

## **Case Study Method for Teaching English as a Second Language**

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### **Abstract**

Learning English language is not merely to score marks and qualify oneself for the job that one is desirous of. Instead, it has to help the learners communicate well with people around them. In addition, English language learning must equip the learners with confidence to articulate their thoughts related to arts, science, business, trade, etc. In this regard, English language teachers hold prime significance in making the students acquire fluency in the second language.

While traditional method of teaching focuses on the completion of the prescribed syllabus, innovative method of teaching enhances the communicative skills of the learners to the next level. Hence, through the latter method, teachers provide the students with a chance to apply their English knowledge to real life situations. Using case study method in an ESL classroom not only increases the learning capacity of the second language learners but helps them remember functional grammar.

This paper analyses the different aspects connected with the application of case study method to teach English as a second language.

**Keywords:** ESL Classroom, Case study, TBL – Task-based learning, SLL - Second language learners, Digital Natives, Higher and Lower Socio-Economic Status (SES)

### **Introduction**

"Cases are stories with a message. They are not simply narratives for entertainment. They are stories to educate."(Herreid, p. 41)

Classroom teaching has become more complicated these days since technology has totally engrossed the attention of ‘Digital Natives’. Besides, teachers have to complete the

syllabus and assess students' performance within the stipulated time. Torn between the pressures from the learners and the education system, teachers quite often fail to get satisfaction from the work that they do. In this scenario, case study method comes to the rescue of both the teachers and the students. Applying case study method to a language classroom not only creates interest among the learners, but helps them learn English language with precision. Also, it helps teachers develop learners' critical thinking skills, which result in the overall development of an individual.

### **Case Study**

Case study, a method used for teaching, refers to a real or an imaginary situation wherein an individual faces problem and tries to find solutions. Teachers can use this method to apply English language to real life situations. Case study was introduced in the fields of law and medicine early in the nineteenth century. Later, other disciplines too adopted this method because it develops "the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning; moving beyond recall of knowledge to analysis, evaluation, and application." (Bonney, p.21)

### **Literature Review**

Case studies have been used by English language teachers across the globe since decades. This student-centred method enables the learners to relate themselves to the cases taken up for discussion. Moreover, students remain motivated in this task-based learning, which develops their critical and analytical thinking skills. Johnson opines that, students develop their "robust reasoning" (1999) through this method. Crandall (2000) views that "Teaching case studies provides a means of bridging theory and practice ..." (p.41).

International associations like TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages -- has also included case study in the teacher education training materials (Plaister, 1993). This method boosts the skills of both experienced and inexperienced teachers as Ellis (2010) points out, "teachers make sense of their work ... through carefully selected case studies of classroom learners and of instructional interventions in language learning." (p.187)

Case study method distances students from their inhibitions and kindles their curiosity to take part in discussions that give them a chance for "probing, evaluating and challenging the contributions of others and arguing one's own position convincingly" (Council of Europe, p.87). Since 1967, teachers teaching subjects like Business English and English for Specific Purposes have included case study method in their teaching methodology. This method makes students practice linguistic skills. Henceforth, learners become competent enough to speak out and write their views about the topics that concern them.

Practicing case study method facilitates the professional growth of teachers. Since this method needs collaborative efforts of the teachers, they can easily dispel the monotony of

English language teaching. Also, applying case study to classroom teaching turns the teachers to act as “a member of a class of events and to call attention to its value” (Shulman, p.21). Naturally, teachers combine the technical aspects of language teaching with social and philosophical aspects that govern a particular situation in a society. Thus, teachers cement the gap between theory and practice.

### **Applying Case Studies to Classroom Teaching**

Case studies work well with smaller or larger groups of students. It all depends on the teachers’ assessment of students’ standard.

To start with, teachers have to decide the concept to be taught. And then the learning outcome has to be decided. For instance, when students are expected to fare well in an interview, two different case studies related to successful and unsuccessful attempts of students have to be presented with proper details. This helps students do the discussions effectively.

Teachers can prepare content for case studies on their own or they can select the relevant content from authentic websites. In either case, teachers have to tailor the content according to the requirements of the students. Moreover, teachers have to familiarize the students with the content. They can adopt storytelling format that drives students to understand the context better, analyze the problems and suggest solutions. Preparation or selection of contents can bring maximum benefits to the teaching and learning process because case study method is “learner-centered and is based on the interactions between students and teachers and students within a group.” (Vicki Golich, p.3)

Generally, in a classroom situation, case studies focus on reading comprehension and speaking activities. Students tend to read the case studies carefully since their aim is to do the discussion well. Here starts the learning process. Comprehending the content helps learners become thorough with the functional grammar. This makes speaking practice easier and effective. Moreover, learners become confident of using English language.

The second important aspect of using case study method in a classroom is to assess the performance of the learners. Because, it guides the learners on how to do the discussion, present their views, examine the problems, and suggest solutions. But, prior to the discussion or role play performance, teachers must explain to the students how rubrics decide the assessment of their performance. Teachers can give this task as class work or homework. In both the contexts, teachers have to train the students to complete the tasks successfully.

### **Case Study Topics**

Teachers have to select the topics based on interest, standard and requirement of the students. Moreover, the selection of topics must attract the students to relate themselves to the situations taken up for discussion. It is quite easier for language teachers to create original case studies, which may be connected with the current issues. Or else, teachers can also rely on authentic websites that offer case studies on a wide range of general topics like “Choosing the best college, Planning a vacation, Adopting a healthier lifestyle, Arranging an inter-collegiate meet, Selecting the right smart phone”, etc.

Teaching business English is rather effective when case studies included topics like “Marketing a product, Choosing a location for opening a new company, Enhancing the existing facilities for the employees, Improving the accessibility of the newly opened show room, Organizing a trade fair to show case the company’s products” etc. This case study practice in the words of Uber Grosse, “carries multiple benefits for students, such as providing opportunities to read, speak, listen, and write. Moreover, vocabulary and grammatical structures are introduced and practiced in the context of the case, instead of traditional drills.” (p.134)

### **Methodology**

Involving second language learners in spoken activities is the biggest challenge to English language teachers all over the globe. However hard the teachers try to motivate the learners, fear of making errors in the foreign language prevents them from speaking. Hence, when case study method is introduced, it builds the right ambience for the learners to speak out their ideas. Using proper content can help the students practice English speaking skills.

Initially, teachers have to introduce the topic, explain background information, discuss vocabulary and linguistic components related to the content in detail. This process familiarizes the students with the topic to be discussed. In addition, teachers have to divide students into groups, discuss how to analyze the case and the steps involved in highlighting the problems and suggesting methods to find solutions. After this, the case study in printed or digital form has to be given to the students. This pre-learning process assists students in comprehending the content well.

Case study method can bring maximum benefits to the students when teachers follow certain steps. First of all, teachers have to be facilitators. Their focus must be solely on imparting English knowledge to students and thereafter examine their skills. This approach motivates the learners largely and makes them more expressive. Furthermore, teachers have to observe the discussion, give feedback and offer suggestions to improve students’ performance. When teachers are methodical, this process helps remove the inhibitions of second language learners. In fact, this method aids teachers in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as well.

## **Assessment**

Assessing the performance of students drives them to participate in the activities with more involvement. Assessment kindles the competitive spirit among the learners. Further, it leads to a faster learning rate. Teachers have to assess individual and group performance. Individual assessment makes learners practice linguistic contents well and group assessment encourages the learners to have collective efforts.

Every work atmosphere requires employees to have team spirit. In fact, assessment develops team spirit among the students. If teachers want to have optimum conditions for learning, it is necessary to explain the rubrics used for assessing students' performance. This makes students to be cautious about their efforts. And they learn functionalities of the language with precision.

## **Scheduling Case Study**

Teachers can use case study method in the classroom when students have gained sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. In fact, it will be apt to use this method at the close of the semester. Also, announcement has to be given at the beginning of the course that there will be case study discussion for awarding marks. Hence, students try to grasp syntax and try to perform all the speaking activities with great attention.

Case study method will be absolutely beneficial to the students when they realize the importance of eloquence needed for doing a discussion, which will form a part of the job that they may be doing in their future. In turn, even the recalcitrant students show keenness on taking up the tasks assigned to them. Above all, introducing this method at an apt time depends on the teachers' understanding of their students' standard and rate of their acquisition of English knowledge.

## **Advantages**

The merits of using case study method in an English classroom are manifold. Firstly, the task-based approach removes the flatness of English language teaching. As Jelena rightly points out that this method has "the application of theoretical non-linguistic knowledge and concepts into language learning."(p.555) Secondly, this student-centered approach encourages group communication and interaction among the participants. Thirdly, it develops students' personal, interpersonal, problem solving, critical thinking and analytical skills. Fourthly, their exposure to different media enhances their social and business outlook making them fit for the job that they plan to do in their future. Ultimately, this method changes the total personality of the second language learners.

## Challenges

Teachers and students face few challenges in this method. To begin with the difficulties of teachers, choosing the right case for the learners is a task since it is associated with the use of content and linguistic features that best suit the learners. It is a time-consuming process as Lundeberg feels that this method takes “a longer time to cover compared to the traditional, lecture-based ones” (p.10). Having to meet academic and personal demands, time factor is a rare commodity to teachers. Unless teachers aim at revolutionizing English language teaching and direct the interest of the learners towards learning English with precision, this method may not bring the desired outcome.

The next problem is about explaining the assessment pattern and training the students to meet the rubrics. Getting students’ cooperation is partially effective as teachers have to motivate the heterogeneous group of students. Coupled with this issue is the noisy atmosphere created in the classroom since this method focuses more on discussion and exchange of ideas. Obviously, English language teachers develop misunderstanding with the other subject teachers.

Speaking about the difficulties of students, the first and foremost one is connected with the intricacies of English language. Picking the right usage might be beyond the non-native speakers’ capacity. Alongside, efforts to use English language effectively may at times lower the interest and confidence level of the learners. In general, when students are bent on acquiring language skills through this method, they can ignore the problems as well.

Learning is a life-long process be it to the teachers or the students. Educational and socio-economic background of the teachers and the students expand or ruin their performance. Especially, the teachers and the students from lower socio-economic status along with rural educational background struggle to perform better than those who are from higher socio-economic position. Yet, the repeated training programs and the performance appraisal result in the paradigm shift in the growth of these teachers. Naturally, they become empathetic to students from lower SES and they figure out the ways to improve their learning capacity. These teachers are successful in their attempts, because they are fully aware of the difficulties and the means to become successful.

Though the merits outweigh the demerits, teachers can easily overcome the challenges through their dedication and devotion to English language teaching.

## Model Case Study

### **Situation: Who is the best candidate for the job?**

A private school advertises vacancy for recruiting a language teacher to work in a rural area. Thousands of applications are received. Four candidates are shortlisted from the applicants. The

first candidate possesses higher qualifications with no teaching experience. The second candidate is less qualified but has experience of teaching children in urban areas. The third candidate has poor qualifications but possesses more years of teaching experience in rural areas. The fourth candidate holds the required qualification with a rural educational background. Now choosing the right candidate becomes a dilemma for the management.

### Candidate Assessment Form

Use the following parameters to rank the candidates:

1. Suits all of the requirements
2. Suits some of the requirements
3. Suits one of the requirements
4. Suits none of the requirements

#### Candidate 1

Education	Experience	Interpersonal skills	Strengths/Weaknesses
1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	
Remarks	Remarks	Remarks	Remarks

#### Candidate 2

Education	Experience	Interpersonal skills	Strengths/Weaknesses
1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	
Remarks	Remarks	Remarks	Remarks

#### Candidate 3

Education	Experience	Interpersonal skills	Strengths/Weaknesses
1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	
Remarks	Remarks	Remarks	Remarks

#### Candidate 4

Education	Experience	Interpersonal skills	Strengths/Weaknesses
1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	1   2   3   4	
Remarks	Remarks	Remarks	Remarks

Teachers can give such a task to the students and monitor how the discussion progresses. This task has to be supplemented with the candidate assessment forms. It simplifies the discussion process to the students and enhances the desired learning outcome. While learners participate in this activity enthusiastically besides using their reasoning abilities, teachers act as facilitators thereby enabling the learners to use language precisely.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the case study method makes second language acquisition interesting as it is learner-centered and task-oriented. It encourages collaborative learning, helps retain information, builds rapport between students and teachers, harnesses students' abilities to analyze, judge and make decisions thus preparing them to fit into their future positions well.

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