

Nataliia PANKOVYK,

orcid.org/0009-0008-0783-934X

*Assistant at the Department of Pedagogical Technologies and Language Training
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University
(Zhytomyr, Ukraine) kptmp_pnm@ztu.edu.ua*

Olga KHOROSH,

orcid.org/0000-0002-9176-1854

*Assistant at the Department of Pedagogical Technologies and Language Training
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University
(Zhytomyr, Ukraine) ktpl_hov@ztu.edu.ua*

Yuliia HERASYMCHUK,

orcid.org/0009-0001-2525-0204

*Assistant at the Department of Pedagogical Technologies and Language Training
Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University
(Zhytomyr, Ukraine) kptmp_gyup@ztu.edu.ua*

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: CASE STUDY METHOD IN ESP FOR LAW MAJORS

This paper examines problem-based learning (PBL) and case study methodology for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) legal education as means of achieving better engagement and proficiency among law students. Case studies have long been used actively in business schools, medical schools and the social sciences and are found effective in engaging student interest in real-world problems that build vital reasoning and ethics competencies. However, research shows uneven usage of case methods across ESP disciplines, with more prevalence in business than law contexts. This study explores implementing case studies as a key PBL component to enhance English proficiency and engagement of ESP law students.

Effective case design balances authenticity with accessible complexity to logically develop legal linguistic abilities. Optimal implementation includes individual study enabling student-led discussion facilitated by instructors.

The paper discusses the use of case studies as an effective teaching technique, especially for inductive learners who learn better from examples. Case studies engage students in active problem solving, decision making, and applying concepts to real world situations. They come in different formats from simple scenarios to complex detailed descriptions with data to analyze.

The study hypothesizes embedding such case techniques in ESP legal curriculum can increase engagement, language proficiency and critical thinking compared to passive learning approaches.

Initial research suggests PBL methodology centered around well-constructed case studies successfully boosts law student retention, problem-solving, and language proficiency. However, further evidence is needed measuring case method efficacy across educational settings.

Key words: *case study method, active learning, ethical dilemmas, e-learning, engagement, critical thinking, ESP.*

Наталія ПАНЬКОВИК,

orcid.org/0009-0008-0783-934X

*асистент кафедри педагогічних технологій та освіти впродовж життя
Державного університету «Житомирська політехніка»
(Житомир, Україна) kptmp_pntm@ztu.edu.ua*

Ольга ХОРОШ,

orcid.org/0000-0002-9176-1854

*асистент кафедри педагогічних технологій та освіти впродовж життя
Державного університету «Житомирська політехніка»
(Житомир, Україна) ktpl_hov@ztu.edu.ua*

Юлія ГЕРАСИМЧУК,

orcid.org/0009-0001-2525-0204

*асистент кафедри педагогічних технологій та освіти впродовж життя
Державного університету «Житомирська політехніка»
(Житомир, Україна) kptmp_guip@ztu.edu.ua*

ПРОБЛЕМНЕ НАВЧАННЯ: МЕТОД КЕЙСІВ У ВИКЛАДАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЗА ПРОФЕСІЙНИМ СПРЯМУВАННЯМ ДЛЯ СТУДЕНТІВ-ПРАВНИКІВ

Ця стаття розглядає проблемне навчання та методологію кейсів для викладання англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням студентам-правникам, як засіб досягнення кращої залученості та володіння мовою серед студентів-правників. Кейси тривалий час активно використовувалися в бізнес-школах, медичних школах та соціальних науках і виявилися ефективними для стимулювання інтересу студентів до реальних проблем, що формують життєво важливі навички критичного мислення та етики. Однак дослідження показують нерівномірне використання методів кейсів у різних галузях англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням, з більшою поширеністю в бізнесі, ніж у правовому контексті. Це дослідження вивчає можливості впровадження кейсів як ключового компонента проблемного навчання для підвищення рівня володіння англійською мовою та залучення студентів-правників, що вивчають англійську мову за професійним спрямуванням.

Ефективний дизайн кейсів збалансовує автентичність і доступну складність для логічного розвитку юридичних мовних навичок. Оптимальне впровадження включає індивідуальне вивчення з метою забезпечення дискусії, ініційованої студентами, за участю викладачів-фасилітаторів.

У статті йдеться про використання кейсів як ефективного навчального методу, особливо для індуктивних учнів, які краще засвоюють матеріал на прикладах. Кейси залучають студентів до активного вирішення проблем, прийняття рішень та застосування концепцій до реальних життєвих ситуацій. Вони бувають різних форматів – від простих сценаріїв до комплексних детальних описів з даними для аналізу.

Дослідження висуває гіпотезу, що вбудовування таких кейс-методів у навчальну програму з англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням студентів-правників може підвищити залученість, володіння мовою та критичне мислення порівняно з пасивними підходами до навчання.

Початкові дослідження припускають, що методологія проблемного навчання, зосереджена на правильно побудованих кейсах, успішно підвищує здатність студентів-правників до засвоєння інформації, вирішення проблем та володіння мовою. Однак потрібні подальші докази ефективності методу кейсів у різних освітніх умовах.

Ключові слова: *метод кейсів, активне навчання, етичні дилеми, електронне навчання, залученість, критичне мислення, англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням.*

Introduction. The digital transformation has dramatically reshaped learning environments and student expectations. Today's learners have fundamentally different needs, motivations and engagement patterns. These shifts necessitate an evolution in educational approaches to align with contemporary contexts. The expectations are constantly rising. Educators must continually reinvent learning experiences leveraging technology to create authentic, competency-advancing environments to intensely engage digitally immersed students.

Nowadays learning incorporates online environments, social media, simulations, intelligent tutors, and a constant stream of information. These technologies have transformed how students engage with and consume information. Consequently, traditional ways of teaching do not always succeed in engaging digitally-immersed learners.

Active learning broadly refers to teaching approaches promoting meaningful student activity and engagement during class time, rather than having students passively receive information

(Prince, 2004: 1). This requires students to perform learning tasks like problem-solving, discussions, writing, analysis beyond just listening and reading. Well-designed activities motivate students to reflect upon ideas and “grasp, apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate them” at higher order thinking levels (Weltman, 2007: 9).

Literature review shows new generations thrive from active, experiential learning approaches centered around problems reflecting real-world complexities (Prince, 2004: 3). Problem-based learning (PBL) has emerged as an impactful methodology. PBL involves structuring learning around an authentic, challenging problem that grasps learner interest while developing critical thinking skills. Students direct their own inquiry-based learning process, individually and collaboratively, to identify root causes and solutions. Technologies, especially e-learning, aid access to reference materials and data from global databases.

Finding resources relevant for law students could take some time but the teacher can find a wide variety of them online. For example, an ESP course for future lawyers could frame PBL around cases involving ethical dilemmas or human rights violations (by corporations) using online resources from Harvard Law School, UCL London, Penn State University, Boston University, UNODC e-learning tool (joint product of the UN Global Compact and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime) etc.

UNODC e-learning uses six interactive learning modules to further the audience’s understanding of the UN Global Compact’s 10th principle against corruption and the UN Convention against Corruption. Each module only lasts about five minutes, providing a quick and effective way of learning.

E4J (Education for Justice) offers a series of 14 University Modules on Integrity and Ethics which focus on such issues as universal values, ethics and society, ethical leadership, diversity and pluralism behavioral ethics, gender dimensions of ethics, and how integrity and ethics relate to critical fields such as media, business, law, public service and the various professions. The Modules include discussions on different issues, suggestions for class activities and exercises, PowerPoint slides, video materials and other teaching tools.

After initial literacy training, the target language and grammar material can be put to practice through participation in a debate, developing argumentation, negotiating settlements, clearly articulating one’s point of view, etc. Such authentic scenarios spur engagement and language development in context.

Our study of using case study method while learning English in ESP classes for law students

showed significant gains in student motivation levels, along with linguistic gains. The integrated, socially situated nature of PBL aligns with sociocultural language acquisition theories.

While adapting assessments for PBL remains an ongoing area requiring further research, possibilities include journals, self-assessments, using rubrics to evaluate competencies. PBL is difficult to evaluate because there is no consensus on its core elements or definitive impact on academic achievement as measured by exams. Meta-analyses suggest discovery learning approaches linked to PBL only weakly enhance test scores (Prince, 2004: 7). However, research shows PBL can positively shape other important outcomes like student attitudes, deeper learning, and knowledge retention compared to traditional instruction. PBL naturally fosters problem-solving and lifelong learning skills—two critical goals not easily achieved through conventional teaching. Evidence demonstrates coupling PBL with explicit problem-solving instruction can further elevate students’ abilities. As PBL promotes self-directed learning and meta-cognition similar to life-long learning, it logically connects to developing this key skill-set often not addressed in traditional education. Ultimately, while proof is lacking that PBL improves academic test results, meaningful evidence supports its capacity to enrich learning processes and goals beyond content mastery (Prince, 2004: 7).

Prince defines PBL as an instructional method where relevant problems are introduced at the beginning of the instruction cycle to provide context and motivation for learning. He notes that PBL is always active and usually collaborative or cooperative, involving significant amounts of self-directed learning by students. Prince’s analysis of the literature on active learning acknowledges the extensive empirical support for PBL. However, he also highlights the challenges in interpreting the effectiveness of PBL, emphasizing the need to specify precisely what elements of PBL are being examined and to be cautious in interpreting reported results. He also discusses the difficulty of measuring the impact of PBL on various learning outcomes and the importance of considering any reported improvement. Despite these challenges, Prince encourages faculty to consider the literature on active learning, as some of the evidence for PBL and other active learning methods is compelling and should stimulate faculty to think about teaching and learning in nontraditional ways (Prince, 2004: 7).

Case studies as teaching method

A case study teaching method is an instructional approach that uses real-world case scenarios to

actively engage students in analysis and problem solving. Case teaching originated at Harvard Law and Business Schools in the 1870s-1890s as an alternative to lecture-based learning (Barnes et al., 1994: 34). The faculty emphasized Socratic discussion analyzing real legal and business dilemmas to prepare students for real-world decision making. In the 1985, case-based teaching emerged in medicine as problem-based learning using clinical cases of patients. Case methodology enabled students to link medical theory to practice through interpretation, teamwork, and developing diagnostic strategies (Garvin, 2003: 56). In 1996 case-based teaching architecture is described by Edelson (Edelson, 1996: 357).

By the 1990s-2000s, case instruction had expanded into fields like education, social studies, physics, and science (Herreid, 1994; Yadav et al., 2007). Recognition of benefits for active learning, critical thinking development, and motivation increased significantly.

Today case method is used extensively in business, law, medicine, psychology, leadership and ethics training (Foran, 2001; Joy, 2011; Naumes & Naumes, 2012). Cases can be found in digital case libraries and from well-known universities.

Foran describes his experience using case method in sociological classroom in UCSB especially for topics related to international issues and social change. He states that case method develops skills for participatory democracy and life skills to address real problems creatively. He aims to instill in his students «eyes open optimism» that positive change is possible when ordinary people unite courageously (Foran, 2001: 49).

Originating to discuss legal and business problems, case teaching evolved across disciplines as an engaging student-centered approach with meaningful real-world application.

Case studies promote higher-order thinking and communication skills (Bonney, 2015: 21). As a form of task-based learning, case studies facilitate language acquisition through authentic problem solving. The case teaching method is highly adaptable style of teaching that involves problem-based learning and promotes the development of analytical skills.

Case studies are considered suitable for EFL because solving them requires applying both linguistic and analytical/interpersonal skills. This aligns with the communicative language teaching approach. Case studies can integrate reading, writing, listening and speaking. Effective cases tell a coherent real-world story that engages student interest and has sufficient detail to examine. Among benefits of case studies one can find opportunities for integrating language

skill with other professional skills, usage of different media, writing students' own cases. As for challenges they can be as follows: finding good cases matched to students' proficiency and subject knowledge, they are time-consuming, assessment criteria need to be carefully established (Roell, 2019: 25).

Initially designed for business and medicine, the case study method transferred effectively to EFL and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms (Basta, 2019: 56) advocates case studies as an innovative multidisciplinary approach enabling students to apply concepts from their core degree subjects for language development.

Additionally, case studies teach legal skills through real examples that encourage critical reasoning. The law teaching guide "A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education" highlights using case studies to demonstrate applied concepts (Fry, et al., 2015: 409).

Although initially designed for non-linguistic disciplines, the case method found its place in language teaching, in particular English for Specific Purposes (ESP), being considered a source of more effective and motivating language teaching methodology. Basta points out that contemporary times call for a shift of traditional foreign language teaching methods towards new and innovative methods, and argues in favor of the case method as a multi-disciplinary approach, including both linguistic and non-linguistic, core-subject matters, which enables the application of theoretical non-linguistic knowledge and concepts into language learning (Basta, 2019: 56).

Gudmundsson distinguishes between retrospective case studies, which examine past events with full knowledge of outcomes, versus decision-forcing cases that place students in a protagonist role inside an unfolding scenario requiring them to choose solutions with uncertain results. While retrospective cases evaluate impartially, decision-forcing cases provide an engaging, active learning experience (Gudmundsson, 2014).

Decision-forcing cases impart factual knowledge more effectively than passive delivery methods through two essential elements: 1) presenting the problem via documents, articles or lectures, and 2) discussing the issues through Socratic dialogue. Socratic conversations enable deep learning through a three step process – cold calling on a student to role play the protagonist, asking probing questions to involve all learners, and the teacher adopting a neutral "humble enquirer" stance focused on eliciting perspectives without judgement (Gudmundsson, 2014).

Key techniques include paraphrasing student ideas, maintaining impartiality by posing additional

questions rather than sharing personal views, and avoiding sarcasm or condescension. With the teacher genuinely curious about all solutions, decision-forcing cases leverage active, enquiry-driven participation to stimulate interest, transfer knowledge, and build critical thinking capacities more successfully than teaching facts alone.

In summary, by situating students inside complex scenarios requiring solutions, decision-forcing case studies use Socratic discussion to actively impart knowledge and cultivate analytical skills better than conventional passive teaching. The approach hinges on the teacher facilitating non-judgemental, engaging dialogue centered on the case problems.

Case studies are used to teach law students by providing real-life examples of legal issues and their resolutions. In the context of higher education, the authors of “A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Enhancing Academic Practice” emphasize the use of case studies to show how successful teachers have implemented ideas in the field of law and other disciplines. The case study material designed by educators from Harvard Law School and other prominent universities to stimulate beginning teachers and act as a reminder for experienced ones about ways to develop and enhance their practice. The use of case studies in teaching law helps students understand the practical application of legal principles and encourages critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Fry , et al., 2015: 409).

Using Case Studies in English with law students

Ethics, integrity, and sound legal judgment are crucial competencies for law students to develop. However, students often initially demonstrate problematic reasoning patterns regarding complex situational dilemmas.

This research was conducted with third year Ukrainian law students to evaluate and improve their ethical decision making abilities using targeted educational modules while actively engaging them in group activities that foster English speaking skills.

Pre-Teaching Evaluation

Prior to any intervention, students discussed ethical scenarios from an English coursebook in pairs and groups. (New Language Leader Intermediate Coursebook, 2014: 78) The majority showed indecisiveness, unwillingness to be truthful or make difficult decisions against self-interest. For example, many expressed support towards a friend shoplifting when denied a bonus by the firm. Only in extreme health/safety threatening circumstances did most report willingness to act decisively against profit motives, like reporting environmental illegalities. This analysis demonstrated significant gaps in ethical

reasoning of Law students needing development. (Pankovyk, Kravchenko, 2024: 423).

Case Study Methodology

The instructional phase focused on exposing students to realistic dilemma case studies requiring reasoned decisions, utilizing E4J’s (Education for Justice) interactive online ethics learning modules from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The modules employ videos with embedded questions at choice points, clarifying consequent situations for each option selected to highlight impacts. Online activities were paired with extensive in-person small and large group discussions on key concepts underlying ethical business practices and law (UNODC).

Step 1. A context is provided involving some ethical dilemma and a protagonist asks a question. As the video is paused, it’s the time for the students to analyze the situation and suggest an answer. (Figure1) In small groups students decide and present their arguments for selecting the answer.

Step 2. When the choice is made, the protagonist comments on the answer which is followed by further explanation. (Fig. 2).

Step 3. Further discussion takes place and students express their thoughts.



Fig. 1. The Fight Against Corruption e-learning tool



Fig. 2. Explanation and further information on the case. (0(UNODC)

Step 4. After the task a written feedback from students is required so that written skills are equally involved.

Guidelines for using case studies:

- Present a decision-maker grappling with a problem needing a solution;
- Use videos to help students visualize the situation;
- Provide context;
- Include supporting data like tables or documents;
- Have students identify issues, goals, context, key facts, alternatives, and make recommendations;
- Pair with readings that introduce applicable concepts;
- Ask questions to guide discussion from problem identification to solutions;
- Evaluate student participation and reasoning during discussion (using rubrics).

In summary, research shows case studies that immerse EFL and ESP students in professional scenarios relevant to their discipline can actively build communication abilities and higher-order capacities like analysis more successfully than conventional methods. Law represents one area where case-based instruction has shown promise for developing core skills.

Conclusion. Integrating case studies in the form of dynamic online scenarios with guided discussions showed an effective way for enhancing law students' preparation for the dilemmas faced by future legal professionals.

Case studies prove to be an effective teaching method, especially for inductive learners who learn better from examples. They engage students in active problem solving, decision making, and applying concepts to real world situations. They come in different formats from simple scenarios to complex detailed descriptions with data to analyze.

Although the results vary in strength, this study has found support for using case study method in ESP teaching for law students. Some of the findings, such as the benefits of student engagement, are unlikely to be controversial although the magnitude of improvements resulting from active-engagement methods may come with time. Other findings challenge traditional assumptions about language teaching and these are most worth highlighting. For example, students will remember more content if brief activities are introduced. Similarly, the support for collaborative and cooperative learning calls into question the traditional assumptions that individual work and competition best promote achievement. The best available evidence suggests that educators should structure their teaching to promote safe collaborative and cooperative environments. Nevertheless, extensive and credible evidence suggests that ESP educators consider case study method for promoting academic achievement and positive student attitudes.

Active learning is not the cure for all educational problems. However, there is broad support for the elements of active learning. Some of the findings are surprising and deserve trainers' and teachers' special attention and considering using case study method in ESP classroom especially with law students. Further research may be conducted on the quantitative findings of case study method impact on the students' learning outcome in different disciplines. Another issue, which should be the subject of further research, is the effectiveness of using the case study method on a target group. Such research could provide valuable information regarding the extent to which the case study method ought to be promoted in the English language classes for specific purposes in order to increase the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process.

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