

CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING OF ART COMMON PRACTICES TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS VIA PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

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Abstract— The paper explores the challenges and potentials to integrate Project-Based Learning (PBL) in arts classes to enhancing the students' soft skills in Malaysian schools. One of the aims of the Malaysian Educational blueprint is to develop students' soft skills, which in turn will ensure greater outcome for them in the future. To achieve that, their soft skills can be improved using PBL approach in the art classroom. This approach is relevant to the 21st century learning concept especially in art education. In fact, many PBL experts highlight the potential of this approach in developing soft skills among the students. However, the concern now is to what extent the current art teaching practice in Malaysian schools reflects the teaching needs of the 21st century classroom and its potential to enhance soft skills among the students. An initial need analysis involving data collection through interviews, observation and document analysis was carried out. This involves the application of PBL approaches in arts classes by five excellent teachers and 10 regular teachers. The findings show that the PBL approach is capable to improve the students' soft skills and teaching quality. However, there are some issues associated with PBL implementation of arts classes such as teachers' experience, knowledge, skills and schools management.

Keywords : PBL, art education, soft skills, pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

The Standard Curriculum of Art education aims to produce holistic students that are equipped with knowledge, norms, values, beliefs and moral values. The six main components in the curriculum is associated with the PBL approach and student aspirations in the education blueprint (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The curriculum content is expected to instill the students with sense of gratitude to God, appreciation of the environment, arts and heritage as well as contribution of significant values to the nation (Curriculum Development Division, 2015). Arts education that adopts PBL approach involves teaching and learning strategies based on hands-on or scaffolding activities encompassing knowledge, arts skills and practical (Curriculum Development Division, 2015). The PBL approach encourage art teachers to develop an effective teaching strategy and set a standard for successful arts classes (Marshal, D'Adamo, 2011; Harris, 2014). PBL will shape the arts classes to focus on the soft skill mastery in the 21st century (Gude, 2013). Therefore, this paper will explore the findings and discuss about the benefits and

challenges faced by art teachers while implementing the PBL approach in the 21st century art classroom.

II. ASPIRATION OF MALAYSIA EDUCATION

A. Malaysia Education Blueprint

The development of the Malaysian Education Blueprint involved many experts and international agencies which aims to understand the current performance and challenges in education, thus establishing a clear vision and aspirations for a better-educated nation (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

One of the objectives in the blueprint is to implement a comprehensive transformation programme in the education system, including changes to the ministry (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). According to Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013) the blueprint also highlights the six key attributes required by each student, known as the student aspirations, such as knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual skills, spiritual ethics and national identity. The ministry believes that the development of students' soft skills will ensure the future generation to be inspired and ready to compete globally.

B. Student Aspiration

The student aspirations are related to the concept of soft skills that needs to be implemented in school teaching and learning ((Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Therefore, the learning curriculum standards which emphasise on students' soft skills should be applied through effective arts' teaching, learning and projects in the classroom (Marshal, D'Adamo, 2011; Kenzi, 2015; Wittber, 2017). The relation between soft skills and student aspirations is depicted in Table 1 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018).

Table 1. Soft skills and student aspirations

Knowledge	Competency	Character
<i>Standard Curriculum & Assessment Document : Pedagogy Curriculum</i>		
Curiosity Informative	Team work Thinker Good Communication	Empathy Patriotic Principle Durable
<i>MEB : Student Aspiration</i>		
Knowledge	Leadership Skills Thinking Skills Bilingual Skills	Spiritual Ethics National Identity

C. The 21st Century Learning

According to Bryant (2010) and Score (2014) the 21st century learning style is to ensure a student-centred learning concept through the application of 4Cs (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity). This concept is carried out using the approach and tools that are suitable in shaping the students’ personality based on the 4Cs’ elements thus improving their soft skills during art lessons (Bell, 2010; Score, 2014).



Fig.1. Project-based learning skills for 21st century learning skill [14].

The PBL approach helps to develop the 21st century skill among students and facilitates them to be more productive, open their minds and encourage them to think critically (Fig.1.) because skills are hard to be measured through standardised test (Norrila & Zaleha, 2015).

D. PBL Approach in Art Education

According to Blumenfeld (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, Palincsar, 1991), PBL is an approach that focuses on systematic and well-planned work in a given period (3 to 6 months). This approach involves data analysis or in-depth reports in the forms of work, product or presentation (Gude, 2013). PBL is based on the Piaget’s theory on constructivism that encourages students to carry out a task in a more interesting way (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, Palincsar, 1991). For example, students can carry out activities or

solving problem based on the real situations in their daily life.

A successful PBL environment in art education requires five elements; being holistic, autonomy, ownership, collaboration and emergence (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; Gude, 2013). The transformation in art education programme will assist the schools to create a successful, effective PBL approach in art classroom (Marshal, D’Adamo, 2011; Gude, 2013).

PBL is a key strategy in producing independent thinkers and learners with three expected outcomes, namely responsibility, independence, and discipline (Norrila & Zaleha, 2015). PBL helps students to learn the 21st century skills in details and promotes social learning as it focuses on building ‘communities of practice’ among people outside the school environment (Curriculum Development Division, 2015).

This will spark students’ interest, critical thinking abilities, presentation and communication skills, as well as the ability to work in a team (Marshal, D’Adamo, 2011). PBL can also help students to polish their reasoning skills in learning the requirements in the 21st century and help them to understand the learning process in the art classroom (Score, 2014; Dobbs, 1998; Wittber, 2017).

E. The Impact of PBL on Soft Skills

Soft skill is defined as a generic skill with no list of specific skills. Soft skills are also related to individual traits or personalities, resilience and innovative communication skills (Bell, 2010).

Academicians have outlined the impact of PBL approaches in improving student soft skills during art lesson (Harris, 2014; Gude, 2013). Skills that can be improved via PBL implementation will helps students to solve their problems and make decision based on new knowledge (Bell, 2010; Wittber, 2017). Hence, art students will gain multiple skills and values from the PBL learning approach (Dobbs, 1998). Furthermore, few studies show that the PBL approach has positive effects attitudes and interests (W. Jamie, 2010), decision-making (Bryant, 2010), thinking ability (Marshal,D’Adamo, 2011) and self-determination skills (Kenzi, 2015; Wittber, 2017) among students at school.

PBL helps arts students learn something from concrete experience because this approach adopts hands-on activities to enhance students’ literacy and creativity level (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; Gude, 2013). PBL further develops soft skills among arts students by enabling them to understand the learning content and train them to think critically (E. Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014). In certain cases, students keep making association between the existing

and new information, exploring new skills and knowledge in PBL arts classes (Gude, 2013; S.A. Scorse, 2014).

Besides, PBL equips the arts students with skills to manoeuvre their own learning through inquiry, collaborative work in research or creation of project to reflect their knowledge (Marshal, D'Adamo, 2011; Kenzi, 2015; Dobbs, 1998). This approach benefits the students in terms of technology skills, communication proficiency and problem-solving (Bryant, 2010; Gude, 2013).

PBL also emphasises on long-term, interdisciplinary and student-centred learning activities so that the students can be independent, confident and have the opportunity to suggest opinions constructively while designing their arts projects (Oreck, 2014; Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; Marshal, D'Adamo, 2011). The fundamental of PBL is to stimulate the students' creative sides that will benefit most of the art classrooms thus reflect the teacher and school performance (Scorse, 2014; Dobbs, 1998).

III. PROBLEM STATEMENTS OF STUDY

The education blueprint has proposed a 13-year transformation strategy to achieve a developed nation with the best status of education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This plan identifies 100 initiatives to be implemented in 3 'waves' (phases) by setting 25 key initiatives including improving teaching professionalism and student success via many educational strategies. However, there are challenges throughout the implementation of the education transformation (Harris, 2014). Among them are the student achievement in international examination and the challenges of PBL implementation among teachers and students.

A. *International Assessments Performance*

To internationalise the Malaysian education standard, the ministry ensures students to participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which examines the three cognitive domains among students namely Literacy, Mathematics and Reading (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). The results however demonstrated that Malaysian students have low performance in reading, problem-solving and critical thinking. Meanwhile, the student performance in Trends in the Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assessment also demonstrated that Malaysian students are weak in related skills and aspects tested (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018).

B. *PBL Implementation Issues among Teachers*

One of the issues to implement PBL approach is resistance from teachers and students towards changes because the exam-oriented culture is ingrained in the

Malaysian educational institutions (Norrila & Zaleha, 2015).

In addition, many teachers are concerned with the challenges to implement PBL in art classroom (Harris, 2014). Among the challenges are time constraint to complete the project according to the school's schedule, teachers have to deal with school tasks or requirements, issues in PBL standards, and designing the project-based experience for the students (Harris, 2014; Gude, 2013).

Some issues also include the tougher competition between curriculum objectives, the amount of time allocated per subject, and the transformation of didactic or conventional classes to the current classroom (Bryant, 2010; Marshal, D'Adamo, 2011). The PBL implementation in the classroom is proven hard for experienced teachers and most of novice teachers are overwhelmed with it (Tally, 2015). An excellent PBL implementation requires huge commitment from teachers and can be very challenging for them (T. Tally, 2015). Some teachers are unable to prepare earlier or cope with projects in a prolonged time (Gude, 2013).

A study by Oreck (2014) highlighted the importance of implementing the best classroom approach and the need to have knowledgeable and creative teachers in art classroom. Nevertheless, most teachers highly regard the importance of arts education but unable to implement an effective teaching method in the classroom due to lack of exposure, knowledge and skills in art teaching (Dobbs, 1998). The readiness of art teachers also affects the PBL effectiveness in the classroom. The 21st century teachers should in fact serve as agents or facilitators in the classroom during the teaching and learning process (Dobbs, 1998; Tally: 2015).

A preliminary study on the readiness of art teachers towards the implementation of the 21st century art classroom was conducted at several primary schools in Selangor. The study that applied the Dick and Reiser Systematic Learning Model (1996) on 120 art teachers showed significant difference in terms of their readiness, which is based on their experience, knowledge and skills in teaching arts classes. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows that the teachers who had enrolled in the arts course and more experienced tend to have higher score. However, the Post Hoc analysis (Tukey) shows that only 15 percent of the experienced teachers are highly ready to implement the 21st century art classroom than the less experienced teachers.

C. *PBL Implementation Issues among Students*

Multiple Intelligence Inventory Constructs (MIIC) also reported that Malaysian students have low and moderate performance in linguistic, verbal intelligence, musical art, visual, logical and kinesthetic evaluations (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). The results also

demonstrate the drawbacks of the current teaching approach in the Malaysian schools which for not inculcating soft skills among the students.

One of the teachers' roles in PBL implementation is to design activities to motivate students, encourage them to do reflection, and facilitate their learning through scaffolding, feedback, guidance, and thinking (Gude, 2013; Wittber, 2017). However, most students do not possess the skills and are not motivated to learn, being irresponsible, have poor behaviour and negative attitude towards PBL learning skills (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; Harris, 2014).

Moreover, PBL in art classroom can also address the issues such as lack of preparation among students, and the teaching approach needed to help improve their soft skills (Tally, 2015). Teachers should provide the appropriate scaffolds or guidelines for arts students to be independent, active and responsible learners in discovering their own learning style via the PBL classroom setting for arts subject (Dobbs, 1998; Jamie, 2010).

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

An initial need analysis which involved art teachers who have adopted PBL approach in art lessons at several primary schools was carried out via interviews, observation and document analysis. The results show that there are benefits of PBL implementation in art classroom. The initial findings show that most of the teachers think that the PBL approach can improve the students' soft skills and their teaching quality in art classroom. However, there are problems in PBL implementation that involve teachers, students and schools.

A. The Benefits of PBL Implementation in Art Classroom

The PBL approach were applied by most of the teachers after taking into account the curriculum content, its implementation in the arts classes at schools and its value on the art teaching professionalism and student success (Oreck, 2014; Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014). Based on the arts curriculum and the 21st century classroom which focus on 4C improvement (Curriculum Development Division, 2015; Bell, 2010) (communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity), most of the art teachers admit that the PBL approach lead to an effective learning process, because students are more prepared to be more creative and cooperative in working on the arts projects, as mentioned by Oreck and Govers et al. (Oreck, 2014; Govers, Major, and Verburg, 2014).

From the findings, art teachers believe that each student should spend on personality development rather than being burdened with examinations. While they think that PBL approach encourage the students to work in a team, it also encourages students to take risk, accept

social gap between them, and boost their confidence. The approach helps arts students to understand the learning content, train them to think critically and creatively, motivate them to keep exploring new ideas, encourage them to think ahead, and apply the existing knowledge in their daily life (Score, 2014; Dobbs, 1998). Therefore, this approach helps to set the standard for a quality art lesson. Via this approach, the teaching process become more interesting and students can generate ideas as well as improve their literacy and communication skills through brainstorming and idea presentation (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; J. Marshal, D'Adamo, 2011; Kenzi, 2015).

According to Blumenfeld, this student-oriented approach emphasises learning from concrete experience as the PBL learning process involves 'hands-on' or 'simulation' activities to enhance the students' communication skills and creativity (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, Palincsar, 1991). Therefore, many teachers think that the PBL classroom setting is so unique because it involves direct simulation or scaffolding technique during art lesson and students can carry out activities based on the real situations. Therefore, students are able to apply the skills they gain during the arts project to be more fun and innovative, resulting in higher creativity level and personality building (Score, 2014; Dobbs, 1998).

Many teachers are convinced that they can assess or evaluate student achievement with a systematic instrument while assessing artworks or projects using this approach. The approach allows the teachers to evaluate the final presentation or product throughout the lesson systematically (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014). This demonstrates the teachers' capability in assessing students via PBL without bias, this signifies the PBL standards as suggested by the academicians (Gude, 2013).

B. The Challenges of PBL Implementation in Art Classroom

The school management play a huge role in providing infrastructure, facilities or services to improve the quality of PBL approach in the learning process. The school administrator should try to reduce constraints faced by art teachers in school (Harris, 2014; Gude, 2013). However, the study discovered some schools still adopt the conventional teacher-centred approach that relies on one-way communication, this does not fit to the 21st century classroom concept (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; Tally, 2015). The exam-oriented practice only aims to maintain the school grade and examination performance, hence art education is regarded to be less important and the time allocated for art subject in class timetables is often replaced by "more-important-subjects" such as mathematics or science. This only encourages students to memorise rather than

understanding and practising things from what they had learnt.

Although the teachers had attended art courses and are fully trained, some of them express the needs for extra guidelines or assistance to conduct art lesson based on the 21st century learning (Gude, 2013; Dobbs, 1998). From the interviews, the PBL pedagogical methods and concepts have ambiguous implementation between the teachers. Some have problems to facilitate effective team-working during PBL teaching and learning. They stated that it is very challenging to encourage students to work together as mentioned by Tally (2015). According to Gude (2013), the lack of exposure, knowledge and teaching skills reflect the drawbacks of PBL implementation in the art classroom.

Then, the teachers think that PBL approach is time-consuming and unable to be conducted within one hour period allocated for art subject. With PBL, teachers require longer time to plan their lesson, prepare teaching aids and design the learning process, but it is difficult to do so as teachers are swamped with clerical tasks and other responsibilities (Harris, 2014; Tally, 2015). Teachers who are burdened with unfinished syllabus due to curriculum overload and inefficient school management find it hard to perform excellent art lesson in the classroom (Oreck, 2014; Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014).

Teachers need to ensure students are motivated and experienced before initiating the art project. Teachers need to create a framework to ensure all students contribute to the session and gain benefits from the collaborative work (Scorse, 2014; Dobbs, 1998). However, the document analysis found that the students were assessed based on their average scores and grades but there is no specific evaluation for soft skills. The results from the interview stated that teachers have limited knowledge in PBL assessment and unable to provide appropriate instrument while assessing the students' projects. This leads to transparency issue during the learning process (Gude, 2013). Moreover, the current assessment method in schools is not suitable as the evaluation process does not regard the creativity element (Jamie, 2010).

Furthermore, many teachers documented their students' artworks in the form of folio or digital. Artworks should be documented in the form of folio, written or pictorial to be presented during the art lesson. As a result, the reports on arts can be done in a more organised manner, thus reflecting the PBL effectiveness in art classroom (O. Gude, 2013; S.M. Dobbs, 1998).

As a conclusion, academicians believe that PBL approach should be backed by financial aid and infrastructures such as high technology equipment (Govers, Major, S. and C, Verburg, 2014; M.J. Harris,

2014). However, due to limited financial resource, uncoordinated management, and inadequate art infrastructure, tools and equipments, it is challenging for teachers to improve their teaching and maximise the student' soft skills via PBL approach in the classroom setting.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis in this study shows that the PBL approach has the potential to be implemented in primary schools especially in art education. The PBL approach has advantages and effects on teaching professionalism and student success. To implement this approach, some aspects need to be addressed to ensure that the learning process is well implemented and provides benefits to students, teachers and schools. The importance of competent and quality teachers is emphasised via the PBL concept, and teachers as the facilitating agent should master the PBL knowledge, skills and strategy (Gude, 2013; Dobbs, 1998). However there are some issues involving PBL in art classroom such as lack of PBL knowledge, the readiness of teachers and students, school infrastructure and others. A thorough analysis should be conducted to analyse the problems associated with PBL implementation in art education. Any problems arise need to be overcome, and the lessons should be improved to reflect the potential and effectiveness of this approach. In a nutshell, every education institutions should play their role to address the issues related to the PBL implementation in art lesson and soft skills development among the students.

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