

## The Attitudes and Preferences of Undergraduate Students toward the Use of Case Studies as an Instructional Methodology

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### Abstract

The increasing use of case studies as a learning strategy has been a trend in higher education since 1870. The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate students towards case studies and the types of case studies they preferred. A total of 16 undergraduate participants exposed to individual and group case studies participated in in-depth structured interviews that lasted between 10 to 20 minutes. The majority of the participants had an overall positive attitude towards case studies, and felt that they were an effective learning tool that increased learning. Students preferred to choose their own group members, and their experiences could be improved with shorter case studies, better online search engines for researching, and clearer explanations and examples by lecturers. Working in groups was the greatest challenge, followed by lengthy case studies and deadlines. They preferred a combination of an equivalent number of individual and group case studies, and found end-of the chapter case studies most beneficial, with an equivalent preference for homework and in-class case studies.

**Keywords:** *Case studies, group and individual, group work*

### Introduction

Case studies have been an integral part of undergraduate studies, particularly in business schools (McFarlane, 2015), as a learning strategy to promote the development of critical thinking skills, collaboration, knowledge application, communication, and ability to grapple with real-life scenarios (Taneja, 2014). Most students are engaged in group case studies and, to a much lesser extent, individual case studies. Educators generally have faith in case study usage (Herreid et al., 2014), while students have varying opinions of group case studies. Some students are in favor of group case studies because of their well-reputed benefits, while many cited their intense dislike of working with free-riders (Grzimek et al., 2014), particularly when everyone receives the same grade (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). The purpose of this study was to find out the feelings that students had about case studies, along with their preferences and dislikes. The amount of literature pertaining to group case studies is huge, but for individual case studies, it is extremely limited. Comparative studies between individual and group case studies were scant, and the results from this study would help to fill an important gap in the literature. Through this contribution to the literature, those who stand to benefit from this study are educators and students in higher education.

### Literature Review

#### *Case Studies*

The case study method was introduced in 1870 by Christopher Columbus Langdell, the Dean of Harvard University's law school and case studies currently are extensively used in higher education in various fields, particularly in business schools (Herreid et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2017; McFarlane, 2015). A case study is defined as "a series of real events that tell a story about an issue or conflict to be resolved" (Peters et al., 2015, p. 1), and its inclusion in the curriculum is a student-centered approach in active learning (Gudmunson et al., 2015; Herreid et al., 2014). According to Brooke (2006), case studies "promote problem-solving skills, higher order thinking skills, or critical thinking skills" (as cited in Pilz & Zenner, 2018, p. 326) that allow students to acquire networked thinking skills essential in handling complicated decisions in a complex world (Probst & Gomez, 1992). The knowledge application gained through case-based learning activities have also had a positive impact on students'

higher-order thinking skills in Bloom's revised taxonomy (Nkhoma, 2017). Also known as the case-study approach, this teaching methodology provides students with the advantage of active collaborative learning (Noblitt et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2014; Yadav & Beckerman, 2009). A few hindrances to active learning include some students' preferences for the "traditional lecture and passive learning" (Gudmunson et al., 2015, p. 321; Kawulick, 2011) and some instructors who favor the traditional lecture approach (Gudmunson et al., 2015).

*The Advantages of Case Studies.* Educators across the global are "convinced of the case-method's efficacy" (Herreid et al., 2014, p. 20), and small group case studies have gained favor amongst educators particularly because students receive the "greatest learning gains" (Herreid et al., 2014, p. 26). This represents a move from a teacher-centered to student-centered activity (Grant, 1997) that promotes reasoning and thought processes (Cellucci et al., 2012). Case studies also enhance the students' ability to collaborate, communicate, and think analytically (Backx, 2008; Cellucci et al., 2012; Prince & Felder, 2007; Taneja, 2014). Other advantages include increased learning motivation (Taneja, 2014; Yadav et al., 2010), along with better and more extensive mastery of course content (Herreid et al., 2014; Kawulick, 2011).

In a survey study conducted by Taneja (2014), students were reported to have "positive attitudes towards the group case-study approach" (p. 185). Aside from being more interesting than textbooks (Cellucci et al., 2012), "case studies made course learning more relevant and beneficial to them" (Taneja, 2014, p. 185). As an engaging tool (Wu et al., 2014), case studies have provided students with rewarding experiences (Kawulick, 2011), collaborative opportunities (Cellucci et al., 2012), and idea sharing (Kathireshan & Patro, 2013; Kawulick, 2011; Taneja, 2014). The exposure to case studies have given them the chance to enhance their critical thinking skills, while reinforcing concepts (McFarlane, 2015). Students are also given the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge and skills in solving real-world scenarios, and in making decisions (Noblitt et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2014; Yadav & Beckerman, 2009).

*The Disadvantages of Case Studies.* Business schools and colleges may be fond of using the trendy Harvard Business Review (HBR) case studies, but students react very differently to them, labeling them as being extremely long, boring, and irrelevant (Cellucci et al., 2012; McFarlane, 2015; Taneja, 2014), preferring short, lesson-related case studies (McFarlane, 2015). Moreover, numerous educators have found them very time consuming (Cellucci et al., 2012; Herreid et al., 2014; Kathiresan & Patro, 2013), adding further to their existing workloads (Andersen & Schiano, 2014), and creating a time constraint (McFarlane, 2015) in completing their teaching outlines (Herreid et al., 2014). Aside from that, some lecturers reported difficulties in motivating students to work on cases, and have been encouraged to select more student-centered cases (McFarlane, 2015).

### **Group Work**

It has been documented widely that students in higher education benefit from the increasing popularity of group work (Hall & Buzwell, 2013; Lavy, 2017; Šerić, & Garbin Praničević, 2018) with learning retention levels as high as 98% compared to 4–8% for lecture-based learning (Herreid et al., 2014). According to Ro and Choi (2011), males had a more positive perception of group work than females. Domestic students were reported to have a preference to work within their circles, while international students were more open to working outside their comfort zones (Moore & Hampton, 2014). Those who had positive experiences in group work had a more positive attitude towards working in groups (Payne et al., 2011). Students were also reported to have more positive perceptions of group work with increased frequency of face-to-face meetings (Butt, 2018). Lower achieving students prefer group work, compared to high achievers, who prefer to work alone (Grzimek et al., 2014).

*The Benefits of Group Work.* There are numerous benefits attached to working in groups (Davies, 2009; Kawulick, 2011) and many studies have supported the positive perceptions that students have towards group work (Knight, 2004). Students benefit from deeper and more involved learning,

increased communication, and opportunities to improve interpersonal and teamwork skills (Gudmunson et al., 2015; Kawulick, 2011; Šerić, & Garbin Praničević, 2018). They also develop good habits of learning how to “help each other and valuing each person’s contribution to the case or project” (Kawulick, 2011; Miglietti, 2002, as cited in Gudmunson et al., 2015, p. 324). Group work provides space for social networking and collaboration, particularly for international students (Mittelmeier et al., 2018). Students also gained better understanding (Kathiresan & Patro, 2013) and achieved synergy (Šerić, & Garbin Praničević, 2018).

*The Drawbacks of Group Work.* Collaboration overload (Cross et al., 2018) may result from too much group work, but this can be remedied by providing time management and project planning training (Butt, 2018). By engaging in group work, students experienced “less time for focused individual work, careful reflection, and sound decision making” (Cross et al., 2018, p. 135). As individual students have their own personalities and work preferences, the desire for and effectiveness of group work varies accordingly (Cross et al., 2018). Some groups that had worked well throughout the term were reported to have fallen apart at the end (Allan, 2016). Interpersonal conflicts resulting from group work have also been a cause for some to intensely dislike it (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). In fact, some students experience “Grouphate,” which is the terminology “used to describe students’ negative attitude toward group work” (Parrot & Cherry, 2011, as cited in Allan, 2016, p. 81). Some students, on the other hand, have found case studies to be a very effective learning methodology (Kennedy et al., 2017). The most salient risks of group work include unfair final evaluations, lack of respect, and the increasing percentage of free-riders (Hall & Buzwell, 2013; Šerić, & Garbin Praničević, 2018). Having free-riders onboard is common in group work; they are defined as “students who do not put effort into group work, but hope to benefit excessively from the work of others” (Dijkstra et al., 2016, p. 675). Administering peer evaluations (Dijkstra et al., 2016; Hall & Buzwell, 2013) and engaging in a group contract (Pahomov, 2018) could potentially reduce this behavior.

### **Individual Case Study Method**

The individual case method is another option for how case studies can be administered. It allows an individual student to work solely on a case study and can be effective, despite the absence of rich discussions in group work (Herreid et al., 2014). Some students have also reported that they preferred to work alone, as group work proved to be a learning hindrance (Kawulick, 2011). Higher achievers had a greater preference for individual work and felt that there should be less group work, as it had a harmful impact on their grades (Grzimek et al., 2014).

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

As there has been minimal research on individual versus group case studies, the objective of this research study was to investigate if undergraduate students preferred individual and/or group case studies, while learning about their feelings towards case studies. The study also sought to explore the challenges involved in solving case studies, and how their case study experiences could be improved.

This study was guided by five main research questions:

- RQ1: What are the students’ feelings towards case studies?
- RQ2: How effective do students perceive case studies to be as a learning tool?
- RQ3: How can their case study learning experiences be improved?
- RQ4: What were the challenges faced in solving case studies?
- RQ5: What type of case studies do students prefer?

### **Methodology**

This research study investigated the attitudes that undergraduate students had towards case studies and their preferences with regards to case studies. The qualitative research methodology was used in this study through in-depth structured interviews that lasted between 10 to 20 minutes, and

data collection was conducted through hand-written notes. The interview protocol consisted of three main parts with a total of 12 open-ended questions:

(a) Part 1: a Student Profile consisting of five questions that included gender, age range, major, nationality, and Cumulative GPA;

(b) Part 2: Students' Attitudes Towards Case Studies, consisting of four questions: Students' feelings towards case studies, Case studies as an effective learning tool, How case study experiences could be improved, and The challenges of working on case studies; and

(c) Case Study Preferences that addressed three questions: Types of case studies most beneficial to students, the option of in-class or take-home case studies, and the preferred type of case study.

Through purposive sampling, the targeted participants included 16 undergraduate students at an International University in Thailand who had been exposed to both individual and group case studies. Every participant completed a personal informed consent form that affirmed the confidentiality of the interview. There were eight males and eight females representing 13 countries from five majors. International Hospitality Management had the highest participation ( $n=9$ ), followed by International Business Management ( $n=3$ ), International Relations ( $n=2$ ), Event Management ( $n=1$ ), and Finance and Banking ( $n=1$ ). Participant demographics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Participant Demographics

Item	Age Range			Year			CGPA			
	Range	18–21	22–25	26 up	2nd	3rd	3+	2.00– 2.50	2.51– 3.00	3.01– 3.50
n	5	11	0	1	11	4	4	4	4	4

### Results: Attitudes of Students towards Case Studies

#### *Students' Feelings towards Case Studies*

This section answers the first research question: "What are the students' feelings towards case studies?" The majority of students liked case studies, and one person specifically stated that "I like case studies a lot." The participants felt that using cases in class was a valuable and practical way to help students relate the concepts learnt in the lesson, and apply them in solving the cases. Moreover, it was interesting and useful as students could learn so many things from companies in real-world settings, and from mistakes that had been made. Some case assignments that required additional research enabled students to gain more knowledge despite the challenges and difficulties involved. Cases added color to normal courses by helping students relate better to the course, as case studies helped build upon the lessons learnt.

A few students mentioned that they preferred case studies that were related to their major and disliked those that were outside of their comfort zones. One student also stated that, "I enjoyed them when they were nice and sweet within two pages", while another mentioned that "case studies were much more preferable compared to difficult project assignments." Students were also appreciative when the same cases were offered across different sections of the same course that were taught by different instructors, as students studying in different sections could collaborate in working on them. Just a small minority responded negatively towards case studies. They hated lengthy case studies that required a great deal of reading, and working in groups had an impact on how they felt. Different perspectives when working in groups had resulted in confusion, and although case studies were sometimes helpful, some students complained that their feelings were negative when the lecturer failed to explain the objectives, and when they did not know how to solve the cases.

#### *Case Studies as an Effective Learning Tool*

The second research question: "Have case studies been an effective learning tool?" is addressed in this section. The effectiveness of case studies as a learning tool was dependent on how they were being used and varied accordingly to the perception of each participant. The majority felt that case studies were an effective learning tool when properly used, explained, and examples given as to how

they should be analyzed. Case studies provided the participants with good and new learning experiences, as every case was different and contributed to new and greater knowledge. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills were used in applying the knowledge to real situations, and the theoretical aspects of the class were made clearer through in-depth information and analysis. Moreover, it helped the participants to relate better to the course, particularly when cases were assigned immediately after the lesson was taught.

The participants described case studies as a motivating tool when they were more interesting than boring lecturers, PowerPoint slides, and tests. Comments were also made that students who were uninterested in class had displayed an interest in solving case studies, and found them to be more useful than just reading the textbook. Analyzing case studies have helped students prepare for examinations, particularly when they were similar to examination questions. The cases in the International Hospitality Management course, according to a hospitality student, "were usually based on the lecturers' actual experiences that were extremely interesting." On the other hand, they claimed that it ceased to be an effective learning tool when no introductions or instructions were given, when it was not graded, and when social loafing occurred in group case study assignments. When there was too much content to cover in one case, it became overwhelming and was no longer an effective learning tool. It also became ineffective when case studies were unrelated to their majors, as they found them to be difficult and confusing.

### ***How Case Study Experiences Can Be Improved***

The third research question: "How can their case study experiences be improved?" is addressed in this section. The students' case study experiences could be improved in four main ways: (a) grouping, (b) type of case study, (c) lecturer; and (d) technology. Several students reported that they had a preference in the choice of grouping, as it was easier to collaborate with those with whom they knew rather than being assigned to work with strangers, or members with a free-rider reputation. With regards to case studies, students expressed a liking for shorter case studies that were straight to the point, and being allowed to think on their own and beyond the topic. They liked a good balance of individual and group case studies with open-ended—rather than close-ended—questions. Many still preferred hard copies to be distributed in class instead of soft copies. The participants stated that their experiences could also be improved if they were assigned at the end of the chapter so that the knowledge and concepts gained could be applied to solve the cases. Lecturers could help improve the students' experiences by providing an explanation of the rationale behind the case study, being more specific in their instructions, coaching to assist students in solving cases, and giving examples within the case studies to help students understand them better. If possible, scheduled site visits to companies where the case studies took place would also make them more interesting and meaningful. With regards to technology, better online search engines were needed to facilitate research, and there was a request for augmented reality.

### ***Challenges in Working on Case Studies***

Multiple challenges were cited when working on case studies, and the answers have been placed into three main categories: (a) group work, (b) case study length, and (c) time. This addresses the fourth research question: "What were the challenges faced in solving case studies?"

Working together in groups was the most frequently mentioned challenge that participants encountered when working on case studies. The differences in opinions resulted in conflicts and confusion, while some members hardly ever voiced their opinions. One respondent specifically stated that "members with much stronger personalities were egotistical and dominated discussions even though they had the wrong answers", while another shared that "there were difficulties in fair division of work, and each student was only knowledgeable about his or her part instead of the entire case study." One respondent also said that "aside from scheduling problems, it was really tough when some meetings did not go as well as planned, with members disappearing while others [were] not making much effort."

Meeting deadlines created problems within the group, particularly when the entire group needed one part to be completed prior to getting the next part done. Other members were "last minute people" who would procrastinate and work at the last moment, while others were simply very slow in completing their parts. One very frustrated respondent said that "Working in bad groups with unambitious and lazy members also required extra effort to go after them to get them to finish their work, which was really frustrating." Bad work submissions had created an extra burden on responsible group members to fix the paper so that it would be presentable and correct prior to submission. And working with strangers was no better, particularly when they were unmotivated and only wanted to pass the course, and a motivated student had to complete the entire work. To avoid conflict, dedicated students have been known to have individually completed the entire assignment, but still included the other non-performing group members' names. Language barriers, due to team cultural diversity, had also created communication issues, and inadequate English skills also created plagiarism problems that consequently had a negative impact on the entire group's grade.

The second most frequently cited challenge was lengthy case studies that contained repetitive contents and sometimes required several rounds of reading. It was particularly a challenge when the topic was difficult, unrelated to the major, and had technical and difficult vocabulary (example: law). Some students also had problems doing online cases that strained their eyes, while other students complained about the need to have their answers aligned with the lecturers' or else they would be wrong. Working in groups even worsened things when it came to coming up with the correct answers, and this was particularly so when the perspectives of teachers and students did not align.

Time constraints were a big challenge for students, particularly when case studies were assigned to be completed in class within a short 20-minute timeframe. When assigned as homework, the challenge came in the form of having better time management, as there were many other assignments that had to be completed, along with other pressures in life.

### ***Case Study Preferences***

The theme addressing the fifth research question: "What type of case studies do students prefer?" was broken up into three parts: (a) type of case studies most beneficial to students, (b) the option of in-class or take-home case studies, and (c) the preferred type of case study.

### ***Type of Case Studies Most Beneficial to Students***

Participants were given three options regarding the type of case studies that would be most beneficial to them. The results of the study (Table 2) indicated that the majority had a high preference for End of the Chapter case studies ( $n = 11$ , 68.7%), followed by one-fourth of participants who opted for Short Harvard Business Review (HBR) case studies ( $n = 4$ , 25%). None of the students indicated any interest in Long HBR case studies. One student (6.3%) had no preference, while another mentioned that "I would like pre- and post-case studies to be administered." The participants who had chosen only End of the Chapter case studies explained that they were easier as they were shorter, straight to the point, and a great summary of the chapter and a beneficial review practice, as knowledge gained from the chapter was fresh and concepts could be immediately applied to solve the case studies.

**Table 2 Type of Case Studies (CS) Most Beneficial to Students**

Type	End of Chapter Case Study	Short HBR Case Study	Long HBR Case Study	No Preference	Total
<i>n</i>	11	4	0	1	16
Percent	68.7	25.0	0.0	6.3	100.0

### ***The Option of In-Class or Take-home Case Studies***

When asked if they preferred in-class or take-home case studies, half of respondents ( $n = 8$ , 50%) preferred in-class case studies, while the other half ( $n = 8$ , 50%) preferred take-home case studies as homework (Table 3). The half of participants who preferred in-class case studies liked the fact that

lecturers gave instructions, they were available for questioning, and gave students immediate feedback. By working on cases in class, the students felt that cases gave them purpose, they could focus and pay attention to the task at hand, and apply the fresh knowledge they had received in their lessons in solving the cases. Another student also stated that “doing it outside of class could lead to procrastination,” while another preferred to just get it done or else “there would be too many distractions in completing it if it were assigned as homework.” Not liking homework was another reason behind the preference for working on cases during class time.

As for those who preferred case studies as homework, they liked the fact that they had more space and time to think and work, and felt more productive at home. Others were distracted when working on case studies in class as “students usually didn’t care and they were doing other things,” and “when others are not focusing on working on the cases, it was difficult for me to focus, too.” Another student also mentioned the preference to just “sit and learn, and so I prefer case studies to be assigned as homework.”

**Table 3** Option of In-Class or Take-home Case Studies

Type	In-Class	Homework	Total
n	8	8	16
Percent	50.0	50.0	100.0

#### **Preferred Type of Case Study**

Participants were allowed to choose which type of case study they preferred from five different options: (a) only individual case studies, (b) only group case studies, (c) an equivalent number of individual and group case studies, (d) more individual than group case studies, and (e) more group than individual group case studies (Table 4).

The majority of the students favored an equivalent number of Individual and Group Case Studies ( $n = 7$ , 43.7%), as they felt they were equal in importance. Working individually allowed them to work independently without any time constraints, pressures, or the need to rely on or discuss material with others. It was particularly good preparation for examinations when cases were related to exam questions, and they provided an opportunity to analyze and improve critical thinking skills. Working in groups, on the other hand, resulted in knowledge sharing from different perspectives, thinking outside of the box, and preparing them for the workplace where they have to work and collaborate with others. This collaboration helped those who did not understand the case study, and helped students to stay on the right track, particularly when they were confused regarding the case study. The downside, however, included division of work amongst group members, with each person focusing on one’s work and not knowing what others were doing. Although working with friends was generally great, it was sometimes problematic when assignments were not submitted on time, or respondents had to work with bad groups consisting of lazy members who were difficult to contact.

As for those who preferred more Individual and less Group Case Studies ( $n = 4$ , 25%), more individual case studies allowed students to showcase their own abilities, and they preferred this approach when the cases were short. These respondents preferred to concentrate by working alone so that they did not have to rely on or be let down by others. A few group cases would be helpful as students also need to learn how to work collaboratively with others to build team building skills aside from working alone. Moreover, less group work meant fewer problems. One student, who had negative working experiences in working in groups as the only one person who did the work, stated that “having more Individual Case Study assignments was much better than Group Case Studies.”

Students who preferred only Individual Case Studies ( $n = 4$ , 25%) stated that they preferred to work alone, and wanted to avoid the unpleasantness of working alongside free-riders or unmotivated groupmates. One student said that working alone allowed her to “focus more and have a greater understanding of the case study”, while another said that “there was no need for group work to work on a short two-page case study.” These students had prior experience of doing all the work alone, even though it had originally been assigned as group work. A female participant said that she

understood that “different students have different academic goals of just wanting to pass the course, so I just completed the entire assignment because I wanted to get a good grade.” A female respondent voiced her frustrations over uninterested group members who “have created a lot of pressure and work, stress, procrastinate, do last-minute submissions, and I have to correct their grammar, and had to eventually complete the entire study myself.” The only person who preferred only Group Case Studies ( $n = 1, 6.3\%$ ) said that “by working in groups, I could work with students from other countries who contributed different perspectives due to the cultural diversity, and it helped me to improve my English. I was also able to discuss the case study with others, and I just love to work with different groups of friends.” No desire for More Group than Individual Group Case Studies was expressed ( $n = 0, 0\%$ ).

**Table 4** Preferred Type of Case Study

Type	Individual CS = Group CS	Individual CS	Individual > Group	Group CS	Group > Individual	Total
<i>n</i>	7	4	4	1	0	16
Percent	43.7	25.0	25.0	6.3	0.0	100.0

## Discussion

Case studies have been used extensively in higher education since 1870 as a student-centered approach to active learning (Gudmunson et al., 2015; Herreid et al., 2014). The study clearly indicated that the majority of students had a positive attitude towards case studies as an effective learning tool. Case studies complemented undergraduate courses by providing more in-depth learning as students applied their knowledge and used critical thinking in solving case studies (Noblitt et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2014). Since most case studies were company-based, they gave students a glimpse of the real world that enabled them to broaden their horizons outside the arena of the textbook. As an additional learning methodology, they also added variety to the class, aside from the normal class lectures. In fact, they have been effective in gaining the interest of some students who never read textbooks, but showed an interest in reading assigned case studies. This finding is aligned with the literature which shows that case studies enhanced course content learning (Herreid et al., 2014; Kawulick, 2011), were more interesting than textbooks (Cellucci et al., 2012), and motivated learning (Taneja, 2014; Yadav et al., 2010). The hospitality students seemed to enjoy and benefit tremendously from experienced hospitality lecturers who had worked in the industry prior to joining the university, and who presented real-life case study scenarios. A few students also mentioned the challenges of working on case studies outside of their majors, as they were filled with technical terms that were outside of their comfort zones. The benefit of this approach would be exposure to something different, while the drawback would be the higher level of difficulty that may demotivate some students. One frustration worth mentioning here is a big challenge that is out of students’ control: the ability to correctly align their answers with their teachers’ expectations.

The length of case studies was a major concern, with students indicating a much higher preference for case studies that were short and to the point, compared to the lengthy ones that proved to not only be confusing, but provided a lot of irrelevant information. It can be concluded that students want to work on case studies that provide relevant and sufficient information to enable them to be solved. This was clearly supported by the high preference for end-of-the chapter case studies (68.7%) and short HBR case studies (25%), with no preference whatsoever for long HBR case studies. This adds on the existing literature that labeled long HBR case studies as being lengthy, boring, and irrelevant (Cellucci et al., 2012; McFarlane, 2015; Taneja, 2014), while supporting the case for shorter case studies (McFarlane, 2015). Case studies have been assigned in various ways by lecturers, and this study reported an equivalent preference for take-home (homework) and in-class work. Students felt that lecturers could improve their case study experiences by taking the time to provide good instructions and explain their expectations instead of just assigning work.

The pain of working in groups where members loaf, procrastinate, or submit poor work undoubtedly contributed to the intense dislike or *group hate* (Parrot & Cherry, 2011, as cited in Allan, 2016, p. 81) of group case studies. This seems to be an ongoing and unsolved challenge of working in groups. Therefore, it came as no surprise that only one person (6.3%) preferred using only group case studies, while the majority of the students opted for a good balance of both individual and group case studies (43.7%) so that they could have the best of both. Despite the disadvantages of group work, some students could see the benefits of group work in learning to collaborate, the advantages of more perspectives, discussions, helping each other out, and staying on track. These advantages are in alignment with the literature on working in groups (Mittelmeier et al., 2018; Kawulick, 2011). Upon further exploration, it was evident that one-fourth of students (25%) just wanted to work individually, as it was easier to complete assignments without having to go through the stress of following up, revising other members' work, and putting up with free-riders. The issue of free-riders never ceases to be a problem, and this is supported by literature that favors working individually (Grzimek et al., 2014). Moreover, these respondents were students who were basically doing the entire group's work anyway. For them, it was logical to do the work individually since the expenditure of effort was the same. The preference for working individually could also be attributed to the fact that students have different personalities and work preferences, and group work is not meant for everyone, which was also mentioned in Cross et al. (2018). The same number of students, on the other hand, could see some light in working with others, and so opted for more individual and less group case studies (25%). Aside from working alone most of the time, students could also cultivate team-building skills through collaboration (Gudmunson et al., 2015; Kawulick, 2011). With fewer group case studies, less problems would be created.

There were reasons behind students' requests for choosing their own group members. Learning to collaborate with strangers can be beneficial even though it involves stress and pressure on students as they work with "uncertainty." This uncertainty takes the form of not knowing the working style of new "members," whether they will do good work, the risk that they may engage in plagiarism, and the question of whether new group members will submit their work on time. Not all group member may share the goal of doing a good job. It takes time for groups to form, storm, and norm prior to performing (McShane & Glinow, 2018). Thus, working with strangers at times poses more costs than benefits. On the other hand, despite the benefits of working in their comfort zone within their same circle of friends, there might also be the danger of allowing their friends to free-ride in order to avoid potential conflicts.

More challenging case studies demanding more research can be facilitated by the library in providing them with more training in search engine usage, and increasing the availability of search engines, but that would mean additional cost which needs to be approved by top management. As time constraint was another challenge for students, which in this case was a time slot of just 20 minutes during class time, lecturers might want to consider extending the time allowance to allow more discussion, less pressure, less stress, and better problem-solving sessions in class. Students with time constraints, particularly in group work, have the tendency to distribute the work to get it completed on time, instead of engaging in active group discussion of all the questions prior to working on the answers. This defeats the purpose of group work.

## Conclusion

This study was successful in addressing its intended objectives and provided valuable insights from students' perspectives regarding case studies. Its findings were aligned with the literature in that case studies were seen as an effective tool for learning that should continue to be included when possible as an additional add-on tool for learning aside from the textbook. Lecturers can improve students' case study experiences by spending some time in giving good instructions, allowing students, if possible, to choose their own group members, and assigning case studies that are not too lengthy and within their majors. Students should be encouraged to benefit from both individual and group studies, where they can think for themselves and learn to collaborate with others. A good balance of individual

and group case studies should be assigned within a reasonable timeframe that allows students to complete their work in a productive, stress-free, and pressure-free climate. As social loafing in groups is difficult to eradicate, individual lecturers might be encouraged to establish their own protocols for reducing this to improve group case study experiences, such as by establishing student peer evaluations (Dijkstra et al., 2016; Hall & Buzwell, 2013) and signing group contracts (Pahomov, 2018).

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