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Case Study Approach in Learning of Accounting Studies: Student Perception Analysis

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Abstract

Teaching term is related with a process to make a student think in more creative and open manner by equipping him with knowledge, experience, and skills with a sound attitude. The rationale of teaching a student is to make him take sound decisions and solve various problems of life by the learning acquired by him through systematic acquisition of education. Various methods of teaching and learning have been adopted and analysed for their effectiveness on learning of students. Case study method, pioneered by Harvard Business School, is one of the most innovative teaching-learning methods for fostering psychological growth in terms of enhancing analytical and rational abilities of a student. It encourages the development of creative ability to analyse the situation and identify all the possible alternatives for the problems analysed by them.

The case study method allows a student to be dynamic throughout the process, to encourage teamwork behaviour, and to make group decisions and discussions by sharing of information. It has been thus one of the best primary learning methods for any phenomenon for all students. In the present research work the impact of the case study approach on learning for accounting subject in undergraduate students of Commerce and Accounts, students of business administration and non-accounting students of similar business and entrepreneurship related programs is studied. The statistical analysis used to the study is one way ANOVA. The data collection for study in hand is both primary and secondary in nature, and an instrument was structured for the collection of primary data. The research findings and results help in making accounting teaching and learning more interactive and effective among both accounting and non-accounting students (business management, auditors, law, etc.).

Keywords: *Case study method, teaching-learning method, accounting and non-accounting students, accounting studies.*

Introduction

Researchers have observed that the students from non-accounting background have certain perceptions regarding accounting studies and accounting profession. It has been found in some studies that teachers teaching accounting are influential in the decision of students to study accounting as their major subject (Tan, 2005), (Paolillo, 1982), (Cangelosi, 1985) and (Saudagaran, 1996).

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Also it was found in some studies, that the inclination of student is also affected by the teaching methodologies used by teachers teaching accounting studies, and it has been reported that the non-accounting students found the subject more challenging than others due to the pedagogy styles (Saudagaran, 1996). Many accountants were found deficient in abilities like confidence, responsibility, leadership, independence and cooperation after pursuing their accounting course of two years in their studies.

A number of different courses including bachelors and masters of business administration and certain business courses including entrepreneurship and SMSEs courses require non accounting students to acquire basic conceptual accounting literacy for proper and effective decision making. Therefore, there is a need of making teaching and learning approaches more strategic, interactive and innovative for both accounting as well as non-accounting students pursuing such courses.

Research Problem and Objectives

The present research work has been carried out to propose active learning and teaching strategies in the form of case study method for both accounting and non-accounting students for effective learning of accounting concepts in form of course material and by providing them the opportunity to use practical thinking skills.

The objective of the proposed research work is to study the impact of case study methodologies in promoting effective learning and long-term retention of the concepts of the subject. Thus, this study helps us in finding out the impact of an innovative learning approach of teaching accounting and analyzes the following research objective:

There is a significant impact of case study approach in teaching accounting studies in both accounting and non-accounting studies

Statement on Significance of Research

Understanding the impact of case study pedagogy method on learning of students serves in designing an appropriate strategy for shaping the difficulty and level of improvement. This helps in creating supportive and reactive environment to ensure academic and behavioural development of all students.

Literature Review

In various research studies more attention is paid to general learning skills of students including communication, problem solving skills and the ability to think analytically. Some researchers found that learners use the experiences to construct new knowledge that they have gained through interaction with the environment (Yang 2012). The researchers also found the need to develop student-centred or conceptual to practical change orientation to introductory accounting teaching and learning (Leveson, 2004).

In an analysis on students of undergraduate courses in agricultural economics the conclusion reached was that certain techniques when used as teaching methods like role playing, case studies, and simulation games can improve the effectiveness of learning. The results indicated that these techniques improve understanding of students of complicated material when combined with lecture presentations (Blank, 1985).

It was suggested in a study that the students of accounting education should be encouraged to become more active and independent learners than involving themselves in processing information. The case study method is one of the best techniques for developing these skills in accounting courses (committee, 1986).

In addition to teaching technical accounting skills and theoretical conceptual knowledge, the case study method develop various kinds of expertise in students such as identifying the difference between cash and accrual accounting, analysing and learning to present the information and develop communication skills. By placing the same issue in context into a case scenario students can consider wider business scenario and thereby acquire additional generic skills pertaining to judgement, problem-solving and critical analysis (Ballantine J., 2009).

Similarly, a research study argued for students' involvement in real-world simulations (an approach known as experiential learning) as part of their classroom experience (through the medium of case studies) as one way to develop competencies other than technical knowledge.

In teaching accounting case studies can be used in a variety of ways as the primary learning mechanism, as this method of learning provides the foundation for an integrated, inductively-driven teaching process.

Shugan (2006) stated that the use of case study method was used for the first time in 1870 by Christopher Columbus Langdell, Professor of Harvard University, to make students develop analytical ability and as an approach to learning apart from reading textbooks. He required law students to apply their theoretical knowledge in different practical situations so that they will be able to apply their conceptual knowledge in practice at their work places. In 1919, Dean, Harvard Business School, Wallace P. Donham adapted this approach in his lectures. This method has been treated as incidence method for the other scientific fields (S, 2006).

The case study method is found to be one of the most effective teaching techniques due to its applicability to real world management situations. As noted in HBS, (2001), businessmen in the real world have to make decisions that have real consequences, and by using the case method students intellectually engaged with the real world situation as they acquire the knowledge, skills, and tools to deal with such situations in their careers. Accordingly case study method is a powerful process of inductive learning and reasoning process to arrive at solutions of the problems identified by them (School, 2001).

Accounting and management teachers can use short case studies to demonstrate realworld practices in lectures as part of the teaching process. This approach requires students to prepare and discuss solutions to ambiguous cases with minimal guidance to maintain the problem solving focus (Libby, 1991). In a research Knyvienė (2014) cited that case studies play a major role as a learning method, facilitating students' preparation and discussion of real business situations, concluding the requirement to formulate a managerial decision. This method engaged students in identifying various relevant issues, making necessary calculations from provided information, identifying appropriate alternatives, and taking decisions in order to arrive at a conclusion, after defending the alternative in groups and after proper evaluation along with the perspectives of other group members and modifying their solution for the problem in hand. He further observed in the research that according to Samarina and Kalugina (1999) the cases are real situations, which require the student to be rational and to think and integrate their existing knowledge in the decision-making to consider the possible decision alternatives, causes and problems, and then to make decisions and validate them. In this method, the student analyzes the situation and examines his theoretical knowledge. Another situation is when the student is informed about the situation, the problem is uncertain and the student has to discover the probable situation (Knyvienė, 2014).

Researchers (Lloyd and Abbey, 2009) also reviewed a variety of unusual strategies like use of remedial modules, case studies, proactive student participation opportunities, within or outside the classroom lecture, mini-quizzes, and mnemonics for presenting and learning opportunities to non-accounting students as tool of effective teaching methodologies to promote active learning, develop interest in accounting studies, and help in enhancing the critical thinking skills in the attainment of concepts of accounting. They also discussed the modifications that can be done according to the size and level of individual in these mathematical, practical, rules and risk oriented accounting courses at the introductory level (Lloyd, 2009). In a research on problem based learning teaching approach of pedagogy applied to the intermediate accounting course of students' learning effectiveness and academic performance, the research findings indicated that such method can significantly improve student's learning outcomes (Wei-hung, 2014). Hughes and Berry (2000) also found that the case study can be used as a learning resource for accounting educators, supervisors and students through a framework provided with review, exploratory and application questions (Hughes & Berry, 2000).

Research Methodology, Analysis and Interpretation

The research is causal in nature as the objective for research is to study the effect of case study on accounting and non-accounting students. The research population for study in hand were students of undergraduate courses of accounting studies and the students of business administration program and similar programs of business and entrepreneurship (which includes students of all educational backgrounds). Simple random sampling is done for the current research work and a sample of 179 students was selected from the population on the basis of their having accounting and non-accounting background along with their enrolment in accounting or management or business studies and business skill courses.

Research Instrument of Data Collection

The data is collected through both primary and secondary sources. The primary data is collected by using a structured questionnaire for collecting the information from sample population. The instrument for collecting primary data was structured on the basis of information from available literature collected from various secondary sources.

Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis statistical method ANOVA is used to study the impact of case study approach on teaching accounting studies across the sample including both accounting and non-accounting students. The method helps in identifying the significance level of different criteria that developed in students due to case study approach. The criteria were identified after reviewing available literature for the study on hand.

The instrument designed was tested and Cronbach's alpha was measured to assess the reliability, or internal consistency, of a set of scale or test items used in the same. The value of Cronbach alpha was assessed at 0.863 which is acceptable for reliability of instrument designed for the study. Proper consideration has been given for maintaining the confidentiality and originality of data for the research work.

Table 1: Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	179	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	179	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.863	22

The criteria were studied on 95% significance level and those having value below 0.05 were found as significant for the study. Twenty-two criteria were studied in the research and around 15 were found to have significant relevance across accounting and non-accounting students as shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Significance Level of Criteria Chosen

1. Level of interaction	.002
2. Understanding of concept	.056
3. Communication of concept	.760
4. Presentation	.000
5. Involvement of teacher/instructor	.000
6. Involvement of student/trainee	.000
7. Selection of case	.899

8. Level of Problem of the case	.863
9. Understanding case study method	.807
10. Enhancement of ability at personal level	.059
11. Group level performance enhancement	.022
12. Time management	.000
13. Fulfilment of objective of curriculum	.000
14. Psychological growth	.000
15. Effectiveness of method than other approaches	.051
16. Freedom to take decisions	.005
17. Leadership development	.359
18. Quantity and distribution of student effort	.000
19. Quality and level of student effort	.000
20. Quantity and timing of feedback	.003
21. Quality of feedback	.006
22. Response of students to feedback	.211

Table 4: ANOVA TABLE

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
VAR00001 Between Groups	10.642	2	5.321	2.040	.002
VAR00001 Within Groups	458.989	176	2.608		
VAR00001 Total	469.631	178			
VAR00002 Between Groups	2.860	2	1.430	.424	.056
VAR00002 Within Groups	594.056	176	3.375		
VAR00002 Total	596.916	178			
VAR00003 Between Groups	8.462	2	4.231	1.583	.760
VAR00003 Within Groups	470.465	176	2.673		
VAR00003 Total	478.927	178			
VAR00004 Between Groups	2.803	2	1.401	.365	.000
VAR00004 Within Groups	675.633	176	3.839		
VAR00004 Total	678.436	178			
VAR00005 Between Groups	5.952	2	2.976	.896	.000
VAR00005 Within Groups	584.349	176	3.320		
VAR00005 Total	590.302	178			
VAR00006 Between Groups	1.911	2	.955	.352	.000

	Within Groups	477.017	176	2.710		
	Total	478.927	178			
	Between Groups	3.456	2	1.728	.483	.899
VAR00007	Within Groups	629.393	176	3.576		
	Total	632.849	178			
	Between Groups	3.776	2	1.888	.524	.863
VAR00008	Within Groups	634.436	176	3.605		
	Total	638.212	178			
	Between Groups	.589	2	.295	.075	.807
VAR00009	Within Groups	688.036	176	3.909		
	Total	688.626	178			
	Between Groups	2.429	2	1.215	.300	.059
VAR00010	Within Groups	713.012	176	4.051		
	Total	715.441	178			
	Between Groups	4.810	2	2.405	.760	.022
VAR00011	Within Groups	557.246	176	3.166		
	Total	562.056	178			
	Between Groups	4.642	2	2.321	1.461	.000
VAR00012	Within Groups	279.604	176	1.589		
	Total	284.246	178			
	Between Groups	4.388	2	2.194	.752	.000
VAR00013	Within Groups	513.255	176	2.916		
	Total	517.642	178			
	Between Groups	8.670	2	4.335	1.475	.000
VAR00014	Within Groups	517.241	176	2.939		
	Total	525.911	178			
	Between Groups	3.899	2	1.949	1.940	.051
VAR00015	Within Groups	176.883	176	1.005		
	Total	180.782	178			
	Between Groups	.714	2	.357	.374	.005
VAR00016	Within Groups	168.046	176	.955		
	Total	168.760	178			
	Between Groups	.803	2	.402	.313	.359
VAR00017	Within Groups	225.543	176	1.281		
	Total	226.346	178			
	Between Groups	.591	2	.295	.299	.000
VAR00018	Within Groups	173.811	176	.988		
	Total	174.402	178			
	Between Groups	4.527	2	2.264	2.622	.000
VAR00019	Within Groups	151.953	176	.863		
	Total	156.480	178			
	Between Groups	3.947	2	1.973	1.564	.003
VAR00020	Within Groups	222.064	176	1.262		
	Total	226.011	178			
	Between Groups	1.417	2	.708	.907	.006
VAR00021	Within Groups	137.511	176	.781		
	Total	138.927	178			
	Between Groups	9.024	2	4.512	4.203	.211
VAR00022	Within Groups	188.953	176	1.074		
	Total	197.978	178			

Discussion and Findings

It has been found in the study, that there are number of criteria related to the study of accounting through case method across which the accounting and non-accounting students found to have significant difference, i.e. case-study method has been found to have significant impact on the learning ability and developing the skills above listed Table 4.

Proper concern must be taken into account by the faculty of accounting in case selection, the level of the problem with which the case dealt with, understanding of case study method and properly defined leadership in identification of case problem and selection of solution. Students' response to feedback has not been found to make any difference across them.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The findings of research verify the case study approach as an effective approach of teaching in accounting pedagogy for the students having accounting background as well as for students from non-accounting background. More case studies based on original and real business situations must be developed and identified by the teachers of accounting studies for effective teaching and developing quality students for the subject. The choice of case study may vary from a single conceptual case study to a multi-dimensional study to make students develop the required practical approach along with the theoretical knowledge of a particular aspect of the subject.

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