

## **INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AS ONE OF THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSE**

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*Abstract.* The present research is devoted to the problem of intercultural communicative competence development in the Business English course taught at University American College Skopje (R. N. Macedonia) and at the Ural State Pedagogical University (Russia). The relevance of this research is in the necessity of intercultural communication skills development while learning the basics of business communication in a foreign language as such kind of communication presupposes its realization in the sphere of international relations. However, the aims of the analyzed courses, devoted to business communication in a foreign language, do not contain statements connected with the competence mentioned above, but consider the process of education only from the point of view of developing or improving linguistic skills and the necessary communicative skills in traditional sense (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Thus the object of our research is the process of intercultural communicative competence development together with its constituent skills, as well as the subject of the research is to organize the content and methodological components of the educational course on business communication in international relations. The paper outlines the theoretical and methodological basis in regards to the intercultural communicative competence and its constituent skills development in a Business English course. The contribution of each author in this research is the following: I. Trajanovska – 50%, D. Starkova – 50%. The research suggests that the development of intercultural communicative competence and its constituent skills in a university course, devoted to business communication in intercultural interaction, will be more effective if real collaboration with students of foreign universities is offered. To realize this idea the Business English International project was elaborated including a combination of normal course of Business English with online international collaboration between two universities, the aim of which is to study the business situation in the country of the partners. The project realization scheme includes regular classes interspersing with online conferences of students – partners in parallel having individual online meetings to collaborate on mutual projects in pairs and present the results at the end of the course. This will strengthen the Business English course and make perspectives of international collaboration in the business sphere for students real.

*Keywords:* intercultural communicative competence; intercultural communicative skills; Business English; business communication; international projects.

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## **РАЗВИТИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ КАК ОДНА ИЗ ГЛАВНЫХ ЗАДАЧ КУРСА ОБУЧЕНИЯ ДЕЛОВОМУ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ**

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*Аннотация.* Исследование посвящено проблеме развития межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции в ходе обучения Деловому английскому языку студентов Университета Американский Колледж

Скопье (Республика Северная Македония) и Института иностранных языков Уральского государственного педагогического университета (Россия). Актуальность исследования заключается в необходимости формирования навыков межкультурного взаимодействия в ходе изучения основ деловой коммуникации на иностранном языке, т. к. такая коммуникация уже предполагает реализацию в сфере международных отношений. Однако цели проанализированных курсов, посвященных деловой коммуникации на иностранном языке, не содержат формулировок, связанных с вышеуказанной компетенцией, а рассматривают процесс обучения лишь с точки зрения формирования или совершенствования языковых навыков и развития необходимых коммуникативных умений в традиционном смысле (аудирование, говорение, чтение, письмо). Таким образом, объектом данного исследования является процесс развития межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции и формирования навыков в ее составе, предметом – организация содержательной и методической составляющих курса обучения, посвященного деловой коммуникации в межкультурном общении. Целью исследования стало выявление теоретической и методологической базы для развития межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции и формирования навыков в ее составе при обучении Деловому английскому языку. Доля участия каждого автора в данном исследовании такова: И. Трахановска – 50%, Д. А. Старкова – 50%. В ходе анализа было выявлено, что процесс развития межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции и формирования навыков в ее составе в курсе обучения, посвященного деловой коммуникации в межкультурном общении, будет эффективным, если обеспечить реальное взаимодействие обучающихся со студентами зарубежных университетов с осуществлением совместного проекта. Для реализации данной идеи был разработан проект Business English International (международный проект по деловому английскому языку), объединяющий стандартный курс по Деловому английскому языку с международным онлайн-сотрудничеством между двумя университетами, цель которого – изучить деловую обстановку в стране партнера. В статье описывается общая схема реализации проекта, включающая обычные занятия, перемежающиеся с онлайн-конференциями студентов-партнеров, параллельно организующих индивидуальные встречи для работы над совместным проектом в парах. Это усилит курс Делового английского и сделает перспективу международного сотрудничества в деловой сфере для студентов реальной.

**Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция; межкультурные коммуникативные навыки; Деловой английский язык; деловая коммуникация; международные проекты.

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**Introduction.** If we agree that the aim of Business English courses, as part of ESP, is to meet the learners' needs in order to do business not in their mother tongue but in the English language, it means that Business English is actually about doing business internationally, i.e. intercultural or cross-culturally. Thus, we believe Business English courses, besides their focus on developing language skills in English in a business context, should also focus on developing intercultural communicative competence in learners because it is a crucial need for doing business in today's global world. However evident this might seem, university Business English course curricula seem to lack focus on developing intercultural communicative skills.

In a research conducted by Evgenija Koleski [Koleski 2021] for her Master thesis at the School of Foreign Languages, University American College Skopje, under the mentorship of Prof. Ivana Trajanoska, forty managers, male

and female from different age groups and with different levels of working experience, from twenty Macedonian companies across industries, which operate internationally, were surveyed regarding their intercultural communicative competence. The results, as expected, showed that the English language was widely used in the professional setting of the respondents. Moreover, in terms of the respondents' intercultural communicative skills, they were surveyed in reference to aspects that are believed to be indicative of intercultural communicative competence. The aspects taken into consideration were proposed by the Global Partners in Education's Global Understanding Program and included: living and working abroad as a meaningful and longer intercultural contact which requires adaptation to a new culture and could lead to the development of intercultural competence; attending trainings abroad; overall intercultural contact through travelling; international friends; the awareness of the need for

intercultural knowledge and adaptation; the knowledge itself and the willingness to learn about cultures, nonverbal signs and other cultural characteristics like beliefs, norms etc; the ability to adapt; and the level of enjoyment in intercultural contact and feeling comfortable when communicating with people from other cultures. The results from the survey showed that the majority of the respondents thought it would be stressful, at least to some extent, to go on a business trip in a foreign country that they had never visited before; the majority of the respondents was not sure whether they knew the rules for expressing nonverbal behavior in other cultures, and felt some degree of lack of confidence when socializing with locals from different cultures. A high percentage of the respondents, although not prevalent, answered that they did not vary the rate of their speaking when a cross cultural situation requires it and that they were not conscious of the cultural knowledge they used when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents stated that they did not change their verbal behavior when a cross-cultural interaction requires it and 57,2% stated that they did not know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures. What is more, 57,1% of the respondents answered that they did not make an extra effort to learn about other countries and cultures during their free time, even when doing business with them, and 51,4% felt anxious or uncomfortable working with people from other cultures. Moreover, only 37,1% of the respondents said they enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures and less than a half (48,6%) answered that they enjoyed working with cultures that were unfamiliar to them [Koleski 2021]. Although the survey sample was not a representative one, it does provide some important food for thought especially in terms of whether something more could be done to encourage love for, enjoyment and proficiency in intercultural communication in students before they enter the job market. The questions that this empirical research could raise are:

- How higher education could help students develop intercultural communication skills and overall intercultural communicative competence?
- What is the role of the Business English courses at universities?
- How could Business English courses

contribute to the development and/or the advancement of intercultural communication skills in students?

Thus, the aim of this paper is to review the syllabi of Business English courses at two universities, University American College Skopje (R. N. Macedonia) and Ural State Pedagogical University (Russia), the materials used, and the practices of teaching Business English to business students, i.e. future business professionals. A Business English course provides an excellent opportunity to develop Business English language skills along with intercultural communicative competence indispensable for doing international business. The reasons are somewhat obvious, i.e. developing language skills in a foreign language is a part of the overall intercultural communicative competence. However, by reviewing the course syllabi of the Business English courses we will be able to see whether there are opportunities which could help students become competent intercultural communicators and give suggestions for improvement.

**Literature review.** Business English is considered a type of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The beginnings of ESP can be traced back to the 1960' and it accrues from the premise that language use is context driven. Hutchinson et al. [1987] define ESP as: "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning". Furthermore, Dudley-Evans [1998] defined ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics. According to Dudley-Evans, ESP's absolute characteristics are as follows: ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners; ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. Thus, as Koay [2016] puts it: "At the core of ESP, I believe, is a learner-centred pedagogy. This means that an ESP course is designed to meet learners' specific needs within their purpose for learning English." On the other hand, Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines Business English as:

1. English as used in business. *specifically*: the study and practice of composition with emphasis on correctness, propriety, spelling, punctuation, and the forms of business correspondence.

2. English as taught in non-English-speaking countries in courses that emphasize its commercial rather than its cultural importance and that are normally designed to produce conversational fluency within a limited vocabulary.

As the definitions show, Business English is English used in business communication. As a course, Business English is taught to non-native English speakers for the purpose of doing business internationally. Moreover, the second meaning of Business English suggests that the accent in Business English courses is put on its practical, i.e. commercial or business importance rather than its cultural importance. These courses are normally designed to develop conversational communication skills. In that sense, the English Language Institute at University of Delaware (USA), for example, describes its Business English Courses as centered on various types of business communication and on development of language skills: "Business English courses provide language instruction and training in business communication, including business correspondence, negotiations, formal presentations, informal networking, business vocabulary, report and proposal writing, vocabulary for professional purposes, and reading for professional purposes. Language skills addressed include: listening, fluency development, oral intelligibility, reading, grammar, writing, and vocabulary development."

Opposite to the definition proposed above, we believe that learning about the cultural importance of the English language, i.e. of language in general and its role in developing intercultural communicative competence should be an indispensable part of a Business English course.

Nowadays there are more than 80,000 transnational corporations in the world. The process of expanding the mutual relations of people, peoples and their cultures is grasping various spheres of their lives in almost all countries. It is next to impossible to find any ethnic society which wasn't impacted by cultures of other nations or a larger social milieu. The Internet is one of the major reasons here as it creates the unified communication system. Due to it you can find partners in any part of the world and discuss immediately the urgent issues distantly with no necessity of flying thousands kilometers to meet in person. All this resulted in explosive growth of

cultural exchanges and direct contacts between government institutions, social groups and movements, and individuals from different countries and cultures.

Cultural diversity of modern humanity is growing and representatives of different cultures are finding more and more aids to save and develop their integrity and cultural identity [Grushevitskaya 2003: 6]. This tendency to saving cultural identity confirms the pattern that in spite of the fact that humanity is becoming more and more interconnected and unified, it doesn't lose its cultural diversity. So it is very important to determine cultural peculiarities of different peoples to understand them better and reach reciprocity and mutual understanding.

The main method of achieving mutual understanding among people is their communication where they can prove themselves, reveal all their qualities and characteristics. In communication human beings acquire common human experience, historically rooted social norms, values, knowledge and ways of doing something, thus shaping themselves as personalities and culture bearers [Sadokhin 2005: 4]. So whether we want it or not, we all are bearers of our own culture which is necessary as it gives us stable understanding of life in our society.

However coming to a society with different from ours norms and values may be problematic. According to the data of Intercultural Network providing intercultural training to managers, from 27% to 35% of all business trips end with a premature return of the person sent by the firm, 35% do not achieve the goals stated, 50% of joint international groups disintegrate without getting any result ([www.icunet.ag](http://www.icunet.ag)). Moreover the firms and companies sustain losses, the business relations with foreign partners, the norms of which are ignored, are spoilt, as well as the reputation of the company itself. That results in serious financial cost. The reason of all these is the problems of intercultural communication? Because people do not know anything about how to take into account cultural norms and values of their partner(s) from other another country.

Different researchers define Intercultural Communication in many ways. Let's see some of them to understand the term better. S. Ter-Minasova gives the simplest definition [Ter-Minasova 2000: 14]: communication of people, presenting different cultures. T. Grushevitskaya describes it as a combination

of various forms of relations and communication between individuals and groups, belonging to different cultures [Grushevitskaya 2003: 16], and also as mutual relations of opposing identities in which penetration of interlocutors' identities into each other occurs [Grushevitskaya 2003: 45]. E. Vereshchaguin and V. Kostomarov define intercultural communication as adequate mutual understanding of two participants of communicative act belonging to different cultures [cit. by Ter-Minasova 2000: 14]. A. Sadokhin determines intercultural communication as the specific form of communication between two or more representatives of different cultures, during which the exchange of information and cultural values of integrated cultures are taking place [Sadokhin 2005: 95].

It is important not only to know the principles and rules of intercultural communication, but use them and make them more and more perfect in constant practice. Today business needs specialists with intercultural communication competence in order to be successful and maintain long-term relations. These specialists are to possess fluency of thought, flexibility of perception, the ability of expressing their ideas in different ways, the ability to be an intermediate between people who represent different cultures (to be able to introduce people to each other, to insert the necessary word in any situation, to explain elements of a different culture to them such as traditions, customs, norms and values, etc).

So A. Berdichevski determines intercultural competence as the ability to communicate with the representatives of another culture, including the ability to understand the limits of one's own culture and one's own language, as well as the ability to switch (when encountering another culture) to not only linguistic but also non-linguistic norms of behavior [Berdichevski 2019: 9]. As we understand, the development of intercultural competence is impossible without opening your mind and getting ready to see yourself with the eyes of a person from a foreign country. This idea is also proved by Y. Rot and G. Kopteltseva who distinguish two main stages on the way to intercultural competence: self-awareness (orientation in your own culture) and cross-cultural awareness (comprehending the meaning of cultural factors in the process of communicative interaction [Rot 2015: 123].

A. Berdichevski suggests the following stages of intercultural competence develop-

ment: 1) cognitive – getting to know about the differences and similarities in values, norms and samples of behavior in contacting cultures; 2) affective – being able to stand in the position of a partner in intercultural communication and identify possible conflict based on values and norms of his/her culture; 3) communicative-behavioral – being able to conduct certain actions in intercultural communication [Berdichevski 2019: 15]. This approach can be chosen to construct the educational course bringing students from level to level in the process of developing different components of intercultural communicative competence.

G. Elizarova sees the structure of intercultural competence as consisting of linguistic (the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances using the norms of the language in use), sociolinguistic (awareness of conditions which determine the form and manner of language use in communication with certain partners, of social connotation of some language units), discourse (the ability to use necessary strategies in constructing and comprehending texts), strategic (the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies in communication), sociocultural (awareness of sociocultural context of communication) and social (the wish and ability to interact and communicate, confidence, empathy, the ability to use social strategies to achieve the aim of the communicative act) competences [Elizarova 2005: 225].

We all know that culture consists of material part, produced by us for convenience and comfort of life, and intellectual part, produced by us in order to develop intellectually and spiritually. L. Grishaeva and L. Tsurikova distinguish also an interactional part of culture, which includes a combination of ways helping to organize interaction in order to produce material or intellectual culture [Grishaeva 2008: 10]. Interactional part of culture can be included into each of the mentioned above competences within the intercultural communicative competence and is to become an object of learning in every Practical Language course, Business Language course or Intercultural Communication course.

An interesting theory was suggested by M. Bennet which depicts the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity [Bennet 1986: 179–184]. It contains different stages through which a person may go while learning another culture: Denial, Defense, Minimization,

tion, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. The first three are ethnocentric; the last three – so called ethnorelative. Ethnorelativity also can be regarded as one of the aims in the educational process.

Having discussed the definition, constituents and stages of intercultural competence development we cannot but determine the intercultural competence skills which also must be among the objectives of any Business English course. A great variety of them is discussed in the article by O.-A. ILIE [Ilie 2019: 266–267], on the basis of which we have distinguished the following intercultural competence skills:

- to possess knowledge about different cultures and customs;
- to be able to communicate in a target language;
- to be able to acknowledge and respect cultural diversity (to manifest tolerance and cultural sensitivity);
- to be aware of one's own cultural identity and possess personal strength (individuals must have a strong sense of self, must know themselves well, and through their self-awareness to initiate a positive communication with the other) ;
- to possess intercultural adroitness (message skills, knowledge of appropriate self-disclosure, flexibility, social skills);
- to be able to use communications technologies (searching for, processing and analyzing data from various sources);
- to be able to adapt easily to new situations and environments;
- to show awareness of political correctness, gender issues and equal opportunities;
- to be able to work in a multinational team and an intercultural environment.

Moreover the process of developing intercultural communicative competence is inseparable from the development of such personal qualities as curiosity, openness, and readiness to change views, as well as critical cultural awareness to prepare knowledgeable students able to reflect and engage effectively in a different cultural context [López-Rocha 2017: 68].

Thus acquiring intercultural communication competence through these skills and qualities should involve not only business language but knowledge about and practical experience of real communication with other cultures. Knowing about and experiencing

cultural differences is very important for future employees in order to establish effective intercultural communication practices. But the process of international communication skills development is rather complex and time-consuming, that is why each of them may be regarded as an objective of the educational course the overall aim of which may be to teach students to communicate with the representatives of another culture adequately and with positive results for both parties.

#### **Analysis of the Business English syllabi.**

The Business English course at University American College Skopje is a compulsory undergraduate fifteen-week course composed of 150 learning hours. As described in the course outline, the course is a general Business English course both for students who have not yet worked in business and for students who already have experience of business environments. It provides practical reading, speaking, listening and writing skills necessary in the business environment. It also contains a wide range of essential business vocabulary and grammar. Business English helps business people worldwide to be able to trade and work together. It includes: the vocabulary which business people use; the particular language skills which they require in order to do business in English; grammar; the ability to read about and discuss topics of general interest to business people.

As we can see from the course description, there is no mention of intercultural communicative competence or skills. Intercultural understanding and communication is also not mentioned. The “particular language skills” required to do business are mentioned but without any mention of the intercultural communicative aspects.

The learning outcomes of the course/class outlined in the syllabus mention: using business language to speak with fellow classmates and the professor; simulations of business situations in groups utilizing proper Business English, etiquette, and body language; demonstrating improvement in business communication skills through homework and exams; developing a final project/research paper during the class that utilizes correct business English terms and concepts, that would be accepted and taken seriously by international companies.

The learning outcomes presented in the syllabus show limited reference to intercultural

communication concepts such as etiquette and body language which are indeed an important aspect of intercultural communication. However, intercultural communication competence and skills are still not mentioned and these aspects are not directly connected to intercultural communication in Business. Moreover, the last learning outcome, which should be “accepted and taken seriously by international companies”, does not mention intercultural aspect neither but focuses on using “correct business English terms and concepts”.

The learning objectives of this Business English course are as follows: By the end of this course, students should be able to: develop better oral communication skills; function more effectively in business situations; improve their own writing skills so that they can produce good, clear and to-the-point business documents in English; gain more insight into the role of English as a lingua franca used in conducting meetings and negotiations; give an individual presentation or conduct business negotiations in the form of role plays and simulations; develop the skills used for writing letters, reports, summaries, etc., with particular emphasis on implementing correct style, structure and coherence in business English.

In these learning objectives which students are expected to achieve, there is one learning objective which can be related to the intercultural communicative competence and that is that students are expected to “gain more insight into the role of English as a lingua franca”. However, the verb used is to “gain insight”, i.e. to see, to understand, to learn a fact and not to develop skills and competences to use English as a lingua franca.

In terms of the course delivery, the syllabus demonstrates possibilities of developing skills and competences, and not only facts and knowledge. According to the syllabus, the course is delivered through a combination of lectures, practice activities, pair and group work activities, case studies, class discussions, individual or group presentations, supervised and independent research. Students are expected to be independent learners and participate actively in the learning process.

The course book used as a required text is Michael Duckworth and Rebecca Turner's *Business Result: Upper-intermediate Student's Book* published by Oxford University Press (2008). The topics covered include: First Impressions,

Motivation, On Schedule, New Ideas, Customer Service, Ethical Business, Making Decisions, Outsourcing, Employees, New Business, Communications, Change, Facts and Figures and Culture. The topics are generally business related. Some indirectly point to intercultural aspects such as the topic “Outsourcing”, “Communication” and even “Ethical Business” which includes ethics and norms throughout cultures. However, only one topic is connected directly to culture but not specifically to intercultural communication.

Speaking about the Ural State Pedagogical University (Yekaterinburg, Russia), in the Institute of Foreign Languages the ideas of intercultural communication are touched in the courses of Intercultural Communication and Language through Culture Studies. Disciplines containing Business English topics do not focus deliberately on those issues and thus do not provide enough practice in this needful field. Bachelor degree students majoring in Applied Linguistics have the discipline “English in the Sphere of Business Communication”. The aim of this course is development of language and communicative skills for professional communication in the business sphere. The course covers such topics as Searching for Job, Introducing Yourself, Business and Project Management and Business Correspondence [Старкова 2013: 3–4]. The course is designed for 72 hours during which students are discussing best practices of getting a good job, speculating on most advantageous job strategies, observing rules of writing cover letters, resumés and curriculum vitae, role-playing job interviews, learning specificities of elevator pitch and the ways of self-branding and self-marketing, getting acquainted with business management terminology and different types of business letters. But none of the topics has inclination of regarding intercultural communication cases where it would be possible to practice special scenarios based on norms, behaviors, etiquette required or on the contrary prohibited in this or that cultural society. However, the current situation in which business and life of people in the world is being developed dictates new requirements claiming to pay more attention to issues and challenges of communication between representatives of different cultures. Teachers and course designers are to be aware of how to include situations of intercultural communication into the syllabi, course content, and course books.

Master degree curriculum realized in the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Ural State Pedagogical University (Yekaterinburg, Russia) includes the discipline “Foreign Languages in Specific Spheres of Communication”, the aim of which is to increase the level of communicative skills necessary for professional communication in business sphere and other specific spheres of communication such as international conferences, exhibitions, forums and other formats of intercultural interaction. Such units as Telephoning Skills, Negotiations and Contracts are presented in the text book used for this course [Старкова 2018: 4–5]. During 216 learning hours graduates are developing skills in simulating situations where they are making business calls within the company or on behalf of it, spelling difficult names, practicing special vocabulary such as *to build rapport*, *to be apt to do something*, *to make a referral*, *to include a margin*, *onerous terms*, *to bid a project*, etc., role-playing situations of win-win negotiations, and constructing contracts and agreements based on different terms of delivery. Still the work on the course book in the classroom with the teacher and at home individually will never give the opportunity of training the situations close to real intercultural communication where unpredictable settings can occur. Only focused study of the cultural information and participation in intercultural activities (meetings, videoconferences, mutual project realization) may help solve this problem. Communication between people is based on their context, interactional and linguistic knowledge [Гришаева 2008: 235]. Context knowledge is responsible for our understanding of things in life and world in general and in the given situation in particular to determine the status of interlocutors and level of formality. Interactional knowledge is based on the discursive experience of participants which helps to decide how to behave and what to say. Linguistic knowledge gives us the choice of necessary vocabulary and grammar to be able to participate freely in the conversation knowing the subject under discussion. Of course, both courses of the Ural State Pedagogical University mentioned above give good practice of business vocabulary and business communication skills, but that covers mostly linguistic knowledge, being thus linguistically biased, and not developing much of the context and interactional knowledge.

Comparing the practices of both univer-

sities it is necessary to mention the main differences in the Business English syllabi: University American College Skopje (R. N. Macedonia) makes main focus on discourse and strategic components of intercultural communicative competence (on using strategies of comprehending and producing texts and practicing non-verbal communication), whereas Institute of Foreign Languages in the Ural State Pedagogical University (Russia) pays more attention to the sociocultural and social components of intercultural communicative competence using relevant context and social strategies).

Among the similarities of the syllabi in both universities we can state that they are targeted on the high levels of English language development (B2, C1) thus providing advanced practice of linguistic component of intercultural communicative competence. However they do not focus on levels of this competence development. Only cognitive level is realized when students get familiarized with some phenomena relevant in intercultural communication. No further progress to affective and communicative-behavioral levels is ever traced. Amount of content where cultural diversity is discussed is insufficient.

**Methodology of the Research.** To understand the practices of teaching intercultural communicative competence to university students we have conducted a qualitative analysis of courses outlines/syllabi of Business English classes/courses at two universities: University American College Skopje in R. N. Macedonia and Ural State Pedagogical University in Russia.

The research question that our paper aims to answer is to what extent Business English courses taught at these universities focus on development of intercultural communicative competence in students. We took into consideration the course description, the learning outcomes and the learning objectives that each course strives to achieve as described in the course syllabus, the course delivery and the topics the courses cover. Our research objective is to see whether the course syllabi include development of intercultural communicative competence or any aspect of intercultural communication skills and sensitivity.

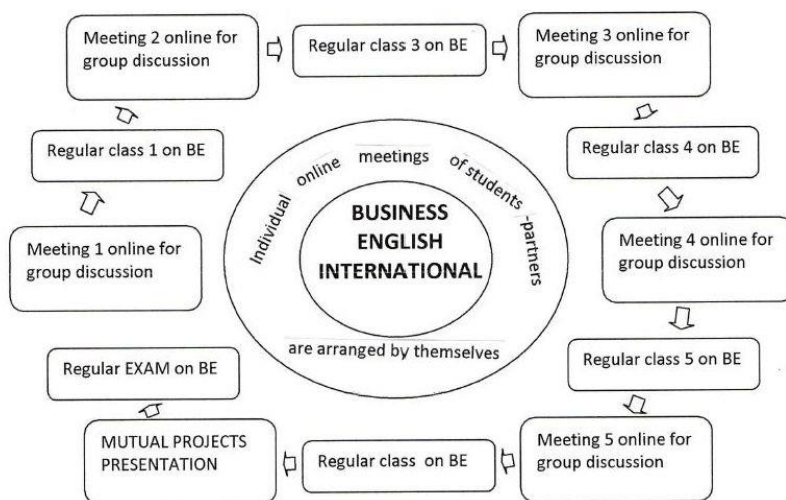
University American College Skopje and the Ural State Pedagogical University have been cooperating through several projects for several years and are focused on developing intercultural communicative competence in students



and foster intercultural understanding and cooperation hence the present case study of their practices. So far, both universities have offered a special, distinct course/class through the Global Partners in Education Program called Global Understanding whose main aim is to practically develop intercultural communication skills in students through synchronous and asynchronous video-conference links and chat session connecting students from various countries and universities throughout the world. Moreover, an Erasmus project was conducted between both universities aimed at exchanging good practices of developing intercultural communication skills in students. This paper focuses on one particular course/class, i.e. Business English, which has not been taken into consideration before. We believe that development of intercultural competence can be achieved fully if the competence is being developed throughout the curricula and should be a learning objective in various courses. As discussed previously in the introduction and the literature review, the Business English course has a special potential for developing this significant competence.

Taking into account all said above about the role of any Business English course at universities, which is not only to equip students with language and linguistic business related skills, but to make students ready for the in-

tercultural communication in business spheres, we have come up to the idea of combining some elements of Global Understanding course with Business English course in a project BUSINESS ENGLISH INTERNATIONAL. The aim of the project is to organize regular online group and individual meetings of students from different universities to discuss Business English topics under study. So the normal face-to-face classes with a university lecturer are interspersed with the online discussions of such questions as *business etiquette in both countries, business trip to each other's countries, a typical working day at the office (e.g. of a Russian or a Macedonian manager), attitudes to technological revolution, rules of negotiating and signing a contract, must-sees in each country, cultural heritage and historical development, etc.* These are the questions for group discussions. During individual meetings the students are to plan and realize their own mutual project base on the analysis of some business problem in both countries: e.g. *how to organize an international conference or how to open a cafe.* The mutual project is presented at the last online meeting by each international pair of students. Thus students, studying Business English, find out as much information about the other country as possible for them to construct business relations with its representatives when they graduate the university.



**Fig. 1. The scheme of work on Business English International project**

In Figure 1 you see how the work should be organized to combine normal course of Business English with online international collaboration

between any two universities, in our case between University American College Skopje in R. N. Macedonia and Ural State Pedagogical

University in Russia. The number of meetings in Figure 1 is nominal and can be changed according to the conditions where the project is implemented. During regular classes the work on the issues subject to evaluation at the BE exam should be covered and practiced. During online meetings with students – partners topics of intercultural relevance concerning both countries are to be disclosed by one party and discovered by the other and visa versa. Ideally it's better the topics of the BE course and questions discussed during meetings with partners correlate and complement each other. And starting with the 3<sup>rd</sup> or not later than the second part of the course students should plan their individual meetings and collaborate on the mutual project.

Thus Business English International project has derived from the analysis of existing educational Business English courses and the experience of participation of both universities in projects of Global Partners in Education. The implementation is planned for the second semester of 2021–2022 academic year. The main outcomes expected are the skills demonstrated by students as proof of formation of intercultural communicative competence in business spheres.

**Conclusion.** The present paper, envisaged as a case-study focusing on two universities the University American College Skopje (R. N. Macedonia) and the Ural State Pedagogical University (Russia), aimed to analyze to what extent Business English courses taught at these universities focus on development of students' intercultural communicative competence. Relying on the descriptive method and through qualitative and comparative analyses of Business English course syllabi, we concluded that the intercultural communicative competence is not explicitly mentioned in any of the course syllabi taken into consideration. However modern reality in the period of globalization and internationalization proves that higher education should considerably help students develop intercultural communication skills and overall intercultural communicative competence in a meaningful and systematic way by providing enough intercultural opportunities. The role of Business English courses at universities is not only to equip students with language and linguistic business related skills. Its role should be to make students ready for the business world where the intercultural com-

municative competence is a prerequisite for success. Business English courses possess a great potential for providing this help to students and can substantially contribute to the development and/or the advancement of their intercultural communication skills.

The qualitative and comparative analyses of the course syllabi of Business English related courses at the University American College Skopje (R. N. Macedonia) and the Ural State Pedagogical University (Russia) show that they do provide an excellent opportunity for students to develop good language skills in English required in the business setting. At both universities students learn business specific vocabulary, develop business related writing, speaking, reading and listening skills through interactive activities and in-class simulations. However, the courses are not tackling the deficit of intercultural communication and purposeful development of students' intercultural communicative competence. The syllabi clearly reflect this tendency.

In order to change this, syllabi designers and course instructors should be aware of the indispensable part the intercultural communicative competence plays in the overall Business English teaching and professional education in general. Understanding its importance, development of intercultural communication skills should be included in the learning objectives and the learning outcomes outlined in any Business English course syllabus. Moreover, intercultural content and topics should be included in the course description. However, mere insertion of the intercultural communicative competence in the course syllabus would not be enough if students are not provided with real opportunities to develop it.

One of the ways to do this is giving students a chance to communicate with students from different universities throughout the world within their standard Business English courses. In order to be able to develop the intercultural competence, students need intercultural opportunities, intercultural simulations, and projects with representatives of different cultures. Today's technology makes these activities very much available and easy to implement. By offering our Business English International project to students of our universities we make them open to international reality of today's business world which will make their future professional activity on an international level successful.

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