

IMPLEMENTING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING CALLED AS “BEST OF BOTH WORLDS PROJECT (BBWP)” IN ENGLISH SYLLABUS

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ABSTRACT

Previous researches have shown that project – based learning has contributed positive impact on students’ learning experience. However, there is a lack of in-depth studies to explore on the process of conducting project-based learning in language classroom specifically in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. This research reports on a case study conducted at an Entrepreneurial University in Kelantan. The research is based on the implementation of drama and entrepreneurial project that was assigned to the students as a part of their assessment for an English course. The study aimed to find out whether the Project – Based Learning could stimulate undergraduates’ language skills and entrepreneurial attributes. It also aimed to investigate on the perceptions of the undergraduates towards the project. This project was carried out in one semester starting from February 2014 until May 2014. A number of 30 participants were selected for this research and they were asked to reflect and write about their experience in preparing for the drama presentation as well as organizing a booth for the project. The data for this research derived from reflective journals and questionnaire (closed and open-ended questions) therefore this research is considered as mixed-method research. The findings inferred that the Project-Based Learning receives positive acceptance from the students as majority of the students claimed that the project helped to build up their confidence level when communicating in English during the discussion, presentation and performance as well as improving their teamwork skills. However, when the students were asked about the challenges that they have faced in the process of undertaking the project, they claimed that they had problems to manage the group members and to find suppliers. This research also suggests few recommendations and suggestions for improvement. Based on the findings from this study, it is suggested that Project-Based Learning needs to be implemented in tertiary level of education in all the universities in Malaysia.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning, language skills, entrepreneurial attributes, undergraduates, reflective journals

INTRODUCTION:

There is a need in global economy for knowledge and technology due to which higher education is being viewed as central to national strategies to secure shares in the Global Human Resource Market by producing valuable human capital to support the development of the nation. According to UNESCO (2012) the contribution of universities towards economic development can be observed in three areas: (i) producing and accumulating human capital; (ii) generating, disseminating, and applying knowledge; and (iii) innovating and inventing new information and technology.

According to UNESCO (2012) annually, the amount of graduates from universities around Malaysia to fulfil the current job market needs locally and internationally is higher compared to the employment rate as they are unable to secure job. The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 reported that employers have identified that the most common problem with fresh graduates is their poor command in English. A research conducted by Noor Azina (2011) supported the findings and added that good grades did not guarantee employment for graduates if they did not possess a good command over English and other soft skills.

In addressing this issue, the Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), has taken an initiative to implement project based learning in second language (L2) classrooms. Stein (1995) mentioned that project-based learning helps to place the learners in a situation which requires authentic use of language in order to communicate. This is because, when the learners work in pairs or teams, they need skills to plan, organize, negotiate and arrive at consensus about the project. Hence, this project, known as “Best of Both Worlds Project (BBWP)” combines pedagogical methods such as project-based learning, active pedagogy and traditional teaching. This project is based on drama and entrepreneurial activities which aims to stimulate entrepreneurial attributes and enhance language skills among undergraduates.

OBJECTIVES:

This research deals with the application of Project-Based Learning method by outlining its essence and effect from the perspectives of the students. This research thoroughly describes the Project-Based Learning environment, namely BBWP, which has been implemented and foster the process of learning in terms of language skills and entrepreneurial attributes. Finally, this research presents the results on undergraduates’ perceptions towards the implementation of BBWP project at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan.

METHODOLOGY:

This project was carried out in one semester starting from February 2014 until May 2014 (refer to Table 1: BBWP’s Timeline). This project used convenience sampling and students from all the campuses were randomly given a questionnaire to answer. After the researchers explained about the process of the project, a number of 30 participants volunteered (self-selecting sample) to join this research and they were asked to reflect and write about their experience throughout the project especially in preparing for the drama presentation as well as organizing a booth for the project.

Table 1: BBWP’s Timeline

Week	Date	Events
1	16/02/2014 – 20/02/2014	Briefing on activity, requirements and assessment
2	23/02/2014 – 27/02/2014	Group formation, Brainstorming and Discussion Process, Drama script writing and performance practice First draft needs to be submitted in Week 3.
3	02/03/2014 – 06/03/2014	
4	09/03/2014 – 13/03/2014	
5	16/03/2014 – 20/03/2014	Drama performances and assessment in class
6	23/03/2014 – 27/03/2014	
7	30/03/2014 – 03/04/2014	Best class drama selected

Semester Break 06/04/2014- 12/04/2014		
8	13/04/2014 – 17/04/2014	All students taking English II on the same campus work together to prepare a campus drama night. The other members of the class will be involved by fulfilling support roles such as publicity and ticketing. Students will generate income through selling tickets, merchandise/mementos, food and drinks during the nights.
9	20/04/2014 – 24/04/2014	
10	27/04/2014 – 01/05/2014	Campus Drama Nights in respective campus
11	04/05/2014 – 08/05/2014	Campus Drama Night Finale-Top three teams from each campus

The data for this research was collected from questionnaire (closed and open-ended questions) and reflective journals written by the students, therefore this research is considered as mixed-method research. The information from reflective journal is hoped to explain on why certain issue or problem occurred and how students overcome the problem. According to Creswell (2003), mixed-method approach is one in which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims and pragmatic grounds as it employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand the research problems. The data collection also involves gathering both numeric information as well as text information so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information.

The data from the questionnaire was analysed according to the frequency of the same responses from the students and the data collected from the reflective journals were read numerous times to be grouped into similar themes in order to create categories.

FINDINGS:

Based on the questionnaire, it was found that majority of the participants (80%) hoped that the English II course offered by the Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development can help them to improve their confidence and speaking skills. Only half of the participants (50%) have participated in Drama performance before they joined UMK.

When the participants were asked about their willingness to join more drama activities, 87% of them would like to have more drama activities as they believed that it helps them to be more confident in using English, they communicate better with their classmates, encourage the teamwork spirit and improve leadership skills. 13% of the students who disagree with the drama activities project stated that drama gives extra burden for the students because of the time constrain, feeling embarrassed when performing drama in front of different gender and reduce low self-esteem to perform in front of the audience.

When the participants were asked whether the BBWP helps them to enhance their entrepreneurial skills, all the participants stated that the project enhances their entrepreneurial skills in terms of management skills, communication skills, the ability to work both as part of a team and individually and able to plan, coordinate and organise the project effectively. These data were further matched to the students’ journal entries and it was found that the students faced few challenges in conducting the project such as difficulty in purchasing raw materials and suppliers, difficulty to get cooperation from the group members and difficulty in arriving at consensus among the group members. Students also requested for marks to be given in relation to their effort preparing for the programme especially regarding the entrepreneurial activity.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, this project can be considered as a success considering that the objective of the project had been achieved as intended. However, there are several aspects that could be improved to enhance the students’ language learning experience. This research applied some of the activities proposed by Brown (2004) in the process of improving some particular aspects of speaking such as drilling to improve the students’ comprehension, grammar and pronunciation aspect and role-play to improve the students’

comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and pronunciation aspect.

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“Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Education Malaysia.”

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WEEK	DATE	EVENT
1	10/02/2014 - 20/02/2014	Final exam preparation
2	23/02/2014 - 28/02/2014	
3	03/03/2014 - 08/03/2014	Group work setting and performance
4	08/03/2014 - 13/03/2014	Final exam preparation
5	14/03/2014 - 19/03/2014	
6	23/03/2014 - 28/03/2014	Group performance and assessment
7	30/03/2014 - 05/04/2014	
SEMESTER BREAK (06/04/2014 - 10/04/2014)		
8	13/04/2014 - 18/04/2014	Final exam preparation
9	20/04/2014 - 25/04/2014	Final exam preparation
10	27/04/2014 - 02/05/2014	Final exam preparation
11	04/05/2014 - 09/05/2014	Final exam preparation



