



SIES School of Learning and Leadership Development (SISSLDD)

TRAINING NOTE (017/2026-27) / P2

on

Case Study

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Backdrop:

The case study method is one of the most effective experiential pedagogies used in higher education, particularly in professional disciplines such as management, law, medicine, engineering, education, and social sciences. Rather than merely transmitting theoretical knowledge, it places students in real or simulated situations where they are expected to analyse information, identify problems, evaluate alternatives, and make decisions.

The method was popularised by Harvard Business School in the early twentieth century and has since become one of the most respected teaching approaches worldwide. Today, with the growing emphasis on Outcome-Based Education (OBE), critical thinking, and employability skills, case study method has gained renewed importance in Indian higher education.

What is a Case Study?

A case study is a detailed description of a real-life or realistic situation involving individuals, organisations, institutions, or communities. It presents facts, data, events, characters, constraints, and dilemmas without necessarily providing the solution. Students are expected to analyse the situation using relevant theoretical frameworks and recommend appropriate courses of action.

Unlike traditional lectures, there is rarely a single correct answer. The focus is on the quality of analysis, logical reasoning, evidence-based decision-making, and the ability to defend one's viewpoint.

Educational Objectives:

The case study method aims to:

- Bridge the gap between theory and practice
- Develop analytical and critical thinking abilities
- Improve problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Encourage collaborative learning
- Strengthen communication and presentation skills
- Enhance leadership and interpersonal competencies
- Prepare students for real-world professional situations.

Prerequisites for Effective Implementation:

For successful use of case studies, certain conditions are desirable:

Prepared Students: Students should possess a basic understanding of the relevant concepts and theories before analysing the case.

Faculty Competence: Teachers should be skilled facilitators who can guide discussions without imposing their own opinions.

Student Diversity: Groups comprising students from different academic backgrounds and experiences often generate richer discussions.

Prior Preparation: Students should receive the case sufficiently in advance to study it individually and in groups before the classroom discussion.

Designing an Effective Case:

An effective teaching case should possess the following characteristics:

- Based on authentic or realistic situations
- Relevant to the learning outcomes of the course
- Concise and focused (normally 5–6 pages for classroom use)
- Rich in facts, data and contextual information
- Presents multiple perspectives and competing interests
- Ends with thought-provoking questions rather than ready-made solutions.

Whenever possible, faculty should use Indian cases that reflect local organisational, cultural and socio-economic realities. Students generally relate better to familiar contexts than to cases from foreign environments.

Conducting a Case Study Session:

A typical case discussion can be organised in the following stages:

Introduction: The faculty briefs the theoretical framework relevant to the case. This ensures that students have the conceptual tools necessary for analysis.

Individual Preparation: Students read the case individually, identify the central problem, analyse the available information, and prepare preliminary solutions.

Group Discussion: Students work in small groups comprising members from different backgrounds. Each group analyses the case, debates alternative viewpoints, and develops collective recommendations.

Classroom Discussion: Groups present their findings before the class. Healthy debate is encouraged, with students questioning assumptions and defending their recommendations using evidence.

Debriefing: This is the most critical stage. The faculty summarises the discussion, links it to theoretical concepts, highlights key learning points, explains the decision-making process, and discusses alternative solutions. The objective is not merely to identify the "best" answer but to understand how effective decisions are made under conditions of uncertainty.

Role of the Faculty:

In the case study method, the teacher performs three important roles:

Facilitator: Encourages free and open discussion while creating an atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing different opinions.

Moderator: Ensures that discussions remain focused, balanced and inclusive, while encouraging participation from quieter students.

Debriefer: Integrates diverse viewpoints, connects classroom discussions with theoretical frameworks, and reinforces the intended learning outcomes.

The faculty should avoid dominating the discussion. Instead, thoughtful questioning often stimulates deeper reflection and richer learning.

Benefits of the Case Study Method:

The case study approach offers several educational advantages.

It promotes active learning by shifting students from passive listeners to active participants. Students learn to apply classroom concepts to realistic situations rather than merely memorising facts.

The method develops critical thinking as students evaluate evidence based on data, compare alternatives, and justify decisions logically.

Decision-making skills improve because students experience the complexity that characterise real-life organisational situations. They learn

that effective decisions require balancing multiple variables rather than applying simple calculations.

Communication skills also improve through group discussions, presentations, debates, and defending recommendations.

Working in teams enhances collaboration, leadership, negotiation, and conflict management skills, all of which are highly valued by employers.

Finally, the method prepares students for professional life by exposing them to realistic challenges before they enter the workplace.

Challenges in the Indian Context:

Although highly effective, several practical challenges exist in implementing the case study method in Indian higher education.

Many students come to class without reading the case in advance, limiting the quality of discussion.

Some students hesitate to participate due to lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes.

Large class sizes often restrict meaningful interaction.

Many students have limited industry exposure, making it difficult to appreciate practical complexities.

Faculty members themselves may not receive adequate training in moderating case discussions and often revert to lecture-based teaching.

Additionally, there is a shortage of high-quality Indian case studies across several disciplines.

Strategies for Effective Implementation:

Institutions can improve the effectiveness of case teaching by:

- Providing orientation sessions on case analysis techniques
- Using short cases initially before progressing to complex cases
- Incorporating both individual and group assessments
- Training faculty in facilitation and debriefing skills
- Developing institution-specific and India-centric case repositories
- Encouraging participation through structured questioning and peer learning.

- Integrating technology using Learning Management Systems (LMS), online discussion forums, and digital collaboration tools.

Moving Ahead:

The case study method represents one of the most powerful learner-centred pedagogies available in higher education. It transforms classrooms into environments where students think critically, analyse complex situations, debate alternatives, and develop data-based decisions. Although successful implementation requires careful planning, committed students, and skilled faculty facilitation, the educational benefits far outweigh the challenges.

In an era where higher education aims to produce competent professionals capable of solving complex societal and organisational problems, the case study method offers an ideal bridge between academic knowledge and professional practice. Properly implemented, it not only enhances subject understanding but also develops the competencies required for lifelong learning, responsible leadership, and effective decision-making.
