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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

IN HIGHER EDUCATION: APPLICATION OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

COMUNICACIÓN INTERCULTURAL EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR: APLICACIÓN DEL MÉTODO DE ESTUDIO DE CASO COMO HERRAMIENTA IMPORTANTE EN LA ADQUISICIÓN DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communication today has become more crucial than ever, and more so within higher education; as such, the pedagogies for teaching academic English should also shift with this in mind. In this regard, although the “case study method” has received growing acknowledgment as part of foreign language education, little has been discussed with regard to its application within an intercultural communication. This is particularly true regarding the gap in understanding how Case Studies bridge the cultural gaps and improve students’ language and views of the world, which calls for deeper investigation. Then, the goal of this article is to evaluate the case study method as an instrument for reinforcing foreign language acquisition, applied especially as a tool for intercultural communication within higher education. It was found that the method enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural awareness. Looking at real situations and solving them not only strengthens linguistic abilities but also opens one’s eyes to even minute details of cultural interactions. Furthermore, the integration of new learning technologies in the application of this approach enhances its impact, thereby making the method even more relevant and engaging for modern learners. These results reflect the important implications of using the Case Study method for teaching foreign languages, both at the level of teaching practice and in terms of student learning.

Keywords:

Case study, Teaching method, Communication, Globalization.

RESUMEN

La comunicación intercultural se ha vuelto hoy más crucial que nunca, y más aún en la educación superior; por lo tanto, las pedagogías para la enseñanza del inglés académico también deberían cambiar teniendo esto en cuenta. En este sentido, aunque el “método de estudio de casos” ha recibido un reconocimiento creciente como parte de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, se ha discutido poco con respecto a su aplicación dentro de una comunicación intercultural. Esto es particularmente cierto en lo que respecta a la brecha en la comprensión de cómo los estudios de casos cierran las brechas culturales y mejoran el lenguaje y las visiones del mundo de los estudiantes, lo que requiere una investigación más profunda. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es evaluar el método de estudio de casos como un instrumento para reforzar la adquisición de lenguas extranjeras, aplicado especialmente como una herramienta para la comunicación intercultural dentro de la educación superior. Se encontró que el método mejora el pensamiento crítico, la resolución de problemas y la conciencia intercultural. Mirar situaciones reales y resolverlas no solo fortalece las habilidades lingüísticas, sino que también abre los ojos a los detalles más minuciosos de las interacciones culturales. Además, la integración de nuevas tecnologías de aprendizaje en la aplicación de este enfoque mejora su impacto, haciendo que el método sea aún más relevante y atractivo para los estudiantes modernos. Estos resultados reflejan las importantes implicaciones del uso del método de estudio de caso para la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, tanto a

nivel de la práctica docente como en términos de aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: estudio de caso, método de enseñanza, comunicación, globalización.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and other social, economic, and political changes taking place in the world today encourage people to engage more closely with different cultural and linguistic environments. In this regard, higher education also emphasizes the importance of intercultural communication and foreign language learning (Moore & Díaz, 2019; Shadiev & Yu, 2024). In this context, applying the case study method, especially in foreign language acquisition and intercultural relations, highlights the relevance of this topic as a crucial tool in preparing students for their future educational and professional experiences (Bryxina & Derkach, 2023; Kuznetsova et al., 2023). The significance of this topic stems from several additional factors, including:

- **Global business world:** In today's business landscape, companies and organizations operate in a wide range of cross-cultural activities. Students' intercultural communication and foreign language skills equip them to work successfully in an international business environment.
- **Internationalization of education:** Higher education institutions accept more international students, and study programs reflect a broader international perspective. This increases the importance of students' intercultural relationships and foreign language skills.
- **The rise of multicultural societies:** In modern societies, intercultural communication and language skills are necessary to build trusting relationships between people who may differ culturally. This is crucial for both educational and professional experiences.
- **Importance for solving global issues:** Many global challenges, such as climate change, health, and human rights, require solutions at the international level. Intercultural relations and foreign language skills play a vital role in addressing these issues.

For these reasons, acquiring intercultural communication and foreign language knowledge through the case study method will help students operate comfortably and successfully in the international sphere and prepare them according to international standards (Bryxina & Derkach, 2023; Derince, 2023). This topic, therefore, requires significant attention and research.

The advancement of the Internet and information technologies has enabled new ways to utilize virtual environments

for intercultural communication and foreign language learning. Online platforms and interactive learning tools can give students closer contact with and understanding of different cultures and languages. Students may also benefit from experiences such as collaboration with international educational institutions, partnerships with practice institutions, and participation in international exchange programs. These opportunities allow them to practice their intercultural relations and foreign language skills. Applied programs focused on intercultural communication and foreign language acquisition, where students conduct their own research and engage in cross-cultural experiences, can be offered. These programs will help enhance their practical skills and cross-cultural understanding (Bryxina & Derkach, 2023; Derince, 2023).

Students can also pursue hybrid learning methods and various classes without limitations. These approaches will facilitate the acquisition of intercultural communication and foreign language skills. Innovative promotion and reward programs can be introduced to encourage students to engage in intercultural communication and language learning, increasing their motivation to develop these skills. These and other innovations provide advanced, creative ways to address challenges associated with the case study method in intercultural communication and foreign language education. Consequently, students will be more successful in the intercultural sphere by effectively building relationships, learning, and gaining experience.

The practical importance of this issue enables students to work more effectively in the fields of international business, diplomatic relations, research, and the celebration of diversity by applying the case study method in intercultural communication and foreign language education. In this context, the case study method is a valuable tool for enhancing students' practical experience and expanding their international career opportunities (Braga, 2023). As students learn to interact more closely with various cultures and languages, they contribute to the development of diplomatic and international relations. The application of the case study method ensures that students engage in research and experimentation within international cultural and linguistic contexts. Additionally, this approach in intercultural communication and foreign language education fosters students' awareness and interest in intercultural relations (Sysoyev et al., 2022). It encourages tolerant and independent thinking, helping them to establish more effective relationships with diverse populations worldwide. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to analyze the fundamental elements of the case study method in language learning and intercultural communication

education, highlighting its practical importance in developing international competences.

DEVELOPMENT

The case study method, as a new technology-method in establishing intercultural communication in higher education, will contribute to increasing students' educational activity by enhancing communication skills and addressing current challenges in teaching English at the level of modern higher education. As an innovative teaching method, the case study approach guides students to analyze problem situations and find solutions for specific learning contexts based on real-life events. It creates a problem-based situation rooted in real facts that aligns with the distinctive characteristics of the case study method, demonstrating the practical side of an issue through descriptive examples. Additionally, it allows students to apply previously acquired knowledge in a comprehensive manner.

The dynamics of the modern world and ongoing globalization have brought English to the forefront among the leading languages, with millions of people across various countries using it as a communication tool in diverse areas of life and intercultural relations. Consequently, the role of English in higher education is gradually expanding, as the scientific formation process significantly enhances language skills among higher education students, encouraging intercultural communication through its applied nature and interdisciplinary essence.

To take a step back, we can look at history. The concept of intercultural communication was introduced by the American cultural anthropologist Edward Hall in the 1950s as part of a program to help American diplomats and businesspeople adapt abroad, following instructions from the U.S. State Department. Researchers accepted this concept as "an ideal goal that a person should strive for, aiming to adapt to the world around them as effectively and efficiently as possible" (Abdulla, 2023, p. 14).

Research shows that the case study method is a powerful educational tool involving the analysis of real-life situations to understand complex concepts and develop problem-solving skills. In higher education institutions today, in-depth English as a foreign language teaching serves as a bridge in establishing international relations between countries. Therefore, as a means of intercultural communication and dialogue in higher education, it is important to focus not only on mastering linguistic and grammatical rules but also on incorporating new learning technologies. The methodology of teaching English as a foreign language should be adapted to these new technologies. The use of the case study method, as an innovative

approach to fostering intercultural communication in higher education, contributes to enhancing students' educational engagement by strengthening communication skills and addressing current issues in English language teaching at the modern higher education level. We believe that the case study method, as an innovative teaching tool based on real-life events, will guide students in analyzing problem situations and finding solutions to specific learning challenges. It creates problem situations rooted in real facts, aligned with the unique characteristics of case research, and reflects the practical side of issues through descriptive examples, thereby enabling students to apply acquired knowledge in a comprehensive way (Samoilova-Tsyplakova, 2014, p. 235).

The application of case technology in foreign language classes has its own objectives, which include improving communication skills, linguistic competence, and socio-cultural awareness. We recognize that communicative learning is considered essential as a modern method of foreign language teaching, primarily aiming to foster intercultural dialogue. The case study method is an excellent interactive tool for teaching high school students' authentic language use, including phraseology, idioms, cue exchanges, and other elements reflecting fluency in modern communication contexts (Rajabova, 2017).

A distinctive feature of the case study method is its embrace of uncertainty. The unpredictable nature of these situations encourages students to discuss emergent problems, think critically, describe the real facts behind the discussion, and ultimately arrive at unique decisions. These processes contribute to developing intercultural dialogue skills in higher education students, enabling them to gain knowledge through independent activity, enhance their knowledge acquisition abilities, and build professional competencies.

The structure of the case study method is based on real-life events, with no specific solution provided for the scenarios given to students for discussion. Each student proposes a solution to a scenario presented under uncertain conditions, and these solutions are shared with all students as alternative versions in English. Discussions, dialogues, moments of conflict, and the presentation of various solutions in English lead either the teacher or the students to select the most appropriate solution. This process aids students in revisiting previously learned concepts, applying new ideas, and broadening and deepening their knowledge. Importantly, it prepares them for intercultural dialogue, enabling them to analyze real-life problems, stories, and events. They gain a comprehensive understanding of the context of each situation—historical, chronological, and the characteristics of the participants'

actions—while they are encouraged to interpret the scenarios, engage in tasks, and explore diverse applications (Herried, 2007, p. 104).

A specific framework for English lessons using case technology is proposed. However, when implementing the case method, several qualitative criteria should be considered in advance and should not be overlooked:

- a) considering the audience's prior experience;
- b) selecting situations relevant to future contexts;
- c) including an unexpected task;
- d) incorporating authentic quotes;
- e) aligning with pedagogical goals;
- f) addressing conflicting information;
- g) guiding students toward making a decision;
- h) providing an outcome at the end of the exercise;
- i) ensuring the workload is appropriate for the students' level and psychological characteristics.

These considerations are essential for effectively using the case method in teaching, as they support the successful establishment of intercultural communication and the organization of English lessons according to specified criteria.

An example of a lesson using the case method.

Let's examine an example of a lesson designed for students on the topic of "Environmental Protection," using case study technology to develop students' intercultural language skills. The outcomes of solving the case tasks will be presented in various formats such as overviews, presentations, project defenses, critical references, descriptive work, or essays.

Topic: Environmental Protection (using the case study method in group work)

Lesson Goals: To teach students how to work with vocabulary, interpret text content from a problem-oriented perspective.

Lesson Objectives:

- To reinforce linguistic knowledge in English, refresh and solidify key concepts, develop expressive and emotional skills, engage in comparisons, analyses, discussions, and enhance the ability to use case study technology.
- To build English language learning skills, foster intercultural communication skills, instill cultural awareness, and improve speech proficiency.

- To analyze and explain real-world processes, acquire critical thinking skills, and evaluate information critically.

Lesson Format: Expression of ideas in English through case study technology in an open-discussion lesson format.

Teaching Methods: Topic exploration, discussion, and problem-scenario creation.

Lesson Materials:

- Presentation slides;
- Handouts: text-related flashcards, a "Correct" chart.

Introductory Discussion: The environment and its protection are critical issues that significantly impact people's lives and the natural world. Increasing human activities and technological developments have intensified challenges related to the exploitation and preservation of natural resources. Environmental factors such as air, water, soil, and biodiversity are subject to frequent changes, which can affect human health, ecosystem stability, and overall quality of life. Environmental protection involves mitigating these impacts and conserving natural resources. Its importance is supported by factors that encourage society, individuals, researchers, policymakers, and businesses to understand and act upon their responsibilities.

Today, we will read the "Letter of the Planet," familiarize ourselves with the problem, learn more about environmental protection, and discuss case scenarios. (Each group will now receive a worksheet to continue working.)

Activity: Read the "Letter of the Planet." We will then work in four groups to explore its purpose. Each group will focus on a different theme:

- Group I – Deforestation.
- Group II - Protection of Endangered Species.
- Group III - Causes of Pollution in Urban Areas.
- Group IV - The Journey from Waste to Recycling.

You have 5 minutes. Each group's file contains questions to guide you in completing your task.

Wrap-up: Time is up. Group 1, please present your findings.

In order to analyze deforestation in the territory of Azerbaijan, it is necessary to study environmental protection. By investigating the effects of forests on the environment and ecosystems, we must identify the causes of this process and explore possible solutions. Forests in certain

regions are being cut down and used as construction material. When I was in the village, I was frightened by the sound of jackals, and the memory of encountering a wolf near the fence one evening still causes me anxiety.

- Why do you think wild animals come so close to human settlements?
- What was the Planet's complaint here? Which problem is important to solve? What steps do you consider essential for a greener world?

Group II discussed their impressions regarding the protection of endangered species, focusing on the white deer. One of our friends, who has seen the white deer with his own eyes, still vividly remembers this remarkable sight. Every time he visits the village, he goes to the Yellow Pyre in the forest above the village, closes his eyes, and waits for the white deer to appear. In this context, endangered species conservation can serve as a significant research topic on environmental protection. The group should assess the effectiveness of policies and measures for protecting endangered species and discuss effective solutions to current challenges.

The story is intriguing. Why do you think the white deer didn't appear? Is it really a white deer? What can you propose to protect biodiversity? Are existing reserves sufficient?

Group III discussed urban pollution. Investigating the pollution in urban areas is another vital environmental protection issue. The group examines the causes of this pollution, evaluates its effects, and discusses potential interventions by local communities and policymakers. Is this a global issue? What is polluting the environment? What actions do you believe should be taken? How can we protect nature from pollution?

Group IV focused on waste and recycling, another critical area within environmental protection. This group talked about the environmental impact of remanufacturing discarded products, proposed solutions to regulate the pace of recycling, and other relevant issues. How should waste be recycled? What suggestions do you have? How can you contribute to this field?

Each group analyzes stakeholders and identifies potential challenges by specifying the main problems related to their research focus. Encouraging critical thinking and group discussions helps to deepen and enrich each group's analysis. Dialogue enhances the quality of the research process and allows various perspectives to emerge. These structured discussions facilitate effective dialogue and enable students to communicate in English

with peers and representatives from different cultures on global issues.

Case technologies, on one hand, stand in contrast to traditional methods such as repeating after the teacher, answering the teacher's questions, and reciting text. On the other hand, they incorporate methods such as game design, role-playing, and situation analysis. At the end of the session, students are presented with a table for the "Speak openly" method, where four problems are solved across four columns. Column 1 lists the cases, Column 2 contains interview questions, Column 3 contains answers, and Column 4 is for the final decision.

Students gather information during the independent resolution of theoretical and practical situations, either on their own or with guidance from the teacher. As they face specific challenges, their activity and independence increase, helping to foster positive motivation for learning. The information obtained in this way is more thoroughly absorbed and retained for a longer period. Learning outcomes improve, and students find it easier to apply their acquired knowledge to new situations while simultaneously developing their skills and creativity.

The characteristics of such a lesson include creating a problem situation, formulating a problem, solving it either individually or in a group, checking the obtained solutions, and systematizing, consolidating, and applying the newly acquired knowledge in theoretical and practical contexts. The results of case study tasks can be presented as an overview, presentation, project defense, critical reference, descriptive work, or essay.

The application of the case study method provides students with various skills in acquiring English as a foreign language and in understanding intercultural relations in English:

- Analytical and problem-solving skills: Students develop analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities by analyzing real-life problems and situations.
- Coordination and communication in English: Students enhance their ability to communicate effectively with peers, the teacher, and others during the analysis of case studies, strengthening their discussion and representation skills.
- Enthusiasm for different cultures: Engaging in diverse case studies encourages students to explore intercultural relations, deepening their understanding of various cultures, values, and beliefs.
- Data analysis and research skills in English: Case

study analysis helps students build data analysis and research capabilities, enabling them to collect, synthesize, and analyze information from various sources in English.

Students enhance their critical thinking and research skills by analyzing problems through case studies. This approach enables them to discover creative and innovative solutions to complex issues. By gaining an appreciation for different cultures and ways of thinking, students learn to put themselves in others' shoes and understand diverse cultural perspectives. This fosters a broader, more inclusive cross-cultural outlook. These skills are essential for students to meet the growing demand for proficiency in English in today's world. They not only contribute to personal development but also enable students to communicate more effectively, both with each other and globally, particularly in English.

CONCLUSIONS

The application of the case study method in intercultural communication and foreign language education enables students to actively and successfully engage in international cultural and linguistic environments. By implementing this method, students gain greater opportunities to understand and appreciate diverse cultures, which fosters increased intercultural awareness, tolerance, and independent thinking. Students who are proficient in foreign languages and possess intercultural communication skills become more competitive and attractive in the global business arena, with employers actively seeking them out. Furthermore, the study of different cultures and languages may strengthen diplomatic ties and international relations, promoting cooperation and facilitating global agreements. We believe that the integration of the case study method into educational systems will lead to adaptation and transformation in intercultural communication and foreign language teaching methodologies. As students engage more actively in cross-cultural research and development, they will become more involved in various fields, gaining deeper insights into different cultures and languages. Ultimately, the growing exchange between cultures will enhance mutual benefits and understanding, fostering greater intercultural collaboration.

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