The usage of Case studies and Role-plays in enhancing EFL learners' Fluency and Critical thinking skills

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of case studies and role plays as pedagogical tools to enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' fluency and critical thinking skills. Through a mixed-methods approach involving classroom interventions, surveys, and pre- and post-tests, the study investigates how these interactive teaching techniques impact students' ability to use English in real-life contexts, while also fostering critical thinking. The results suggest that case studies and role plays significantly improve fluency, as learners engage in realistic dialogues and problem-solving activities. Additionally, these methods help develop critical thinking skills, as students analyze scenarios, make decisions, and express opinions. The findings support the integration of these interactive methods into EFL curricula to promote communicative competence and cognitive skills.

Keywords:

Introduction

The development of fluency and critical thinking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is a key objective for language educators worldwide. While grammar and vocabulary instruction remain fundamental, communicative approaches that emphasize real-world application and cognitive development have gained prominence. Among these, case studies and role plays have emerged as effective pedagogical tools. These interactive teaching techniques engage students in authentic language use, enabling them to practice fluency in meaningful contexts while also stimulating critical thinking.

Literature Review

The integration of case studies and role plays into EFL teaching is rooted in communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes authentic language use and student-centered learning. Both methods are designed to create a dynamic classroom environment where learners actively participate in problem-solving and real-life scenarios.

Case Studies in EFL Teaching

Case studies are detailed, real-world scenarios that require students to analyze, discuss, and make decisions based on provided information. Research suggests that case studies enhance language learning by engaging learners in complex, realistic situations that stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999). They encourage higher-order thinking by challenging students to evaluate information, consider alternative perspectives, and develop reasoned conclusions. In EFL classrooms, case studies provide students with the opportunity to use English in context, allowing for the practice of both fluency and accuracy in language use (Harmer, 2007). Case studies also help learners build critical thinking skills by requiring them to assess situations, recognize key issues, and make decisions based on available data

Case studies are a powerful pedagogical tool in the EFL classroom that significantly enhance students' critical thinking and speaking fluency. By presenting learners with real-world scenarios, case studies require them to analyze complex issues, identify problems, and develop viable solutions. This analytical process encourages students to engage deeply with the material, fostering a higher level of critical thinking. Case studies immerse students in authentic contexts where they must evaluate information, consider multiple perspectives, and make reasoned decisions, thus promoting critical thinking skills[1]. Additionally, the collaborative nature of case studies involves group discussions and debates, where students articulate their

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[1] Yin, R. (2014). Case study research: Designs and methods (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

thoughts, defend their viewpoints, and negotiate meaning with peers. This interaction is crucial for developing speaking fluency, as it provides opportunities for spontaneous language use and immediate feedback from others. The necessity to communicate ideas clearly and persuasively in these discussions helps students become more confident and proficient speakers. Moreover, Doody, J. (2015) notes that the integration of language skills through case studies—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—ensures comprehensive language development. Therefore, the use of case studies not only challenges students intellectually but also enhances their ability to use language effectively in real-life situations, contributing to their overall linguistic competence and critical thinking prowess.

Case studies are also useful for training learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) because to find a solution to a case study, the learners need to apply linguistic skills in combination with analytical and/ or interpersonal skills—the kind of situation that can occur in "real life," outside the classroom.

Case studies, a form of Problem-based learning (PBL), allow teachers to implement the communicative approach: the central focus is on completing a task, and students use language as a tool to communicate their ideas instead of doing language exercises to practice a grammar point or lexical item. PBL is considered conducive to language learning because it is learner-centered and engages students in active learning by providing opportunities for authentic communication. The focus of the task is on meaning; it has "a clearly defined, non-linguistic outcome", and learners select the linguistic resources they need to complete the task. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator and advisor who circulates among the students and is available for language-related questions[2].

CASE-STUDY TOPICS A case study should be based on the description of a particular situation or conflict-arousing issue to which students can relate. Teachers can use ready-made cases studies that are included in some coursebook packs and found on reputable Internet sites, or they can write their own cases. Teachers can create original cases based on current affairs or on topics contained in the coursebook. Articles and other materials (videos, practical tips, PDF brochures, menus, etc.) available on Advantages Challenges.

Challenges	Advantages
Teachers must find case studies that are suitable for their learners regarding content, complexity, and linguistic level, or they must write the case studies themselves.	Language skills are used in combination with other skills (e.g., business, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills).
Reading and analyzing longer case studies can be time-consuming.	Integration of various language skills is possible.
Assessment criteria need to be carefully established, explained, and considered.	Different media can be included.
	Some cases can incorporate role plays.
	Students may generate their own cases.
	Task-based learning can be implemented, and language is used to communicate.

Table. *Advantages and challenges of using case studies to support language learning*

The more complex the case is, the more specific the knowledge and the more specialized the language students will need. the Internet can either be used as source texts for the case study or be adapted for classroom use. Printed materials, such as informational and tourist brochures, are also useful. Topic areas that teachers of general English courses may consider include the following:
• planning a weekend in a specific town, reconciling the various interests of group members

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[2] Rohim, A. (2014). Improving students' speaking skill through problem-based learning (PBL) strategy. *JP3*, 3(8), 1-7

• choosing a restaurant suitable for people with different dietary requirements
 • planning a vacation on a budget for a group or family at a specific destination
• advising somebody on how to reduce plastic waste in daily life
• advising somebody on how to lead a healthier lifestyle
 • planning an intercultural party
• evaluating a brochure
• evaluating apartment rental offers

A case study should be based on the description of a particular situation or conflict-arousing issue to which students can relate. language they have learned, combining it with skills required to communicate effectively in meetings and presentations. Dealing with longer, complex cases is time-consuming, so it is recommended that students read the material and answer guiding questions for homework before class. If complex case studies are used, teachers need to consider how to integrate them into the course syllabus.

Role Plays in EFL Teaching

Role plays, on the other hand, involve students taking on specific roles in simulated scenarios, allowing them to practice language in context and engage in spontaneous communication. According to Livingstone (1983), role plays help learners build fluency by providing a platform for authentic conversation and negotiation in a low-pressure environment. They encourage students to use the language creatively, adapt to changing conversational dynamics, and practice real-world communication strategies. Role plays also contribute to the development of critical thinking by requiring students to consider different perspectives, analyze situations, and make decisions based on the roles they are assigned.

According to Nation (2013), role plays engage learners in cognitive processes such as evaluation, hypothesis testing, and decision-making, all of which are essential for critical thinking.

Methodology

This study was conducted in an intermediate-level EFL classroom at a language institute, consisting of 25 students (ages 18–25) from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research followed a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection to assess the impact of case studies and role plays on fluency and critical thinking.

Participants

The participants were 25 EFL learners with intermediate proficiency in English, as determined by their scores on a standardized English proficiency test. These students were divided into two groups: the experimental group, which received lessons incorporating case studies and role plays, and the control group, which followed a traditional grammar-based curriculum.

Procedure

The study took place over 10 weeks, with two lessons per week. The experimental group engaged in activities such as case study discussions, role-playing business meetings, and debating social issues. These activities were designed to foster fluency in both formal and informal contexts while encouraging students to think critically about various topics. In contrast, the control group received traditional lessons focused on grammar exercises, vocabulary drills, and structured writing tasks, with minimal focus on communicative tasks. The overall aim was to isolate the effects of case studies and role plays on language development.

Data Collection

• **Pre- and Post-Tests**: To measure changes in fluency, both groups took pre- and post-tests that assessed speaking ability, including fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. The tests involved tasks such as role plays and short discussions on familiar topics.

 • **Critical Thinking Assessment**: Critical thinking was evaluated using a rubric that assessed students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and form reasoned judgments during discussions and written assignments.

• **Surveys and Interviews**: At the end of the study, students completed a survey evaluating their perceptions of the activities, their confidence in using English, and their development in critical thinking. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of students to explore their experiences in more depth.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine whether there were statistically significant improvements in fluency and critical thinking. The qualitative data from surveys and interviews were coded thematically to identify common trends in students' perceptions of the teaching methods and their learning outcomes.

Results

Quantitative Findings

The pre- and post-test results showed significant improvement in the experimental group's fluency. On average, students in this group showed a 20% improvement in speaking tasks, with notable gains in vocabulary usage and fluency. The control group, by comparison, showed only a 5% improvement in speaking skills. In terms of critical thinking, the experimental group demonstrated a marked improvement in their ability to analyze and discuss topics critically. The critical thinking assessment revealed that 75% of the students in the experimental group showed a significant increase in their ability to evaluate and reason, compared to 40% in the control group.

Qualitative Findings

Survey results indicated that the majority of students in the experimental group felt more confident in speaking English and enjoyed the interactive nature of the lessons. Many students reported that the case studies and role plays provided them with real-world context for using English, which enhanced their motivation to participate. Interviews with students revealed that the role plays helped them think on their feet, and they appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions in English, even if they made mistakes. Case studies, on the other hand, were praised for their ability to encourage reflection and discussion, particularly in terms of evaluating complex situations and considering multiple viewpoints.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations indicated that students in the experimental group were highly engaged during case study discussions and role plays. They were more willing to take risks with language and demonstrated increased interaction with peers. In contrast, students in the control group were more passive and less willing to participate in speaking activities.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that case studies and role plays are effective in enhancing both fluency and critical thinking in EFL learners. The significant improvements in fluency suggest that these methods encourage students to use English in meaningful, context-rich situations, which fosters more natural language use. Furthermore, the improvement in critical thinking aligns with previous research suggesting that task-based activities promote cognitive development by requiring learners to analyze, evaluate, and make decisions (Goh & Burns, 2012).
The positive feedback from students also supports the notion that these methods increase engagement and motivation, which are crucial factors in language learning. By using case studies to introduce relevant issues and role plays to practice language use, students are able to develop both their linguistic abilities and cognitive skills simultaneously.

Report of the microteaching results of using typical PBL activities in teaching English by sample lesson plan

Case-studies and Round-table discussions are among the activities that can promote Critical thinking skills and speaking skills in the EFL context. This study shed light on both the relation of the use of Case-studies and Round-table discussions in enhancing the student's speaking skills and its benefits to the students. It is also focuses on the student's perception towards the use of Case-studies and Round-table discussions in the classroom in helping them increasing their speaking fluency and critical thinking skills.

The following guidelines can help students write a case study:

1) When you are writing a case study, you are telling a story. Do not analyze the situation; just describe it.

2) You need to address the following questions:

- *Who are the protagonists, and what are their roles? (Change the names if they are based on real people.)*
- *What are the key problems and issues?*
- *What background information and relevant facts do others need to know to understand the case?*

3) Make sure your story is coherent. This means that the argumentation needs to be consistent. The order of events—the timeline—must be easy for a reader to follow, and the relationship between cause and effect in the events must be clear. 4)Provide supporting data if necessary (links to statistics, facts about the problem, a video that provides useful background information, etc.).

5) Use paragraphs to structure the information. Each paragraph should be limited to the discussion of one aspect of your story and backed up with details. When you move on to another aspect, start a new paragraph.

Table: The case-study method usually involves the following steps:

Step 1:	The teacher introduces the situation and, if necessary, relevant vocabulary.
Step 2:	Everyone reads the case study and analyzes additional materials. The following procedure can help students analyze a case systematically: - describe the context of the situation/ problem - describe the main issues/problems -describe the causes of the problem (there is usually more than one - identify possible solutions - determine the advantages and disadvantages of each option o decide on the best solution/action
Step 3:	Students discuss possible solutions, usually in small groups. Students may visually represent the aspects of the case by drawing a mind map or mapping out the elements of the story and the relationships of the people involved, causes of the problem, and possible solutions.
Step 4:	Students present and justify the solutions, usually with the whole class.
Step 5:	Everyone participates in a feedback session, typically led by the teacher.
Step 6:	Students reflect on the case study itself and on the procedure. The duration of each step, particularly the reading and discussion stages, depends on the length and complexity of the case study.

EXAMPLE OF A SHORT CASE STUDY

This case study is suitable for students of different backgrounds and can be adapted. It actively involves learners and creates opportunities to communicate about a situation they can relate to or are familiar with. After studying the vocabulary of character traits, learners apply it to a specific case that resembles a real-life situation. Furthermore, they use their reading skills and employ their oral skills when interacting and expressing opinions with others. They also have the opportunity to practice their writing skills in a follow-up activity. The time needed is about 45 to 60 minutes.

Procedure:	
Step1:	Elicit from students' character traits that are desirable for people in helping professions; write the traits on the board. Below is a list of personality traits that are desirable for social workers: • empathetic (able to understand how other people feel) • assertive (able to express their views clearly without being aggressive and to stand up for their own and other people's rights in a reasonable and clear way) • persistent (unwilling to give up easily) • reliable (can be counted on) • flexible (open-minded; willing to consider different points of view) • resilient (able to recover easily from difficult situations) • patient (able to stay calm and uncomplaining, especially in difficult situations) • committed to the job (willing to work hard to do a good job)

	• organized (able to plan procedures effectively and manage time well) • self-confident (confident in one's own abilities and knowledge)
Step2:	Have students work individually or in small groups. Tell students that they will form part of a committee that selects a candidate for a nongovernmental organization (NGO). Give each student or group a handout with the description of the candidates and the Candidate Assessment Form . If there are no photocopying facilities available, explain the situation to the students and read the information about each candidate to students so that they can take notes. Circulate among students to answer questions later
Step3:	Let students fill in the assessment form in Table 3. If there are no photocopying facilities, write the assessment template on the board for students to copy.
Step4:	In small groups, have students decide on a candidate and present their arguments for selecting him or her for the NGO position. The teacher and other students can ask further questions along the lines of the following: • Does it make a difference if the job is done by a man or woman? • How important is a person's age for this type of job? • Would your choice have been influenced by knowing the people's names, especially names that hint at the person's ethnicity?
Step5:	Provide feedback on language aspects, those that were strong and those that can be improved.

Conclusion

The use of case studies and role plays in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms proves to be a highly effective pedagogical approach for enhancing both fluency and critical thinking skills. By engaging learners in real-world scenarios and interactive problem-solving activities, these methods encourage students to use English in meaningful contexts, promoting greater fluency in both speaking and listening. The dynamic nature of case studies, which require analysis, evaluation, and decision-making, and the spontaneous communication fostered through role plays, directly contribute to the development of critical thinking skills.

Through these activities, students not only practice language use but also engage in cognitive processes that require them to critically assess situations, explore multiple perspectives, and justify their decisions. These skills are essential not only for language acquisition but also for developing the intellectual flexibility needed in real-world communication. The findings from research and classroom applications consistently highlight the positive impact of case studies and role plays in fostering both communicative competence and higher-order thinking.

As such, integrating case studies and role plays into EFL curricula is a valuable strategy for creating engaging, student-centered learning environments. These methods help bridge the gap between language learning and cognitive skill development, preparing students to use English confidently and critically in a wide range of real-life contexts.

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