Teaching by the Case Method: Using Action Research to Enhance Student Participation

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine factors that contribute to postgraduate students' class participation when the case study method of instruction is used. It was motivated by lecturers' concern on low class participation. The outcome was identification of appropriate interventions to enhance class participation.

The study surveyed 124 postgraduate students at Strathmore University and interviewed four lecturers. The results showed that while both students and lecturers considered the case methodology an effective approach to course delivery, a number of factors hindered effective participation. Students said they lacked adequate time for case preparation, lacked clarity on expected learning outcomes, and were often fatigued when going to evening classes, a view supported by lecturers.

Students and lecturers indicated that using diverse ways of teaching, being familiar with case context and being able to apply lessons learnt were contributors to effective class participation. On interventions for the future, more time for case preparation, balanced class participation and alignment between the teaching approach and assessment were identified.

Key Words: Participatory Action Research, Higher Education, Teaching and Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning by the case method has been described as the most relevant and practical way to learn managerial skills. The method calls for discussions of *real-life situations* that business executives have faced. As students review the cases, they put themselves in the shoes of the managers, analyse the situation, decide what to do and defend their decisions (Hammond, 2002) .

The case method helps students to learn because the case studies cut across a range of organizations and situations thereby providing managers with greater exposure than they are likely to experience in their day-to-day routine. In class discussions, students bring to bear their expertise, experience, observations and analyses. Each student's contribution becomes key to the learning process as students bring different interpretations to problems and ways of solving them. Students active participation is therefore a key component to the success of learning using the case method. In addition, the students sense of fun and excitement that comes with being a manager is reinvigorated. The method is therefore motivating and effective to students in educating the manager (Hammond, 2002; Bruns, 2006).

A. Background to the Study

Strathmore University runs six masters programmes. All the programmes are offered on a part-time basis as the target students are those in the workforce. Students come to class in the evenings and Saturdays. The evening classes run from 5.30pm – 8.30pm (three evenings a week), while the Saturday classes run from 8.30am – 1.00pm.

The case study methodology is used in all the programmes. About 50% of the course time is spent on case discussion teaching. Students receive the cases one or two weeks before each class session and are required to do individual preparation and group discussions before they come to class.

B. The Problem

Anecdotal evidence from postgraduate students suggests that they consider the case method appropriate for teaching, especially since they are mature-age working class students with a lot of experience to share. They say cases help them to remember concepts and apply them appropriately. Assessment of lecturers by the university management has also demonstrated that lecturers who use case studies to teach receive a better student evaluation than those who do not. Consequently, there is a "push" by some deans to get more of their faculty to use the case method. Despite these perceived benefits, faculty consistently report low class participation by students, with only about 30% of students actively participating in each session.

Various researchers suggest some of the reasons for low student participation. Bruns (2006), for example, suggests that student participation in class should be graded. He argues that if left ungraded, part of the motivation that students need is lost and part of the record that the lecturer can use to facilitate individual student learning is not developed. Hammond (2002) emphasises that students' effective participation is a direct outcome of their individual preparation before the class, while Ellet (2007) takes the debate further and posits that student preparation is not about reading the case, but thinking about it and asking the right reflective questions. As such, if adequate time for reflection is not available, participation is low.

The teacher plays an important role in encouraging participation. On the one hand Frei (2004) suggests that student participation is a function of the ability by the teacher to create a supportive environment for participation. The teacher has to encourage and celebrate student participation as a way of motivating them to participate. Golich (2000) on the other hand suggests that for the case method to be effective, the feedback cycle has to be completed. Students must be given an opportunity to evaluate on the usefulness of particular case(s) as this adds to their motivation to participate as they are willing to invest more in the learning process when they have a voice on the outcome. If the learning environment is not right, student participation will be low. As such, there is a diversity of hypothesis as to why student participation may be low.

This study therefore sought to elicit postgraduate students' feedback on the usefulness of the case method to their learning, with the aim of developing appropriate interventions to motivate their classroom participation so that improved learning can occur. As noted by Jain (2005) the case methodology is highly context-specific in terms of effectiveness. The study aimed to identify some of the context-specific challenges that Kenyan postgraduate students face with regard to discussion teaching and their individual participation.

The research approach taken was participatory and collaborative action research and self study with the researcher being an active participant and asking self-reflective questions (McNiff & Whitehead 2006) aimed at understanding the behaviour of students and the teacher's own practice. The current study reports on the reconnaissance phase of the action research. The action/ interventions identified are currently being implemented and findings will be reported in 2011.

C. Research Aim and Expected Outcome

The aim of the study was to examine the factors that contribute to classroom participation when the case study methodology is used. The study sample was 124 students taking different masters courses at Strathmore University. The outcome of the study was to identify key interventions aimed at enhancing classroom participation and consequently improved learning by students.

D. *Research Questions*

- What factors contribute to classroom participation of postgraduate students where the case method is used?
- What factors hinder classroom participation of postgraduate students where the case method is used?
- What interventions can be implemented to improve postgraduate students' participation in case teaching?

E. *Justification of the Study*

Key stakeholders to benefit from the study include the lecturers of postgraduate students who consistently struggle with the issue of enhancing student participation. Deans of faculties who are constantly encouraging their lecturers to use the case method will reflect on the issues and challenges faced by lecturers and students in using this method. The University management benefits as the quality of teaching continues to improve, influencing the corporate image on the institution in a positive way. On a broader scope, the study could have national significance. The issues raised in this study affect many postgraduate students in Kenya and beyond. The interventions suggested could benefit postgraduate students in other institutions of higher learning.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. *Introduction*

The review of literature briefly examines some theories on how students learn, makes a case for student participation and highlights some challenges. It provides a critical evaluation of the participatory and action-oriented methodology and demonstrates how this methodology is appropriate to explore the practices necessary to facilitate student participation and consequently their learning.

B. *The Case for Student Participation*

Freire (1970) in developing theories of education demonstrated how dialogue with others and reflection on our circumstances through "problem-posing" pedagogy brings about true education: people educating each other through their interactions in the world. Freire argued that the individual should form himself rather than be formed. To this end, he proposed that educational topics or opportunities be taken from the daily experiences. This would imply two distinct steps: the first is to go to the place where the events take place in order to become familiar with the issues and the second is to apply problem-posing thinking to the systematic learning process by emphasizing group interaction between the participants so that each person both acquires consciousness of his reality and truly expresses it. This leads students to construct knowledge with their own activities, building on what they already know (Biggs & Tang 2007) and increases the "stickiness" of the learning. As such, the individual's participation is central to the learning process and outcomes (Golich 2000).

According to Hertenstein (1991) students learn in two ways: through their own active participation and through the contributions of others. The students collaborate to build an active learning community. Christensen (1994) further noted that such active learning enhances students' self esteem—essential for effective learning—and gives them an opportunity to consolidate what they know by teaching others. Teaching for active participation and engagement, building on the knowledge base of students and assessing for interpretations and understandings is likely to result in collaborative and deep learning (Biggs & Tang 2007).

Hertenstein (1991:179) argued that class participation enhances the learning environment as it can show that students are mastering skills appropriately, and their attitudes are changing. These key learning outcomes can therefore be learned and measured. It also helps to highlight recurrent errors that reveal

misunderstandings to be corrected. The teacher therefore has the role of assessing the patterns of class participation as these reveal areas of weakness and strength in the class. The teacher can use these patterns to structure better participation opportunities for individual students.

C. Practices that Support Student Participation

Effective case discussion learning depends on a well executed teaching/learning contract between the teacher and the students. Each has a key role to play (Hansen 1991). On the part of the student, it depends upon their active and effective participation. The students must get involved and take a primary responsibility for their learning (Shapiro 1985). Shapiro identified the '4 Ps' of student involvement in case discussion – preparation, presence, promptness and participation.

On the part of the teacher, one of the initial goals is to create a comfort zone for student participation and define the rules for productive participation. Because case learning involves collaboration between the teacher and student, the experience must feel safe enough for students to venture intellectually (Golich 2000). They must be able to take risks and contribute to the evolving understanding of the case situation (Ellet 2007).

A discussion teacher must take concrete steps to promote collaboration and comradeship in the class. Some key values to support this include *civility*—courtesy in working with one another; willingness to take risks—as it encourages innovation and new knowledge to be generated; and *appreciation for diversity*—that allows students the freedom to venture into diverse intellectual debates (Christensen 1994; Garvin 1991). *Listening* to student comments and *responding* to them constructively makes the students feel valued and respected, and helps the students to develop a sense of trust and willingness to take risks (Christensen 1994; Shapiro 1985). This is echoed by Hoskins and Newstead (2009) who argued that having the right learning classroom environment that included the provision of high quality feedback was instrumental in motivating students to engage in class.

Frederick (1994) noted that the first ten minutes of the class are crucial and either make or break student engagement. Teachers must therefore be careful how they set the scene each time, by devising ways in which students will have something to say early on in the class. He identified various ways to start a class, that included role playing, generating questions, working in small groups and forced debated all aimed at getting every student engaged early in the class. These, he argued, break down barriers to participation and bring energy to the class.

There is a need to think about student interest, knowledge base and previous experience when choosing case studies and planning learning activities. Intrinsic interest, familiarity with the material, and perceived relevance of the cases build a sense of ownership of the subject matter and students participate with much energy and willingness (Finney & Pyke 2008). Jain (2005) further argues that the case methodology is highly context-specific in terms of effectiveness; therefore, the instructors must be careful about the choice and age of the case, keeping in perspective the students' profiles, their background, and the lessons sought to be realized. As such, selecting case studies that profile businesses that students can identify with is an important contributor to student participation and learning (Ramsden 2003; Walker 2009).

According to Garvin (1991) students must experience a sense of fairness in the manner in which case discussion is conducted. Fairness in assigning readings and cases, fairness in the level of preparation required, and fairness in the actual class discussion is expected. Students must be given a fair chance to express their opinion and to expect equal treatment for all.

Clarity of learning outcomes is also central to a good case discussion and student engagement. Students need to know where they are going with the discussion, what they are expected to learn and how to apply it in their workplaces (Golich 2000). The teacher must therefore facilitate good closure of the case discussion with adequate sense of completion. Good closure includes asking students to evaluate the usefulness of a particular case or set of cases, as this makes them invest more in the case process. Overall, it impacts on students' motivation to prepare for the next class and engage with the material (Golich 2000; Walker

2009). In addition, Ellet (2007) advices that students write down two or three takeaways for each case and reflect upon them later. This not only helps students to remember what they have learnt, but link different sessions with greater clarity. The clarity is a resource for subsequent case analysis and class participation.

Adequate time for individual preparation and group discussion are also prerequisites for good class participation. One way to do this is to use 'extended case studies' – these are case studies that stretch over a few weeks with different learning each week. At times they may be labelled Case A, B, C, etc (Golich 2000). These long structured cases spread over a number of weeks allow for incremental summation and weekly review. When students know that they will draw lessons from one case over a period of time, they are more likely to make time to develop an analysis of the case situation. This builds their confidence to participate, own the learning and conclusions reached and consequently deepen their learning (Shapiro 1985; Walker 2009).

A healthy social environment can also support student participation. Ellet (2007) argues that classmates who get to know each other outside the classroom can change the atmosphere inside it. Students surrounded by classmates who respect them will probably be more willing to take risks in class discussions. These sentiments are echoed by Garvin (2004) who noted that students find it so hard to participate in the first few weeks because in that time '*the student is their classroom comments*'. They are not known in any other way than the comments they make in class. As such, getting different settings for interaction among students dilutes this participation anxiety.

D. Challenges to Student Participation

For many postgraduate students, their interests, pressures of work, family and social life all compete with their time for university learning (Walker 2009). Given these time pressures, Ellet (2007) suggests that students should set a time limit on case preparation. This puts a healthy pressure on the student to use their time well, keep a balance between work, study and family and pay attention to class analysis.

A shyness to speak in public hinders students from participating. But as noted by Ellet (2007) if a student is shy and does not speak early in the semester, it becomes harder and harder as they put pressure on themselves to come up with great comments. The longer a student delays, the more likely it is that the student will end up not participating. The only way to become a good class participant, is to participate.

Christensen, (1994) noted that cultural, religious and language barriers are a key hindrance to student engagement in class. If a teacher is not sensitive to these barriers, student participation can be damaged beyond repair. In setting up role plays for example, asking a devout Evangelical Christian to take the role of a sales manager of a liquor firm might give personal offense. We also often give students labels based on what we think we know about them. For example, labelling a student "our African resource" while the student may have spent limited time in Africa as a child and may not know much about its current issues. Christensen therefore notes that one of the costs of actively engaging students is learning about them. This requires time, emotional energy and research ingenuity.

Learning by the case method requires that students prepare adequately for class by reading the cases. They are also given discussion questions to help them understand what they are reading. However, as Ramsden (2003) found, this approached resulted in an extreme form of surface learning, where students only answered the discussion questions without engaging with the text. Students may perceive the discussion questions as an end, reading only sections of the text that enable them to answer the questions.

Ellet (2007) notes that students try to reduce the risks in class participation by stock piling comments they expect to use in class. This '*canning of comments*' however, means that if the class discussion does not proceed as they had expected, or if another student makes the comment before they do, they are lost. They will either give their comment at an inappropriate time (and end up feeling embarrassed) or they may choose not to participate. Either way, they feel frustrated and may not prepare adequately for the next class.

Achieving a sense of fairness in discussion leadership is an ethical issue that the teacher has to be constantly aware of. As soon as students perceive sense of unfairness, either in the calling patterns, the responses received or the non-verbal communication of the teacher, they are likely to shut down and their participation becomes restrained. Energy levels in the class are likely to decline (Garvin 1991). The discussion teacher therefore has a critical role to play, not just in delivering the appropriate content to students, but in thinking about the process of learning as well and creating an enabling environment to allow students to participate and learn.

E. Using a Participatory Action Research Approach

Action research was identified as the appropriate approach for this study for several reasons. First, it provides a useful framework for critical educational research enquiry (Biggs & Tang 2007). Within the context of higher education, action research has been used to improve teaching practice, student learning and curriculum design (Herington & Weaven 2008). Second, as argued by McNiff and Whitehead (2006: 8) action research can be a powerful and liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that practitioners themselves investigate their own practice as they find ways of living more fully in the direction of their educational values. They are not told what to do, they decide for themselves. This is important because good teachers are necessarily autonomous in professional judgement. Whereas a curriculum may outline what is to be taught, only the teacher can judge how to promote learning in their classroom. It therefore becomes crucial for the teacher to examine their academic practice. This means that the teacher takes more control of their professional lives (Hopkins 2008). Third, action research calls for a continued interest in serving students better and providing increased accountability for our teaching. As such, action research is not simply a good idea. It is an ethical responsibility for teachers to monitor the effectiveness of their practice and increase the competence of their teaching (Parsons & Brown 2002).

The clearest distinction between action research and other modes of research lies in the attitude to change to what is being researched. Researchers set out with the intention of improving their practice. The very essence is quality enhancement – to improve the quality of learning and teaching (George, Craven, Williams-Myers & Bonnick 2003). As such, taking an action research approach provides the opportunity for researchers to change a situation aided by reflective iterations that are supported by the collection and analysis of data. As changes are made, the research takes the form of cycles of action and research (Herington & Weaven 2008).

The action research cycle for this study is in Figure 1 below. The reconnaissance phase of action research (Cycle 1) provided the opportunity to explore the situation and reflect upon identified solutions in order to make conclusions about appropriate interventions that can be implemented to enhance student learning through class participation. Cycle 2 is currently being implemented.

In any action research there must be a question regarding how much time is taken to investigate the

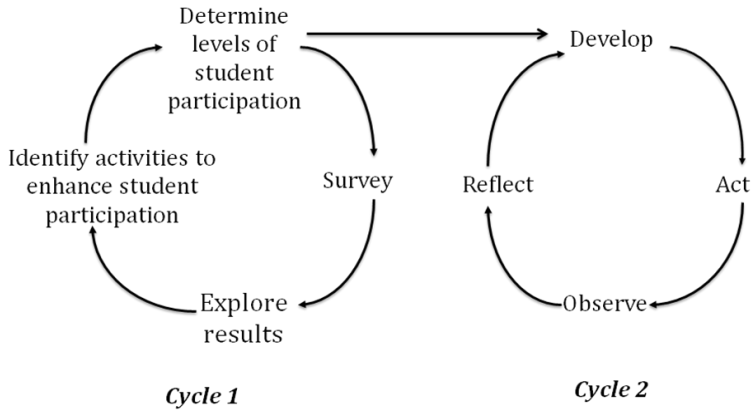

Figure 1: Action Research Cycles

current situation before developing a plan of action; and in any action research this takes place within a time-frame that will be influenced by all manner of practical considerations (Burchell 2000). The action research component discussed here was no different in this respect. As it was participative and collaborative project, the teacher/researcher was able to devote one academic year to the investigative/reconnaissance phase, with different classes of postgraduate students and this added to the significance of the findings.

The question is also raised as to what the goal of action research should be. Should it focus on delivering local solutions or national recommendations? From a practitioners' point of view, the action is the prime goal of action research, whereas for others not principally involved in the project such as policy makers, their focus may be reflection (Burchell 2000). However, according to Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993), these goals are not in conflict, and in fact reinforce each other. Action research is based on the assumptions of *reflective rationality*. This means that there are complex practical problems demanding specific solutions; that these solutions can be developed only in the context in which the problem arises; and that the solutions can be made accessible to other practitioners as hypotheses to be tested. This was the view taken by the current study. Postgraduate studies in most Kenyan universities are offered on a part-time basis to students who work full-time. As such the challenges addressed in this study are national in nature, so the solutions proposed in this study have national significance. This adds to the external validity of the study. The findings of the second cycle of the action research (see Figure 1) will therefore be disseminated to other universities for testing of hypotheses.

Action research, however, raises power relationship questions. The approach taken by this study was participatory and collaborative, where the researcher was also a participant. As argued by McNiff and Whitehead (2006) this does create a problematic situation as it is unclear whose perspective is being reported in the findings. The perspective of the students may be lost as the teacher projects his view as the dominant one. However, this may not take away from the significance of the research. If action research outcomes show that practitioners have been able to understand their practices and offer theoretical underpinnings for it, and if they can demonstrate how their learning from the process has influenced their practice then action research has significant potential. In addition, the stories generated from action research cumulatively support a body of knowledge that has future implications for influencing new directions in educational research and educational practices (Whitehead & McNiff 2006).

As such, there are significant benefits of participative action research, as the participating teacher takes ownership of the findings and inevitably engages in self-study to help understand the issues better, learn from them, and improve on practice.

III. Research Method

The study employed a descriptive research design aimed at gathering evidence on the characteristics of postgraduate students' class participation where the case method is used. The study also sought to estimate the proportion of the sample with these characteristics and explain the association between different variables (Cooper & Schnidler 2008). The population was the postgraduate students in the six programmes offered at Strathmore University. This population is about 300. However, the study aimed at gathering data from a cross-section of students who had been taught Strategic Management by the researcher in which the case method had been used each week. This would enable comparison among responses. The sample selected was first year Master of Business Administration (MBA) class of 62 students, and first year Master of Commerce (MCOM) class of 62 students. In addition the researcher interviewed four other lecturers who had taught these two classes. Getting the views of other lecturers was intended increase the validity of the findings and provide a more balanced view rather than having the researcher as the only source of data on the lecturers' perspective.

Data were gathered from the 124 postgraduate students using a questionnaire after one of their class sessions. Data from lecturers were gathered using an Interview Guide. With regard to data analysis, the

quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analysed utilizing content analysis to make comparisons and contrasts between comments.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents were assured of confidentiality and privacy. They were also informed of the objectives of the research and assured that their participation was voluntary. Further assurance was also given that the findings of the study would not be used to disadvantage or penalise the students in any way.

IV. Findings and Discussion

There was a 100 percent response rate from both students and lecturers. The findings of the study are presented to give the students' perspective and the lecturers' perspective, in line with the research questions.

A. Student Responses – Quantitative Data

The students were asked to rate four dimensions of case discussion: Individual Preparation, Class Participation, Perception about the Cases and Usefulness of the Cases. Each dimension was rated using several items on a scale of 1 – 5 where 1 represented 'Not at all' and 5 represented 'Always.' At the time of data collection, the students had covered nine case study discussions in class. The following frequency distribution tables have presented the percentage responses, with frequencies in parentheses.

1) Individual Preparation

The students were asked to rate their individual preparation of case studies. Their responses were as shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Individual Preparation

	Item	1 Not at all	2 Seldom (1 - 3 cases)	3 Sometimes (4-6 cases)	4 Most times (7 – 8 cases)	5 Always (9 Cases)
1.	I read the cases before class	-	-	9.7% (12)	74.2% (92)	16.1% (20)
2.	I attempted the discussions questions	1.6% (2)	3.2% (4)	24.5% (30)	51.6% (64)	19.4% (24)
3.	I got together with my group members to discuss the cases before class	-	4.8% (6)	29% (36)	38.7% (48)	27.4% (34)
4.	I understood the case arguments	-	-	19.4% (24)	43.5% (54)	37.1% (46)
5.	The volume of work to get through with the cases meant I couldn't thoroughly prepare for each class	8.1% (10)	14.5% (18)	50% (62)	19.4% (24)	8.1% (10)
6.	The length of the cases meant I couldn't read the entire cases before class	32.3% (40)	33.9% (42)	21% (26)	11.3% (14)	1.6% (2)

Ninety percent of students said they read the cases most or all of the time, while 71 percent indicated that they attempted the discussion questions most or all of the time. 66 percent said the cases were not (or were seldom) too long for them to read before the class, meaning that there were able to read them.

2) Class Participation

The students were asked to rate their class participation. Their responses were as shown in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Class participation

	Item	1 Not at all	2 Seldom (1 - 3 cases)	3 Sometimes (4-6 cases)	4 Most times (7 – 8 cases)	5 Always (9 Cases)

1.	I contributed to the case discussions in class	-	8.1% (10)	35.5% (44)	40.3% (50)	16.1% (20)
2.	I was able to follow the discussions	-	1.6% (2)	4.8% (6)	45.2% (56)	48.4% (60)
3.	I asked questions in class	6.5% (8)	14.5% (18)	32.3% (40)	30.6% (38)	16.1% (20)
4.	I arrived to class on time	1.6% (2)	1.6% (2)	4.8% (6)	56.5% (70)	35.5% (44)

With regard to class participation, while 92 percent indicated that they arrived to class on time most or all of the time, the percentage of those who contributed in class discussions most or all of the time was at 56 percent. The percentage of those who asked questions most or all of the time was even lower at 47 percent.

3) Perceptions about the Cases

Students perceptions about the cases were examined using eight items. These are as shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Perceptions about the Cases

	Item	**1 Not at all**	**2 Seldom (1-3 cases)**	**3 Sometimes (4-6 cases)**	**4 Most times (7–8 cases)**	**5 Always (9 Cases)**
1.	The cases were complex and difficult to analyse	33.9% (42)	40.3% (50)	24.2% (30)	1.6% (2)	-
2.	The cases were very demanding	9.7% (12)	19.4% (24)	43.5% (54)	24.2% (30)	3.2% (4)
3.	I had enough time to understand the things I had to learn	1.6% (2)	3.2% (4)	50.0% (62)	41.9% (52)	3.2% (4)
4.	It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in the case discussions	27.4% (34)	50.0% (62)	22.6% (28)	-	-
5.	It was easy to know the level of analysis required from the cases	-	11.3% (14)	38.7% (48)	43.5% (54)	6.5% (8)
6.	The assessment methods using cases required an in-depth understanding of the course content	1.6% (2)	4.8% (6)	16.1% (20)	48.4% (60)	29.0% (36)
7.	The workload was manageable (not too heavy)	3.2% (4)	17.7% (22)	38.7% (48)	35.5% (44)	4.8% (6)
8.	I was satisfied with the quality of the cases	-	-	6.5% (8)	45.2% (56)	48.4% (60)

Over 74 percent of students responded ‘not at all’ or ‘seldom’ to the question on whether they found the cases too complex and difficult to analyse. 50 percent of students said they sometimes had enough time to understand the things they had to learn and 50 percent said it was seldom hard to discover what was expected in the case discussions, which indicates that they knew what was expected. 94 percent of the students said they were satisfied with the quality of the cases most or all of the time.

4) Usefulness of the Cases

On the question of usefulness, the students generally found the cases to be useful at indicated in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Usefulness of the cases

	Item	1 Not at all	2 Seldom (1 - 3 cases)	3 Sometimes (4-6 cases)	4 Most times (7 – 8 cases)	5 Always (9 Cases)
1.	The cases sharpened my analytic skills	-	-	-	22.6% (28)	77.4% (96)
2.	The cases helped me develop my ability to work as a team member	-	-	12.9% (16)	40.3% (50)	46.8% (58)
3.	As a result of using the cases, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems	-	1.61% (2)	9.7% (12)	38.7% (48)	50.0% (62)
4.	The cases developed my problem-solving skills	-	-	4.8% (6)	41.9% (52)	53.2% (66)
5.	The cases were good at helping me to understand different concepts	-	-	6.5% (8)	29.0% (36)	64.5% (80)
6.	The cases helped me to reflect on my work experiences	-	-	8.1% (10)	29.0% (36)	62.9% (78)

77% of the students found that the cases always sharpened their analytical skills. 95 percent also indicated that the cases had developed their problem-solving skills most or all of the time, while 92 percent indicated that the cases had helped them reflect on their work experiences most or all of the time.

5) Overall Rating on Participation

Students were asked to rate their overall participation on a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 was 'did not participate' and 10 was 'excellent participation. Their rating was as shown in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Overall Rating on Participation

Rating	Frequency	Percent
3	6	4.8%
5	22	17.7%
6	2	1.6%
7	44	35.5%
8	44	35.5%
9	4	3.2%
10	2	1.6%
TOTAL	124	100%

Most students rated their participation at 7/10 or 8/10. It was interesting to note that some students rated their participation as low as 3/10.

The following section presents and discusses the qualitative responses from students' and lecturers' perspectives, to explain some of the quantitative data.

B. Factors that Hinder Class participation

1) 4.2.1 Students' Perspective

Students were asked to give reasons why their participation was not always at 100%.

The most common reason given by 30.6% was inadequate preparation, as indicated by some of their comments:.

> "In some instances, I had not read the cases in advance and therefore could not contribute effectively."
>
> "I could not follow the discussions clearly because of lack of adequate preparation before the case discussion.

These findings are consistent with Hammond (2002) and Ramsden (2003) who found that lack of adequate preparation by students was a key hindrance to student participation.

The other common reasons for not participating in class included the challenge of time management (14.5%) and lack of clarity on the expectations/learning outcomes (14.5%).

On time management, students' comments included:

> "Workload in my workplace meant I could not complete reading the cases and chapters before class."
>
> "Time constraints – balancing between family demands, office tasks and the coursework for all my subjects has been a challenge."

These findings are consistent with Ellet (2007) who advises students on the importance of setting time limits for case preparation so that they put a healthy pressure on themselves to prepare without taking too much time.

On the lack of clarity on expectations/learning outcomes, some comments included:

> "Depending on the approach of the lecturer, sometimes I just wasn't able to follow. I didn't really know what the lecturer was looking for."
>
> "I wasn't sure what was expected at the end of the case discussion."

This finding is supported by Golich (200) and Walker (2009) who have emphasised the importance of clarifying learning outcomes to students.

Other reasons for low participation were: 'not enough time for everyone in class to speak' (13%); 'shyness' (8%); 'fatigue' (6.5%); and 'having some students dominating class participation, hence not giving others a chance to speak' (6.5%). Nanda (2004) suggests that the onerous is on the teacher to ensure balanced participation. Some students indicated that they did not participate '*because someone else had already said what I wanted to say*' (4.8%). This finding is supported by Ellet (2007) who noted that when student have a laundry list of comments to give in class and then delay their participation, they often get frustrated and not participate when other students share similar comments before they do.

Frei (2004) and Garvin (2004) refer to the issue of shyness and lack of confidence to speak as '*participation anxiety*' and advice the case teacher to work with such students, encouraging them with positive reinforcement until they feel confident.

2) Lecturers' Perspective

From the lecturers' perspective, the main hindrance to student participation was lack of preparation because they did not have time, and were already tired when they came to class.

> "Students are tired. These are part-time students who are working all day and yet we expect 100% attention when they come to class in the evening. It's just not possible. In many cases, they have not even read the cases."

Other responses were on the attitude of students. Students expect that:

> "Someone else will participate today. It doesn't have to be me," or "the teacher will understand. Surely, they can't expect us to have read all these cases all the time."

Students and lecturers appear to be in agreement that lack of time to prepare and fatigue are some of the hindrances to effective participation. Ellet (2007) advises students to manage time by setting time limits for case preparation so that they put a healthy pressure on themselves to prepare without taking too much time.

The lecturers were asked what they did when they found students unprepared.

> "I just walked out of class. They had not prepared, why should I struggle to teach them? I asked them to prepare two cases for the next session."

> "I converted my class to a lecture. Without their preparation, we could not proceed with the case discussion. So I just lectured."

According to Srinivasan (2009) these two responses are inappropriate as they are not a sustainable solution, and may only lead to antagonizing the class and hindering future class participation. The lecturers admitted as much. They said that walking out of class did not have the intended effect of 'forcing' students to prepare better for the next class. Srinivasan argues that a teacher who cancels the class or gravitates to the familiar lecture method is saying more about themselves and their inability to make the case methodology effective rather than the lack of preparedness by students. Walking out of class may make the teacher feel powerful, but it is ultimately an admission of failure.

Other responses were:

> "I taught the case. Since I had prepared the slides, I just took them through the case, while I tried to get them to identify basic facts of the case."

> "I gave them time to read sections of the cases during class time. I know this is not ideal, but at least it gets some discussion happening."

According to Dixit (2005) when students are not preparing for case discussions, yet they consider the method an effective way to teach them, it is the responsibility of the teacher to find appropriate interventions. There must be an easier way for students to prepare, he argues.

C. Factors that Support Student Participation

1) Students' Perspective

Students identified the following characteristics of case studies as contributing to their class participation: 'sharpening their analytical and problem-solving skills' (78%); 'improving their understanding of concepts' (65%); and 'similarity of the issues in the cases to what they were encountering at their workplaces' (63%).

> "The case method has improved my analytical skills, given me practical problems to analyse and helped me to tackle unfamiliar problems. At work I had a similar problem to one of the cases. Now I have ideas on what to do."

> "It's a very good way of understanding the course content and developing analytical skills and problem solving skills. I like the cases."

Other reasons given were familiarity with the case material (19.4%) and the "stickiness" factor as the things learnt were easier to remember (4.8%), an argument supported by Golich (2000). These reasons are similar to Finney and Pyke (2008), Ramsden (2003) and Walker (2009) that familiarity and usefulness of cases contribute to effective class participation.

However it is important to note that none of the case studies used in the course were set in the Kenyan or African context. However, students still found them useful. This is contrary to what is argued by Jain (2005) that case methodology is highly context-specific and that case settings should be in contexts familiar to students.

2) Lecturers' Perspective

The lecturers identified a number of factors that had contributed to class participation:

"Diverse ways of running the class – I used videos, role plays, jigsaw reading, small group discussions in class, and getting groups to lead case discussions."

"I have used debates. These have been quite successful as students argue their points of view and try to 'win'. Debates seem to work as students take time to prepare well."

This finding is supported by DeLong (2004) who suggests that the best way to energise class discussion is to get students to take different sides of an argument.

"I have used role playing. However, I'm careful to choose students who will be confident and not feel offended to be part of a role play. As such, I do not use this method until I have become a little familiar with the students."

Role plays are a good way to engage students (Frederick 1994) and help them to remember – the "stickiness factor" (Golich 2000). However Christensen (1994) and DeLong (2004) warn that teachers should be careful when assigning roles to ensure no student is offended. The use of a variety of methods is supported by Stevenson (2004) who advises that varying the medium of instruction (use of debates, videos, role plays, PowerPoint slides) energises class participation.

On the factors supporting class participation, students appear to focus more on the *content* (usefulness of the cases), while the lecturers focus on the *process* of teaching (by using different approaches). A combination of a good process and solid content leads to improved class engagement (Austin 2004).

D. Interventions to Enhance Class Participation

1) Students' Perspective

The most common intervention suggested by students was that more time should be given to read and discuss the cases (21%). Other interventions suggested were: 'Use a variety of facilitation methods more frequently' (19.4%); 'More local content' (18%); 'Summarise the key learning points and expectations' (14.5%); 'Cold call students so that everyone gets a chance to participate' (14.5%) and 'Reduce the number and/or length of the cases' (8%).

A few students (6.5%) identified the issue of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang 2007):

"At times, we use case studies in class, but in the testing or exams, we are expected to explain theories and concepts rather than apply them. There seems to be a mismatch between what is meant to be, and what actually is."

"If we are going to spend all this time reading, analysing and discussing cases, more of the assessment should be on our input in these areas rather than the theoretical exams at the end of the semester."

"We are taught using cases, why are we not assessed the same way?"

2) Lecturers' Perspective

The lecturers suggested some interventions that include rewarding class participation (Bruns 2006), facilitating students' preparation (Hammond 2002) and having cases on CD (Dixit 2005).

"Currently, we do not have a system of rewarding those who participate and punishing those who do not. We need to find a way."

"May be we should put more emphasis on course work (case analysis, discussions and class participation) than the end-of-semester examination. This may motivate students to spend more time on case preparation and discussion."

"May be have cases on CD. I think students might like that, and it may be easier than reading the cases. All the hours they spend in traffic jams could be put to good use."

The issue of aligning teaching methodology with assessment (Biggs & Tang 2007) was raised by both students and lecturers as important to further enhancing class participation. The implementation of this intervention could be a subject for further research and discussion.

V. CONCLUSION

Both the teacher and students have a significant role to play for the case methodology to be an effective learning approach. They share responsibility for learning and control of the outcome. They must both consistently strive for excellence.

To do this, interventions are required at two levels. First, both the teacher and the student need to acquire or enhance a set of skills. For the teacher, these skills include: effective communication, mediation, listening, motivating, questioning, bridging/linking ideas, managing class participation, responding appropriately, setting clear learning outcomes, using diverse teaching approaches, setting appropriate assessment, knowing the students and creating a safe discussion environment. For the student the skills to be developed include: active listening, effective communication, willingness to take risks, critical thinking, time management, and cooperation with other students to create knowledge.

Second, students' *perceptions* about the course workload, required level of engagement, and the length, complexity and quality of cases are important to their participation. The *usefulness* of the cases with regard to content, case settings, issues being discussed, relation to theory, similarity to students' experiences and consequently their applicability, are also vital to students' class participation and long-term learning. The teacher must pay attention to these issues of perception and relevance of cases.

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