

Problems and Solutions of Case-based Teaching Method in Business Education

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Abstract. In combination with the author's learning and teaching experience in UK and China with regard to case-based teaching, this paper emphasizes the significance and proposes common problems and solutions in the application of case-based teaching method in business education based on business courses of SQA-HND program in Xianda College of Economics & Humanities Shanghai International Studies University.

1 Introduction

As the booming economy in China, the number of start-up business is increasing rapidly. Thus business courses have been welcomed widely by students after their high school education. However, according to the author's 5 years' consulting experience with human resource department of different client companies, there is a gap between theory and application in those who graduate with business courses. The main reason for this may be lack of practical exercise due to the traditional teacher-centered teaching. Case-based teaching was firstly introduced to business courses in Harvard University, applying theory to application as its unique advantage now it is widely adopted by universities and education providers all over the world. Thus a surprisingly wide range of professional schools, including Xianda College, have concluded that the best way to teach business related courses is by the case-based teaching method.

2 Significance of Case-based Teaching in Business Education

Reinforce Knowledge and Skills

Students receive information instead of interacting with teachers and other classmates from traditional teacher-centered class, thus there is lack of interests for further reinforcement which leads to mechanically theory learning from class. As a student-centered method, case-based teaching can motivate students to actively participate in the case discussion and promote deep learning through applying theoretical knowledge to problem solving in real life cases. Various kinds of cases with different business situations recur to students' mind, which could lead to adequate practice in practical business environments. Case materials can help teachers "think like a teacher" [1]. Business cases usually come from practical operations, based on students' learning from class, for instance SWOT analysis they could identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the business operation.

Promote Innovative Thinking

Case-based teaching encourages students to provide solutions from different perspectives based on the same question from the same case. Unlike other traditional exercises there is no right answer which could motivate students no matter with good performance or not to propose their own innovative solution. In the meantime, teacher is no longer the knowledge initiator but the facilitator of classroom discussion. As there are differences in students' perceptions, values and judgments, through teacher's efforts on inspiration, facilitation and conclusion, students would come up with unique opinion.

A Path to Career Success

As employers are complaining about the limited application ability of graduates from business courses, case-based teaching can bridge the gap between textbook knowledge and real case solutions. Nowadays, case-based teaching has been in an unprecedented importance with the emergence of case-based interviews on business position, thus candidates with rich experience in case-based activities would retain absolute advantage to win the job. In the meantime, since usually well-known company cases will be adopted, students would have the opportunity to know the marketplace beforehand which would be beneficial for them to move to their career.

3 Problems in Applying Case-based Teaching Method in Business Courses

Lack of Up-to-date Case Materials to Arouse Student's Attention

Case materials are the core of case-based teaching. It takes a long time for teachers to research and compile a case, in the meantime, teacher's experience on the course is essential. Business courses such as accounting may encounter adjustment of tax rate; other courses such as marketing may experience the traditional 4Ps extending to 7Ps, therefore the need for developing up-to-date case materials is essential to helping students stay on the right track.

Insufficient Case Preparation from Both Teachers and Students

Business major students in Xianda College usually have 7 courses each semester. As shown in Table 1, there are average 3-5 assessments for each major business course with teaching hours vary from 48 to 72 hours. After the first month's course delivery, students start to get busy with exams through the rest of the semester, and teachers on the other hand engage in course review and exam marking. Case-based teaching usually involves lead in, discussion and conclusion stage, is regarded as a time consuming method would result in losing interest from both teachers and students gradually.

Course Name	Assessments	Teaching Hours
Business Accounting	4	72
Economic Issues	3	48
Managing People and Organizations	4	72
Business Culture and Strategy	5	72
Marketing	3	48

Table 1. Assessments and teaching hours of 5 major business courses

Examination Concerns

As can be seen in Figure 1, there are usually five different question types for 5 major business courses, single and multiple choice questions, true or false questions, fill in the blank questions, short answer questions, and case study questions. Among which, the first four question types which pay more attention to theories account for 80% of the total marks. Case-based questions only account for 20% of the total marks which would imply the ignorance of case-based teaching as more efforts should be put into those question types with higher marks.

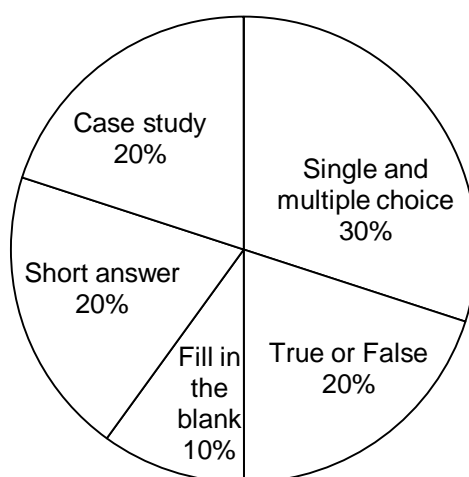


Fig. 1. Question types of 5 major business courses

4 Suggestions to Improve the Effectiveness of Case-based Teaching Method in Business Courses

Choose the Right Case and Keep Updated

Case should meet the needs of teaching objectives and arouse students' interests, thus it is suggested that the case chosen should be interesting and popular and relate to theory. Take the popular TV series *The name of the people* in 2017 for example, students may find relevant information from their business courses such as stakeholders of State-owned-enterprise Dafeng clothing factory, organizational structure of government organizations, accounting record of Shanshui group etc. With strong interest in the case, students' participation and contribution is expected to increase.

Adequate Guidance from Assignment to Feedback

As mentioned above, case-based teaching is proved effective in business courses, however it is time-consuming. Teachers should pay more attention to time management of the case study. During the case study process, teachers should give clear instructions on what tasks are to be accomplished as well as facilitate the discussion. From the author's personal teaching experience in Xianda College, feedback session is usually finished in a rush due to limited time as most case studies are conducted after lecture session. Feedback which plays the vital role in the case-based teaching should be emphasized as students may need teachers' comments to recognize or improve their work.

Combine Case-based Teaching with Traditional Teaching Methods

Each teaching method has its uniqueness and limitations, so as the case-based teaching method. Therefore, other teaching methods should not be excluded during the teaching process. Although students' application skills have been emphasized, case-based teaching should be undertaken on the basis of theory understanding. From the perspective of knowledge popularization and updates, traditional lecture delivery tends to be more effective than case teaching. Therefore, combining case-based teaching with traditional teaching method would inspire students utilize the comprehensive knowledge and skills from traditional teaching to discuss and analyze the case materials.

5 Conclusion

Business courses are majors that need to be closely integrated with company practice; its course characteristics have determined the application value of case-based teaching on inspiring students' thinking and arousing students' learning interests. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers could continue enhancing exploration on case-based teaching and applying to business course classrooms.

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