

Teaching Business English – A Challenge Both for Students and Academics; A Survey of University of Isra Hyderabad

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Abstract

This article examines the challenges faced by teachers and students in the academic environment of University Hyderabad pertaining to the study of English. We discuss the curriculum currently used, the materials and techniques utilized in the teaching process, the need to adapt to the future demands of the workplace for students, and the type and content of the Business English Language Certificate exam assessment presented by our division. To better equip the learners with the necessary knowledge, the curriculum should be up-to-date with the latest developments in the field while taking into account the students' requirements. Furthermore, the materials and techniques should be tailored to the students' needs, and professional guidance should be provided to pass the certificate exam. Lastly, the students should practice skills that will be applicable in a business context.

Keywords: Business English; students; language certificate; syllabus; course design

1. INTRODUCTION

Business English needs to be perceived within the framework of English for Special Purposes (ESP) as it holds similar features like needs assessment, educational program design, and course design and selection of resources which are found in all types of ESP areas. It is similar to other form of ESP in its particular language requirements and focus on communication in particular contexts.

However, according to Ellis & Johnson (1994) it differs from other branches of ESP due to its combination of specific and general content. The question that Business English teachers and courses face is, what is the primary focus? Is it to construct a specific glossary, create a communication atmosphere related to businesses, or teach and hone the skills required for future businesspeople? What skills should be taken into consideration when designing courses for non-native economics and business majors? Furthermore, which teaching and learning methods are best suited to the Business English content and objectives?

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2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDYING ENGLISH IN INNATE LANGUAGE

Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989, the role of foreign language acquisition has become increasingly prominent in many countries. English, in particular, has experienced a surge in popularity due to its perceived status as the language of global communication. This renewed emphasis on developing language skills has been especially apparent in school-age education, where children are now encouraged to learn at least one foreign language as a matter of course. Private and public institutions alike now demand that prospective employees possess fluency in one or more languages, the most popular among these being English.

The importance of foreign language proficiency applies to all ages, from early childhood through to the postgraduate level. At the elementary and secondary school levels, English tends to be the most widely-taught language, with students often able to supplement their studies with classes in French, German, Spanish, or Italian. This prevalence of language courses is especially commonplace in higher education, where foreign language literacy is often an essential component of gaining entry to a bachelor's or post-graduate program. Additionally, some educational institutions also require students to earn certificates in language proficiency prior to graduation.

In light of its evident usefulness and wide-ranging applicability, it is no wonder that foreign language acquisition has become so prevalent. Whether for personal, educational, social or career-oriented purposes, fluency in a foreign language – particularly English – now stands as a cornerstone of progression in contemporary society.

3. ENGLISH AS A MOTHER TONGUE IN AN EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

At Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, one of the world's top 1000 universities, the study of foreign languages is mandatory for all students. In particular, English is taught to the students of the bibliography faculty. Comprised of two departments, the courses last from one to four semesters, depending on the faculty's own program. It is expected that students have a B1 level of understanding of English before the start of the course, at an intermediate level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and will achieve a B2 or C1 level by the end of two or three semesters. While the study and course plans are tailored to the students' major studies, common topics such as grammar and function still form a part of the objectives. Furthermore, the vocabulary and topics covered also vary depending on the lecturer.

4. OCCUPATIONAL ENGLISH

It is widely accepted that economics or commerce students need to study specific business language and vocabulary, while those majoring in other scientific fields should take general English (or other foreign language) courses, tailored to their area of expertise. Our department specializes in the foreign language studies of the Faculty of Business and two other faculties, the Faculty of Business and the Faculty of European Studies. This results in a focus on Business Language and Communication.

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At our university, an undergraduate program specifically designed for business and economics students consists of four semesters of foreign language courses with practical English (or French or German) courses and two semesters of Language of Business Communication. All students of the faculty are to complete the same required 28 hours of practice classes and 14 hours of lectures per semester in the first two years, and 14 hours of seminars per semester in the third year. International relations students have three semesters of practical foreign language courses following the third semester. All second-year students have the opportunity to take another foreign language as a compulsory subject. As for Master's students, a semester of intercultural business communication (in either English or French, based on their previous school and the foreign teacher's language) is incorporated into certain program curricula.

5. THE SYLLABUS AND THE DESIGN OF A BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSE FOR STUDENTS

In recent decades, the approach to teaching Business English has undergone a significant shift. Rather than simply providing targeted technical vocabulary, the primary focus is now on developing communication skills in the areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. This shift is due to the need for learners to be prepared to utilize Business English confidently in practical, real life situations, such as giving presentations, negotiating and participating in meetings.

To meet the particular needs of Business English learners, courses must be designed to accommodate both novice and working students. Novice learners need to gain relevant knowledge and proficiency in business-related topics, while more experienced students require an understanding of the language requirements and nuances of their specific working environment. Recognizing this distinction, then, instructors should tailor their courses and activities to meet the individual needs of their learners.

When designing business English courses, experts such as Mark Ellis and Christine Johnson (1994) recommend considering some specific steps compared to general English courses, such as:

Needs Analysis: What do students need to know in order to be prepared for a future work environment?

Level Assessment: An assessment in the form of either written or verbal tests to measure the students' ability at the start of the course.

Curriculum: An organized learning program with set goals and objectives.

Course Objectives: Based on the Needs Analysis, or pre-set objectives that students need to reach (command of structure, function, etc.).

Time: Due to limited university time, the course should be tailored according to the duration (weeks, semesters, etc.).

Learner Expectations: With a business English course, learners have a need for success and are focused on achieving their goals.

Evaluation of Progress: Should be done intermittently in order to measure student's progress, either through written or verbal testing.

When the Bologna System was implemented, many tailored language courses were eliminated, with the intention of standardizing the curriculum to ensure equal outcomes for

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all. One of these courses was the Business English course, a program formerly designed to give students the language skills necessary for their chosen field of work (finance, marketing, tourism, etc.) Subsequently, this course outline has remained largely unchanged, and is now taken by students of all majors. It is recognized as an effective way to increase business English proficiency despite the lack of customizability of the existing courses. With the right structure and adapted teaching methods, the course can be adapted to suit a variety of learners, helping them to achieve their desired goals.

3. THE LANGUAGE CERTIFICATE

Proficiency in a foreign language is an essential requirement for obtaining a degree from a university abroad or within the European Union (EU). Consequently, language centers at our university, such as Lingua, offer language courses to students and provide language certificates in general and business languages, such as English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. This certification exam must be completed during a student's undergraduate studies, unless they hold a globally recognized language certificate (e.g. TOEFL, Cambridge). Applicants who pass the Lingua exam will gain a nationally recognized language certificate, which is valid for two years and can be used to apply for a master's or doctoral degree, for scholarships, or even for professional opportunities. According to the EU's new language policy rules every European citizen must be able to speak at least two foreign languages (EU, 2021).

This certification exam evaluates a student's learning progress from enrollment to graduation. written exam has four parts: a listening comprehension exercise, a reading comprehension exercise, an English in Use section, and a writing assignment. The oral exam is divided into two parts: a mini-presentation and a conversation. To obtain the certification, a student must have a grade of 20 out of 30, which corresponds to the B2 level (Council of Europe, 2001). The exams are held twice a month, must be registered online, and have a nominal candidate fee. By obtaining this certificate, a student can enroll in additional courses related to his BA thesis and complete a bachelor's degree or apply to an entrance exam for a master's or doctoral program.

6. CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to teaching business English, we have encountered many obstacles while attempting to create effective curricula and practical courses for economics students. In order to maximize the efficiency of the course, we suggest that more attention should be paid to spoken language and phrases, rather than solely focusing on technical expressions. Schools around the globe who have adopted the Bologna system may need to reassess their educational approaches, including the curriculum, in light of the updated financial information required by the international community. Thus, it becomes even more required for teachers to use a forward-looking and comprehensive curriculum that continuously evaluates language use and comprehension.

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