

The difficulties in implementing the case-study method

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Full reference: Daniel Erlandsson, “The difficulties in implementing the case-study method”, Högskolan I Halmstad.

Abstract

Since the requirements for a graduate to get an employment has changed must the also education of the graduates' change. With this said must the education and the requirements for getting a employment have a positive correlation. There are studies that deduces that the case-study method has many beneficial properties that will help accomplishing this, but the case-study method does also come with some difficulties that should be had in mind when considering the implementing of the method. This paper has therefore been constructed to enlighten those who potentially thinks of using the case-study method as a pedagogic tool, in purpose to educate them about the difficulties. In this paper have the current literature been analysed and there been found difficulties in the implementation of the case-study method. These difficulties have therefore been categorised in the purpose the facilitate the conclusions.

Keywords: Pedagogic tools, case method, case-study method, cases as pedagogics, implementation, difficulties, limitations, cases, cases as education.

Introduction

Accordingly, to (Floyd & Gordon 1998; Smith & Van Doren 2004) are employers looking for certain skills, certain skills that are more valued than other skills. Therefore, must the students acquire these skills. Accordingly, to O'Brien & Deans (1995) does the employers do not think the graduates possess these desired skills. The students' future employers do not think they can implement their knowledge to productive and resource generating activities. This has amplified the pressure of giving the students' these skills (Bovinet 2007; Rebele 2002). In order to supply the students with these skills needs the tutoring be educational and interesting for the students.

The pick of teaching methodology is crucial for what the students' will learn. The Centre for Teaching and Learning (1994) says that use of cases in educational purposes can be beneficial for the students. The cases are not often presented problems. Cases do often require a high level of prior knowledge and understanding in the subject to be able to find and solve the problems at hand. The students must there for be able to sort out relevant and irrelevant information. Faust & Paulson (1998) argues that the case-study method is one way to accomplish this. Easton (1992) reached the conclusions that the case-study method can stimulate creativity, decision-making and train the analytic, implemental, communicational, social and self-analytic skills.

The teaching has now a days began to be internet-based. This have created a problem on an educational level, the lecture-based teaching is not efficient in this situations. Alon (2003) has come to the conclusion that the case-study method is a very good pick here. Since the internet eliminates some of the managerial issues that will be presented in this paper. And at the same time can an open discussion be held in the online forums between the teacher and students.

The purpose of this paper is to present the difficulties that is imbedded in the implementing of the case-study method.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to present the difficulties that are imbedded into the implementation of the case-study method as a pedagogic tool. The research of the study is based on secondary sources, this mean that the information is not experienced in first-hand, someone else has already conducted the research is reached conclusions. The data collecting process has consisted of searching for scientific articles, books, reports, and other relevant publications regarding the subject. The search has mostly been conducted in databases such as Scopus and Web of science, the use of Halmstad university's database (Summon) has also been a productive way for gathering information. Google has also been used to search information. The search words consist of: Cases; Case-study method; Case study method; Cases as pedagogics; teaching approach; Experiential learning; Business education; accounting education; Marketing education; Case-based education.

To make the study reliable has the analyse of the sources been focused of finding the difficulties associated with the implementation of the case-study method as a pedagogic tool. To ensure the validity of the sources are most of them are peer reviewed, which is an accepted method in the scientific community. This method ensures that the information is correct and that the conclusions of the source has been audited and accepted by an independent peer.

Theoretical findings

When teaching a class, it is important that the instructor construct the teaching strategies and curricula in a way that will tangentially with the courses accommodated

requirements (Boyce, Williams, Kelly, & Yee, 2001). says this because students will construct their learning patterns after the accommodating assessment requirements Boyce et al. (2001) points out the importance of learning to analyse the breadth and depth of data. Since the case study method focuses on this, the student is not surface learning, e.g. learning the case. Instead the student is getting a deeper and greater understanding of the case issues, e.g. learning for the case. Boyce et al. (2001) want to address the importance of appropriate assessment of each student.

By picking a teaching methodology that incorporate the use of cases benefits the student in the way that cases are constructed. Cases are rarely structured problems. Cases are more often constructed in a way where the reader must understand the context of the text. In order for the student to learn something from the case the student has to define the problems that the case present, to do this the student has to sort out irrelevant information and analyse the relevant. This sorting capability is something students with a quantitative approach such as accounting or economists quite often do not possess. This skill will help to prepare the students for what they will face in practice (Center for Teaching and Learning, 1994).

Limitations of the Case-study method

Among all the benefits that the case study method provides, it also provides a lot of implemental problems. (Stearn, 2009) identifies that cases are time consuming for both students and instructors, as long as several learning object are not integrated in the case. Cases will not function as a tool to learn students' new information; this makes it difficult to apply case studies in intro courses. Cases takes time for the instructor to grade and this may result in subjectivity and can lead to dissatisfaction from the students against the course. This can be resolved by making case evaluation less impactful on the course grade but this can lead to another problem, the problem that students' not will come prepared for the case discussions.

This will further lead to that the effects of the case study method fades.

When using the case study method in large class settings it is challenging to get the whole class engage in the case discussion. Cases are often constructed in a very articulate way; this can make instructor that are teaching in their second language uncomfortable with this the case study method because they have to argue (Adler, Milne, & Stringer, 2000). Adler et al. (2000) concludes that there lies a great responsibility on the instructor when using the case study method. Adler et al. (2000) says that it is the way of how the instructor implement the method, not that the instructor is implementing the method. This argument is also discussed by (Hassall, Lewis, & Broadbent, 1998). They deduce that case studies are appreciated by the students accordingly to how the instructor incorporates the cases context into enriching learning objectives. This associates to Adler et al. (2000) argument of the importance of how the instructor involves the students in the cases and how the cases are used to enhance the students generic learning skills. (Sharma, 1997) want to emphasise that constructive feedback from the instructor is one of the critical factors to stimulate the student's personal learning.

(Adler, Milne, & Stringer, 2000) points on the responsibility of the instructor. They discuss the limitations of how individual engagement can be achieved by the case study method in large class settings. (Burt, Wright, Bardfield, Cairns, & van der Heijden, 2006) argue for that the case study method focuses on the retrospective thinking bases upon businesses past successes and failures, instead of prospective thinking that focuses on investigating the of possible outcomes. This makes the case study method less efficient then their own method (critical scenario method). Some limitations that (Greiner, Bhambri, & Cummings, 2003) found was that “today's case teaching approach appears to be heavily deductive, with instructors guiding students’, sometimes unintentionally, to ‘answer’ that confirm the validity of concept being taught” (p. 405).

(Cohen, 1989) wants to point on the limitation of the case study method. Cohen (1989) says that the case study method encourages the students' passivity, and at the same time unintentionally "teaches that good leadership is manoeuvring others into saying what you wanted them to say while getting them to believe they came up with the answer!" (p. 73). With this said student can learn how apply theories in real-life but will not learn the practical leadership skills.

Most of the limitations enroots in the difficulty of the implementation of the change of teaching method. Changing from the "receiving" teaching-centered approach to the "generating" learning-centered approach (Barr & Tagg, 1995). By do this reconstruction can case studies be complemented with exercises, reflective writing and other methods that help students to know how and when they should apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. Even though this method is implemented correctly, can some parts this teaching-method can be criticised to be to "skill-specific" instead of stimulating the students' to get a deeper learning. So they can handle unexpected situations better (Bigelow, 1995).

According to (Barnes, Christensen, & Hansen, 1994) can teaching methods that incorporates cases that imbeds the Socratic dialogue can disregard the moment of cross-examination. As good as cases can be for illustrating how management theories can simplify the complex phenomena's of business management, as equally bad can cases be for the development of new behaviours (Greenhalgh, 2007). (Argyris, 1980) says that cases often have the main focus on using already known knowledge and applicate this in new situations. The case study method does accordingly rarely support the students to see things from different perspectives or new thinking.

Opportunities with the Case-study method

According to (Easton, 1992) are the case study method creating the opportunity to address knowledge acquisition, analytical skill, application skill, creativity, decision-making skill, communication skill, social skill, self-analysis skill and teach about attitudes. (Argyris, 1980) concluded that case studies can be used to teach the students to hearing others' views, confronting differences, making decisions, becoming aware of the complexity of reality and realizing that there are rarely right or wrong answers, since cases are incomplete so are real-life situations. The case study method focuses on looking at phenomena, investigate and localise problem areas and later on resolve the found problems. Among the pedagogic tools for teaching econometrics is case studies the most used learning methodology (Zhang, 2009) (Zhang, 2009) Talks about the pros and cons with the case study method. They can be categorised accordingly:

- Theme choosing
- Students prior knowledge
- Students information searching capability

Since business economics such as econometrics are based on a quantitative method. The students' ability to attain useable and reliable data is critical. This is therefore linked to the students' prior knowledge, because to obtain relevant data the student must be capable to understand and analyse data properly. (Alon, 2003) Says that case studies can help teaching online courses or through online formats. This it because the case method provides the opportunity to open up online discussions, and engage the students to interact. The case study conducted of (Fordham, 2012) is deducing that the case study method has been successfully implemented in seven semester of an accounting course. The study show

that the students' reactions have been positive against the method. The method allowed the teacher to cover course details through analysis of real scenarios, which lead to higher appeal and participations from the students than traditional lectures and textbooks did.

How the Teaching-approach impacts

(Ramsden, 2003) emphasises that teaching is not something absolute. Teaching is accordingly to Ramsden (2003) ideas and how they are put together for educational purposes. This creates a good ground for how (Leveson, 2004) argues about how instructors teaching influences what the students are learning throughout their education. In a study conducted by (Lucas, 2002) she discovers that there are three conceptions of teaching, the shaping conception, the travelling conception and the growing conception. The study results in that the relationship between teaching method and teaching approach must be further investigated. According to Ellet (2007) can cases function as a viable simulation of real life situations (p. 13). Ellet (2007) also presents the difficulties that the case study method brings with it. As noted by Ellet (2007), "you can't sit back and let the text do the work. You have to read the case actively and construct your own meaning..." (p. 16). As said the student has to be active in the learning process, which can sometimes be challenging because this can force the students to leave their comfort zone.

(Libby, 1991) also points out that, when an instructor is challenging a student beyond their own comfort zone, resistance is to be expected. Libbys own words are "a significant attitudinal barrier" exist. According to Ripping et al. (2002) there can be some managerial factors that could limits to use of the case study method in large class settings. This is because the whole class is required to attend the class during case study teaching, the large number of students' can therefore lead to a shortage in teaching space.

Analysis

Since the way of teaching is evolving must also the way to teach evolve. When a teacher is about to construct the curricula for a semester is it important that the teacher constructs it so the students are going to get interested and involved in class (Boud, et al. 1993). The involvement and interest of students is important since this stimulate the learning and they can process more information than, in order to pass class. This means that the teacher has a very great responsibility on their shoulders. Since it is the teachers task to educate the students will teachers sometimes need tools to accomplish this. This tools are the so called pedagogical technics. In order to pick the right tools for the task must the teaching-approach and teaching-method correlate with one another, and there are more room for further research in this area to improve the knowledge of the correlation of these phenomena (Lucas, 2002). With arguments that Lucas (2002) concludes has Ramsden (2003) support for his theory, teaching is not something *absolute*. The teaching is the ideas of the teacher, and the results of the ideas is the reflection of how good the teacher succeeds to mediate these ideas and knowledge into educational texts', exercises and etcetera.

One pedagogics technic that teachers can use is the so called "case-study method". When a teaching is implementing the case-study method is it important for the teacher to have some things in mind, when using pedagogics tool such as the case-study method is it not that the teacher implements the tools, it is the way how the teacher implements the tools, e.g. the teacher needs to implement the method in a way that activates the students learning (Boyce, et al. 2001; Adler et al. 2000; Hassall, et al. 1998).

Whit this said can there be difficulties in the implementing of the case-study method.

So what are the difficulties in the implementation of the case-study method?

In this paper have the difficulties been categorising in three different categories. The categories are; *time consuming difficulties, educational difficulties and managerial difficulties.*

Time consuming difficulties

Stearn (2009) points out some difficulties that can come with the case-study method. Stearn (2009) says that the case-study method is very time-consuming. This argument is based on that the case-study method is time-consuming for both parties (e.g. teachers and students). If a teacher wants to use the case-study method efficiently must the teacher either buy an already constructed case and then adjust it to that specific class, or construct a whole new case, which can be even more time-consuming. The cases must also address several problems at the same time for being time efficient. Then the teacher has to present it to the whole class. When this is done must the student spend time reading the case, analysing it and draw conclusions which each students are going to present in a case-report or similar. The time students have to spend is dependent on the extent of the examination and the case.

After examination must the teacher also grade the reports, which adds even more time to this pedagogic tool. As Sharma (1997) said must the grading of the students' reports also be fair and constructive. If this is not done properly can a bad attitude against the teacher / class / School emerge and the students will not take the criticism of the grade seriously.

This time-consumption on the teachers' side will therefore be cost full for the institution, which not all universities are willing to permit and stand behind. The case-study

method will for that reason alone maybe not always be prioritised over the regular textbook teaching.

Educational difficulties

Stearn (2009) also wants to point on that implementing the case-study method in class where new information is being taught to the students, will the case-study method not serve as the ultimate pedagogic tool. As Zhang (2009) concludes, must the students have sufficient prior knowledge and the capability to search for relevant information regarding the subject in order for the case-study method to be educational and efficient. Therefore, will there be difficulties with the implementation of the case-study method in introduction courses.

The case-study method is built on constructed situations whose purpose is to serve as real life scenarios. This scenario-simulation can therefore seem to be deductive since it is not experienced in first-hand. The teacher own knowledge and experiences can therefore influence the students very much, maybe not always intentionally. This deductive approach leads also to that the students' uses their prior knowledge which can therefor lead to that the case-study method is retrospective orientated, e.g. looking on how other has already solved the "case-problem". Instead of promoting new perspectives off thinking or other ways to solve the problem at hand (Fordham 2012; Greiner, et al. 2003; Burt, et al. 2006; Argyris 1980; Leveson 2004).

The cases in their self can be an issue when using the case-study method. As Barnes et al. (1994) says can cases in their construction have a Socratic dialogue, which can overlook the point of cross-examination. Another "difficulties" associated with the case-study method is that it is supposed to be a "generating" form pedagogic tool. The down side with the

method is that it can sometimes be a “passive” form of education, which will not lead to that the students are generating knowledge. With this said can some cases be too “skill specific”. The students are then not always getting the deep understanding of the theories, they are being taught when and how they can implement the theories, instead of the practical skills needed to fully understand the theories. This aligns with the theories that says that cases are excellent simulations of reality and how scenarios evolve, but not ultimate for teaching the students to develop new thinking behaviours regarding the problem (Bigelow, 1995; Greenhalgh 2007; Cohen 1989; Baar & Tagg 1995).

When implementing the case-study method in classes does the number of students’ have an impact. If the number of students is low will it be fewer difficulties in the implementation, then if the number of students are high. There are several reasons for this. As (Libby 1991 & Ellet 2007) deduces is there a possibility for the case-study method to challenge the students’ to leave their comfort zone, which is good. But this can result in oppositions from the students against the teaching method. A problem that are emerging when using the case-study method is; how will the teacher involve all the individual students in the case discussion? The teacher has here a great responsibility to carry since the students can just lay back and listen to the discussion and self not a part of it. This aligns with what Cohen (1989) says about the case-study method encouraging the students’ passivity. This is more important to think of when using the case-study method in larger class settings.

Managerial difficulties

If the case-study method is going to be efficient must all students attend class at the same time. Depending on the number of students the class includes can there be many or few people in the same room at the same time. Often does classes include many students and

therefore demand much teaching-space. This can eventually create difficulties in finding class-spacing's that fits the large class settings. Rippin et al. (2002) have also argued about this as a difficulty for implementing the case-study method in larger classes.

Since cases often is constructed in a very articulate way can it be more difficult to find teachers with the cases language as a second language that are comfortable reading, discussing and fully understand the case-text. This effect is also applied in the students. If the student does not fully understand the text in the case will it be more difficult to sort relevant from all the irrelevant information, and solve the problem that the case presents. This will further on impact how educational the teaching is.

Conclusions

This papers purpose is to present *the difficulties in implementing the case-study method*. This paper will therefore not answer any questions on if the case-study method should be used or not used. This paper is supposed to just act as an educational paper so anyone that thinks of implementing the case-study method can be informed about the difficulties that are imbedded in the case-study method.

In the analysis can we see that there are some different kinds of difficulties in implementing the case-study method. There are:

- time consuming difficulties

Which includes the difficulties that will take time and resources from both the teacher and students', such as; constructing the case, discussing the case, writing and grading the case-reports. Another crucial difficulty is that the case must address several problem-areas at the same time to be efficient.

- educational difficulties

Which includes the difficulties the teaching will face when using the case-study method, such as; new information is not easily taught through this method, deductive-approach and retrospective thinking. The case-study method teaches often only how and when theories should be used, not why. The method can also sometimes encourage passivity.

- managerial difficulties.

Which include the difficulties the management e.g. the institution will face when using the case-study method, such as; that all students must attend class, hard to find teaching space for large class settings. There will be also be difficulties regarding if the cases are on a second language.

In conclusion are there difficulties imbedded in the case-study method. If anyone is going to use this method as a pedagogic tool must these difficulties be weighed against the benefits of the case-study method, in order to give a fair judgement regarding if the method is suitable for task at hand.

I hope this paper has given the reader a judge picture of the parameters that should be had in mind, and that this paper will prepare the reader for eventual difficulties.

Suggestions for future research

In the future should there be more research be done in the area of the implementation of the case-study method in classes. A study regarding which classed the case-study method is more or less suited for and how the method effects the examination-score, attendance, and overall interest of the students in class would be interesting to read.

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