

THE ROLE OF CASE STUDIES IN ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract. *Case studies, as pedagogical tools, offer a dynamic approach to learning, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and active participation among students. In the context of blended learning, case studies play a pivotal role in engaging students through interactive online platforms and face-to-face discussions. This paper delves into the specific roles that case studies play in enhancing student engagement within blended learning environments, drawing upon concrete examples to illustrate their efficacy. The effectiveness of case studies in English classes was assessed through feedback from about 140 students. While many found them relevant to future job needs, opinions on content quality varied. Despite challenges as the dislike for written tasks, case studies were noted for their role in enhancing critical thinking, research, and problem-solving skills. Key aspects which were appreciated included class discussions and listening tracks. Suggestions for improvement focused on incorporating more practical tasks and enhancing interactive content. This highlights the value of case studies in the linguistic skill development while pointing to areas for refinement in content quality and engagement strategies.*

Key words: *blended learning, case study method, critical thinking, engagement, findings*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: A: 23

INTRODUCTION:

Case studies serve as invaluable tools in enriching students' engagement within educational contexts. By presenting real-world scenarios that require analysis and application of theoretical knowledge, case studies prompt active participation and critical thinking among students. Engagement is further heightened as students collaborate with peers to dissect complex issues, debate alternative solutions, and share diverse perspectives. Moreover, case studies foster a deeper understanding of subject matter by contextualizing abstract concepts within tangible, relatable contexts. Through interactive discussions, multimedia presentations, and online platforms, students are empowered to construct meaning and develop essential skills for lifelong learning. Ultimately, the integration of case studies into pedagogical practices enhances students' cognitive engagement, emotional investment, and motivation, thereby facilitating more meaningful and transformative learning experiences. Case studies serve as a teaching tool to demonstrate how theories or concepts apply to real-world situations. In the context of education, they allow teachers to implement the communicative approach. Rather than practicing grammar or vocabulary exercises, students use language as a tool to communicate their ideas while focusing on completing a task, thus they are a form of task-based learning (TBL). Additionally, the Case Study method is one of the blended learning strategies which has revolutionized the landscape of education by integrating technology with traditional pedagogical methods. Recent technological developments have given rise to blended learning classrooms and an inverted (or flipped) classroom is a specific type of blended

learning design that uses technology to move lectures outside the classroom and uses learning activities to move practice with concepts inside the classroom (Strayer, 2012).

The methodology used for developing this article involves conducting a comprehensive literature review across reputable databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, followed by a meticulous comparison and evaluation of the findings from relevant studies among the students from the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM). To delve into the effectiveness of blended learning in the Business English Course, the study employs a case study approach alongside questionnaire surveys and analysis of the online questionnaire feedback. Despite affirmations from this study and others regarding the widespread adoption of blended learning, its effectiveness remains inconclusive in the Case Study Method.

Primarily, blended learning is an educational approach combining traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning activities which has gained significant traction in contemporary educational settings. Within this framework, case studies have emerged as a potent tool for enhancing student engagement and promoting deeper learning experiences. Currently, blended learning stands as a widely employed educational strategy across various educational contexts. This research endeavours to scrutinize and assess the efficacy of the **Case Study Method** as a blended learning strategy, which represents an educational resource within the Business English Courses at ASEM. Therefore, to assess the case study method implemented in our Business English courses there has been carried out a questionnaire survey within a sample of about 140 students in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of studies.

The findings from this comprehensive questionnaire survey shed light on the pivotal role of case studies in enhancing students' engagement within educational settings. Through meticulous data collection and analysis, various charts have been generated to illustrate the profound impact of case studies on student participation, critical thinking, and collaborative learning experiences. These visual representations encapsulate the quantitative insights gleaned from the survey responses, providing compelling evidence of the efficacy of case studies in fostering active learning environments. In this article, we delve into the significance of these findings, exploring how case studies serve as dynamic pedagogical tools that not only stimulate student interest but also cultivate essential skills for lifelong learning and success. Hereinafter you will find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the role of case studies in learning a foreign language?
2. How effective are the case studies we use at ASEM?
3. How can we make case studies more engaging for our students?

Thus, the first part of the work brings out the overall role of case studies in blended learning focusing on: **Promoting active learning, encouraging collaborative learning and teamwork, fostering critical thinking and enhancing digital literacy.**

Promoting Active Learning:

Case studies provide students with real-world scenarios that require analysis, synthesis, and application of theoretical concepts. In a blended learning environment, students can engage with case studies through online platforms, interactive simulations, or multimedia presentations. For instance, in our Business English courses, students may analyse a case study on organizational behaviour using graphs and charts, business documents, and online video resources such as experts' comments on the case studies, which raises students' engagement. Students who are interested in learning are more likely to devote time and effort to achieve their goals (Ginting, 2021). As a result, involvement is viewed as a motivator in obtaining academic success or achievement (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Robinson & Hullinger, 2008; Kuh *et al.*, 2009). Such activities encourage active participation and foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Case studies are highly effective in promoting active learning in the context of learning English by engaging students in hands-on, participatory experiences that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving. Specific examples illustrate their efficiency:

Authentic Language Use: Case studies present real-life language situations, such as dialogues, emails, or articles, requiring students to actively engage with authentic language materials. For instance, students may analyse a case study involving a business negotiation scenario, where they must identify language strategies and cultural nuances to communicate effectively.

Interactive Discussions: Case studies stimulate interactive discussions among students as they collaborate to analyse language use, discuss interpretations, and propose solutions. For example, students can engage in role-playing activities based on a case study depicting a customer service interaction, where they practice using language in context and receive immediate feedback from peers.

Problem-Solving Tasks: Case studies present language-related problems or challenges for students to solve, encouraging active participation and critical thinking. For instance, students may analyse a case study involving a grammar error in a written text and collaboratively edit and revise the passage to correct the mistake, applying their knowledge of English grammar rules.

Multimedia Presentations: Case studies can incorporate multimedia elements, such as audio recordings, videos, or online resources, to engage students in interactive learning experiences. For example, students may explore a case study featuring a multimedia presentation on a cultural topic, where they listen to authentic accents, watch video clips, and analyse language use in different contexts.

Overall, case studies actively involve students in the learning process, promoting engagement, critical thinking, and language proficiency development in meaningful, real-world contexts. They also spark interactive discussions among students as they work together to analyse language use, discuss their thoughts, and come up with solutions. They might even role-play a customer service interaction, practicing their language skills and getting instant feedback from their peers. On the other side, teachers utilize frequent evaluations to monitor achievement and comprehension of course content in active learning (Weimer, 2002).

Encouraging Collaborative Learning and Teamwork

Blended learning environments offer opportunities for collaborative learning, wherein students can work together to solve complex problems and share their insights. Case studies serve as catalysts for collaborative discussions, group projects, role plays enabling students to exchange ideas, debate alternative solutions, and learn from each other's perspectives. As Crookall and Oxford (1990) suggest, several activities, such as games, role plays, and theatrical exercises, can be designed by the teacher to enhance interaction in the classroom.

Case studies are highly efficient in promoting collaborative learning and teamwork in the context of learning English. When students engage with case studies, they are presented with real-life language scenarios that require teamwork to analyse, interpret, and solve language-related challenges. Through collaborative discussions students exchange ideas and collectively brainstorm solutions, thereby enhancing their understanding of English language concepts and fostering a supportive learning environment. Moreover, case studies encourage peer-to-peer collaboration, allowing students to learn from each other's perspectives and experiences. By working together on case study tasks, students develop important teamwork skills such as communication, negotiation, and cooperation, which are essential for effective language learning and real-world communication. Overall, case studies serve as effective vehicles for promoting collaborative learning and teamwork in English language education, enabling students to actively engage with the language and develop their linguistic proficiency in a collaborative setting. For instance, in our language course, students may examine a case study on abnormal and uncollaborative behaviour and consequently develop

diagnostic criteria and solution plans. Through such collaborative endeavours, students enhance their communication skills, teamwork abilities, and empathy towards diverse viewpoints.

Fostering Critical Thinking

Case studies play a crucial role in fostering critical thinking skills in learning English by presenting authentic language use in real-world contexts. Through the analysis of case studies, students are challenged to apply their linguistic knowledge to understand and evaluate complex language situations, such as interpreting authentic texts, deciphering communication strategies, and solving language-related problems. Additionally, case studies encourage students to engage in higher-order thinking processes, such as analysing, synthesizing, and evaluating information, as they navigate through the nuances of language use in different scenarios. By grappling with authentic language challenges presented in case studies, students develop the ability to think critically about language structures, meanings, and functions, ultimately enhancing their language proficiency and communicative competence.

Furthermore, case studies provide opportunities for students to explore cultural aspects of language use, promoting intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Overall, the integration of case studies into English language learning fosters a deeper understanding of language and cultivates critical thinking skills essential for effective communication in diverse contexts.

Case studies challenge students to think critically and apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations which is highly important as (Southworth, 2022) claims ‘Nevertheless, when engaging with perspective-taking exercises, I argue that instructors ought to prioritize the development of students’ critical thinking skills.’ In a blended learning context, students can engage with case studies through interactive quizzes, reflective journals and online debates. For instance, in our courses, students may analyse a case study on a recent or past experience a company has gone through and critically evaluate different interpretations and perspectives. By grappling with complex issues and synthesizing diverse sources of information, working out solutions students develop their analytical skills, discernment, and capacity for reasoned judgment.

Enhancing Digital Literacy

Blended learning environments necessitate the integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning practices. Students are engaged in meaningful learning activities when they connect with other learners and complete substantial tasks, according to Kearsley and Schneiderman (1998). Case studies provide opportunities for students to develop such digital literacy skills as information literacy, media literacy, and technological proficiency. For example, students may examine a case study on ethical dilemmas and in reporting utilize online resources to verify facts, evaluate sources, and navigate multimedia content. Through such experiences, students become adept at leveraging digital tools for research, communication, and knowledge creation. Blended learning forces us to consider the characteristics of digital technology, in general, and information communication technologies (ICTs), more specifically (Dziuban, *et al.*, 2018).

To answer the question ‘How effective are the case studies we use?’ a study was carried out among the students from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of study. Thus, the analysis of the feedback from about 140 respondents on the effectiveness of case studies in the English classes at ASEM reveals several notable findings in terms of the following features:

- Relevance to future job needs
- Perceived content quality
- Vocabulary learning and improving English proficiency
- Effectiveness in engaging research, critical thinking, and problem-solving
- Facilitation of teamwork and intercultural communication skills
- Preferred aspects of case studies

- Disliked aspects of case studies
- Suggestions for improvement

Relevance to Future Job Needs: A significant majority (55.1%) of respondents (Chart 1) found that case studies meet their future job needs to a high extent. This suggests that students perceive case studies as beneficial for their professional development.

Do the Case Studies from your course meet your future job needs?
138 de răspunsuri

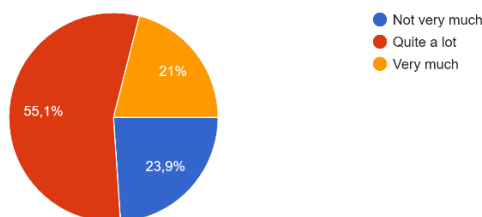


Chart 1 Do the Case Studies from your course meet your future job needs?

Source: Author's research based on a personal questionnaire survey (2024)

Perceived Data/Content Quality: Although opinions on data/content quality varied, a majority (62%) expressed a high level of satisfaction, Chart 2. This indicates that while some improvements may be needed, many students appreciate the quality of content provided in case studies.

How much do you like the data/content quality in the Case Studies?
137 de răspunsuri

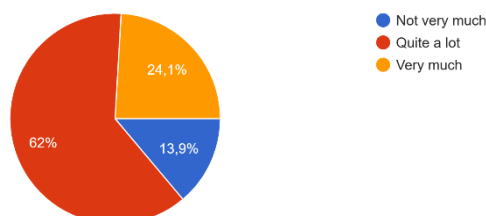


Chart 2 How much do you like the data/content quality in the Case Studies?

Source: Author's research based on a personal questionnaire survey (2024)

Learning New Vocabulary and Improving English Proficiency: The majority of respondents (52.9%) found case studies quite helpful in learning new vocabulary, while a similar percentage (52.2%) found them very useful for improving overall English proficiency (Chart 3). This highlights the educational value of case studies in language acquisition.

How helpful are the Case Studies for learning new vocabulary?

138 de răspunsuri

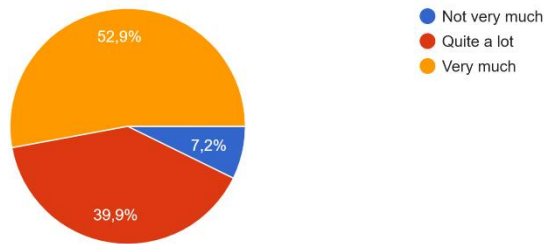


Chart 3 How helpful are the Case Studies for learning new vocabulary?

Source: Author's research based on a personal questionnaire survey (2024)

Effectiveness in Engaging Research, Critical Thinking, and Problem-Solving: Case studies were deemed effective in engaging students in research (48.9%), critical thinking (50%), and problem-solving (48.9%), (Chart 4). This underscores the role of case studies in fostering higher-order thinking skills.

How effective are Case Studies in engaging you in critical thinking and professional reasoning in a safe environment?

136 de răspunsuri

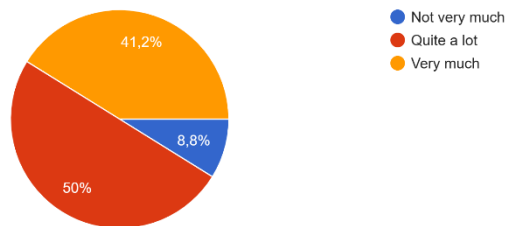


Chart 4 How effective are Case Studies in engaging you in research and reflective discussion?

Source: Author's research based on a personal questionnaire survey (2024)

Facilitation of Teamwork and Intercultural Communication Skills: While case studies were generally effective in facilitating teamwork (43.1%), respondents were less unanimous about their effectiveness in developing intercultural communication skills (48.9%), Chart 5, Chart 6.

Do Case Studies allow you to work in teams?

137 de răspunsuri

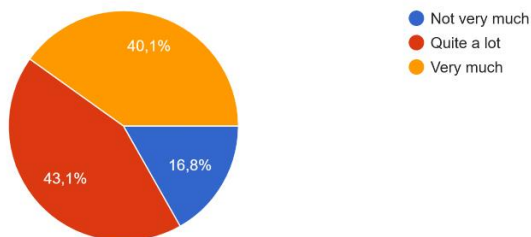


Chart 5 Do Case Studies allow you to work in teams?

Source: Author's research based on a personal questionnaire survey (2024)

How effective are Case Studies in developing your intercultural communication skills and the skills for working in a multicultural environment?

135 de răspunsuri

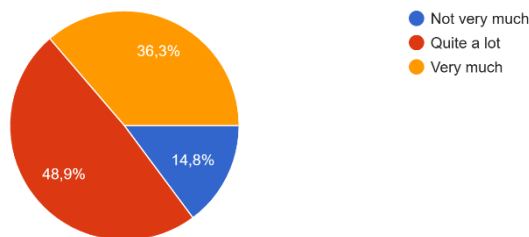


Chart 6 How effective are Case Studies in developing your intercultural communication skills and the skills for working in a multicultural environment?

Source: Author's research based on a personal questionnaire survey (2024)

Preferred Aspects of Case Studies: The findings from the student responses indicate that the most appreciated aspects of case studies are the comprehensive presentation of information and the engagement in group projects and meetings, each receiving 134 and 80 responses, respectively. Following closely behind are the written tasks associated with case studies, which garnered 60 responses. Additionally, students expressed a liking for videos featuring expert commentary, with 40 responses, and listening tracks with directors, with 20 responses. Among the aspects appreciated by respondents, class discussions on causes, issues, and solutions received the highest endorsement (65.7%). This suggests that interactive elements play a crucial role in engaging students in case study learning.

Disliked Aspects of Case Studies: Common dislikes included written tasks, particularly when perceived as too lengthy or lacking clarity. Additionally, some respondents expressed frustration with the frequency of tasks and the complexity of case study scenarios.

Suggestions for Improvement: Respondents provided various suggestions for improving the effectiveness of case studies, including incorporating more practical tasks, promoting teamwork, and providing clearer instructions. Overall, the findings suggest that while case studies are valued for their relevance and effectiveness in skill development, there is room for enhancement in content quality and student engagement strategies.

Response Analysis: The responses indicate a range of sentiments regarding case studies in the English classroom. While some students express overall satisfaction with the tasks involved, many highlight challenges and areas for improvement. Common themes include:

Written Tasks: A significant number of students express dissatisfaction with written tasks, citing them as time-consuming, tedious, or overwhelming. Some specifically mention difficulties with writing reports, emails, memos, and detailed analyses. Others note the lack of clarity regarding the expected length or format of written assignments.

Access to Information: Several students mention issues with accessing up-to-date or relevant information, with some cases being entirely imaginary. This lack of access can hinder the authenticity and applicability of the case study scenarios.

Feedback and Evaluation: Students express a need for clearer guidance and feedback from teachers regarding the correctness of their decisions and the quality of their analyses. Many feel uncertain about whether their solutions make sense or align with the learning objectives.

Repetitiveness and Predictability: Some students find case studies, particularly those involving negotiations, to be repetitive and predictable. They suggest that negotiation skills may be inherently intuitive rather than learned through structured exercises.

Complexity and Overwhelm: The complexity of case study scenarios and the abundance of information provided can overwhelm students, making it challenging to analyse thoroughly and make informed decisions.

Group Work Challenges: Collaborative tasks, such as group projects or discussions, pose challenges for some students. Issues include difficulties in reaching consensus, making decisions, and coordinating efforts effectively.

Engagement and Interest: A few students mention that the topics or information provided in case studies may not always be interesting or relevant to their interests or learning goals.

Finally, here are some concluding guidelines for enhancing student engagement in case studies.

Clear Task Guidelines: Provide clear guidelines for written tasks, including expectations for length, format, and content. Consider offering examples or templates to help students structure their analyses effectively.

Access to Authentic Information: Incorporate real-world case studies or ensure that imaginary scenarios closely resemble authentic situations. Provide access to up-to-date information sources to enhance the relevance and authenticity of the tasks. Thus, case studies which exhibit real companies which students know about or can find online would be more appropriate and engaging for them.

Feedback and Assessment: Offer timely and constructive feedback on students' analyses and decisions. Provide explanations for correct and incorrect approaches, helping students understand the reasoning behind their evaluations.

Diverse and Engaging Topics: Select case studies that cover a range of topics and industries to cater to diverse student interests and backgrounds. Ensure that the scenarios are engaging and relevant to students' learning objectives. Maybe we should not discuss all the case studies with a group, but choose the most relevant ones for a certain faculty or specialization.

Balanced Complexity: Gradually increase the complexity of case studies to challenge students' analytical and decision-making skills while avoiding overwhelming them. Provide scaffolding and support as needed to help students navigate complex scenarios effectively.

Facilitate Effective Group Work: Offer guidance on effective communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution strategies for group projects. Consider assigning specific roles or tasks to ensure equitable participation and contribution from all group members.

Promote Active Engagement: Incorporate interactive elements such as discussions, debates, or simulations to enhance student engagement and participation. Encourage students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios actively.

Flexibility and Adaptability: Be flexible in adjusting tasks and activities based on student feedback and learning needs. Consider incorporating alternative formats or assessment methods to accommodate diverse learning preferences and abilities.

By implementing these recommendations, teachers can create a more enriching and effective learning experience with case studies in the English classroom, fostering critical thinking, communication and teamwork skills, and problem-solving abilities among students.

CONCLUSION

Case studies constitute a versatile and effective instructional strategy for enhancing student engagement in blended learning environments. By promoting active learning, collaborative interactions, critical thinking, and digital literacy, case studies empower students to construct meaning, deepen their understanding, and cultivate essential skills for success in the digital age. Educators should harness the pedagogical potential of case studies to create dynamic and engaging learning experiences that cater to diverse learning styles and preferences (Boix & Jackson, 2011).

Thus, the analysis of the feedback provided by the respondents on the effectiveness of case studies in English classes reveals several key insights. A majority (55.9%) finds that case studies very

much meet their future job needs, indicating perceived relevance. However, opinions on the data/content quality vary, with 63% liking it very much and 13.3% not very much. The majority (52.9%) find case studies quite helpful in learning new vocabulary. Additionally, 52.2% find them very helpful in improving overall English proficiency. Most appreciated aspects include class discussions (65.2%), listening tracks with comments (34.1%), and written tasks (21.2%). However, challenges exist, such as the dislike for written tasks (42.4%). Despite this, case studies are deemed effective in engaging students in critical thinking (50%), research (48.9%), and problem-solving (48.1%). Suggestions for improvement include more practical tasks, interactive content, and clearer instructions. Overall, while case studies are valued for their relevance and effectiveness in skill development, there is room for enhancing content quality and student engagement.

First and foremost, providing clear task guidelines emerges as a pivotal factor, enabling students to navigate written tasks with confidence and clarity. Moreover, ensuring access to authentic information enhances the relevance and engagement of case study scenarios, bridging the gap between theory and real-world application. Equally crucial is the provision of timely and constructive feedback, guiding students towards deeper understanding and refinement of their analytical skills. Diverse and engaging topics further enrich the learning experience, catering to varied student interests and backgrounds.

Striking a balance in complexity fosters gradual skill development without overwhelming learners. Facilitating effective group work promotes collaboration and communication, essential skills in today's interconnected world. Encouraging active engagement through interactive elements cements theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. Lastly, flexibility and adaptability ensure that educational strategies evolve in response to student feedback and diverse learning needs, fostering a dynamic and inclusive learning environment.

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