

**Online Project Based Learning in
International Business Education:
Bridging the Gap between Theory
and Practice
E-Leader
Berlin 2012**

**Dr. Basil J. Janavaras
Minnesota State University,
Mankato, USA**

Introduction

This paper addresses one of the most important challenges faced by international business faculty and students, that is, how to bring the real world of business into the classroom or training environment by providing the needed platform and systematic step-by-step process to support students in their roles as managers and decision makers in a global setting. The JAI (Janavaras & Assoc. Int'l) platform, <http://www.janavaras.com>, discussed in this paper has been designed to address this pivotal issue. Instructors and their students are provided with interactive, engaging, and innovative software which help to bridge the gap between theory and the rigorous decision making process of solving real, complex business problems.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to discuss PBL theories, the JAI platform, the reasons for using the JAI software platform in teaching international business courses, the expected student learning outcomes, the benefits to instructors and make suggestions for further research on this very important and challenging topic.

JAI Web Based Software

The three JAI Project-Based Learning (PBL) learning tools are the:

- Global Market Potential System Online (GMPSO), www.gmpso2.com
- Global Marketing Management System Online (GMMSO}, www.gmmso3.com)
- Export Import Management System Online (EIMSO), www.eimso2.com)

Project-Based Learning(PBL)

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects.

- **According to Shields (2005), PBL incorporates methods from problem-based learning, cooperative learning, constructive learning, active learning and project management theory. Developing workplace know-how should be the main objective of any project-based learning. Shields identifies five competency areas that projects should address:**
 - 1. The ability to identify, organize, plan and allocate resources,**
 - 2. interpersonal skills,**
 - 3. the ability to acquire and use information,**
 - 4. the ability to understand complex interrelationships, and**
 - 5. the ability to work with a variety of technologies.**

Project-Based Learning(Cont.)

Interactive learning, made possible with the arrival of the World Wide Web, has a lasting impact on a person's ability to retain and understand information as described by the classic study conducted by the National Training Laboratory's "Learning Pyramid" (DeKanter, 2005). As represented by the statistics on retention rates below, students will have a greater opportunity to learn and retain the information presented in the web based tools than by simply learning the material in a traditional way:

- Teach others/use immediately 90%**
- Practice by doing 75%**
- Discussion Group 50%**
- See a demonstration 30%**
- Learn from audio/visual 20%**
- Reading 10%**
- Lecture 5%**

Project-Based Learning(Cont.)

Despite the lack of a universally accepted model or theory of PBL, five criteria should be considered when determining the effectiveness of a model: centrality, driving question, constructive investigations, autonomy, and realism.

- First, projects must be central to the curriculum and not peripheral; meaning that projects are the curriculum.**
- Second, projects should be designed to force students to encounter and struggle with the central concepts and principles of the discipline.**
- Third, projects should create constructive investigation that involves inquiry, knowledge building, and resolution.**
- Fourth, projects are student-driven and not instructor-lead or scripted.**
- Fifth, projects should be realistic and relate to the real world (Thomas, 2000).**

The JAI Approach

- **The JAI approach finds its theoretical and empirical justification from both PBL theories and the international business and strategic management literature (Cavusgil, 1980, Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1991, Grosse and Behrman, 1992 and Holtbrugge, 1997).**
- **Regarding International Marketing Management literature Kotabe and Helsen (2001, 578-580) mention that the content of global strategic marketing plan that guides the strategic and tactical marketing decisions usually covers four areas:**
 - **Market situation analysis**
 - **Objectives for each country**
 - **Strategies and resource allocation**
 - **Action plans (for each marketing mix element)**

JAI Approach(Cont.)


Hollensen (2007, 670-673) describes the stages in the development of a global marketing plan as follows:

- Deciding whether to internationalize**
- Deciding which markets to enter**
- Market entry strategies**
- Designing the global marketing program – developing the international marketing mix**
- Implementing and coordinating the global marketing program according to the allocation of marketing resources indicated in the marketing budget.**

The JAI Platform

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BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND THE REAL WORLD OF BUSINESS

Module 1 - Instructions | Suggested Websites | Glossary

Module 1 - 1.1 Company Analysis

Industry	<input type="text"/>
Company Name	<input type="text"/>
Company Contact Name	<input type="text"/>
Website URL	<input type="text"/>
E-mail Address	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>
City	<input type="text"/>
State/Province	<input type="text"/>
Zip Code/Postal Code	<input type="text"/>
Country	<input type="text" value="United States"/>

Note: From the dropdown box, select the currency you will use throughout the project. If you use a currency other than the ones shown, enter the name/symbol for it. Make sure you are consistent! The web site shown below gives both names/symbols and provides conversion capability. Weblink: <http://www.ratesfx.com/resources/symbols.html>

Currency Type :

1.1 a) Company background

WWW.GMMSO3.COM

1 **MODULE 1** Company Situation Analysis

Company Analysis

International Involvement

Industry Analysis

Target Market Profile

Product Profile

Global Readiness

S.W.O.T Analysis

Conclusion &
Recommendations

Report

2 **MODULE 2** Global Market Search Selecting Country Markets

Country Selection

Criteria Selection

Country Evaluation

Conclusion &
Recommendations

Report

3 **MODULE 3** In-Depth Market Analysis

Contacts

Market and Company
Sales Potential

Competitive Analysis

Country Entry Conditions

Financial and Market Entry
Conditions

Best Target Market Country

Conclusion &
Recommendations

Report

4 **MODULE 4** Entry Strategy and Marketing Plan

Entry Mode

Product / Market Strategy

Pricing Strategy & Plan

Promotional Strategy & Plan

Distribution Strategy and Plan

Projected Profit / Loss (P/L)
Statement

Conclusion &
Recommendations

Report

JAI Approach(Cont.)

The JAI approach leads to a systematic gathering and evaluating of information to build a learning experience that stimulates students using online resources. This approach seems to be consistent to that suggested by Chickering and Gamson's (1999).

- These authors recommend 'Seven principles for good teaching practice' encouraging: i) interaction between students and faculty; ii) development of reciprocity and cooperation among students; iii) use active learning techniques; iv) provision of prompt feedback; v) emphasis of time on task; vi) communication of high expectations; and vii) respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.**

Learning Outcomes

As a result of using JAI software as a key teaching and learning tool students should learn how to:

- Research, analyse, interpret and use data to make business decisions in a global setting.
- Apply what they learn in the classroom or training environment.
- Integrate knowledge from all functional business areas and be able to make decisions in a global context.
- Perform a situation analysis of a company in a global context.
- Practice how to research global markets.
- Identify and evaluate high potential country markets for company's products/services.
- Conduct competitive analysis.
- Determine best entry mode strategies.
- Develop customize marketing plans and strategies.
- Use internet resources and information effectively.

Learning Outcomes(Cont.)

Several surveys have proven (Janavaras, 2007, Janavaras, Gomes. Young, 2008, Gomes, Janavaras, 2008) that GMMSO software is an excellent way for students to enhance their understanding of decision making in international management and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Instructor Benefits

These web-based tools provide instructors the ability to bring the real world into the classroom, while offering an interesting, engaging and stimulating environment to their students.

- **Some of the instructor benefits include:**
 - **Minimum preparation time.**
 - **Instructor's manual and PP presentations.**
 - **Ability to monitor student progress and review completed projects online.**
 - **Real-time business tools.**
 - **User friendly (need basic computer skills only; detailed instructions are provided to guide you in completing the process).**
 - **Interactive and integrative (students can work independently or as a members of a team from anywhere in the world).**
 - **Cognitive and experiential (hands-on)**
 - **Resourceful and innovative (up-to-date web sites and targeted resources are included for each phase).**
 - **Multidimensional (can be used for global, regional and, individual country markets).**
 - **It can be used from anywhere in the world with internet connections!**
 - **Generate reports, provide feedback, and keep scores as shown in figure 2 and 3 below.**

Report Generation

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BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND THE REAL WORLD OF BUSINESS

Report Selection

Title and table of contents report	Generate Report
Executive summary report	Generate Report
Module 1 - 4 report	Generate Report
Bibliography report	Generate Report
Full project report	Generate Report

Score & Comments(Feedback)

Home | About Us | Site Map | FAQ | Contact Us

GMMSO
Global Marketing Management System Online

Basil Janavaras Logged in

Quick Links

- ▶ Module 1
- ▶ Module 2
- ▶ Module 3
- ▶ Module 4
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- ▶ Bibliography
- ▶ Title & TOC Page
- ▶ Report Selection
- ▶ Full Report
- ▶ **Score & Comments**
- ▶ Back To Project
- ▶ Back
- ▶ Send Technical Issue

BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND THE REAL WORLD OF BUSINESS

Score & Comments

Module 1	<input type="text"/>	View Comments
Module 2	<input type="text"/>	View Comments
Module 3	<input type="text"/>	View Comments
Module 4	<input type="text"/>	View Comments
Overall Score	<input type="text"/>	View Comments

Potential Software Users

The JAI platform is designed to guide students and managers through a systematic and integrative process for gathering, evaluating and entering data for a chosen company into each software system. The expected outcome is a comprehensive and dynamic global business plan, which can be executed anywhere in the world. It is designed for:

- **Business managers, government trade specialists and trade consultants seeking high potential markets and developing their marketing plans.**
- **Instructors teaching courses in International/Global**
 - **Marketing, Management, Strategy and Exporting/Importing who wish to bring the real world of business into the classroom or training environment so that their students could enhance their understanding of international business and improve their team-working, research and critical thinking skills.**

Teaching Suggestions

The suggestions below are based on the author's eleven-years of classroom and training experience with GMMSO software and that of other colleagues.

- Review the software prior to assigning it to your students for the class project.
- Assign it early, that is, the first or second week of classes.
- Assign it as a group project (Up-to- five (5) students per group). Individual assignments should also be considered on a case by case basis, depending on circumstances.
- Recommend an industry and publicly held companies or provide a list of companies to choose from.
- Require a project proposal consisting of Module 1.1a – 1.2.e.
- Allow students to work on the project during class time (If you teach an online course specify a time students can contact you with project related questions).
- Visit with the groups while working on the project in class.

Teaching Suggestions(Cont.)

- **Have deadlines for the completion of each module along with the final project.**
- **Consider grading each module separately and give students feedback.**
- **Since this is a group project, grade the Group site only. Tell your students to use the Individual site for recording their notes and keep track their contribution to the group project. As an Instructor you are able to access both sites.**
- **Challenge students to search for answers instead of expecting answers with the click of the mouse (they will learn a lot in the process)!**
- **Remind students to “Save” the information entered every time, that is, before they leave the screen they are working on.**
- **Suggest to your students to save the information they have entered to a Word document as a backup (as we all know, no web site or data base is immune to hackers and server related problems).**
- **Ask students to review the User Guide, Case Examples, Resources and Glossary before they begin working on the project. Glossary terms are hyperlinked in all 4 Modules.**

Concluding Remarks

The twin engines of global economic development, information technology and globalization, have accelerated the growth of web base pedagogical resources and revolutionized the teaching and learning methodologies through the use of the internet. Research evidence seem to indicate that one of the immediate consequences of increasing adoption of technology into the classroom is the shift from lecturer and lecture discussion to student center learning (Marcus, 2006). Recent research by Samarawickrema and Stacey corroborate previous studies showing that innovation and technology adoption in teaching and learning provide “effective, efficient, relevant, interesting, learner-centered, web-based learning experiences” (Samarawickrema and Stacey, 2007: 317). Several surveys have proven (Janavaras, 2007, Janavaras, Gomes, Young, 2008, Gomes, Janavaras, 2008) that the JAI software had enhanced the skills of the students, such as critical thinking, web-based research, team working and decision making.

Suggestions

Further research is needed in the area of PBL and interactive learning to determine the benefits and pitfalls associated with web based software and other simulations. It is also commended that morer instructors, students and business practitioners who use the JAI software are also surveyed in order to determine their opinions and experiences with the software.