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PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

English plays a dominant role as the primary language of international education, scientific research, tourism, and global trade, making it an essential skill for personal and professional development. Therefore, for university students, developing academic literacy is important not only in their first languages but also in English [4]. Moreover, proficiency in English enables individuals to communicate across cultural boundaries, participate in the global community, and remain competitive in the modern job market. Consequently, learning English is no longer simply an academic requirement but a vital tool for success in an interconnected world.

The primary aim of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is to equip learners with the language skills and communicative abilities required for their academic and professional fields. ESP focuses on specialized vocabulary, professional communication, and authentic tasks that reflect real-life situations. To achieve these objectives effectively, ESP increasingly incorporates problem-solving activities that engage students in meaningful and practical learning experiences. Through collaborative tasks, case studies, and real-world scenarios, learners develop not only professional communicative competence but also essential twenty-first-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity.

Problem-based learning (PBL) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses reshapes language activities by engaging learners as active problem-solvers. Working collaboratively in small groups, students address complex, real-life issues related to their fields of study while simultaneously enhancing critical thinking skills, specialized vocabulary, and communicative competence.

Among the most significant advantages of PBL in ESP courses, researchers [2, 3, 4] identify the following:

1. *Development of professional communicative competence*: PBL enables students to practice English in authentic, profession-oriented situations related to their fields of study. Through discussions, presentations, negotiations, and collaborative tasks, learners acquire specialized vocabulary and improve their ability to communicate effectively in professional contexts [4].

2. *Enhancement of critical thinking skills*: PBL encourages learners to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and propose solutions to complex problems [2, 4].

3. *Promotion of student-centered learning*: ESP prioritizes learner autonomy and individual learning needs. In PBL environments, students take responsibility for their own learning by identifying knowledge gaps, seeking relevant information, and applying it to solve real-world problems [2, 3, 4].

4. *Development of problem-solving abilities, collaborative teamwork, and independent learning skills*: PBL is typically organized around group work, where students cooperate to solve tasks and achieve shared goals. This interaction improves communication, interpersonal

skills, and the ability to work effectively in teams, which are essential competencies in modern professional settings [3, 4].

5. *Encouragement of creativity and flexible thinking*: Well-designed problems allow for multiple possible solutions. This aspect of PBL stimulates creativity and encourages students to approach challenges from different perspectives [4].

6. *Increased motivation and engagement*: Students are more motivated when learning activities are relevant, challenging, and interactive [4].

7. *Emphasis on real-world relevance and authentic tasks*: PBL tasks reflect practical situations that students are likely to encounter in their professional lives, enhancing the applicability of learning [3].

8. *Teachers act as facilitators throughout the learning process*: In PBL, teachers guide, support, and supervise rather than directly instruct, allowing students to take ownership of their learning [2].

C. Mariotti [4] identifies several essential components of problem-solving activities:

- Problem engagement – learners work with complex, real-life problems that stimulate active participation and motivation.
- Self-directed learning requires learners to recognize their learning gaps and independently seek and utilize information to address them.

Among the most effective problem-solving activities in ESP instruction are simulations (e.g., a business fair), designing research projects (e.g., presenting marketing strategies), writing reports, participating in negotiations for business agreements, handling commercial disputes, participating in job interviews, coordinating business or scientific conferences, showcasing a product or service, and preparing SWOT analyses. [1]. Additionally, various debates can be organized on relevant topics, such as the role of AI and new technologies in the labor market, globalization in business, digital etiquette and business ethics, or stress in the workplace.

In conclusion, ESP enables learners to communicate effectively and confidently in their future careers. In addition to improving linguistic competence, ESP promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural communication skills, preparing students to function successfully in an increasingly globalized and professional environment. By completing problem-solving tasks, students become more confident and capable of using English in professional contexts. Working collaboratively to analyze problems, exchange ideas, and propose solutions allows learners to develop essential professional skills while simultaneously preparing for the challenges of the global workplace.

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