



Transforming Education: A Case Study on Implementing PBL Method and Teacher Training

A Multi-Modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings

Villa College, Maldives
2024

Supported By



Canada



INTRODUCTION

Mohamed Fayaz, an island school principal, was among the 15 fellows who went to Mumbai for the MATPD fellowship. Commenting on his fellowship opportunity Fayaz said *“I focused my efforts on Project Based Learning (PBL) and its transformative potential in education. My primary objective was to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively implement Project Based Learning (BPL) in their classrooms”*.

Fayaz, returned to his island after completing 10 in person fellowship training, with high expectations that would last a lifetime learning experiences. Thus, Fayaz aimed to become an advocate and practitioner, who utilized the Gold Standard Project-Based Learning Elements provided by the BUCK Institute as a model and framework to develop innovative lessons. While focusing on the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into this framework has been instrumental in enhancing the learning experience in his island school.

BACKGROUND

The school, in the North of Maldives on the serene island of Raa, known as Hulhudhuffaar, caters from Foundation Stage (preschool) to Key Stage 5 (Grade 12), plays a crucial role in the education of the local community. School boasted a student body of more than 370 students, with 43 dedicated teaching staff.

The educational landscape in this part of the Maldives was characterized by traditional teaching methods, predominantly teacher-centered. While some educators did employ student-centered approaches, the prevalence of teacher-centered instruction remained a significant challenge. In pockets of the curriculum, students engaged in project-based activities and initiatives, but these were often isolated efforts without a comprehensive, planned integration into the educational system. The prevailing teaching methods in the school, like many other schools in the Maldives, primarily adhered to teacher-centered paradigms. Teachers took the lead in the classroom, with students serving as passive recipients of knowledge. While there were instances where students were involved in project-based work for select subjects and topics, these endeavors lacked a systematic and consistent approach.

Project Based Learning in Raa Atoll Hudhuruffaar

The introduction of a competency-based national curriculum, the need for a more student-centered teaching and learning approach became increasingly evident. The curriculum's emphasis on developing competencies among students necessitated a shift away from the conventional teacher-centric model. It was against this backdrop that the concept of PBL

emerged as a viable solution. PBL, with its emphasis on student engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving, aligned well with the objectives of the new curriculum. It offered a structured and systematic framework for promoting student-centered teaching and learning, while also addressing the need for competency development.

This realization prompted the decision to introduce PBL as an alternative teaching approach in the school. The goal was to not only align with the new curriculum but also to foster a more dynamic and participatory learning environment, where students took on active roles in their education, acquired practical skills, and applied their knowledge to real-world scenarios. Through this shift, the school aimed to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century by nurturing their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, ensuring that they are not just passive learners but active contributors to their education.

BEGINNING

Prior to the MATPD fellowship, Fayaz had already initiated work with primary teachers at his island school to implement PBL. This early experience provided him with valuable insights into the practical aspects of integrating PBL into the curriculum. While these initial efforts were successful to some extent, his participation in the MATPD project exposed him to further opportunities for improvement and modification of the school's existing PBL model.

The fellowship program equipped Fayaz with valuable information and resources related to PBL, which included best practices, research findings, and innovative methodologies. With this knowledge in hand, Fayaz collaborated closely with his teaching staff to enhance and adapt the current PBL approach. He conducted an extensive review of educational literature on PBL and identified the Gold Standard Project-Based Learning (GSPBL) framework developed by the BUCK Institute as a valuable model to implement in the island school.

Selecting Teachers for PBL Training

Fayaz selected a group of teachers from Key Stage 2 (Grade 4-6) to participate in the PBL training. This group of teachers were chosen; a) willingness to embrace change and b) enthusiasm and commitment to improving the educational experience of the students. They were seen as early adopters and innovators in the school community, making them ideal candidates for pioneering the PBL approach. Key Stage 2 was chosen for its unique advantage - the students in this stage had access to tablets, providing an opportunity to incorporate Information and ICT into the PBL framework.

PBL Training Program

The PBL training program was designed to be comprehensive and hands-on, ensuring that teachers moved beyond understanding the theory behind PBL and to adopt the practical skills to implement it effectively. The program consisted of the following components:

- 1. Introduction to GSPBL Framework:** The training began with an introduction to the GSPBL framework by the BUCK Institute. Teachers were familiarized with the key elements of this model, including the project design, project management, and project assessment components.
- 2. ICT Integration:** Recognizing the importance of incorporating ICT, teachers were provided with training on how to leverage technology to enhance the PBL experience. This included guidance on using digital tools, resources, and platforms.
- 3. Collaborative Lesson Planning:** Fayaz and teachers collaborated to plan PBL lessons, aligning them with the GSPBL framework and the national curriculum. This phase allowed for the customization of lessons to suit the specific needs and interests of the students.
- 4. Observation and Feedback:** As teachers implemented PBL lessons in their classrooms, Fayaz actively observed and monitored their progress. I provided timely feedback to individual teachers, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.
- 5. Workshops and Practical Implementation:** Workshops were conducted to facilitate peer learning and the exchange of best practices among the participating teachers. These workshops also served as forums for discussing challenges and seeking solutions collectively.

IMPLEMENTATION

The introduction of PBL in the school was a phased process that began with the foundation laid during the MATPD fellowship and was then fine-tuned through the active engagement and collaborative efforts of teachers. The implementation process unfolded as follows:

- Step 1: Training and Familiarization:** Teachers were provided with lesson plans structured according to the GSPBL framework and the national curriculum. These plans incorporated ICT tools and resources to enhance the learning experience.
- Step 2: Collaborative Lesson Planning:** A key aspect of the implementation process involved collaboratively planning lessons that aligned with the curriculum and the GSPBL framework. This collaborative approach encouraged innovation and customization, allowing teachers to adapt the lessons to their specific students' needs and interests.

Step 3: Classroom Observation and Feedback: As teachers began to implement PBL in their classrooms, Fayaz played an active role in observing their lessons and providing timely feedback. This feedback loop was instrumental in ensuring continuous improvement, aligning the lessons with best practices, and addressing any challenges that arose.

Additionally, during the implementation phase Fayaz dealt with challenges and also saw a process of change among his teachers. His experiences are mentioned below.

Barriers

Teachers faced significant **time constraints** due to the need to cover the prescribed curriculum within a limited timeframe. Through careful lesson planning and ongoing support, teachers learned to strike a balance between PBL activities and curriculum coverage. Furthermore, collaborative lesson planning sessions and the use of the GSPBL framework provided a structured approach to lesson design, saving teachers time and effort. As teachers became more familiar with the process, their planning improved, resulting in streamlined PBL implementations. However, limited access to ICT tools and a slow internet connection presented challenges, especially given the importance of incorporating technology into the PBL approach. Teachers adapted by finding creative ways to make the most of the resources available. They explored offline resources, optimized the usage of ICT tools, and sought assistance from peers and senior students when required.

Positive Impact of PBL on Student Learning

As an educator promoting student-centered learning and advocating for PBL, Fayaz witnessed a shift in teaching pedagogy among the teachers that he had worked with. Teachers who participated in the training have begun incorporating PBL into their teaching practices. This shift is not just about using a different method; it represents a fundamental change in their belief about the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing student learning. The method became more than a tool but a philosophy shaping their approach to education.

Changes in Teaching Practices

Teachers who underwent the training reported increased clarity about the PBL method. They expressed a deeper understanding of the principles, the GSPBL framework, and how to effectively integrate ICT tools into their lessons. A significant outcome was the change in teachers' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of PBL. Many started believing that PBL is not only a viable method but also one that has the potential to significantly enhance student learning outcomes. This implementation represents a tangible shift in their teaching practices, moving away from traditional methods towards more student-centered and experiential learning. The

training sessions fostered a sense of community among teachers. They began seeking advice and support from one another, creating a network of peer learning. This collaborative environment contributed to the successful implementation of PBL in various classrooms.

INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

While the implementation of PBL at Hulhudhuffaaruu school was a transformative journey, yielding invaluable personal insights and lessons. One of the most notable achievements of the PBL implementation was the transformation in both student and teacher attitudes. Students became more engaged, motivated, and active participants in their education. They displayed enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers, on the other hand, embraced the shift towards student-centered teaching and demonstrated a willingness to adapt and innovate.

While the initial implementation was successful, there is always room for improvement. The journey toward PBL excellence is an ongoing one. With practice and ongoing guidance, teachers can continue to refine their skills and approaches to create even more engaging and effective PBL experiences for students.

Growing Interest in PBL

Witnessing the positive changes in both students and teachers fueled Fayaz's passion to further develop and promote PBL. As he witnesses the impact on student engagement, motivation, and critical thinking skills, Fayaz is inspired to explore new horizons and continue the journey of innovation in education.

This enthusiasm led him to actively seek opportunities to expand his expertise in PBL. Fayaz participated in atoll-level workshops, where he facilitated PBL training sessions for educators from various schools. This experience provided him with deeper insights into the challenges and possibilities of PBL implementation on a broader scale. It also boosted his confidence in promoting and supporting PBL as a powerful pedagogical approach.

The success of PBL at Hulhudhuffaaruu school not only validated its effectiveness but also kindled a desire to further champion student-centered, competency-based education. The journey continues, with an unwavering commitment to refining PBL practices and sharing its transformative potential with educators across the region.

Expanding Horizons

Fayaz's decision to extend knowledge and experience in PBL to teachers from other schools was driven by a conviction that the transformative impact of this teaching methodology should not be confined to his own educational community. The visible impact on both students and teachers inspired him to reach beyond the boundaries of his school and contribute to the professional development of educators on a larger scale.

The primary motivation behind disseminating PBL practices lies in the tangible benefits students' experience. By extending the training to teachers from other schools, Fayaz aims to empower them to create dynamic, student-centered learning environments that foster critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. For Fayaz, the process of expanding training to teachers from other schools serves as a source of inspiration for continuous improvement. Witnessing the positive changes and feedback from diverse educational settings motivated him to refine and enhance his training methodologies.

Transformation Across Schools

The impact of Fayaz's efforts extended beyond the walls of his school, influencing educators and students in other institutions. The dissemination of PBL practices to teachers from different schools created a ripple effect, contributing to a broader transformation in teaching methodologies. The positive feedback from participating teachers indicated a growing acceptance and adoption of PBL as a valuable approach to education.

In other schools, the introduction of PBL not only changed the way teachers approach their lessons but also translated into improved student engagement and motivation. The collaborative workshops have created a network of educators who share a common goal of enhancing the learning experience for students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in ongoing professional development for educators to deepen their understanding of PBL principles, methodologies, and effective implementation strategies.
- Foster a culture of collaboration and peer support among educators. Establish platforms for sharing best practices, lesson plans, and success stories related to PBL.
- Begin with small-scale PBL implementations to allow educators and students to acclimate to the new approach. As confidence and proficiency grow, consider scaling up the use of PBL across various subjects and grade levels.

- Ensure that PBL activities align with curriculum objectives and learning outcomes. Integrate PBL seamlessly into the existing curriculum to maximize its impact on student learning.
- Establish a feedback loop that involves continuous reflection and improvement. Encourage educators to seek feedback from students, colleagues, and administrators to refine PBL practices and address any challenges that may arise.

Disclaimer: *The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of International Development Research Centre (IDRC) or its Board of Governors.*

Citation as: Nasheeda, A., Nihaadh, M., Zuha, A., Saeed, F., & Latheef, A.U. (2024). Transforming education: A case study on implementing PBL method and teacher training. *Faculty of Educational Studies, Villa College*. Maldives.

Acknowledge: *This work was supported by the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange, a joint endeavour with the International Development Research Centre, Canada.*