

## **THE EFFECTS OF PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING ON KNOWLEDGE OF GLOBAL MARKETING AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

This study was an attempt to enhance knowledge of global marketing among MBA students at a public university in Malaysia. To do so, problem-based learning (PBL) was implemented at the experimental group with 25 participants and the conventional teaching approach at the faculty was used with the control group learners (n=24). To correctly implement PBL, the model used by Hmelo-Silver (2004) was used. The treatment lasted for 12 sessions. In general, 5 concepts in global marketing were targeted in the treatment phase of the study. The comparison of the posttest results through independent samples t-test showed that PBL can have a significant positive effect on enhancing knowledge of global marketing among the postgraduate students. This study has pedagogical implications for lecturers, curriculum designers, and content developers in the field.

*Keywords:* Master of Business Administration (MBA), problem-based learning (PBL), global marketing, cognitive learning, cooperative learning

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## **Introduction**

Practical knowledge of global marketing is a sine quo non for those in the field of Master of Business Administration (MBA) to the extent that a course with a relevant title is taught to postgraduate students in this field. The underlying theme in global marketing, as stated by Robertson (as cited in De Mooij, 2018), is 'globalization' which is referred to as "the concrete structuration of a world as a whole" (p. 7). The aim of globalization is to bring people of the world closer together, and to increase the understanding of the people around the world (Giddens, 2018). One possible approach to appreciate globalization in trade is through global marketing. Global marketing is more than selling products to people of other countries. It is, as posited by Gillespie and Riddle (2015), understanding the intricacies of peoples' ideas, culture and interests. In turn, it means that global marketing is a multifaceted issue and requires extensive research.

As global marketing is a diverse issue, it would be cumbersome to consider it and its aspects in one study. The focus on this study is on the role of technology in global marketing. Although technologies such as media can bring about change in the customers' purchase behavior, not all those in the field of MBA are well aware of the role of media in this regard. Prior research also shows that the role of technology and media in advertising and building effective *quanxi* with customers has not been appreciated to satisfactory level. This issue was also observed in case of MBA postgraduate students in a public university in the context of Malaysia. As a result, the researcher decided to measure the effects of problem-based learning (PBL) on understanding the role of media in global marketing among the students. going through prior studies, it was found that research on this issue is scant.

## **Research Questions**

The following research question was proposed for this study:

Q1: What is the effect of PBL on the knowledge of global marketing among MBA students?

## **Research Hypothesis**

In line with the research question 1, the following research hypothesis was formulated:

H<sub>01</sub>: PBL has no significant effects on MBA students' knowledge of global marketing.

## **Research Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The main idea of the research in this study is that lecture-based instruction may not be as effective as it should be (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). As a result, PBL as a more recent form of instruction with features such as cognitive thinking, collaboration was utilized in this study. As PBL is a collaborative approach to learning, it makes use of the learners' proximal zone. Considering the proximal zone as noted by Chaiklin (2003) is a necessity for optimization of the learners' learning. The main idea in the theory is that the competency of all learners is not equal. Therefore, the learners can benefit from each other's knowledge. This theory can be traced back in the works of Vygotsky (1978) who believed that development does not occur in isolation.

Another significant theory is that of higher order thinking suggested by Bloom(1956, as cited in Anderson et al., 2001) who believed that cognitive thinking while learning is a significant factor which occurs if learning follows a certain procedure, i.e., creation, evaluation, analysis, applying, understanding, and remembering. Therefore, the teaching steps in PBL should comply with the concepts in Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking.

### **Problem-Based Learning**

As an established approach to education, the first PBL courses were officially launched at McMaster University in Canada in 1969, though planning for these courses had begun about two years earlier to that (Gilkison, 2003). The focus of the PBL course at The McMaster University was to solve problems with impracticality of medical courses of the time; believing that the medical students needed more hands-on experiences of their major.

Later and due to the success of the PBL course at McMaster, the PBL approach was adopted by many universities and educational systems in various parts of the world including Australia, Brazil in South America, Switzerland in Europe, and Malaysia in Asia (Ansarian, 2015). The diversity in the use of PBL in educational systems was also observed in terms of the disciplines. Indeed, various disciplines such as engineering, nursing, and even social sciences began to enjoy PBL (Larsson, 2001).

PBL has features which distinguish it from other forms of instruction, among which the diminished role of a teacher to a tutor, the need for making decisions, authenticity and practicality of learning, and making connection between theory and practice can be highlighted (Ansarian, Adlipour, Saber, Shafiei, 2016). In PBL tutorship, the learners are in charge of the learning outcome and processes, and the tutors guide the learning process rather than explaining and decoding the learning concepts (Ansarian & Teoh, 2018).

### **Empirical Studies on Global Marketing**

Global marketing, also known as international marketing, is a significant aspect of conducting online businesses. Therefore, a number of studies have dealt with how the knowledge of global marketing can be enhanced. Janavaras (2012) suggested a web-based teaching of global marketing. He believed that web-based learning can provide the students with experiential exercises in form of blended education. Janavaras (2012) suggests project-based learning (PJBL) as a possible approach to teaching global marketing in the online atmosphere. Elsewhere, Shields (2005) suggests the use of PBL in teaching of business concepts, as PBL entails features such as cooperative learning, active learning, and suits teaching of concepts such as project management. Keegan, Green, and Fu (2005) outlined the major dimensions of global marketing. For example, the economy of the country which is subject to trade should be well studied. Some of the governments do not allow their companies to establish business with some other countries. These are the issues which are hard to teach using conventional courses and need a new look at education. Mooij (2018), on the other hand, mentions that some concepts in global marketing are cumbersome to transfer to the learners. Take for example, the idea that in global marketing traders should think globally and act locally, and yet, not be affected by their own cultural values. Analysis of such a complicated situation requires consensus from a group of people rather than individuals.

All above mentioned problems with teaching, learning, and conducting global marketing were considered by the researcher as the main gap based on which this study was conducted. The researcher hypothesized that problem-based learning could possibly solve the problems with transferring and enhancing knowledge of global marketing.

## Method

### Participants

The participants for this study were 49 MBA students at a public university in Malaysia. The participants were non-randomly selected in form of two intact classes and were distributed into a control group (n=24) and an experimental group (n=25). These participants were experiencing their first course on global marketing in the center. The participants' demographics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*The Demographics of the Participants*

Group	N	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
Experimental	25	23-33	Malay=12	Male=11
			Chinese=8	Female=14
			Indian=2	
			International=3	
Control	24	24-39	Malay=9	Male=13
			Chinese=9	Female= 11
			Indian=3	
			International=3	

### Instruments and Materials

The book 'Consumer Behavior' authored by Schiffman and Wisenblit (2018) is being taught in the center as the main course book. This book was used for the participants in the control group; however, as the participants in the experimental group were not provided with a course book (based on PBL tutorship model), they were asked to find relevant data from online and paperback sources.

### Homogeneity Test

As 5 main concepts with regard to media were targeted to be used in these study, a homogeneity test was designed using these concepts and administered to all participants prior to the study.

Based on the results of the homogeneity test, the participants were homogeneously distributed into the control group and the experimental group with no statistical difference in their scores.

### **Pretest and Posttest**

A summative test on global marketing prepared in the faculty was used with the participants both as pretest and posttest. The test consisted of 25 multiple-Choice questions and was administered both before and after the treatment in both groups.

### **Procedure**

In the first place, a consent form was given to the participants to comply with rules of ethical research. Next, the homogeneity test on knowledge of global marketing was administered to all participants based on which the participants were homogeneously distributed into two groups. The control group participants went through 12 sessions of instruction at the faculty using the conventional procedure (lecture-based) and also the book 'Consumer Behavior' authored by Schiffman and Wisenblit (2018) as the main course book.

To correctly implement PBL in the experimental group, the model designed and suggested by Hmelo-Silver (2004) was used. The participants formed 6 PBL groups. Prior to the treatment, 5 problem-based scenarios were designed and given to the participants at each group. They were asked to decode the learning problem and conduct a search to find the answer to the PBL scenarios. They shared their findings with their peers in the group and decided on one final solution to the learning problem. Having prepared their solutions, they presented the answers to the class, and the peers in the class decided how practical the answers could be. The role of the lecturer was diminished to a tutor in this approach; meaning that the lecturer was not supposed to aid unless the learning process was blocked. This procedure was used in the experimental group for an equal number of sessions with the control group participants.

Having finished the treatment, the participants in both groups received an identical posttest (25 items) on global marketing. The scores were compared to find the answer to the research question.

## Data Analysis and Results

This study began by administration of homogeneity test to the participants. In the first place, the distribution of the homogeneity scores was checked using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 2

### *Distribution of the Homogeneity Scores*

Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
Statistic	df	Sig.
.311	48	.612

As can be understood from the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Sig= .612), the scores showed normal distribution; therefore, parametric tools on Statistical Package in Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyze the data.

In the next phase of the study, item analysis was conducted for both the homogeneity test and the pretest-posttest. Using the ratios of item discrimination (ID) and item facility (IF), the researcher attempted to make sure that the tests designed for this study could be used. As the ratios acquired for all test items in all tests fell between .33 and .66, it can be assumed that the items were acceptable (Stevens, 2009).

Then, independent samples t-test was run between the posttest scores of the participants in both groups. Table 3 shows the mean score of the participants on the posttest.

Table 3

### *Posttest Mean Scores*

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	Control	24	17.41	4.11
	Experimental	25	22.62	3.93

As can be seen in Table 3, the experimental group (M=22.62) outperformed the participants in the control group (M=17.41). Table 4 shows the results of independent samples t-test.

Table 4

### *Independent Samples t-test; Control Group vs. the Experimental Group*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
							Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	.798	.358	3.82	47	.00	5.21	.570	1.04	3.31

As can be understood from Table 4, the results of the independent samples t-test ( $t(47)=3.82$ ,  $Sig=0.00$ )[1.04,3.31] shows that there is a meaningful and significant difference between the scores of the participants on the posttest of global marketing; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

## Discussion

The findings of this study were compared and contrasted with previous studies in the field. Although research on PBL and MBA is very scant, the researcher could benefit from other studies conducted with regard to PBL and other disciplines.

This study is in line with the findings of Larsson (2001) who noted that PBL is suitable for use in social sciences. To him, some disciplines deal with learning problems which do not have one certain answer. Such disciplines require a constructivist look at the issue, and PBL can provide the learners with such a look. To Hollensen (2007), global marketing is not an algorithmic process and requires decision-making. This shows that a constructivist approach to learning of global marketing should be adopted; therefore, it can be assumed that PBL is a wise choice in teaching and learning of global marketing.

Janavaras (2012) also suggested a web-based approach to learning global marketing. Indeed, most research conducted by the PBL learners is in the online atmosphere. Therefore, the findings of the current study which utilized a PBL as a possible approach to learning global marketing is in congruence with Janavaras (2012). In addition, as stated by Janavaras (2012) and Hollensen (2007) global marketing requires experiential exercises. This issue is well considered in PBL tutorship and the learners are provided with hands-on experiences of the learning content.

Elsewhere, Shields (2005) suggested the use of cooperative approaches for teaching global marketing. To him, active learning should also be a feature of the learning process. This is in line with the main premises of PBL. Cooperative learning is a feature of PBL and as the role of the tutor is diminished in the PBL process, as seen in case of this study, the students have an active role in the learning process.

### **Conclusion**

This study attempt to find an approach to enhance knowledge of global marketing among MBA students with regard to use of media. The overall view was that global marketing is a multi-dimensional concept and it is hard to consider its all aspects in traditional education. Therefore, PBL; due to its success in learning of other academic disciplines was selected and implemented in this study. The results of the study showed that PBL can be a possible approach to enhance knowledge of global marketing among the MBA students. As a result, this approach is suggested to educators in the field.

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