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Original Article
10.51889/2960-1649.2025.63.2.009AZHAR ABDULLINA^{1*}*¹Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

*Address of correspondence: Azhar Abdullina, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, Department of Postgraduate Education, Muratbaeva Str., 200, Almaty, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7316-7756>, E-mail address: azhar_abdullina@mail.ru, Tel.: 8(701)985-90-85

Case Method in Professional Language Education at Universities

Abstract

Introduction. The study explores the case method as an instructional strategy in foreign language education, addressing the need to enhance language acquisition and professional competence among students while bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in professional communication scenarios. *Methodology and Methods.* The research employed a competence-based approach focusing on developing students' professional worldview and competencies. The study utilized theoretical methods including relevant literature review, and empirical methods encompassing pedagogical observation and analysis of the author's teaching experience with second-year students in professional foreign language education settings. *Results.* The findings indicate that employing the case method in foreign language studies effectively develops professional competence, improves students' ability to analyze situations, evaluate alternatives, and select optimal problem solutions. The research demonstrates that implementing the case method creates conditions closely resembling real-life scenarios and fosters development of foreign language professional competence. Teaching Professional Foreign Language through case methodology extends beyond mandatory curriculum topics by grounding instruction in current problem situations from practice, serving as a valuable tool for achieving objectives in professional communication scenarios. *Scientific novelty.* The research contributes to advancing pedagogical practices in professional foreign language education by establishing the theoretical framework for integrating case methodology with competence-based approaches, demonstrating how case studies can effectively bridge linguistic and professional development needs. *Practical significance.* The study provides evidence-based insights for educators to enhance foreign language teaching practices, offering practical approaches for implementing case methodology in university settings to improve formation and development of students' foreign language professional competence while addressing the linguistic needs of future specialists.

Keywords: interactive learning, case method, foreign language, professional competence, competence-based approach, professional activities.

Introduction. Learning a foreign language is a mandatory component of professional training for future specialists in medical universities. The contemporary approach to language education focuses on providing professionally oriented instruction in foreign languages, aimed at developing the necessary competencies for effective communication in the students' future careers. The state compulsory educational standard for higher education mandates the incorporation of professional specifications into the foreign language curriculum to enhance communicative competence in foreign languages within particular professional fields

(State compulsory educational standards, 2025).

The case method (Hammond, 1980; Barnes, 1994; Christensen, 1994) is recognized as one of the most effective interactive learning strategies for teaching a professional foreign language. This method emphasizes students' independent activities within a simulated professional environment, where they engage with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills essential for their future roles (Kalust'yants, 2020). The case method incorporates real social, economic, and business scenarios, requiring students to analyze situations, identify

problems, propose potential solutions, and select the most effective one. These cases are grounded in factual material or closely resemble professional situations.

Originally developed at Harvard Business School in the 1820s, the case method was first applied in the fields of law and medicine during the 19th century (Harvard Business School (HBS), 216). Over time, it has been adopted in various disciplines, including psychology, pedagogy, and language learning (Tcurkan, 2021). The problems of the case study method have been examined by researchers such as S.M. Gass, L. Selinker, A.L. George, E. Bennett, M.V. Kuimova, V.V. Filonova, and others, whose contributions have led to significant advancements in this field. However, the issue of effectively utilizing case studies in the education of university students remains unresolved.

The case method (George, 2019; Rashid, 2019; Priya, 2021) offers numerous advantages for learning a foreign language. It enhances language proficiency and facilitates its application in professional contexts, fosters creative thinking, encourages students to think in the target language, and develops skills in public speaking, questioning, discussion, and argumentation. Additionally, it improves students' abilities to read professional literature in a foreign language and process information relevant to their field, while promoting teamwork and collaborative problem-solving. The method also supports both individual and group independent work among students (McLean, 2016). By studying real or hypothetical scenarios that future specialists may encounter in their fields, the case method enables students to analyze complex situations, devise problem-solving strategies, and engage in discussions about their solutions. This approach not only deepens students' understanding of the language but also allows them to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. However, it is crucial for educators to recognize the distinctions between cases and situational tasks (Vinokurova et al., 2020, p. 89).

Creating a case involves a complex pedagogical process. When developing a case, it is essential to clearly define the objectives

and select materials that align with the students' proficiency levels. Cases should be relevant and illustrative, presenting situations that can only be resolved through discussion and analysis. Students are presented with a case that includes an unresolved problem, structured with a clear framework comprising a problem situation, discussion questions, and tasks, along with supplementary information in appendices (Torres et al., 2023). Contemporary scholars assert that employing the case method in foreign language studies enhances overall language proficiency, fosters the development of linguistic and communicative competencies, and improves students' abilities to analyze situations, evaluate alternatives, and select optimal solutions. Vocabulary and grammatical structures are introduced and practiced within the context of professional communication scenarios, rather than through traditional general exercises, which actively engages students and positively influences their motivation and attitudes toward language learning. The application of case method technology is particularly relevant in the current landscape of higher medical education (Makusheva, 2020).

Materials and Methods. The analysis of the use of this methodology on the example of teaching medical students a foreign language was carried out on the basis of a competence-based methodological approach, which made it possible to consider the research problem taking into account the formation of a professional worldview, as well as professional competencies of future specialists. The theoretical methods were the analysis and generalization of the scientific literature on the use of the case method in the educational process of a modern university. Empirical methods included pedagogical observation, heuristic method (selection and analysis of clinical and linguistic material), analysis of the author's own experience as a teacher of a foreign language to 2nd-year students of the Medicine Faculty at the S.Zh. Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University. Additionally, a survey was conducted to assess respondents' reactions to the case method. Forty-five second-

year students from the Faculty of Medicine at S.Zh. Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University participated in the survey. The questionnaire was administered online, allowing participants to complete it remotely via a digital platform.

The questionnaire was carefully designed to effectively gather participants' perceptions of the case method. The questions were selected based on relevant literature and previous studies to ensure they addressed key aspects of respondents' attitudes and experiences. The final questionnaire consisted of 7 questions, primarily structured as closed-ended items to facilitate quantitative analysis. These included Likert-scale questions, where participants could choose from options such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, and Disagree, allowing for straightforward measurement of their opinions. The design aimed to be clear and concise, ensuring that participants could easily understand and respond accurately.

Results and Discussion. The educational process in modern universities is complex, involving not just knowledge transfer but also the education and social adaptation of students. Teachers need extensive subject expertise, organizational skills, and effective communication abilities. They play a vital role in building positive relationships with students and fostering a productive learning environment. To improve education quality, it is important to analyze the educational process and promote effective teacher-student interactions based on psychological and pedagogical principles. Interactive methods like surveys and questionnaires help assess teaching performance, identify challenges, and gather student feedback, ultimately enhancing the educational experience (Togizbayev et al., 2024).

The following areas of communication in the professional activities of medical university graduates can be identified:

- discussion of professional situations using medical terms;
- preparation and translation of medical documentation, including descriptions of diseases, treatment methods, techniques, experiments, procedures, drugs, technical means;
- participation in international professional conferences, seminars etc.;
- communication with a patient in English in emergency situations (Bryksina et al., 2023).

Work with this case was organized in four stages:

1. Stage of preparation.
2. Stage of immersion in the communication situation.
3. Stage of analysis of tasks and solution methods.
4. Stage of control.

The online survey was proposed to determine the respondents' reaction to a case method. Forty-five 2nd-year students of the Faculty of Medicine of S.Zh. Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University took part in the survey. Students chose an answer from four proposed options (Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree). The results of the student survey upon completion of using the case method in the course "Professional Foreign Language" are presented in Figures 2-7. Summarizing the data obtained as a result of the survey allowed us to draw the following conclusions: A significant majority of participants responded positively to the question regarding the enhancement of motivation for learning a foreign language in professional communication contexts, with 73.3% indicating "Strongly agree" and 23.3% selecting "Agree" (Figure 1). For the second question, concerning the encouragement of communication in a foreign language through the use of case studies, 63.3% of respondents answered "Strongly agree" (Figure 2).

Table 1. *A questionnaire on the use of case method*

The case method helps	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
increase motivation for learning a foreign language taking into account professional interests and needs				
stimulate communication in a foreign language				
integrate theoretical knowledge and practical actions				
acquire teamwork skills				
overcome the “language barrier”				
develop the ability to make independent decisions				
master spontaneous speech skills				

The third survey question, which focused on the effectiveness of the case method in merging theoretical knowledge with practical application, received responses indicating that 56.7% of students “Strongly agree”, 33.3% “Agree”, 6.7% “Neutral”, and 3.3% “Disagree”. This suggests that students are largely satisfied with the case method’s effectiveness in developing the mentioned skills.

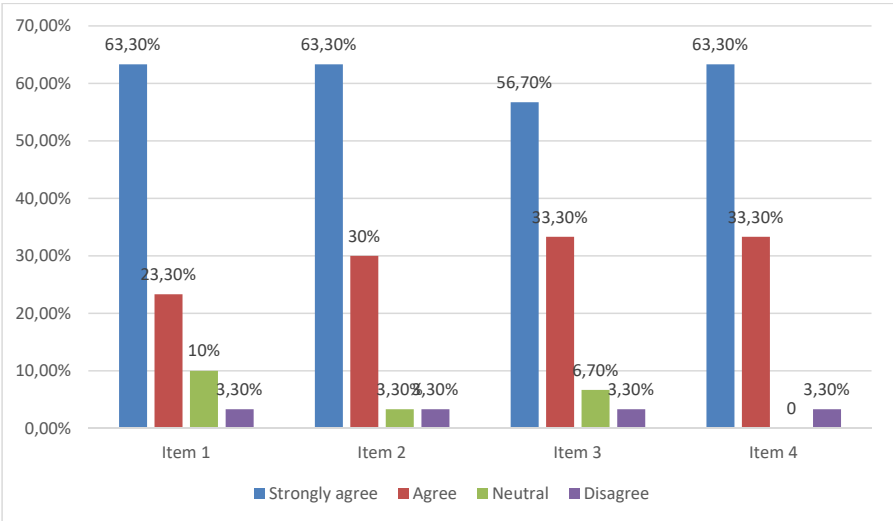


Figure 1: Results of the questionnaire – Items 1-4

According to just over half of the students, the case method aids in the development of teamwork skills, with 63.3% responding “Strongly agree” and 3.3% expressing disagreement. When asked about the effectiveness of the case method in overcoming the “language barrier” and enhancing language skills for discussing professional issues in a foreign language context, a majority of students responded positively, with 56.7% indicating “Strongly agree”, 6.7% being “Neutral”, and 3.3% disagreeing with the statement. 66.7% of respondents reported that they are developing their ability to make independent decisions (Figure 2).

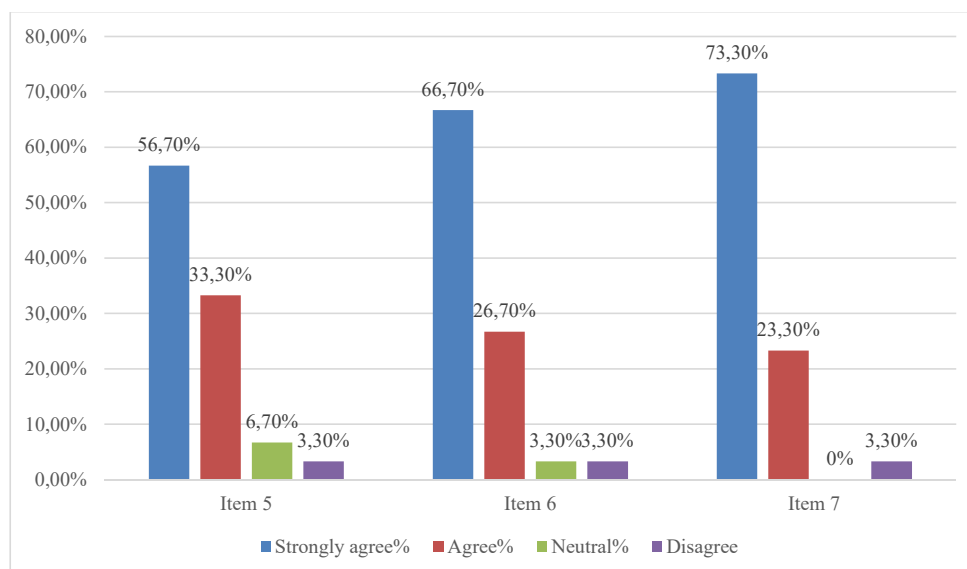


Figure 2: Results of the questionnaire – Items 5-7

A large portion of students (73.3%) strongly agreed that they are improving their spontaneous speaking skills through the case method. The case method possesses several didactic properties. Students are presented with a case (situation) that includes an unresolved problem.

Each case has a clear structure, comprising a problem situation, discussion questions and tasks, as well as appendices containing additional information. Multiple students can engage in the discussion of the situation simultaneously (Table 1).

Table 2. Case Study Example for Medical Students

Title: Managing a Patient with Asthma in a Multicultural Context	
Background: Maria, a 30-year-old female patient, visits the clinic for a follow-up appointment. She is originally from Mexico and has been living in the United States for the past 5 years. Maria has a history of asthma, which she was diagnosed with at age 10. She speaks limited English and often brings her sister to help translate during medical visits.	Management Plan: What recommendations would you make regarding her medication regimen? How can you encourage Maria to use her fluticasone inhaler consistently?
Presenting Complaints: Increased shortness of breath, especially at night Frequent coughing, particularly in the early morning Use of her rescue inhaler (albuterol) more than twice a week	Patient Education: What key points should be included in the education plan for Maria regarding asthma management? How can you ensure that the information is understood, given the language barrier?
Discussion Questions: Cultural Considerations: How might Maria's cultural background influence her understanding of asthma and its management? What strategies can be employed to ensure effective communication with Maria, considering her limited English proficiency?	Follow-Up: What follow-up appointments or tests should be scheduled to monitor Maria's asthma control? How often should her peak flow measurements be taken, and what should she do if her readings are low?
Diagnosis: Based on Maria's symptoms and history, what is the current status of her asthma? Are there any potential triggers for her asthma that should be explored?	Interdisciplinary Approach: Which healthcare professionals (e.g., respiratory therapist, social worker, interpreter) should be involved in Maria's care, and what roles would they play?

Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that the use of case studies gives an effective result in the formation and improvement of the foreign language professional competence. Thus, the results of the study showed that the case method is an effective tool for achieving the set goals in professional communication situations. The created collection of exercises includes five themes, with each theme featuring two medical cases designed to enhance professional competence in a foreign language.

The findings of this study raise important questions about the role of the case method in transforming the traditional model of language education in medical universities. High motivation indicators (73.3% “strongly agree”) may reflect not only the effectiveness of the method itself but also the novelty effect, which requires longitudinal studies to confirm the sustainability of the obtained results. Questions arise regarding the validity of student self-assessment as the sole criterion for method effectiveness. Subjective perception of improved language skills does not always correlate with objective indicators of linguistic competence, which points to the need for developing a comprehensive assessment system. It is necessary to include both quantitative and qualitative parameters of language development to obtain a more reliable picture of educational outcomes. Critical analysis also reveals the need for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which the case method affects learners’ cognitive processes, since positive perception does not always indicate genuine enhancement of professional linguistic competence.

The question of adapting the case method to the specifics of various stages of medical education and the cultural characteristics of the educational environment merits detailed consideration. The presented research is limited to experience working with second-year students from one university, which calls into question the possibility of generalising the obtained conclusions to a broader population. The cultural context of Kazakhstan is characterised by multilingualism and specific features in the perception of interactive teaching methods, which may significantly influence the

effectiveness of case technologies. Integration of the case method into the existing medical education system requires revision of traditional approaches to assessment and may encounter resistance from lecturers who are not prepared for radical changes in pedagogical practice. The question remains open regarding resource expenditure for preparing quality cases that correspond to rapidly changing standards of medical practice, and the necessity of constant updating of educational content to maintain its relevance and professional applicability.

Conclusion. The use of the case method in professional foreign language training at higher educational institutions has proven to be an effective and innovative pedagogical approach. By integrating real-world professional scenarios into language instruction, the case method allows students to engage in meaningful communication, develop critical thinking skills, and enhance their problem-solving abilities. This approach transforms passive language learning into an active process where learners must analyze information, make decisions, defend their viewpoints, and collaborate with peers - all within the context of their future medical profession. Through consistent application of the case method, students not only improve their foreign language proficiency, but also cultivate essential soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, time management, and intercultural competence. These skills are indispensable in the context of globalized healthcare systems, where medical professionals are expected to interact effectively with diverse populations and multidisciplinary teams.

Moreover, the case method bridges the gap between theory and practice by creating authentic learning experiences that mirror real-life clinical environments. Medical students are exposed to language tasks that simulate patient consultations, interprofessional dialogues, case documentation, and emergency communication - thereby preparing them to operate confidently in high-pressure, multilingual medical settings. The integration of case-based teaching in English language classes at medical universities supports the development of professional foreign language competence and

fosters deeper cognitive and communicative engagement. This method encourages students to become active participants in their own learning process, which increases motivation and retention of material. In conclusion, the case method can be considered not merely as a technique for language acquisition, but

as a comprehensive educational strategy that enhances the overall quality of professional preparation. Its implementation in medical education contributes significantly to the readiness of graduates to meet the challenges of modern healthcare and successfully integrate into the international professional community.

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Information about authors:

Abdullina Azhar, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, ORCID ID: 0009-0008-7316-7756, email: azhar_abdullina@mail.ru