

Problem Based Learning (PBL) in Malaysian Higher Education: A Review of Research on Issues of Implementation and Learners' Experience

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Background: Since its inception about 40 years ago in a medical educational program at McMasters University, problem based learning (PBL) has evolved in many institutions worldwide and extensively applied in myriad fields regardless of geographical boundaries. Over the last ten years, many Asian countries have implemented PBL inspired by the success of this approach in western countries, especially in medical schools. Following this trend, PBL has been adopted in Malaysia within a variety of fields in higher education such as engineering, ICT and multimedia, medical and dental education, physics, and teacher education. As PBL implementation involves significant change in class management and the role of students and teachers, it is pertinent to address the issues that arise during implementation, and any viable and feasible solutions. Since PBL is relatively new to the Malaysian educational landscape, it is also important to document the ways in which learners experienced PBL in terms of their perception, motivation, awareness and opinions. Specifically, this paper aims to document implementation issues and learners' experience while undergoing PBL learning in Malaysian higher education settings, and also to suggest potential solutions arising from the implementation issues, leading to successful PBL implementation. Methodology involved identification of journal articles and conference proceedings on the implementation of PBL in Malaysian higher education and elsewhere from bibliographic databases for education and social science research, in particular that focus on implementation issues and learners' experience in PBL. These resources were selected based on specific selection criteria outline at the outset of the study. The study found that Malaysian undergraduate students experiencing PBL in their learning are positive, based on their perceptions, motivations and opinions. Scaffolding students, staff training, a supportive administration and time constraints are among general issues in PBL implementation recurring in given disciplines. The paper concludes that Malaysian undergraduate students have largely positive perceptions and opinions of, and motivation towards PBL. Strong support from staff and faculty, and students and teachers' readiness appear to be the key ingredients for successful implementation of PBL in Malaysia.

Keywords: Problem based learning; higher education; implementation; learners' experience.