

ROLE OF CASE STUDIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

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Abstract. *Modern times require a functional level of the knowledge of the English language. Big corporations expect their future employees both to know English for Business and Economic Purposes and to possess sophisticated business skills. The task of the ESP teacher is to instruct learners to successfully develop linguistic as well as non-linguistic skills. One of the ways of doing so is by means of the case study analysis method, which might be considered as one of the most valuable methodological tools, as it provides learners with an authentic learning environment and authentic study materials. In order to successfully realize the case study task, the ESP practitioner is supposed to establish interdisciplinary collaboration with core-subject professors, who will significantly contribute to effective and efficient business solutions proposed by ESP students. The aim of this paper is to give a theoretical review of case studies and present the results of the survey on the role of case studies in ESP classes conducted at the Faculty of Economics, University of Niš. The paper will also point to advantages and disadvantages of using this teaching approach. In the end, the paper will give the suggestions about the ways as to how to overcome common obstacles which arise in the course of conducting this ESP teaching and study method.*

Key words: *ESP, case studies, authenticity, interdisciplinarity, linguistic skills, business skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Global economic trends, increasing migrations and mobility primarily within the European Union, but also worldwide, have led to an urgent need for economic and business experts with an advanced and extremely functional level of the knowledge of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Unfortunately, as it has turned out, most graduate students are not capable of communicating successfully in the business and professional surroundings. As far as their knowledge of a foreign language is concerned, most employees and HR specialists who conduct job interviews in English have reported that although the candidates' knowledge of English is usually at an intermediate, upper-intermediate or even advanced level, it is commonly limited and confined to the knowledge of General English, and not English for Business and Economic Purposes. Thus, the crucial component they lack is functionality and since contemporary labour markets require graduate economists and managers to demonstrate the knowledge of a highly specific foreign language customized to the needs of a future job, the most important skills that a future manager needs to possess are communicative competences which would be applicable to a business environment. That is the reason why most national governments support university ESP

study programmes and courses which would integrate the knowledge of both English language and other professional skills. ESP centres are being established at various universities with the aim of promoting an interdisciplinary approach to language teaching and learning, by means of integrating professional and linguistic competences, whereby the individual competitiveness of future employees substantially increases and leads to higher employability. Taking into consideration all these facts, ESP lecturers have become more interested in innovative and creative teaching and learning activities which encourage and promote the incorporation and application of acquired economic and business knowledge, skills and dexterities.

English Language Teaching that is exclusively focused on grammatical structures, and not on intercontextual application and use, represents an outdated method of language teaching. Cutting-edge study programmes at world universities are, as a matter of fact, integrated courses of ESP and other subjects. Such integrated and interdisciplinary courses offer a wide range of opportunities for a more effective and efficient, more flexible and more practical approach to language learning. It is, therefore, upon an ESP lecturer to devise more innovative courses in cooperation with other subject professors, and this collaboration puts an emphasis on a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and authentic approach to language teaching. This *joint venture* of lecturers, to use an economic term, will encourage all participants in teaching/learning activities (i.e. both professors and students) to relate ESP to specific scholarly and academic disciplines. One of the basic assumptions of this paper is that such an integrated, interdisciplinary approach would instigate a direct cooperation of all participants in the ESP methodological paradigm. Hence, it is indispensable that ESP lecturers should take into consideration the needs of students and future employees.

Only by suggesting absolutely functional language teaching approaches will ESP students be able to acquire skills necessary for a future job. Case studies, as a specific language teaching method, provide an excellent starting point for students to learn both language and core-subject contents.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the theoretical background of case studies, particularly within the interdisciplinary context and the framework of authentic materials, and to investigate students' attitudes towards this particular language teaching and learning approach, thus pointing to the importance and role of case studies in ESP. The paper will also present possible problems related to the use of this teaching activity and solutions to the problems. Inter/multidisciplinarity is the key distinctive feature of ESP and it should be used as a backbone for solving any difficulties that arise along the ESP teaching and learning process.

2. LITEARTURE REVIEW

A case study method first appeared as a method of teaching non-linguistic contents of various business subjects at the Harvard Business School and it has been used ever since the foundation of the school, i.e. since 1908 (Corey 1998). The same method has been used at the Richard Ivey School of Business since 1921. Case studies have also found its place in teaching engineering and their primary advantage has been reliance on real-life matters and issues. This method has been praised for its meaningful and pragmatic, hands-on approach to studying a specific subject matter.

However, during the 1990s ground-breaking research in language teaching and particularly in ESP teaching shed light on applications other than the ones to business and economic subjects (Al-Mansour and Hussain 2014). To be more precise, this study activity was found to be an excellent source of an efficient and effective, more motivating and more authentic language teaching methodology.

As for the definition, case studies represent a “presentation of a specific situation taken from professional or everyday life, which is displayed through specific facts, attitudes and opinions, on the basis of which a decision has to be taken” (Kaiser, quoted in Kiefer 2004, 70). The implication is that case studies refer to real-life situations or problems that need to be solved. Case studies provide students with indispensable information about an issue, matter or problem, as well with background information. Students are faced with a problem which needs to be solved. Additional information and data are usually also supplied in the form of diagrammatic presentations, tables, charts, and graphs. These details help students come up with the best solution to the problem presented. Case studies contain both quantitative and qualitative pieces of information which are an inevitable prerequisite for putting forward logical and plausible solutions to the problems presented.

As opposed to traditional language teaching methods which assume minimal student participation and an emphasis on grammar and translation, case studies provide an utterly different teaching and learning environment in which student involvement in classroom activities is of crucial importance for a successful realization of an ESP class. Students who have been accustomed to traditional language teaching methods are faced with a major change in language learning. The study focus shifts from learning various grammatical structures by heart to an active participation in various stages of case study activities. Namely, students are involved in six stages of case studies, which require a serious mental involvement as well as an average level of linguistic competence. Those stages include:

1. Reading the case,
2. Identifying the problem,
3. Defining priorities and limitations,
4. Looking for alternative solutions,
5. Choosing the best alternative as well as the best linguistic way to present it, and
6. Preparing an action plan (Jendrych, http://conference.pixel-online.net/edu_future/common/download/Paper_pdf/ITL33-Jendrych.pdf).

All these stages point to a significant attribute of case studies and it is their multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary character. As a matter of fact, case studies represent a significant contribution to the development of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity. The reason for this stands at the very observation that Stern (1983) made. He noted that “the scholarship underlying language teaching is multidisciplinary and it stands in marked contrast to earlier conceptions in which language teaching was founded entirely on the study of *belles lettres* or on linguistics alone” (47). This implies that, as it has already been pointed out, contemporary times require modern teaching methods which substantially differ from the early ones – teaching English is not only teaching grammar and literature, but teaching both linguistic and non-linguistic skills intertwined with intricate core-subject matters. In that sense, interdisciplinarity is “not simply a matter of coupling two disciplines together, with each retaining its own identity and integrity, but of one discipline assuming a dominant role and drawing from the other 2005, 18). And so is the case with a case study method, which allows the application of theoretical non-linguistic knowledge and concepts into language learning, therefore bridging the gap between theory and practice (Davis and

Wilcock 2005). This kind of activity brings about students' critical thinking, improved communication skills and decision-making competences. The interdisciplinary character of case studies is reflected in the fact that the engagement of students in this kind of ESP teaching activities essentially leads to students' "information literacy" (Angelo and Boehrer 2002), since it requires participants in the ESP learning process to conduct research and evaluate various sources of data. The case study method helps to develop both practical, theoretical and language skills and, hence, contributes to interdisciplinarity by analyzing, synthesising and harmonizing links between disciplines "into a coordinated and coherent whole" (Choi and Pak 2006, 351).

Apart from being an illustration of an interdisciplinary character of teaching ESP at the tertiary level of education, case studies are also an exquisite paradigm of the use of authentic materials in ESP teaching. If we assume that authentic materials are "material normally used in the students' own specialist workplace or study situation" (Robinson 1991, 56), it becomes worthwhile thinking about case studies as a means of exploiting authenticity in ESP classes, in which students are exposed to intrinsically communicative surroundings. Since "authentic texts play an important role in demonstrating 'real' language use" (Basturkmen 2010, 63), it is no wonder that case study activities increase communicative competences of students.

If we want to observe what kind of authenticity case studies belong to, it could be concluded that they assume several positions within the taxonomy of authenticity. Firstly, all case studies show a considerable level of *text authenticity*. Text authenticity implies that authentic material is "produced for purposes other than to teach language" (Nunan 1988, 99), that it is "created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced" (Devitt and Singleton 1988, 27), and that is "originally written for non-classroom audience" (Thornbury 2006, 21). Taking these considerations into account, we may deduce that case studies are actually texts created for business purposes – the purposes other than the linguistic ones. The primary aim of case studies is to provide students of economics, business, medicine, etc. with the actual, real information in contrast with more traditional materials and texts consisting of dialogues, or reading sections related to some business, economic or medical topic.

The second category of authenticity that case studies perfectly fit into is the one of *task authenticity*. Instead of memorizing and practicing linguistic chunks and paying less attention to communicative aspects of a foreign language, case studies enable an active participation of students and the interrelatedness of learning experiences and real-life situations. Case studies prevent students from responding mechanically to a limited number of situations and make them use the language for "more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making" (Breen 1987, 23), which task authenticity is, actually, about. If, according to Nunan (1989), the task is a classroom work in which students are involved in "comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (10), a case study method is an embodiment of task-based activities. Case studies, as illustrations of tasks, prepare students for diverse activities that they might encounter at work, and since they have real-world relevance, they become authentic materials which promote using the language free of all inhibitions.

Moreover, the teaching method of case studies also promotes *learner authenticity*, as it endows students with the attribute of self-determination and commitment to understanding (Van Lier 1996). By active engagement in such a communicative activity, students develop

what is called “authenticity of response” (Morrow 1977), positive feelings and responses towards pedagogical materials and intentions inherent in them (Lee 1995). This leads to students’ genuine interest in a task, particularly because of the fact that the materials they are processing are not exclusively linguistic materials but core-subject-related texts. While solving business cases, students tend to share worries, concerns, suspicions, other psychological states that a native speaker would normally feel in a similar problem-solving situation.

Finally, case studies bring about *classroom authenticity*, for, when students try to make decisions in relation to some problems, the classroom plays a pivotal role acting as a place where authentic texts, tasks and learners converge to create a real-like world within the walls of the classroom. During case study analyses, the classroom becomes a produce of various interactions and that makes it a unique learning environment. It is the imaginative faculty of the students that leads to the creation of an authentic atmosphere. Namely, a genuine learning purpose facilitates the students’ acceptance of the classroom as real (Ellis 1993). The overall teaching and learning situation in which students join together to solve a problematic situation resembles a meaningful business and economic reality and interactions to a great extent.

Before we proceed with the presentation of the attitudes of students in relation to the role of case studies, let us briefly examine the types of case studies that ESP lecturers might use in their classes. This classification might point to possible advantages and disadvantages of using diverse types of case studies, as well as encourage ESP lecturers to use this kind of teaching activity. The classification can be carried out in accordance with a temporal, media or structural perspective (Heath 2004, 5-6).

As far as the temporal aspect of case studies is concerned, they can be classified into *retrospective* and *decision-making* case studies (Heath 2004, 5-6).. The former deal with the past problems, which implies that students are supposed to approach the case study from the past perspective. The solutions to such case studies have already been found. There are two ways of dealing with such a type of a study. The first way is to present the students with the proposed solution and to ask them to analyse it, assess the effects of the decision reached and propose other alternatives. The other way of making use of such case studies is to ask students to provide diverse solutions to the problem presented, without introducing them to the original solution. Once they have come up with an acceptable solution, the teacher presents them with the real decision and asks them to compare it with their decisions. The latter type of case studies provides students with a current problematic situation and students are supposed to offer a solution of their own. In such cases no real solution has been found yet, which certainly instigates students to actively participate in discussions and show their energy, competitive character and spirit.

When it comes to the classification of case studies on the basis of the type of media, there is a distinction between *paper-based* and *internet-based* case studies (Heath 2004, 5-6).. Students are more willing to do online research for several reasons. The structure of internet-based case studies is more visibly organized and easier to access. The text is usually supported by a great number of visual and audio presentations, which facilitates studying the research materials and makes learning fun and more attractive. In addition to this, students decide where and when they want to analyse the research material, which facilitates the whole study process. At the same time, they feel less discouraged to process all the data since they do not see all the material at once. On the other hand, paper-based case studies, although they might seem threatening, may be used as a valuable study

resource if teachers want to train students to work under pressure and skim and scan the text in search of important pieces of information. This activity, in fact, resembles a real-life situation in which employees are required to cope with a great amount of material within a limited period of time. Generally speaking, both types of case studies help students overcome various difficulties which arise during the study process. They learn to improve their listening, reading and communication skills. The final outcome of both varieties of case studies is the enhancement of spoken interaction and production, as the students have to give their oral presentations of the solutions to the problems presented in class. They also learn to comment on other solutions and to refine their personal business skills, such as making compromises, negotiating, etc.

Finally, the third mode of classifying case studies is in accordance with their structure. In that sense, they can be divided into *open case studies* and *closed case studies* (Heath 2004, 5-6). The former type of case studies implies that students are presented with a limited amount of information and are, therefore, expected to search for the additional background information either on the Internet or in the library (Casey/Fischer 2005). The solutions that various groups of students put forward will vary significantly from group to group due to the fact that each group has used different sources. The latter type of case studies implies that students are provided with all the information they need and the proposed solutions are not expected to differ considerably since all the groups had an access to the same source of information.

As for the types of case studies used in classes of ESP at the Faculty of Economics, University of Niš, the most common variety of this authentic material is the retrospective, paper-based, closed case study. However, this does not mean that other types of case studies are not exploited in ESP classes. Yet, the limited number of semester classes (30 classes per semester) substantially restricts the teacher to the well-organised, time-limited in-class activities. In that respect, the results of the research which will be presented in the following section of the paper will primarily refer to the most commonly exploited type of case studies in classes of the target group students.

3. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

One of the aims of this paper, besides introducing the readers to the theoretical overviews of case studies, is to examine the attitudes of students at the tertiary level of education towards the use of the case study analysis method and get an insight into teaching and learning effectiveness of such an approach to ESP teaching and learning. Quantitative data were obtained from 200 students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Niš. 75 interviewees were students of the second year of studies, while the remaining 125 were the students of the third year of studies. Language courses are obligatory in both the winter and summer semester of the second and third year of education. The data about the students' perspectives on the use of case studies in ESP classes were collected through a nineteen-item questionnaire. All the items in the questionnaire were designed using a simplified three-interval Likert scale of "agree", "neutral" and "disagree". The questions have been divided into two groups. The first set of questions refers to the attitudes of students in relation to their personal feelings regarding case studies and the extent to which case studies help them develop their professional skills. On the other hand, the second group of questions refers to the students'

attitudes towards the linguistic competences bred by case study analyses. The students completed the questionnaire at the end of the winter semester.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using percentages and are presented in tables and figures.

3.1. Results – students' attitudes towards the role of case studies in English for Business and Economics

The students' personal and professional attitudes towards the use of case studies in EDP classes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Students' attitudes towards personal feelings and professional skills related to case studies

Personal and professional attitudes	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Increases self-confidence	72.7%	8.7%	18.6%
Represents a process of life-long learning	85.4%	7.3%	7.3%
Improves managerial skills	93.3%	0.9%	5.8%
Improves negotiation skills	91.8%	3.7%	4.5%
Improves project coordination	77.9%	6.4%	15.7%
Improves problem-solving abilities	93.1%	4.7%	2.2%
Improves developing ideas	94.5%	3.6%	1.9%
Interesting	82.5%	5.6%	11.9%
Threatening	32.1%	14.4%	46.5%
Induces stage-fright	29.7%	18.2%	52.1%
Exhausting	19.9%	10.8%	69.3%

The results obtained from the survey and presented in the Table 1 indicate that students have positive attitudes towards the use of case study analyses in ESP classes. Namely, almost about three quarters of the respondents (72.7%) claim that case studies increase self-confidence, while 85.4% of the respondents replied that case studies significantly contribute to the process of life-long learning. As far as professional skills are concerned, the majority of the students agreed that this approach of language teaching drastically improves their business skills. To be more precise, 93.3% of the interviewees replied that case studies improve their managerial skills, while 91.8% of the students believe that this approach improves negotiation skills. This teaching method also improves project coordination (77.9%), as well as problem-solving abilities (93.1%) and developing new ideas (94.5%). As for the students' view on other personal aspects related to case studies, most students (82.5%) find this approach rather interesting. However, the results indicate that there are students who feel discouraged by such a teaching methodology. Therefore, 32.1% of the respondents find this method threatening, while 29.7% of the students believe that case studies induce stage-fright. Finally, a minority of the interviewees (19.9%) find this method exhausting.

On the other hand, the Table 2 gives an overview of the students' attitudes in relation to linguistic competences that case studies foster.

Table 2 Students' attitudes towards linguistic competences developed by case studies

Linguistic attitudes	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Improves presentation skills	96.2%	2.9%	0.6%
Improves professional vocabulary	92.2%	5.0%	2.8%
Improves reading skills	78.4%	4.5%	17.1%
Improves speaking skills	83.6%	2.2%	14.2%
Improves grammar	63.4%	3.6%	33.0%
Improves writing skills	52.7%	11.0%	36.3%
Improves listening skills	58.6%	5.9%	35.5%
Improves pronunciation	42.9%	7.7%	49.4%

When it comes to the students' attitudes with regard to the linguistic competences which case study activities instigate, it is undeniable that such a teaching method enhances all linguistic skills – it improves presentation skills (96.2%), professional vocabulary (92.2%), reading skills (78.4%) and speaking skills (83.6%). It also affects the remaining linguistic skills but, according to the respondents, to a slightly lower degree. Therefore, more than a half of respondents (52.7%) believe it improves writing skills, grammar skills (63.4%) and listening skills (58.6%). Yet, less than a half of the interviewed students (42.9%) replied that case studies improve pronunciation.

Generally speaking, judging from the presented results, it turns out that case study activities positively affect the learning process, contributing to the development of both linguistic and non-linguistic competences.

4. DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the questionnaire point to the fact that case studies as an ESP teaching and learning method have numerous benefits. First of all, the presented results indicate that case studies help students develop their professional skills in accord with job requirements. Namely, one of the major tasks in case studies is to analyze the given data, both in the form of text or diagrammatic presentations, as well as to present and discuss the graphs, charts, tables and other quantitative data. By accomplishing this task, students become equipped with both analytical and problem-solving skills. Since there is always a group leader accountable for managing all the activities within the assigned group, case studies are of particular importance for improving managerial skills and project coordination skills, and that statement is supported by the previously presented results of the questionnaire. This teaching method is an outstanding source of providing a systematic approach to looking at events. Students are expected to collect information, analyse data and report the results. All these tasks require critical thinking, for not all the information provided is equally important. Case studies require pondering upon the supplied text, contemplating about possible solutions and putting forward only those plausible and technically feasible business solutions. By doing this, not only do students grow as future businessmen with subtle business skills and dexterities but they also develop as people with a sound logic. As all these activities assume constant alertness and education, case studies can be said to induce life-long learning and investment in one's own education.

In addition to this, the presented results point to the fact that case studies foster negotiating and chairing skills. Given that all the students within the designated group are supposed to reach a single solution, negotiation skills become an indispensable prerequisite for completing such a task. While doing case studies students participate not only in a linguistic in-class activity but also in the components of a business culture and business ethics. Thus, they practice intercultural competences (M. Byram 1997). They learn how to behave within various ethnic contexts, paying special attention to the intricacies of a specific culture within which they are analyzing case studies.

Furthermore, taking part in diverse business-like activities boosts self-confidence of all students, since they are encouraged to express their opinions, give their suggestions and ideas in relation to a particular topic. They usually find these activities less stressful, as they inspire creativity under conditions free of strict rules. The very learning atmosphere is relatively relaxed and friendly. The core part of the class focuses on students and lets them guide the learning process in contrast to a traditional classroom, where the focal point is upon the teacher, i.e. the language instructor. That is the reason why more than three-thirds of the respondents replied that case studies are an interesting and motivating teaching method.

However, as we can see from the Table 1, some students find these activities boring and unexciting (11.9% of the respondents), as well as exhausting (19.9% of the interviewees). It seems that the reason for this lies at the fact that those students are unwilling to pay attention to the material being studied. They are generally uninterested in the study material. A solution to this situation is rather simple and it requires an ESP teacher to devise and select case studies that are based on students' interest. Only under such circumstances will the students be willing and prepared to engage in the study process. Moreover, there might be some students who are accustomed to the traditional setting and who do not work efficiently enough because they are not accustomed to such a learning environment, which they find boring and tiring. In order to prevent such situations, it is necessary that the teacher should convey both the coursework and exam assessment on the case study content.

Other negative aspects of case studies, from the point of view of the students, are that they might be threatening (32.1% of the students) and stage-fright-inducing (29.7%). Teachers should not consider these statements weird and awkward because some students show a significant degree of lack of self-confidence and self-assurance. As the greatest part of case study tasks is conducted orally, some students, who are generally afraid of speaking publicly, might find such activities unpleasant. If we assume that stage-fright is an ordinary feeling even in the mother tongue, we should not blame those students who grow the same feelings in the foreign language. Instead, we should encourage and support them even if they make grave mistakes. For, the final aim of these activities is to make students communicate successfully in the foreign language and not to point to every single mistake that an ESP student makes.

The students tend to find case study activities threatening and hard to cope with owing to their lack of trust in their Business and Economic English skills. They firmly believe that their knowledge of ESP is poor, which is often ungrounded. It is, hence, upon the teacher to familiarize the students with the main elements of the case study before the very beginning of the task. If the students have been encountered with the necessary vocabulary, grammar and presentation skills, it will not be difficult for them to complete the task with ease.

When it comes to linguistics, there are numerous advantages of the case study analysis method, also. From the presented results it could be induced that this teaching and learning activity encourages practicing all language macro-skills: reading, speaking, listening and writing (Council of Europe 2001; Richards and Schmidt 2002). By actively participating in case studies, students become immersed in the productive language skills in a very intensive way. The obtained results point to the fact that case studies actively promote the improvement of presentation, reading and speaking skills. Students are required to read a great amount of text on a given topic, which actually brings about an increase in the reading competence. An insistence on presenting the proposed solutions in front of the whole group and class encourages the incorporation and development of the communicative competence (Burgess and Head 2005). At the same time, professional vocabulary is enriched and put into the practical context, which gives meaning to the whole learning process. Thus, it is no wonder that "case studies follow the principles of task-oriented and problem-based teaching and learning. They have proven to be an excellent means in particular to improve oral language competence" (Fischer 2005, 5). It is a constant insistence upon interaction and discussion among students that enables this teaching method gain more importance in communication in comparison to other linguistic aspects.

Although other linguistic skills are also improved by case studies, it is worth observing that the students purport that grammar, writing, listening and pronunciation skills are improved to a lesser extent in comparison to communication skills. The informal conversation with the interviewed students carried out after the results of the research have been collected reveals that students do not pay so much attention to grammar and pronunciation when presenting their solutions, as the ESP teacher circulates the classroom and listens only to some parts of the oral presentation of some of the members of the group. This, however, does not mean that improving grammar and pronunciation to a greater degree is not possible with this method. On the contrary, if the students within each group are assigned the task to listen to their interlocutors and make notes of the grammatical and pronunciation mistakes their peers make, and point to the mistakes after the activity is completed, these skills might also be improved. It is also upon the teacher to circulate through the classroom and notice the errors typically made by students.

Also worth noting is that only about a half of the respondents believe that case studies enhance listening and writing skills. As far as the listening skills are concerned, the reason why the students feel sceptical about the improvement of this dexterity lies at the fact that, as it has already been stated, most case studies at the Faculty of Economics in Niš are paper-based case studies. In that sense, students do not have so many opportunities to practice their listening skills. The only mode of improving this competence is by means of listening to the teacher setting the background information for the case study analysed. As for the writing skill, students are asked to write a report on the proposed solution after each case study analysis class. However, as there are not so many instances on which students can do this case study analysis, due to the limited number of classes, the students cannot frequently practice their writing skills. Even though they are given feedback on the writing assignments, they still hold that their writing abilities need some improvement and amendment.

Nonetheless, it seems logical to deduce that case studies in ESP classes contribute to the enhancement of collaborative learning and team-working skills. Students are made to work together and act as a single body. Although rivalries within each group are possible, the task of the ESP lecturer is to set specific targets and identify the role of each individual in the

assigned group. By doing this, the students will be encouraged to work both individually and as a team, since they will know what their roles are. It is also essential that students should be assessed on the basis of individual merit and contribution to the group work. Such a setting will bring about a successful realization of the case study analysis class.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conducted research on the role of the case study analysis method has shown that there are numerous advantages of this kind of a teaching and learning activity. The aforementioned and analysed results have pointed to one significant aspect of ESP learning and it is that “learning a language [...] essentially means learning how to deal with contextualized, interactionally oriented discourse activities” (Mondada and Doehler 2004, 508). Case studies, therefore, support the cognitive and social development of individuals, by stimulating processes such as “structuring participation frameworks, configuring discourse tasks, interactionally defining identities” and making students become “competent members of the community in which they participate” (508).

Case studies are considered to be very functional teaching material as they comprise cases and contents that are authentic, while the authenticity of the teaching material provides ESP learners with the opportunities which lead them to the acquisition of linguistic, business and managerial skills essential for carrying out tasks outside the classroom. In that sense, the benefits of the case study analysis methodology encompass the authenticity of the selected information, the attraction of situations presented to students by means of cases, the freedom of interpretation and the readability of the material (Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis 1976). At the same time, students develop a disposition towards critical thinking, which represents a necessary tool for solving problems and a decision-making process (Simpson and Courtney 2002). The case study method encourages students to be actively involved in learning activities and to use both their linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge to solve serious business problems, and analyse and organize the presented information in order to make decisions. Thus, they become reflective, open-minded and creative in finding the best method of solving problems (Tiwari et al. 2006). Active engagement in such a learning activity brings about bridging the gap between the theoretical and practical knowledge. No more are students required to learn strings of words and grammatical units by heart, but are now supposed to apply theoretical knowledge to practical examples of solving business cases. Students also use their core-subject knowledge to put forward the best solutions. By doing this, they are actively improving all four language skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) and using multiple linguistic registers. Moreover, the case study method creates a real-like, authentic learning and teaching environment, where the classroom gains its own reality and naturalness, while students involved in solving numerous cases also create their own authenticity (Taylor 1994, 5). This authenticity also leads to the enhancement of the teacher-student dynamics, which is probably one of the vital characteristics of case studies. Case studies also make in-class improvisation possible – teachers implement a lot of freedom in the curriculum in accordance with the students’ needs instead of exclusively relying on inflexible teaching materials with exhausting instructions and puzzling exercises.

Yet, there are some drawbacks, or, to use a subtler phrase, potential negative aspects of case studies, as observed from the teachers’ point of view. However, these problems

might be easily overcome by careful planning and active interdisciplinary collaboration. Firstly, most ESP teachers are commonly afraid to use the case study method lest ESP classes be overwhelmed by the business content, which might lead to the misconception that the emphasis is put on business and not linguistic acquisition. This fear is actually ungrounded, as the ESP teacher should be familiar with various business areas, even though he/she is not a subject specialist. The best solution to this problem lies at interdisciplinary collaboration. ESP teachers are invited to collaborate with other core-subject teachers who might also help both the ESP teacher and ESP learners by offering them some pre-teaching on the case study topic.

Another negative aspect, which is closely related to the previous one, is that case studies are considered to be time- and energy-consuming at the pre-teaching stage. Even though using a case study method is not an easy task, ESP practitioners should be aware of the fact that it represents a crucial factor in the development of linguistically equipped students capable of acting professionally in the given context. That is the reason why teacher should not neglect this kind of the teaching activity. The key to the successful realization of such a task lies at interdisciplinary collaboration, again. If the core-subject teachers take upon themselves an obligation to do some pre-teaching on the case study topic, less time will be wasted in ESP classes. ESP lecturers might also consider inviting external lecturers from the industry to contribute to the clarification of the case studies being analysed. Thus, new dimensions can be added to the learning activity which can lead to an enhanced teaching act (Nadrag and Buzarna - Tihenea 2013: 134 -139).

Thirdly, ESP teachers are constantly exposed to the constant fear that students will not use complex linguistic patterns and that the language instructor might not correct the mistakes. There is a solution this problem, too. As it has already been suggested in the paper, the teacher is expected to circulate the classroom and watch for the mistakes that students make, and make use of the mistakes he/she noted. Namely, ESP teachers are considered to be material designers. In that sense, they are supposed to make exercises drawn from the students' mistakes in the course of the case analysis task.

Moreover, teachers are also uncertain about as to how to assess both the content of the case study and the language used, which is closely related to the previous consideration. Students should be introduced to the purpose of case study activities – the idea is that they do not serve to fill up the space in the curriculum, but they have a two-fold purpose: to practice both the linguistic and non-linguistic skills. Hence, teachers are supposed to create various testing materials in the form of questionnaires, interviews, discussions, grammar and vocabulary tests based on the afore-mentioned exercises. If they are not sure whether the business content is adequately handled by the students, the ESP practitioners may also invite independent evaluators and core-subject professors, who might give their opinion on the correctness and fairness of the business content. Thus, all ambiguities will be avoided.

To conclude, the case study is a valuable teaching method in ESP classes and, as such, it induces the development of both linguistic and non-linguistic competences. It is a brilliant way of stimulating students' motivation, as it arouses curiosity and interest in the study content. Students are encouraged to further explore the subject, which intensifies the learning process. Nevertheless, ESP teachers should carefully consider the case study material as they have to make sure that the level of the case study corresponds to the linguistic level of the ESP students. Otherwise, students will become stressed, frustrated, bored or discouraged.

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