

## ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES THROUGH TEACHING NEGOTIATION SKILLS AT ENGLISH CLASSES

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The article describes a semester-long pilot course on negotiations taught to management majors at Baikal International Business School. Drawing on frameworks like content-based instruction (CBI), ESP and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), together with project-based learning (PBL) and real-world simulations, the author explores the benefits of integrating professional training into language curricula. After detailing the negotiation course syllabus, the paper discusses the challenges faced by sophomores and gives recommendations to improve it. Findings highlight enhanced soft skills like strategic, critical and creative thinking, communication, spillover benefits to everyday interactions and potential business contexts, and improved student motivation.

*Keywords:* content-based instruction, ESP, teaching negotiation skills, professional training

**T**raditional business education prioritizes technical competencies like financial modeling and strategic analysis, yet employers consistently highlight deficiencies in soft skills. To illustrate, a 2023 World Economic Forum report identifies critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence as top skills for future employees, with communication topping the list [1]. Similarly, surveys from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) reveal that 80 % of graduates struggle with workplace English proficiency, leading to missed opportunities in multinational settings [2]. Therefore, business graduates should master not just discipline knowledge but also the art of professional communication and interpersonal dynamics.

English language classes, often positioned as supplementary to core business curricula, hold unlimited potential to bridge this gap by embedding professional skills training. Integrating negotiation skills, cultural competence, ethical issues and so on into English instruction equips students not only for corporate success but also for effective everyday interactions. English classes, which use language as a medium, offer a favorable environment to cultivate these skills through role-plays, debates, and case studies drawn from real-world business scenarios. What is more, this integration addresses a pedagogical imperative: English instructors, often undervalued in business programs, can transform their classrooms into hubs of holistic development. By aligning lesson objectives with business outcomes, educators ensure relevance without diluting linguistic goals. Consequently, it is relevant to teach negotiation skills as part of a business English course. The paper discusses the outcomes of the undergraduates' exposure to a negotiation course taught to 2nd-year students of Baikal International Business school for a semester.

#### Literature Review

Actually, the idea of content-based instruction (CBI) is not new. Originating in the 1960s, it evolved through English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the 1980s-1990s in the United States and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in 1990s in Europe. These frameworks were integrated steadily into higher education as they leverage authentic discipline content to enhance motivation, specialized vocabulary acquisition, and simultaneous development of language and critical thinking [3, 4]. For business students, CBI, ESP and CLIL foster transferable competencies like negotiation through experiential tasks, enhancing employability while mirroring real-world communication demands. Research confirms that CBI boosts retention and autonomy, as learners actively use language as a tool rather than an end goal. Obviously, these frameworks position business content as the vehicle for language acquisition, yielding practical application since they prioritize the so-called 4Cs (Content, Communication,

Cognition, and Culture) and focus on «learning by doing» rather than passive instruction.

This content-based approach encompasses an experiential method, project-based learning (PBL), which further amplifies benefits by simulating real-world scenarios. Studies affirm PBL's efficacy in ESP courses. Key studies highlight improved outcomes when students actively design role-plays. For example, Chi reports that implementing PBL in an English for Business course boosted students' autonomy, motivation, and field knowledge» [5]. Similarly, task-based learning in business ESP develops confidence through simulated negotiations.

Beyond business applications, the acquired skills foster lifelong adaptability. Professional English training enhances active listening and persuasive speaking and writing, which translate directly to personal domains such as conflict resolution in relationships, informed civic participation, and effective self-advocacy in consumer interactions. For instance, a student mastering cross-cultural negotiation in a simulated discussion gains tools for resolving family disputes or advocating in community forums. Research by Hyland underscores this spillover effect, showing that language-integrated skills training boosts overall life satisfaction and resilience [6].

#### Course Description

Before discussing the course taught to students, let us give its brief overview. The negotiation course is based on the book *Negotiating Successfully* [7] and is divided into 9 units which approach negotiation skills step by step, mirroring real negotiation stages. Starting with preparation and opening to concluding the deal, the learner is taken through a variety of activities which help develop language skills, master negotiation skills, building confidence and competence. The course draws on materials borrowed from negotiation books, Coursera courses, online lectures and websites. The course includes a lot of audio and video materials, and is designed for students with at least an intermediate level of English language proficiency, but some activities can be adapted to lower-level students.

Each unit divides into consistent sections: lead-in discussions, reading for context, listening activities with audio/ video from Coursera and lectures, negotiation tips with quizzes and professor videos (e.g., Kellogg School of Management), language focus on key phrases/ idioms, and practicing via role-plays and group tasks. Unit I, *Defining Negotiation*, explores definitions, win-win vs. win-lose negotiations, and concepts like BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) and pie expansion through readings, videos and quizzes on different negotiation traps. Unit II, *Preparing to Negotiate*, covers such basic negotiation terms as ZOPA (Zone of Potential/ Possible Agreement), positions/ interests negotiations, prioritizes aims and team roles. Unit III, *Opening Negotiations*, details welcoming, small talk, agenda-setting, and stating interests. It also provides students with ice-breaking techniques, useful sequencing phrases and raises cultural awareness in openings. As

it follows from the title, Unit IV, Understanding Cultural Differences, analyzes cultural factors and their role in negotiating (e.g., contract vs. relationship goals, direct vs. indirect communication, formal vs. informal style, high or low time sensitivity, high or low emotionalism, general vs. specific agreement, ways of building an agreement — bottom up or bottom down, risk-taking, and team organization). Unit V, Using Communication Skills, focuses on tactful questioning (direct/indirect), active listening, and observation of nonverbal cues, offering students movie analysis tasks which allow practicing the taught skills. Unit VI, Making Proposals, teaches how to frame offers, make counter-proposals, reject diplomatically, and give feedback. Unit VII, Using Negotiation Techniques, discusses strategies and tactics (anchoring, framing, reciprocity, contrast, etc.) used in negotiations and exposes students to various contexts for practice. It develops persuasion skills and teaches how to handle objections as well. Unit VIII, Bargaining and Reaching Agreement, emphasizes win-win principles, concessions with conditions, logrolling, and exerting pressure politely, further making undergraduates test the strategies and tactics learned in the previous unit. Finally, Unit IX, Concluding Negotiations, summarizes agreements, detail-checking, confirmation emails, and closing techniques.

Strategies build from theory to practice: readings/videos introduce concepts, tips/ quizzes reinforce psychology (e.g., anchoring bias), and language focus provides phrases for real use in the follow-up activities. Activities emphasize experiential learning: pair/group role-plays simulate scenarios (e.g., IT contracts, staffing disputes); compare/contrast audio versions highlight effective vs. poor techniques; charts (positions/interests) and brainstorming foster preparation; quizzes test comprehension; and movie analyses and essays develop critical reflection. These promote speaking/ listening confidence in business and everyday contexts.

#### Discussion

Exposing students to this course proved very beneficial. Although most Business English learners are not going to take part in international negotiations, all will have to communicate with colleagues, bosses, subordinates, clients, parents, and siblings on a regular basis. So knowing how to negotiate effectively increases chances of settling the differences, getting a job or a pay rise, lowering a price, getting better terms and so on. In other words, these competences are vital skills for real-world deal-making and conflict resolution. Also, the blend of some theory, practice, and peer feedback builds confidence and strategic thinking.

Moreover, teaching how to negotiate offers a lot not only to students but also to language teachers as it allows teaching management-related content while developing such language skills as speaking and listening, which are crucial for language use. Despite the fact that the course offers a lot of scenarios to act

out, sophomores are also encouraged to make simulations on their own. In fact, Druckman and Ebner (2013) advocate student-created simulations drawn from real business scenarios, deepening mastery of BATNA while heightening engagement. A study on collaborative role-play design with internships reports students better balance distributive (win-lose) and integrative (win-win) elements, gaining insights into information asymmetry via feedback [8]. Besides, analogical reasoning, when students compare cases, and observational learning, when they watch model negotiations, boost joint gains more than didactic methods. What's more, making sophomores role play simulations fosters creative solutions, developing creative thinking. Pairing hands-on role-playing simulations, which mirror scenarios like supplier contracts or salary discussions, with choice, emotion and outcome analyses accelerate skill transfer to real business contexts.

When asked about the positive outcomes on completing the negotiation course, the students mentioned boosted confidence and deal-making efficacy in everyday interactions, higher resilience when dealing with insistent partners, better problem-solving, and greater awareness of psychological tools to influence others, self-awareness and self-control. Also everybody admitted that the course was relevant, useful and interesting, and it was fun for them to act out numerous scenarios.

Despite the undergraduates' positive evaluation, there were some challenges that they faced while learning negotiation skills. In the beginning, they did not quite realize how important the preparation stage of negotiations is and neglected it, which resulted potentially in missed opportunities. Here audio illustrations proved useful as they showed how thorough discussion before the negotiation sets the frames and limits for your further talks, thus increasing the chances of getting better terms for your company. As an example, in the dialog the students are exposed to the two team representatives who discuss negotiation skills of the opposing team members, the competitor company's current financial situation and business interests, their strengths and weaknesses, discounts that they are going to offer the opposing team, possible counter proposals and consequences for their company. It took some time for students to understand the significance of this stage and learn this value-creating strategy to discover hidden agendas.

Another challenge was training students to uncover interests beneath positions and bringing «more toys to the sandpit» as the Kellogg Management School professor metaphorically called in her video course [9]. Here breaking up negotiations into smaller sections really helped. When students were asked to act out only this part of the negotiations, it worked well; however, when they had to deal with the whole negotiation, they often missed it or did not develop properly. One more recommendation to teach this

strategy is thorough analysis because detailed peer and teacher feedback is key.

Also most students opted for a win-win strategy making unnecessary compromises and being too polite. Larry David once said that «A good compromise is when both parties are dissatisfied [10], which means that true compromises often leave everyone feeling that they have given ground and that pleasing everyone fully is unrealistic in negotiations. The sophomores liked the integrative approach much and were not tough enough to resist, especially when dealing with a pushy partner. Another extreme, when both the parties were tough, was struggling with emotional control, which often resulted in switching to Russian. To overcome this issue, it is helpful to pre-teach functional language for different stages like opening («Let's discuss terms»), proposing («How about a 10 % discount?»), agreeing/disagreeing («That works for us» or «I'm afraid that's not feasible»), and closing («Let's seal the deal»). Clarification language («Could you rephrase?») and paraphrasing to handle misunderstandings are necessary too, even if the students have a high English-level proficiency.

To improve the course, it would be effective to invite guest speakers from industry for authenticity or experts who could evaluate and give feedback to students. Also making negotiation teams more diverse can enrich discussions as diverse student backgrounds bring more variety and experience to a negotiation table.

To sum up, the negotiation course demonstrates that embedding professional skills in English classes elevates student motivation, transforms supplementary language training into a powerhouse for business readiness, yields measurable gains in both professional trajectories and personal efficacy, fostering not just fluency but adaptability in global and personal contexts. In spite of such hurdles as underemphasized preparation, overly conciliatory approaches, and lack of language skills, experiential role-plays and targeted functional language build lasting competence which can ensure graduates not only excel in deal-making and conflict resolution but also meet the high demands of their profession. ■

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**Развитие профессиональных компетенций через обучение навыкам**

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## **переговоров на занятиях английского языка**

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В статье описывается опыт обучения студентов-менеджеров Байкальской международной бизнес-школы переговорным навыкам в течение семестра. Опираясь на такие подходы, как контентно-ориентированное обучение (СВИ), английский для специальных целей (ESP) и обучение через содержание и язык (CLIL), а также проектное обучение (PBL) и моделирование реальных ситуаций, автор раскрывает преимущества интеграции профессиональной подготовки в языковое обучение. После рассмотрения учебной программы по переговорам в статье обсуждаются проблемы, с которыми столкнулись второкурсники, и советы по доработке курса. Итогами курса являются улучшение таких мягких навыков, как стратегическое, критическое и творческое мышление, общение, перенос этих умений на повседневные и рабочие ситуации, а также заметное повышение мотивации студентов.

*Ключевые слова:* контентно-ориентированное обучение, английский для специальных целей, обучение ведению переговоров, профессиональная подготовка