

## COMPETANCY-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) AND BUSINESS ENGLISH (BE)

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**Abstract.** The article presents the competency-based approach to teaching ESP and BE defined and substantiated by the authors. It shows the ways of developing ESP and BE students' competencies as well as ways of identifying and nurturing ESP and BE teachers' core competencies. Implementation of competency-based approach to teaching ESP and BE in University context requires transformations in the teaching process and provided educational content. The article focuses on the analysis of future economists' professional and BE competence structure and ESP and BE teachers' core competencies structure.

**Keywords:** competency-based approach, ESP, BE, competency, teaching.

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### Introduction

The modern stage of post-industrial development of society is marked by irreversible processes of globalization of politics, business and economy. Ukraine's participation in such processes is carried out through international contacts and the use of international experience in various fields of activity. Ensuring cross-cultural connections and enjoying the results of international cooperation within the country as well as the exchange of technologies and the formation of a single information space requires specialists, who have acquired a high level of foreign language proficiency. Consequently, learning ESP and BE becomes an important tool for the formation of professional competence, the relevance of acquired professional foreign language communication competence for a specialist of any scope, which will ensure professional mobility, efficiency of activities and the use of relevant information, is growing. In order to bring language teaching closer to the European and world standards, set out in the European Recommendations on Language Education, it is necessary to transform the learning of the foreign language of future specialists through the review, in particular, of its content and educational technologies. These standards require that the design of courses and programs be in accordance with the professional needs of students and meet expectations of society, which in its turn will facilitate mobility of students and their competitiveness in the labor market; encourage independent language for specific purposes learning throughout life. Absolute unification of ESP teaching programs for specialists of different competency profile is impossible because of the diversity of students needs.

The study aims to explore the theory and practice of competency-based approach to teaching ESP and BE; the ways of developing ESP and BE students' competencies as well as ways of identifying and nurturing ESP and BE teachers' core competencies; transformations

in the teaching process and provided educational content in connection with the implementation of competency-based approach to teaching ESP and BE in the University context.

### **Professional competency**

The key concept of the economic education content is professional competency as the most complete, personal and socially integrated result of education, targeted at ensuring successful functioning of specialists in society (*Epstein, Hundert, 2002*).

Researchers define professional competence as the gathering of specialized knowledge that forms the intellectual, technical-functional, behavioral, ethical and political competences, particularly, by the professional in their productive role, in a way that generates recognized results individually or collectively (*Harris, 1995*).

Professional competency is considered to be an ability to make decisions in order to solve problems, perform your professional responsibilities in different situations, fulfill your social role according to knowledge, experiences, values and attitudes, and apply your knowledge within a specific context. In other words, competence shouldn't be restricted to simple "know-how", it should not result in an automated and routinous practice that excludes subjectivity, reflection and creativity from the employee performing it. Professional competence, on the contrary, should use methodical and judicious communication, knowledge, technical abilities, performance-oriented reasoning, emotions, values and the capacity to reflect upon daily practice for the individual and collective benefit (*Kelchen, 2015*).

The modern educational paradigm is aimed at ensuring formation of a set of integrated knowledge, skills and personal qualities, constituting professional competency of a specialist and taking into account tasks and personal needs of student development. Professional competency structure of the future economic specialists according to L. M. Dibkova (*Dibkova, 2006*) consists of competencies in the sphere of economic activity, closely related areas of professional activity, IT technologies, communicative and social ones and those in the field of personal qualities such as self-determination and self-organization.

Another variant of professional competency components of an economist is introduced in the monograph of L. S. Otroschenko (*Otroshchenko, 2010*), according to which competency profile is distinguished into functional, methodological, informational, social and personal components. Such a competency profile is far more comprehensible and clearly structured. In its turn, each component of the structure is taking into account the characteristics of the professional activity of a specialist in economics and contains a number of lower level subcomponents that correspond to the range of professional tasks performed by economists in their professional activities, educational and qualification characteristics and professional characteristics (Table 1).

Therefore, the professional competency of an economic specialist is a combination of professional and personal features which in addition to professional knowledge, skills and abilities in economics, management, administrative and tax law, ethics, social psychology, culturology, contains cognitive and creative capabilities, preparedness for risk and taking additional responsibility, predictiveness and critical thinking to assess the results of their own activities.

Table 1

**The structure of the professional competencies of an economic specialist**

<b>Components of professional competencies structure of the first level</b>	<b>Components of the professional competencies structure of the second level</b>
Functional	economic forecasting professional managerial monitoring
Methodological	didactic and methodological educational cognitive organizational researching
Informational	media informational and analytical
Social	communicative (in particular foreign language communicative) interculturological conflict-solving cooperative
Personal	motivational and resolving reflexive moral and spiritual

Professional competencies have their own profile criteria. The highly competitive labour market sets standards for them: “The global economy is already losing around 100 bn. USD a year in lost contracts because of lack of language skills in the workforce,” says Baroness Coussins, chair of the all-party parliamentary group on modern languages (APPG). “And we aren’t just talking about high flyers: in 2017 over 27% of office and clerical jobs went unfilled because of the languages deficit.” Thus, the existing criteria constitute the foundation in job interviews and work performances assessment. Besides, job assignments accomplishment requires a set of abilities and knowledge which the students seek to acquire.

**Foreign language competency as a functional component of an economist’s professional competency**

Professional competency as an integral unity of special and interdisciplinary key competencies of the specialist means the effective appliance of knowledge and skills as well as the continuous generation of new cognitions and abilities that should ensure the competitiveness of modern specialists. Foreign language competence as a functional, substantive component of the professional competence of future economists acquires new characteristics relevant to the professional and social activities of a specialist in the global information space.

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", the economic professions belong to social and behavioral field of knowledge, thus the humanitarian cycle syllabus,

which is included in the content of professional training of economists, is aimed at the formation of ideological, psychological, social and communicative competences of graduates.

Therefore, the professional competence of a modern economic specialist is a complex multicomponent concept, which in modern scientific researches is characterized from the point of view of several approaches such as sociocultural, activity-based, communicative, professional, context, informational and psychological ones.

Foreign language proficiency is an integral part of the professional activity of future specialists in the economic field. Knowledge of a foreign language helps to establish relations with foreign partners, to get acquainted with the world's achievements in the field of professional activity and use them in their professional practice. A modern competitive economist must be able to establish contacts with foreign partners independently, hold negotiations, write business letters properly, draw up business contracts, process professional information acquired from foreign-language sources. One of the problems of language education while forming professionally oriented foreign language communicative competence in the process of teaching is having methodological support adequate to the requirements of time and environment.

Students majoring in Economics have their own specifics regarding the objectives, content and methodology of learning. According to the ESP syllabus for economic specialties, the purpose of this discipline is to master the level of knowledge that is necessary for skilled professional activities in various spheres and situations of business partnership, joint production and scientific work. In general, the study of a foreign language in a higher educational institution has a professional and communicative orientation and future-oriented professional communication. When studying a foreign language, students must not only learn vocabulary specific to an economic specialty, but also learn to use their knowledge in different situations of business communication.

Since language and speech, in particular, foreign ones are universal means of human development and formation of higher mental functions on which the structures of consciousness, personal qualities, including professional ones, are based, the study of a foreign language, in its turn, affects the formation and development of personal qualities that are essential for an economic specialist. The orientation to solving real problems, to productive and constructive interaction, purposefulness, practicality, non-standard, multivariate and creative approach to professional affairs are of utmost importance. Teaching foreign languages to future economic specialists in accordance with the syllabus, in addition to its own foreign language communicative competence and general professional knowledge, is targeted at forming such competencies as follows: cognitive (erudition, intuition, imagination, analytical and predictive thinking), socio-cultural (expressive features of personality and motor-volitional characteristics), professional (organizational skills, analytical and planning abilities, self-motivation, riskiness as well as the ability to make the right, optimal solution in case of lack of necessary information, its contractiveness and lack of time on its comprehension and interpretation) and general cultural components of professional competence. Teaching a foreign language for future specialists in economics has specific goals, content and methodology. The purpose of studying foreign languages is to achieve the level of language proficiency which will provide successful orientation in professional situations.

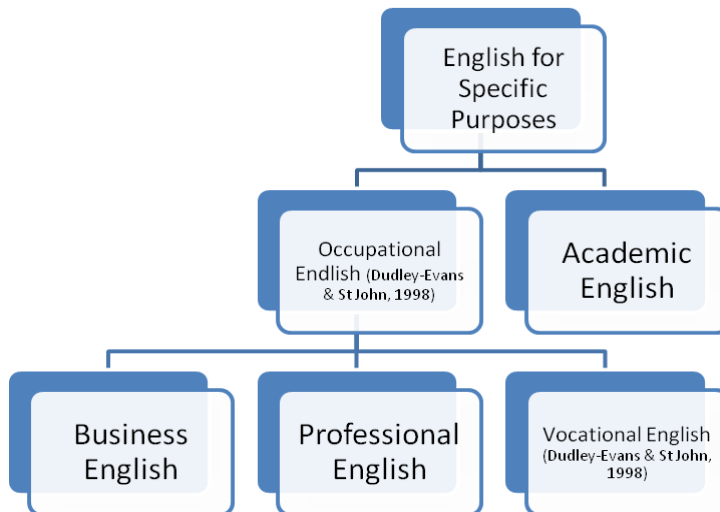
The successful formation of foreign language competency is influenced by a number of factors that determine the level of students' acquiring foreign language communicative competency, in particular:

- approach to teaching and pedagogical environment;
- forms of educational process;
- personal work of students;
- forms of extra-curricular activities;
- requirements and motivational sphere;
- personal potential;
- abilities;
- social environment (*Master, 2009*).

Among the above mentioned factors it is approach to teaching, which in all fairness takes the first place.

### Competency-based approach to teaching ESP and BE in University context

We refer to Business English as one of the 5 components of English for Specific Purposes (Fig. 1). While ESP is very largely based on written text, BE is more dependent on oral face-to-face interaction between people.



**Fig. 1. Structural components of English for Specific Purposes**

Business English course focuses on such areas as telephoning, business writing, presentations, meetings, negotiations. The focus is then on courteous language that attracts, establishes and sustains good business. These skills are primarily for dealing with customers, clients and colleagues.

It is necessary to create a system of teaching ESP and BE that meets the requirements of modernization process. In the process of modernizing education, the competency-based approach is treated as one of the important conceptual provisions for updating the content of economic education. In this regard, the definition of "key, basic competencies" is introduced as a focal concept (*Zimnaya, 2009*). Competitive competency-based approach, unlike performance-based one, involves not only obtaining a certain amount of academic knowledge, but also the practical application of the knowledge gained in professionally oriented

environment. The purpose of competency-oriented approach is to bridge the gap between education and job requirements. Educational priorities should shift from the students' need to reach a certain level of competence formation in professional activities to future specialists' being ready to realize the acquired set of competencies in the surrounding reality, the ability to interact, cooperate in the team, compete in the labor market. The paramount purpose of competency-based approach to teaching ESP is to design a work related language teaching program for adult learners. It focuses on outcomes of learning and addresses what the future specialists are expected to do, rather than what they are expected to learn.

In competency- based approach a major concern lies in providing a great variety of learning alternatives to accomplish the objectives, making future specialists competitive in labour market. American scientists Burns and Klingstedt, who are believed to have initiated a competency-based approach, mention the psychological aspect underlying the different styles of learning, and state that "the emphasis in competency- based approach to education is on the achievement of specified objectives and not on the ranking of learners" (*Burns, Klingstedt 1973*).

Taking into consideration, that competency-based approach is a function –related teaching approach, it focuses on life required skills and abilities and evaluates and assesses the mastery of those capabilities in accordance with students' performance, which is traditionally viewed as a process, which is based on performance and, consequently, leads to demonstrating the mastery of basic professional and life skills which are essential for the individual's successful functioning and being a competitive professional.

The general emphasis on competency- based approach is to favour educational investments towards the current and nearest future requirements of business environment. As far as ESP and Business English is concerned, the assumption can be made about the lack of cross-cultural skills, which refer to knowledge of foreign language and, on the contrary, related cultural awareness in business may promote international negotiations and business communication. It is obvious, that under current circumstances of global world teaching language in isolation from its related cultural background cannot meet the demands of multinationals and joint ventures as the latter look for reliable cross-cultural awareness in their employees.

There is a commonly applied technology of connecting profession-related skills and abilities with competency-based approach in teaching ESP and BE which focuses on teaching specific language skills that could be applied to carrying out specific profession –related activities. Competency-based approach is aimed at establishing the targeted competencies of students. It is of utmost importance that communicative model in the lecture-room environment was similar to that one in working environment where future specialists are to use the acquired competencies. The business world, being in a continuous development, made language proficiency a very important business skill that will boost anyone's career. In order to integrate competencies necessary for a student to cope with accelerating globalization and specific occupational environment the ESP and BE teacher should create central points for a competencies profile.

### **Developing ESP and BE students' competencies**

The growing demand for economists with fluent English proficiency has shifted the attention to teaching more focused content, business buzzwords and relevant language structure. ESP teaching is applied as a dynamic, interactive process which teaches special

genre of language to achieve specific purposes. Instead of teaching general language it includes special scope (e.g. economics and business) and creates the desired structure of language which solves the targeted communicative problems. ESP syllabus is built up to develop targeted competencies.

Business English, being the most demanding course within ESP refers to the communication skills used in the workplace, and focuses on the language and skills needed for typical business communication such as presentations, negotiations, meetings, small talk, socializing, correspondence, report writing, and a systematic approach. Business English teaching is particularly centered on interactive, student-focused teaching methods. Students should actively participate in communication tasks which can be transferred to their real work situations. Using competency-based approach to Business English teaching means having students learn the language through the use of authentic situations rather than learn about the language. With language learning, it's all about interacting with the students through conversations, role playing, mock game shows, simulations, case-study etc.

Competency-based approach to Business English teaching has a completely different logic of educational material delivery and arrangement compared to traditional language teaching. In traditional language teaching there is a strict adherence to the sequence of grammar tenses delivery (Present Simple, Past Simple, Future Simple...Progressive...Perfect...Active...Passive ...etc.). Each unit includes thematically arranged vocabulary; a text, text/vocabulary/grammar-based exercises and written or oral communicative tasks. The core element of the unit is the text.

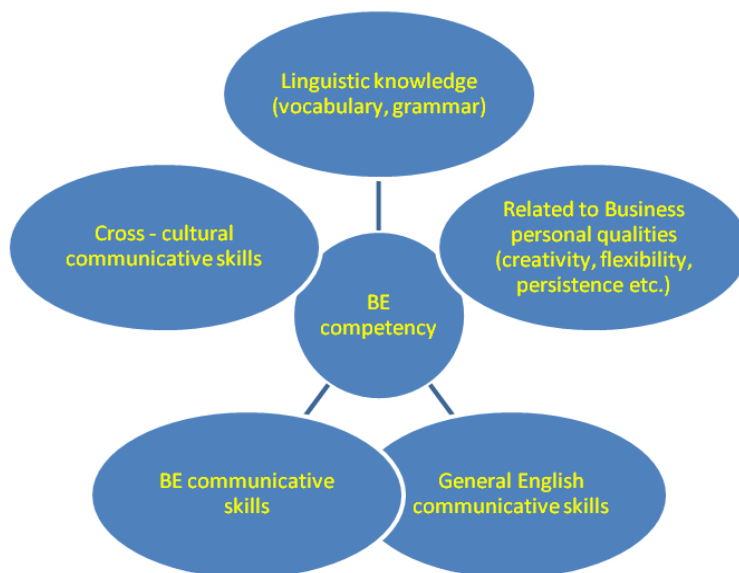
In Competency-based approach to Business English teaching the core element of the unit is the business related task to do something with the language: to speak to the foreign partner on the office phone about... (not just to speak on the office phone), to hold a meeting in the department of a multinational company on the issue of.....(not just to hold a meeting), to advertise something to the foreign audience (not just to advertise something) etc. The logic of material delivery is task-based: presentation/review of task related vocabulary and grammar, a business related general algorithm/procedure for the activity (that does not exclude student creativity), cross-cultural specifics, recommended mode of speech, business etiquette, audio-visual (e.g. YOUTUBE) patterns of a BE competency (negotiations, business presentation, a meeting in a multinational company etc.) etc.

The general structure of BE competency is complex and consists of such elements (Fig.2): linguistic knowledge (vocabulary, grammar), General English communicative skills, BE communicative skills, cross - cultural communicative skills, related to business personal qualities (creativity, flexibility, persistence etc.).

Thus, BE course is designed to develop such BE competencies as:

- to effectively interact with foreign partners or colleagues on the phone, via Skype etc.;
- to hold/participate in a meeting (including teleconferencing) of multinational company;
- to write minutes of the meeting in English;
- to make a cutting-edge business presentation in English;
- to hold/participate in business negotiations with English-speaking partners;
- to deliver business speeches in English;
- to fill out a CV in English;
- to hold/participate in a job interview in English;
- to write business letters, emails, memos, reports in English etc.





**Fig. 2. The general structure of BE competency**

Competency-based approach to BE teaching makes language learning more result – oriented, goal-oriented and motivated. Each BE competency is easy to assess.

A particular BE competency consists of a number of skills. For example, if the student has acquired a competency to make a cutting-edge business presentation in English, it means that he is able:

- to introduce himself;
- to follow the logic of presentation procedure;
- to persuade, to agree, to disagree, to object, to reject, to apologize, to take a spontaneous decision etc;
- to formulate the theme and the aim of the presentation;
- to speak English fluently and distinctly;
- to attract attention of the audience by telling a joke at the beginning;
- to keep eye contact;
- to keep to the point;
- to get feedback from the audience;
- to encourage some kind of interaction with the audience;
- to take into account cross-cultural differences of a foreign audience;
- to paraphrase the questions from the audience in order to make sure that he has understood them correctly;
- to use proper body language and gestures;
- to make proper use of modern electronic presentation tools;
- to make a conclusion etc.

Competency-based approach to BE teaching in contrast to traditional language teaching approaches is based on a focus on successful functioning in professional sphere, modularized teaching, achievement of outcomes that are made explicit a priori, task /performance-centered orientation and immersion into simulated business environment.



## **Identifying and nurturing ESP and BE teachers' core competencies**

Rita Mészárosné Kóris (2015) studied “how the corporate requirements shape the competencies that make BE teachers highly competent and successful in the field. The findings reveal that language teaching competence, skills and positive personal characteristics are considered to be the most important qualities of BE teachers, while business competence is the least expected attribute of BE teachers.

Ukrainian higher school institutions do not train ESP and BE teachers, they just train English teachers. The English teachers have to build specialized competencies (knowledge, skills and personal qualities) in order to run successful ESP and BE courses and comply with the requirements of the business community. You have to be at least to some extent an expert in your students' major (Marketing, Management, International Economics etc.) or have some experience in running a business. Otherwise you will have to rely on self – education and learning from your students. It takes years to gain some experience in ESP and BE teaching. Therefore, acquiring and improving ESP and BE teachers competencies are vital for the successful delivery of any ESP and BE course.

BE teachers need to evolve “survival strategies” for situations where they feel their business knowledge and skills are deficient.

ESP and BE teachers should acquire such core competencies:

- qualification in ESP and BE;
- experience in ESP and BE teaching;
- content knowledge of ESP and BE;
- ESP and BE teaching methodology;
- implementation of competency-based approach to ESP and BE teaching.

ESP and BE teachers have to possess or develop such skills:

- communication skills;
- business related skills;
- skills of comfortable users of computer technology;
- interpersonal skills (leader, facilitator, motivator, negotiator, consensus builder, team builder);
- skills to learn while teaching;
- skills to create real life teaching environment.

Personal qualities of ESP and BE teachers are the following:

- positive, supportive, fair, respectful and encouraging;
- creative, flexible, innovative, consultative and punctual;
- business-like behavior and appearance;
- openness and self-confidence.

BE teachers should build on their general English language teaching competencies and develop specialized ESP and BE competencies with a focus on skills and personality qualities that are required by the business community. There should be a shift in emphasis from business content knowledge to skills and attitudes in ESP and BE teachers' education and self-training. Thus, ESP and BE teachers should develop skills and personality qualities tailored to the learners' expectations and the business environment.

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

Competency-based approach to ESP and BE teaching was introduced as one of the key pedagogical conditions to meet changing needs of future economic specialists. It takes into

account a professional orientation of both teaching materials and the activity including definite content, models and methods to form communicative competence and professional skills and abilities. Competency-based approach is focused on recent scientific achievements in professional sphere of students' interests to provide them with opportunity for professional growth. Thanks to dynamic atmosphere students become partners in the teaching process by offering their views and visions. Joining ESP, competency-based approach encourages the teacher to design courses to instruct, form positive motivation and emotional background, where the teacher becomes less as a traditional authority and more as a modern example of coordinator and language consultant and, finally, promotes involving students in business model simulation and role-playing of professionally oriented activities.

Further research in the field of competency-based approach to ESP and BE teaching might be connected with modularized assessment of student ESP and BE competencies.

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