نهج حل المشكلات في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية العراقية

Problem- Solving Approach in Iraqi EFL Teaching English Among Primary Schools

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة تطبيق مدخل حلّ المشكلات في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، وذلك من أجل التعرّف على فاعليته في تحسين اكتساب الطلبة للغة وتنمية مهارات التفكير النقدي لديهم.

تتكوّن الدراسة من ثلاثة أقسام رئيسة. يتناول القسم الأول أهداف البحث، بما في ذلك تحديد المشكلة البحثية، وأهداف الدراسة وأهميتها، وحدودها، وتعريف المصطلحات الأساسية. أمّا القسم الثاني فيقدّم عرضًا نظريًا شاملاً لمدخل حلّ المشكلات، موضحًا مفاهيمه الرئيسة وخطواته وخصائصه ومبادئه، مثل التعلّم النشط، والتعلّم القائم على الاستقصاء، والبنائية، والتغذية الراجعة. كما يستعرض هذا القسم النظريات المعرفية المرتبطة بحلّ المشكلات، ومنها حلّ المشكلات البنائي كما طرحه بياجيه وفيغوتسكي، وحلّ المشكلات الإجرائي (الاستكشافي) كما قدّمه نيويل وسايمون، إضافة إلى توضيح أدوار كلٍّ من المعلّم والطالب في عملية حلّ المشكلات. أمّا القسم الأخير فيلخّص نتائج الدراسة، ويقدّم الاستنتاجات والتوصيات في ضوء ما توصّل إليه البحث.

Abstract

This paper examines the use of the problem-solving approach (PSA) for English teaching, and looks at its impact on learning and critical thinking tasks. The paper is divided into three major sections. The objectives of the study, identification of the problems to be solved, aims and significance of the study, limitations, and definition of basic terms are described in the first section. The second part of this paper provides a thorough introduction to the approach to problem-solving based upon several key elements including active engagement, inquiry-based learning, constructivism, and feedback. It explores cognitive theories, specifically constructivist problem solving as suggested by Piaget and Vygotsky, heuristic problem solving (Newell and Simon), and discusses teachers' and students' roles in problem solving. The last section outlines the study's outcome by concluding and providing recommendations according to the study findings.

1.Introduction

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) is not easy, the conventional methods such as memorizing all of the instructions and simple grammar drill may not develop the critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving aspects which are needed to communicate very well. Many students have difficulty using theoretical concepts in practical cases. Therefore, the study focuses on the problem-solving approach (PSA) that is often used to learn critical thinking and active learning to enhance the process of acquiring language as well as developing the ability to solve a specific problem. PSA nurtures both linguistic and cognitive abilities in learners through addressing and solving real-world problems compared to the traditional way by providing a variety of methods for doing so that would challenge students as well. The aim of the study presented is to develop an understanding of the educational system in adopting a problem-solving approach to teaching English and the benefits that a problem-solving pedagogy would bring to the EFL classroom.

The study aims to identify the following:

To consider the effectiveness of the problem-solving approach (PSA) for English instruction.

To find out if using PSA helps to enhance critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and immersion in the English language.

To investigate teachers' primary contribution to facilitating problem-solving activities on the basis of the effect on teaching practice.

To assess the cumulative effect of the problem-solving approach on student performance in English proficiency tests and assessments.

This study holds significance based on the following points:

1. Research informs key areas where improving teaching strategies is essential. The study delivers essential knowledge for improving approaches to learning.

2. This can inform future educational programs: PSA as an important element of participatory learning.

3. Through the study we connect PSA with cognitive theories and language teaching.

4. Being interactive in teaching can enhance more confident English speakers in different contexts.

The study offers an in-depth analysis of the problem-solving approach (PSA) within specific classroom settings, although it has some other limitations. This study may be less able to account for the long-term impact of PSA on language proficiency. It largely analyzes the theoretical side of PSA and does not mention how it can be implemented for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in English language learners. Notwithstanding these shortcomings the paper provides important insights that can be used in the future to shed light on PSA and

English language teaching in the context of interactive teaching through interactive play.

2. Theoretical Background
2.1 The Problem-Solving Approach

This approach of teaching English is based on the perspective that the way students acquire a language is not a passive process, but an active one, actively encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. It facilitates active learning in English through the application of the language in situations (in this case real life) from which they would learn. Collaborative projects, language-based puzzles, or role play that imitate authentic conversations or contexts of work can be utilized through this teaching method (Ormond 2006:121). Gorgiladze (2005:51) explains that as a problem-solving technique it allows more likely participation in a less negative and flexible learning environment where errors, as well as trial and error, are considered essential components of learning.

By actively responding and overcoming their challenges students will be able to improve their language skills and build their confidence to communicate more effectively. Decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution are some of the valuable skill set building blocks for such a method of learning. The teachers in this kind of education model serve as facilitators, offering guidance, materials, feedback, and encouragement throughout the learning process. Instead of simply passing on information, the emphasis is on improving the ability of students to think critically, communicate, and cooperate. The work of problem solving is all about developing language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) through individual tasks and group activities, just as it is doing with group work (Burke 1996:534).

2.2. Strategies of Problem-Solving Approach

The Problem-Solving Approach (PSA) is a teaching method that focuses on real-life problems that the learner is challenged to solve. Such a lesson develops the student in advanced thinking; the higher-order thinking skills in critical, creative, and collaborative thinking are essential. In English class, PSA is a learning technique for giving learners opportunities to address challenges in English by analyzing their communication and suggesting an action.

Problem-solving, as defined by Kahneman (2011:22), is a cognitive process that engages two different systems of thinking. There is the system in the first, which is quick and intuitive, usually unconsciously based on intuition and experience, and the decision is made in a split second. In contrast, the second system is more deliberate, aware and analytical, which uses logical reasoning and appraisal. The first system is efficient for everyday situations and the second one is for complex problems that require detailed analysis and structure.

Moreover, according to Jonassen (2000:302), problem-solving is a systematic and structured approach and is often used by identifying, analyzing, and later addressing a specific issue or problem. Furthermore, he shows that such a framework focuses on critical thinking and creativity, and using relevant strategies to find viable solutions. It also promotes testing and refinement iteratively through which the problem is understood more completely.

2.3. Steps of Problem-Solving Approach

The problem-solving approach is goal-oriented and the most frequently proposed solutions address the root problem at its operational level. In work, daily life or even academia (learning about a subject), it does assist in breaking down complex challenges into component pieces that will, in turn, help you create practical solutions. Such an approach focuses on not just short term problem solving, but also promotes continuing education and development. Most commonly, it has several fundamental steps (Schunk, 2012:210-215).

Step 1: Define the Problem

The issue of the problem is identified by examining it more deeply. For instance, a teacher notices that students quickly forget the English vocabulary they have learned after a lesson and find it difficult to use in spoken or written work and this can result in a loss in their overall skills.

Step 2: Diagnose the Root Cause. Cause and problem Investigation. In this instance, students are likely to regurgitate vocabulary without context and as a result retain the information poorly. For example, they may only see words written in flashcards or lists, but not in meaningful sentences.

Step 3: Determine and Practice a Solution (The Next Generation VOCabulary) Include vocabulary in participatory lessons with some context, like telling stories or having speech. For instance, have students read a short story or talk together using the new vocabulary.

Step 4: Ongoing Results

Ongoing gauges of student progress through quizzes or discussions. If students remember the vocabulary, often continue reinforcing the method. Make the approach interactive if you need to.

2.4. Characteristics of Problem-Solving Approach

The problem-solving is an organized, adaptive procedure. According to Trollip (2001:102-104) it consists in various qualities. Logical: effective problem-solving is usually based on reason:

Reasoning is usually used to make sense of the problem. This is often found in cause-and-effect relationships, structuring solutions where possible, as well as forecasting outcomes. It is often accompanied by analysis, organizing the structure of solutions. Systematic:

This methodical approach follows the detailed steps which are usually systematically arranged in an orderly sequence of processes, leaving no detail overlooked.

Creative: Problem solving usually stimulates more creative thinking, offering a spectrum of options and fighting against being guided by the urge to accept the first feasible suggestion. Flexible: The process is flexible allowing for adjustments based on new information or feedback from previous stages.

Collaborative: Effective problem management is often a team effort, in which different views and knowledge often jointly lead to the optimum solution.

Goal-Oriented: the process is goal oriented; one step of the process is strategically related to that of another and leads to a desired result. It usually includes using facts, questioning, problem-solving, challenging assumptions, and assessing facts, to make critical thinking in a decision-making style about what one, and how you can make good decision-making.

Iterative: Solutions to problems are usually iterative of sorts -- it is important to go back to step 1, change up strategies, or modify solutions and approaches as insights are discovered to solve issues.

2.5. Principles of Problem-Solving Approach

Based on some key principles, the problem-solving approach is implemented in the classroom:

2.5.1. Active Engagement

Being an active learner translates into actively participating in conversations, experiments, and activities that contribute to critical thought and solving of problems. They are also used to develop cognitive development, enhance communication and strengthen teamwork (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001:102). For example, when they are speaking in the English language class, they would act out a communicative problem like solving a misunderstanding or agreeing on a term. This type of exercise is mostly aimed at leading them to critically think, express their ideas coherently, and adjust their words with an understanding of different social and cultural issues so that their problem-solving skills and communication are greatly improved.

2.5.2. Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) creates an open classroom atmosphere in which students question, explore ideas, and experiment with solutions together. This pattern often mirrors real-world problem-solving—students identify problems and ask questions; seek information on them; and test hypotheses. It enhances their comprehension of narrative perspective and at the same time it develops their problem-solving and interpretative reasoning of analytic skills, a benefit not only for the

language learning process (Thomas & Reinders, 2010:321). Students might examine short stories to investigate 'narrative perspective' as a component of reading comprehension in an English class. Rather than learn something from an individual, instead, they question, 'How does perspective make up the narrative?' or 'How does the narrator impact the reader?' Reimagining the stories for a different viewpoint teaches students critical thinking and how to solve problems.

2.5.3. Constructivism

Under constructivist education, students construct their own knowledge by doing, real life experiences and solving problems and not just sitting in passive reception of information. It requires student work on the application of language to real worlds: often, students are engaged and in close collaborations or thinking. Instead of memorizing information, students typically learn from purposeful engagements, which improve understanding and retention (Fosnot, 2005:114). For instance, you could set up a trip to a country that has English as its native language, research a range of travel options, design an itinerary, and present that itinerary in English with students.

2.5.4. Feedback and Reflection

A little feedback provided on students' problem-solving process, this will inspire self-reflection which will lead to continual growth. Most of that feedback encourages students to think about how they solved the problems (e.g., misconceptions) based on the feedback they have received. Learned through self-reflection, students learn from the mistakes they made, identify patterns in their strategies, and practice their skills. Not only does this process provide them with proper answers when they are correct, it also helps them to build problem-solvers (Richards & Rodgers, 2014:71). In an English classroom, for instance, a teacher might have certain students correct grammatical errors in a paragraph. Feedback is given by the teacher after submission, emphasizing strengths as well as areas for improvement.

The learning process is guided in that these principles foster active participation and reflection. Wells (1999:57-59) compares these principles in the following table that summarizes their function in the pedagogical context.

Table 1: Principles of problem-solving approach

Principle	Description	Role in the classroom
Active Engagement	Students actively participate in discussions and activities.	Encourages participation in problem-solving tasks.
Inquiry-Based Learning	Students ask questions and explore concepts.	Fosters exploration and testing of ideas to uncover solutions.
Constructivism	Students build knowledge through problem-solving.	Promotes learning through active experiences, not passive receipt.
Feedback and Reflection	Students reflect on solutions and refine their approach.	Encourages selfassessment and improvement of problem-solving strategies.

2.6. Cognitive Theories and Problem-Solving

Cognitive theories of learning, especially those which center on problem-solving, emphasize how students take in and retain knowledge, while at the same time they must then put their studies into practice. In terms of the English language, these theories can be used to help teachers understand, analyze and address language learning difficulties. Applying them in this way promotes understanding and good ways to tackle difficulties, not only helps a great many learners develop the skills necessary for mastering English.

2.6.1. Constructivist Problem-Solving (Piaget and Vygotsky)

From the constructivist perspective, learners construct their understanding through their interactions with the context and task to solve problem(s) and thereby construct knowledge. These are critical activities for young people as they allow the learner to practise language and be able to think critically, co-construct and understand language deeper (Ellis, 2003:83).

This encourages independence, curiosity and helps to support the students' ability to think on their feet in a range of contexts and tasks. For Piaget, active process learning is the main form of learning in an interactionist scenario. For example, in the case of English teaching, this looks like putting to task the construction of dialogues which promotes meaningful problems the opportunity for students to use language, which contribute in the development of higher order thinking and language production (Piaget, 1973:47).

In contrast, Vygotsky emphasises social interaction and teaching scaffolding in learning. Problem-solving tasks in English teaching would be best handled within the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) where teachers or peers would help a student to overcome language challenges that are just beyond his own ability (Vygotsky, 1978:86).

Saville-Troike (2012:22-25) defined four key elements of these theories: role-playing, where students commonly are placed in realistic instances, to help them with language use; task-based learning, which comprises completing exercises such as planning a trip to use English skills; collaborative problem-solving, where students may work together on tasks to negotiate and make agreements; and project-based learning, where students are required to research and present realistic problems in English.

2.6.2. Heuristic Problem-Solving (Newell and Simon)

Heuristics are shortcuts, or principles of thought which people take when taking decisions based on cognitive shortcuts, that play a fundamental part in solving problems. They are helpful in the teaching of language, especially when breaking down challenging language tasks, for students to develop essays, analyze and deconstruct new texts and often allow students to engage with language problems in a more positive manner by making them seem more approachable and easier to understand (Newell & Simon, 1972:35).

Such as in writing where you can instruct students to apply the use of simple heuristics (e.g. PEEL technique -- point, evidence, explanation, link) to the "problem-based writing" to offer a consistent and organised way of writing. Skimming and scanning are effective heuristics in reading. Skimming helps students quickly recognize the main idea of a passage, while scanning aids in effectively finding specific details (Sweller, 2011:67).

These strategies act as problem-solving tools that not only enable the student to better guide passages in reading but also comprehend them correctly. Heuristics also encourage critical thinking skills and self-sufficiency in language learners by supporting systematic approach to tasks--this often means the improvement in comprehension and production across diverse language skills.

2.7. Teacher and Student Roles in Problem-Solving

An understanding of this aspect of problem-solving will bring out both teacher and student; how these can work together and support effective learning. As Lave and Wenger (1991:38) state and illustrate, in the role of the teacher, the teacher is used as a facilitator who leads students through the process of solving the problem. They offer tools, generate questions that go deep and create a kind of a space that nurtures critical thinking and collaboration. The role of the teacher is to ask questions that

provoke reflection in the students. In contrast, when students are in student mode, they are the active participants in the process of learning, whether individually or working collaboratively in a team to solve problems. They claim ownership over their learning through real-world application and discussions and through reflective consideration of solutions. Students share ideas, interact with their peers, and reflect on their response to these problems (Cocking, 2000:55).

Table 2: Roles of the teacher and the student in problem-solving

Aspect	Teacher's Role	Student's Role
Primary Function	Facilitator and guide.	Active participant.
Main Responsibility	Provide resources, ask questions, and ensure objectives.	Apply knowledge, participate in discussions, reflect.
Focus	Encourage collaboration, challenge thinking, and support learning.	Contribute ideas, engage in dialogue, and evaluate outcomes.

3.1 Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that the Problem-Solving Approach (PSA) is effective for the teaching of English as a Second Language. PSA gives students real-life problems and exposure to language and critical thinking by engaging the students in real-world problem-solving. It is designed to increase motivation and confidence among students to be the basis of a sense of ownership and also to be customizable to the different learning styles. No longer teachers as transmitters, they become facilitators, in which way, the classroom becomes more dynamic. PSA also supports the idea of continuous feedback for teachers and students alike. Further work is needed to understand the longer-term impact and scalability of PSA across a wider variety of settings. Do you view studying the methods behind why students should learn English in the problem-solving approach? Yes, this is a useful skill that you can apply to other things like thinking critically and understanding the language. Students are engaged, independence grows and they are able to show their skills in the real world, which promotes language ability and cognitive development.

3.2. Recommendations

According to the findings, the following recommendations have been offered:

1. Incorporating PSA into the Curriculum: Problem-solving tasks should be integrated into English curricula for their deep-learning purposes and to foster critical thinking. Tasks similar to these should be applied in real-world scenarios.

2. Teacher Training: Teachers should be trained in the principles and techniques of the problem-solving approach. Educators need skills to effectively facilitate problem-solving activities in the classroom, and this is what needs to be addressed in professional development programs.

3. Teaching as Collaboration/Peer Learning: The teacher should attempt to create opportunities for students to collaborate while solving problems. Peer learning will facilitate development of language and social abilities such as collaboration and communication.

4. Future Research: PSA's longer-term effect on students' language and problem-solving ability and its adaptability across cultural and institutional contexts need to be investigated.

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