
Introducing Case Study in Classrooms :
A holistic approach to Language teaching

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Abstract: There have been ongoing researches in creating innovative methods of teaching language to second language learners, with an eye on the ever-changing needs of the learners and the scientific systematization of knowledge. Educational researches have in recent times laid much importance on case study as a heuristic language teaching methodology that encourages language learners to discover their fundamental slip-ups in their target language, and to learn to solve them for themselves. This study, much though it realizes the fact that case study is rarely being used by language teachers in classrooms, argues nevertheless, that it provides important insights into the complexity and effectiveness of language classrooms, and the work of language teachers. The researchers' investigation into the effectiveness of language teaching through cases will lead to evolving a methodology of case study, and to demonstrate some of the understandings reached by this type of inquiry. This paper considers and assesses the different types of case studies available to language learners and teachers and elaborates a methodology on how the case-based approach can be exploited to maximise language learning in the classroom. There are a number of ways to develop case studies to teach language skills. But not all of them are equally successful for all learners. Their success and efficacy varies in keeping with the skills, and the levels of learners. This paper also discusses how case studies can be developed to suit the learner's interest and encourages task-oriented teaching methods and problem-based learning where the students are confronted with an authentic problem they have to solve by analyzing material in the target language. In this study, we have contended that case study, are one way to capture the rich contexts of language classrooms, and to provide valuable insights into language pedagogy and programs.

Keywords: case study, pedagogy, empirical, experiential, palpable methodology, communicability, particularistic, descriptive, heuristic.

Introduction

Case study is an innovative teaching methodology that can be used to teach various disciplines, be it science, technology, or language for the simple reason that it employs a wealth of practical real life models and paradigm that can be used to contextualize and articulate theoretical concepts. This is possible because the examples, activities, and teaching structures used in this methodology are very rich in content and reinforce the knowledge that is already gained. In addition to this, teaching through case-studies incorporates a host of social, personal, and true-life pedagogical material which can be utilized for effective language learning.

It is a teaching approach that consists in presenting the students with a case, putting them in the role of a decision maker facing a problem (Hammond 1976). In a case method classroom, both the instructor and the student must be active in different ways. Each is dependent on the other to bring about teaching and learning. Instructors are generally experts, but they rarely deliver their expertise directly.

It has been regularly observed that second language teaching fails to achieve its targeted goal in a real classroom situation. Researches on traditional language teaching methodologies have shown that this failure is largely due to the fact that in a conditioned classroom atmosphere, textbooks often carry stereotyped teaching

contents with which students are rarely familiar, and the language is often too formal to attract any attention or create any sort of enthusiasm necessary for language learning (Nunan, 1992). Language teaching in today's age of technology and globalization needs to be a great deal correlational, acquainting learners with out-of-classroom situations, and subject-oriented. Emphasis should be laid less on the literature of the language and more on the subjects of interests and utility that learners today need to talk about, write, and discuss so as to become informed language learners. The subjects that the case-study approach takes up for language learning, carry instruction materials that are problem based and task-oriented, which adds purpose to language learning, and integrates language with situations and recent events from real life. In this way teaching with cases improve accuracy in language learning and make a positive impact on learners', creating a sort of enthusiasm in them. In this kind of language teaching approach, students face authentic language problems through different cases presented to them, and they are encouraged to solve them with the stock of linguistic knowledge they are inculcated with.

The case study approach is primarily a task oriented approach, where the language instructors supervise and set the tasks the learners have to perform. The focus here is on solving a problem set forward by the language instructor, and learners are required to provide the solution. They are expected to use their knowledge

gained from their earlier language experiences to start up with a strategy to solve the language problem presented to them with cases. Their theoretical knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structures is contextualized and presented as real life cases, where language problems are inserted to encourage them to employ their language experiences to solve them. The familiarity of the language learners with the issues presented through cases enhances their interest and motivates them to demonstrate their theoretical concepts and participate in the active learning strategy (Grant, 1997).

Language teaching carried out by the case study methodology also helps language learners develop their communicative and collaborative skills in the process of solving language problems presented as cases. In this kind of language teaching approach students feel that they are confronted with not an imaginative, author-created, and culturally and linguistically unfamiliar language lesson, but the stuff that they are aware of, and that they are asked to solve not a non-existent problem but something that they face in real life situations. So, they find that they can apply in their everyday life what the case-based language problems they are going to solve (Mustoe and Croft, 1999).

This research paper is concerned with a systematic and scientific appraisal of the case study based approach for the

acquisition of language skills. Effort will be made in the following pages to discuss through a careful and comprehensive literature review as a dynamic document of the researches and studies undertaken by the exponents and expounders of the case study approach. Before embarking on a full-scale discussion on the research topic, it is imperative to know what has already been written on the subject and the ground it covers. This would help us further on in the study, to identify problems, to answer specific questions to provide rationale to the fulcrum round which the present study moves, and to respond to challenges presented by our research. It would help us in the setting of priorities and targets for undertaking case study as a viable and hands-on language teaching methodology. Relating to the previous studies on the case study methodology would help us detect conflicting points, and may reveal its strengths and weaknesses which will be discoursed in the conclusion.

The Discussion section includes and states the major crux of the study, explains the importance and relevance of the findings presented in the literature review, makes suggestions for future research, states our interpretations and opinions, and explains the implications of our findings. It also answers the questions posed in the literature review section, and discusses the important and directly relevant issues related to the case study methodology and how best it can be incorporated into a successful language teaching

programme. Care has been taken to provide a commentary and not a reiteration of the findings obtained through reviews of researches conducted by experts on the subject. No issues are included that tend to obscure the message. No paper is perfect; the key is to help the reader determine what can be positively learned and what is more speculative. The Discussion is organized from the specific to the general: our findings to the literature, to theory, to practice. The hypothesis developed in the Introduction section, and supported by extensive references in the Literature Review, is examined in the Discussion, answering the questions that are posed in the Introduction. In the pages that follow, it has been demonstrated how the expectations built up in the Discussion are acceptable, and how they are consistent with previously published knowledge on the topic.

In language case studies learners are provided with authentic situations where they have to answer or solve language problems independently where there is no single solution but a freedom to express opinions which are tested according to the situation presented. Case studies are improvised and devised by language instructors and the topics they introduce are specific and real. Language case studies can be used in order to train learners in all language skills, be they reading, writing, group work, presentation skills, competence in speaking, and in learning vocabulary.

In the face of current expansion in world trade, travel, tourism, and cultural and economic cooperation among nations, there is an increasing need to attain a sort of competence in the global language which has become the current lingua franca of the international community. The traditional approach to language teaching was based largely on the employment of cultural specific topics or literary components as instructional tools, but today, with growing needs of a global society, where collaboration and interaction have become the law of existence, it is imperative to lay stress on the communicative aspect of language in real-life situations. It is this need that has forced to include true-to-life subjects or cases for language teaching, integrating thereby subject-specific aspects into language teaching. This has been found to be a very successful language teaching methodology. The cases are authentic tasks with syntactic, semantic, morphological, or phonological, and the students are asked to solve them by analysing material in the target language. In such a language teaching approach learners are confronted with situations they face in their everyday life, which motivates them positively to integrate their language learning with their life. Let us now interpret and analyse the observations of those researchers and language experts who have laid down the importance of case study as the most trustworthy and workable methodology of English language teaching today.

Literature Review

Empirical researches and intensive studies on the methodology of teaching language through cases have been immense. This approach is not as recent as it appears to be, and has been used as a teaching methodology at the Harvard Business School since its founding in 1908 (Corey 1998) and at the Richard Ivey School of Business since 1921. It has also been used in teaching of Material Science and Engineering as it has been considered an ideal teaching method because of its reliance on practical real-life subject matter. But ground-breaking researches in language teaching through the 1990s have realized the efficacy of this methodology for language teaching too. And since then exponents of this approach have written tomes that explore the need for a more authentic and motivating method of language teaching, and they have found the case study approach as a viable tool for teaching language skills.

David and Wilcock (2005) in their paper presented to the Higher Education Academy, UK, have set forth their finding that case studies are, by their nature, multidisciplinary, and they allow the application of theoretical concepts into language learning, bridging, as a result the gap between theory and practice. They believe that it can inculcate in students critical thinking, and help them in acquiring communication, and interpersonal skills.

In another study on Case method, Angelo & Boehrer (2002) say that it is an action oriented approach where students work through real-life, problems where the course material encourage learners to research and evaluate multiple sources of data, “fostering information literacy” (2002). This definition implies that Case method is also helps in developing practical language skills and it makes learners competent in written and oral communication, in addition to coordination and collaboration (Daly, 2002).

In a classroom oriented research on the efficacy of case studies as a potent language teaching tool, it was observed that this approach carries the distinct practical possibility of incorporating relevant instructional material which is appropriate to the personal, and social existence of the learner, and which cannot easily be obtained by other methods. The research also ascertained that apart from being used in the sphere of individual language acquisition, case studies have often been found relevant and successful in a classroom, encouraging participatory learning (Johnson, 1993).

Context for language teaching and learning is crucial to case study. Experiential, empirical ... case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources. (Merriam, 1988, p. 16)

Defining the role of case studies Johann Fischer says, “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.” (2005, p.5) Though commonly used in teaching of all language skills, case studies gain more importance in communication because of the insistence on the interactive and discursive style of teaching under this approach.

Although it became popular in the 1990s, the importance of the case study approach in language teaching was realized much earlier by Uber Grosse. He analyses the advantages of the approach in the following lines:

“As a method for teaching English, case studies combine many of the latest techniques currently advocated by researchers and practitioners in the profession. They teach language through content, rather than through grammatical or lexical exercises. . . . Case studies are typically authentic materials which present the students with actual . . . problems to analyze and solve, in contrast with more traditional materials that consist of dialogues or reading selections . . . They constitute an integrated skill develops reading, oral, and aural skills. Of necessity the class is learner-centered rather than teacher-centered, as students assume some of the responsibility for the direction of class discussion and for their own

learning. Instructional techniques used to present case study materials include student-directed, small group discussions, role plays, and simulations rather than lectures or structured drills. Learning activities center on problem-solving and situational analysis instead of question-answer or close-ended exercises, and tend to develop critical reasoning skills. The combination of these characteristics distinguishes the case study approach from any single method of teaching English as a second language.” (Uber Grosse, 1988: 131-132)

Uber Grosse considers case study as a rounded approach to language learning which combines all updated language teaching methodologies. Instead of breaking skills into learning zones like grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, etc. it incorporates a 'bounded system,' (Richert, 1991) underlining the unity and wholeness of the cases presented for problem solving, combining skimming, scanning, and oral and aural training. The texts and context in case method, according to Uber Grosse, are collected through multiple sources which are factual and empirical, and therefore they allow learners a wealth of real-life situations where they are offered to explore and simulate the problems and tasks set before them, according to their knowledge and language experiences.

According to Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976) there benefits of teaching language through case studies include the

authenticity of the data, the attraction of the situations presented as cases, the freedom of interpretation, and the readability of the material. One another factor that these exponents of case studies stress upon is the independence of the readers bring into play their own awareness and knowledge of language in order to solve problems and tasks set before them.

Castler and Palmer distinguish between two different forms of teaching methodologies with regard to interactive case studies. The one provides learners with cases that are directed at improving their communicative skills, and train them in problem-solving and decision making. The other kind of approach related to teaching with cases is to encourage learners to respond to untargeted cases, with complex and diverse content, allowing teachers thereby to employ their eclectic classroom strategies according to the language needs of the learners in the classroom. (1989)

Case studies are handy and functional for the reason that they embody cases and contents that are original and not imagined, informative and not ambiguous or far-fetched, and which the learners can readily evaluate, understand and work on. This as a result reinforces them to work freely to solve the language problems introduced there. As for the teachers, case studies provides them with a lot freedom to implement and improvise their teaching style and curriculum according to the learners' needs rather than relying on esoteric and inflexible materials that provide instructions and exercises that are abstruse, and fail to present situations and settings

that are relevant to the learners. Cast-iron courses with pre-determined courses and contents oftentimes work contrary to the expectations. They block the process of dynamism needed for language learning, and oftentimes fail to motivate the enthused learners.

Stenhouse (1981) suggests that whether cases are problem-solving or task-oriented, or a combination of both, must be selected, on the strength of meticulous observation and data collection. He stresses on the close observation of the cases in relation to the learners' needs. Stenhouse believes that selecting cases on the basis of their veracity, viability, and contemporaneity will help the learners make sense of them and motivate them to solve even complex language problems with willingness and success. This is what entails dynamism in language learning.

The texts or cases for teaching language skills may create problems in the teaching process where the teacher is compelled to make compromises that can frustrate the learning process. The name and nature of the cases selected for language teaching tell upon the teachers' ability to make decisions and invent their teaching strategies. Cases also bear upon the performance of the learners and the knowledge they receive. It is because of this that Miller (1997) opines that cases are relative and concomitant to the teachers' performance.

Miller expounds the term 'relational' to explain the relationship between the teacher and the text. According to her,

"the term implies that cases may provide more than a description of what teachers do and think, for they are situated in a particular place and time, and cast light on the contextual complexities of such work." (p.42). Case studies, therefore, must carry "rich description" and "detailed contextual information" (Miller, 1997) to help the teacher improvise them for language classrooms without any dilemma or ambiguity. This in turn will motivate learners to read them with interest and respond successfully. And to obtain best results from the learners, Miller believes that cases must be concise and carry fundamental details that are comprehensible and factual.

Discussion

The foregoing explications, analyses, investigations, and appraisals of case study as an efficacious language teaching methodology proves beyond doubt that this approach is significantly helpful in the improvement of second language skills. The eminent researchers and prominent exponents in the field have all maintained through their researches and experiences that teaching with cases goes a long way in analyzing and articulating complex situations and incomplete information. These observations have reinforced the main thesis of this paper that cases use language whose statements resemble terminology of the user, and they focus on the completion of particular language tasks as a measure of success. Focusing on or single-minded application to the problem

presented as cases builds up confidence in the learners and induces them to actively participate in the problem-solving exercise. Working with cases for language learning on the one hand broadens the knowledge base of the learners while on the other it develops their power of independent judgment-making.

It is often discovered that language learners respond differently to the same language problems or textual resources coming up usually with multiple results. Even when the fact remains the same oftentimes learners assess the cases according to their own pre-reading and predicting which is why their conclusions are different. So, in order to attain cohesion and clarity, the language teacher has to take certain steps while preparing cases, and guide learners to base their solutions on evidence based guidelines.

Best practices for teaching with cases:

Teachers should always start with simple task-oriented cases, and talk over with the learners asking them to either work independently or with peers, talking over to them about the task to be performed, and the ways of doing it. In problem-solving cases the learners have in the beginning to be told about the problems that need to be solved, and at a later stage should be trained to discover problems by themselves, sometimes alone, sometimes in groups.

Pyatt (2006) suggests that students should be given enough class time to discuss, understand the case facts, and complete their

assignments. He also proposes as indispensable that teachers teaching with case studies must include additional reading resources and contextual information in their deliberations with the students so as to help them arrive at a consentient response. Also, learners should be given enough vocabulary knowledge to respond the problems presented in the cases.

To achieve the best results out of a case study teaching method, the dictum '*familiarity breeds contempt*' holds less water. It is only when teachers and learners are conversant and informal, as against the earlier formalistic classroom atmosphere that real language learning can really happen. In addition to this it is also pertinent that teachers are familiar with the educational and knowledge background of their students. They must be motivated to collaborate with their classmates, and leave out the fear that is associated with learning a foreign language. Garvin (2004) believes that students working in groups can work on problem-solution cases more efficiently and successfully in finding out the right answers.

Discussions

C. Roland Christensen, the acknowledged authority on the case study method and a professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education, in his book *Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership* (1992), discusses the need for the case method of instruction, and describes it as a potent tool for

developing language skills as well as transmitting knowledge. To him it is a kind of *laissez-faire* approach dictating a minimum of teaching control where learners are confronted with the same kind of ambiguous, many-sided problems they will face in their lives. The book maintains that this method helps in building leadership qualities, orchestrating a constructive process of questioning, listening, and responding; encouraging independent thinking; and guiding learners toward useful roles in their interaction with one another.

Given a free hand to explore a problem by sorting out relevant facts, developing logical conclusions, and presenting them to fellow students and the instructor, students do not remain just students in the traditional academic sense but assume the role of an active participant in the learning process. They are thus prepared to take on initiatives where topics are no longer treated as abstract ideas, but become central to the student's sense of self — of how they would choose to communicate in a specific real world situation.

Towards a framework for case-based teaching:

In his paper presented to the Learning and Teaching Office at the Ryerson University, Canada, Michelle Schwartz (2013), suggests that the case-based teaching structure can be divided into six instructional steps. They include giving students “ample time to

read and think about the case” assigning homework “with a set of questions for students to consider; *introducing* the case briefly and *providing* some guidelines for how to approach it, *clarifying* how *the teacher wants* students to think about the case,” focusing on certain task-oriented information; creating “groups and *monitoring* them to make sure everyone is involved” designating “roles within each group; requiring groups to “present their solutions with reasoning; asking questions for clarification and *moving* the discussion to another level”, and; synthesizing “issues raised”. (pp. 3-4)

Michael also advocate for a U shaped classroom, the opening part of which should face the blackboard or a smart board. In this kind of a classroom set students will be made to see one another. Smart boards can be used to initiate discussions, engaging them thereby in the language learning process.

It is also imperative for a result-oriented language teaching that questions must be posed to the students to enhance both interactivity and learning. They must be open-ended, direct, and intelligent and not daunting and dull questions. They should be expository, asking learners to clarify the facts, encouraging them to evaluate their judgments, and provide concrete explanations. The problems posed to the students can be subtle and complex. Some language problems leading to grammar structures, as for example

some clause constructions, error analyses, syntax rules etc. are complex and persistent. Learners must be introduced to them through cases, at a later stage and trained and asked to provide correct solutions. They should be prepared to face complex language problems in all skills, and asked to analyze and solve them. What is important in all these activities is the action perspective which case studies provide to the learners to arrive at a solution. It goes a long way in developing their reasoning skills, exposing them to the ambiguous and complex problems found in cases, helping them, in the process to build the confidence that successful language learning requires of them. Presenting learners with cases that carry language ambiguities, and motivating them to replace them with clarity of understanding, would cultivate tolerance in them, and make them able to take the right decisions. Through such practices, they learn to cope with the uncertainties that challenge foreign language learners today.

The success story of case studies lives on the principle of class interactions, providing learners with the valuable opportunity to learn from each other's as well as their own experiences. Students watch their classmate's problem-solving approach, learn to avoid it if it is unsuccessful, and acquire it if they find it succeeds in giving the required answer. So, it is a kind of self-learning even under the traditionally academic atmosphere of a classroom.

Benefits of teaching with cases:

The fundamental strength of this ground-breaking language teaching methodology is making the classroom much more than just a formal lecture room. It becomes a dynamic language learning centre enhancing through interaction such language skills as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, imbuing in learners the freedom that a language demands for its acquisition. Through this approach it has been observed that students gain better conceptual understanding and develop analytical skills, and power of judgment not perhaps possible through any language learning medium. Students under this method do not only undertake the responsibility for their own learning but for their classmates too. They just do not participate in thinking and communicating, but also listening and enriching their language knowledge by the responses of their classmates. It is, therefore, not about just learning a language. In fact, the aim and objective of teaching through cases reaches to other levels of learning too. Here learners develop as thinking persons, coping with various ambiguous problems, analyzing them, learning to solve them alone as well as in groups, understanding the emotions, the sensitivity of their fellow learners, developing as a result with a wholeness of personality. Along with the acquisition and enhancement of their mental and language abilities, case studies help them in the acquisition of such positive personality traits as persistence, patience, persuasiveness, and confidence.

Conclusion & Recommendation

In this paper, we have tried to focus on the Case study and observed how traditional language teaching approaches have become infructuous in the wake of rapid modern advances in technologies that quicken and simplify language learning, and the growing demand for the acquisition of language not for its esoteric, specifically literary qualities, but for its communicability and interactive qualities in the global world of today where proficiency in communication and possession of information are keys to development and successful existence. Our effort has also been to show and try to assert in the foregoing pages that language teaching now is not just a choice but a necessity, and it is therefore, pertinent to understand the different aspects of it for a fuller understanding of the process and it's the necessity of changing it to the demands of time. All this has been undertaken in this paper with holistic assessment of the case study method and its viability today as the best tool for teaching language skills.

The paper though evolving round the basic theme of the importance of case method, reaches to the conclusion through various stages of discussions, deliberations, clinical understanding of the theories presented by the exponents of case studies, references from their works, weighing their arguments and observations with a clear, unbiased, and practical mind. Cautious

steps have been taken throughout the discussion section in this paper to assess scientifically the tenability of the enormous researches and based on all those building blocks of observations, proofs, and time-honoured experiences, it has been empirically deduced that highly interactive world today has made it quite impossible to keep language shut out within borders, or optional limitations. Language is related to development today, and it must be taught in a way in which it provides maximum utility to its learners. It has to be taught and learnt in context, in the framework of the modern milieu, and therefore the best way to do that is to teach language with cases, rather than through the strange, imaginative contents present in the traditional language teaching books.

The thesis developed throughout this paper holds the language classroom at the center of the language learning process. It is the place where real language has to come into play. It is a kind of a lab where language is tested on the learners and results achieved. It is, therefore, suggested towards the end of the discussion section that the great potential of the language classroom must be utilized to present learners with multiple contextual data involving them to react and allow them to solve problems independently, without the interference of the teachers with their traditional ring-master attitude.

No research is final, and this also is not the end of the road to language learning. This paper is not written without the knowledge of the fact that lots and lots of researches are being conducted as this paper is being written, and language teaching experts and successful teachers around the world have been, day in and day out, developing novel ways of teaching language all the world over making great strides in producing remarkable language learners. The effort that has been taken in this research, and the topic that has been selected for study, evaluation, examination, and scrutiny, have all been undertaken with full awareness of the role of case method as a well-established language teaching tool, and as an approach that is most suitable to the educational environment and demands of the modern times. For the reason of arriving at a cogent and palpable understanding of this methodology, its efficacy in the pages above has been scientifically explored, examined, assessed, and consequently reaffirmed for the benefit of future learners and teachers of the language.

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