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# Cross-Disciplinary Challenges: Learning Management among Non-Business Students

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**Abstract**

In the ever-changing landscape of higher education, the incorporation of interdisciplinary learning has resulted in an increase in the proportion of students who are not majoring in business enrolling in basic management classes. Although this incorporation improves employability and provides students with essential skills in decision-making, leadership, and planning, it also presents distinctive pedagogical challenges. Non-business students often struggle with management coursework due to unfamiliar terminology, language barriers, and inadequate study strategies. This qualitative study investigates their learning difficulties and coping strategies to shed light on pedagogical gaps and propose actionable teaching enhancements. This study seeks to delve into the educational experiences of non-business students within management education, highlighting the challenges they face and the sophisticated strategies they employ to navigate these obstacles.

**Keywords**: Non-Business Students, Management Education, Learning Challenges, Qualitative Study, Self-Regulated Learning

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing trend toward integrating interdisciplinary learning in higher education, where students from non-business programs are increasingly required to engage with foundational management courses. This development is driven by the recognition that management knowledge—encompassing planning, organizing, leadership, and decision-making—is not solely relevant to business majors but has wide applicability across disciplines such as education, information technology, social sciences, and the humanities. However, while the inclusion of management studies in non-business curricula adds value to students' employability and real-world problem-solving skills, it also introduces significant pedagogical challenges. These students often encounter unfamiliar concepts, terminologies, and frameworks that were not part of their previous academic training, making the learning process more complex and cognitively demanding.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the learning experiences of non-business students as they navigate management coursework. Specifically, it investigates the difficulties they face and the strategies they employ to understand course content. While management education research is rich in studies focused on business students, there is limited attention paid to how non-business students experience and adapt to the demands of this subject. This constitutes a crucial gap in the literature, particularly given the growing emphasis on cross-disciplinary learning and curriculum integration.

Understanding the lived experiences of these students is essential for improving instructional design, assessment, and support systems in management education. By identifying the specific barriers they face—such as language proficiency, conceptual overload, and lack of engagement—this study aims to provide educators and curriculum designers with actionable insights. Furthermore, by analyzing the learning strategies that non-business students adopt, including both self-directed and externally supported approaches, the study contributes to the broader discourse on self-regulated learning (SRL) in higher education. Ultimately, the research underscores the need for a more inclusive and responsive pedagogical approach to management education, one that accommodates the diverse learning needs of interdisciplinary cohorts.

## Literature Review

### *Management Education for Non-Specialists*

Management as an academic discipline includes key components such as leadership, strategy, organizational behavior, and decision-making. However, when non-business students engage with these areas, the lack of prior foundational knowledge makes them vulnerable to disengagement (Vo, 2020). The abstract nature of theories, case-study-based approaches, and terminologies steeped in business logic can overwhelm students from unrelated fields.

### *Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)*

SRL encompasses metacognitive, behavioral, and emotional components that learners deploy to manage their learning process. Zimmerman (2020) categorizes SRL into three phases: forethought (planning and goal setting), performance (self-control and observation), and self-reflection (evaluation and adjustment). SRL helps learners cope with unfamiliar content by giving them tools to control and optimize their learning pathways (Malan et al., 2025).

### *Challenges in Interdisciplinary Learning*

Chin and Teoh (2022) describe "disciplinary discourse dissonance"—a state in which learners from non-specialist fields struggle to engage with domain-specific content due to differences in epistemology, terminology, and delivery. Students report confusion when management concepts are presented without interdisciplinary scaffolding. Language proficiency, particularly among ESL learners, compounds the issue, making comprehension and participation more difficult (Lim & Khalid, 2021).

### *Learning Strategies and Scaffolding*

Potgieter et al. (2025) stress that students often rely on simplified texts, collaborative learning, video content, and note-taking techniques. The cognitive load theory supports chunking and visual processing as key strategies for comprehension. Technology-supported SRL strategies,

such as translation tools or grammar checkers, also play a growing role in student adaptation (Barnard et al., 2009).

## Methodology

*Research Design*

A qualitative research design using semi-structured student reflections was employed. This allowed rich narrative data to be collected.

*Participants*

Six students enrolled in a management course from non-business programs participated voluntarily.

*Instruments and Procedure*

Students were prompted to write reflections addressing two areas: (1) difficulties encountered, and (2) strategies used. Responses were anonymized and thematically coded using NVivo.

## Findings

The analysis of the student reflections revealed several key themes related to both the challenges encountered and the strategies adopted while learning management as non-business students. One of the most prominent difficulties reported was the language barrier. Many students struggled to comprehend management terminology, especially when presented in formal academic English. This issue was particularly pronounced among those for whom English is not the first language, creating additional layers of complexity in understanding course materials.

Another recurring theme was the lack of visual aids in teaching materials. Participants expressed that text-heavy slides without supporting visuals, such as diagrams or flowcharts, made it difficult to process and internalize abstract concepts. This lack of visual scaffolding contributed significantly to cognitive overload, as students were required to extract meaning from dense content without adequate support.

The cognitive load was further intensified by the fast pace of content delivery. Students indicated that the volume and speed of information shared in class left little room for reflection or consolidation, leading to challenges in retaining and applying what they had learned. Compounding these issues were motivational barriers. A sense of disconnect from the subject matter led some students to disengage or experience reduced enthusiasm for learning. The perception of irrelevance or overwhelming complexity made it hard to maintain consistent interest.

Lastly, many students reported challenges in focus and time management. Competing academic priorities, personal commitments, and frequent distractions impacted their ability to consistently dedicate focused time to study management topics. These environmental and psychological factors significantly influenced their learning outcomes.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrated resilience through a variety of self-initiated strategies. A common approach was content chunking and summarization, where students

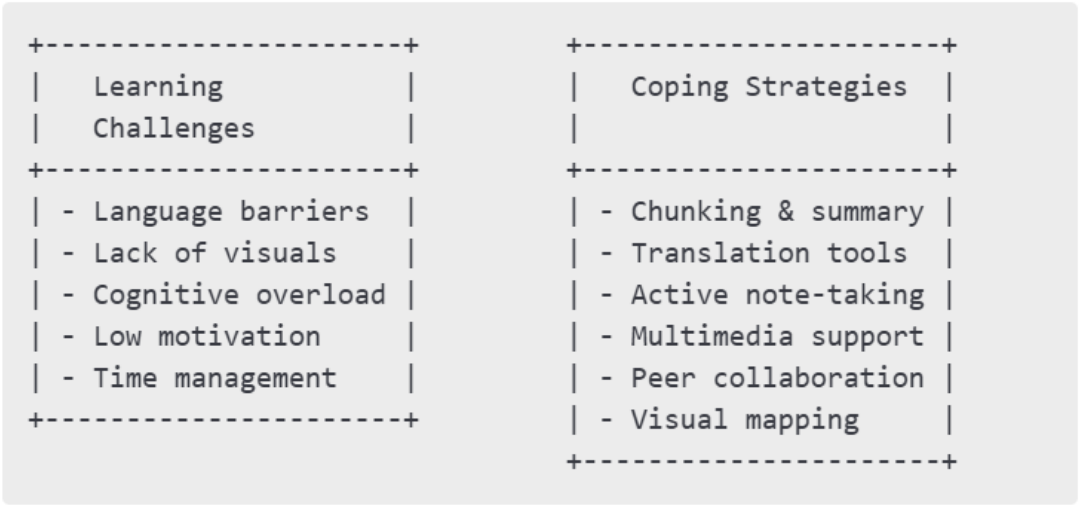
broke down lengthy materials into smaller, more manageable sections and paraphrased them in their own words. This helped in simplifying difficult concepts and reinforcing understanding.

Students also relied heavily on translation tools and grammar aids such as Google Translate and Grammarly to decipher unfamiliar terms and improve comprehension. Active learning strategies such as note-taking and highlighting key points were widely practiced, enabling students to stay engaged with the content and revisit important concepts later.

To supplement traditional classroom learning, students turned to external multimedia resources. Educational videos, chapter summaries, and explanatory articles provided alternative perspectives that often-clarified confusing material. Peer and instructor support played an essential role, with students seeking clarification through discussions and direct questions.

Additionally, time blocking and the creation of distraction-free study environments were cited as helpful for maintaining focus. Some students went further by constructing visual diagrams or conceptual frameworks to connect ideas, showcasing a deepening of metacognitive engagement and learner autonomy. The idea can be constructed in figure 1.

Figure 1. Themes Identified in Findings




**Recommendations**

The findings of this study underline the need for an inclusive and adaptive pedagogical approach tailored to the needs of non-business students engaging with management content. A significant recommendation is to simplify the academic language used in lectures, slides, and textbooks. Given that many students faced challenges with unfamiliar jargon and complex sentence structures, instructional materials should prioritize clarity and accessibility. Creating a glossary of key terms and using plain English where possible can reduce barriers to understanding.

Another important recommendation is to incorporate more visual scaffolding in teaching. Students consistently reported that the absence of diagrams, flowcharts, and other visual aids made it difficult to comprehend abstract concepts. Educators should consider integrating

visual explanations to complement text-based content, especially when introducing theoretical frameworks or models. This visual reinforcement not only aids comprehension but also supports different learning styles.

Adopting microlearning strategies can also enhance learning experiences. Breaking down chapters into shorter, focused segments can help prevent cognitive overload and allow students to process and internalize information more effectively. Each segment should be clearly aligned with specific learning outcomes to guide students in understanding the objectives of their studies.

Moreover, embedding self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies into the curriculum can empower students to take control of their academic progress. By explicitly teaching students how to plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning processes, educators can cultivate more independent and confident learners. Tools such as learning journals, reflective prompts, and progress checklists can facilitate the development of SRL skills.

Assessment methods should also be diversified to include inclusive and creative formats. Traditional examinations may not fully capture the learning achievements of non-business students who benefit more from applied, visual, or reflective forms of expression. Assignments such as infographics, video presentations, and learning portfolios can provide alternative avenues for students to demonstrate their understanding.

Collaborative learning opportunities should be promoted through peer discussions, group projects, and study circles. These not only enhance comprehension through shared insights but also build a sense of academic community. Additionally, providing blended learning resources—including videos, podcasts, and interactive platforms—can offer students flexibility in how and when they engage with the material.

Importantly, the curriculum should be designed to engage students' background knowledge and academic identity. Drawing analogies between management concepts and their respective disciplines can make the content more relatable and meaningful. For instance, education students might explore management principles through the lens of classroom leadership or school administration.

To address language-related challenges, targeted support for ESL learners should be incorporated. Short workshops on business English vocabulary, reading comprehension strategies, and writing conventions can bridge language gaps. Finally, fostering reflective practices, such as journaling or self-assessment, can deepen students' metacognitive awareness and help them identify what strategies work best for their individual learning journeys.

These recommendations, grounded in both empirical data and contemporary educational theory, provide a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing management education among non-business learners. By adopting these practices, educators can contribute to more equitable and effective interdisciplinary learning environments.

## Conclusion

Non-business students face distinct challenges in comprehending management education due to language, content density, and lack of prior exposure. However, through self-regulated learning strategies and support mechanisms, they demonstrate resilience and adaptability. This study emphasizes the importance of inclusive pedagogy and SRL-enhanced instruction for supporting diverse learners in interdisciplinary contexts.

Future studies could explore longitudinal changes in learning behavior across semesters or assess the impact of targeted SRL interventions on academic performance.

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