

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING HEALTH  
SCIENCE COURSES

by

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## CERTIFICATE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Signature

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the similarities, differences and relationships between two full Problem-Based Learning (PBL) degree courses in the Health Sciences at a university in Hong Kong. It aimed to: explore the experiences and outcomes for students based on their perceptions of full PBL courses; compare the findings with previous published research about other PBL courses, particularly in Hong Kong; and to develop substantive theory to better inform practice.

The study was carried out in several phases. First, data to describe students' perceptions of PBL were collected from interviews conducted by the researcher with a purposive sample of 32 students. Students were interviewed in sixteen pairs consisting of two pairs from each of the first four years of both PBL courses. Second, these data were analysed using a constant comparative method to develop tentative domains of those students' perceived learning experiences. Three experts in PBL then checked this analysis. Third, two focus groups consisting of six students in each representing both courses reviewed the findings of the initial interviews. Fourth, data were collected from one-to-one interviews with the two academic leaders of both courses and used to triangulate data collected from students in order to complete an overview of the full PBL environment.

The findings showed that this group of students perceived the PBL environment supported them to engage in higher levels of cognitive activities, to become more motivated to learn, to develop generic attributes of teamwork and communication skills, and to become confident as independent learners. Perceived differences between the approaches used in both courses showed that appropriate support strategies for students and staff do result in improved learning outcomes, particularly in the early stages of a course. Implications are drawn from these findings for informing future practice and for suggesting further research in full PBL environments.

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Comparison of the PBL Environments in BD and BS	105
Table 4.2 Comparison of the PBL Process in BD and BS	133
Table 4.3 Comparison of the PBL Outcomes in BD and BS	159

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

HKCPBL	Hong Kong Centre for Problem-Based Learning
PBL	Problem-Based Learning
BD	A health science degree course at a Hong Kong university using Problem-Based Learning
BS	Another health science degree course at the same university using Problem-Based Learning
HOD	Head of the BD degree course
HOS	Head of the BS degree course

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF TABLES	iii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Overview	1
Background to the Study	2
The Problem and Its Significance	10
Research Design	14
Assumptions	16
Structure of the Thesis	16
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Overview	17
The Problem-Based Learning Environment	17
Facilitation	33
Assessment and Evaluation	36
The Problem-Based Learning Process	39
The Problem-Based Learning Tutorial	41
The Problem-Based Learning Tutorial Group	45
Problem-Based Learning Outcomes	47
Research on Outcomes	57
Summary	58

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	59
Overview	59
Research Design	59
Site and Participants	66
Procedures	68
Data Analysis	75
Summary	82
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	83
The PBL Environment	83
The PBL Process	104
The Facilitator	117
The Group	125
PBL Outcomes	134
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS and IMPLICATIONS	160
Overview	160
Summary of the Research	160
Reflections on the Research Design	163
Limitations	164
Conclusions	165
Implications	167
Final Comments	170
REFERENCES	171
APPENDICES	178
Appendix A	178
Appendix B	179
Appendix C	181