Research Article

Linking Classroom to Real-World Practices: Problem-Based Learning in Microteaching for EFL Teaching Practicum Preparation

*1Willy Prasetya, 1Anandayu Suri Ardini

1Universitas Islam Indonesia, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: willy.prasetya@uii.ac.id

How to cite this article: Prasetya, W. & Ardini, A. S. (2023). Linking classroom to real-world practices: Problem-based learning in microteaching for EFL teaching practicum preparation. *International Journal of Education, Language, and Religion, 5(1),* 89-98. doi: https://doi.org/10.35308/ijelr.v5i1.7237

Abstract

Although Problem-Based Learning has been frequently explored in higher education, little is known about how it is implemented in English teaching practicum preparation context. To fill this practical gap, this article discusses the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in a microteaching class to prepare EFL pre-service teachers for teaching practicum in schools with various conditions. This article elaborates how students critically identified and found solution to the authentic problems posed at the beginning of every practicum cycle. This problem-solving process not only developed pre-service teachers' critical thinking but also raised their awareness of the importance of being an adaptive teacher.

Keywords

Problem-Based Learning; microteaching; EFL; teacher education; teaching practicum

Introduction

Microteaching is an organized teaching practice that focuses on specific teaching skills under controlled conditions (Reddy, 2019). Initiated by Allen (1967) as a diagnostic tool for teacher intern programs, microteaching has evolved into an inseparable part of nowadays teacher education. By involving a small group of students in relatively short time, microteaching allows pre-service teachers to identify, analyze, and apply various pedagogical strategies to develop their teaching competencies (Onwuagboke & Nzeako, 2017).

89

However, as COVID-19 has spread across the globe rapidly, everyone must stop all in-person activities to prevent the spread of the virus. As a result, physical activities are migrated to online platforms, including education. This sudden change has caused all instructional planning and teaching no longer conducted face-to-face, and this is proven to be a real challenge for many teachers (Moorhouse, 2020) as well as universities in preparing prospective teachers (Hill, Rosehart, St. Helene, & Sadhra, 2020).The same challenge is also experienced by teacher educators in Indonesia. The sudden shift from in-person teaching to online instruction has created a confusion in how to prepare pre-service teachers for their teaching practices, particularly in microteaching as a compulsory course before students conduct their teaching practices at school. Gosselin (2009) has underlined that the absence of explicit guidelines for online teaching may result in teachers' hesitation in deciding what and how to teach. Even teachers who rated themselves having high efficacy in face-to-face teaching may still be shocked with this completely different teaching condition.

While much effort to deal with the abovementioned challenges focused on the use of technological tools (Bodis, Reed, & Kharchenko, 2020; Helda & Zaim, 2021; Mahpudoh, Umamah, & Suhartoyo, 2021; Roza, 2021; Sihotang, 2021), implementation of instructional innovation was left underresearched. Therefore, the present article aimed at describing the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a way of preparing pre-service teachers taking a microteaching course to deal with various teaching conditions during the pandemic.

The context of this article was a microteaching course in an English teacher education program at a private university in Indonesia. PBL was implemented not only as a teaching approach but also as a basis for instructional design for the course. Learning activities and assessment of the course were prepared by referring to Hmelo-Silver's (2004) PBL cycle as the main consideration.

Method

Numerous studies on microteaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bodis, Reed, & Kharchenko, 2020; Helda & Zaim, 2021; Mahpudoh, Umamah, & Suhartoyo, 2021; Roza, 2021; Sihotang, 2021) have been conducted, but they mainly focused on the incorporation of various online platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom. To fill this gap, the present article explores the way Problem-Based Learning (PBL) was implemented in a course called Reflective Peer Microteaching (RPM) during the pandemic. The problem-based learning implementation being described was part of a research project that we conducted in an English language education department at a private university in Indonesia by involving three RPM classes, each of which consisted of 18 pre-service teachers preparing for their teaching practicum.

After more than a year of online teaching, various schools and universities have begun to find a more suitable pattern for carrying out teaching and learning activities. However, many others are still struggling with the same problems, namely the lack of devices and network, the lack of relevant teaching materials, and the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of students (la Velle et al., 2020). For that reason, preparing pre-service teachers for teaching practicum in different schools with different levels of support and diverse student socio-economic backgrounds is

90

challenging. To address the challenge, we considered the implementation of PBL in the RPM course. Two main principles underlying the selection of PBL as an innovation for RPM courses were the lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993) and problem-posing education (Freire, 1970).

According to Aoki (1993), the learning process refers to two types of curricula, namely curriculum-as-plan and lived curriculum. Curriculum-as-plan contains standards set by policy makers at the macro level, and often this type of curriculum is general in nature. Meanwhile, the lived curriculum is a teaching and learning process that is centered on the experience of students with all their respective characteristics, backgrounds, interests, and perspectives. In the context of teacher education, PBL is an approach based on the principle of a lived curriculum (Kerr, 2016), in which students get an authentic learning experience that can be adapted to their respective backgrounds and interests.

PBL is also in line with the philosophy of problem-posing education that puts forward critical thinking and dialogue in which the learning process occurs not from teacher to student but from students together with the teacher (Freire, 1970). In PBL, the teacher acts as a facilitator who will work together with students to solve the problems raised. That way, the teacher is no longer the only source of knowledge in the classroom, because students have the freedom to dialogue, criticize, and express their thoughts.The implementation of PBL in the RPM course was based on the Problem-Based Learning Cycle by Hmelo-Silver (2004).
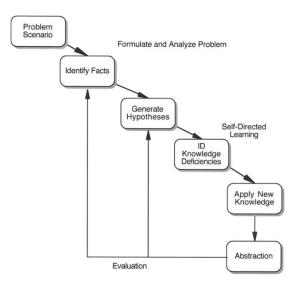

Figure 1. Hmelo-Silver's (2004) PBL Cycle

We contextualized the PBL cycle for our microteaching course into the following.
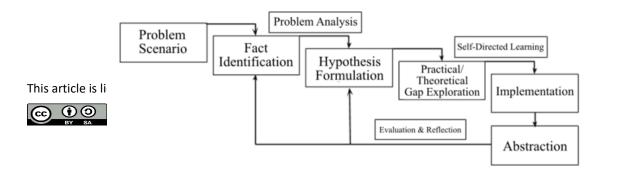
91

Figure 2.The Adaptation of Hmelo-Silver's (2004) PBL Cycle for RPM

Theoretical/practical gap exploration was included instead of identifying only knowledge deficiencies to help students focus on deficiencies in both theories and practices. This was necessary because students had to be able to connect what they had learned in class with what they were going to encounter in the real world. In addition, reflection was added so that students could retrospectively examine themselves as teachers while it was also necessary part in the RPM course. It was also intended that students had the opportunity to explore the relevance of the learning experiences they had experienced with real life more deeply and comprehensively.

Research shows that PBL can improve students' critical thinking skills because it allows them to find solutions to their problems (Duran & Dokme, 2016; Tiwari, Lai, So, Yuen, 2016). However, the implementation of Problem Based Learning in microteaching is still scarce. Chien (2020) had conducted a study on the implementation of PBL in the elementary school English teacher training program in Taiwan and its influence on the participants'' pedagogical content knowledge. However, Chien's study was not conducted in the pandemic situation, so the problems in the implementation of PBL was most likely to be different from what is currently happening. The second limitation was that Chien's study focused on pedagogical content knowledge, while for distance teaching practices during the pandemic teacher candidates had to also innovate to increase access, participation, and engagement (Scull et al., 2020).

Results
In the context of this article, the pre-service teachers were required to take the Reflective Peer Microteaching course before they conduct their teaching practicum. Previously, the course was conducted in three cycles, namely teaching using digital technology, teaching without digital technology, and offline classroom management. However, this arrangement was no longer relevant during the current pandemic because the pre-service teachers had to be able to quickly adapt to the demands of online learning. Thus, the design of the RPM course cycles was adjusted into the following.
1. Synchronous online teaching with adequate technological support (videoconferencing)
2. Asynchronous online teaching with adequate technological support (assignments with video materials)
3. Synchronous online teaching with inadequate technology support (teaching using chat)

Even when the design and practicum cycles were turned into fully online schemes, the problem was not necessarily resolved. Distance learning tended to make students isolated and find it difficult to keep up with the lessons. In many cases, lack of internet connection resulted in difficulties in accessing materials. Lack of engagement with teachers made students feel

92

disconnected with the class, and without the sense of attachment, student involvement in the class declined. The highly diverse conditions of schools and students forced the pre-service teachers to be able to choose appropriate online teaching techniques.

Problem Scenario

At the beginning of each microteaching cycle, an in-service teacher who had experienced online teaching during the pandemic was invited to share experiences in dealing with issues in online teaching. This served as the first step of the PBL cycle. In this step, the pre-service teachers directly learned the real-life problems in online learning. This step served as an authentic learning experience for them.For Cycle 1, the in-service teacher being invited came from a school with adequate facilities and highly motivated students. Most of her lessons were conducted synchronously using videoconferencing services. For Cycle 2, the teacher taught in a school with students having the moderate level of motivation. The teacher implemented both the synchronous and asynchronous learning in her class. For the last cycle, a teacher from a school with most students coming from low-economy families was invited to share her experience in teaching only using instant messaging application along with Google Classroom.

Fact Identification, Hypothesis Formulation, and Gap Exploration

After examining the problems explained by each teacher, the pre-service teachers had a small-group discussion to identify facts related to the problems by separating them from opinions or assumptions. Then, each group formulated a hypothesis based on each fact that they had identified. The hypothesis served as the initial assumption about the cause of the problem. With the hypothesis, the pre-service teachers worked individually to explore theoretical and empirical literature to fill the gap in the problem. To do so, the pre-service teachers selected the appropriate method, teaching strategy, materials, and media. They worked independently in designing their teaching plan, and we provided assistance by giving consultation whenever they had any difficulties. The following is an example from a pre-service teacher working on Cycle 1.

Table 1. Example of A Pre-Service Teacher's Work

Fact	Hypothesis	What to Do to Fill the Gap
Some students did not obey instructions from the teacher during videoconference.	The students did not obey the teacher because there was no rules and reward/punishment for student behavior.	Make a clear rule and procedure during synchronous online teaching: students have to turn on their camera, or if there is no sign from the students after 3 times being called they are considered absent. Try to project a virtual social presence by asking them how their day is going, how they are feeling.

Implementation

In this step, the pre-service teachers implemented their planning by conducting a teaching practice (microteaching) individually. It was intended that they could experience directly the application of the solutions they formulated.In the first cycle, the pre-service teachers utilized zoom video conference and other interactive applications, such as Quizziz, Mentimeter, Padlet,

93

etc. to conduct the lesson. They also implemented different teaching methods such as PPP, task-based learning, project-based learning or project-based learning. The decision to use the tools and to implement the methods above was based on their observation on the problem explained by the first teacher. They designed a lesson that is suitable for quite highly motivated students who were well supported with good facilities at home and at school.
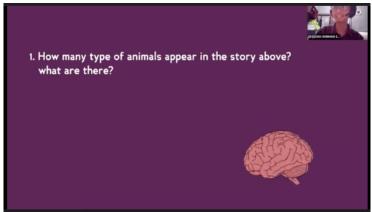

Figure 3. Teaching using Videoconference

The microteaching of the next cycle was quite different from the first one. The pre-service teachers made a teaching video to support the asynchronous teaching activities that they designed. Based on the problem orientation in cycle 2, they found out that teachers have to be well prepared when teaching in a school with quite highly motivated students, but unfortunately were not equipped with adequate devices and internet quota.In this kind of situation, teaching via video conference is not supposed to be the only option. As teacher should be considerate with the choice of application and device, creating a teaching video became a new solution. The pre-service teachers can still feel the presence of the teacher, but it will not spend too much of their internet quota since the learning can be conducted asynchronously.
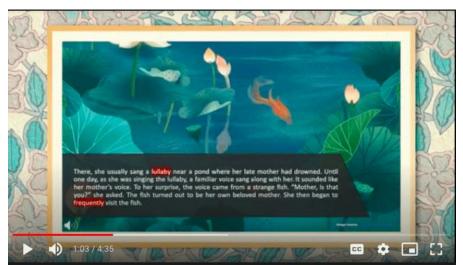

Figure 4. Screenshot of a learning materials on YouTube Made by a Pre-Service Teacher

Lastly, in the third cycle the pre-service teachers conducted a fully asynchronous teaching practicum. They utilized group chat application such as Whatsapp or Telegram as the main platform of communication. The pre-service teachers learned how to show their social presence by sending greetings, asking students condition, offering helps and being available for consultation through the chat group. Besides, they also had to simplify the material and exercises since they would not be able to give oral explanation to students. Even though the last cycle was quite challenging, most of the pre-service teachers could do it well.

Figure 5. Teaching Practice using Instant Messaging App

The cycle that was applied in the RPM course undergoes a slight modification by adding reflections at the final stage. At the abstraction stage, students give each other peer reviews and reflect to review the progress they have made. It is intended that students have the opportunity to explore the relevance of the learning experiences they have experienced with real life more deeply and comprehensively. The cycle was applied three times throughout the semester. Thus, students have solved three different online learning problems. So far, three major problems that have been identified are the lack of student involvement, low student motivation, and lack of social interaction between students and teachers.

Reflection
From the reflection that the pre-service teachers have written, it is figured out that they experienced some moment of revelation and most of it was about the importance of being an adaptive teacher. Pre-service teachers also acknowledge that inviting real teachers from different schools did help them to understand the current situation more accurately. It can be inferred that providing real problem to be studied in class will help teacher candidates to raise their awareness and stimulate their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. One of the teacher candidates even took further action by applying an internship where she had opportunity to facilitate teachers with trainings and professional development.

Gaining new insights from a course is one of the precious things that can motivate me to pay attention to the class. I probably would say that the sharing sessions we had with English teachers were interesting enough because their statements can be taken as the reality of teachers usually face. Starting from that point I questioned myself, how about other teachers? Do they face the same problems or maybe more complex than they do? What solutions do they offer to overcome the problems? I realized that just by wondering myself without taking further actions won't lead me anywhere, so from these interesting discoveries I challenge myself to go beyond; by taking an internship in a division where I hold events both offline and online targeting teachers. Although I'm still doing my internship, I find interesting discoveries and see the reality with my own eyes. I really appreciate the interesting discoveries that I got from this class because of it I got a chance to intern at a company that specialized in education.
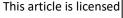
Figure 6. A pre-service teacher's reflective essay

Furthermore, teacher candidates also found it useful to conduct teaching simulation in different circumstances as it trained them to be more adaptive and creative. This skill will later be used in their teaching internship program and will be developed further once they become a real teacher. Students realized that teacher is not a monotonous profession because it requires a lot of adjustment and critical thinking skill; and therefore, a teacher profession should not be taken for granted. This reflection shows that teacher candidates in this class were not self-centered by only focusing on their individual progress and the techniques and tools that they should use in class. They were able to reflect on a wider scope and increase their awareness that a teacher is a lifetime learner.

> I learned that each school and teacher has to deal with a situation unique to their own. Only through determination and perseverance can the hardships that come with their situation be overcome. I also learned that within those hardships there are always going to be challenges that must be dealt with, and it is up to the teacher and school committee to choose the best options in dealing with them. In the current state of the world, those challenges practically doubled in number and tripled in how much pressure it can bring to teachers. Throughout this course, I learned how to manage classes in different circumstances; dealing with school with adequate as well as inadequate technologies, and how to teach in a synchronous and asynchronous class. (2) To be honest, I quite liked the simulations where we had to play the role of teacher in various settings. They were undoubtedly new and challenging to me personally. Looking back at it, I noticed there were so many components of my performance that could have been improved if only I immersed myself more in each scenario.

Figure 7. A pre-service teacher's reflective essay

However, what matters most was not only the teacher candidates' ability to analyze problem and provide solution but also their skill to implement it in real life setting. In the reflective essay above, it was mentioned that the teacher candidate felt most challenged during the teaching simulation as it was conducted in three different contexts and settings based on the authentic problems posed at the beginning of each practicum cycle.

Conclusion

During the implementation of Problem Based Learning in Reflective Peer Microteaching course, we experienced some constraints. The first one is that students are still not used to exploring problems and thinking critically to find the most appropriate solution. As a solution, the lecturers did scaffolding and intensive assistance during the preparation of the lesson plan. This, however, required an extra meeting schedule with students outside the class schedule that was already written in the lesson plan. The second constraints is that the first teacher who was presented in the second sharing session (topic: asynchronous learning) gave material that was not in accordance with the topic. To solve this problem, the lecturers immediately contact other teachers from different schools, who can provide more suitable material.

After conducting the course for one semester and found some interesting findings, several recommendations can be given to the next lecturers or researchers.

96

- The department should consider to revise curriculum to add psychology elements of learning in all pedagogical courses
- The department should make alignment of the pedagogical course from the beginning until the end for students to have a fundamental knowledge and strong pedagogic ability
- The department should provide the opportunity for pre-service teachers to interact with teachers, students, or other parties directly involved in the education process.

The outputs of this innovation will contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on PBL in the context of teacher education which has so far not been widely studied. Practically, the output of the proposed innovation will provide new perspectives for education practitioners and policy makers in order to provide a more comprehensive consideration regarding the importance of authentic learning experiences and the background and characteristics of students in the teaching and learning process.

Acknowledgement

Author Contribution and Competing Interest

There is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

References

Allen, D. W. (1967). Micro-Teaching, A Description. California: Stanford University Press.

Aoki, T. (1993). Legitimating lived curriculum: Towards a curricular landscape of multiplicity. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 8*(3), 255–268.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological review*, *84*(2), 191.

Bodis, A., Reed, M., & Kharchenko, Y. (2020). Microteaching in isolation: Fostering autonomy and learner engagement through VoiceThread. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, *2*(3), 1-12.

Chien, C. W. (2020). Influence of problem-based learning (PBL) on Taiwanese elementary school pre-service English teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. *Education 3-13*, *48*(5), 550–564. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.1633373

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Seabury Press.

Gosselin, K. P. (2009). *Development and psychometric exploration of the online teaching self-efficacy scale* (Doctoral dissertation, Texas Tech University).

Helda, T., & Zaim, M. (2021, April). Effectiveness of the zoom meeting applications in micro teaching lectures in the pandemictime covid-19. In *English Language and Literature International Conference (ELLiC) Proceedings* (Vol. 4, pp. 128-135).

Hill, C., Rosehart, P., St. Helene, J., & Sadhra, S. (2020). What kind of educator does the world need today? Reimagining teacher education in post-pandemic Canada. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4), 565–575. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1797439

Hmelo-Silver, C.E. (2004). Problem-Based Learning: What and How Do Students Learn? *Educational Psychology Review, 16*, 235-266.

Kerr, J. (2016). Exploring theoretical frameworks of Problem Based Learning through Aoki's Curriculum-as-Plan and Curriculum-as-Lived. In M. Filipenko and J. Naslund (Eds.), *Problem-Based Learning in teacher education* (pp. 11-22). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

la Velle, L., Newman, S., Montgomery, C., & Hyatt, D. (2020). Initial teacher education in England and the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4), 596–608. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1803051

Mahpudoh, U., Umamah, A. & Suhartoyo (2021). EFL pre-service teachers perceptions and experiences of online teaching practice. *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, dan Pembelajaran*, *16*(7), 1-9.

Moorhouse, B. L. (2020). Adaptations to a face-to-face initial teacher education course 'forced' online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4), 609-611. DOI: 10.1080/02607476.2020.1755205

Onwuagboke, B. B. C., Osuala, R. C., & Nzeako, R. C. (2017). The impact of microteaching in developing teaching skills among pre-service teachers in Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri, Nigeria. *African Research Review*, *11*(2), 237-250. DOI : http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrev.v11i2.18

Reddy, K. R. (2019). Teaching how to teach: microteaching (a way to build up teaching skills). *Journal of Gandaki Medical College-Nepal*, *12*(1), 65-71.

Roza, L. (2021). *Pengembangan Media Pembelajaran Pemahaman Sintak Model Pembelajaran Abad 21 Berbasis Mobile Pada Matakuliah Microteaching* (Doctoral dissertation, STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat).

Scull, J., Phillips, M., Sharma, U., & Garnier, K. (2020). Innovations in teacher education at the time of COVID19: an Australian perspective. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *46*(4), 497–506. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1802701