

The Implementation of Transformative Case Study Model for the Development of Professional English Language Competence in Business Administration Studies

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Abstract: Transformative learning is one of the most significant and popular theories in the field of higher education. This article emphasizes the case study method usage in professional English language teaching as supporting transformative learning. It presents a transformative case study model and reports that transformative learning applied in case study modules develops student professional English language competence, which is of vital importance as it enables the learners to face complex demands of their future career. The main aim of the present research was to implement the transformative case study model in the professional English course and to determine its impact on student professional English language competence development. The results of the empirical research conducted by the author confirm that by implementation of the study program using the case study method and transformative learning principles, it is possible to promote professional English language competence of business administration students. The created transformative case study model can be applied in the professional English course as it observes specific features of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: transformative learning, case study method, professional English language competence, university education.

Introduction

The students of business administration at the higher school have to develop a number of such important competences as critical thinking, creativity and innovation, collaboration, entrepreneurship, lifelong learning as well as to acquire knowledge related to the business domain such as business management and personal management. Moreover, the students have to be able to communicate in the foreign language on the professional level effectively in order to accomplish duties and achieve aims at work. Business administration graduates who possess professional English language competence are in great demand nowadays.

A task for the teachers of professional English courses at the higher school is to use more efficient teaching methodologies aimed to educate creative, reflective and competent professionals who can develop personally meaningful and transferable knowledge and understanding (Briede, 2009; 2016). The author of the present research reckons that modern professional English learning process should be transformative and it should involve students in meaningful learning situations where they study actively and experientially.

The proponents of transformative learning J. Mezirow (1991, 2003), E.W. Taylor (2007), E.W. Taylor and P. Cranton (2013), S. Merriam (2004), M. Tennant (1991), D. Boud (Boud, Keogh, Walker, 1985), P. Race (2006), J. Stepanova (2017) emphasize the importance of experience, critical reflection, and reflective discourse in the learning process. The mentioned above authors articulate that the learner's personal review of his or her experience creates meaning, which leads to a paradigm shift, change in beliefs, worldview and behaviour. In transformative learning a person surpasses the mere reception of information and undergoes a complicated process of conscious change reassessing beliefs, values and assumptions, critically analysing different perspectives in order to act more effectively. Therefore, it is essential that adult learners analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating and reassessing it individually or together with others.

The author of the article has concluded that the case study method can form a transformative learning framework and may be one of the most efficient active approaches of professional English education. The author suggests that the usage of case study modules in professional English course facilitates student transformation as it: provides the learners with activities in which they are transformed through their actions, interaction and relations; involves the learners in experiential learning; encourages active use of the learner's relevant prior life experiences in new learning; encourages critical examining of

assumptions, beliefs and values; improves research and investigative skills; involves the learners in active and reflective learning experiences.

Having investigated and analysed the theoretical background of transformative learning and case study method the author of the research began to develop transformative case study model for the students of business administration in Baltic International Academy. During several study years the author has been involved in the process of implementation, evaluation and improvement of the created model. The transformative case study model for the development of professional English language competence in the professional English course in business administration studies is presented below (Figure 1).

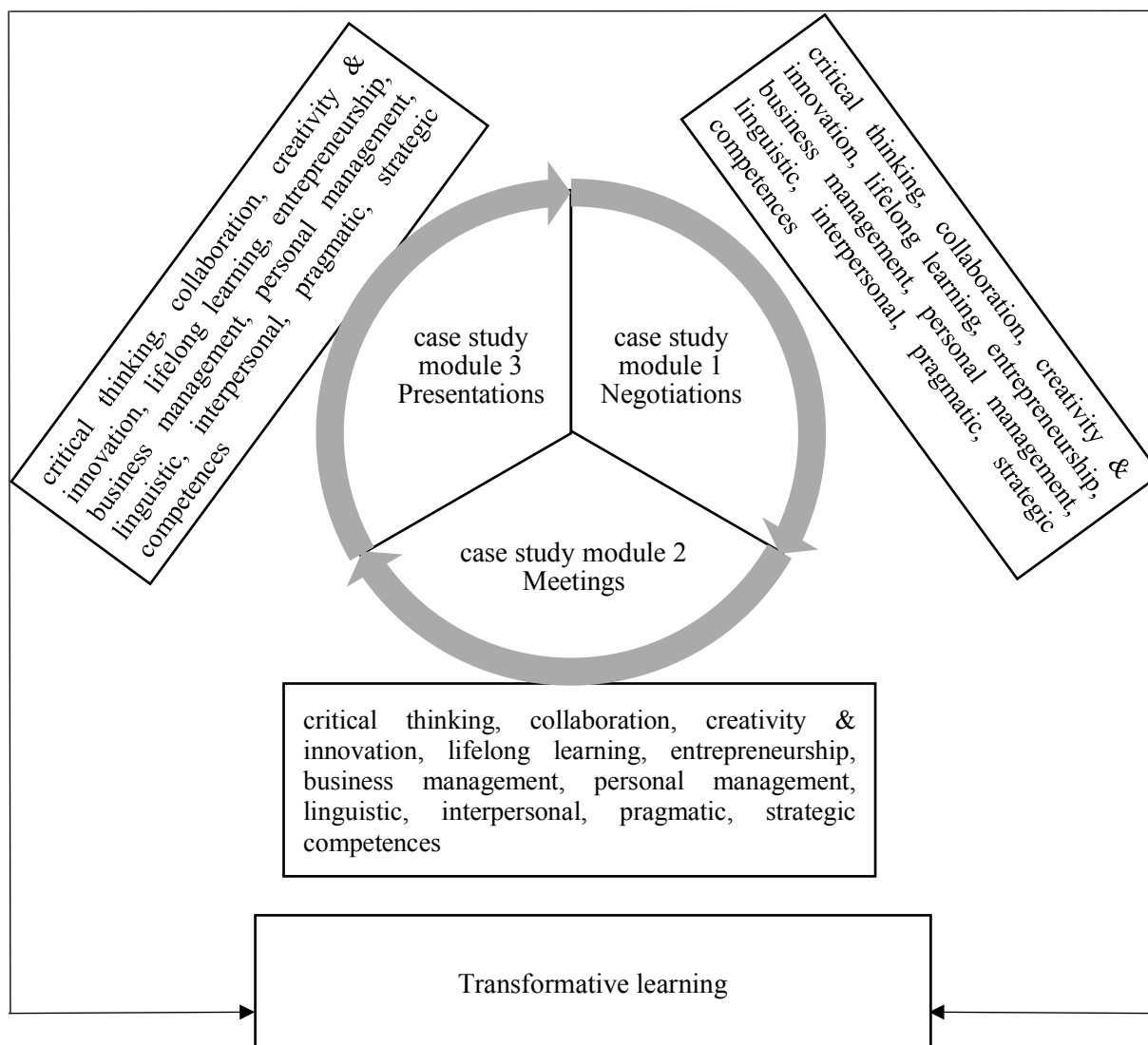


Figure 1. The transformative case study model.

The transformative case study model consisting of three modules titled Negotiations, Meetings and Presentations was used in the professional English course to develop the professional English language competence comprising critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and innovative thinking, life-long learning, entrepreneurship, business management, personal management, linguistic, interpersonal, pragmatic and strategic sub-competences.

Case study, as a specific language teaching method, provides an excellent opportunity for students to learn both the foreign language and business administration subject-matter and can lead to practical acquisition of professional English language competence. Therefore, the aim of the present research was to determine the transformative case study model's impact on student professional English language competence's development in the professional English course in business administration studies in higher education.

Methodology

Experimental data were obtained by carrying out a number of studies undertaken during the period of five years, from 2014 to 2019, with the aim to determine the transformative case study model's impact on student professional English language competence development.

The first stage of the research focused on unstructured observation in Baltic International Academy and the description of the process of involving 107 1st year students of business administration in transformative case study modules with the aim to develop the professional English language competence.

The second stage of the research focused on the student assessment of the professional English language competence development in participation in transformative case study modules within the framework of professional English course. The results were obtained in: 1) teacher assessment of the professional English language competence constituent components: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and innovative thinking, life-long learning, entrepreneurship, business management, personal management, linguistic, interpersonal, pragmatic and strategic sub-competences' development after the professional English course and 2) student professional English language competence self-evaluation. Seventy-five 1st year business administration students of Baltic International Academy took part in all three types of assessment.

The third stage of the research, involving 73 1st year business administration students of Baltic International Academy, examined student opinion on the case study method usage in professional English course.

The fourth stage of the research, involving 67 1st year business administration students of Baltic International Academy, examined whether the professional English course promoted transformative learning.

Results and Discussion

In the end of the professional English course the teacher assessed the development of the professional English competence's constituent components: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and innovative thinking, life-long learning, entrepreneurship, business management, personal management, linguistic, interpersonal, pragmatic and strategic sub-competences. The results are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Teacher assessment of student professional English language components' development after the course

Nr.	Competence components	Teacher assessment					Non-parametric descriptive statistics		
		Excel-lent (10)	Very good (8-9)	Good (6-7)	Fair (4-5)	Poor (1-3)	Mo	Me	A
		Rank							
		1	2	3	4	5			
Date distribution, n=75									
1.	Critical thinking	10	27	32	6	0	3	3	4
2.	Collaboration	14	51	5	3	2	2	2	5
3.	Creativity and innovation	17	22	30	3	3	3	2	5
4.	Lifelong learning	35	14	14	12	0	1	2	4
5.	Entrepreneurship	28	23	18	6	0	1	2	4
6.	Business management	29	26	15	5	0	1	2	4
7.	Personal management	11	46	9	8	1	2	2	5
8.	Linguistic	3	23	38	11	0	3	3	4
9.	Interpersonal	2	48	19	4	2	2	2	5
10.	Pragmatic	9	37	24	3	2	2	2	5
11.	Strategic	5	39	26	4	1	2	2	5
Total		163	356	230	65	11			

Assessment very good (8-9) is domineering, which is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.00$). The professional English language competence's components Lifelong learning, Entrepreneurship, Business management are the highest assessments. It is confirmed by verification with interactive calculation tool for chi-square tests (Preacher, 2001).

After the professional English course, the students also participated in self-evaluation of the professional English language competence. The results obtained in the student self-evaluation are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Student self-evaluation of professional English language competence development

Nr.	Competence components	Student self-evaluation					Non-parametric descriptive statistics		
		excellent (10)	very good (8-9)	good (6-7)	fair (4-5)	poor (1-3)			
		Rank					Mo	Me	A
		1	2	3	4	5			
		Date distribution, $n=75$							
1.	Critical thinking	8	36	25	5	1	2	2	5
2.	Collaboration	16	48	6	3	2	2	2	5
3.	Creativity and innovation	23	18	29	4	1	3	2	5
4.	Lifelong learning	29	18	15	13	0	1	2	4
5.	Entrepreneurship	31	23	17	4	0	1	2	4
6.	Business management	32	29	10	4	0	1	2	4
7.	Personal management	12	45	10	6	2	2	2	5
8.	Linguistic	6	19	40	10	0	2	3	4
9.	Interpersonal	5	42	16	9	3	2	2	5
10.	Pragmatic	5	44	23	2	1	2	2	5
11.	Strategic	7	39	15	12	3	2	1	5
Total		174	361	206	72	13			

As well as in the teacher evaluation, in student self-evaluation assessment very good (8-9) is domineering, which is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.00$). Competence components' Lifelong learning, Entrepreneurship, Business management are the highest assessments. It is confirmed by verification with interactive calculation tool for chi-square tests (Preacher, 2001).

Another stage of the research examined student opinion on the case study method's usage in the professional English course. The results of the findings are presented in Table 3 below.

Assessment Strongly Agree + Agree are domineering. Their sum (1495) is statistically significantly different from assessment Disagree and Strongly disagree sum (374). Strongly Agree + Agree (1+2) assessment have a wide range (20...61). In several cases statistically significant difference cannot be observed, for example, statement 19: I took part in peer-evaluation ($p > 0,127$), and statement 24: I was aware of alternative solutions of a problem ($p > 0,87$). For the statement 19: I took part in peer-evaluation, Median cannot be defined in actual fact, and it is in brackets (2).

Table 3

Student opinion about the case study method usage in the professional English course

Nr.	Statement about the professional English course	Average		Strongly agree, Agree	Disagree, Strongly disagree	Range
		M _o	M _e	1 + 2	4 + 5	R ₁₊₂
1.	I easily got used to working on a case study in the course	2	2	39	22	28
2.	I have developed presentation skills	2	2	57	10	6,5
3.	I took decisions with incomplete information	2	2	40	22	26,5
4.	I developed skills I need to participate in meeting	2	2	52	10	12,5
5.	I solved problems collaboratively	1	2	51	10	15
6.	I developed public speaking skills	2	2	48	18	22
7.	I developed foreign language interactive skills	2	2	60	5	2
8.	I was actively involved in case study	2	2	51	17	15
9.	I had an opportunity to experience various real business situations	2	2	56	9	9
10.	I was involved in the analysis of a case	2	2	44	16	24,5
11.	Case study increased my motivation in English learning	2	2	46	15	23
12.	I developed English reading skills	1	2	56	11	9
13.	Case study enhanced my understanding of the business environment and its problems	2	2	56	10	9
14.	I integrated knowledge from other subjects into case study	2	2	50	8	17,5
15.	Case study increased my team-working skills	2	2	51	14	15
16.	I applied what I had learned in practice and it helped me understand the problem better	2	2	59	13	3
17.	Case study enhanced my information summary skills	2	2	40	21	26,5
18.	I took part in self-evaluation	1	2	55	11	11
19.	I took part in peer-evaluation	2,4	(2)	37	25	29
20.	I tried to solve a problem creatively	2	2	49	14	20
21.	I used my logical thinking skills	2	2	50	8	17,5
22.	I have developed negotiation skills	1		57	10	6,5
23.	I approached business problems from various perspectives	1	1	61	2	1
24.	I was aware of alternative solutions of a problem	3	3	20	21	30
25.	I learned non-verbal communication skills	2	2	44	14	24,5
26.	I learned written business communication	1	1	52	11	12,5
27.	I reflected on my participation in case study	2	2	58	7	4,5
28.	I developed tolerance to other opinions	2	2	49	5	20
29.	I was more responsible for my learning than usual	1	2	58	6	4,5
30.	After the course I feel more confident to use English	2	2	49	9	20
Sum				1495	374	

The next stage of the research examined whether the professional English course promoted student transformative learning. After the professional English course, the students were asked to complete the Likert-type questionnaire where they ranked statements about the course as 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Transformation in the professional English course

Nr.	Statement about the professional English language course	Average		Strongly Agree, Agree	Strongly disagree, Disagree	Range
		M _o	M _e	1+2	4+5	R ₁₊₂
1.	It helped me discover that learning is contextual.	2	2	47	7	17
2.	It increased my sense of responsibility.	2	2	50	9	12
3.	I analysed critically various situations.	1	2	53	6	7
4.	It helped me understand my strengths.	1	2	47	9	18
5.	It helped me understand my weaknesses.	2	2	48	9	14
6.	It helped me motivate myself.	2	2	44	17	21
7.	It helped me find new objectives in learning English.	2	2	57	3	2
8.	It helped me realize importance of working in teams.	2	2	48	15	15
9.	I assessed my knowledge/skills myself.	2	2	52	8	8
10.	I developed a sense of connection to other group mates.	2	2	40	15	27
11.	It taught me treating others with respect.	1	2	41	16	25
12.	I experienced and enjoyed creative learning.	1	2	51	11	9
13.	It helped me build confidence in speaking English.	1	1	56	6	5
14.	It changed my role in the classroom from passive to active.	2	2	50	7	13
15.	It helped me discover I am creative in decision-making.	2	2	46	14	19
16.	It helped me realize my growth/progress in English.	2	2	43	13	23
17.	It helped me appreciate various opinions.	2	2	35	21	29
18.	I approached a situation using my personal experience.	1	2	51	10	10
19.	It presented me with an opportunity to become more open.	2	2	32	25	31
20.	It changed the way I interact with people.	2	2	44	14	22
21.	It helped me express myself.	2	3	28	28	33
22.	It presented me with new facts about the foreign culture.	1	2	55	7	6
23.	I improved my English communication skills: holding a meeting, negotiating a contract, giving a presentation.	1	1	57	2	3
24.	It showed reflection helps me understand myself better.	1	1	51	3	11
25.	I developed non-verbal communication skills.	2	2	41	13	26
26.	I improved my organisational skills.	2	2	35	14	30
27.	I improved team-working skills.	1	2	48	10	16
28.	I improved English language skills.	2	1	46	11	20
29.	I analysed and solved actual business problems.	1	1	59	3	1
30.	It presented me with an opportunity to interact in groups.	1	2	57	9	4
31.	It enhanced my problem-solving skills.	1	2	39	11	28
32.	It gave me more confidence in ability to conduct business.	1	3	31	21	32
33.	I applied new skills learned in practice.	1	2	43	10	24
Sum				1525	377	

Assessment Strongly Agree and Agree are domineering, their sum (1525) is statistically importantly different ($p < 0.05$) from assessment Disagree and strongly disagree sum (377). Values coincide in the statement 17 - it helped me appreciate various opinions ($p > 0.06$). Values coincide statistically importantly in statement 19: it presented me with an opportunity to become more open, ($p > 0.21$) and in statement 32 - it gave me more confidence in ability to conduct business ($p > 0.17$). The highest and the lowest value complete coincidence can be observed in statement 21 - it helped me express myself.

Conclusions

The author of the research applied the transformative case study model in the professional English course in Business Administration studies in order to develop student professional English language competence. After the professional English course, the teacher assessed student professional English competence development, as well as the students participated in self-evaluation of the professional English language competence. Having analysed the results obtained in both assessment types after the course the author has come to the conclusion that the transformative case study model applied in the professional English course in Business Administration studies facilitated the professional English language competence development. Involving the students in the transformative case study modules comprising cases and case-based activities from business settings enhanced the development of critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and innovation, lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, business management, personal management, linguistic, interpersonal, pragmatic and strategic competences, which are integral constituent components of the professional English language competence.

The students were actively involved in the case study modules that provided them with actual business problems and were asked to examine the cases collaboratively from a variety of perspectives, to analyse them critically and to arrive at conclusions taking up the role of decision makers. All the cases involved a question or a problem that was not evident to the students and there was more than one answer possible so the students could suggest any solution of the issue they wanted on the purpose that their ideas were supported by credible arguments, knowledge and information. Taking part in the case study modules the students learned theoretical and practical aspects of the business sphere and they were provided with environment for business administration training.

In the professional English course, the case study modules provided the students with a wide range of opportunities for valuable language practice. All language skills were promoted: reading, writing, speaking and listening tasks were incorporated into case study modules. The students studied the vocabulary, common phrases, grammar rules, and pronunciation. The learners no longer passively memorized new words and grammatical structures, they applied them actively in their communication. Moreover, working on the case study modules required the students to become more self-directed and responsible for their learning.

The students' opinion on the CSM usage in the professional English course is positive. The majority of the students stated that it gave them an opportunity to experience and enjoy more creative and engaging way of learning, helped build confidence in speaking English and find new objectives in learning the foreign language. Most students appreciated the opportunity to approach business problems from various perspectives, develop foreign language interactive skills, apply what they learned in practice, reflect on participation in case study, and increased responsibility for learning.

Case study model's implementation in professional English course is transformative in its nature. It is based on the principle that personal experience is fundamental for the learning process. Providing with a context of real-life business situations enhanced retention of the learners and made them understand the meaning of the tasks better. Thus, learners could easier assimilate their knowledge and apply what they had learned in practice. The learners had an opportunity to reflect on their learning experience. Reflection on participation in the case study modules focused students' attention on their learning processes and the ways they think, which is especially important in personal change, development and growth. The students assessed their learning, skills and abilities, summarized what they had learned, considered their learning strategies and how to improve their learning outcomes. This process of reflection allowed them to become more self-aware and understand themselves on a deeper level. As a result, they could get more from their learning, developed deeper understanding and gained experience in their future profession.

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