

B2B SALES COURSE AS AN EFFORT TO BUILD STUDENT SALES SKILL

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Abstract

Preparing graduates who have sufficient sales skills for company needs has been a challenge for universities so far. Appropriate and effective learning methods are needed that are genuinely able to develop sales skills, especially Business to Business (B2B) sales. This study aims to empirically test how effective the Project Based Learning B2B Sales Meeting organized by the Applied Business Administration Study Program is in improving student sales skills. The method used to answer research problems is Quasi Experiment method. The results of hypothesis testing using the t-test showed that there were significant differences in the pretest and posttest scores of the research subject's sales skills. The t value from t-test obtained is -2.829 with a significance below 0.05, namely .006. The posttest scores was 86.40 higher value than the pretest scores 81.59. Thus from the result can be conclude that PBL B2B Sales Meeting is effective in improving sales skills of research subjects. With the proven effectiveness of the PBL method, it is recommended that this method be applied in other courses.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, B2B Sales Meeting, Sales Skills

Abstrak

Mempersiapkan lulusan yang memiliki kemampuan sales yang memadai untuk kebutuhan perusahaan selama ini menjadi tantangan bagi perguruan tinggi. Diperlukan metode pembelajaran yang tepat dan efektif yang benar-benar mampu mengembangkan keterampilan penjualan khususnya penjualan Business to Business (B2B). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji secara empiris seberapa efektif Project Based Learning B2B Sales Meeting yang diselenggarakan oleh Program Studi Terapan Administrasi Bisnis dalam meningkatkan keterampilan penjualan mahasiswa. Metode yang digunakan untuk menjawab permasalahan penelitian adalah metode Quasi Eksperimen. Hasil uji hipotesis dengan menggunakan uji-t menunjukkan terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan skor pretest dan posttest keterampilan penjualan subjek penelitian. Nilai t dari uji-t yang diperoleh sebesar -2,829 dengan signifikansi di bawah 0,05 yaitu 0,006. Nilai posttest bernilai 86,40 lebih tinggi dibandingkan nilai pretest 81,59. Dengan demikian dari hasil tersebut dapat disimpulkan bahwa PBL B2B Sales Meeting efektif dalam meningkatkan keterampilan penjualan subjek penelitian. Dengan terbukti efektifitasnya metode PBL, maka disarankan agar metode ini juga diterapkan pada mata kuliah lain.

Kata Kunci: Project Based Learning, B2B Sales Meeting, Keterampilan Penjualan

1. Introduction

Sales ranks among the top three initial career paths for graduates across diverse business disciplines such as economics, finance, general business, human resources, management information systems, management, marketing, and operations management (Cummins, et. al., 2013). Meanwhile Spiller, Kim, & Aitken (2019) stated that professional salespeople are the main job in both the current and future workforce. The government website, namely Prakerja.go.id, states that salespeople are included in the category of the 10 most sought-after jobs by job seekers in Indonesia in 2020.

In today's increasingly fierce competition, the role of salespeople is very vital. Through the sales force, transactions for the company's products are realized. Koponen, Julkunen, & Asai (2019) stated that the international B2B solution sales environment has become an increasingly complex and global communication environment. Reliable salespeople are needed by companies considering the competition that is currently increasing. Panagopoulos, Rapp, & Ogilvie (2017) stated that focusing on sellers is very important because they are essential players in the actual interaction with buyers through the relational process in sales solutions.

The important role and industry demand for sales personnel, especially professional B2B, encourage the emergence of training and education to develop the skills of sales personnel. Various learning models to build student sales skills have been developed in various universities. Spiller et. al. (2019) identified 30 learning models to improve sales skills during 2014 – 2019 from various articles. Cummins et. al (2013) stated that experiential learning and career development development) are most frequently discussed topics found in the critical review of 107 articles published in the top four journals covering sales education.

Studies that try to study the effect of experiential learning on skills in marketing and sales show positive results. Research conducted by Valdez & Cervantes (2018) shows that teaching through a retail laboratory can build the ability to investigate and design new retail strategies, increase satisfaction and motivation, increase student learning interest and learning value, and increase the skills needed. Furthermore, research by Rocco & Whalen (2014) on improving adaptive selling skills through class lectures, demonstrations, and role playing exercises. The results showed that the participants experienced an increase in ticket sales performance and also showed a better class evaluation.

Research on critical thinking skills in traditional and online sales education through experiential-based learning conducted by Alvarez et al., (2015) shows

that experiential-based learning improves critical thinking skills. The increase in critical thinking skills occurred in students who followed traditional educational techniques as well as online education.

Batam State Polytechnic of Batam Applied Business Administration Study Program in the past year has designed learning to build B2B sales skills for its students. The B2B Sales learning is grafted into one of the courses. Polibatam's B2B sales learning program is designed so that students have good B2B sales skills. The learning model used is the Project Based Learning (PBL) method. PBL is a form of learning

The critical role, demands and needs of the industry for salespeople, especially professional B2B, encourage the emergence of training and education to develop salesperson skills. Various learning models to build student sales skills have been developed in various universities. Spiller, Kim, & Aitken (2019) identified 30 learning models to improve sales skills during 2014 – 2019 from various articles. (Cummins, et al, 2013) states that experiential learning and career development experience based. In PBL learning students are asked to independently work on projects, namely finding solutions to real problems.

PBL B2B Sales Meeting challenges students to market Polibatam products to the industry. The two courses related to PBL are the Marketing and Sales course and the Entrepreneurship and Business Plan course. Thus students in the two courses will carry out PBL activities.

There needs to be a scientific effort to examine the effectiveness of the learning program in building student B2B sales skills. The fundamental research question that really needs to be asked is whether it is true that the learning program implemented by the Batam State Polytechnic Applied Business Administration Study Program has been able to develop students' B2B sales skills?

On the basis of the description above why this research is very important to do. The results of this research are expected to be an evaluation material and input for Polibatam, especially the Applied Business Administration Study Program to design better learning programs. In addition, it is hoped that the output will be in the form of modules which will later become guidelines for the implementation of learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Experiential Learning

Cummins, et al (2013) states that experiential learning (experience-based learning) and career development are two of the most frequently discussed topics found in critical reviews of 107 articles published in the top four journals that include sales education (ie, Journal

of Marketing Education, Marketing Education Reviews, Journal of Education in Business, and Journal of Sales & Personal Sales Management). Meanwhile Corbett, Kezim, and Stewart (2010) stated that because professional selling is a skill-based field, experiential learning is the key to student success.

Experience-based learning theory states that people experience the learning process from their experiences. According to Kolb (2015) learning is a process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. This definition emphasizes several critical aspects of the learning process from an experiential perspective. First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second, knowledge is a process of transformation that is continuously created and re-created, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning changes experience in both objective and subjective forms. Finally, to understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa. Furthermore, according to Kolb, the experiential learning process can be described as a four-stage cycle involving four modes of adaptive learning - concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

2.2 Project Based Learning

Ye et al., (2017) stated that the PBL learning approach places students at the center of the learning process and guides them in developing the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in school and the workplace. Meanwhile Efstratia (2014) states that the core idea of project-based learning is that real-world problems attract students' interest and provoke serious thinking when students acquire and apply new knowledge in the context of problem solving.

Furthermore, Ye et al., (2017) explaining the unique aspects of PBL, it was emphasized that customization is a crucial feature, allowing students to tailor projects to incorporate elements personally relevant to their interests and values when addressing real-world questions. Additionally, projects can be adjusted based on a student's existing knowledge and expertise, striking a balance that challenges them appropriately, fostering self-confidence and motivation. PBL demands significant high-level thinking and self-management skills from students, along with timely and constructive feedback from faculty. This approach naturally cultivates a learning environment conducive to the development of market-demand skills, or meta skills, as students progress through their projects. Furthermore, real-life projects often necessitate ongoing, task-specific feedback from faculty at various stages of the project.

2.3 B2B Sales Meetings.

Mullo (2018) states that the sales process can be interpreted as a series of activities that link two organizations together, with the aim of selling products, offering services, or providing solutions to customer problems. Meanwhile B2B, or business-to-business, is a type of trade transaction based on the exchange of products and services from business to business, not business to consumer (Saha et al., 2014). An example of B2B is sales components from motor vehicle component companies to motor vehicle assembly companies. B2B sales have several characteristics that differentiate them from B2C sales. The following are these characteristics (Mullo, 2018).

1. In a B2B sales meeting, usually one person represents the selling company and one person represents the buying company. However, in some instances a B2B sales meeting may involve more than one person.
2. In B2B selling, the seller deals with a small number of buyers but a larger volume of purchases.
3. The focus of B2B sales is how sales are able to build trust and maintain buyer trust in long-term relationships. This relationship must be constantly maintained, so that decision making becomes easier and more efficient
4. Sales on B2B are heavily influenced by technological developments. Buyers can view various kinds of products owned by the company through its website.
5. In B2B, buyers usually have high knowledge of the product and also have good purchasing process skills.

B2B sales meeting is the primary process in B2B sales. Sales meeting is a process where sellers and buyers meet in order to carry out trade transactions. Apart from involving two companies from the same country, B2B sales often involve two companies from different countries, which is called International B2B Sales. The International B2B sales meeting process can be summarized into three stages, namely the meeting preparation stage, the meeting stage, and the evaluation stage. These stages are described in figure 2.1.

2.4 PBL B2B Sales Meetings

PBL B2B Sales Meeting is a learning method by providing real problems to students, namely how to offer products produced from various study programs at Polibatam through sales meeting activities. In general, the process for implementing a B2B International Sales Meeting follows the B2B International Sales Meeting process.

Stages of PBL Sales Meeting students are asked to

carry out meeting preparation processes according to the product they will market. Here is what students do:

1. Setting goals
2. Studying products and companies (product knowledge)
3. Study customers
4. Analyze aspects of customer culture
5. Prepare questions for
6. Identify needs
7. Prepare product presentations
8. Prepare to deal with rejection

After the meeting preparation stage is complete, they are asked to carry out meeting activities with the industry. PBL sales meeting activities end with students making evaluation reports. The three stages in the B2B Sales meeting process above are implemented through the following PBL stages:

- 1) Fundamental/Challenging Questions
How do you market Polibatam products to the industry through Sales Meetings?
- 2) Planning the project
Activities/work
Equipment and materials
Division of work
- 3) Arrange activity schedule
compile a table of activity schedules and time targets
- 4) Monitoring the progress of the project
Write down activities in the logbook
Reports and presentations
- 5) Assessment of the resulting product
Reports and presentations
Video recording of the sales meeting process
- 6) Evaluation
Evaluation report

Polibatam products marketed by students through PBL B2B sales meetings are in the form of goods and services. The following are the names of the products being marketed:

- Garbage collection tool
- Cloverleaf antenna for temperature and humidity data acquisition
- Quadrifilar helix antenna for inter-island communication in the UHF band
- A solar panel energy marine garbage collector
- RFID for inventory, logistics, & for entity assets
- Magnetic stopper carriage for lathes
- Duku fruit picker with dispensing bag
- Trailer tail support leg with simple pulley drive
- Bottle cap holder at the opening of the bottle cap
- Clamp plate as milling machine accessories
- Plastic filament attachment kit for 3d printing machine
- Portable smart card and fingerprint reader system for IoT based time attendance
- Trainings for all Polibatam majors

- production of ic packaging
- PCB production two layers, three layers, 4 layers
- Manufacture of portable hand washing equipment
- all-purpose wrench

2.5 Sales Skills

Selling skills have been described as the proficiency one learns in performing the tasks required for a sales job, and consists of three distinct components (Ford, et. al., 1987):

1. Interpersonal skills, such as knowing how to deal with and resolve conflicts.
2. Sales skills, such as knowing how to make presentations and how to close sales.
3. Technical skills, such as knowledge of product features and benefits, technical skills, and procedures required by company policy (italics added).

Rentz, et. al (2002) divides sales skills into three dimensions, namely interpersonal skills, selling (salesmanship skills), and technical skills. From these three dimensions, they then created a scale to measure sales skills.

2.6 Prior Research

Delpechitre & Baker's (2017) research on the importance of intercultural selling in sales education. In his research, learning about intercultural selling uses the role playing method and then examines how it influences sales behavior and sales performance. The results show that students who have a high level of cultural intelligence are able to adjust their selling behavior and also show higher sales performance in role playing.

Research conducted by Valdez & Cervantes (2018) shows that teaching through a retail laboratory can build the ability to investigate and design new retail strategies, increase satisfaction and motivation, increase student learning interest and learning value, and increase the skills needed.

Furthermore, research by Rocco & Whalen (2014) on improving adaptive selling skills through class lectures, demonstrations, and role playing exercises. The results showed that the participants experienced an increase in ticket sales performance and also showed a better class evaluation.

Research on critical thinking skills in traditional and online sales education through experiential-based learning conducted by Alvarez et al., (2015) shows that experiential-based learning improves critical thinking skills. The increase in critical thinking skills occurred in students who followed traditional educational techniques as well as online education.

2.7 Research Hypothesis

Based on the theory and results of previous studies, the research hypotheses proposed in this study are:

Ha: “There is difference in student sales skills before and after participating in PBL B2B Sales Meeting learning. Student sales skills after participating in learning are higher than before participating in activities”.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Methods

The research method used to answer research problems is the Quasi Experiment method. Cooper & Schindler (2014) stated that under field conditions, we often cannot control enough extraneous variables or treatment experiments to use the correct experimental design. Because the stimulus conditions occur in a natural environment, field experiments/quasi experiments are needed. There are various designs in Quasi Experiment research and the design used in this research is the One-group pretest-posttest design.

In the One-group pretest-posttest design, there is no control group and there is an experimental group. The experimental group which can be referred to as the subject of this study was given testing before and after they were given treatment. Each test was carried out once.

Testing before and after treatment in this study is to provide a Sales Skills questionnaire to be filled in by research subjects. At the same time, the treatment is the implementation of the PBL B2B Sales Meeting.

3.2 Research Subjects

The experimental group or in this case referred to as research subjects are 4th semester students studying in the Applied Business Administration Study Program and Applied Logistics Business Administration Study Program. The number of students who became research subjects totaled 59 people. Fifty-nine students who were selected as subjects were those who filled out the pretest and posttest questionnaires completely.

3.3 Research and Measurement Variables

The independent variable in this study is the PBL B2B Sales Meeting while the dependent variable is sales skills.

The PBL B2B Sales Meeting learning method is a learning method that aims to develop student sales skills using the PBL method. Students in the learning process are given challenges to market Polibatam products to the industrial world. The following is a list of products offered to the industry.

Sales skill variables were collected using the sales skills scale compiled by Rentz, et. al (2002). The sales

skill scale is composed of three dimensions, namely interpersonal skills, selling (salesmanship skills), and technical skills. From these three dimensions, they then created a scale to measure sales skills.

Validation of the questionnaire on 30 respondents using Pearson's Product Moment correlation on the sales skills questionnaire indicated that out of 19 questionnaire items, only one statement was declared invalid and then removed from the questionnaire. The following are the Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficients for each statement:

Table 1 Questionnaire Validity Test Result

Statements	Product Moment Value of Correlation	Decision
1	.553	Valid
2	.295	Invalid
3	.518	Valid
4	.472	Valid
5	.553	Valid
6	.387	Valid
7	.717	Valid
8	.852	Valid
9	.736	Valid
10	.841	Valid
11	.761	Valid
12	.704	Valid
13	.678	Valid
14	.834	Valid
15	.823	Valid
16	.790	Valid
17	.678	Valid
18	.749	Valid
19	.719	Valid

Meanwhile, the reliability test of the questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha indicated a value of 0.931. This suggests that the questionnaire had a very high level of reliability.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected will be analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and inductive analysis. Descriptive analysis was carried out to summarize and present data related to research variables so that trends and variations in data on research variables can be identified.

Inductive analysis method to test the research hypothesis used is to use the t-test. Test the t-test to test whether there is a difference significantly between the results of the first assessment score, namely before the implementation of the B2B Sales Course & Competition learning, and the results of the second assessment score, namely after they received the learning. Before the t-test was carried out, the data was tested for normality with Kolmogorov Smirnov.

Learning B2B Sales Course & Competition will be said to be effective in increasing student sales

competence if there is a significant difference between the average score of sales competencies before attending the lesson and the average score after participating in the lesson. In addition, the average score of sales competencies after learning must be higher than the average score of sales competencies before learning.

The research stages are described in the figure below:

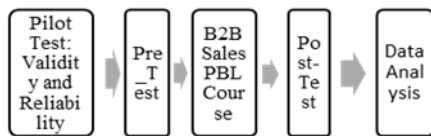


Figure 2. Research Stages

4. Results And Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The research subjects were students of the Department of Business Management from the fourth semester of Applied Business Administration and Logistics Business Administration Study Program. The number of students who were the subject of the study (sample) was 59 people consisting of 49 women and 10 men. Thus most of the research subjects were female, namely 83%. The table shows a description of the research subjects by gender.

Table 2 Research Samples Based on Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	10	16.9	16.9	16.9
Female	49	83.1	83.1	100.0
Total	59	100.0	100.0	

Judging by job status, the majority of research subjects were not yet working, namely 47 people (79%), while the remaining 21% worked both in marketing and non-marketing. Table 3 shows the description of research subjects based on their work.

Table 3 Research Samples Based on Employment Status

	f	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Working in sales	2	3.4	3.4	3.4
Working in non-marketing /sales	9	15.3	15.3	18.6
Not yet work online shop	47	79.7	79.7	98.3
Total	59	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.2 Pretest and Posttest Scores

Before participating in PBL B2B Sales activities, research subjects were asked to complete a pretest by

filling out a sales skills questionnaire. After carrying out B2B Sales activities, research subjects were again asked to fill out a sales skills questionnaire. The pretest scores of the research subjects had an average score of 81.5932 while the minimum score was 42 and the maximum was 121 with a standard deviation of 14.44. Meanwhile, the posttest score of the research subjects had an average of 86.4068, while the minimum score was 39 and the maximum was 123 with a standard deviation of 17.65. Thus it can be concluded that the average score of the post-test research subject's selling ability is higher than the average pretest score. Thus there is an increase in the sales skills of the research subjects after they participate in the PBL B2B Sales Meeting activities.

The following table 4 shows a description of the pretest and posttest scores of the research subjects.

Table 4 Pretest and Posttest Scores of Research Subjects

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
SKOR_PRETEST	59	42.00	121.00	81.5932	14.44266
SKOR_POSTEST	59	39.00	123.00	86.4068	17.64704
Valid N (listwise)	59				

4.3 Assumption Test Results

Before testing the hypothesis with the t test, the normality assumption test is first performed. The normality assumption test with Kolmogorov Smirnov produces a significance coefficient value of 0.200. Thus, the data meets the normal assumptions.

Table 5 Tests of Normality

TEST	Statistic	df	Sig.	Shapiro-Wilk		
				Statistic	df	Sig.
SKOR_TEST	.079	59	.200*	.984	59	.634
SKOR_POSTEST	.073	59	.200*	.986	59	.726

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Test the hypothesis using the t-test with 95% confidence. The t-test compared the average pretest score with the average posttest score of the research subjects. The results of the t-test yielded a significance value of 0.006. The significance value indicates that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores.

Table 6 Paired Samples Test

Paired Differences					t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
			Lower	Upper		

SKOR_ PRETE ST - SKOR_ POSTE ST	-4.81356	13.0680 9	1.70132	-8.2191 2	-1.40800	-2.829	.006
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4.5 The Effectiveness of PBL B2B Sales Meetings in Developing Student Sales Skills

The results of the hypothesis test showed that the PBL B2B Sales Meeting activity proved to be effective in improving student sales skills. The sales skill scores of students who took part in these activities increased after they took part in the PBL B2B Sales meeting. The increase in sales skills after participating in the PBL B2B Sales Meeting was quite significant.

According to the principle of experience-based learning, the learning process is derived from personal experiences. According to Kolb (2015) learning is a process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. This definition emphasizes several critical aspects of the learning process from an experiential perspective. First is the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes. Second, knowledge is a process of transformation that is continuously created and re-created, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. Third, learning changes experience in both objective and subjective forms.

The learning model with PBL B2B Sales Meeting provides experience for students to understand the products that will be offered to customers. They are involved in compiling product information so that product knowledge is very good. Understanding of this product is an essential part of sales skills. Students as research subjects also learn about customer needs related to products and also think about the product competitors they offer. By knowing customer needs related to products and competitors they learn to design the right bidding strategy.

Furthermore, students learn about the stages of the B2B Sales meeting strategy. They try to apply the process of understanding the customer's situation, identifying the customer's problem, studying the impact of the problem on the customer, and negotiating. They also practice to make convincing presentations to their customers.

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