ENHANCING ESP COMMUNICATION SKILLS: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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Abstract. This study is dedicated to the English for Special Purposes (ESP) course for students in electrical and computer engineering. The study involving second-year students at Ajou University in Tashkent seeks to enhance professional communication skills, encompassing the acquisition of technical vocabulary and proficiency in oral presentation. By analyzing real-world situations, such as website usability tests and problem-solving activities, the case study method fosters critical thinking and teamwork. Despite obstacles including limited technical vocabulary and presentation anxiety, survey findings showed significant improvements in students' English ability and engagement levels. The research connects theoretical knowledge with practical application, illustrating the efficacy of case studies in equipping students for actual professional settings.

Keywords: ESP, case study approach, electrical and computer engineering, oral presentation, technical vocabulary, survey, presentation anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

The English for Special Subjects (ESP) course emphasizes English tailored for specific disciplines, wherein subjects are instructed using professional terminology and contexts pertinent to a professional background (Merriam S., 1988). This is a significant element in the transitional phase of Uzbekistan's current market economy. The university's language instruction is career-focused, equipping students in fields such as business, engineering, or medicine with relevant English vocabulary and

phrases, as well as skills in letter writing, presentation creation, and logical reasoning. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) places more emphasis on specialized vocabulary, context-specific communication skills, and real-world applications than conventional English courses do. ESP classes are a useful teaching strategy that links language learning theory to real-world implementation (Staley K., 2020). Case studies increase the importance and involvement of the learning process by exposing students to real-world situations that demand the use of language in context. Students improve their language skills while also gaining the critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills necessary for their future employment through the examination and resolution of problems in a specific professional field. As Vygotsky (1978) advocates, learning occurs exclusively within the zone of proximal development, defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". Instructional approaches, including reciprocal teaching, peer collaboration, cognitive apprenticeships, and problem-based instruction, emphasize collaboration among learners (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

By exposing students to real-world situations that reflect the difficulties they face in their professional jobs, these case studies primarily seek to improve language competency in the field of computer and electrical engineering. Students can develop critical communication skills through this case study, such as successful collaboration in professional settings, bargaining, and solution presenting. The case study method's primary strength lies in its ability to enhance communicative competence by utilizing authentic language, alongside fostering non-linguistic skills in research and collaboration (Moulton & Holmes, 2000).

A common link between theoretical knowledge and real-world application is seen in applied research. In a computer and electrical engineering ESP course, students could look at a case study of a business dealing with a specific problem. Through this

approach, they can learn particular vocabulary and language structures and understand how language is used in a professional context (Belcher, 2009). This pragmatic emphasis enhances the significance of language acquisition. Numerous scientists assert that case studies serve as an effective instrument for promoting student collaboration. Students can engage in speaking, listening, and writing within a professional context, debate various aspects of their roles, and collaborate to devise solutions in group environments. Many pivotal assertions from Yin's case study research (2009) can offer a robust theoretical framework. These assertions underscore the significance, thoroughness, and adaptability of the case study methodology, particularly within the specialized domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). "A case study is an empirical investigation that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the distinctions between the phenomenon and context are not distinctly defined" (Yin, 2009). This is directly relevant to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as the language and skills imparted frequently rely on authentic professional contexts (e.g., medicine, engineering, or business) (Bouck E, 2024).

Paltridge and Starfield (2013) assert that these interactive components assist the development of communication skills essential for future employment. Moreover, case studies facilitate the application of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in students. Students engage with the language by navigating complex, real-world scenarios pertinent to their disciplines or prospective careers, thereby enhancing their analytical and decision-making abilities. This is an optimal method for ESP courses to equip students for professional communication in real-world contexts (Basturkmen, 2006). Case studies provide authentic, contextually rich situations that are relevant to students' academic or professional needs. This contextualization, according to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), ensures that language learning is closely linked to the target domain's specialized discourse. It highlights the communication that students will encounter in their future employment and goes beyond abstract

language exercises. According to Flowerdw (2013), reading specialized literature such as research papers, reports, or business correspondence is sometimes required of students enrolled in ESP courses. Case studies are a useful way to improve reading comprehension through original materials, which are then followed by writing assignments like creating emails or reports.

These tasks replicate the writing encountered in their respective fields, enabling the development of their writing skills within a relevant context. The case study approach frequently encompasses cultural and contextual nuances that illustrate the distinct challenges or conventions of a specific profession or discipline (Stake R. E., 2007). Case studies in an ESP course for computer and electrical engineering may examine negotiation strategies among diverse cultural groups. Through these case studies, students enhance their language proficiency and develop an understanding of intercultural communication, which is essential in a globalized workplace (Hutchinson and Waters,1987). Another benefit emphasized by researchers is the active engagement of students in case studies. Students engage with real-life issues by relating current events or historical contexts to classroom topics, thereby enhancing the content's appeal and motivation (Nunan, 2004). This approach also encourages students to remain informed about the latest developments in their respective subjects, which is especially important in rapidly developing fields such as engineering.

In conclusion, scholars agree that case studies serve as an essential tool in ESP courses for promoting meaningful and contextual language acquisition. Case studies enhance critical thinking, application, and collaborative learning, effectively connecting language acquisition with professional practice, thus serving as an essential component of contemporary ESP pedagogy (Howard D. E., Lothen-Line C., Boekeloo, B. O., 2004).

METHODOLOGY

This case study uses a task-based technique within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to improve professional communication skills in the fields of computer and electrical engineering. The primary objective is to provide students with the chance to refine their language skills in genuine situations that mirror the practical challenges they encounter in their respective fields.

The case study method was applied in courses for second-year computer and electrical engineering students at Ajou University in Tashkent who had intermediate to advanced English skills. The English language curriculum featured topics such as "Inside the Computer," "User Interface," "Images and Graphic Design," "Web Design vs. Web Development," and "Desktop Publishing". Case studies on these topics were provided, allowing students to explore real-life circumstances and consider the key components of decision-making and problem-solving (Hartono H, Mujiyanto J, Fitriati SW, Sakhiyya Z, Lotfie M., Maharani M.2023).

When conducting the case study, it is essential that it aligns with the objectives of the ESP course as outlined in the university curriculum and fulfills the competencies and knowledge that students are expected to attain. The primary objective of the research is to enhance students' capacity to analyze electrical and computer engineering issues in English, refine professional presentation skills through report preparation, and cultivate oral communication abilities via the professional presentation of case study solutions.

Students' oral and written presentations were assessed to determine the implementation of these objectives during the lesson. Furthermore, students' engagement in group discussions was monitored and documented. Following the research, feedback was obtained from the survey. The case method was employed in the course for four months, utilizing pedagogical techniques such as collaborative work, role-playing, debates, and presentations to enhance case studies. The initial

phase entailed the examination and analysis of case study materials, succeeded by the group. During the second round of discussions and brainstorming sessions, students articulated their solutions to the class and obtained feedback from both their peers and the instructor. Authentic websites were utilized to furnish students with a context that mirrored the language in a professional setting. For instance, in the subject of "User Interface," students analyze an effective website (currently Amazon.com) alongside a less user-friendly site (healthcare.com), and through discussions, they discern the characteristics of an exemplary website created presentations to demonstrate. This subsequently offered students instances of language and discourse utilized in professional contexts, allowing them to interact with particular terms and terminology. Both summative and formative methods were employed to evaluate students' knowledge. Formative assessment occurred during group discussions and presentations. The final project for the summative assessment was assessed via an oral presentation.

Upon completion of this case study, students are anticipated to exhibit enhanced oral language proficiency, particularly within the realm of electrical and computer engineering. Moreover, they enhance their capacity for critical thinking, collaboration with peers, and resolution of intricate professional challenges. These outcomes assist students in navigating the challenges of their selected profession and facilitate effective communication within the workplace.

FINDINGS

The 2nd year students of Ajou University in Tashkent took part in the English course for special electrical engineering and computer engineers. In this course, the case study approach was widely used, and students' opinions about this approach were studied by conducting a survey through Google Form.

According to the questionnaire, the use of the case approach led to an increase in students' interest in the lesson, their involvement and better mastery of the topics.

Over 85% of students acknowledged that this method enhanced their English language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking).

They also felt that their engineering vocabulary, technical writing, oral presentation, and critical thinking skills were more developed by analyzing case studies.

When asked what they liked most about teaching with a case study approach, most students answered that the teaching method and topics are related to real life.

Student 1: The case studies were very practical and helped me to understand real life scenarios related to the subject of this course.

Student 2: I thought that by relating theoretical ideas to real-world situations, case-based learning made the subjects engaging.

Student 3: I enjoy how case studies lead to real-life situations.

Question 6 of the survey questioned about the problems they found while learning through case approaches, and several students confessed that case studies were more challenging due to a lack of electrical and computer engineering terminology. Furthermore, some students claimed to being embarrassed to present their study analysis in front of the public, as well as humiliated by their lack of English proficiency. Regardless of these limitations, approximately 95 percent of students reported that this technique improved their understanding of the subjects and increased their participation in the courses, expressing satisfaction with the case study approach's application in the ESP course.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support the use of a case study methodology in English for Special Purposes (ESP) courses tailored for students in computer and electrical engineering. This method lays the groundwork for a thorough analysis of the language while also facilitating its practical use, allowing students to develop both linguistic and professional skills through contextual real-world examples. This

approach encompasses several essential components that necessitate further exploration and discussion. Case studies offer learners real-world situations that demonstrate the obstacles they might face in their future professions. By engaging in activities like delivering presentations, proposing solutions, and collaborating within a professional setting, students develop practical skills that are closely aligned with their fields of study. The results demonstrate a significant improvement in students' technical vocabulary, critical thinking skills, and oral communication abilities. These skills are essential for tackling real-world engineering problems and participating effectively in the professional environment (Ibrahim Mohamed O, Al Jadaan D.,2024). Furthermore, case studies conducted in a structured setting allow students to engage in professional dialogue and improve their language skills. Analyzing the usability of websites like Amazon.com and Healthcare.com in the User Interface module will enable students to communicate technical terms with confidence. This approach not only deepens their comprehension of subject-specific content but also facilitates opportunities for the professional application of English.

One significant advantage of case studies is their ability to link lesson subjects to practical examples. The students' feedback from the questionnaire indicates the significance and applicability of the employed research methodology. A multitude of students valued the contribution of this approach in linking theoretical concepts with more engaging and practical content. Students realized that by examining real-world examples, such as the comparison of effective and ineffective website designs, the subjects were more engaging, stimulating active engagement in class discussions and group activities. The connection to real-world circumstances encourages students to stay current on advancements in their fields.

The incorporation of authentic materials and scenarios guaranteed that students honed language skills pertinent to the swiftly changing requirements of the engineering profession. Adapting to this professional reality is crucial for sustaining students' engagement and fostering a sense of purpose in their academic pursuits.

Case studies facilitate collaboration and intercultural communication. This skill set is progressively esteemed in the modern engineering environment. A. Khudaykulov and A. Doniyorov (2018) emphasize the importance of cultural understanding in promoting effective communication in their research on teaching intercultural communication in Uzbekistan. Their research suggests that grammar, vocabulary, and phonology hold less importance in international communication, and effective engagement can be achieved by comprehending and honoring each other's cultures.

Group discussions, debates, and collaborative problem-solving afforded students the opportunity to enhance their speaking and listening abilities in a professional setting. These sessions facilitated their understanding of cultural nuances and the development of strategies for effective communication within diverse communities.

The study revealed that certain students encountered difficulties in group settings owing to insufficient technical vocabulary or a lack of confidence in their linguistic abilities. Addressing these challenges through additional vocabulary enhancement activities or peer support systems may improve the effectiveness of this strategy.

R. Ergashev (2024) asserts that improving the structural vocabulary of Uzbek master's students can enhance their language proficiency, thereby increasing their group interaction skills and boosting their confidence.

The present matter highlights the importance of gradually implementing tasks, starting with small, low-risk actions before moving on to more complex presentations. Facilitating peer feedback and cultivating a supportive classroom environment can reduce anxiety and improve student confidence.

Future research may investigate the impact of case-based ESP instruction on students' professional success. Furthermore, investigating the relevance of this approach in other technical fields or modifying it for online learning environments may yield significant insights for educators globally. The case study approach demonstrated significant efficacy in enhancing the professional communication skills of students in computer and electrical engineering. This method combines language

instruction with practical, real-world resources, guaranteeing that students are sufficiently prepared to meet the demands of future employment in a globalized and interdisciplinary work environment.

CONCLUSION

The integration of case studies in ESP courses functions as a highly successful educational tool, especially for students in computer and electrical engineering. The use of case studies promotes the synthesis of theoretical knowledge with practical application, enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional communication skills. These are crucial skills for pupils to thrive in future careers. The research conducted at Ajou University in Tashkent reveals that interaction with real-life circumstances during lectures efficiently inspires students, enriches their technical vocabulary, and boosts their oral presenting skills.

Notwithstanding initial obstacles, including students' restricted technical lexicon and apprehension regarding collaborative work, favorable feedback indicates that they perceive the method as pragmatic and inspiring. Moreover, a task-based methodology has demonstrated the ability to enhance collaboration and cross-cultural communication that aligns with the evolving demands of the engineering sector.

To tackle the expected challenges, it is crucial to create a structured vocabulary and cultivate a supportive classroom environment that encourages student feedback. The broad implementation of this approach in various ESP domains will enable students to succeed in their professional environments.

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