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PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING ELEMENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGICAL SYSTEM FOR ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT: The growing emphasis on communicative competence in contemporary English language teaching has created a demand for learner-centered instructional approaches that promote active participation and real-life communication. Despite improvements in communicative methodologies, many learners continue to experience difficulties applying linguistic knowledge in authentic communicative situations. This challenge highlights the need for instructional frameworks that integrate communication, problem-solving, and learner engagement.

The purpose of this study was to develop a methodological system for integrating Problem-Based Learning (PBL) elements into English language teaching in order to enhance communicative competence and increase learner participation. The study employed a qualitative methodological research design focused on instructional model development and pedagogical evaluation. Data collection procedures included literature analysis, classroom observation, implementation of selected problem-based activities, and reflective analysis.

The findings resulted in the development of a structured six-stage lesson model and a problem-based exercise system consisting of problem-identification, analytical, solution-generation, decision-making, and reflective tasks. Classroom implementation demonstrated increased learner participation, stronger communicative interaction, and greater engagement in collaborative activities.

The study concludes that integrating Problem-Based Learning elements into English language teaching contributes to communicative competence development by combining communicative, cognitive, and collaborative dimensions of learning. The proposed framework provides practical methodological guidance for implementing learner-centered instruction in English language classrooms.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning, English language teaching, communicative competence, learner-centered learning, problem situations, instructional methodology.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of educational systems has significantly influenced approaches to English language teaching (ELT), shifting instructional priorities from teacher-centered knowledge transmission toward learner-centered practices that emphasize communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Within this paradigm shift, communicative competence has become one of the central goals of language education, requiring learners not only to acquire linguistic knowledge but also to apply language effectively in authentic communicative situations.Communicative competence is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct extending beyond grammatical knowledge. Hymes (1972) argued that language learning should involve the ability to use language appropriately within social contexts rather than simply

mastering formal linguistic structures. This perspective was further developed by Canale and Swain (1980), who proposed that communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies that interact during language use. Despite methodological developments in communicative language teaching, many learners continue to experience difficulties transferring theoretical language knowledge into practical communication.One of the persistent challenges in English language classrooms is the discrepancy between linguistic knowledge and communicative performance. Students often demonstrate acceptable understanding of grammar and vocabulary but struggle when required to participate in discussions, negotiate meaning, express opinions, or solve communicative problems in unpredictable contexts. Such challenges indicate the necessity of instructional approaches that create meaningful communication opportunities and encourage active learner participation.

Among learner-centered instructional approaches, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its emphasis on authentic problems, collaborative inquiry, and active knowledge construction. The theoretical foundations of PBL are closely associated with constructivist learning theories. Dewey (1938) emphasized that education should be grounded in meaningful experiences where learners actively engage in inquiry and problem-solving processes. Piaget (1950) similarly viewed learning as an active cognitive process in which knowledge is constructed through interaction with new experiences. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1986) highlighted the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning, arguing that cognitive development occurs through guided participation and communication. Bruner (1960) further strengthened these ideas through his concept of discovery learning, emphasizing learner autonomy and active meaning construction.

The pedagogical framework of PBL was later systematically developed by Barrows (1996), who conceptualized learning as a process organized around authentic problems that require inquiry, analysis, and collaborative decision-making. Within language education, such instructional principles align closely with communicative language teaching because both approaches prioritize interaction and purposeful language use.

Previous research has increasingly explored the relationship between problem-based instruction and language learning outcomes. Studies suggest that PBL environments encourage higher-order thinking, learner engagement, and collaborative learning processes (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Recent systematic reviews further indicate that problem-oriented instructional practices positively influence communicative performance, participation, and learner motivation in English language classrooms (Guo, 2024; Han, 2025). Similarly, Šliogerienė et al. (2025) argue that problem-based activities support creativity development and communicative competence formation.

However, despite growing interest in learner-centered approaches, several limitations remain. First, many studies discuss the benefits of problem-oriented learning conceptually without proposing structured methodological frameworks for classroom implementation. Second, limited attention has been devoted to designing systematic exercise systems specifically intended for communicative language teaching contexts. Third, recent literature frequently overlaps Problem-Based Learning with Project-Based Learning despite important pedagogical distinctions. While Project-Based Learning generally emphasizes product creation and final outputs, Problem-Based Learning prioritizes problem-solving processes as mechanisms for learning and communication development.

Addressing these gaps requires a methodological framework that integrates problem-based principles with communicative language teaching objectives. Therefore, the purpose of this study

is to develop a methodological system for integrating Problem-Based Learning elements into English language teaching in order to enhance learners' communicative competence and increase active participation in classroom interaction.

The objectives of this study are:

- to analyze the theoretical foundations of Problem-Based Learning in language education;
- to identify pedagogical opportunities for integrating problem situations into English language teaching;
- to develop a structured problem-based lesson model;
- to design a system of problem-based exercises;
- to examine the practical effectiveness of the proposed methodological framework.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How can Problem-Based Learning elements be systematically integrated into English language teaching?

RQ2. What types of problem-based exercises contribute to communicative competence development?

RQ3. How does the proposed methodological system support learner engagement and language use in classroom settings?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodological research design aimed at developing and theoretically validating a problem-based instructional framework for English language teaching. The study focused on designing a structured methodological system based on Problem-Based Learning (PBL) principles and examining its pedagogical applicability within English language classrooms. Qualitative methodological research was selected because the primary objective of the study was not statistical measurement but the development, implementation, and evaluation of instructional practices.

The research design combined theoretical analysis with practical classroom-oriented model development. The methodological framework was constructed through the integration of established theories of communicative language teaching, constructivist learning, and problem-based instructional approaches.

Research Context

The study was conducted within the context of English language teaching in higher and secondary specialized educational settings. The instructional model was designed for use in communicative language classrooms where learners are expected to develop speaking ability, interactional competence, and independent thinking skills.

The focus of the study was not limited to a particular institutional environment; instead, the proposed framework was developed to provide adaptable methodological guidance for various English teaching contexts.

Data Collection Methods

Several complementary methods of data collection were employed to ensure theoretical consistency and practical relevance.

Literature Analysis

Scientific literature related to Problem-Based Learning, communicative language teaching, constructivist pedagogy, and language acquisition theories was systematically reviewed. The analysis included classical and contemporary works addressing learner-centered instruction, communicative competence, and cognitive aspects of language learning.

Classroom Observation

Observation was used to identify common communicative difficulties experienced by learners during English lessons and to examine how problem-oriented activities influence learner participation and interaction patterns.

Experimental Lesson Implementation

Selected instructional activities based on problem situations were incorporated into classroom practice to examine their applicability. These activities included discussion-based tasks, collaborative problem-solving activities, role-play situations, and decision-making exercises.

Reflective Analysis

Reflective observation notes were used to analyze learner responses, participation patterns, and classroom interaction during the implementation process. This procedure supported the evaluation of pedagogical effectiveness from a process-oriented perspective.

Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of five consecutive stages:

Stage 1: Theoretical Analysis

Existing theoretical foundations of Problem-Based Learning and communicative language teaching were examined.

Stage 2: Development of the Instructional Model

A six-stage problem-based lesson model was designed to structure classroom implementation.

Stage 3: Design of the Exercise System

A system of problem-based exercises was developed, including problem-identification, analytical, solution-generation, decision-making, and reflective tasks.

Stage 4: Classroom Implementation

Selected activities and lesson components were integrated into English lessons to examine their practical applicability.

Stage 5: Evaluation and Interpretation

Observation-based evidence and reflective analysis were used to interpret the effectiveness of the methodological framework.

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed through comparative and thematic analysis techniques. Classroom observations, reflective notes, and implementation outcomes were categorized according to communicative engagement, learner participation, interaction patterns, and problem-solving behaviors.

Rather than measuring isolated linguistic outcomes, the analysis focused on identifying pedagogical tendencies and evaluating how problem-based instructional practices contributed to communicative competence development.

RESULTS

Development of the Problem-Based Lesson Model

One of the major outcomes of this study was the development of a structured instructional model for integrating Problem-Based Learning elements into English language teaching. The model was designed to organize classroom activities around communicative problem-solving processes and learner-centered interaction.

The instructional framework consists of six sequential stages that guide learners from problem recognition to reflective evaluation.

Table 1. Six-stage Problem-Based Lesson Model

Stage	Instructional Focus	Expected Learner Activity	Communicative Function
Problem situation	Introducing authentic problems	Identifying communicative challenges	Engagement
Problem understanding	Clarifying the problem	Discussing and interpreting situations	Interaction
Hypothesis generation	Developing possible solutions	Sharing ideas and negotiating meaning	Speaking practice
Solution development	Selecting appropriate strategies	Collaborative problem solving	Communication
Presentation	Reporting solutions	Presenting and defending opinions	Fluency development
Reflection	Evaluating learning process	Self-assessment and discussion	Metacognitive development

The proposed model shifts classroom interaction from teacher-centered instruction toward collaborative knowledge construction. Learners become active participants responsible for identifying, discussing, and solving communicative problems.

Development of the Problem-Based Exercise System

The second important outcome was the development of a structured exercise system aligned with the stages of problem-based instruction. The exercises were organized according to their pedagogical functions rather than traditional language skill categories.

Table 2. Problem-Based Exercise Types and Their Functions

Exercise Type	Primary Purpose	Learner Activities	Expected Outcomes
Problem-identification tasks	Recognize communicative problems	Observation, discussion	Analytical thinking
Problem-analysis tasks	Examine causes and consequences	Interpretation, comparison	Critical thinking
Solution-generation tasks	Produce alternatives	Brainstorming, collaboration	Creativity
Decision-making tasks	Select best solutions	Argumentation, negotiation	Strategic competence
Reflective tasks	Evaluate performance	Self-analysis	Metacognitive awareness

The developed exercise system created opportunities for learners to use language for meaningful purposes rather than isolated language practice.

Classroom Implementation Outcomes

The implementation process demonstrated several observable changes in classroom interaction patterns. Learners showed greater willingness to participate in collaborative activities and were more actively involved in classroom discussions.

The most visible changes included:

- increased participation during speaking activities;
- more frequent peer interaction;
- greater willingness to express opinions;
- increased engagement during group tasks;
- improved confidence in problem-solving situations.

These outcomes suggest that problem-oriented activities create communicative necessity, which encourages learners to use language more actively.

Observed Pedagogical Effects

The implementation of problem-based activities generated several pedagogical effects beyond language practice.

First, learners demonstrated higher levels of communicative engagement because classroom tasks required active interaction rather than passive response production.

Second, collaborative activities supported the development of negotiation and decision-making skills, both of which are important components of communicative competence.

Third, reflective activities encouraged learners to analyze their own learning processes and identify communication difficulties.

Overall, the findings indicate that integrating Problem-Based Learning elements into English language instruction contributes not only to language practice but also to learner autonomy, interactional competence, and cognitive engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) elements into English language teaching creates favorable conditions for improving communicative engagement and increasing learner participation. The developed methodological framework demonstrated that organizing instruction around communicative problems encourages learners to use language more actively and purposefully.

One important finding concerns the effectiveness of structured problem situations in promoting communicative interaction. The implementation process showed that learners participated more actively when classroom activities required them to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and collaboratively solve problems. This finding supports the communicative perspective proposed by Hymes (1972), who argued that language competence should involve appropriate language use in authentic social contexts rather than isolated grammatical knowledge.

The six-stage instructional model developed in this study also aligns with constructivist perspectives on learning. Dewey's concept of experiential learning suggests that knowledge is constructed through active engagement with meaningful experiences. Similarly, the problem-oriented classroom procedures used in this study required learners to interact with authentic communicative challenges rather than reproduce memorized language patterns. Therefore, the findings reinforce Dewey's argument that learning becomes more effective when learners actively participate in problem-solving processes.

The results additionally support Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of social interaction as a mechanism for cognitive development. Group discussions, collaborative tasks, and decision-making activities created opportunities for peer-supported learning, allowing students to construct knowledge collectively. This suggests that problem-based activities may contribute not only to language acquisition but also to higher-order cognitive development.

Another significant finding concerns the exercise system developed within the study. Unlike traditional drill-oriented language practice, the proposed exercise framework encouraged learners

to analyze situations, generate solutions, and reflect on their own learning processes. These findings correspond with Bruner's discovery learning principles, which emphasize learner autonomy and active knowledge construction.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that integrating PBL elements changes the traditional classroom structure. The teacher's role shifts from direct knowledge transmission toward facilitation and guidance, while learners assume more responsibility for communication and decision-making processes. This transformation reflects contemporary learner-centered approaches in English language teaching.

Despite these positive findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study primarily focused on methodological development rather than large-scale empirical measurement. Second, classroom implementation was limited to selected instructional contexts, which may restrict broader generalization. Finally, the qualitative nature of the research emphasizes interpretative understanding rather than statistical verification.

Overall, the findings suggest that Problem-Based Learning can function as an effective pedagogical framework for integrating communicative, cognitive, and collaborative dimensions of language learning. The proposed model therefore contributes to the ongoing development of learner-centered practices in English language education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the integration of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) elements into English language teaching and developed a methodological framework aimed at enhancing learners' communicative competence. The findings indicate that problem-oriented instruction creates more meaningful learning environments where learners actively participate in communication, collaboration, and decision-making processes.

The study demonstrated that a structured six-stage lesson model can provide a systematic way of implementing problem-based instruction in language classrooms. Additionally, the development of a problem-based exercise system contributed to organizing learning activities around authentic communication rather than isolated language practice. These instructional components collectively support learner engagement, independent thinking, and communicative interaction.

The findings further suggest that integrating problem situations into classroom practice positively influences learner participation and encourages more active use of language. The proposed framework not only addresses communicative goals but also contributes to the development of higher-order cognitive skills, including problem-solving, reflection, and critical thinking.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study emphasizes the importance of shifting from teacher-centered instruction toward learner-centered and interaction-oriented approaches. In this context, the teacher functions primarily as a facilitator who guides learners through communicative problem-solving processes.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations related to its qualitative methodological orientation and limited implementation context. Therefore, future studies may expand the proposed framework through larger empirical investigations, comparative studies, or quantitative measurement of communicative outcomes.

Overall, the study confirms that Problem-Based Learning can serve as an effective pedagogical framework for English language teaching by integrating communicative, cognitive, and collaborative dimensions of language learning into a unified instructional model.

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