

LEARNING BUSINESS ENGLISH – NEW CHALLENGES AND METHODS: FROM COURSEBOOKS TO TECHNOLOGY BASED STRATEGIES

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Abstract: Being a trade language and a diplomatic one, used in business, science, aviation, computers, tourism, diplomacy, actually, in all the fields of our lives, English is the third most widely spoken language in the world, taught in 118 countries. Thus, acting as a communication language across the globe and having a huge influence in the business field, we are facing the expansion of international relations in various spheres, requiring future university graduates a competency-based approach to mastering Business English. Language education policymakers have incorporated English in higher education syllabuses in order for the students to become proficient in English, having different pedagogical methods and motivational techniques. In this article we are trying to describe our perception on how to shape the students' motivation to study Business English, by using new techniques and more attractive methods. Human behaviour can be shaped and influenced in a wide variety of ways, ranging from incentives and rewards, considered to be external motives and continuing with the internal motives, which are represented by the wide spectrum of reasons for doing things: people can be motivated by the love of power and money, the love for others and the world around us or the love of peace and freedom. And because of the complexity of life, in general, several of these motives can affect us simultaneously, interacting with each other. When talking about mastering Business English, the same situation occurs. The students' ultimate success always depends on the level of motivation. And this motivation has been the target of intensive research in Business English acquisition for a long time. The article begins with a theoretical approach describing the problem under discussion, continuing with some suggestions of pedagogical conditions that make effective impact on increasing the students' motivation and adding some ideas of materials to be used in class.

Keywords: Business English; motivation; communication; teaching methods; language acquisition, Artificial Intelligence.

JEL Classification: Y8, Z19

A trade language, the language of diplomacy, business, science, aviation, computers, tourism, and socializing, English has become an extremely important subject to study in universities all over the world. Being taught in 118 countries and being the third most widely spoken language in the world, the importance of mastering English is no longer an issue to be discussed. In all the aspects mentioned above, English must be mastered; the need to attain language proficiency in order to excel in various aspects is more obvious than ever. All the countries where English is taught incorporated English as part of the syllabus, by having different pedagogical methods and motivational techniques in order to improve the students' proficiency in the English language. Mastering English gives students, the opportunity to reach their desired goal and objectives easily. From another point of view, having employees who are proficient in English gives multinational companies the opportunity to compete globally. Being a branch of English for Specific Purposes, Business English is designed, based on the specific needs related to the Economic environment, apart from English for law, for doctors, for engineers, and so on.

In the modern world, more exactly in the era of social networking and all kinds of gadgets at hand, learning a foreign language may seem an easy task to achieve, at first sight. However, if we take a closer look at the issue under discussion, we will understand that things are not as easy as they seem. During the years, learning methodology of Business English has gone through various periods in which it has evolved, being the focus of many experts who have continuously striven to find new and improved ways of learning Business English. Researchers have given a large range of prognosis and explanatory studies, providing a vivid image on the potential future lines in the higher education sector. The enormous progress of Information Technologies is having a positive effect on teaching and learning Business English, the main focus being on the continuous development in mobile software and hardware and the way these new methods have blended with the traditional methodology, in order to achieve the expected results. Due to these aspects, collaborative learning has acquired a new dimension; the huge advantage is the great exposure to authentic language, the unlimited access to a wide source of information and the opportunities to interact and communicate more intensively.

Many researchers have used the method of collaborative learning, when promoting new ways of teaching Business English. (Kirschner 2001, Storch 2005, Hafner and Miller 2011, etc.) Generally speaking, the students enrolled at Economics prefer to use technology in their daily activities, thus technology representing an important tool in teaching Business English. As Hafner and Miller said in 2021: *'Recent advances in Information and Communication Technologies, including the development of various Web 2.0 platforms have contributed to the emergence of new literacy practices in online contexts.'* As we all know, the students of today's universities are mostly 'Digital natives' and they are entirely different from the previous generation. In higher education, and not only, we are at a time of change, new learning experiences becoming more and more engaging, meaningful and relevant. The use of the instant messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger,

etc and the different digital social media such as Facebook, Blog, Twitter, etc gives them the possibility to interact with family members, friends and whomever they want. Similarly, they use the latest technological findings, such as Moodle and different applications in order to achieve their educational goals. If a teacher wants to fully motivate his/her students in grasping a new lesson, the teacher will strive to find innovative ways to do it. It has been said, during the years that 'a good motivator, automatically is a good teacher, and a motivated learner will eventually become a good student' (Ushioda, 2008). Moreover, university teachers have to conform to the trend of the times and to the demand of the students and integrate as much as possible elements of technology with the aim of professional teaching. The above-mentioned picture provides us with what we need for the following strategies, in order for them to be properly applied. From the digital perspective, there are three main directions that will gain more and more space in Business English teaching: the Virtual Reality, the Artificial Intelligence and the Metaverse. It may sound quite strange but the truth is that these three directions are here and they are developing really fast. The concept of Virtual Reality encompasses the idea of a computer-simulated 3D situation, a virtual real-life environment in which the learner can immerse with the help of some 3D googles. The Artificial Intelligence direction is the one where computers execute tasks that normally need human intelligence. *'The Metaverse is an online, open, shared, persistent, three-dimensional virtual realm that offers people to connect with each other from all parts of their lives. It would link many platforms, same as how the world wide web connects several websites using one browser.'* (Blockchain Council) From our point of view, the Metaverse is the most likely to gain interest both among teachers of Business English as well as among students at the Faculty of Economics. Why? Basically, Metaverse allows you to enter a world which looks exactly like real world, creating virtual classrooms and situations in which both the teacher and the students can interact in real-time. The virtual environments can be created to simulate real-world situations in which the students are active and 'real' actors who need to practice their speaking skills, practising their Business English in a realistic context. Another way of using this digital tool in Business English classes is for the teacher to create a social metaverse where students can meet directly native speakers, practising their listening and speaking skills while interacting with virtual characters. Thus, the possibility of creating real-life contexts in Metaverse is a huge opportunity for Business English teachers and students all over the world. Due to the extraordinary developments in the computer industry, three-dimensional modelling and the Internet, the new learning methods and techniques, both for students and for teachers, are somehow a necessity rather than a need, learning being moved to a different dimension in all fields of study.

The question that arises is the following: when will this be possible? How soon will teachers of Business English in Romanian universities use Metaverse in their courses? The answer is: not very soon. Despite all the hype of the moment, in order to use these tools, the equipment needed in order to put this in practice is a pretty sophisticated one, requiring financial resources as well as a lot of knowledge in the field of technology. Besides the benefits

of the new trends, of course, there are some possible downsides. We will present them and we will try to compare the level of their effect on developing the methodology of teaching Business English. Although the current trend can be characterized in one word, that is tech-dominant, there are two more ingredients to a successful Business English course: a positive learning environment and an excellent teaching approach. There are four strategies that are suggested for the teacher to apply in the classroom: firstly, find the proper method to a high exposure to what we learn; secondly, make use of what the students have acquired in communication with others; thirdly, pay attention and become more reliable in the usage of the particular knowledge; lastly, put into practice the theoretical information, as much as possible. The question is how do we, teachers, achieve this goal as every student is unique and the given language needs to be used in real-world environments?

We suggest approaching one or more teaching strategies, which are considered to be the most appreciated strategies in teaching Business English today.

- **Personalized Learning**

According to Atikah Shemshack, learning is *'a natural human activity that is shaped by personal experiences, cognitive awareness, personal bias, opinions, cultural background, and environment. (...) Learning is a personalized experience that allows one to expand their knowledge, perspective, skills, and understanding.'* Personalized learning has been a topic of discussion for a long time. The use of this term goes back to the 1960s and all the enthusiastic users of this method have come to the conclusion that there is no common definition attributed to this method of learning. However, beginning with 2008, this method of teaching/learning Business English has started to gain more and more attention. But basically, we talk about an educational approach in which the teacher aim is to tailor the instruction to the students' needs and abilities. The significance and effectiveness of this method have been emphasized by the recent changes in the curriculum and pedagogical approach in comparison with the traditional way of teaching. Personalized learning *'heralds a new way of dealing with individual differences by effecting as precise a dialogue as possible on each language learner, thus triggering specific interventions designed to target and respond to each person's specific language learning problems.'* (Liam & Sangarun, 2017) To say it in other words, personalized learning is an important and valuable method to precision language education, which has become a crucial topic of current interest when talking about technology oriented learning/teaching.

- **Gamification and role-playing**

Around 2010, when the technological developments were having a rapid pace, the world of education witnessed the emerge of a new term – gamification. It is a non-game-based teaching method which has become increasingly popular among teachers of Business English. As Hadirotun Nikmah points out, by gamification teachers can improve the students' engagement in learning English; the choices offered by the technology varying considerably the teacher of Business English can make the class more attractive and also more productive when it comes to refinement. Thus, a

boring seminar atmosphere can turn into a more enjoyable, comfortable and motivating one. Tara and Samer claim that *'gamification and role-playing motivate students through a magic formula of fun and meaningful learning that can be attributed to the design elements of the game varying from points and levels for rewarding and ranking to incentives and badges to challenge and excite.'* When teaching Business English, we can accept and recognize the use of different technological tools that enhance the learning process, providing a full and reliable support. Moreover, teachers can get an aid in creating a true business English learning atmosphere, great convenience and fun in the process of learning, since the use of technology can somehow avoid the embarrassment in students' practice and improve the communication skills more easily. Some apps can be used as teacher assistants providing the class with sentence patterns and fixed collocations for practice activities, which can be of great help. The concept invites users to be more involved in solving a problem, having different levels, a scoring system and a wide range of tools focusing on learning. The concept is divided into three categories: the internal one, which is gamification aiming the increase in productivity, by creating new innovative projects in business and organization. The external gamification uses outside-company firms or organizations, aiming to improve the relationships between different companies, between business and customers, increasing the profitability of the enterprise. The third level of gamification is entitled behaviour-change gamification, having the aim to form a new habit against a person.

- **Project-based Learning**

In recent years, teachers of Business English have been trying to provide students methods of learning/teaching engaging both cognitive skills, namely hard skills and problem-solving and teamwork, namely soft skills. However, this goal is not easy to be achieved as the role of traditional learning has been prevailing for so long. It's rather difficult to achieve these skills related goals as the role of the teacher has been known for so long as 'the transmitter of the knowledge' while students act as 'the receptors of the information'. The fact that the students have been encouraged to focus on the cultivation of their research skills rather than on the professional ones, led to a deep gap between what students learn at the university and what they actually need in real-life situations at their workplace. In order to change this, researchers in the field suggested the engagement of the students in real-problem solving and knowledge construction in authentic professional contexts. Project preparation and presentation represent an attractive and challenging way to achieve this goal. This method is a way of learning which is based on the hypothesis that students gain a deeper and better understanding of the material when they actually build and work with their own ideas and concepts on a given topic. It is an active form of instruction, being centred on the student. The more communicative, autonomous, willing to collaborate the students are, the better the outcome is. Moreover, the presentation of the projects implies thorough preparation, constructive investigations, goal-setting, practice, real-world practices, confidence and real-world practices. Researchers in this field have come to the conclusion that modern digital technology, group processes and the teachers' ability to

provide guidance and support can be used as facilitating factors in the implementing of this teaching method. Thus, students are challenged to drive their own learning through a lot of collaborative work, inquiry, creating the projects that can easily reflect their knowledge and interest in the field. The transversal skills that are employed in this activity prepares the students for the real-world challenges they might face in their future career, by combining motivation and acquisition of knowledge.

- **Flipped seminar**

This term has become synonymous with active learning for some researchers. Why? Because it engages students in learning, more than just listening, reading, and memorizing, including collaboration between students (either in pairs or in groups) as well as independent activities involving reflection and writing. The definition of this term is '*a flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, which aims to increase student engagement and learning by having students complete readings at home and work on live-problem solving during class time.*' (Wikipedia) This strategy is valuable and appreciated both by teachers and students for several reasons among which we mention: the students can estimate their own understanding, the students can collaborate with their classmates, thus enhancing their sense of belonging as well as motivation, and the teachers can get feedback about what the students are learning, providing better guidance in the learning process. The teacher's approach in this method should be following these steps: find or create and recommend resources for students, suggest activities and teach students how to use their material.

- **Collaborative learning**

According to Wikipedia, '*Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product.*' A major component of this method of teaching/learning is the training of the students in their social skills, so much needed at their future workplace, building positive relationships, encouraging diversity understanding and promoting positive social responses to problems encountered during the activity. Another major component of this approach is that the students are committed in the learning process, working together and being taught how to challenge ideas and advocate for the wanted positions without too much personalization on the statements. While working together, both the active part (speaker) and the passive part (listeners) involved in the process, develop valuable problem-solving skills by formulating ideas, discussing them, receiving immediate feedback and giving answers and comments. This way, the oral communication skills are developed, the students being actively involved in the cooperative process which leads to deep learning rather than to surface learning. During this activity, the teacher has the opportunity of assessing students from different points of view, such as interaction, explanation of the reason, asking questions and discussing ideas and concepts. Compared to individual effort and competitive strategy, the collaborative learning method provides numerous advantages such as higher achievement and greater productivity, as well as greater self-esteem, psychological health, and social competence.

Conclusions

As English has expanded tremendously in the last decades along with the technology that has been at hand, Business English teachers have to adapt their work to the current trends if they are to achieve successfully their goal of developing all four skills in their students. The required goals of learning Business English may not be achieved by using past methods, which are neither productive nor creative and constructive. The new technological advancement has created the proper ground for more improvement, more effectiveness and efficiency in our attempt to be better and better day by day. Business English teachers can achieve a fundamental transformation of the courses' outcome by breaking through the inherent teaching ideas and using the technological development that is at hand.

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