Implementing Team-Based Learning Pedagogy in an Undergraduate Hospitality and Event Management Course

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Abstract: Previously, the Special Events Coordination course was conducted using a traditional lecture approach. The Special Events Coordination is an advanced level course where students learned about leadership and communicate direction for the production of an event. Realizing that the nature of the course requires more teamwork, starting in 2015, team-based learning (TBL) pedagogy was introduced to the course. TBL is a teaching method that encourages team development among students using active small groups. This study was designed to examine the effectiveness of using the TBL approach in teaching hospitality and event management students. Approximately 10 to 13 students participated in five different focus group sessions where participants shared their actual experiences with the course. The majority of the participants preferred the TBL approach compared to the traditional lecture, particularly when the courses require students to work on projects or coordinate events like this course. After experiencing TBL, the participants believed that the TBL method not only can help improve their academic performance but also prepare themselves for future careers in the hospitality and event management field. Additionally, this study found that more than 30 participants who agreed to reveal their final grade earned "A" for this course. While the findings are interestingly good and can benefit other hospitality and event management courses, there is still room for improvement. Future research could utilize TBL when teaching other hospitality and event management courses and compare the students' team development progress every semester until they graduate from the program.

Keywords: education, event, hospitality, team-based learning

INTRODUCTION

Team-based learning (TBL) is a teaching strategy that shifts the content delivery by instructors to the application of the course content by students working in teams. Students learned to make collaborative decisions and develop problem-solving skills that could prepare themselves for working in the future workplace. It is important to note that the hospitality and event industry requires employees to be able to work in teams effectively to satisfy customers. Teamwork is also crucial for the reputation of the company. Likewise, contributions by each member of the team are important and everyone in the team needs to feel like their opinion matters and valued by other team members. Therefore, becoming an effective team player is key for business success.

Importantly, TBL is slightly different than the normal working in groups as there is a structured forms of small-group learning. At least four core elements should be included in a TBL classroom, which is: (a) strategically formed, permanent teams, (b) readiness assurance test for individual (iRAT) and team (tRAT), (c) application activities, and (d) peer evaluation. According to Balan, Clark, and Restall (2015), the application activities or the classroom exercises rely on students using their self-gain knowledge; hence, TBL requires students to pre-learn the course materials before a teaching session. In other words, student pre-preparation or preparation before their class time is crucial to help the student excel in the readiness assurance tests (both iRAT and tRAT) that normally conducted in-class. While TBL offers many advantages, Frash, Kline, and Stahura (2008) recommended instructors using peer evaluation to reduce social loafing among students in the TBL classroom.

The TBL method is widely known among educators teaching medical and science courses (e.g., medical pharmacy, nursing). Using questionnaire, Mohammad-Davoudi and Parpouchi (2016) found significant results for team motivation (b = 0.197), team enjoyment (b = 0.418), and team cooperation (b = 0.205) on the learning results of medical science students. From the path analysis, they found that when the team motivation, team enjoyment, and team cooperation increased, the students' learning results will subsequently be increased. For one thing, a TBL classroom structure allows students to engage in the learning process, hence, students' learning

becomes deep. The TBL structure allows for a deeper understanding of content and prepares students more effectively for assessments (iRAT and tRAT) and overall course performance. Not to mention, one of the key factors of learning is motivation. Students will enjoy and willing to engage in the classroom when they have the motivation to learn. Using a classroom engagement survey, Faezi et al. (2018) found a high level of engagement in the TBL classroom structure (M=26.7, SD=3.70) compared to lecture-based classroom structure (M=23.8, SD=4.35). As mentioned above, TBL encourages students to engage in the classroom, thus promote a collaborative environment which consequently increases students' overall satisfaction.

Generally, most TBL studies found positive impacts of the TBL structure on student engagement. In addition to that, the TBL structure could help improve student academic performance. Swanson et al. (2017) found that TBL improves student classroom engagement, final grades, and performance in tests. Liu and Beaujean (2017) meta-analyzed 38 publications related to TBL on academic performance and found that on average, courses using TBL structure resulted in better learning outcomes compared to other teaching methods. Later, Chen et al. (2018) meta-analyzed 13 publications and found TBL classroom structure increased student examination scores, attitude towards learning, and learning skill. In a more recent study, Lang et al. (2019) found that the TBL helps improved student learning enthusiasm, communication skills, thinking ability, as well as, student ability to study by themselves.

Based on the aforementioned literature that is mostly from medical or science fields, it is important to note that a lack of studies is found examining the effectiveness of the TBL method for teaching social science courses. Although the TBL method is well-known for teaching medical or science-based courses, the method is becoming increasingly popular among social science instructors (e.g., humanity, hospitality) (Frash et al., 2008; Harde, 2015). Furthermore, many of the TBL studies found were using quasi-experimental design or quantitative approach to gather their data. This study is unique as the authors used focus groups to gather qualitative data, which include a planned discussion and interview with a small homogenous group of students conducted by a moderator which is the researcher (Kruger & Casey, 2000). This study examined the effectiveness of implementing a TBL method for Special Events Coordination, a capstone course. The

course was divided into five modules and each module follows a team-based learning module comprises of the readiness assurance tests to the application activities. At the end of the projects, students are required to complete peer evaluations individually to assess their team members' performance. Approximately 30% of the course grade is contributed by the team performance and a majority of the course assessments are team-centered, compared to the individual.

METHOD

2.1   The focus group interviews

A qualitative method was used whereby all students who enrolled in the Special Events Coordination course had an equal opportunity to participate in the focus group interviews. According to Anderson (1990), as cited in Dilshad (2013), a focus group consists of a group of individuals, with similar characteristics, who will discuss a given issue or topic. Morgan and Krueger (1998) emphasized that focus groups are guided group discussions that are used to "generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs" (p.11). In this study, focus group interviews were used to collect narrative data based on participant's experiences in the classroom, other than to elicit participants' perceptions about the effectiveness of using TBL in the Special Events Coordination course. This method is useful as it allows participants to provide detail information about the topic while at the same time, the researchers can control the ordering of questions (Creswell, 2014). The majority of questions focused on two main topics: factors motivating students to do their pre-class preparation and whether the TBL approach helps improve student academic performance. There were a total of five focus groups, ranging in size between 10 to 13 participants each. All focus group sessions were conducted in a private discussion room in the university library. Sessions averaged one hour to two hours and were conducted by the researcher who acts as the moderator, with the help of a trained postgraduate student.

Data collection period begins from February until March 2017.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the university. Each participant completed two informed consent documents. The first informed consent document detailed instructions about the research procedures including the participant rights (i.e., participation in the sessions was voluntary) and the measures are taken to ensure confidentiality of the records (i.e., participant identity will remain confidential). The second informed consent document is for permission to access student grades after the course is completed and the grades are submitted by the instructor. The moderator commenced each focus group by requesting the participants to read the informed consent document and to sign their names if they agreed to participate. Then, each participant was asked to introduce themselves at the beginning. As the role of the moderator is to encourage interaction among participants, the moderator used focus group protocol to maneuver the discussions and ensured all participants responded to at least some of the questions. With permission from the participants, all focus group interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim using professional transcriptionists. The data were then triangulated to examine the similarity of the responses among the different focus groups as described in-depth in the results and discussions section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 61 undergraduate students comprised of seniors (80%) and juniors (20%) participated in the focus group interviews. The majority of the participants were females. The Special Events Coordination is a required course for event management major, hence, justified the reasons for having more than 50% of the respondents from event management major. Other respondents who participated in this study were from other majors such as hospitality management, psychology, apparel design, agricultural communications, and public relations. A mixed of different majors allows each participant to contribute uniquely to this study as they will view the topic from different angles. This section will discuss the common themes and the different themes found from the focus groups. Direct quotes will be included to report the focus group interviews.

Common Themes

The participants of all the focus groups suggested that the most important aspect of learning is learning how to apply or use that information in new situations in addition to learning information including facts, principles, and concepts. Multiple quotes follow. One participant stated, "The most important thing… applying what we learned because the event management field is such a hands-on field, that if you don't have that real-world experience, you're not really getting much out of the class that you're taking" while another participant mentioned, "That's why I like the class, cause like somebody [referring to guest speaker] does come in, and it's like we're actually applying it to something real instead of just like going off of the books".

Related to the aspect of learning that participants think can be done effectively outside the classroom on their own or with their teams, most participants agreed about the importance of meeting outside of the classroom time to work on projects. Even though the instructor allocated all Fridays for project meetings, not all teams utilize the time to work on their projects. Also, the frequency of the meeting varies between the teams. One participant stated, "Everybody has a really different schedule. It was really hard to meet outside, except like the Friday which technically a class". However, one participant stated, "Everybody had to at least try to meet every other week. Not every Friday but every other week. Everybody had to attend the meeting." In a similar tone, one participant claimed, "It's really hard to find a schedule that works for everyone, so we just meet on Friday." Based on the interviews, most participants reported that they meet every Friday. For example, one participant stated:

"We divided the projects up into segments, and then each person did their project. And then we came in on Fridays and talked over with the group about what should we change, what we should do different, what's good, things like that. Then we would go for another week to work on that again, and then meet on Friday again and just keep doing that. So we met every Friday."

For things that are needed to do to be successful in the course, all focus groups felt that students need to do their learning (referring to self-directed learning) and not to procrastinate their work. One

participant stated, "There's a lot of work that you're responsible for learning on your own and that's not going to be re-lectured in class. Like, you're expected to know that." Similarly, another participant stated, "Just staying on top of things…we had to take a lot of courses… so, just making sure you stay on top of that. Time management is important." In line with that, one participant stated, "Time management is important since there are deadlines, so, we have to make sure to get everything done as a group". Participants highlight the importance of working on projects as a group and communicating effectively with the team members. For example, one participant mentioned, "Staying up to date with your team...if anyone is falling behind or doesn't respond, it's really hard to communicate with them to get work done."

For a successful implementation of the TBL classroom, the students need to play their role and to prepare prior to each class. For example, one participant mentioned, "Reading is really beneficial and I think reading textbooks is difficult. In this class, I feel like it's almost necessary so that you are comprehending the information within the chapters." Another participant believed that watching the lectures (referring to PowerPoint video lectures) was very helpful because the readiness assurance tests (iRAT and tRAT) will include information from the video lectures. Regarding students' preparation before coming to class, one participant mentioned, "Preparing outside of class, making sure that you're doing the readings before coming to the class so we have something to discuss on, and then just putting in the extra effort with the group project because we don't have a lot of time within the class to work on it, so just like holding yourself accountable for that." A TBL structure teaches students to be accountable to both the instructor and their peers.

The participants were asked to share their learning experience with the course, as well as, experience working in teams. Across all focus groups, concerns were expressed regarding conflicts that often occur when working on projects together. One participant mentioned, "It's a good experience to be able to work with other people and know what conflicts they're going to have when working in a team…making a contract and being able to decide what the firing process is…That's good for future learning." Nonetheless, one participant stated:

"At first, getting to know each other and then the next step was like we're trying not to step on each other's toes. We make sure no one was upset but right now we're all kind of like there's definitely very different dynamics in my group. There's been some conflict with people not getting their things done on time and others having to pick up the workload for others and so the one thing that's very hard about the class is working together. We did like the DISC profile analysis with the different personality types and it is really hard to get certain people motivated if they really don't want to work."

The nature of TBL pedagogy is about collaboration where every team members work together towards a common goal [referring to the special event projects] and coordinate their work amongst themselves. Normally in the TBL classroom, the teams will be strategically formed by the instructor and the teams should be permanent until the end of the semester. Instead of randomly assigned students into teams, instructors can creatively use various methods (e.g., DISC®, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®) to group their students accordingly. In this course, the instructor utilized the DISC personality test to strategically formed the teams at the beginning of the class. Most participants felt that there will be a mixture of individuals with at least four different traits (i.e., dominant, inspiring, supportive, cautious) in each team. One participant stated:

"One thing was really good with this class is, you got the personality assigned, so someone automatically becomes a leader. They help you take care of the group, and people who're better doing their own stuff, they can focus on you know not to waste energy on leading, but then actually focus on their part."

Generally, there will be no specific leader assigned either by the instructor or by the team members in the TBL structure. For that reason, each member should share the leadership roles and work together as a cohesive unit. Nonetheless, the DISC personality test somewhat allows students with a dominant character to lead the team. For example, one participant cited, "When we took the personality assessment, one of the personalities was called dominance. So, they naturally were the leader." Similarly, one participant stated, "There are people who take over leadership roles, but there is no specific leader." Another participant mentioned, "We split up our project… It was kind of almost hard to have just one leader because we're all kind of leading our part. But there was one person that like submitted everything for us. I was kind of the one to follow up with that person."

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The majority of the focus groups were in agreement about delegation of the task either voluntarily or based on their expertise. For example, one participant stated, "It's kind of like mixture. Usually, it's a volunteer. You don't really like have to tell someone this is what you have to do. Like in this class, people in the group want to do something, so they'd rather volunteer than be assigned something." One participant stated, "We delegate the task, but it does have a deadline. Sometimes, other people have to step in and help out and figure that out but the team evaluation has been good though cause it keeps you in check with that." All focus groups mentioned the importance of communication, time management, teamwork, and accountability when asked about things that team members need to do for the team to work effectively and successfully. In regards to communication techniques, other than meeting face-to-face, participants mentioned using technology applications such as Google Docs, GroupMe, emails, and text messages to help each other through the process of completing the projects. One participant mentioned, "Communication is huge. My group created a GroupMe on the app so that we can all text each other all the time. And then we're just constantly emailing each other to make sure that we have a report on Google Docs so everyone can work on it at the same time, so that really helps." Onother participant stated, "Communication was really important…We had some team members that had to miss because of certain things like sickness and weather, so I think we did a good job of just communicating [usually through technology] with each other. And then if they weren't able to be there, the rest of the group kind of pitching in more and saying how can we make sure that this section gets done." One participant cited, "Communication was the key. You keep communicating with each other and just making sure that everything's getting done."

Other than communication, the participants realized that the importance of having a good time management strategy is to ensure that the projects will be completed on time. One participant stated, "Just focus on time management…the instructor gave us this project in the beginning of this semester. Every Thursday, the instructor kind of brought it up [to remind the students], but we didn't start working on it till a little later on and so, we kind of just relaxed for a little bit, and then it all kind of just started piling up. So, I think that's important

to have time management for future students." Another participant highlighted, "Everybody has to read, definitely read, and go through the PowerPoint before taking the testa. So, if anyone in the group like literally missed questions…everybody kind of together support you. Then, do the study on your own because you have expectations from other people, so you kind of uphold that with yourself as well." Another participant stated, "Willingness to put in the time. Since we don't have a class with the instructor on Fridays, we still have meetings with the group, and using this time to meet up is important too."

In addition to communication and time management, two other important things mentioned by most focus groups were related to accountability and teamwork. For example, one participant mentioned, "A general idea is just to hold yourself accountable, and other group members accountable. Because you're expected to know the knowledge [referring to the course content]. So holding yourself accountable and communication are the biggest things that you need to have in a group to be successful." Another participant stated, "I would say teamwork and taking the initiative to actually do it on time. Like even if it's not due, we have our own due dates." Similarly, one participant stated, "Helping each other out as well as keeping others accountable and good communication; just making sure that we work as a team and not just like trying to do stuff on our own or go apart from the team." Another participant mentioned, "Being open to like your group members' ideas. Since we all come from different backgrounds and we're not all event management majors, I think we all have different ideas. Just be open to them, and then from there as a team, you can decide on what's right or which way to go." One participant stated:

"Our group was good at the tRATs. A lot of us had different answers for some questions, but we were very good at talking it over [discuss]. Then, the group came together to pick the best reason. Even though it might be wrong, we all came to a census of why the answer was right. And more than likely we got the answer right because we just talked it out with the team. So, our group did really well at reading, being prepared. Even though they might've got the answer wrong, they had a reason why they thought it was that answer. So, I thought we were really good at that."

Depending on the projects assigned by the instructor, most focus groups preferred to work in teams mainly like this course where students are required to coordinate a special event. One participant

mentioned, "You learn a lot more in teams because working by yourself, you only have your opinions and input. Working with other team members, you have people from all over the place, so they have different experiences and different knowledge sets." Another participant stated, "I like working in teams because it gives you more ideas, that you maybe would not have thought of that on your own." Some participants see the benefits of working in teams. For example, one participant stated, "It helps you lessen everything that you have to do and it helps you get feedback and make sure that the idea that you have is headed down the right track." Another participant stated, "I like it because you get different perspectives and have different opinions…people think differently, so maybe you're thinking about doing this way but then your team is like no I think it's a better way and then it makes you realize something else that you can do and it's just different perspectives."

Some other factors that should be taken into consideration such as the different personalities of the team members, as well as, the team sizes could influence team effectiveness. Some participants perceived six or seven as adequate size for a team. One participant cited, "It's harder to coordinate a bigger group like in this class, if there was only like three or four, it's easier. Especially since we all don't have the same schedule, it's so hard." Not to mentioned, some participants prefer to work alone as they perceived some projects are better to be completed individually. Two participants claimed, "I prefer to work by myself" and "I feel like some projects are better done individually". To elaborate more, for example, one participant stated, "Some projects like research papers where it's just easier to work by yourself because you know all the information and you can just organize it the way you want instead of talking to other people and having to communicate with them."

As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of the class, the instructor made each team come up with a contract and each team member was required to sign the contract before they embark on the projects. One participant stated, "At the beginning of the class, they made us sign a contract about what we could do if team members are not participating or not showing to class. We can fire a group member if they really

aren't. I like it because it keeps people accountable." One participant stated, "When we make the contract, we sit down and make a schedule about when we want every part of the project due and when we want to have meeting times. So, we try to stick to that. But sometimes people don't show up and then we change the dates that things are due and then it kind of messes up our original plan." Meanwhile, another participant shared their team strategy, "We have the dates, we did the same things, we set dates and all that stuff and we stick to the dates. If a team member doesn't show up then we just inform them of what we have discussed. We ask them if they have questions or anything. We still stick to our deadlines to make sure that we're still up to date."

All focus groups felt that most of the conflicts arises were due to different personality traits in the teams along with unaccountability issues. It is not easy to come into consensus with the team that consisted of different personality traits. For example, one participant mentioned, "Learning to work with a group that was picked for you with different personalities that you maybe would have never worked with before, collaborating on a project together and like having to organize a time when you can all meet." Another participant cited, "Just brainstorming your ideas and coming down to like a solid idea. Because with six-plus people in a group you have all different brains that are all thinking a different way. So it's good because you get more ideas and you figure out the best one, but like somebody's idea might be, they think theirs is the best and that person thinks theirs is the best. So that's probably, it's not a huge conflict, because you'll decide eventually. But it's definitely like a back and forth type of thing." It is worth noting that conflicts also can arise from unaccountability issues. For example, one participant stated, "There's been conflict in our group for sure. It's been like this people not holding up the end of their work and thinking that you can rely on someone to get something done. Especially if you have a section split with someone and you've done your part, but then they don't finish theirs. It's like turns into a big catastrophe when someone else has to finish it last minute." Another participant stated, "People sometimes don't show up to meetings and it's hard to do the projects and talk about it if people don't show up." One participant reported, "One of my team members doesn't really show up to class…always makes up excuses." Overall, the participants

felt the challenge of working together effectively; some managed to take the challenge positively while some struggled to keep up with the team.

Different Themes

Interesting themes emerged regarding the aspect of learning that students think can be done effectively outside the classroom by themselves or with their teams. These things were either appeared in only a minority of focus groups or shed different lights on themes reported from other groups. Among the differences was about how frequent they meet throughout the semester to work on their projects. Although the instructor allocated every Fridays as meeting times for projects, flexibility is given as long as students completed their projects on time. Some teams meet at least once a week and some participants mentioned that they will meet depending on how much they can get done in the meeting. The participants mentioned that some works can be done online via Google Docs or some other applications that permitted them working from a distance, which justifies why they did not have to meet face-to-face every Friday. One participant stated, "If you can do most of that on your own, there's not a lot of meeting outside of class." which in line with another two participants, "We rarely had to meet in our group because a lot of our things could have been done using Google Docs and things like that." and "Not every Friday. Unless if we need to, then we probably will." Depending on the tasks, one participant emphasized, "For collaboration work, we will make sure we're all on the same page. But other than that, we all did our individual portions on Google Docs." Even though there were teams that did not meet every Friday unless necessary, some participants did understand the importance of utilizing the allocated time to work on projects. For instance, one participant stated, "Most people probably meet on Fridays, the time we had allowed to meet and discuss for group projects." Another participant cited:

"Since we didn't have class on Fridays, I think that was a really good time to meet as a team. That was set up really well cause we had so many team projects."

Another difference between participants surrounded issues of their learning experience with the course. To point out, most of the

participants preferred the TBL method. For example, one participant stated, "I like this class because you kind of teach yourself on your own. Then, you come together with your team, and you talk about it, and then the instructor discusses whatever your team doesn't understand. So, it's kind of like you get three tries to really get it." However, there were participants expressed their concern about the teaching method since TBL is more about student self-directed learning that somewhat forces students to be more accountable towards their own learning. For example, one participant mentioned, "I don't like this kind of learning, because there's no incentive of coming to class. If I'm supposed to learn it all on my own outside of class, then, why do I need to come, other than the days that we have the quizzes [referring to iRAT and tRAT]…also it holds you accountable to quickly memorize the materials and I don't think you really are absorbing it." Other participants were more likely to view TBL as a teaching method that requires them to put extra effort for their team success. For example, one participant claimed, "I definitely put in a lot more effort for this kind of class. Because, it is like team quizzes and team-based learning, I don't want to let my team down by not knowing the materials. So, I definitely put in an extra effort because it's not just me and my grade by it's like the whole group." For some other participants, it was not about the extra efforts that concerned them, but rather the issues of having different personalities in a team and conflict that may arise resulted from different personalities. For example, one participant mentioned, "I like working in teams, but it can get frustrating because sometimes there are bigger personalities and sometimes there are quieter personalities. That's always a harder thing to balance but, overall I like the team-based learning because I feel like you get so many different ideas and stemming off of each other is always really entertaining and fun to get to do."

Some participants able to see the reasons behind the instructor's decision on forming the teams using DISC personality test and the importance of having different personality traits within a team. For example, one participant mentioned, "Working as an actual team and not break off individually. Be more positive about things. Some people can get upset or negative when things don't go right but it's important to stay positive about everyone. Everyone brings something

to the table, we don't need to always be negative about what's going on." Another participant cited, "You don't really form your teams in the workforce. You get chosen. That's how it works in the workforce. You don't get to choose your teams." As mentioned earlier, in TBL structure, the teams should be permanent throughout the semester, thus changing groups are not allowed unless permitted by the instructor. Simply incorporating permanent learning teams for projects instead of randomly assigned students can boost the team dynamic. One participant cited:

"The importance with the team projects is you know, not everyone's going to get along with the teams, and that's a perfect example of you figuring it out together as a team, using communication, and what works for someone doesn't work for someone else. You have to learn that along the way. This project was a perfect example of working in groups. What you're going to have to do like, I mean for me, I'm graduating soon so what I'll also be doing shortly [referring to working in the future workplace]. Some of my group members handled that very differently. Some things could've been handled in different ways. Everyone had different experiences."

Another different theme emerged from the focus groups was related to the use of technology such as instant messaging, Google Docs, and emails to work on projects. For example, one participant stated, "If we put it on a Google Docs and then everyone gets their own part, we don't actually meet as a team and then we're only learning the certain part where we're supposed to go over as opposed to learning all of it and then working together to work on the whole thing. So, I think it's easier because it's done quicker to do it that way [referring to Google Docs] but I also think we're missing out on the other aspects about working in a team." To put it another way, as TBL requires students to work collaboratively in a team, it defeats the purpose of using TBL when each student in a team merely focused on completing their part. In that case, students should use the time allocated by the instructor or alternatively, do virtual meetings via Skype or Zoom to discuss and work together on the projects.

Based on the focus group interviews, it is interesting to found that some teams not only have different personality types but also with a combination of different majors and minors. For example, one participant claimed, "That kind of help breaks up the different tasks. If someone knows a lot about marketing, then they can take on that section. That helped a lot to kind of further the project process." Having

different personality types and different majors/minors also challenged the students' ability to work in teams. For example, one participant cited, "It's nice but at the same time you don't know anyone. You don't know what the personalities are like."

While other focus groups mentioned about those with dominant traits will automatically become the leaders, some focus groups perceived that every team member should be equally treated as leaders for the teams. For example, one participant stated, "My group didn't necessarily pick out a leader. We all led the group. We all tried to hold up our end of the deal and complete our part of the work." Similarly, one participant quotes, "We all equally take initiative cause we're all like, at this point we're all seniors and we just kind of want to get stuff done and we're all kind of motivated." Another participant stated, "We all just kind of take turns. We all work together. We do have some people that may think they're more in charge than others. That's fine. But that's just because when you put a bunch of personality with leadership-driven people in a group. In general, put a lot of leadership-driven people and you're going to get conflicts. You're gonna get overpowering people. That's just how life is. You just have to know how to work with them."

Given that there were five focus groups, it is remarkable to discovered how many themes were commonly conveyed by most groups of participants. Participants' agreement on similar themes provides reasoning about how qualitative data shed important light on relevant issues for more qualitative or quantitative research regarding this topic in the future. In addition to the rich data found through focus group interviews, when the semester has ended, the researchers contacted the academic department to retrieve the final grades of participants who were willing to share their final grades. It was found that at least 30 participants who participated in this study earned "A" for this course and no student has failed the course. Based on the empirical data and students' final grade, it seems reasonable to say that the TBL structure helps improve student academic performance, particularly in the Special Events Coordination course.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides evidence to show that TBL is more effective than other teaching methods in improving student classroom engagement, as well as, student overall academic performance. Therefore, TBL should be gradually introduced to other hospitality and event management courses. The higher education institutions should consider revising the current curriculum to include more team activities because, in reality, the hospitality and event management industry will hire graduates with the ability to work in teams. For instance, if you are working in hotels, either in the front office department or the food and beverage department, teamwork is a must to ensure the overall hotel operations run smoothly. With that, higher education institutions need to equip students with important skills for them to succeed when working in the industry. Additionally, this study found that TBL is a profoundly effective teaching method although requires the instructor to spend a lot of time prepare the course materials. Once the course materials, the readiness assessment tests, and the rubrics are completed, much instructor efforts will be spent on ensuring students' engagement and learning satisfaction in every class time.

Whilst this study found rich data from through focus group interviews, one of our limitations was the data gathered were specifically focused on one course. However, since the purpose of this study was examining the effectiveness of implementing a TBL structure for the Special Events Coordination course, focusing on one course allowed us to explore the issues in depth. Moreover, this study did not compare the effectiveness of the TBL structure with the other teaching methods; thus, a comparison study is recommended to examine the effectiveness between TBL and lecture-based learning in teaching hospitality and event management courses. Future research could also compare the students' team development progress every semester until they graduate from the program.

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