

**CASE-BASED APPROACH AND ITS APPLICATION TO ENHANCE SPEAKING SKILLS IN ESP COURSES: A LITERATURE REVIEW****Đặng Thanh Điềm<sup>1</sup>, Mai Thị Thu Hân<sup>1</sup>, Nguyễn Thị Liên<sup>2</sup>  
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**Abstract:** This article offers an overview in the use of case-based approach (CBA) in order to confirm the potentials and outline related issues in the application of this method to enhance speaking skills in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The main aim of the article is to identify the benefits and challenges of using CBA and to provide practical guidance for educators looking to implement this approach in their ESP classrooms. This article reviews 26 selected studies on English teaching and learning related to various fields, such as law, medicine, and business, that have exploited CBA. The analyses focus on the findings and discussions of those studies regarding benefits, challenges and suggestions of CBA application. The literature review provides an overview of the benefits of CBA, including its ability to promote learner engagement, domain-specific language acquisition, and authentic communication. However, the review also highlights challenges in implementing CBA, such as the need for careful selection of cases and appropriate scaffolding. Based on the literature, the article suggests best practices for the implementation of CBA in ESP courses, such as selecting cases that are relevant and engaging, providing clear instructions and scaffolding, and incorporating feedback and reflection activities. Most importantly, the review suggests the 4-step procedure of CBA implementation in ESP courses, which can be beneficial for further studies and application of the method.

**Keywords:** case-based approach, ESP, speaking skills, literature review

**SỬ DỤNG PHƯƠNG PHÁP DẠY HỌC TÌNH HUỐNG ĐỂ PHÁT TRIỂN KỸ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH: KHẢO CỨU TỔNG QUAN**

**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết cung cấp những hiểu biết về việc sử dụng phương pháp dạy học tình huống (CBA) nhằm khẳng định những tiềm năng và nêu ra những vấn đề liên quan trong việc áp dụng phương pháp này để nâng cao kỹ năng nói trong các khoá học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành (ESP). Mục đích chính của bài viết là xác định những lợi ích và thách thức của việc sử dụng phương pháp CBA và cung cấp những chỉ dẫn thực tế cho các nhà giáo dục muốn áp dụng phương pháp này trong lớp học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành của họ. Bài viết khảo cứu 26 nghiên cứu về dạy và học tiếng Anh liên quan đến nhiều lĩnh vực khác nhau (y học, luật, kinh tế...) đã áp dụng CBA. Qua đánh giá, phương pháp CBA được đánh giá là hiệu quả trong thúc đẩy sự tham gia tích cực của người học, và khả năng tiếp thu ngôn ngữ theo chuyên ngành và thực hành giao tiếp. Khó khăn trong áp dụng CBA gồm sự đòi hỏi đầu tư thời gian công sức của người dạy và người học, tính phù hợp của tình huống với năng lực, đặc điểm của người học và các yếu tố khách quan trong việc triển khai lớp học. Bài báo cũng chỉ ra những gợi mở về việc chọn tình huống, quy trình tiến hành lớp học và tiêu chí đánh giá người học theo phương pháp này. Trong đó, việc giới thiệu quy trình 4 bước sẽ rất hữu ích đối với cá nhà nghiên cứu và giáo dục trong việc áp dụng phương pháp này.

**Từ khóa:** dạy học tình huống, tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, kỹ năng nói, khảo cứu tổng quan

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## 1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are designed to meet the specific needs of learners in a particular field, such as economics, medicine, law, or engineering. It is a specialized form of English language teaching which aims to improve learners' ability to communicate effectively in their specific professional contexts.

Speaking skills play a critical role in ESP courses, as they allow learners to interact with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders. However, many ESP learners struggle to speak fluently and accurately in their target language, especially in situations that require them to apply domain-specific knowledge. One potential solution to this problem is the use of case-based approach (CBA), which involves presenting learners with real or hypothetical scenarios that relate to their profession. CBA has been widely used in various fields, such as law, medicine, and business, to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Hidayati, 2021; McLean, 2016). In recent years, CBA has also gained attention in the field of language learning as a way to enhance learners' speaking skills.

This article provides a literature review of studies that have investigated the use of CBA to enhance speaking skills in ESP courses. The aim is to identify the benefits and challenges of applying CBA and to suggest best practices for its implementation.

## 2. Definitions of key terms

### 2.1. Case-based approach

According to Boehrer (1995), a case is considered as a specific and detailed story, transferring the vividness and complexity from reality into the classrooms. The case-based approach is a teaching methodology that involves the use of real-life scenarios or cases that are relevant to the learners' professional contexts (Grosses, 1988). The approach aims to equip learners with the language skills required for effective communication in their professional fields. It has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as their language proficiency.

Nguyen (2010) clarified that CBA is a specific method of teaching problem-solving according to the situation, where situations are the main object of the teaching process. The cases raised in the teaching context are typical situations and the process of learners studying the case is also the process of understanding and applying knowledge.

Westerfield (1989) suggested three distinctive kinds of cases. One requires students to propose a solution to an unsolved situation; another can be identified in which students must evaluate an action that has already been taken and a further type asks students for a general appraisal of whether the situation in proceeding as it should be.

### 2.2. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a type of English language instruction that focuses on teaching English for specific purposes or specific fields, such as economics, medicine, law, or engineering. The primary goal of ESP is to equip learners with the language skills required for effective communication in their professional contexts. For example, ESP for economics is a type of ESP that focuses on teaching students how to communicate effectively in the field of economics. This includes understanding economic concepts and terminology, writing reports and proposals, and making presentations related to economics.

### 2.3. Speaking Skill

Speaking skills refer to the ability to use language orally to convey meaning effectively and appropriately in a specific context. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning, speaking skills involve the ability to communicate using English language in a professional or academic setting related to a specific field or discipline. It includes the ability to use industry-specific vocabulary and language functions, such as giving presentations, participating in meetings, negotiating, or discussing technical topics. In an ESP learning context, speaking skills are essential for learners to be able to effectively communicate and interact with others in their professional or academic field, and to be able to perform specific tasks that require oral communication skills.

### 2.4. Teaching methodology

Teaching methodology refers to the strategies and techniques used by teachers to facilitate learning. It involves the use of various instructional approaches, such as lectures, group discussions, case studies, and simulations, to enhance learners' understanding and retention of course material.



Effective teaching methodology involves selecting and implementing appropriate instructional approaches that align with the learning objectives and needs of the learners.

According to Dinh and Nguyen (2011), CBA is one of the active teaching methods or modern teaching methods consisting of two main parts: one is the traditional presentation method; the other are the complementary methods for presentations, which are used to encourage learners to participate, create a positive atmosphere and change the learners' state of information absorption.

Teaching speaking skills in ESP courses presents various obstacles and challenges related to limited exposure to authentic spoken language, lack of confidence, and the specificity of domain-specific language. However, current approaches such as task-based language teaching, the use of authentic materials, integrated skills instruction, peer collaboration, and technology-enhanced learning have shown promise in addressing these challenges (Kristianto & Harendita, 2022). The first obstacle comes from the limited exposure to authentic spoken language: ESP learners often face limited opportunities to engage in real-life spoken interactions in their target language. The absence of authentic input hinders the development of their speaking skills and may lead to difficulties in understanding and producing specialized discourse. Another challenge results from the lack of confidence and motivation. According to Bekai and Harkouss (2018), many ESP learners exhibit low self-confidence when speaking in a second language, fearing mistakes and negative evaluation. Additionally, the motivation to improve speaking skills may vary among learners, with some perceiving speaking as less important than other language skills like reading or writing. Next, the obstacle may be related to the specificity of domain-specific language. Saienko and Nazarenko (2021) suggested that ESP courses require learners to master not only general English but also domain-specific language related to their field. The complexity and specialized vocabulary of these domains can pose challenges in developing fluency, accuracy, and appropriacy in spoken communication.

### 3. Methodology

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, and Scopus. The search terms used were "ESP," "English for economics," "case-based approach," "teaching methodology," "Vietnam," and "language learning." In total, 26 articles were reviewed, and included in the final analysis. The inclusion criteria for the articles were that they had to be published in English and Vietnamese. Moreover, the articles were selected based on their relevance to the topic and the rigor of the research methodology.

The literature review on case-based approach (CBA) involved analyzing the chosen articles' discussions on the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for applying CBA in various contexts. Following are the steps in the conduction of this review:

- Defining the research question: The researchers clearly defined the research question that the literature review aims to answer.
- Searching for relevant literature: The researchers conducted a comprehensive search of relevant literature using various databases and search engines by using related key words to narrow down the search results.
- Screening and selecting articles: The researchers screened the articles based on their relevance to the research question and their quality. Articles that are not relevant or are of low quality should be excluded.
- Analyzing the articles: The researchers carefully read and analyzed the articles to identify the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for applying CBA. This analysis involves categorizing the findings into different themes or subtopics, such as "cases choosing," "teachers' preparation," or "assessment methods."
- Synthesizing the findings: The researcher synthesized the findings from the articles to provide an overview of the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for applying CBA in ESP courses, especially to enhance speaking skills. This synthesis involves summarizing the main findings from each article or synthesizing the findings to develop overarching themes or conclusions.
- Reporting the findings: The researchers reported the findings of the literature review in a clear and concise manner including a summary of the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for applying CBA, the research gap found in the application of the approach in ESP courses



to teach speaking skills, as well as a discussion of the implications for future research or practice.

Overall, this literature review on CBA involves a systematic approach to analyzing and synthesizing scholarly articles to provide an overview of the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for applying this approach in various contexts, especially with a view to enhancing speaking skills of learners in ESP courses.

#### **4. Results and Discussions**

##### **4.1. Benefits of CBA**

In the word, there have been many studies on the application of CBA in teaching foreign languages, particularly in ESP courses and those studies all have reported the benefits of CBA in many different aspects.

One of the main benefits of the case-based approach is its ability to contextualize the language learning process. Learners are presented with authentic and relevant situations that they are likely to encounter in their professional contexts. This contextualization helps learners to better understand the language and its appropriate usage. Furthermore, the case-based approach encourages learners to engage in meaningful communication and collaboration, which enhances their language production skills. McLean (2016) investigated CBA in a medical English course and found that it helped learners to apply their medical knowledge to real-life situations, which in turn improved their ability to communicate with patients and colleagues. Similarly, Hidayati (2021) reported that CBA helped learners to develop domain-specific vocabulary and to express their ideas more effectively. Basta (2017) also discussed the enhancement in specialized vocabulary by placing the vocabulary in specific contexts of use. This is consistent with the conclusion of Grosse (1988) about the effectiveness of CBA in contextualizing vocabulary, teaching through content and using documents related to real professional needs. In addition, Roell (2019) also appreciates the flexibility of this method when it can be adjusted to suit different levels and teaching situations.

More importantly, CBA helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to connect knowledge with practice, to present real-life resources, and to help learners become familiar with the working environment in the real world (Jackson, 1998). Nguyen (2015) supported that CBA helps to link theory with practice in teaching so that learners gain a deeper and more practice view of the theoretical framework that has been learned and have a chance to apply these theory in practice. In this light, the case-based method contributes to improve the students' activeness, imitativeness, creativity and interest in learning.

CBA is also a very flexible teaching method that helps learners develop reasoning skills as well as high order thinking skills in Bloom's cognitive taxonomy (Herried et al., 2011). McLean (2016) and Sapeni (2019) suggested that situational teaching aims to meet teaching goals with more flexibility in how to apply situations, and at the same time helps to improve cognitive ability through encouraging critical thinking ability of learners. In addition, this method also aids the learners themselves find their own motivation through communicating with each other to find a solution to the required situation (Bekai & Harkouss, 2017). Le (2014) shared the same idea that the use of CBA helps students develop their critical thinking and learning reflexes, simultaneously improves students' organizational ability through filtering and organizing information as well as collaborative learning and teamwork skills, analyzing and debating skills. Nguyen (2013) reinforces the advantages of applying CBA in ESP classrooms, which is to provide an ideal pedagogical environment for students to organize their learning activities. Through specific and typical situations, students can sharpen the ability to think independently, critically and creatively. They can also think in an object-oriented manner and develop the capability to adapt in different situations by applying experiences to solve problems in the classrooms.

Other studies have highlighted the benefits of CBA in promoting learner autonomy and engagement. For example, Williams (2005) found that CBA encouraged learners to take ownership of their learning and to actively seek solutions to problems. This is because the use of authentic cases and scenarios can help learners to see the practical applications of their language learning. Similarly, Nguyen (2014) reported that CBA fostered learners' interest and motivation by making the learning experience more authentic and relevant to their professional needs. The class is always attractive, exciting as student actively read documents, learn from classmates and teachers. In this way, the method allows to improve the quality of training by the fact that students gain more confidence in



themselves and quickly adapt to the professional environment in their future career. CBA exercises are also said to create motivation for English learners when they encounter real situations and can solve economic problems through their own experience and knowledge (Popsecu, 2016).

Regarding the advantages of CBA for teachers, Popsecu (2016) pointed out that this method provides an opportunity for teachers to play an active role in managing learning activities, bringing theory close to practice, flexibly applying active teaching methods to enhance language skills and promote learner-centered approach. Teachers can monitor and support students in a more effective manner to bridge the gap between teachers and students. According to Le (2014), the use of CBA makes it easier for teachers to express and analyze concepts by applying situations to create real-life communication, which helps better their teaching practice. Nguyen (2015) added that thanks to this approach, teachers also have the opportunity to exchange and learn experiences, new perspectives and solutions from their learners, thereby contributing to richer teaching contents as well as perfecting teaching situations.

There are many studies evaluating the effectiveness of CBA in improving the quality of teaching many different subjects. For the subject of General Law at a Technical College (Phan, 2013), after using the method, the percentage of students who understood the lesson well increased a lot, from 9% to 29%. Learners are also motivated to self-study and be more active in learning; they can practice teamwork skills and presentation skills, which are necessary for the working process after graduation. Le (2014) affirmed that the method is suitable for the new requirement posed for the business industry. Knowledge from real-life simulations will be of the essence in preparation for students to start their career.

The case-based approach in teaching ESP for economics has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical tool. This approach involves the use of real-life scenarios or cases that are relevant to the learners' professional contexts. The case-based approach has been shown to enhance learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as their language proficiency. Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the case-based approach in teaching ESP for economics. According to Esteban and Canado (2004), the authors found that the approach significantly improved the students' language proficiency and financial literacy. Similarly, Basta (2017) found that the approach enhanced the students' language proficiency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Moreover, the case-based approach has been shown to be effective in overcoming some of the challenges faced by English language learners in Vietnam (Hoang, 2019). For example, the lack of exposure to authentic English language environments and the limited opportunities for English language use can hinder language learning. The case-based approach provides learners with authentic and relevant contexts that enhance their language proficiency and increase their motivation and engagement. Nguyen (2015) demonstrated the effectiveness of the case-based approach in teaching ESP for economics in Vietnam as the approach significantly improved the students' language proficiency and financial literacy.

#### ***4.2. Challenges in the application of CBA***

Despite the potential benefits of CBA, there are also challenges to its implementation in ESP courses. One major challenge is the time and resources required to design and implement cases that are relevant to learners' professional needs. First, it requires a significant amount of preparation time. Teachers need to research and select appropriate cases, design activities and assessments, and provide feedback to learners. Second, the teacher must be skilled in selecting, adapting, and presenting the cases in a way that promotes effective learning. Phan (2001) and Trinh (2010) said that building up a pedagogical situation is not a simple task, it is a continuous working process. Therefore, it requires teachers to have a lot of professional experience, extensive cultural capital and understanding of practical issues related to the subject area. They need to be always innovating, updating new information, knowledge and skills to process information and build up proper situations.

According to Pham (2013), the reluctance to apply alternative methods to the traditional teaching method is also an obstacle to the development of this type of teaching. There are many teachers who are still afraid to use the CBA because this method significantly increases the teachers' workload as they have to be active and innovative and invest a lot of time in preparing lessons. Therefore, many teachers who are familiar with the traditional information delivery method may find



it difficult to use CBA (Le, 2014). Nguyen (2013) emphasized that teachers need to renew themselves to have strong expertise, professional experience, interdisciplinary knowledge and devote more time in their teaching.

Another challenge is the potential difficulty in finding appropriate cases that are neither too simple nor too complex for learners' language proficiency level and domain knowledge. It may be difficult to find suitable cases that are relevant and applicable to learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, the chosen cases must be relevant and engaging to the learners and should reflect the complexity of the real-world situations they are likely to encounter in their professional contexts.

Moreover, some learners may find it challenging to participate in group discussions and to express their ideas in front of their peers. This may be particularly true for learners from cultures that value individualism and avoid public speaking. In fact, the case-based approach may not be suitable for all learners. Some learners may prefer a more traditional, lecture-based approach. Therefore, instructors need to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages learners to collaborate and share their ideas without fear of judgment or criticism. Pham (2013) raised the difficulties on the part of learners, which mentions the active participation of students. There is still a part of students who have not yet adapted to the active way of acquiring knowledge. They may spend a lot of time thinking to draw the necessary knowledge, sometimes getting lost in the process of solving situations, so they are easily discouraged or not enthusiastic enough to participate. Nguyen (2015) agreed that the biggest challenge in CBA application is the requirement for learners' dynamism, creativity and independent thinking ability. In reality, some learners will be confused in this method of teaching and learning practices. As for learners, if they are not well-prepared, or only familiar with traditional teaching methods, it is likely that CBA will not achieve the desired effects (Billings & Halstead, 2005).

In addition, there are some difficulties due to objective conditions (Pham, 2013). Many situations are costly and difficult to implement. Learning facilities may not be fully equipped in schools. Moreover, the CBA should be organized in a small number of students and the seating positions of the students should be more mobile for convenience when participating in the activities.

#### ***4.3. Suggestions for the implementation of CBA***

Despite the potential benefits of the case-based approach in ESP courses, there is a limited amount of research dedicated to its effectiveness in speaking practice. The existing studies primarily focus on the general benefits of case-based learning, neglecting its application specifically in developing speaking skills. Therefore, a research gap emerges, calling for further investigation into the application of CBA in improving students' speaking skills in ESP classes. In fact, CBA holds considerable potential in teaching speaking skills in ESP courses, given its emphasis on authentic problem-solving and domain-specific communication. By bridging this research gap, educators can gain valuable insights to enhance the design and delivery of ESP courses, ultimately fostering more proficient and confident speakers within specific professional domains.

In order to make full use of the method in teaching speaking skills, three important notices should be considered, including the selection of cases, the procedures of implementation and the criteria for assessment.

##### ***4.3.1. The selection of cases***

Choosing a suitable case to apply is not an easy task. Esteban & Pérez Cañado (2004) suggested that before applying cases in the classrooms, teachers need to prepare carefully, consider the appropriateness of the cases with the curriculum, learners' motivation, the authenticity of activities and learning materials. Strelchonok and Ludviga (2013) defines an effective case study as the one that tells a real and engaging story, raises a thought-provoking issue, has elements of conflict, promotes empathy with the central characters, lacks an obvious or clear-cut right answer, encourages students to think and take a position, portrays actors in moments of decision, provides plenty of data about character, location, context, action and is relatively concise.

According to Strelchonok & Ludviga (2013), an effective situation must give students the opportunity to practice topics related to business and economics such as human resources, or management, to practice and develop language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing or translating, to develop business communication skills and analytical management skills (teamwork skills) and to strengthen their overall English language proficiency.



#### 4.3.2. The procedures of implementation

A series of studies on the procedure of implementing CBA have presented different approaches to apply CBA in the classroom. The following table summarize their discussions on this.

No	Researcher	Year of publication	Procedure of CBA
1	Nguyen	2013	Step 1: Define the lesson objectives Step 2: Carefully study the content of the lesson Step 3: Identify the knowledge related to the lesson Step 4: Create cognitive obstacles related to the content Step 5: Outsource pedagogy to become a case
2	Phan	2013	Step 1: The teacher determines the lesson goal Step 2: The teacher selects the case Step 3: The learners suggest solutions Step 4: The teacher formulates discussion questions Step 5: The teacher assigns groups to deal with the case Step 6: the learners report the case
3	Phan	2014	Step 1: The teacher introduces the case Step 2: The learners research and find solutions to the case Step 3: The learners introduce and defend the solutions Step 4: The teacher summarizes and gives lessons from the case
4	Le	2014	Step 1: The teacher determines the goals Step 2: The teacher chooses the suitable case Step 3: The teacher introduces the data and discussion methods Step 4: The teacher assigns roles for students Step 5: The teacher lets students present the ideas, ask questions, discuss the case, clarify and summarize the problem posed Step 6: The teacher rearranges the classroom (e.g. a U-shaped arrangement of seats) Step 7: The teacher guides the discussion Step 8: The students conduct the discussions (via role-playing, voting, using bulletin boards, etc.)
5	Nguyen	2015	Step 1: Read the case and identify the key issues facing the decision makers Step 2: Identify the data needed to analyze the problems and to synthesize into solution Step 3: Analyze and compare different solutions Step 4: Suggest a course of action
6	Vi	2019	Step 1: Define the lesson content Step 2: Collect data Step 3: Evaluate and analyze data Step 4: Build up the case Step 5: Apply the case in the lesson

From the above-presented summary of CBA implementation procedure, it can be seen that there are some common shared points of various researchers. In fact, the teaching process in CBA approach in general can be categorized into four main steps:

- Step 1: (Teacher) identify the case
- Step 2: (Teacher) divide the case study groups of learners
- Step 3: (Learners) handle the case
- Step 4: (Teacher) comment, evaluate, give lessons from the case

This can be of great help for those who want to implement CBA in the context of ESP classrooms or to conduct further research related.

#### 4.3.3. The criteria for assessment

Among all the reviewed articles, none discussed the implication for assessment. Assessing students in this type of approach can be challenging. One suggestion for assessing students in case-



based approach ESP classrooms is to use a rubric that considers a range of criteria such as language accuracy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. The rubric can be designed to evaluate both individual and group performance, as case-based approaches often involve collaborative work. Additionally, assessment can be supplemented with other methods such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher feedback to provide a more comprehensive and well-rounded evaluation of student performance. Overall, effective assessment in case-based approach ESP classrooms requires careful consideration and planning to ensure that students' language proficiency and critical thinking skills are accurately measured.

### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the case-based approach in teaching ESP has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical tool. This approach provides learners with authentic and relevant contexts that enhance their language proficiency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The case-based approach has also been shown to enhance learners' motivation and engagement. However, the selection and presentation of appropriate cases can be challenging, and careful planning and preparation are required. There is also a research gap in the application of CBA in ESP courses to enhance speaking skills of the students. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of the case-based approach in different contexts and to identify best practices for its implementation, particularly to better the speaking module. The literature review suggests that CBA may have the potential to enhance speaking skills in ESP courses by providing learners with opportunities to apply domain-specific knowledge to real-life situations.

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