

Teaching Translation Using Project-Based-Learning: Saudi Translation Students Perspectives

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Abstract

In the last few years, interest in improving the teaching of translation increased immensely. Proposals of introducing many methods to raise students' involvement and centeredness in the process evolved and many concepts from other disciplines were implemented. One of these evolving concepts was Project Based Learning (PBL) which was popular across many education fields: the main essence of it is involving the students in an authentic and practical translation project. This article investigates the experiences of Saudi under-preparation-translators in a Computer Aided Translation (CAT) course that was introduced using the PBL method. Using qualitative methods (mainly interviews and observations), students' receptions were collected and analyzed and themes were elicited to report the students' attitude to PBL method. Although many positive experiences such as autonomy and team work skills were reported, some indicated the concerns of the practicality of the procedure as well as time issues.

Keywords: Computer Aided Translation, method, perceptions, Project-Based-Learning, Saudi translators, Translation

Cite as: Alkhatnai, M. (2017). Teaching Translation Using Project-Based-Learning: Saudi Translation Students Perspectives. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 1(4).

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol1no4.6>

1. Introduction:

In the last few decades, translation education began to form itself as a new domain in research by itself far from language education and its father field, translation studies. It can be claimed nowadays with the huge influx of research within this field that it is shaping itself to be a professional pedagogical enterprise. Moreover, the changing nature of markets needs and employability concerns as well as the changing nature of teaching and learning pushed all disciplines whether old or new to seek alternatives teaching methods.

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a new teaching method that involves the students learning through engaging in learning experiences through working on a project and delivering the results.

2. Literature review

Many scholars theorized how translation should be taught. However, it can be argued that all those theorists are in agreement on the following steps:

- Interpretation and comprehension of the different types of texts including the textual, referential, cohesion and naturalness levels should occur (Garant et al., 2014; Takeda, 2010). Some refer to this as encoding and decoding (Kobyakova & Shvachko, 2016; Conway, 2017).
- Recoding which implies applying various strategies for the reconstruction process of the message using appropriate methods and procedures (Share, 1999; Hung, 2002; Soang, 2016). According to Newmark (1995), some of these techniques used require the translator to transfer, find a cultural or functional equivalent, look for synonymy, transposition, modulation, compensation, reduction, and expansion or amplification. Training prospective translators should consider this beforehand.
- The huge importance of the assessment of the result. Translation assessment is an important part in making sure that translated text provokes the translated text with the original text (Firoozkoochi, Beikian, & Golavar, 2012; Farahzad, 1992). Measuring translation quality is an important part of translators' preparation (Bogucki & Deckert, 2012). However, the specific individual preferences of the translation styles make it necessary to create the sole and coherent criteria for evaluation (Tajvidi, 2005).
- The native language of both teacher and the learners is the important factor which greatly influences the effectiveness of the learning as well as the approaches which should be used to enhance the better results (Bassnett, 2002; Soang, 2016).

Although the steps necessary for the successful translation teaching was formed, there was also apparent the question regarding the need of linking translation teaching to professional practice and market needs. For instance, Lavault (1985) stresses the importance of linking theoretical translation teaching to real-life translation tasks and argued that translation takes place in the real world and has a communicative purpose to fulfill. Keith and Mason (1987) states that "many feels that, if the exercise is to assume meaning and purpose of a degree course in modern languages, it should be taught with "real-world" criteria in mind" (v-vi). Some scholars adopted the sociocultural approach in viewing learning as a practice-based community

practice (Bruffee, 1995; Burke et al., 2014). Learners start as outsiders and gradually acquaint themselves with the practices and ways of thinking of those belonging to the same community of practitioners. This interaction between learners and others within their communities of practice is socially grounded and skills learners are real and practical (Armson et al., 2007; Duan, 2011). Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) also stress the following essential elements of Project Based Learning (PBL): starting with a compelling question or challenge; creating a desire to acquire or create new knowledge; carrying out an inquiry to acquire or create the knowledge; requiring critical thinking, communication, collaboration and technological skills; incorporating feedback and revision; making a publicly presented product; rendering students' voice and choice.

The results of PBL implementation in teaching translation has been already proved in several areas. For instance, the study by Li, Zhang, and Fe (2015) analyze the effect of PBL utilization during the business translation teaching in the Asian context. The researchers reported the positive perception of the students; however, the limited character of research makes it necessary to conduct the further studies on the matter. The similar research, however, based on the combination of Chinese and Australian experience, was conducted as well: according to its results, the students did not only show the better comprehension but also appeared to be more autonomous during the learning process (Yang, 2015). Speaking abilities of the students and development of the students' opinion are also among the major benefits of the students who are involved in linguistics (Lam, 2011; Yang & Puakpong, 2016). In addition, according to the studies by Galan-Mañas (2011) and Huang et al. (2012), PBL implementation also shows the increased motivation among students. Students were reported to have improvement in such variables as students' attitudes, satisfaction and self-achievement (Huang et al., 2012). Problem based learning was also proved to be efficient method to help the students to deal with their undergraduate research problems as this approach allowed cooperate in teams and go beyond the disciplinary bounds (Pierrakos, Zilberberg, & Anderson, 2010). The combination of cooperation-based approach with problem based learning also appeared to be extremely beneficial as it motivated students finding multiple solutions to each question, discuss their findings with others, and compare their results with other students which enhances improved self-evaluation (Zainudin & Awal, 2012; Bogain & Thorneycroft, 2006).

The influence of the PBL approach on the European educational context was also examined. In the study by Kerkka (2009), motivation of the students was also highlighted, which was explained by them feeling the experts in the minor issues. However, the study also showed poor results in regard to improving performance of those students which do not attend the classrooms constantly: they did not show any improvement in the attendance and educational success. Another study also showed that the success of PBL techniques greatly depend on the ability of the teacher to understand and integrate the newly-received approaches into the learning environment (So & Kim, 2009). As a result, it is crucial for the teacher to sufficient repertoires for teaching and the corresponding understanding of the methods suggested for a use.

The study by Mitchell-Schuitevoerder (2011), instead, focused on the combination of translation and modern technologies in the learning environment. Again, PBL showed satisfactory positive results as it made possible for the students to become prepared to the changing trends in translation area. However, although the benefits of PBL are not criticized,

there is also a theory which states that combination of PBL and traditional education experiences (Billett, 2010; Neck, 2014).

3. Aims of the study

The literature review clearly indicates that PBL approach shows positive results regardless of the setting, learning environments, and even the object of study. The aim as stated elsewhere is to elicit Saudi translators under training ideas and perceptions about the use of PBL in teaching translation in their classes. The main questions that drive this study are:

- What advantages do Saudi translation students perceive from studying a translation course using the PBL approach?
- What disadvantages do Saudi translation students perceive from studying a translation course using the PBL approach?
- What enablers do they perceive in transferring their CAT course into a project?
- What barriers do they perceive in transferring their CAT course into a project?

The results of the research will be based on the answers of the students based on the answers to the interview. As a result, the research will be based on the qualitative study with the corresponding analysis of the answers along with the evaluation of the results. In general, the research aims to discover whether PBL learning will be as effective in the Saudi learning environment as in the contexts already studied. In addition, the research will focus on the area of teaching translations as the field which can potentially benefit greatly from the PBL approach implementation.

4. Participants

The participants in this study were 12 Saudi male students who were studying translation as their major at the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The course is introduced in the second semester of the third year of their four year BA in Translation program. The participants were made aware of the change in the course delivery mode from their first day and clear instructions of how the course will be run as a project. They also consented that they will be observed by their instructor and agreed to be interviewed at the end of the course. Towards the end of the semester, they were made aware of the survey questions and their perception was elicited during individual interviewees and within groups. They were given transcriptions of their interviews and were given the chance to give feedback on what seemed unclear or needed further explanation.

5. Methodology

According to research, research questions should guide the decision on which research methodology to choose. As the questions of the undertaken research implies, eliciting interviewees perceptions about the use of PBL in their translation course requires. To ensure unbiased replies, the participants were interviewed at the end of the semester, which means that they were able to tell the truth about their perceptions and recommendations. To make the received results clear and concise, the questions for the interviewees were grouped around several topics, which allowed tracing similarities and differences in the students'

perceptions. As a result, it becomes possible to find the main points of satisfaction and concerns by the students.

6. Results:

Advantages and Students' Positive Experiences

Editing skills

Twelve participants revealed many benefits of having to take this course as a project. One most important fact that many stated is that working on projects opened their eyes to new products as well as the fact of deepening their understanding of software and CAT used. An example here is the pre-editing features of Word-processing. For example, one of the participants states:

I have been using Words for many years but when instructed on using the editing, reviewing aligning features of Word, I realized how important it is to deepen my knowledge of this software and how important to translators to use these features effectively.

The similar idea for articulated by the different participant:

One of the important things I learned in one of the projects is how important Word is for translators. I used to believe that dictionaries (both paper and online) are the most important CAT tool for translators. Now I believe Word should be considered as one of the most important. Features like "Look up"; "Synonyms", and "translate" are very important Word features that I haven't considered before.

Some linked this to the pre-editing and post-editing view of translation:

I never thought of the importance of pre-editing, post-editing skills and how important they are to improve the translation task. Preparing the work for translation is an important skill and the CAT tools like Word and alignment tools are really important. Post-editing and revising skills are important to check the quality of the translation.

Presentation skills

As all the participants were required to present a CAT tool out of their choice, students reflected positively on this experience. The practicality of the course was one of the positive sides that helped students come up with practical and involving presentation. Most, if not all, presenters included the rest of the class in either trying the CAT tool presented or gave time for some to try. One reflects:

Since the aim of my presentation is to present voice-translators, I was able to try this CAT tool with all my colleagues. I asked them all to try it in turn and I felt I involved them all and they liked my presentation.

Another participant mentioned the fact that other presentation skills were gained out of this experience:

I am more confident in the delivery as well as the content of my presentation. The teachers' notes on how we should present and keep eye contact with the listeners as well as engaging them as much as possible helped a lot. The clear instructions on the project grade that it will be on both the content as well as the delivery made me aware that I should pay attention to both.

Learning skills

Students reported many learning advantages when this course was introduced based on the PBL philosophy:

This course was a complete change for me. I used to wait for the instructor to give the syllabus and do the required part without pushing myself a lot. I believe this course changes my perceptions. From the first day, we worked on every single step ourselves and I felt I can't hide or do the minimum as usual. Most of the project required me to work completely on my own or work with colleagues and had to do my part or I let them down. I felt engaged and to be honest I felt that I am part of the whole process and an important one as well.

Some related to the feedback process with a PBL class:

One of the things I liked about the projects is that we got feedback every single step until the end. The instructor and the colleague were able to give feedback in each step and we had the opportunity to improve accordingly.

Some realized that in PBL using technology as a tool for learning is a skill. It is indeed encouraging to notice that some reflected that their look into technology was enhanced by the way they used these tools to improve their learning:

When we surveyed the CAT tools in our first project I realized how huge the CAT tool market is and the magnitude of alternatives when thinking about a certain CAT tool for a specific reason. For example, I learned how varied and complex the e-dictionaries market and the huge number of alternatives there are.

Communication skills

Many of the participants reflected positively on the communication skills they were able to develop during their project for this course. They agreed that successful translators need communication and negotiation skills. They found these skills important when communicating among themselves as learners and with potential customers.

One of the students reflects on an activity where he had to convince his colleagues to share him a project idea he presented:

I really never thought it is hard to convince people with my own idea. I thought since it is clear in my mind that all will take it for granted but it was the opposite.

They convinced me that it is not feasible for the time being. I had to convince and negotiate with them other alternatives and it was not easy coming to a concise until the last minute. This helped in the future to always think of a plan B if things didn't work the first time.

Another speaks about negotiation skills after visiting the commercial translation office and engaging in talking to real customers in real life situation:

I haven't thought that as a translator that I will have to think of bargaining and negotiating prices, delivery time, the number of pages, the number of words, the number of lines and pricing and repricing. Translation as a business seems to have its rules and values and one has to familiarize himself with these skills before going into such business.

Some learned that listening to customers is as equally important as talking to them:

Dr. Saleh [Commercial translation office owner] was very patient and listened to the customers without interruption. He listened to their requests as well complaints and did speak that much. I believe listening is a skill for translators to familiarize themselves with.

Job-market skills

Realizing the potential of the translation market in Saudi Arabia was one of the most noted benefits perceived by the students. Many reported positively on the size of the market, the value of working in translation and the practicality of the course when visiting an established translation office and meeting with people in the field.

Some of the job-market skills included “pricing” “negotiating with clients” “delivery time” and much more. One states:

As a translator, I have never expected to be talking about concepts related to business like pricing and negotiating. In fact, I haven't been to a translation business and have never thought of what it means to open a business in this area.

They realized the need for a course on translation business. One of the participants suggests:

I think there must be a course that teaches translators how to start and market their business, how to deal with customers, how to manage time, how to make the business profitable and many other skills related to this trade. I believe this is important to nowadays translators.

During the course, students learned about how technology can help manage a translation or freelancing business. They learned about many websites that help translators handle clients' requests and engage with their fellow translators working currently in the market. Some examples of these include “Proz” and “TM Town”. A participant reflected:

I believe the two websites I learned about [Proz – TM Town] taught me a lot about how technology can help freelancers and translators manage their work

very efficiently. I already created my accounts on both and started engaging with other translators and will continue to hopefully make some benefit out of this. I am excited.

The same point of how technology can help translators benefit from technology and improve themselves and their potential start-ups was dominant in most of the participants' reflections. Some suggest:

Nowadays translators are very lucky with the advancement of technology. They need nothing but a website and they can literally work from anywhere. Handing in and receiving jobs, estimating time and cost, delivery, and quality check can all be done the far distance.

As a result, it can be stated that PBL approach can help the students to broaden their horizons in regards to their knowledge potential and implementation as well as to gain confidence in the ability of its use.

Technological skills

Most students referred to this area as being the best area of growth in knowledge. They realized that their knowledge of CAT tools increased as well as their knowledge of how to use them practically.

The wealth of technologies introduced in this project taught me about how CAT tools advanced in the past few years. It seems that it will take me ages learning about these technologies and their uses.

More importantly, students related positively to how using these CAT tools in a translation project enhanced their ability and opened their eyes to a brighter and more promising future.

This project helped me learning about many CAT tools and seeing them in action. I am interested in seeing practical uses of the tools and I think this project helped me achieve this. This should help envision my future as a translator that is capable of using the latest technologies effectively.

Another person related to the idea of practicality and seeing these tools in action as an advantage of the course:

One of the most favorable aspects of this course is its practicality. We learned a lot about many tools and we use them in a real situation. I didn't know that there are many translation technologies that can ease the process and make translation more practical.

Disadvantages and Students' Negative Experiences

Although it can be argued that students' positive experiences exceeded their negative ones but the other side of the argument deserves to be uncovered. Fewer numbers of students showed their frustration with the course being transferred to a project and these negative attitudes can be classified under three main themes.

There seems to be a negative attitude toward working on projects at times as students never experienced these at times and do not learn that much about market needs and beliefs.

Technical Skills

The first theme is the technical one. The course is focusing on the use of CAT in translation and some students were faced with the technical issue. Although enough support was given, students with lower ICT skills struggled. The technical infrastructure added to their inconvenience experiences. One student explains:

The lab was not up to date and some of the software was outdated. Trados version in the college translation lab was six years old and already outdated.

Another student states:

As the course is focused mainly on the use of CAT, there should have been technical assistance from the IT department within the university. The Internet in the school was not reliable at times. This affected the experience negatively at many times.

Time issues

Although engaged and benefited from the experience, some students recognized the time and effort it takes to plan and execute a PBL experience. Some mentioned how the planning process consumed a big portion of the meeting time.

Every meeting was a negotiation game. We have had to agree on different bits and play different roles. This experience taught me that time is critical in the translation industry, not only in delivering the outcome on a certain time but to appreciate and plan very carefully and economically time-wise.

Practice issues

Some of the participants reflected some minor issues that made their experience less attractive at times. One for example reflected on the under researched translation market in the country and how that ambiguity made him unoptimistic.

Translation market in Saudi is not researched and we know very little about its size and the demand for such service. I believe there must be numbers and statistics about the nature of translation market we have here and how it is shaped.

7. Discussion

This study looked at the perceptions of Saudi students with regard to studying a translation computer tools class using the project approach. It looked at their positive as well as negative experiences. Project based learning proved many positive results and enhanced the students learning and knowledge of the subject matter. In opposite to conventional classroom, students realized the practicality of a PBL course and how it put them in the center of attention. As this is new to the sample of this study students-centeredness although appreciated, it led some astray. Part of the issue is the cultural effect of teacher-centeredness compared to students-centeredness.

As students worked on their projects themselves and felt the potential of them engaging with translation technologies and business first hand. Some felt that a CAT course shouldn't be taught in another way. PBL proved very positive in putting the participants into very practical and close to real experiences dealing with these technologies; receiving projects, giving financial as well as time estimates; delivering projects; listening to clients; measuring the translation quality as well as many other skills that students wouldn't have learned without the PBL project. These include communication skills; teamwork; and many other transitional skills.

This experience also proved that translation teaching like any other pedagogical effort does benefit from other education theories and efforts within the education field. This is truer when it comes to the setting where this study took place. Students were desperate to try something new. They were fed up with the lecturing class mode. This would prove positive to other researchers within the field building on the results of this study and look into implementing other ideas into translation teaching.

8. Conclusion

In order to take this further a research that would look into how much students benefited from this method on certain levels can be quantified quantitatively and this will inform people within the field of the degree of benefit of adopting such a method. It would be plausible to look into the PBL class dynamics especially within translation studies and try to deeply understand the dynamics and interactions both on individual and group level.

For sure, the study had its own limitations, which should be taken into consideration while interpreting results. The main limitation of the study is a small number of the participants involved: although this proves that thorough choice of the suitable interviewees, the number of the latter should be increased for the statistical significance. Secondly, additional measurement can be conducted after set period of time to receive less emotional replies and determine the long-term effects of PBL approach implementation.

The limitations provided can be also regarded as the vectors for the future research. The current study has started the tradition of examining PBL's influence in Saudi context, which can be further developed with the bigger number of participants and longer period of experiment conducting. Discovering the impact of PBL on other disciplines teaching will be also a potentially fruitful area to study as well as finding the specifics in the Saudi culture which can shape PBL implementation for the better results. Another angle is looking at the potential of comparing the results in this study's settings to that of other settings. This will inform

practitioners within the field of the caveats of applying such methods to translation teaching courses and more particularly into CAT courses.

Acknowledgments

The researcher would like to express his appreciation to the Research Center within the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University as well as the Deanship of Scientific Research at the same university for their support.

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