and challenges occurring in the PBL classroom setting. In order to maximize the benefits of PBL, it is suggested that teacher and students should be ensured that they understand both the pedagogical principles underlying the PBL and its actualization in the classroom. Training on PBL for both teachers and students

might be a correct option to be done to increase the likelihood that PBL will be successfully employed in the ELT with more positive and productive outcomes.

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