CASE-BASED LEARNING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCES ABOUT PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN CONSTRUCTION BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT

In the modern advanced construction industry, students are required to engage in active learning and critical thinking to deliver defect-free outputs and ensure user satisfaction. Case-based learning is an approach that fosters active learning among students. The aim of this research is to present the educational experiences of students and the teaching advances by the educators involved in case-based learning assignments. 155 students enrolled in the people management course received information on theories and their application at construction sites. Case-based learning and teaching were implemented to fulfil the course objectives, focussing on ongoing projects, site defects and the fraud triangle theory as the scope of the case. Students conducted semi-structured interviews with the site personnel, transcribed the recordings and analysed them by referencing the brief notes provided by the educators. The findings indicate that the students exhibited better performance in the learning environment. Case-based learning enhanced their research skills, communication, collaboration, ethical values, engagement and continuous improvement. The findings also show that the significance of appropriate teaching materials and efficient team teaching in case-based teaching is paramount. These elements are essential for creating an engaging learning environment that supports qualitative educational approaches and thereby improves student learning outcomes.

Keywords: Case-based Learning, Construction Defects, Fraud Triangle Theory, Teaching and Learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

Case-based learning has emerged as a powerful teaching and learning approach that aims at narrowing the gap between theoretical learning and application in real-life situations. In the field of construction education, effective people management is of utmost importance to the students to navigate complex, real-life challenges, such as people management and decision-making under pressure (Nurjehan et al., 2024; Rasmini & Antara, 2023). It becomes even more important as graduates transact into the construction business and need to negotiate with human fallibility and ethical dilemmas that can lead to financial loss, safety hazards and reputational damage.

One of the major challenges in the construction industry is the presence of workmanship defects at sites. Thus, it is essential for students to recognise the potential threat they pose to the industry. Construction defects are caused mainly by inadequate management (Atkinson, 2002; Gamil & Rahman, 2017) and the involvement of numerous stakeholders along with project complexity may lead to disputes among them (Fenn et al., 1997). There are mechanisms underlying defects that underline the direct need for a good understanding of how theory translates into practice, especially in the management of teams and processes concerning defect vulnerability, as it can be extremely costly. Addressing these challenges through case-based learning can significantly improve students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, particularly when examining the underlying causes of construction defects.

The aim of this research is to present the educational experiences of students and the teaching advances by the educators involved in case-based learning assignments. Interviews and analyses on construction defects were conducted using the fraud triangle theory following the adoption in a study conducted by (Latif et al., 2022). The fraud triangle theory postulates that fraud occurs if three conditions coincide, which are: opportunity, pressure and rationalisation. Opportunity is a condition that allows fraud to be perpetrated, pressure is an incentive or motivation for committing fraud and rationalisation is the excuse given by a person who commits fraud or wrongdoing.

By incorporating the fraud triangle into case-based learning, we aim to guide students in recognising the ethical dilemmas and potential misconduct associated with construction defects. This approach encourages students to critically assess the factors influencing fraudulent behaviours and develop strategies for managing these issues in real-world construction scenarios. Interviews and analyses conducted on construction defects will utilise the fraud triangle as a conceptual framework to understand the root causes of unethical behaviours during defect management. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of case-based learning, ethical decision-making, and people management in the context of construction education.

2. BRIDGING BUSINESS THEORY AND PRACTICE

The study of people management provides students with the knowledge needed to deal with complex problems such as construction defects that affect project quality, schedule and cost. For example, understanding the impact of construction defects on project quality, cost, and schedule (Love & Edwards, 2004) encourages students to apply theoretical knowledge on practical scenarios, fostering deeper engagement. Examining how fraud exacerbates defects allows students to explore ethical dimensions and managerial responsibilities, sharpening their analytical and decision-making skills. Addressing workplace dynamics, such as disengagement or burnout, (Huang et al., 2017; Jain & Sharma, 2020; Khan et al., 2021), through case studies highlights the importance of effective people management, preparing students to anticipate and mitigate challenges in professional settings The factors that reduce motivation, productivity and quality (Koropets et al., 2020) in construction projects developing into a vicious loop of low performance and increasing the likelihood of defects and fraud (Johari et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2022), can be effectively addressed through case-based teaching and learning This approach enables students to critically analyse and propose solutions to such scenarios, linking theoretical knowledge with practical applications to mitigate these challenges.

2.1 The Basis for Case-Based Qualitative Enquiries

The fraud triangle theory (comprising opportunity, pressure and rationalisation) elucidates factors driving dishonest behaviour. Personnel may rationalise their act of concealing defects to escape punitive penalties or reputational harm (Latif et al., 2022; Mubarak et al., 2022; Sarwar et al., 2021). Weak monitoring, supervision and transparent communication channels enable rationalisation, reducing accountability (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Without ethical leadership, defect concealment and shortcuts often occur under time or budget pressure

(Piccolo et al., 2010). Ineffective leadership in construction defect management may create opportunities for fraud due to insufficient oversight and quality control measures. The Fraud Triangle was introduced to students as a conceptual framework for analysing ethical behaviour in construction management. Through case-based learning, students were asked to apply the theory to real-world scenarios to explore issues such as conflict of interest, decision-making under pressure and integrity in the construction industry. The theory acted as a lens for students to critically evaluate the factors influencing unethical behaviour and develop a deeper understanding of ethical decision-making.

2.2 Case-based Learning

Case-based learning enhances critical thinking, promotes student involvement and develops practical skills. This process requires students to analyse complex scenarios that reflect real-world situations, requiring them to evaluate information, identify difficulties and formulate solutions (Arsjad et al., 2023; Herreid, 2007). This involvement fosters higher-order thinking and analytical problem-solving skills, essential in contemporary business environments. Case-based learning enhances student engagement and motivation due to its perceived relevance to real-world contexts (Raza et al., 2019). The collaborative aspect of case-based learning fosters interpersonal skills and community within the classroom (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2008). It also emphasises the implementation of theoretical principles in practical contexts, preparing students for the workforce. Employers highly value the competencies acquired through case-based learning, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and proficient communication. Additionally, case-based learning encourages an inquiry-based approach, cultivating a lifelong learning mindset and enthusiasm for learning beyond the classroom (Mahdi et al., 2020).

Despite the clear benefits, research into the application of case-based learning within construction and built environment education is still scarce. Existing studies on case-based learning predominantly focus on its application in fields such as law, business, and medicine. Meanwhile, research in construction education has tended to prioritise technology-enhanced learning, such as building information modelling and virtual reality, rather than case-based learning methodologies. While these technologies are valuable, they do not address the need for real-world problem-solving that case-based learning provides. Addressing this gap through future research could provide more robust insights into how case-based learning enhances construction education and better prepares students for the industry's dynamic challenges.

3. METHODOLOGY

Multiple methodologies can be used for case-based learning, however, qualitative methods particularly narrative-based cases, interviews and group discussions are utilised to explore complex, context-specific problems (Popa et al., 2020; Rambe et al., 2022; Salnaia et al., 2019). These methods allow students to immerse themselves in rich, detailed cases that reflect the ambiguity and complexity of real-life scenarios (Chandrasekar et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to (Şen Akbulut & Hill, 2020), qualitative research is particularly ideally suited for case-based learning because it enables students to engage with detailed descriptions of real-world events, allowing them to explore multiple perspectives and interpretations.

The methodology employed in this research focused on the interaction between students and educators during case-based learning experiences. Students conducted semi-structured interviews to explore various perspectives on construction defects, utilising thematic analysis to draw connections between theoretical learning and practical application. Simultaneously, educators provided observational insights into the overall impact of the teaching methods, such as team teaching, the role of engaging lecture activities and the importance of using appropriate teaching materials. This dual focus allowed for a comprehensive exploration of case-based learning and teaching experiences, supporting the identified learning outcomes related to student engagement, communication skills and ethical decision-making.

3.1 Students

A total of 155 undergraduate students from the BSc Construction Management program enrolled in the people management course. They were assigned into groups, each led by a different educator. To maintain consistency in teaching, the resource person provided assignment briefings and concise materials ensuring uniformity in the case-based teaching approaches. Tutorial sessions enabled deeper discussions and students had the opportunity to ask questions at any time using the WhatsApp or Telegram applications. Additionally, the

teaching team periodically conducted briefings and short meetings to ensure uniform responses to student enquiries.

3.2 Procedures and Instruments

Lectures from weeks 1 to 4 laid the groundwork for understanding people management theories, such as the fraud triangle and organisational behaviour. From week 4 onwards, students formed groups to select an ongoing construction site for a case study. Students actively approached site personnel, following the university's ethical guidelines (including consent forms) To collect data on defects handling and management practices. In week 6, students conducted interviews with site personnel. Due to varying availability, students were encouraged to utilise contacts and to understand the importance of effective communication and personal values in qualitative research.

3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Students conducted interviews with key personnel such as supervisors, project managers, QAQC managers and quantity surveyors – who were well-positioned to provide insights into defect management. Each interview lasted no longer than one hour, to avoid redundant or irrelevant information. Students were encouraged to ask follow-up questions to uncover relevant information related to the theoretical lens.

3.4 Thematic Analysis

Students transcribed the interviews and mostly used Excel for thematic analysis, identifying patterns and drawing insights related to the fraud triangle and other management theories. Educators reviewed transcripts to ensure consistency and cross-case analyses were conducted, comparing findings within and across class groups. This approach fostered a collaborative learning environment while maintaining research ethics.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings: Case-based Learning Experiences

Case-based learning about defects at construction sites through case studies in a controlled yet authentic learning environment enhanced students' knowledge, abilities and professional attitudes. Several significant outcomes observed by the educators include:

4.1.1 Enhance Research Skills

The research skills students acquired to identify and analyse defects in construction through the evaluation of real-world scenarios have enhanced their capacity for critical thinking and identifying the underlying causes of problems. Through a qualitative method, it was observed that students not only comprehended the content of the cases but also developed skills in interviews, followed research protocols and applied theory in data collection. Interviews with practitioners provided students with direct insights into real-world challenges and how theoretical principles are applied in practice (White & Cooper, 2022).

Furthermore, students were able to use the interview transcripts to comprehend the significance of the fraud triangle theory as the framework for data analysis. By identifying themes related to opportunity, motivation and rationalisation, students gained a deeper understanding of how fraud theory was operationalised in practice. One of the lecturers conveyed the disparity in research skills exhibited by students compared to the previous semester, especially noting that her students had conducted appropriate thematic analysis and produced informative data visualisations, despite not having previously studied research methodology. As students worked together to analyse qualitative data through thematic analysis, and each of them was asked to contribute to the analysis, they were exposed to different interpretations and perspectives. This approach encouraged deeper engagement with the lecture notes and assignment materials given, as students articulated their reasoning, challenged assumptions and refined their understanding of theories in light of new insights from their peers as stated by (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This is consistent with previous studies concerning the benefits of qualitative methods in case-based learning, which have contributed to the people management course to the enhancement of crucial transferable research skills in students, such as data analysis. Research skills are essential for students pursuing careers in the advanced construction industry, where the ability to collect, interpret and apply data is imperative.

In addition, qualitative methods such as interviews and thematic analysis encouraged active learning and student engagement, which were key factors in improving comprehension and retention of theoretical knowledge by linking qualitative data with theoretical frameworks. Students engaged with theory through the use of thematic analysis, another key qualitative method in case-based learning. Through thematic analysis, students identified recurring. Through thematic analysis, students identified recurring themes or patterns within qualitative data, such as interview transcripts or case studies, to uncover underlying theoretical principles. Thematic analysis is highly effective for teaching students how to extract relevant information from real-world cases and link it to theoretical frameworks (Ferree et al., 2022; Seshan et al., 2021).

4.1.2 Application of Theoretical Understanding

Case-based learning benefitted the students in the implementation of theoretical principles in practical contexts, therefore equipping them for the workforce. In lectures, students were taught about individual behaviour and ethics and were reminded about the importance of acquiring insights into industry-specific difficulties, so they could augment their preparedness for future employment. In the classroom, the students expressed their knowledge of the practical application of various people management theories, which offered them insights into the complexities of organisational behaviour. The students agreed that the interview sessions have allowed them to gather first-hand accounts of operational processes, motivations and challenges faced by site personnel in handling defects. These qualitative insights provided a more grounded understanding of theories such as leadership, individual behaviour and ethics, making abstract concepts more tangible and relatable. By presenting students with complex, real-life construction projects, case-based learning facilitated the development of practical application of theoretical concepts.

4.1.3 Enhanced Communication and Collaboration

Group discussions and teamwork were fundamental to completing the assignments and facilitated the students' exchange of varied perspectives and the joint construction of knowledge as highlighted by (Rambe et al., 2022). The assignments were developed not only to promote teamwork among the group members but also with other groups so that students collectively recognise issues associated with defects. The collaboration among the students has enabled them to access and collect data according to the given schedule, enabling all groups to conduct cross-case analysis within the designated timeframe. This required explicit communication, whereby students were required to articulate defects and fraud to other groups, thereby resembling professional engagements with clients, contractors and regulatory entities in the construction world. It was observed that collaborative learning environments enhanced students' communication skills since they were required to express their ideas, attentively listen to other groups and negotiate decisions. This interactive engagement not only deepens their comprehension of the material but also equips them for professional settings where collaboration and good communication are essential. Moreover, the collaborative aspect of case-based learning, wherein students frequently engage in group discussions and case analyses, fosters interpersonal skills and cultivates a feeling of community inside the classroom (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2008).

4.1.4 Internalising Ethical and Professional Judgment

Each group was led by a leader and they were reminded to use leadership skills to handle their members so that the assignments could be completed within the time given and with good report writing. However, other group members were also encouraged to use their leadership skills by handling the tasks given to them with their own judgment and challenging any ideas so that the group became successful. By initiating group conversations and addressing problems, students acquired leadership capabilities, steering their teams toward effective resolutions. The students were cultivated with a professional demeanour about quality control, client communication and ethical behaviour, which are vital attributes for prospective industry leaders.

4.1.5 Students Engagement

Most of the students as reported by the educators, were more engaged and motivated in their learning when they perceived its applicability to real-world contexts as corroborates with (Nurjehan et al., 2024; Raza et al., 2019). Students had the opportunity to apply classroom information (e.g., lecture materials) to understand real-world difficulties on-site. This hands-on approach fostered deeper engagement with theoretical concepts, as students actively participated in connecting theory to lived experiences. Several students shared their experiences that their interviewees incorporated engaging and pertinent narratives that captivated their interest. This further

stimulated their active participation in discussions. The class representative, at the end of the lecture, conveyed the class's appreciation for the interesting lecture, helpful brief notes and discussions. This engagement not only improved knowledge retention but also cultivated a favourable inclination towards learning, as students acknowledged the practical relevance of their studies as highlighted by (Raza et al., 2019).

4.1.6 Independence and Continuous Education

Students frequently investigate supplementary materials to resolve situations, fostering independent learning and the capacity to seek information beyond the classroom. For example, how to use NViVo software was not taught but two groups managed to use it by self-learning through websites and YouTube. This demonstrates the readiness of students to confront changing difficulties in the construction sector, cultivating an attitude of perpetual learning and ongoing enhancement. Rather than passively receiving information, students were actively constructing knowledge. Case-based learning in this context equipped students to address construction problems comprehensively and enhanced their professional preparedness for the industry. They acquired the ability to recognise the interaction of opportunity, pressure and rationalisation. This comprehensive understanding enables them to tackle real-world difficulties by applying theoretical frameworks to realistic scenarios.

4.2 Findings: Cased-based Teaching Experiences

The role of educators in case-based learning about the construction of real-world scenarios facilitated discussion and analysis and ensured students engaged with the lecture materials. Following is the approach taken by the educators to ensure an effective case-based learning environment.

4.2.1 Importance of Appropriate Teaching Materials

Effective teaching materials played a crucial role in case-based teaching, as they offered the essential context and resources that enabled students to interact with intricate scenarios. This ensured that students gained and were prepared to apply it in practical, real-world contexts. Relevant and current teaching materials greatly improved student motivation and engagement, as they recognised the direct relevance of their studies. The lack of comprehensive teaching materials poses significant challenges for other team teachers in delivering high-quality instruction, thereby hindering students' comprehension of intricate concepts. Materials were structured and incorporated step-by-step guidance to allow students to explore and analyse real-world problems with effectiveness.

4.2.2 Role of Team Teaching

When students did their assignments collaboratively, they experienced varied viewpoints among them. In this collaborative environment, educators were required to implement more comprehensive and diverse learning activities. Despite receiving teaching materials, each educator committed to implementing a variety of teaching activities to enhance the learning experience. The team teaching as the educators often discussed with each other, has allowed the blending of teaching styles, effectively addressing the diverse learning needs of students. Moreover, the team teaching promoted the exchange of practices and fostered collaborative problem-solving among educators. This also required the educators to possess knowledge of qualitative research, a mutual understanding of the level of analysis and the ability to standardise activities across different classes. Through the exchange and discussion, the team-teaching was able to enhance the teaching materials for the effectiveness of case-based learning.

4.2.3 Encouragement of Interesting Lecture Activities

Defects in the construction industry were selected to apply the theory because it could require students to take the initiative in analysing the problem. The educators agreed to guide the discussion, ask probing questions and help students stay focused on the scope of the assignment without providing direct answers. Students were encouraged to have open discussions, group work and communicate diverse viewpoints. Students had the opportunity to highlight their learnings and the evolution of their thinking after the data collection and before the data analysis. The educators then randomly selected some ideas, highlighted areas where students could further elaborate on their analysis and connected these ideas to other theories in the people management course.

This holistic approach ensured students could transfer knowledge from cases to other areas. This required the educators to supplement other forms of learning, such as lectures and tutorial discussions.

5. IMPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

The findings from this research highlight the critical role of case-based learning in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in construction management education. Key outcomes, such as enhanced research skills, improved communication and internalised ethical judgment, demonstrate the effectiveness of the case-based approach in developing students' competencies in real-world scenarios.

From a teaching perspective, the results underscore the value of team teaching, engaging lecture activities and the use of appropriate teaching materials in fostering an interactive and dynamic learning environment. These strategies contribute to continuous student engagement and the internalisation of complex management theories.

The implications of this research suggest that educators should consider incorporating case-based learning more extensively into curricula to strengthen students' problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, the findings emphasise the importance of structured guidance, such as semi-structured interviews, to ensure consistency in students' learning experiences and the development of transferable skills.

6. CONCLUSION

Effective people management is essential for promoting clear communication, and accountability and fostering a culture of quality in construction projects. Case-based learning served as a powerful method that connects theoretical knowledge with practical application, promoting critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making abilities. It also promotes collaborative learning, teamwork and leadership development, which are essential for construction professionals who often interact with interdisciplinary teams.

One significant outcome of using the fraud triangle in case-based learning was enhancing students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge to ethical understanding. Students demonstrated improved research skills as they investigated the causes and consequences of unethical behaviour in construction case studies. Moreover, students' ethical judgment was notably internalised, with many expressing a greater understanding of the complex interplay between opportunity, pressure and rationalisation in real-world contexts. This directly reflects the impact of the fraud triangle in fostering critical thinking about ethics. Additionally, case-based teaching experiences were enriched by the role of team teaching, which fostered engagement and the use of interactive lecture activities, all of which contributed to the successful integration of theoretical knowledge into practice.

The importance of people management in addressing building defects is paramount, but there is potential for further investigation into specific practices that are most effective in varying circumstances. The study should also emphasise the integration of innovative technologies with people management strategies to mitigate construction defects. This research also calls for further exploration into how case-based teaching methods can be refined to address specific industry challenges, such as defect management in construction sites.

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