

Trends and Applications of English Language Teaching and Learning in Ukraine Context: A Case-study Method in Teaching English for Specific Purposes for Ukrainian Students

Serhii Yablokov

English Philology

Foreign Languages Department

Mariupol State University, Mariupol, Ukraine

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analyzing the main methodological principle, which focuses on the technological support of the educational process regarding teaching foreign languages for specific purposes. The law lies in the fact that the methods used in teaching foreign languages should be considered from their most significant effect to achieve educational goals. The research work aims at analyzing the technological support of the process of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes. We consider this support as an essential component of professional training. While working on the paper, we used the following methods of pedagogical research: theoretical analysis and generalization of literature on the research problem; theoretical forecasting methods; a sociological survey (questionnaire, interviews) of students and teachers; testing; mathematical processing of the results of questionnaires and interviews. We developed and used several cases for students of different specialties in our teaching practice. Our development of cases and our teaching experience in the research field proved the effect of the use of the case-study method and its main advantages. We highlight the main question for further developments in the research field as the problems for developing and solving for the effective implementation of this method in teaching practices.

Keywords: case-study method, communicative competence, languages for specific purposes, Ukrainian students

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Introduction

The Council of Europe has proposed the basic methodological principle, which prioritizes technological support for professional education while studying foreign languages by the states – members of the European Union; this principle serves for holistic, systemic training in the issues of foreign language education. Its essence lies in the fact that the methods, used in the process of a foreign language teaching, should be considered from their most significant effect to achieve educational goals. These goals should be consistent with the needs of each student regarding their social context. According to Kotkovets (2012), the teacher focuses the process of a foreign language teaching on the formation of professional language competencies of students. To master communication in a foreign language, students should achieve professional foreign language communicative competence. A sufficient level of the development of this competence should provide students with the opportunity and the success in communication in the professional, labor, and domestic spheres in typical communication situations. The teacher clearly and specially selects these communication situations for the class, regarding the possibility of the occurrence of these situations in the professional (and not only professional) activities of a graduate of a higher education institution. We think these priorities to highlight the training of a competent person who can find the right solutions in specific educational, life, and (in future) professional situations.

Therefore, the aim of our research paper is to analyze the technological support of teaching the English language for specific purposes as an essential component of the education of future specialists in different spheres. A significant number of different innovative methods and technologies have been used in recent years to make the process of teaching foreign languages (for specific purposes, likewise) more effective. The use of these innovative methods and technologies also helps achieve educational goals. And the case-study method is one of them. In our teaching practice, we developed and used several cases for students of different specialties. This experience assured that this method, as a kind of the technological support of teaching, is substantially effective. We also found out and formulated the problems (or obstacles) for solving in further developments regarding the method under our research.

Data collection and analysis

While working on the article, we used the following methods of pedagogical research:

- The theoretical methods. We analyzed and generalized philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, methodological, and educational literature on the research problem for comparing various approaches of scholars to the selected issue. We determined the theoretical foundations and conceptual categorical apparatus in the research sphere. We used the method of speculative forecasting (the hypothesis of the research). This method helps determine the further dynamics of increasing in the effect of teaching a foreign language for specific purposes using the technique of case-study. We used the method of expert assessment to specify indicators and levels of the formation of foreign language communicative competence of future specialists.
- The empirical methods. We used a sociological survey (a questionnaire and an interview) of the students and teachers of the chair at the starting point of our pedagogical experiment. During the test, the students were divided into two groups: a control group (in this group we organized the teaching process following the methodology traditional for Ukraine) and the experimental group (in this group we mostly used the case-study method). To identify the dynamics of the learning process using the technique of case-study, we conducted testing of the students.

– The statistical methods. After the test, we mathematically processed its results.

The results of our test confirmed the effect and feasibility of the usage of the case-study method in teaching English for specific purposes. The students of the experimental group showed a significant positive dynamics in the formation of the communicative competence: a cognitive component of the communicative competence increased by 13 %, a communicative-activity component – by 16 %.

Main text

Our own experience as a teacher (at a secondary school and a university) of the English language convincingly testifies that new Ukrainian school (a higher educational institution in our case) is a consequence of the Soviet school. So it has several shortcomings, generated by that Soviet school (now we call it a “traditional educational system”). One of these shortcomings is the unwillingness of the students to learn. A university does not sufficiently develop the abilities that graduates need for self-determination in the world for making decisions about their future to be active and mobile subjects in the labor market. We support the point of view of Bondaruk (2011), who believes that if we want to overcome the crisis of modern education system in Ukraine we should reform it. This reform lies in the process of forming a fundamentally new educational system. This system will gradually replace the “traditional” one. It is not enough to use only the “traditional” lesson to ensure cooperation between the students and the teacher, and develop students’ creative abilities, their gradual and systematic involvement in the independent cognitive activity. Unfortunately, at English lessons, the teachers, as a rule, use only a primary textbook or a workbook to study and practice new material, which makes the learning process monotonous and uninteresting. Therefore, we are sure that the English lessons should not be reduced to mechanical reproduction and practicing the skills (Bondaruk, 2011).

The process of leaving the “traditional” Soviet school, the technological support of the educational process will, by all means, lead the teacher to apply a wide range of modern innovative methods and technologies, the technique of case-study in particular, in the process of students’ foreign languages education.

Many domestic and foreign scientists of have devoted their works to studying the theory and practice of the use of the method of case-study. There is rich experience in its research and use in various foreign countries by such researchers: in the field of interactive learning – Abercrombie (1971); Nae (2017); teaching skills – Scrivener (2011); communicative approach – Savignon (2005); sociology – Burawoy (2009), Glaser (2000); theory and practice of case-study – Alpi (2019), Durepos (2010), Eisenhardt (1989), Ellet (2007), Erskine (1998), Hancock (2016), Mills (2010), Wiebe (2010), Yin (2014), and others.

The post-Soviet and Ukrainian scientists – Bobokhujaev (2006), Mikhailova (1999), Surmin (2015), Sheremeta (1999), and others have researched the essence, theory, and practice of the case-study method. Garbuznyak (2013), Grinyuk (2017), Ivanova (2017), Omelchenko (2012), Zolotova (2015), and many others studied the potential of the case-study technique in teaching foreign languages.

At the same time, we have some questions:

– Are the teachers of foreign languages (for specific purposes, in particular) aware of the need to apply innovative methods and technologies in the educational process?

- Is there a sufficient theoretical and methodological database for the development and practical use of the specifics of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes?
- Is there a thoroughly studied and developed issue of pedagogical conditions for the use of technological support to train future specialists for their profession-oriented communication in a foreign language?
- Are the results of the research of the ways how to increase the effect of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes justified and proved?

We pay significant attention to the communicative approach to teaching foreign languages when we speak about the formation of students' foreign-language communicative competence. It is precisely the language-communicative activity that is the object of training in this approach. We connect the search for effective communication learning methods with the communicative needs of future specialists. We consider the formation of foreign-language communicative competence to be a significant component of language training. The communicative competence helps specialists integrate into various language groups, and feel confident in any communication conditions.

A communicative approach (Richards, & Rodgers,., 2014) to teaching a foreign language helps prepare students to model speech interactions, use the word as a means of social action and interaction in specific communication situations. Communicative competence depends on knowledge of a language and on the ability to use it depending on the event. There are two communicative approaches to learning a foreign language:

- 1) the thorough organization of the curriculum;
- 2) methodology, i.e., the use of a word in a real communicative situation has generated some trends relevant for teaching a foreign language:
 - the communicative orientation of all types of learning;
 - the main subject in the learning process is not the teacher, but the student (in this case we are talking about the “student-centered approach”);
 - students' interest in the learning process following their interests, abilities, and needs;
 - teaching methodical materials are submitted on a case-thematic or functional basis;
 - the main activities of students are pair work (a dialogue), group work (a polylogue);
 - the communicative approach to learning a language has generated an unusual attitude towards a mistake that should not be feared.

The organization of the educational activities based on a communicative approach provides for three primary conditions:

- 1) the orientation of student's learning is not to obtain language knowledge, but to develop skills that provide the ability to carry out foreign language speech activity in acts of communication;
- 2) the implementation of the principle of a communicative group. It means the communicative nature of the exercises, used in the educational process for developing speech skills. The tasks of various levels are most appropriate; the best ones are the exercises of a high level for the assimilation of a language material and development of speech skills in a real communicative situation, as well as those exercises that meet the purpose of training – i.e., to develop a communicative competence;

3) the formation in students of the incentive-motivational phase of activity creates a need for foreign language communication. This creation requires a high positive motivation. Very often speech activity cannot begin at all without such a motivation. At the same time, the effect of a speech activity increases when the students have a high positive motivation (Podzygun, 2017).

The educational (and not only) activities aimed at communication, at the desire to speak out, at the interaction with the interlocutor are of essential significance when using the case-study method in teaching students a foreign language for specific purposes. At the same time, we strengthen the role of students as equal partners and subjects of the educational process; we help increase the motivation for learning; we create a “real” communication environment; the forms of presenting language and speech material become more diverse, and we provide immediate feedback.

The next necessary approach to teaching a foreign language, of course, is interactive learning (Bakhreddinova, 2020). When we speak about interactive teaching (foreign languages in particular), we mean that there is a constant, active interaction of all participants in the educational process. The teacher and the students are similar, equivalent subjects of learning. We achieve learning outcomes by the mutual efforts of the participants in the educational process. The interactive learning activities include the organization and development of dialogical speech aimed at understanding, interaction, solving problems that arise in the learning process.

We agree with Koval (2011) that interactive learning of foreign languages is, first of all, learning in dialogues. Interactive learning is mutual learning (a collective one, a group one, one in cooperation), where the student and the teacher are equal subjects of education (Koval, 2011).

The case-study method (Yin, 2014), that is, the method of situational learning with the help of specific examples, is related to interactive teaching methods; we also call this technique a way of imitation. In the learning process, a situation (an activity) is created that imitates real-life processes. A case is a description of a specific event used as a pedagogical tool; it is both a type of a task and a source of information for its implementation.

Thus, the case-study method is a method of the interactive approach to learning. The purpose of this technique is to teach students to address difficult situations and at the same time to learn and apply existing knowledge, that is, not only to memorize something but to understand and use the information acquired, to build algorithms and schemes for addressing the case (Dindarenko, 2010).

We also consider it equally important to pay attention to the subject-subject approach in learning (Grigorieva, 2018), directly related to the dialogical interaction of the participants in the educational process. The dialogue of equal communicants allows them to solve the problems of the development of each of the communication participants.

We clearly understand that to improve the educational process and its content, based on the approaches to learning mentioned above, we should have not only desire of a teacher. Of course, one should consider the pedagogical conditions associated with the organization of the learning process, its methodology, and technological support.

One of the essential pedagogical conditions, which contributes to the effectiveness of the organization of teaching a foreign language for specific purposes, including the use of the case-study method, Kukharuk (2006) considers the creation of convincing motivation. It is vital to identify the leading motives for learning. As a rule, a cause for learning lies in cognitive interest, which goes through different levels in its development: from curiosity (due to the novelty of educational material) to study of the essence of phenomena, and, finally, to solving educational and cognitive tasks (Kuharuk, 2006).

We agree that the effect of the usage of the case-study method in the process of learning a foreign language also depends on the student needs; these needs determine their educational activities. First, there is a need, then we form motivation, we define a goal, we set tasks, we perform specific actions, and after all, we have the result (Atanov, 2003).

The dynamics of case technologies is dependent mainly on the development of students' interest in the case. An interest is a form of manifestation and expression of such activity incentives as motives, needs, and goals. In the learning process, cognitive interest, based on the student's need for new knowledge, is of great importance. One shouldn't equate the interest with the motive; the interest can be considered as a variation of motivation (Kostyuk, 2015).

We mentioned the pedagogical conditions, the observance of which directly affects the effectiveness of the educational process. To these conditions, we can also add the need for methodological support, and the need for careful selection of the learning material for the discipline "a foreign language for specific purposes." It is essential to consider the professional motives of students, their interests, needs, and goals.

Today, the case-study method is a sufficiently researched pedagogical technology. It is a teaching technique that uses work with real situations from different fields of human activity. Cases are based on factual material or are close to the actual case.

The case-study method has a significant pedagogical effect. It helps develop features of a personality. Among these features we can name the ability to analyze and diagnose problems, the ability to form and express one's position clearly, the ability to communicate, to discuss, to perceive and evaluate the information that comes in verbal and non-verbal forms (Surmin, 2015).

A case is the event that happened in a particular field of activity and was described by the author to provoke a discussion in a foreign language in the classroom, to encourage students to discuss and analyze the situation and make decisions.

The purpose of this method is to put students in a situation where they will need to make a decision. The students should identify significant and secondary facts, choose the main problems, and develop strategies and recommendations for further actions. Moreover, the students should be ready to present their thoughts in a foreign language when discussing a case in the classroom, defend their views, and reconsider their initial decision when it becomes necessary. When addressing the situation, the students not only use the knowledge they've got, but they also show their personal qualities, their abilities to work in a group. They also demonstrate how they understand the case and their knowledge of a foreign language.

Learning with the help of the case-study method involves immersing students in a specific situation where they can find a practical application for their knowledge. The work in a given case allows the students to “use” the system of intellectual, social, and other relationships of the participants involved in this situation, which is formed and developed with the cooperation of the communicants. Obeying the norms of coordinated actions and the norms of behavior of the participants in the specific events defined by the learning situation, during the analysis, evaluation, and resolution of this situation, the student becomes a specialist within the framework of a given activity aimed at learning the content of the training (Kotkovets, 2012).

The analysis of the sources on our issue allowed us to generalize the classification of cases and determine:

- event cases (they provide information about a particular situation. We usually use them in the class to illustrate a specific idea or raise a question for discussion),
- exercise cases (they provide students with an opportunity to put the acquired skills into practice),
- and situation cases (in other words, classic cases that require analysis of the situation).

As for the presentation of information, the scholars distinguish cases into:

- a structured case – the case gives the minimum amount of additional information. When working with such a case, the student must apply a specific model or formula; there is an optimal solution in the tasks of this type;
- small notes, containing, as a rule, from one to ten pages of a text and one or two pages of applications. Cases of this type introduce only vital concepts and, when analyzing them, the student must also rely on his knowledge;
- significant unstructured cases of up to 50 pages; they are the most difficult of all types of educational tasks of this kind. The information in them is very detailed, including data, which are entirely unnecessary; the required information, on the contrary, maybe missed; the student must identify the existing problem and the necessary information that can help solve this problem;
- innovative cases; when considering them, the performers are required not only to apply the knowledge already acquired, theoretical and practical skills but also to offer something new; the students act as the researchers (Sidorenko & Chuba, 2001).

We can successfully use the case-study method in the classes of a foreign language for specific purposes. This method involves all types of speech activity: reading, speaking, writing, and listening comprehension. At the same time, the students conduct their activities in a foreign language in the conditions of the “real” professional environment created in the classroom. We also want to note the following: when the students study a foreign language for specific purposes with the help of the case-study method, they not only activate their knowledge of a foreign language, they also explain practical professional questions.

Among the main advantages of using the case-study method in learning a foreign language for specific purposes, we can determine the following:

- 1) The method increases the level of knowledge of a foreign language as a whole. (The use of professional terms in a foreign language and their understanding is more effective than merely memorizing them since it requires the ability to use them during conversations, discussions, and reports).

- 2) The method develops creative thinking, makes the students think in a foreign language.
- 3) It helps students prepare their skills in presentations, that is, to present their work in a foreign language publicly.
- 4) It teaches students to formulate and actively use various types of questions.
- 5) The method develops the students' ability to discuss and reason their answers; it contributes to the development of speech without reliance on the finished text.
- 6) It improves students' skills in professional reading in a foreign language and information processing skills.
- 7) It teaches how to work in a team and to produce a collective decision.
- 8) The method allows the students to fully solve the individual and group self-work (Mozharovska, 2014).

Thus, regarding everything given above, we can suggest using such types of cases when teaching a foreign language for specific purposes:

- Practical cases, which, in the methodology of teaching English, can be associated with popular conversational topics, such as “a business trip,” “choosing a venue for the conference,” “business ethics,” “marketing,” “free trade,” etc. The task of the case is analyzing a specific situation and similar situations modeling. Each case should include an informative aspect in the form of a problem text (an article) as a subject for discussion, the active vocabulary for the analysis, the necessary grammatical structures, and the models of possible dialogues.
- Analytical training cases. When the students work on this case, they are to read the theoretical material, analyze lexical and grammatical structures, memorize and train new vocabulary, and, finally, state the problem. In addition to philological tasks, the articles (the texts) expand their professional knowledge and develop their reading skills in original and adapted (depending on the group) texts. After reading and analyzing the book, the students do the work they do on other cases: they work in groups, prepare individual projects or broad discussion in groups.
- Comparative research cases. The teachers use them in the classroom to study the country-study aspects and the problems of cultural differences between the countries of the language the students learn and Ukraine. The teacher can present for students' analysis the information related to business styles in different countries, features of conducting international advertising companies, a comparative study of educational systems in different countries, and career prospects in foreign countries. While working on the case, the students can use Internet resources, specialized sites, scholarly and specialized literature in a foreign language (Shovkoplyas, 2013).

We developed and used in our practice several cases for teaching English for specific purposes for students of different specialties. Usually, we presented the tasks to the instances (the name, the goal, the history, the components of the case, the summing up, etc.) in the form of the presentation slides. Here are some examples of these cases:

- Specialty: Management of an educational institution (a secondary school). Case: The organization of competition for occupying a vacant position of a director of a secondary school.
- Specialty: Management of an educational institution (a secondary school). Case: The organization of competition for receiving a grant to create a new type of a secondary school (a gymnasium, an academy, “a new Ukrainian school,” etc.).
- Specialty: Law. Case: A Round table devoted to violations of human rights in the legislative acts of the times of the USSR.

- Specialty: Physical Culture. Case: The formation of a team for the relay at the stage of the Biathlon World Cup. The problem is that the day before the relay, it became known that one of the participants of the relay had taken doping.
- Specialty: Philology (translation included). Case: The organization of competition for the best interpretation of a short story by a famous English writer.
- Specialty: Tourism. Case: Making a plan for the emergency return of the vacationers who appeared in the disaster area abroad.
- Specialty: Ecology. Case: A Survey – Safe, healthy, but jobless life in environmentally friendly conditions or jobs for city residents in the metallurgical industry.

Conclusion

Summing up, we think it necessary to say the following. If we want to overcome the drawbacks of the post-Soviet “traditional educational system,” we should do our best to reform our new educational system intensively. In this process, we consider it fundamentally essential to adhere to technological support of the educational process and some approaches to teaching English for specific purposes at a higher educational institution (in our case). To these approaches, we attribute a communicative approach, an interactive approach, and a subject-subject one. In our opinion, the case-study method never better corresponds to this technological support and these approaches. We developed several cases for teaching English for specific purposes for students of different specialties. We also conducted the test when using these cases in our teaching practice. The results of the test show positive dynamics in the formation of the communicative competence of the students. These results allow us to assert that the case-study method contributes to the effectiveness of teaching a foreign language for specific purposes.

Simultaneously, realizing all the advantages and educational possibilities of the case-study method when teaching a foreign language for specific purposes, we cannot but pay attention to the fact that for the effective implementation of this method in teaching practices, it is necessary to solve several problems. In this, we agree with Surmin (2015), who emphasizes the need to address the following issues in Ukraine:

- 1) It is necessary to retrain foreign language teachers to help them overcome their psychological barriers, develop their skills in building, and using cases.
- 2) It is essential to provide educational and methodological literature prepared both by case developers and teachers who use cases in the educational process.
- 3) It is necessary to establish case database in different disciplines at universities, to establish a library or a laboratory of cases, to provide the exchange of cases among the departments.
- 4) It is necessary to ensure an integrated approach to the choice of forms and methods of teaching. It helps create a learning framework, attractive for students, for their practical training.
- 5) Formation of creative teams for the development and adaptation of training cases.
- 6) Interdisciplinary and inter-chair coordination in the issues of applying interactive technologies and methods of education.
- 7) It is necessary to improve, develop pedagogical skills of teachers, and form their style of behavior as a trainer-instructor.
- 8) Conduction of scientific and methodological conferences, training courses on the development of cases.

- 9) The study and dissemination of the advanced foreign and domestic practices in the use of the cases-study method.
- 10) Significant promotion (financial bonuses as well) for the teachers who develop cases; enhancement of the communication of specialists in the field of case development and use.

About the Author:

Serhii Yablokov is a Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences (PhD) and an Associate Professor in teaching English at the English Philology Chair, the Department of Foreign Languages, Mariupol State University, Mariupol, Ukraine. He has been working at the said university since February 1997. His academic interests include teaching English for specific purposes, and innovations in teaching foreign languages. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3018-1231>

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