INNOVATIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH PROBLEM- BASED LEARNING IN MALAYSIAN POLYTECHNIC

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Abstract- Problem-based learning is a student centered approach that has been implemented in a number of higher educational institutes around the world. Problem-based learning is the program of learning and teaching process which has so many advantages in usage. One of the primary motivating influences of PBL is derived from the fact that problems are based on real-world situations or events. Problem-based learning incorporates innovative teaching and learning methodologies that are relevant and allows students to learn how to analyze the problem given and share classroom knowledge into practice. The educator acts as a facilitator and resource person to whom students can come to for advice or guidance. This paper aims to share experiences in teaching English language class using Problem-based learning method. This paper also has shownthat PBL is a promising approach in teaching language and approaches creativity, critical thinking and team working among students. However, the educators using this approach will face multiple challenges when implementing PBL and have to create and adapt effective strategies to successfully mitigate the challenges.

Keywords- Creativity, Critical thinking, Innovative teaching and learning, Problem based Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Problem-based Learning (PBL) is a student centered, inquiry based approach which has been implemented in various disciplines, such as medicine, engineering and education. Its effectiveness in facilitating student problem-solving and self-directed learning skills has been widely reported in medical education. In PBL small group of students learn collaboratively to solve authentic problems. The problems used in PBL units tend to be intricate, challenging, and unrestricted, involving students in creativity and critical thinking. In PBL students encounter problem before learning as oppose to traditional learning where student will learn the content before attempting to apply the knowledge learned.

PBL allows students to address challenges and tackles problems using strategies that are encountered in real life. Through self-directed study, creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork, English language learning is strengthened and authentic communication takes place. Within the area of second language learning and teaching, PBL learning aligns with approaches in which students learn the target language by using it, rather than being presented with and then practicing predetermined language structures.

Students and educator's role in Problem-based learning differ from the traditional student educator role. In PBL, knowledge building is stimulated by ill-structured problem and helps students develop advanced creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem solving and communication skills. Students assume responsibility for learning and access their own material and adjust strategies for learning. Students do independent self-directed learning before the group discussion and therefore increase their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.
Educators are facilitators who group students, introduces problems, vocabulary and provide resources. Educators also need to observe students and provide instructional support as needed but do not control the learning. While observing, the educator takes notes and provides students withopportunities to present and share the results of their work, provides follow-up activitiesbased on his/her observation and assesses students' participation and provide constructive feedback for success of activity.

Within the field of language learning and teaching, PBL encourages languagestudents in learning how to learn while they also learn language and content in attempting to solve the task given.

Mathews-Aydinli suggested a few steps that could be followed by language educators:
1. Pre-teach. The educator needs to take effort in making sure that students are aware of the objective and benefits of a problem-based approach for language learning and the significance of using English while carrying out the problem-solving activities.
2. Introduce problem and vocabulary. The educator may use traditional method or technology to introduce the problem to students. Students also need to have vocabulary related to the problem and teacher can guide by providing pre-reading exercises about the problem.
3. Group students and provide resources. Educator needs to group students with different language proficiency to ensure that communication takes place in English language. Educator needs to provide traditional and technology related resources to enable

students to solve the problem. Educators also should make the student aware that there is no single answer to the problem and that any answer is acceptable providing they are able to justify it.

4. Observe and support. The educator observes students and provides feedbackas needed, but they do not control the activities and acts as a facilitator by guiding the students.

5. Follow up and assess progress. Students are given opportunity to present their work and the educator providesfeedback based on his/her observation and assesses students' participation.

II. BENEFITS OF PBL

The benefits of PBL in language learning are various. It is widely accepted that problem solving activity promotes construction of useful knowledge, develop reasoning strategies and effective self-directed learning strategies, increase motivation for learning, and learner are given opportunity to become effective collaborators. Particularly in language classroom, PBL promotes significant interaction in the classroom. The interactions that occur while students were dealing with real-world issues and problems are more meaningful and authentic than interactions produced during activities such as assigned role plays or pre-planned presentations. Students are given opportunity to develop their ability to listen, debate, negotiate, share information, problem solve and experience real communication whereby the students apply the language learned appropriately. Since PBL shifts the emphasis on learning activity from educators to students, it is a learner centered approach that help students become autonomous learners who will transfer the skills learned in the classroom to their real-life communication outside of the classroom. As to activate learners to interact with each other in listening speaking class, PBL can be powerful. While students are focusing on the problem to be solved, students with different language proficiency will try to overcome the linguistic limitation, retrieve prior knowledge of the language to be used, and finally, become skillful language users. Students also learn how to think critically and creatively. They will use a variety of information resources such as books, journals, reports, web resources, and a variety of people with different areas of expertise. In this way learning is adapted to the different needs and learning styles of the individual student.

III. CHALLENGES

However the educators using this approach will face challenges in implementing PBL. One challenge is that students may use their mother tongue while working with their group in solving the problem assigned to them. This ability can be addressed by making sure that each group consist of students from different language proficiency. A second concern is that problem-based learning may not be appropriate for students whose English proficiency is minimal especially those who learn English as a Second language. One way to address this concern is educators need to make sure that they pre- teach the vocabulary needed to solve the problem and also design problems that students with limited language ability would be able to solve.

Educators also need to design problems that are authentic and meaningful to student's future profession. Hence, it would be an advantage if the educator has industrial experiences in order to create meaningful problems that would encourage real-life communication. The administrators could help provide resources for educators by inviting Industrial advisors who could give advice and exposure in promoting real-life learning that would help students to use the English language effectively and enable them to communicate globally.

Research in Portland, Oregon, on pair work in ESL classes suggests that when educators approach students working in pairs, the environment of the students' interaction changes. Students may ask the educator questions that prompts them to control the discussion and students are not given the opportunity to try out linguistic strategies in order to solve the problem on their own. PBL is a learner centered approach and requires change in educator's perspective and commitment. The educator should always remember her/his role as a facilitator who provide support and not control the learning.

Group work is an essential feature of PBL. Working in groups require students to know how to organize the work, allocate responsibility, divide complex tasks, and provide constructive feedback on work that is done. Educators should help students understand the commitment and collaboration needed in group work so that they could have productive work. Students also need to be made comfortable in this new learning environment which requires them to interact in groups and respect each other opinions.

The educator decides on activities students can do on their own and what they need to learn to do to solve the problem. Therefore the success of scaffolding or coaching students to the extent that they can perform tasks on their own depends largely on the educators. The success of PBL approach is determined by how the educator design problem that is manageable, engage students with the problem, facilitate and guide students to solve the problem given. Educators need to truly understand and practice their roles and functions in order to support students in their learning.

Giving adequate feedback on learning and assessment is crucial in implementing PBL. Instead of focusing

on the result of the assessment educators should encourage students to self -reflect their learning and discuss with them on ways to improve their weakness and motivate learning. Students can take videos of their presentation and have peer evaluation on their performances which would foster critical thinking and team work among them. Educators could also introduce relevant web resources as a background support that enable students to reflect their learning process rather than focusing on solving the problem.

PBL requires students to take responsibility of their own learning. However to change the mindset of students who rely on the teacher as the main source of knowledge is a challenging task.Educators need to encourage students to learn for themselves by using learning materials independently. Online learning should be incorporated in the learning process so that students have independent interaction with educational technologies. The students need to understand that the educator's role in PBL learning environment is as a facilitator who guides them throughout the learning process and the obligation of learning lies on them.

As in all changes a change from the traditional educator centered approach to student centered approach would certainly generate challenges. However looking back at the affective benefits of implementing PBL approach in the form of creating independent students, promoting authentic learning, fostering creative and critical thinking, supporting team work, the educators should embrace the challenges experienced and focus on creating a successful learner centered classroom.

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