

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

21st-century education demands a transformation of teaching approaches to equip students with skills relevant to global challenges. One widely recognized approach is Problem-Based Learning (PBL), a problem-centered instructional model that fosters critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication skills (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Initially introduced at McMaster University in the 1960s within the context of medical education (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980), PBL has since been adopted across various educational domains, including English Language Education (Tan, 2003).

In the context of English Language Education (ELE), PBL offers an approach that integrates language use in authentic situations, helping students develop more effective and meaningful communication skills. PBL encourages students to use language as a tool for solving real-world problems rather than merely mastering linguistic structures (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Consequently, this approach aligns well with the 21st-century skills expected of modern learners.

Among various instructional models, PBL occupies a distinctive position as a learner-centered, inquiry-based approach that contrasts with traditional teacher-centered methods. Unlike the Grammar Translation Method, which emphasizes linguistic accuracy through rote memorization and translation exercises, or the Audio-Lingual Method that relies on drills and repetition, PBL focuses on authentic, meaningful problem scenarios that stimulate higher-order thinking. Compared to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which promotes interaction for fluency, PBL extends this by embedding language use in complex, real-world problems that require collaboration, critical analysis, and self-directed learning. As such, PBL represents a transformative instructional model that aligns with constructivist learning theories, supporting students in developing the 21st-century skills needed for global communication and problem-solving (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Richards, 2015).

However, the process of adopting and institutionalizing PBL in English language teaching shows considerable variation across educational contexts.

Savery (2006) revealed that the success of PBL implementation is highly dependent on institutional readiness, teacher competence, and curriculum flexibility. Leary and Walker (2018) also emphasized the importance of the teacher's role as a learning facilitator and the need for well-designed activities that promote collaborative interaction and authentic language use. As paradigms in English language teaching have evolved from Grammar Translation Method to Communicative Language Teaching, and now to literacy-based and 21st-century competence-based approaches the adaptation of PBL in diverse teaching practices has undergone dynamic changes (Richards, 2015).

Technological advancements in the digital era have further influenced the implementation and transformation of PBL in English language teaching. The use of online learning platforms, mobile devices, interactive media, and artificial intelligence has opened new possibilities for creating more flexible, collaborative, and personalized PBL experiences (Hung, 2011). Nonetheless, Lehtinen et al. (1999) cautioned that integrating technology into PBL entails several challenges, such as the digital divide, teachers' pedagogical readiness, and the need for assessment models aligned with PBL characteristics.

Based on the literature review conducted, no comprehensive study has been found that systematically maps the historical development of PBL in English language teaching, particularly in relation to the influence of global educational trends and technological innovations. Therefore, this study aims to trace the process of adopting and institutionalizing PBL in English language teaching over time, identify the evolution of teaching methods and classroom practices, and analyze the impact of educational trends and technology on the transformation of PBL. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of a more adaptive, relevant, and responsive PBL model for contemporary English language education.

To support these objectives, the following chapter will present a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on the historical development of PBL, its pedagogical applications in English Language Education, and the influence of emerging educational trends and technologies.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Based on the background outlined above, the research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How has the process of adopting and institutionalizing PBL in English language education evolved over time?
2. How have teaching methods and classroom practices evolved in the implementation of PBL in English language education across different time periods?
3. How have educational trends and technological innovations influenced the development and transformation of PBL in English language education over time?

## **1.3 Purposes of The Study**

This study purposes to:

1. Trace the process of adopting and institutionalizing PBL in English language education across various contexts and time periods.
2. Identify the evolution of teaching methods and classroom practices in the implementation of PBL in English language education.
3. Analyze the influence of educational trends and technological innovations on the development and transformation of PBL in English language education.

## **1.4 Significance of The Study**

This study is significant both theoretically and practically in the context of English Language Education (ELE) and instructional innovation. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on learner-centered approaches by offering a comprehensive historical and pedagogical analysis of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in ELE. It traces how PBL has evolved from its early integration into language education to its expansion and transformation in response to educational policies and technological advances. By examining the development of PBL across three decades, this study provides a chronological and conceptual framework that can guide future inquiries into inquiry-based instruction and curriculum design in language learning contexts.

Practically, the study offers valuable insights for English language educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers particularly in Indonesia who seek to implement or strengthen PBL in response to current demands for 21st-century competencies and active learning. With national reforms such as *Kurikulum 2013* and *Kurikulum Merdeka* encouraging more flexible, student-centered teaching models, this research provides evidence-based considerations for aligning PBL with institutional goals and classroom realities. It also supports teacher education programs by informing the preparation of future English teachers to apply PBL methods that are contextually appropriate, pedagogically sound, and technologically responsive.

### **1.5 Research Scope**

This study is a conceptual and historical investigation into the development of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) within the field of English Language Education (ELE). The scope of the research is delimited in several ways. First, it focuses exclusively on the evolution of PBL as an instructional approach in ELE from 1990 to 2025, divided into three key periods: 1990–2010 (initial emergence and adaptation), 2011–2020 (expansion and institutionalization), and 2021–2025 (innovation and technological transformation). Each period is examined in terms of its pedagogical trends, curricular shifts, and broader educational contexts that influenced the use of PBL in language teaching.

Second, this study limits its analysis to the context of formal education, with particular attention to secondary and tertiary English language instruction. While global perspectives are considered, the study places emphasis on the Indonesian context, highlighting how PBL has been adopted, adapted, and institutionalized in Indonesian English language education policy and practice.

Third, as a library research, this study relies solely on document analysis and review of relevant literature, including journal articles, books, policy papers, and curriculum documents. It does not involve fieldwork, empirical data collection, or classroom-based observations. Therefore, the study does not aim to measure the effectiveness of PBL implementation or assess learning outcomes, but rather to trace the historical development, pedagogical foundations, and evolving applications of PBL in ELE over time.



## 1.6 State of the Arts

The application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in English language teaching (ELT) has evolved significantly over time, with conceptual roots traceable to early 20th-century progressive education movements that emphasized experiential and student-centered learning (Dewey, 1938). This philosophical foundation laid the groundwork for learner autonomy, reflective thinking, and authentic problem-solving in education.

The formal development of PBL as an instructional model began in the late 1960s at McMaster University in Canada, where Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) designed it to foster independent learning, clinical reasoning, and collaborative problem-solving in medical education. During the 1980s and 1990s, PBL gained prominence across disciplines including health professions, engineering, and business education highlighting its flexibility as a learner-centered, inquiry-driven approach (Boud & Feletti, 1997).

In the context of English Language Teaching, interest in PBL grew from the 1990s onward alongside broader pedagogical shifts from structuralist and behaviorist methods to communicative and task-based approaches that emphasize meaningful, authentic language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Willis & Willis, 2007). Tan (2003) and Nunan (2004) documented early integrations of PBL principles in ELT classrooms, demonstrating benefits for learner engagement, communicative competence, and critical thinking.

In the 21st century (2000–2024), research on PBL in ELT has expanded, reflecting technological change and global education reforms prioritizing 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; OECD, 2019). Hung (2011) highlighted the role of technology in supporting PBL, particularly in online and blended learning environments. Leary and Walker (2018) emphasized the importance of teacher facilitation and carefully designed collaborative activities. Recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews confirm the effectiveness of PBL in improving language learning outcomes across diverse contexts (Alghamdy, 2023; Elahe & Alireza, 2023).

However, existing studies remain fragmented, often limited to descriptive case studies or small-scale interventions in specific classrooms or regions. There is still a lack of comprehensive, systematic research that maps the historical development of PBL in English language teaching over the entire period from 1900 to 2024, or that critically examines the influence of global educational trends and technological innovations on its pedagogical evolution.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by conducting a systematic historical review spanning over a century of PBL's development in English Language Education. It aims to analyze how PBL has been adopted and institutionalized over time, how teaching methods and classroom practices have evolved, and how global trends and technological advances have transformed PBL as an instructional approach for developing 21st-century competencies in language learners.

