

Impacts of the case-study method on English acquisition: perspectives of transnational students

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Abstract: *This study looks at the case study as an active teaching method in English as a foreign language instruction. The concept of active ways of teaching is discussed, as well as the definition of a case study and the stages of case study preparation. This is a small-scale qualitative study conducted with a class of transnational students at a public university. Interviews with a sample of eight students were conducted after the intervention of the case study method. The finding indicates that students have a positive attitude towards case studies as this technique promotes motivation and subject knowledge.*

Keywords: *Active teaching, case study, transnational students*

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural communicative skills is now the foundation of teaching methodological needs. It is regarded as a linguistic, communicative, and cultural whole. The teaching of a second or foreign language should determine the likelihood of providing adequate communicative behavior within the target language's country of origin and thus familiarity with value reference points. Hence, modern active teaching strategies are employed to achieve this purpose (equipping students with the insight knowledge of the language). Cooperative learning, design technology, student-centered learning, distant learning, the use of a language portfolio, computer and video technologies, and case studies are some of them. However, studies on the perspectives of students on such methods are inadequate, especially those on case studies. Thus, this study was conducted to delve into such issue.

2. Development

2.1. Active teaching methods

Active teaching strategies are a novel way to boost students' involvement, motivation, excitement, attentiveness, and perceptions of the class's usefulness and application (Stewart-Wingfield & Black, 2005). Experiential learning allows students to participate in higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Hackathorn, et al., 2010). They are also more adept at recognizing and manipulating concepts in real life. They can also recognize concepts in real life, alter phenomena for their own goals, think about the material in new and

complicated ways, comprehend phenomena, and recall, retain, and memorize them (Serva & Fuller, 2004). Case studies show realistic, intricate, and contextually rich situations. They usually involve a dilemma, conflict, or problem that one or more of the case's participants must overcome. Thus, they are deemed beneficial in language acquisition.

2.2. Features of a case study

Case studies are the scenarios that apply the concepts learned in the classroom within the "real life" situation. Usually, they are presented in narrative form, and sometimes include problem-solving, links to some course reading or raw materials, and discussions by groups of scholars, or the class. As a rule, case studies are more practical when they are presented sequentially; therefore, students receive additional information looking at matters unfold, and may still analyze or criticize the case or the matter. As an academic strategy, case studies have a variety of benefits. They "bridge the gap between theory and practice and between the academy and the workplace" (Barkley, 2005). They also give students an opportunity to practice recognizing the matter parameters, identifying and articulating ideas, assessing options for actions, and arguing different points of view. Communication-oriented instruction using the above-mentioned technology requires that both the teacher and students possess a variety of developed professional communicative abilities. They are as follows:

a) ability to perceive and evaluate the data coming in both verbal and non-verbal form;

b) ability to hold out diagnostics and analysis of the problem;

c) ability to formulate and logically construct a press release in compliance with the foundation of language;

d) ability to require participation in the discussion;

e) ability to participate in collective decision-making.

An efficient case study should encompass the following attributes:

- x tells a “real” and engaging story
- x raises a thought-provoking issue
- x has elements of conflict
- x promotes empathy with the central characters

• x lacks an obvious or clear-cut right answer

• x encourages students to think and take a position

- x portrays actors in moments of decision
- x provides plenty of data about character, location, context, actions
- x is relatively concise.

(Davis, 1993)

It should be noted that case studies may vary in terms of duration, details or processes counting on the case itself and the instructor’s goals.

2.3. Main steps of a successful case study

These six phases provide a common framework for how to conduct the debate in a case study.

The first stage is to allow enough time for the group to read and consider the issue. Teachers can give it as homework if the case is long. A set of questions are assigned for a group to ponder.

The second step is to introduce the case and provide some guidance on how to approach it, as well as how teachers want students to respond.

The third step is to form groups and monitor them to be persuaded that all the students are involved in the discussion.

The fourth step is to have groups present their solutions. When students know they are responsible for creating a mini-presentation, analyzing decisions, and presenting them to the class, they will be more engaged in the discussion.

The fifth step is to ask questions to clarify things and take the conversation to the next level.

The sixth step is to synthesize the issues that

have been raised. Synthesizing does not have to be done by the instructor; one or more students can be assigned to this task.

Some variations on this general method include having students conduct outside research (individually or in groups) to bring the case in question, as well as comparing the real-life outcome of a dilemma to the solutions generated in class. (Beckisheva et al., 2015).

2.4. The research aim

This study examined the perspectives of students toward the case-study method in the learning and teaching of English. Based on such perspectives, recommendations for the use of such a method would be deduced.

2.5. Methodology of research

The study investigated the case of Thuong Mai University, a public university in Vietnam which offers different courses in various fields. A group of transnational students were chosen for the research. The group consists of 35 students (33 females and 2 males), and they were required to participate in different case-study activities. These activities were introduced to them and they applied their knowledge and skills to finish the tasks given.

After the intervention, interviews with eight participants chosen randomly were conducted to find out opinions on the impacts of case-study activities.

The coding of the data proceeded via three steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

In the open coding steps, the data were transcribed and broken up into parts, and information was summarized as keywords (codes created). In the axial coding, codes related to umbrella aspects were grouped into one category. In the selective coding, the categories in the second step were grouped into one core category which is directly related to the subject.

2.6. Findings and discussions

The author coded data and synthesized the three positive impacts of the application of case studies, namely motivation and subject knowledge. Besides, concerns about time strains and assessment were also raised.

First and foremost, most opinions centered around the point that these activities were appealing as they involved students in new roles and required

them to act on the situation. “I suppose such activities are interesting as we can do something different”, said Student A (anonymous name). Student B (anonymous name) also noted that they were engaging as they afforded them the chance to be actors or actresses. Besides, it is the authenticity as well as the rehearsal of the case that makes the activities attractive to students. They admitted that such activities encouraged them to learn more and learn better enthusiastically. One student said that “Such activities definitely appeal to me. To begin, the roles of the team members are very clear. We agreed on the roles, and everyone must contribute fully to the activities. We cannot complete the task if one of them does not contribute and play her part. Furthermore, because each student has their own role, they cannot rely on others and cannot be passive in the group. What I mean is that this activity involves all members and improves group cooperation. In fact, everyone has a role, so everyone is motivated to take part in.” This is very likely to mean that their motivation was boosted to a high level.

In addition, these activities aided students in gaining more knowledge regarding business aspects. For example, student C (anonymous name) asserted that by doing such activities, he could acquire more knowledge about how to describe the products or give the specifications like dimensions, weight, and shapes to potential customers. Others acclaimed that they retained more phrases related to business transactions and strategies for doing business. This may mean that the knowledge gained through such activities is easier as students took an active role in delving in the information. The more they were engaged in the activities, the more knowledge they could acquire.

However, there were some concerned related to time constraints and assessments. They said that sometimes they were struggling to reach the decision and found that they were running behind the schedule. Hence, they wished to have more time for such things. This means that teachers can allocate more time for the student to do case studies. Other individual work may be assigned as homework to save time for these activities.

3. Conclusion

As an active teaching method, case-study method proved to be effective in many aspects. In this study, the intervention of a case-study method was conducted with a group of transnational students.

The focus group interview revealed two prominent impacts related to the case-study method. Firstly, they motivated students in authentic and at the same time artistic activities. Secondly, they assisted students in acquiring and retaining content knowledge.

Although there was difficulty related to the limited time allocated to such activities, this can be addressed by assigning more individual work as homework. The concern for assessment can be dealt with by suggesting the authorities to modify their current assessment method in an appropriate way.

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