

# ACTIVE METHODS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

*One of the most significant ways to increase the classroom performance is to raise the amount of active learning methods. Not only will you find it easier to keep students engaged during the most difficult periods of time of the year (before holidays i.e.), but you will find that your students will retain information with greater pleasure that will lead to an effective achievement of the educational objectives. We introduced in this paper some ideas of how the teachers can promote active learning through case studies. The various educational tasks of a case study are meant to make the seminars attractive for the students, to stimulate the students to become more active during the class and to contribute in this way to their own training.*

**KEYWORDS:** peer teaching, role-playing, think-pair-share, cooperative learning, problem solving, transfer of information

## 1. Creating an Active Learning Environment

Active learning methods are the most effective means of delivering training. Learners understand information better and retain it longer. It is a student centered approach in which the responsibility for learning is placed upon the student, often working in collaboration with classmates. In active learning teachers are facilitators rather than one way providers of information. The presentation of facts, so often introduced through straight lecture, is deemphasized in favor of class discussion, problem solving, cooperative learning, and writing exercises (graded and ungraded). Other examples of active learning techniques include role-playing, case studies, group projects, think-pair-share, peer teaching,

debates, and short demonstrations followed by class discussion.

Active training is also defined as making participants work within a cooperative learning context. Instructional use of small groups is needed so that students work together to maximize learning. *‘Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject’* (in **Education Research Consumer Guide**, produced by the Office of Research, Office of Educational Research and Improvement – OERI – of the U.S. Department of Education <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/cooplear.html>).

The benefits of cooperative learning are that it can be used in any setting, can be adapted for content and individual differences, focuses on individual differences. Cooperative learning is based on the assumption that people learn differently and also learning is an active effort. Research shows that cooperative learning produces:

- higher achievement
- positive relationships between group members
- greater productivity
- greater transfer of information
- healthier psychological adjustment.

Physical setting is important for successful learning experience as it creates a mood and sets the tone. There can also be used posters, props, icebreaker. Seating arrangement is another instrument that helps learners focus on course content and involve them immediately.

The structure and organization of cooperative learning aim at structured learning groups and oral and written instructions. This type of learning focuses on learning not necessarily on content, the skills and understanding are more important than facts, dates, formulas, etc.

The teacher/trainer's role is of a facilitator, whose primary function is to manage learning process in a manner that may raise the level of participation, interdependence, each group member brings experience and expertise and is responsible for teaching and learning a small component of the lesson.

Lecture should be limited to 10-15 minutes. Long lecture creates boredom therefore a variety of methods should be used such as: role plays, games, case studies, simulations, real-world applications. Regularly the trainer uses activities that build on and overlap earlier concepts and skills.

When creating this type of learning context the facilitator should take into consideration certain factors such as: time, costs, quality of material, suitability, own experience and expertise.

In order to better know his learners the facilitator can use any pen-and-paper device for gathering information about an individual, group, or organization, such as: questionnaires, tests, surveys.

The participants are directly involved in the learning process by experiencing the activity which may include role play, case studies, simulations and games.

## 2. Short Description of the Case Study

Case studies are stories. They present realistic, complex, and contextually rich situations and often involve a dilemma, conflict, or problem that one or more of the characters in the case must negotiate.

A case study is also a thorough analysis of a person, group, a research strategy focused on a real case which is thoroughly detailed. This needs the use of various complementary methods in order to gather, analyze, process and storage of relevant information both quantitative and qualitative.

According to Yin (2003, p. 5), “*a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and multiple sources of evidence are used*”.

From a managerial perspective, a case study is a detailed analysis of an economic entity, performed to determine factors underlying its success or failure. It demonstrates how the problem has been identified, which solution was chosen and highlights the final result for a specific area.

It is also a narrative account of a series of events or situations centered around one or more problems. There are a variety of problems that could be the subject of a case study: difficulties with interpersonal relationships, loss or lack of funds, clearly defined tasks for people who work together discrepancies bureaucratic system etc. Preparing a case study clearly

begins by ensuring that account is consistent with the objective of the session.

The objective must be of analytical character: identifying options for solving a problem, or identify weaknesses and strengths of the characters involved in the case. One way to structure ideas as you write the story is simply, as you can use the three traditional stages: introduction, middle and conclusion.

Introduction:

Where does the situation appear and in what context? (This sets the framework for problem/issues you will address the case study).

What are the main characters and the relationship between them?

What is the situation in which these characters are at the beginning of the case, what problems they face, and what are their thoughts and feelings related to these problems?

Content:

What situation/problem situation is created?

What are the events and factors which contribute to the problem/problems?

Where are the main characters and what do they do?

There are secondary characters who are currently placed in landscape?

Who are they and how do they relate to the situation/circumstances?

What happens to the relationship between the characters?

What problems are addressed systematically and how are they developed?

Conclusion:

What is the stage of the problem/issue now?

What are the main/secondary characters and their thoughts/feelings?

What happened to the relationship between the main characters?

How can this situation end, so as to leave various interpretations?

Presentation stages of a case study are:

- prepare atmosphere
- present the objectives of the session
- introduce the theoretical (optional) content
- share the event to participants
- present the case briefly
- give participants the opportunity to ask questions
- clarify the facts of the case
- give instructions for the task
- divide the group into subgroups to work specific tasks
- monitor the work of the group
- drive presentations reports
- make generalizations
- conclusions.

Case studies can help address the following aspects of learning:

- skills analysis/problem solving
- thinking and discussing “how” to do something, planning/strategy
- identifying factors/aspects of a problem; identify the problem
- a model or approach of “reality testing”
- as an initial step in preparing for a conversation or other experimental methods.

Characteristics of effective training sessions using case studies can be:

- the case study related to the goals of the session
- the outcome is not predetermined case, there are several “correct” answers
- there is too much data that are not at issue in the case
- the case is as realistic and authentic as possible. This is relevant, and participants may call on it to solve a problem no matter how difficult
- the case is designed in a way that leads to action – “What have you done?”, “What do you see here?”
- session enables all learners to participate.

Using case studies, participants learn from their own experiences, the experiences

of other participants and the trainer or facilitator. Case studies must simulate real-life situations. When structuring a case study, consider the following seven steps:

*Choose a theme* – choose a theme that is important and relevant to the participant and the learning objective.

*Choose incident or situation* – determine how you are going to approach the issue you have chosen. For example, if you teach employment practices, your situation could address to conducting an interview.

*Provide sufficient detail* – to provide enough information on the roles, objectives and details of the situation on which participants can take appropriate and informed decisions.

*Identify and communicate the result you expect* – participants accurately informed on what to do during this process.

*Determine the size of the group* – set the optimum size of the group by answering the following:

- participants will complete the work as a group?
- can the activity be carried out in pairs?
- should the case study be performed by each participant?

*Determine the composition of the groups.* Men will work together with women, chiefs and subordinates, who have similar responsibilities, etc.

*Set time limits.* They aim at determining the period of time during which participants have to answer questions from the case study. Also, determine what time should prompt participants to conclude discussion.

In general, a case study is divided into maximum three pages, without excessive graphic content. Exaggeration leads to the interpretation of study that requires force, so opting for a moderate form of the content. In form and substance, a case study is divided into three sections, called by topic:

- challenge/problem/hypothesis,
- approach/solution/implementation,
- benefit/result/completion.

The case study focuses on one problem, centered on the solution or the advantage offered by the product in question. Deviation from the topic leads to loss of reader's interest.

A good headline increases readers' interest. The advantage of a service or product should be emphasized from the start, the title will be then supported by arguments within the case study. Keep the reader's attention by emphasizing the explanations in solving the issue, by means of measurable and quantifiable terms. Support the problem by statistical data, graphs or tables, as appropriate. Argue the advantage of recovering the investment in the service/product offered in form of increasing figures.

A case study stands out with the language. The recommendation is to avoid overly technical terms and loading text. As source documentation can be made available various guides, but it is also allowed the use of other information means.

For a better understanding of the complexity of a case study we present it in comparison with the a short description of the role interpretation:

Table no. 1

Comparative table between role interpretation and case study  
(Chervase, Cojanu, & Dan, 2015, p. 40)

| Role interpretation              | Case study                                     |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Live presentation of the problem | Problem presentation in writing                |
| Problem is part of the process   | Problem reflects a real or imaginary situation |
| Feelings are important           | Facts are important                            |
| Problem is inside                | Problem is outside                             |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Emotional involvement<br>Solutions to be put into practice<br>It is appropriate to human and interpersonal relations.<br>It is of short-term and with a few characters<br>Immediate and continuous opinions. | Intellectual involvement<br>It suggests solutions<br>It can be adjusted to all the phases of management<br>It can be long-term and with multiple characters<br>Limited opinions. |
|--|--|

### 3. English Topics Taught at Police Academy

Foreign languages teachers at the Police Academy have taken into consideration the need to identify the specific policing vocabulary to help the future police officers in their activities that require linguistic competences. In this regard, they design English topics, courses and other complementary teaching resources (glossaries, exercise books, dictionaries etc.) to be used at seminars. It represents a very hard and difficult task, as it means that the teachers of foreign languages make a great effort to learn and comprehend knowledge from other fields than the one in which they are qualified. These teaching materials can help the teachers of foreign languages to make the seminars more attractive as well as they can help the students in their individual study. Our main goal is to also develop the four classical language abilities – speaking/ listening/ reading/ writing – by means of all the materials in forms of workbooks, DVDs, CDs, audio tapes, posters etc. used at seminars.

Still our courses are aimed not only at the Police Academy students, but also all the persons from the Ministry of Home Affairs structures who are involved in international missions, participate in training courses, meetings, round tables at international level and want to develop their foreign languages skills in policing.

The topics identified for the English language courses are in accordance with the main issues related to police work in the common curricula developed for all the police workers in the European countries,

such as: roles and responsibilities, police ethics, organizational structure of the police, police ranks, types of uniforms, types of police cars, weapons used by different police forces and their regime, elements of a police report, forms of crimes and punishments, police investigation and criminal procedures, crime scene investigation and evidence collecting, forms of domestic violence, stages of trafficking in human beings, forms of terrorist attacks, criminal network of the organized crime etc.

The course topics have resulted from discussions with our colleagues from the MAI structures, who are the beneficiaries of our university “products”, but the documentation, selection of information, course design, learning units structure, exercises, applications represent the conceptual work of our teachers and are reflected in a work over years.

Generally, the English Coursebooks are structured into *learning units*, followed by sections containing the *keys to exercises* and some *annexes* at the end.

The information sources that were used for elaborating the content of the course were searched on the Internet sites and other references which are presented at the end of each unit, along with other links to additional sites that can be viewed by those who need more information. The content of a unit is distributed into sections according to the importance of the topic. For instance, the unit *Police investigation* is structured into the following sections: Steps the Police May Take During an Investigation, the Investigative Role of the Police, Answering Police Questions, Who Decides to Lay Charges, Arrest – After



Arrest, Police Reports, **Arrest Reports, Crime or Incident Reports**, What's Publicly Available, **Jail & Bail**, Arrest Warrants, Search, Search Warrant Filings, Crime Scene Examination – Steps of a Crime Scene Examination, Types of Evidence, DNA: The Basis of Forensics, 7 Skills of a Crime Scene Investigator etc.

Every unit starts with the presentation of the topic, in which various definitions, classifications, types, forms, examples are presented. The content is familiar to the students, due to their training performed in the operative structures during the semesters. What's new is the specific terminology in the foreign language they have to acquire.

The *Vocabulary* section aims at the comprehension of some general foreign language words and terms, therefore they are explained at the end of the unit content.

There is also a sub-section that lists *Law Enforcement* terms and expressions in the foreign language, which does not require necessarily the translation especially because we want our students to have the pleasure of discovering themselves the meaning of the terms by using all the teaching materials mentioned above and, on the other hand, to help them learn by doing their own efforts which represents the basis for learning. This list can be used in different ways during the seminars both by teachers and students for the purpose of reaching the educational objectives of the seminar. For example, the teacher can ask students to choose some terms and use them in their own sentences in writing or verbally, or the list can help teachers in students' evaluation at the end of the unit. We think that if all the unit tasks are properly used in the class by teachers and students, then we can be sure that the aims regarding the acquisition of special policing terminology could be achieved.

The section with *Exercises* offers a variety of educational tasks in form of a series of open/closed questions, grammar and vocabulary exercises designed to assess

the knowledge and practice the terminology. Solving these tasks requires the reading and learning of the content, meaning that the student must cover the theory contained in the course chapter. The variety of the exercises suggested in the course are meant to stimulate the creativity of the students as well as to make the teaching-learning process more attractive. The key to exercises will help students to evaluate themselves and can also help to the achievement of the educational goals regarding the self-study.

The aim of the authors is that the course will contribute to the development of the students' knowledge and skills in a foreign language. We also hope that our foreign language courses will represent a valuable educational tool for all the students in the Police Academy and other beneficiaries.

#### 4. Introducing Case Studies into the Seminars

In order to make the students better understand the topic of a seminar and practice the specialized vocabulary, the teacher can introduce case studies during his seminar. For example, let's choose the topic about *Types of crimes, Crimes against persons, Mugging* which is included in one of the course units mentioned above.

After the theory about the topic is presented to the students, the teacher can choose an incident or situation which will be transformed into a case study. In our case it is a short story about a case of mugging happened to Mrs. White in her way back from the market to her home, based on the following text:

*Yesterday Mrs. White went back home from the market and while walking in the park she was grabbed by the shoulder by someone who took her purse. There were a few persons nearby but only a teenager saw what happened to her. He saw the suspect fleeing the area on foot and then getting in a car, a white van which was stopping near*

the park. He helped Mrs. White arrive to the closest Police Station where she reported the mugging. Officer Benson was on duty that day afternoon and he filled in the report.

In order to obtain correct information and fill in the report, officer Betany started asking specific questions.

The next step is to provide sufficient details on the roles, objectives and situation on which participants can take appropriate decisions in order to turn the incident into a police investigation. This is in fact the challenge or problem of the case study.

In this regard, the teacher reminds the fact that when a crime has been committed, the first officer at the crime scene should ask himself a set of questions which in fact are the starting point of the police investigations. If the clues of the crime are properly explained by the police then the investigator can be sure he follows the right lead. In order to determine if there is a crime or not, the police officer should take into consideration four elements: there has to be a violation of the existing law, a person who commits an illegal act, a victim of the crime and a place in which the crime was committed.

In our case, the law that was broken is the Romanian Criminal Law, the offender is the teenager who committed the mugging, the victim is Mrs. White and the crime scene is the park near Mrs. White's house.

Developing the problem of the case study, the teacher reminds the "rule" of the five "W's" and the one "H" which includes questions starting with the capital letters mentioned above. Based on these questions, the students will re-tell the story. The questions starting with *W* are:

Who press charges to the police?

Who are the victims?

What are the injuries of the victim?

Who is suspected for the crime committed?

Who saw the crime and can give statements related to it?

Who helped the criminal (if he has accomplices)?

*The complainant is Mrs. White who, being in a good physical form, went to the Police station next to the park and reported the mugging. She was accompanied by a witness, the teenager. The victim is also Mr. White who fortunately hasn't suffered serious injuries during the assault. The suspect has been seen by the victim and a few suspects who will give statements about his description.*

Other questions starting with *W* are:

What category of crime has happened?

What are the circumstances in which the crime has been committed?

What is the *modus operandi* of the criminal?

What is the vehicle(s) used by the offender?

What is the direction in which the criminal fled the crime scene?

*The crime committed is one against property and also not a very serious one. It was an act of mugging, including physical harm and also taking property. After questioning, the police decided there wasn't any connection between the victim and the suspect.*

The police officer also ask himself questions about the time:

When was the crime committed?

When was the crime discovered?

When did the first police officer arrive at the crime scene?

When did the witnesses see what happened?

*The mugging was committed around 2 o'clock and reported in approximately 30 minutes.*

Other important questions are those about the place where the crime has been committed.

Where has the crime been committed (address)?

Where were the victims, witnesses, and suspect(s) at the time of the crime commission and where are they now?

*As we know from the text, the mugging was committed in the park near Mrs. White's home and the only eye witness is now at the Police Station for giving statements.*

Maybe one of the most important question is about the motive of the crime committed:

Why did the criminal comit the crime?

Why was the victim in that area?

Why was the suspect(s) in this location?

Why did the criminal choose the victim, the place and the time to commit this offence?

*The mugger is not Mrs. White's relative, friend, family member or neighbor and she doesn't know why the mugger chose her to be the victim.*

Last but not least it's important to find out about the modus operandi of the crime committed:

How was the crime committed?

How severely is the victim injured?

How did the suspect leave the crime scene?

How many victims, witnesses, and suspects are involved in the crime?

*During the mugging, Mrs. White was slightly injured at her right arm. The suspect succeeded to flee the area on foot then he got in a white van parked near the park. Nobody saw the car's directon of travel.*

After obtaining all these details about the crime committed, the next stage consists in the implementation of the solution which in our case can be the police report. After taking the statements from the victim and witness, the police investigator fills in the police report based on the information and evidence collected.

The last step after completing the above task is to highliht the results or the

benefit of the activity which represents in our case the ability of conducting interviews/interrogations and filling in the police reports which are very useful in the police work.

Before starting working at the case, the teacher will divide the participants into groups to complete the tasks mentioned above. Taking into consideration the complexity of the topic, he can decide the size and the composition of the groups which in this situation can be mixed pairs or small mixed groups.

He will also set time limits, for example 30 min. to work the tasks and other 20 min. for debates and conclusions.

This case study can also be combined with other methods for example a role play in which the persons' roles to be played are: Mrs. White, the teenager and officer Betany. The situations which can be turned into dialogues can be: the moment in which the teenager helped the lady; the dialogue between officer Betany and Mrs. White or the teenager etc.

## 5. Conclusions

Case studies can be effectively used as an educational tool at seminars. In the case studies, participants learn from their own experiences, the experiences of other participants and the trainer or facilitator. Case studies must simulate real-life situations. When structuring a case study, the seven steps mentioned above should be taken into account, regarding the topic, the circumstances, a great number of details, the expected result, the group size and component, the timing.

It's very important how the teacher uses the case studies in their seminars or training sessions.

The facilitator shoud focus on a specific title for the case, which is very important because it can increase the readers' interest in the case and it must be followed by a strong reasoning. Depending on the size of the group, he can adjust the



quantity of the details offered to the participants; the bigger is the group, a larger amount of information is offered.

The facilitator must pay attention to the language used in the case study, because the terms shouldn't be too technical or shouldn't be so many because they can make the reading and understanding too difficult.

The case study should reach the goals of the training session and there is not only one result expected, there can be more correct answers. It is as realistic as it can, and also action oriented, making the participants think what would they do in that situation?

The case study focuses on one problem, leading to finding the solution for the case. Deviation from the topic leads to loss of readers' interest.

Irrespective of the format in which the teacher uses case studies, it is important for the facilitator to know all the issues involved in the case, prepare questions and be prepared for all the questions that the participants should ask at one moment. This means a very thorough preparation of the teacher who, in every moment of the seminar, can face unexpected issues from the students.

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