The training and education of police officers has recently come into question by many facets of the American general public and the mass media as well. Empirical research into the effects of police academy teaching methods is minimal. This study examined correlations between different police academy adult learning strategies and police officer licensing examination results. A quantitative approach was utilized to compare the Michigan Police Officer Licensing Examination mean test scores between academies that formally adopted Problem-Based Learning (PBL) teaching strategies and police academies that have not formally adopted PBL (NPBL) teaching methods. Examination mean scores from official state records for a 15 year period (1999-2014) were statistically analyzed. The PBL trained police officers were found to have statistically significant higher scores overall on the licensing examination.

In addition, the perceptions of 231 Michigan police officers on their academy experiences were collected using an electronic survey to study the effects of PBL and NPBL teaching methods. The officers opined on their levels of agreement regarding seven areas of their academy education: the level of the PBL instruction provided, their acquired problem-solving skills, their acquired critical thinking abilities, their acquired communication skills, their level of satisfaction of their academy classroom experiences,
their beliefs that the education prepared them adequately to perform the requisite job tasks of a police officer in Michigan, and their overall satisfaction with their academy. The officers from the PBL police academy provided statistically significant higher levels of agreement than the NPBL academy officers in all seven areas.

Comments on three open-ended questions were evaluated to discover common themes. The officers provided their observations on the areas that were most and least valuable during their academy training, along with recommendations for change. Moreover, the police officers identified the key factors of their academy training to be the actual learning methodologies employed, their individual classes, and practical scenario exercises. Recommendations for academy directors, instructors, and curriculum development specialists are also provided in this study.