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Case Study Method in Human Rights Education: An Approach from the Rights-Based Framework

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ABSTRACT : In the context of higher education reform toward developing learners' competencies, selecting appropriate teaching methods is one of the key factors in preparing learners to adapt to an increasingly volatile and changing world. In particular, when teaching human rights, which is an important educational content for developing awareness, competencies, and a sense of human rights in learners' future professional lives, selecting appropriate teaching methods is an issue that needs to be addressed. Based on an analysis of the advantages of the case study method from a rights-based approach, this article examines the current application of the case study method in human rights education in Vietnam. It then proposes solutions to improve the effectiveness of applying the case study method to human rights education at higher education institutions in Vietnam in the context of international integration.

KEYWORDS: Case study method, Rights-based approach, Higher education, Educational reform.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the spirit of the current breakthrough in education and training development, education, development, and educational reform in Vietnam have become urgent requirements for improving the quality of human resources in an increasingly volatile and complex world. The top priority of modern education is no longer simply the acquisition and memorization of theoretical knowledge, but rather the development of learners' ability to apply knowledge, think creatively, and solve practical problems. One of the key directions for achieving breakthroughs in education and training is to place the *"learner at the center and as the subject of the educational and training process."* The role of learners is therefore changing from passive recipients of support to active rights-holders and subjects of the educational process. Education and training must ensure that learning goes hand in hand with practice, that schools are closely connected with society, and that learning environments enable students to practice and apply their knowledge while equipping them to proactively adapt to the context of digital technology and artificial intelligence.

At the same time, the rights-based approach has become an important theoretical framework in education in general. It reshapes the relationship between teachers and learners, shifting the focus from meeting needs to realizing rights. Building upon the positive aspects of traditional teaching methods, it is necessary to apply and integrate teaching methods that promote learners' independence and strengthen activities aimed at personal development. The case study method is not only a pedagogical technique that responds to the requirements of educational reform, but also an effective tool for realizing the core principles of human rights, such as participation, accountability, and empowerment of rights-holders. Applying the case study method within a rights-based framework not only helps learners acquire professional knowledge but also develops their mindset and attitudes as rights-holders.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE RIGHTS-BASED FRAMEWORK AND THE CASE STUDY METHOD

2.1. Rights-Based Approach

From the period before the 1950s to the present, various approaches have been developed with the aim of promoting greater protection and advancement of human rights in social practice, including the charity-based approach and the needs-based approach. Since the 1990s, the rights-based approach has increasingly been regarded as the most appropriate approach to ensuring and promoting human rights. Unlike previous models, which viewed the protection of human rights primarily as the responsibility of society and the State, with individuals receiving rights in a passive manner, the rights-based approach considers those whose rights need to be protected as active actors who claim their rights and demand accountability from duty-bearers (Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment, 2025). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) is "*...a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights*" **(**Le, 2023). The rights-based framework creates conditions for rights-holders to participate in decision-making processes concerning issues that may affect their rights. This also means that duty-bearers have the obligation to recognize, respect, and ensure the rights of rights-holders and other relevant actors.

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In the context of university autonomy and digital transformation, higher education operating within a rights-based framework is not merely a methodological change, but also a fundamental transformation in educational governance thinking. This approach represents an effective direction for educational development, creating greater equality, promoting a sustainable knowledge ecosystem, and enhancing the status and reputation of educational institutions. To effectively implement rights-based higher education, implementation measures should comply with the fundamental principles of the rights-based approach, specifically the PANEL principles: Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, and Legality (Le, 2023).

2.2. Case Study Method

In Vietnam, in the spirit of Politburo Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW on breakthrough development in education and training, shifting from a model of passive knowledge transmission toward learner competency development has become an urgent requirement. Applying the case study method in higher education is therefore a strategic necessity for realizing the objectives of educational reform. According to researcher Nguyen Huu Lam, "the case study method is a teaching technique in which the main components of a case study are presented to learners for the purposes of illustration or providing experience in problem-solving" (Nguyen, 2024). The essence of the case study method lies in enabling learners, through studying and solving specific cases, to develop critical thinking, professional sensitivity, and the ability to make decisions based on legal foundations and humanistic values. In this way, the method contributes to developing learners' political awareness and sense of community responsibility.

The teaching process using the case study method consists of the following steps:

Step 1: Presenting the case. The lecturer is responsible for providing information and content related to the case to the learners. A case should meet the criteria of educational value and relevance to current issues; identify the key issues and be appropriate to the lesson and learners; generate learners' interest; and create a need or motivation to solve the case.

Step 2: Studying the case. At this stage, learners take an active role in approaching the case. They proactively identify relevant information and collect information related to the case through various methods and sources. The lecturer must ensure that all learners clearly understand the content of the case and is responsible for supporting learners and creating opportunities for them to develop their thinking and broaden their knowledge.

Step 3: Analyzing and resolving the case. Based on their previous research, together with suggestions and guidance from the lecturer, learners identify the causes and nature of the issues presented in the case. They then proactively propose solutions and approaches based on their own knowledge and skills. At this stage, learners may also evaluate their proposed solutions and predict their possible outcomes. The lecturer takes the role of a listener and demonstrates respect for learners' perspectives and reasoning.

Step 4: Presenting the results. After learners present their proposed solutions, different approaches may be compared in order to identify the most appropriate solution, while also evaluating and connecting the case with the lesson. At this stage, the lecturer may provide comments, assessments, and constructive feedback on learners' approaches without imposing a particular solution. In particular, the lecturer should provide an overall assessment of the case and draw lessons from it to guide learners in future situations (Ly, 2024).

The case study method is an effective tool for promoting a significant shift toward a modern and active educational model. In particular, this method strongly supports innovation in testing and assessment. Instead of examinations based primarily on memorization, assessment based on learners' ability to analyze and propose solutions to specific cases can enhance fairness and objectivity while more accurately reflecting learners' actual competencies.

2.3. Compatibility Between the Case Study Method and the Rights-Based Approach

Teaching through case studies is an appropriate educational method that is compatible with the rights-based approach in higher education, which reflects the philosophy and objectives of modern education. The compatibility between the case study method and the rights-based approach represents the practical realization of principles for ensuring human rights within the educational environment.

Table 1: The Compatibility between the PANEL Principles and the Case Study Method

PANEL Principle	Case Study Method	Points of Compatibility
P – Participation: Rights-holders have the right to participate actively, freely, and equally in decision-making processes that affect their rights and interests.	Learners are transformed from passive recipients of knowledge into active participants through group discussions, debates using the Socratic method, role-playing, and participation in solving learning cases.	The case study method creates a democratic learning environment in which the right to participation is exercised directly throughout the educational process. As a result, knowledge is acquired and transformed into experience, thereby developing learners' competencies.
A – Accountability: Duty-bearers are responsible for explaining and being subject to monitoring and scrutiny regarding their actions and decisions, thereby ensuring the rights of other actors within the framework of the law.	To ensure the quality of learning, when implementing the case study method, lecturers are responsible for providing information, answering questions, supporting learners, and consolidating knowledge. Learners themselves actively participate and take	The case study method contributes to strengthening accountability and the support responsibilities of duty-bearers such as lecturers and educational institutions. At the same time, it helps develop learners' sense of social and professional responsibility.

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PANEL Principle	Case Study Method	Points of Compatibility
	responsibility for their proposed solutions to the cases.	
N – Non-discrimination & Equality: All individuals are equal before the law and are entitled to the same rights without discrimination. Ensuring equality also requires appropriate attention to vulnerable groups.	Learning cases are developed based on real or hypothetical situations involving different actors in social life, including vulnerable groups, thereby requiring learners to examine the issues from multiple perspectives.	The case study method helps learners identify barriers to equality and discrimination. Through this process, learners' professional thinking and competencies are developed toward promoting social justice and humanistic values.
E – Empowerment: Empowerment aims to enhance the knowledge, skills, confidence, and capacity for action of rights-holders, enabling them to recognize, claim, protect, and proactively exercise their legitimate rights.	Learners proactively explore and research issues and develop their own proposed solutions. Their ideas and proposed approaches are respected and listened to by lecturers and other learners..	By participating in case-solving activities, learners actively research and examine the facts of the case, develop the ability to formulate judgments, and are empowered to make decisions regarding how the case should be resolved.
L – Legality: The exercise of rights and the resolution of human rights-related issues must take place within the framework of national law and international human rights standards.	When resolving cases, learners must identify and apply appropriate and reasonable solutions while ensuring compliance with legal regulations.	All arguments and proposed solutions must be verified against relevant professional and legal standards, ensuring a multidimensional approach throughout the learning and case-solving process.

From the above analysis of compatibility, it can be seen that the case study method is an appropriate approach to ensuring the rights of various actors, particularly learners, in the following ways:

First, realizing the right to participation and transforming the position of learners. Under the rights-based approach, participation is a core principle requiring every individual to participate actively and voluntarily in processes that affect their rights and interests. The case study teaching method places learners at the center of the learning process, requiring them to move away from a passive state of knowledge acquisition. It creates opportunities for learners to independently explore and apply knowledge and encourages active participation throughout the learning process. In doing so, learners exercise and realize their rights to access information, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and decision-making. This transforms the classroom into a democratic space in which each individual's views are listened to and carefully considered.

Second, enhancing the accountability of duty-bearers. This principle applies not only to the case study method but also to the educational process in general. Educational institutions and lecturers have a responsibility to provide learners with clear information about curricula, assessment methods, learning outcomes, and other relevant matters when they participate in educational and training activities. The case study method provides a clearer mechanism for assessing accountability, as lecturers are required to listen to, respect, and respond positively to learners' perspectives, as well as provide information and ensure the accuracy of information related to the case. In addition, lecturers are responsible for answering questions related to the lesson and providing feedback on learners' perspectives, thereby helping learners achieve the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes specified in the learning outcomes of the training program.

Furthermore, through participating in, and even "role-playing" different actors in cases, learners can clearly identify who the rights-holders and duty-bearers are within a particular social relationship. This allows learners to experience the roles of different parties, thereby developing a deeper understanding of the accountability obligations and legal responsibilities of state agencies and other relevant actors.

Third, ensuring equality and non-discrimination. The case study method provides an equitable mechanism for learners and helps break down traditional classroom hierarchies in which academically stronger students often dominate. Through practical cases reflecting the diversity of social life, learners from different backgrounds, including differences in ethnicity, gender, economic circumstances, and abilities, can participate, interact, and engage in group discussions about the cases. This creates a space for learners to share their opinions, experiences, and proposed solutions. In this way, the right to education and comprehensive development can be fully realized in accordance with the principle that no one should be left behind.

Fourth, developing professional competencies, attitudes, and individual autonomy. The ultimate goal of a rights-based approach is empowerment, enabling individuals to strengthen their ability to exercise control over their lives and proactively make decisions affecting their rights and interests. Through analyzing complex cases, learners develop critical thinking and logical analysis skills, which are essential professional competencies. Learning through practice not only enables learners to acquire professional knowledge but also develops an attitude of autonomy and personal responsibility for their decisions, grounded in respect for the rule of law and social ethics. As a result, learners become more confident and proactive in asserting their legitimate rights and interests, as well as being prepared to protect the legitimate rights and interests of other members of society.

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3. HUMAN RIGHTS TEACHING METHODS AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

3.1. The Position of Human Rights Education in Higher Education

In the modern Vietnamese higher education system, human rights education is not merely the transfer of legal knowledge. Rather, it serves as a "guiding principle" in shaping learners' worldview and professional ethics. From a political and social perspective, incorporating human rights education into curricula represents the concretization of the strategies of the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam. This is reflected in documents issued by the Vietnamese State, specifically: Decision No. 1309/QĐ-TTg dated September 5, 2017, of the Prime Minister approving the Project on incorporating human rights content into the national education system; Directive No. 34/CT-TTg of the Prime Minister on strengthening the implementation of the Project on incorporating human rights content into the national education system; and, particularly, Official Letter No. 8435/BGDĐT-GDĐH dated December 11, 2025, of the Ministry of Education and Training on incorporating human rights content into training programs.

From the perspective of a rights-based framework, human rights education not only responds to the fundamental transformation in educational thinking, namely, the shift from a "needs-based" support model toward the realization of rights standards based on human dignity, but also helps learners clearly understand their status and rights in both education and social life.

3.2. Current Application of the Case Study Method in Teaching Human Rights Courses at Higher Education Institutions

In Vietnam, human rights education has become part of the educational curriculum. Although there are differences in its scope, level, and methods of implementation, the overall process is still being consolidated, with the initial objective of ensuring that by 2025, 100% of schools within the national education system would include human rights courses in their curricula (Tran, 2023). To ensure that human rights education reflects its appropriate importance, many factors need to be considered, one of the most important being teaching methodology. To achieve greater effectiveness in the educational process, human rights education methods have been developed based on practical experience and adjusted to suit different learners and groups of learners. Methods aimed at encouraging learners' participation in human rights courses include lectures and discussions, group work, case studies, case-solving activities, simulations, role-playing, and practical exercises.

However, in practice, most educational institutions still rely primarily on traditional lecture-based teaching. The inevitable consequence is a one-way flow of information, which can cause learners to become passive, mechanically memorizing legal provisions while lacking critical thinking and practical judgment. Several factors explain why lecture-based teaching remains the predominant method.

First, with regard to human rights education curricula, there is generally no uniformity among higher education institutions in terms of course titles, teaching content, or instructional hours devoted to human rights. Most institutions incorporate human rights content into general education courses, while only a small number establish human rights as a separate course, which is generally offered as an elective course worth two credits. This situation means that human rights education does not fully reflect the importance and significance that such education should have.

Second, human rights provisions are scattered across numerous legal documents. Therefore, during the teaching process, particularly for learners who are not specializing in law, it can be difficult to access and synthesize human rights-related content. Lecturers need to guide learners toward comprehensive thinking and integrate the analysis and study of domestic and international legal documents. In addition, the body of knowledge related to human rights is highly diverse and extensive. Therefore, when lecturers aim to convey a comprehensive body of human rights knowledge, the lecture method is often the first method selected. This is particularly relevant in Vietnam, where human rights courses and content still lack standardized textbooks and learning materials across educational institutions, and where comprehensive educational materials tailored to specific learner groups have not yet been fully developed (Tran, 2023).

Given these limitations, innovation in teaching methods is an inevitable requirement for improving the quality of rights-based education. However, in practice, the application of the case study method in human rights education still faces a number of difficulties and limitations, specifically:

First, **subjective factors**.

From the lecturers' perspective: The case study method requires more complex teaching skills, such as classroom organization, time allocation, question formulation, organization and encouragement of learner discussions, commenting, and critical debate. This requires lecturers to have a clear understanding of learners' characteristics and the factors affecting them in order to provide appropriate guidance and facilitation. In addition, designing and developing educational cases requires lecturers to have professional experience and diverse knowledge of relevant fields to ensure that the cases are accessible and appropriate to different groups of learners.

From the learners' perspective: Applying the case study method in human rights education requires learners to participate actively, based on their independent thinking, dynamism, creativity, enthusiasm, and genuine interest in knowledge rather than attending classes merely out of obligation. In reality, however, some learners are still reluctant to actively participate in discussions because they are accustomed to traditional teaching methods. Learners may also lack confidence in expressing their opinions because they are afraid of making mistakes. Furthermore, at the university level, learners must absorb a large amount of knowledge, which can make independent study a barrier when they have not received adequate guidance and encouragement.

Second, **objective factors**.

As discussed above, human rights education encompasses a highly diverse and extensive body of knowledge. However, there is currently no unified and comprehensive system of materials for this subject. Most learning materials used by educational institutions for human rights education have not been standardized across institutions, partly because human rights can be approached from many different perspectives and disciplines. Although the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training has organized the compilation of *Human Rights Education Materials for Undergraduate Training Programs*, this material serves only as a reference source for educational institutions when developing textbooks and learning materials appropriate to the specific characteristics of their training programs.

In addition, inadequate physical infrastructure is another limitation in implementing the case study method in human rights education at higher education institutions. For example, library systems at some institutions have not yet been sufficiently upgraded or interconnected to establish large databases and ensure the academic resources that learners and lecturers can access and use. Similarly, classroom space can also be a limitation.

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Classrooms are still generally organized according to traditional models, making it difficult to create spaces for case-solving activities and for learners to exchange ideas and engage in group discussions.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the effective application of the case study method in human rights education within a rights-based theoretical framework, this article proposes the following recommendations:

First, **the design and selection of cases should ensure the principles of equality and non-discrimination.** When selecting and developing cases, it is necessary not only to ensure their educational and practical relevance but also to select cases with universal content. Priority should be given to incorporating issues involving rights-holders and duty-bearers and linking them to learners' own contexts, thereby ensuring that all learners can recognize their rights and interests within the lesson. Cases should serve as "material" that learners can analyze and approach from multiple perspectives rather than being restricted to a particular group. In this way, learners can proactively identify the root causes of problems and recognize their own rights and interests within the situation.

To achieve this, lecturers themselves need to continuously improve their knowledge and skills and receive professional training through workshops, professional development activities, seminars, and similar activities. In addition, to motivate lecturers to develop and design lessons using the case study method, educational institutions can provide incentives through support policies, competitions, and rewards for lecturers who demonstrate creativity in their teaching.

Second, **enhance learners' active participation in the classroom.** Human rights courses contain a substantial amount of knowledge, which may make learners less interested in participating actively in class. In such circumstances, lecturers have a responsibility to listen and respond positively to learners' critical opinions, thereby creating motivation for learning and research. At the same time, learners themselves need to develop an appropriate understanding of their roles and responsibilities when participating in class. Assessment criteria that take learners' participation throughout the learning process into account can be applied to encourage their active engagement.

Experiential learning activities should also be strengthened in combination with the case study method so that learners can develop and demonstrate their abilities while forming a sense of autonomy and responsibility for exercising rights in their future professional practice. This can be achieved by having learners study cases and place themselves in the positions of the different actors involved.

Third, **establish accountability through a transparent assessment system.** The final stage of lesson review and assessment should be designed as a mechanism through which lecturers and educational institutions demonstrate accountability to learners. Assessment criteria should be clearly established and publicly communicated, allowing learners to participate in independent self-assessment in order to ensure objectivity. Lecturers should apply two-way feedback techniques so that learners can monitor the quality of teaching and request explanations regarding content they consider inappropriate or inadequate. Assessment should not focus solely on learners' final knowledge scores but should also be based on indicators of their participation in research and case-solving processes, thereby ensuring objective and fair assessment and protecting learners' rights and interests.

Fourth, **ensure consistency in teaching materials and learning resources for human rights courses.** Unlike general law courses or general political education courses, human rights education, although mandatory across educational levels, including higher education, still lacks consistency in terms of teaching content and whether it should be offered as a separate course or integrated into other courses. In particular, learning materials remain scattered across different sources. Most materials address human rights primarily from a legal perspective and do not adequately reflect the comprehensive nature of human rights education across different areas of social life. Therefore, there is a need for greater consistency in teaching content, learning materials, and reference resources so that learners can easily access information and develop greater autonomy in their learning.

Fifth, **upgrade and improve physical infrastructure to facilitate the implementation of the case study method by learners and lecturers.** Applying the case study method should not be limited to providing cases for learners to study. It can also incorporate "role-playing" activities, allowing learners to gain additional perspectives by taking on the positions of different actors within a case. Therefore, classrooms should not only be equipped with projectors, boards, and Internet access, but should also provide sufficient space for learners to engage in role-playing activities and use supporting materials and props. In addition, university library systems and open-data linkage models can serve as valuable tools for learners and provide lecturers with authoritative resources from which to guide learners toward independent research.

5. CONCLUSION

The case-solving method is an appropriate and effective choice in the process of higher education reform, particularly when it is implemented within a rights-based approach. Applying this approach to education and training not only helps learners gain a deeper understanding of the position of rights-holders but also develops critical thinking and a sense of responsibility toward complex social issues. This provides an important foundation for building a human rights-oriented education system and contributes to developing generations of global citizens with the capacity to protect human dignity and justice in the context of contemporary international integration.

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