

# Interactive Methods of the Formation of English-language Communicative Competence for Future International Economists

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## Abstract

The paper elaborates the peculiarities of prospective international economists' competence formation. The research was aimed at the analysis of the formation of students' professional qualities within the context of globalization challenges. This study was carried out in 2018-2020. The research site is the West Ukrainian National University. The authors stressed on the need to select creative assignments for oral and written exercises to enhance students to apply the acquired knowledge and stimulate their mental activity via reviewing, projects preparation, text editing, and creative assignments.

The authors specified the system of basic concepts. Based on the above, the authors substantiated the need to form professional communication skills, learn the professional language peculiarities, develop the language culture, creative thinking, and successful functioning of individuals in a multicultural environment. Additionally, the research identified a number of unsolved issues in teaching students. These are the need for a broad discussion on the benefits and disadvantages of distance learning, the rational use of ICT, specialized sets of trainings, methodological support system update, language didactics development, and organization of the educational process during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** interactive methods, communicative competence, foreign language teaching, foreign language for business

## 1. Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has been marked by the search for new educational paradigms of highly qualified specialists training. To secure social protection, an individual needs to be fundamentally educated and have the ability to flexibly modify the content of professional activities related to ICT development and new labor market requirements. Learning foreign languages is a compulsory part of tertiary education.

Khvalyboha (2020) in her dissertation research supervised by A. Vykhreshch analyzed the way the definition of the term "education" presented in publications of American academia and English explanatory dictionaries, as well as compared them with the definitions formulated by the Ukrainian researchers. Leading American researchers identified primarily the following attributes of education: 1. Action or set of actions aimed at acquiring knowledge. 2. The process of acquiring knowledge by an individual. 3. The study of teaching methods and techniques as a human activity. 4. The set of knowledge, skills, abilities acquired during the learning process. 5. Subject-knowledge, i.e., information about a specific subject, acquired during the learning process. 6. Official activities arranged to educate society in specially created institutions. 7. Stage of human development related to the acquisition of qualifications (Khvalyboha, 2020).

Further, Khvalyboha analyzed the problem of education quality. To improve the insight into the essence of the problem, American researchers identified its eight structural elements. These are the level the student acquired the

educational program content, the need for the acquired knowledge in specific conditions, the role of education in life quality improvement, the workplace knowledge efficacy after graduation, efficiency of education in society, compliance with the society's needs and expectations, the degree the students' expectations met by educational institutions services, the stage of citizens' success and socialization (Khvalyboha, 2020).

We opine that this is a promising idea since dictionaries are intended for the general audience and their compilers offer the most conventional approaches to the definitions. By and large, they do not consider the aspect postulated by A. Vykhrushch: "Education for light and world", i.e., activities aimed at the spiritual development of "enlightenment of the soul" and preparation for the life in the world. This slogan is used as an epigraph for *the Universytetska Dumka* newspaper ("University Thought") of the West Ukrainian National University. These fundamental points must be taken into account to shape the students' English communicative competence.

*Analysis of recent research and publications.* Current pedagogical and linguodidactic, research has a certain amount of works on teaching foreign languages for special purposes. Thonus treats second language writing as an independent discipline and emphasizes its importance since its mastering strengthens theoretical and practical skills of researchers, practitioners and multilingual researchers which is of utmost importance (Thonus, 2020). Schwarz and Hamman-Ortiz (2020) singled out four central themes in the English language learning which stress the potential of pedagogy and support basic curricula. Here belong genre-specific texts composition, academic language acquisition and literacy skills mastering, learning within academic disciplines, and development of critical language awareness (Schwarz & Hamman-Ortiz, 2020).

Communicative aspects of teaching and learning foreign languages for business at economic universities were elaborated by Semenchuk (2007) (interactive learning), Tarnopolskyi (2005) (principles of teaching Business English), M'mbone (2013) (oral communicative competence), DoganGer and Dubravac (2017) (intercultural communicative competence), Chorna (2017) (case-technologies). Bykonja (2012) analysed the foreign language communicative competence within business communication and provided its definition as 'the ability of an individual to successfully implement oral and written business communication with native speakers complying with norms and cultural traditions for direct and indirect contacts in certain spheres and communicative task-based situations (Bykonja, 2012: 97). Despite a number of recent research, the issue of the formation of the foreign language communicative competence as a basic component of the professional training of a specialist in the sphere of international economics, international economic relations, and international management remains relevant.

*Unresolved aspects of the problem.* The current context reveals three apparent problems. First, since entry-level professionals are not expected to deal with tests in the workplace, they need entirely different qualities, i.e., communication, ability to make decisions in non-standard situations, self-improvement motivation, creativity, persistence, etc. Second, given the job requirements, it is important to reveal gaps in school leavers' skills to focus on the development of the essential qualities. Third, L. Vygotsky's idea of "the zone of proximal development" acquires special significance. The *purpose* of this research was to check the effectiveness of the interactive methods of the English language communicative competence formation for prospective international economists.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The site of the experimental research was Bohdan Havrylyshyn Educational and Research Institute of International Relations of the West Ukrainian National University. The experiment involved 124 second-year students majoring in international economics, international economic relations, and international management (62 students in the academic year of 2018-2019 and 60 students in the academic year of 2019-2020). Students were divided into two groups, i.e., the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG).

The research methods applied by the authors are analysis of psychological, pedagogical and methodical literature, educational process modeling, educational process observation, implementation of diagnostic tasks, testing, methods of mathematical statistics for quantitative and qualitative analysis to prove the results reliability.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The "early start" technique was an essential component of this research. The idea is that students receive advanced level tasks as soon as they begin their studies. This is partially similar to the Socratic dialogue method, i.e., a system of complex questions, a belief in the interlocutor's capability, win-win situation, etc. The text below explains the way this methodology was implemented.

The process of formation of communicative features of Business English for prospective international economists covered three stages: initial (preparatory), main, and final.

At the preparatory stage, students were additionally offered a corrective English phonetics course to acquire the skills of the pronunciation norms of modern literary and colloquial language. Additionally, we preliminarily tested the levels of Business English communicative competence, i.e., linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic.

The main stage was aimed at activating the existing knowledge along with further development and improvement of practical English language skills. It embraced various types of specific subject speaking activities. In addition, a corrective diagnosis of the formation of foreign language communicative competence was conducted for the second time. As a learning outcome at this stage, students had to acquire Business English lexical and grammatical phenomena, different types of phrases and clichés, professional terminology as well as the rules of speech etiquette. Also, they were expected to be able to respond adequately to what they heard during communication, to be engaged in conversation and dialogue, to think logically, to reasonably express their opinions orally and in writing, to support extended academic and professional discourse, and independently work on professional texts. To achieve the aforementioned, an interactive model of teaching and learning activities was introduced into Business English classes. These are brainstorming, business games, and projects. The final stage provided corrective and final diagnostics of the entire interactive process of communicative features formation of prospective specialists in international economics, international economic relations, and international management.

To efficiently determine the effectiveness of the interactive technologies implementation, the criteria for academic achievements assessment of the second-year students were developed; we also established the levels of business foreign language communicative features formation. This complies with the methodology of Markova, Horpinich, and Vysochan (2017).

As we stated above, linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies comprise the units of learning outcomes. According to CEFRL, linguistic competence is based on the system of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic, and orthoepic competences (CEFRL, 2001: 109).

Language competences reflect the mastery of the norms of all levels of the language hierarchy. Sociolinguistic competencies relate to the knowledge and skills needed to address the social dimension of language use. Here belong linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expression of folk-wisdom, register differences, and dialect and accent (CEFRL, 2001: 118).

Pragmatic competences refer to the learner's knowledge of the principles according to which messages are: a) organized, structured and organized ('discourse competence'); b) used to perform communicative functions ('functional competence'); c) sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata ('design competence') (CEFRL, 2001: 123).

Professionally oriented creative tasks were carefully selected to make a comprehensive analysis of each of the above characteristics. The results evaluation was based on CEFRL descriptors.

To achieve the highest degree of objectivity, we carried out the diagnosis at the initial and final stages by means of the overall average assessment of the results. In other words, the level of development of communicative features of the Business English within the higher education curriculum was determined by three independent experts.

Testing of the level of business foreign language communicative features development was conducted two times during the academic year: at the beginning of the first semester (late September – early October) and at the end of the second semester (mid-May – early June). The results obtained at the initial stage revealed the main problems and certain peculiarities of foreign-language communication training of prospective specialists in the field of international economy.

We postulate that the implementation of interactive technologies in Business English classes for the students of Bohdan Havrylyshyn Educational and Research Institute of International Relations allows carrying out the educational process via a new qualitative format application. An innovative approach to educational activity involves not only improvement and development of knowledge, skills and abilities, but also modeling of the individual or professional activity, promoting the development of autonomy, problem-solving creativity, as well as the gradual formation of the foreign language communicative competence.

Researchers (Ribe & Vidal, 1993; Hrydzhuk, 2017) suggested that the interactive in-class teacher-student cooperation provokes interest to the future job, promotes active participation of each student in educational activities, presupposes the proper and relevant learning of the material, and provides positive feedback of the audience.

To date, researchers have singled out different approaches to the organization of the educational process (Lemberger, Brigman, Webb, & Moore, 2007; Vykhreshch, Fedchyshyn, Khvalyboha, Drach, & Rudenko, 2020), different criteria

for innovative learning technologies classification (Perry & Southwell, 2011; Ovadiuk, 2015), which include interactive technologies (Stanley, 2013; Bodnar, 2017; Morska, Skibska, Sulym, & Masztalir, 2018).

Given the objective of the class and its form, four groups of interactive teaching methods are differentiated: discussion of controversial issues, situational modeling, group learning, and cooperative learning. Further, researchers distinguish a number of teaching methods subtypes.

For example, debates, continuum (continuous flow of thoughts), evaluative discussion, etc. are used to process relevant debate questions. Amongst the technologies of situational modeling are public hearings, role-plays, simulation games, etc. General problem discussion and brainstorming belong to group training. Within the cooperative education technologies, we differentiated pair-work, “two to four – all together”, dialogue, information search, joint projects (Hrydzhuk, 2017: 348). The aforementioned interactive technologies are aimed at the continuous search for new forms, methods and means of educational process organization to intensify the creative and cognitive activity of higher education graduates.

For brainstorming at Business English classes, we proposed using the following list of topics:

- 1) The EU as a leader in the European market for goods and services.
- 2) Ways to intensify cooperation between Ukraine and Great Britain.
- 3) The social market economy of the EU – social protection of its citizens.
- 4) Environmental protection in Ukraine: problems and prospects.
- 5) European education system: advantages and disadvantages.

A game is an activity which enhances the development of communicative features of speech of a future specialist. A business game is a reproduction of reality within a specifically modeled problematic situation. Being both a means and method of professional training and gradual adaptation for the future sphere of activity, it largely contributes to the professionally-oriented foreign language communicative competence of university graduates. Formation of professionally essential skills and abilities is the basis of the business game.

Dominant features of the business game are the common goal, active role interaction, decisions variability, ability to respond based on the circumstances, and selection of players for a suitable communication strategy. A priori, thorough preliminary preparation, is essential to organize and successfully conduct business games in foreign language classes. The main stages of this interactive learning method involve familiarization with the real situation, creation of the game simulation prototype, outlining the key task of the micro-groups, selection of an essential issue to solve the problem, modeling of the problematic situation, problem-solving, discussion and verification of the results, discussion and evaluation of the final results.

This innovative approach can be used to acquire both new and previously learnt professionally oriented material. We use business games as an interactive technology to simulate a regular meeting of top managers at a large private enterprise. As a result, the second-year students are able to discuss a range of job-related issues, including requirements for signing contracts with suppliers, amendments to agreements and contracts, ways to optimize the production process, and a potential opening of a subsidiary in Central Europe, etc.

The project technology provides interactive educational research and quasi-professional activity of higher education graduates aimed at a project as a final product. A project is a creative task, which presupposes independent (individual) or group performance. It usually takes place during the semester. A project serves to forge communicative features of a business foreign language for prospective specialists in the field of international economics, international economic relations, and international management. The project technology implementation involved the following stages: motivational planning (problem analysis, goal setting, identification of the main tasks); creative-and-search (practical implementation of the plan); presentation (presentation of the final project); appraisal (adequate assessment and comprehension).

The authors' methodology revealed the most efficient lexical topics which best suit the project as an activity for Business English classes:

- 1) The USA in the global economy. Foreign trade. Foreign investments.
- 2) The most important sectors of the US and Canadian economy. Industry. Agriculture.
- 3) The USA and Ukraine: the current state and prospects for further cooperation.
- 4) English-speaking countries economy.

- 5) Education of the Ukrainian youth abroad: reasons, benefits, and forecasts.
- 6) National holidays in Ukraine and the USA.
- 7) Environmental protection in Ukraine and the USA.
- 8) Economic system. Market economy. Planned economy.
- 9) Management as a system.
- 10) Personal and professional features of a prospective international economics specialist.

Rational implementation of the individual research task involves the subdivision of students into small groups (2-3 persons) in order to carefully cover one topic and the joint presentation of the creative product. The peculiarity of the project activity of future international economists was preparation of presentations on the United Nations Day in the first semester, while the second semester topic was the Independence Day of Ukraine. The respondents were divided into several teams; they had an opportunity to prepare and present their creative work, applying both the knowledge of the English language and their subject knowledge. Such an interactive approach contributed to the formation of autonomy, logical thinking, students' creativity and ingenuity development, as well as interpersonal communication.

At the final stage, students learn the rules of the logical definition of concepts, i.e., commensurate division; division should be based on similar reasons; avoidance of tautology; the definition should be clear, expressive, and free from ambiguity; definition should not be negative. Further, students independently build comparative tables for one of the concepts. Of particular interest are group activities, i.e., small groups of students consisting of two or three persons prepare a comparative table and defend its content in front of the colleagues. Further, this element will be an essential part of the author's narrative for abstract writing.

The next step is to familiarize learners with high-quality texts. Students typically come up with their own titles, find the main idea, and argue the contradictory aspects of the text. The assignment to continue and finish up a famous text is of particular students' interest. For instance, an unsurpassed text of Max Ermann "Desiderata", which has been relevant since 1926, ends with the words: "Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy". Students offer quite interesting options to continue a unique text. Along with students' grammatical problems, these small fragments reveal a sense of the text logic and the author's opinion, which may become a focus of interest for experts in hermeneutics and didactics of higher education. Below are unedited students' proposals: 1. "Share your happiness with your neighbors, because the time will come when they will share their joy with you. Learning to accept defeat is a necessary path to success. Walk with like-minded people, they will help conquer the peaks. Forgive those who are guilty, life is too much short to waste it on insults. Breathe in full, no one knows when the last breath will come in. Use resources wisely, think about your descendants. Live without thinking about how many are left, we are all temporary here, fulfill your mission in the world". 2. "Do not betray your outlook on life. Make your dreams come true easily. Do not create ideals for yourself, because they do not exist. Always work on yourself to improve. Remember, the greatest value in life is family. Live in harmony with yourself and nature, because you are a part of it. Always have God in your heart. Remember that happiness loves silence".

R. Kipling's poem "If" is of special importance for the students' professional development and self-education. His famous poem "Mary Gloster" provides significant potential for ideas in class as well. Sometimes even a single poetic line can be used beneficially. For instance, a line of Kipling's poem "The lesson", i.e., "We have had an Imperial lesson; it may make us an Empire yet!", motivates the Ukrainian students for personal growth and overcoming failures. Speaking in front of the audience is an essential component of the students' professional training. Practical experience suggests that ability to keep the audience interest and overcome anxiety is a more complicated issue for the students than the choice of topic and information search. These skills should be developed in secondary schools. However, at universities, a set of training activities and classes can help achieve the expected result. Mind mapping as a technology of British authors is useful in this case since it allows to concentrate large amounts of information and present the main ideas during the speech. The art of dialogue is of utmost importance for future professionals.

Students' answers about the regularities of successful dialogues were interesting. Below are some examples. 1. "Rules of a successful dialogue: an appropriately chosen conversation topic, the opponent should be an expert, pre-prepared basic questions, you need to introduce yourself to both interlocutors at the beginning, ask not only basic questions but also those which arise during the dialogue, the dialogue should end with the opponent's advice to the listeners, and it is also important to thank for the conversation".

The students' assignment to offer independent proposals on the topics was appealing as well. This list is quite peculiar. It can be divided into two parts. The first group of students understood the essence of the task and suggested research-related topics: 1. Plagiarism. 2. Integrity of the text. 3. The relevant selection of literature. 4. Important markers and templates. 5. Peculiarities of article and essay writing. 6. Abstract composition. 7. Reviewing. 8. Preparation of an argumentative essay. 9. Academic integrity as a trait of an intellectual person.

The second part of the students suggested topics essential to understanding the youth's interests: 1. Time management and tasks delegation. 2. Basics of speed reading technique. 3. Creative thinking as a component of success. 4. Communication. 5. How to get success early in life. 6. Life and its issues. 7. Problem solution. 8. Motivation for higher achievement. 9. Public speaking. 10. Spiritual self-improvement. 11. Personal self-realization. 12. The formula for success. 13. How to be yourself? 14. The winners' laws.

At the initial stage, organization of educational process which combines professional qualities development and creativity requires a lot of effort from the teaching staff. This is rewarded during classes in the atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect when time passes imperceptibly and young people achieve the highest level.

To determine the degree of effectiveness of interactive training forms, we performed the second diagnosis of the respondents' level of the English language communicative competence formation. The results are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The analysis of indicators proves that in the EG the level of communicative the English language competence formation increased by 18.75-19.99 %. Lower efficiency is observed within the CG, i.e., the average growth of the English language competence formation is 6.64-9.44 %.

Table 1. Levels of the students' English language competence formation (control group) at the beginning and at the end of the experiment

Control group										
Levels	CEFRL-based	Before the experiment				After the experiment				
		Quantity of respondents		%		Quantity of respondents		%		
		2018/2019	2019/2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	
High	C1	0	0	0	0	C1	0	0	0	0
Intermediate	B2	5	6	15.60	20.00	B2	6	8	18.8	26.67
	B1	10	8	31.26	26.67	B1	12	8	37.5	26.67
Low	A2	17	16	53.14	53.33	A2	14	14	43.7	46.66

Table 2. Levels of the students' English language competence formation (experimental group) at the beginning and at the end of the experiment

Experimental group										
Levels	CEFRL-based	Before the experiment				After the experiment				
		Quantity of respondents		%		Quantity of respondents		%		
		2018/2019	2019/2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	
High	C1	0	0	0	0	C1	0	0	0	0

Intermediate	B2	6	5	18.75	16.67	B2	9	9	28.12	30.00
	B1	12	9	37.50	30.00	B1	15	11	46.88	36.66
Low	A2	14	16	43.75	53.33	A2	8	10	25.00	33.34

This research correlates with a project of the British Council in Ukraine. In 2014-2017, the British Council in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine conducted in-depth research, which involved 15 Ukrainian universities to assess the current state of teaching English. The results of the project were summarized in *The Internationalization of Ukrainian Universities: The English Language Dimension* (Bolayto & Vest, 2017). The researchers highlighted the following issues: 1) the difficulty of establishing a true level of foreign language proficiency for students since specific descriptors for such assessment are required; 2) teachers' focus on the correctness of speech, rather than on the ability to speak freely; 3) insufficient training of teachers in the field of pedagogical language awareness (e.g., few interactive activities, prevailing of teacher-centrism) (Bolayto & Vest, 2017: 53, 56).

This induced us to search for effective interactive teaching methods as well. Our study allowed us to determine the level of English language proficiency for university graduates via the following descriptors: development of the English language communicative competence and demonstration of the effectiveness of interactive methods of the English language communicative competence development for prospective international economists. The learning outcomes of the program correspond to the scale of the European recommendations on language education and methodological approaches to the educational process organization.

#### 4. Conclusions

The authors' methodology of an interactive model to form a complex of communicative features of a business foreign language represented foreign language training as a dynamic and systematic process grounded in the basic principles of pedagogy, psychology, lingo-didactics, and linguistics. Intensive implementation of interactive methods for the English language communicative competence formation presented foreign language learning as a dynamic and systematic process. The positive dynamics of the English language communicative features formation for prospective international economists and the growth of the motivation of university graduates to study were revealed in both EG and CG. However, the systematization and generalization of the results of a comprehensive diagnosis demonstrated a significant advantage of quantitative indicators among the EG respondents. According to the current course design, students are able to plan, implement, and correct their personal communicative behavior to generate and adjust English oral and written business communication. The statistics proved the effectiveness of the introduced authors' methodology.

*The prospects* for further research are to study the implementation of ICT for Business English classes. The study proves the need to choose oral and written creative exercises. These should develop the acquired theoretical knowledge and contribute to students' mental activity via reviews, project preparation, text editing, and creative assignments. Analytical assessment of the basic concepts system needs further research. The aforementioned proved the necessity to shape professional communication skills, study professional language features, develop the language culture and creative thinking as well as the successful functioning of the individual in a challenging multicultural environment. Nonetheless, we identified a number of unsolved issues in terms of teaching students. To be more precise, there is a need for a broad discussion of advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, responsibility, rational use of ICT, special training issues, updating the methodological support system, language didactics improvement, and educational process issues during the pandemic.

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