

WHAT PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING METHOD IS BEST FOR MBA STUDENTS?

Educators should consider levels of student experience and readiness when integrating problem-based learning projects in coursework.

Real-time, problem-based learning is a type of experiential education that challenges students to solve unstructured problems with real-world implications. Although experiential education is the pedagogy of choice for many MBA programs, little is known about students' perceptions of various problem-based learning methods.

In order to find answers, TL Hill, Dennis Paris, David Nash and Gary Blau tested whether a live-problem project (LPP) or a client-consulting project (CCP) was perceived as more effective by MBA students for learning fundamental marketing concepts early in their program.

While both LPPs and CCPs were well received, students taking LPP courses felt they learned more. This difference could be related to student preparedness and/or to a key distinction in the two methods: client involvement. Although students in both courses worked on marketing strategies, those in CCP courses who worked directly with clients were pressured to deliver a professional-grade product and felt that client demands interfered with academic priorities.

The researchers recommend scaffolding the projects to match student levels of readiness. LPP may be best for students early in the program and focused on learning core concepts calibrated throughout the project, whereas CCP may be suitable for students integrating concepts from the entire MBA program in capstone courses.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

- Overall, early-program students taking LPP courses reported higher levels of perceived learning than those taking CCP classes.
- Clients' expectations for a professional-grade deliverable increased pressure on students and sometimes caused friction with learning priorities.
- When integrating experiential education, it is important to scaffold different learning methods to match student levels of readiness.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW:

- Students, professors and administrators

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- Live-problem project v. client-based project: Which is most effective for perceived learning of MBA-level marketing concepts?
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