

From Challenges to Mastery: Non-Native Teachers in Business English and Business Negotiation Courses

Ivana Kapráliková

Abstract:

This research paper examines the unique challenges faced by non-native instructors teaching Business English and Business negotiations at Slovak universities. These educators often encounter difficulties with fluency and confidence, leading to potential doubts about their authority due to accents or occasional language errors. Cultural nuances and diverse classroom backgrounds further complicate communication, resulting in misunderstandings and differing expectations regarding negotiation tactics and styles. Teaching non-verbal communication skills adds complexity, especially when cues vary across cultures or are conveyed virtually. Additionally, mastering specialized business vocabulary and industry-specific jargon requires significant professional development efforts to stay current with business trends. Broader challenges include balancing language teaching with business content and addressing diverse linguistic backgrounds, necessitating tailored and differentiated instruction. Limited access to professional development and constrained lesson times (typically once a week for 1.5 hours) hinder comprehensive role-plays and interactive activities essential for developing practical negotiation skills. The research adopts a qualitative approach, employing thematic analysis to explore insights and solutions from 8 non-native ESP teachers at four Slovak universities. Data collection was conducted through interviews, gathering qualitative data on teachers' perceptions and strategies. Thematic analysis identified recurring themes and patterns, providing valuable insights into common challenges and effective strategies. Findings suggest enhanced cultural competence training, collaboration with experts, and use of authentic materials as strategies to address these challenges. Future research should investigate these solutions' effectiveness and explore innovative teaching methods and technologies to overcome time constraints, enhancing learning experiences in business negotiation courses.

Key words: soft skills, business negotiations, non-native teachers, cultural nuances, professional development

Introduction

The teaching of Business English and Business negotiations at the university level presents a unique set of challenges for non-native instructors. The educators often tackle with issues related to fluency and confidence (Reves, T., Medgyes, P., 1994), as their non-native status can lead to occasional language errors or accents that may cause students to question their authority. Additionally, cultural nuances and diverse classroom backgrounds complicate communication, resulting in potential misunderstandings and differing expectations regarding negotiation tactics and styles (Kumaravadivelu, B., 2008). The importance of body language in business

negotiations adds another layer of complexity, as teaching non-verbal communication skills proves difficult, especially when such cues vary significantly across cultures or are taught through virtual platforms (Goman, C. K., 2008). Specialized business vocabulary further poses a challenge, as instructors strive to ensure students fully comprehend complex terminology.

Non-native teachers of Business English as a part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) also face broader challenges. One major issue is the lack of familiarity with industry-specific jargon and real-world business practices, which can limit their ability to provide relevant and practical examples. This gap often necessitates extra effort in professional development and continuous learning to stay updated with the latest trends in the business world. Moreover, the need to balance language teaching with the specific content of business subjects can be overwhelming, as it requires a dual focus on linguistic skills and specialized knowledge.

The diverse linguistic backgrounds of students add another layer of complexity (Garrett, L., Taylor, D., 2014). Non-native teachers must navigate varying levels of English proficiency among their students, which can hinder the effectiveness of their teaching. This diversity often requires tailored approaches and differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners, adding to the workload of non-native instructors. Furthermore, non-native teachers might experience a lack of confidence in their own language abilities, leading to self-doubt and anxiety, which can affect their teaching performance.

Despite recognizing the need for ongoing professional development, many non-native teachers find it challenging to access sufficient training opportunities (Zhu, W., Deng, J., 2025). Moreover, the limited time available for lessons, typically only once a week for one and a half hours, hinders the ability to conduct comprehensive role-plays and interactive activities crucial for developing practical negotiation skills. These challenges underscore the need for more support and resources to help non-native educators navigate these obstacles and enhance their teaching effectiveness.

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the challenges faced by non-native teachers in teaching Business negotiations courses and to propose practical solutions for overcoming these challenges. By examining these issues, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving the quality of business negotiation education and enhancing the effectiveness of non-native teachers.

The specific objectives of this paper encompass identifying the key challenges that non-native teachers encounter in teaching business negotiation. Furthermore, the paper aims to analyse the impact of cultural nuances, body language, and specialized vocabulary on the teaching process. It also proposes strategies to improve the teaching effectiveness of non-native teachers, including professional develop-

ment, collaboration with subject matter experts, and the utilization of authentic materials. Additionally, the paper highlights the importance of creating immersive learning environments and focusing on the development of practical skills. Finally, it emphasizes the significance of building cultural competence among non-native teachers.

The scope of the paper encompasses a comprehensive review of the literature on teaching business negotiations, an analysis of the specific challenges faced by non-native teachers, and the presentation of evidence-based solutions. The paper draws on qualitative research method to provide a well-rounded perspective on the topic. By addressing these challenges and proposing actionable solutions, the paper aims to significantly contribute to the advancement of business negotiation education and the professional development of non-native teachers.

Theoretical framework

Fitria (2019) states that, the definition of Business English or English for Business Purposes shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, course design, and the selection and development of materials with all ESP fields of work. Teaching Business English (English for Business) requires a teacher's awareness of the subject matter. ESP combines the subject matter and English language teaching skills. The role of a teacher at this stage is managing to adapt teaching skills and strategies for teaching Business English. Donna (2000) makes a comprehensive introduction to Business English, and provides both a comprehensive introduction to Business English for teachers who are new to the field, as well as inspiration and guidance for those already involved in this area, and it also deals with a range of issues from needs analysis and course planning to testing and evaluation.

According to Zhu's and Deng's (2025) case study on Business English teacher development in China, the case research brings at least the following implications to other Chinese universities or even foreign universities having similar Business English degree programmes: Business English teachers with whether business-related degree education or English language-related degree qualifications should first become a competent English language teachers; there is a need to develop the type of "language + business" multi-skilled teachers teaching Business English courses as these teachers are most expected by the students; and the professional development of Business English teachers requires the taking of a variety of approaches together in order to achieve the expected results.

Shtaltovna (2021) points out that the real-world communication cases for Professional and Business English should be the main focus of corporate training and university teaching. Eventually, as teachers and trainers, they are supposed to get

students and clients prepared for the real-world scenarios of online communication, which is a basic acceptable level for business communication these days.

Moreover, numerous studies highlight the necessity for new engineering graduates to possess a range of skills. Besides technical knowledge, they are expected to be flexible, communicative, creative, adaptable, and cooperative (Kolmos, 2006; Lappalainen, 2009; Williamson et al., 2013). Holik et al. (2023) emphasized the critical importance of stress management and communication skills development in higher education. Their survey of 208 engineering students underlined the need for these soft skills.

Montalvan et al. (2024) demonstrated that industrial engineering students acquire skills in business classrooms that are highly sought by employers. These skills are vital for modern-day business operations and underscore the role of industrial engineering students in meeting job market demands. The findings provide valuable insights for business education in engineering courses and inform educational stakeholders on updating and implementing new curricula criteria in higher education.

Universities play a vital role in preparing future professionals by incorporating business communication skills development into their curricula, ensuring graduates possess the interpersonal and communication skills needed for success in the modern workplace.

Challenges faced by non-native teachers in teaching Business English and Business negotiations classes

In the realm of business communication, cultural nuances and business etiquette play a pivotal role, heavily influencing the business communication process. Non-native teachers, despite their expertise, may lack an in-depth understanding of these cultural norms and customs, leading to potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations in the classroom. The intricate dynamics of body language and non-verbal cues further complicate this issue, as different cultures exhibit distinct styles of non-verbal communication. Awareness of these differences is paramount for teachers to effectively convey negotiation strategies and accurately interpret student behaviour.

The specialized vocabulary and terminology inherent especially in business negotiations present another layer of complexity. Business jargon, replete with specific vocabulary, may pose a challenge for non-native teachers, particularly those from non-business backgrounds. Moreover, industry-specific language varies according to the target sector, necessitating teachers to invest substantial effort in acquiring and mastering this specialized knowledge.

Access to authentic materials and real-world scenarios is crucial for providing practical and relevant learning experiences in business negotiation courses. However, non-native teachers may face limitations in obtaining these resources, such as business negotiation case studies and scenarios reflecting genuine business contexts. The challenge is further exacerbated when attempting to create realistic simulations, particularly if teachers lack first-hand experience in business settings.

Effective development of negotiation skills hinges on practical experience and exposure to real-world situations. Non-native teachers, who may lack this first-hand experience, find it challenging to impart practical advice and guidance. Teaching business communication strategies, tactics, and techniques requires a profound understanding of communication theory and practice, making it a complex endeavour for those without practical exposure.

Methodology

The methodology employed in our research was designed to comprehensively explore the challenges and strategies related to teaching business negotiation skills by non-native teachers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at Slovak universities. The research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on thematic analysis to delve into the insights and solutions provided by these educators. Participants in the research consisted of 8 non-native ESP teachers from four Slovak universities (University of Economics in Bratislava, University of Alexander Dubček in Trenčín, Comenius University in Bratislava, and Pan-European University in Bratislava), providing a targeted and relevant sample for the research. To meet the criteria for the research, participants had to be university lecturers, currently or formerly actively teaching Business English or Business Negotiations classes. Participants were recruited through our contacts, assistant professors whom we have known personally or met and come into contact with in the past.

Data collection was conducted through interviews, which were utilized to gather qualitative data on the teachers' perceptions and strategies. This method allowed for an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences and viewpoints of the participants.

The thematic analysis of the collected data aimed to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing valuable insights into the common challenges faced by non-native teachers and the effective strategies they employed. By using the above-mentioned method, the paper offers an examination of the complexities involved in teaching business negotiation skills, contributing to the broader discourse on ESP education and teacher development.

Once the participants had decided to be involved in the interview process, we made sure to inform them about the purposes and the subject matter of the

interview in more detail. We informed them about how we would handle their data and that they could withdraw or modify their consent at any time. The data were collected through online (via MS Teams) or face-to-face interviews with the participants.

First, we established an interview protocol, which is an essential part of the whole interview process. It consisted of two parts: a header to obtain relevant data about the interviewee and a list of questions or topics to be covered in the interview. There were ten open-ended questions aligned with our research. It served as a guide to follow during the interview; however, during the interview process, we did not maintain the order of the questions or their exact wording, as we needed the flexibility to adapt to the situation and the interaction that arose during each interview. The questions were formulated based on specific themes, which helped us to analyze the content more categorically at a later stage of the research:

1. *Challenges in teaching*: What are the primary challenges you face as a non-native teacher when teaching business negotiation?
2. *Cultural nuances*: How do cultural differences between your students impact your teaching approach in business negotiations?
3. *Body language*: In your experience, how significant is the role of body language in teaching business negotiation, and how do you address it in your lessons?
4. *Specialized vocabulary*: How do you handle the teaching of specialized business negotiation vocabulary to ensure students understand and use it effectively?
5. *Professional development*: What types of professional development have you found most helpful in improving your teaching effectiveness in business negotiations?
6. *Collaboration with experts*: How often do you collaborate with subject matter experts in business negotiations, and how has this influenced your teaching methods?
7. *Authentic materials*: Can you share an example of how you have used authentic materials in your business negotiation classes and its impact on student learning?
8. *Immersive learning environments*: What strategies do you use to create an immersive learning environment for your students during business negotiation lessons?
9. *Practical skills development*: How do you focus on the development of practical negotiation skills in your students, and what activities or exercises do you find most effective?
10. *Cultural competence*: How important is it for you to build cultural competence among your students, and what methods do you use to achieve this?

The interview recordings were transcribed and read through multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content. Significant excerpts were highlighted, and recurring themes were noted. The next step involved labeling these key segments with codes representing different themes. To ensure accuracy, the same transcripts were independently reviewed and coded by another researcher. Any differences in coding were discussed and resolved. The codes were then grouped into larger categories capturing the main themes.

The themes were interpreted in relation to the questions and connected to existing literature on ESP education and teacher development. The insights gained provided an understanding of the challenges faced by non-native ESP teachers and the strategies they used to overcome them. At this stage of the research, the responses of the teachers were generalized to identify the main challenges. These findings will be elaborated in more comprehensive research involving a larger group of interviewees on an international level. The findings are discussed in the following sections of the paper.

Research findings

This paper aims to uncover the key challenges faced by non-native assistant professors in teaching Business English and Business negotiations, along with their strategies for overcoming these challenges.

All respondents acknowledged that their non-native status occasionally impacted their fluency and confidence in teaching complex business negotiation concepts. This resulted in students questioning their authority, often due to accents or minor language inaccuracies. Cultural nuances were identified as another significant challenge. Five respondents frequently addressed diverse student backgrounds to prevent misunderstandings and align expectations in communication styles and negotiation practices.

The importance of body language in business negotiations was unanimously emphasized. However, teaching non-verbal communication skills posed particular difficulties, as these cues often vary across cultures. Some respondents found it especially challenging to convey the subtleties of body language in virtual settings. Participants also reported the need for a robust understanding of specialized business vocabulary. They faced difficulties in ensuring students fully grasped complex, context-specific terminology.

The importance of professional development was widely recognized among respondents. Nevertheless, only three had actively participated in workshops, webinars, and training sessions aimed at improving their language skills, cultural competence, and pedagogical methods. Collaboration with business professionals and the incorporation of authentic materials, such as case studies, recorded negotia-

tions, and business documents, were highlighted as effective strategies to enhance student engagement and bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Five respondents detailed their use of interactive teaching methods, including role-plays, simulations, and group discussions, to foster immersive learning environments and enhance students' negotiation skills. These activities were noted as particularly effective in building confidence and critical thinking. However, almost all participants highlighted the significant challenge posed by the limited time allocated for lessons-typically one and a half hours per week-which restricted the scope of these interactive exercises. Instructors often found themselves balancing the need for theoretical content with practical application.

Cultural competence was identified as a teaching priority. Respondents integrated cultural awareness training into their curricula to equip students with the skills necessary to navigate diverse norms and practices in business negotiations. However, the constraints of lesson duration limited the extent to which such training could be conducted effectively.

In conclusion, the research revealed persistent challenges faced by non-native assistant professors in their efforts to teach Business English and Business negotiations effectively. Despite implementing various strategies to overcome these difficulties, obstacles such as linguistic barriers and cultural complexities persist. Respondents often grappled with maintaining authority in the classroom, as accents and occasional language inaccuracies sometimes impacted students' perceptions of their expertise. Additionally, adapting to the diverse cultural expectations of students required significant effort to ensure clear communication and mutual understanding.

Teaching critical aspects like non-verbal communication and specialized vocabulary presented further hurdles. The subtleties of body language were especially hard to convey, particularly in virtual environments, where cultural variations added another layer of complexity. Similarly, the intricate nature of business terminology posed challenges for both educators and students.

Time limitations were a recurring theme, with most respondents expressing the difficulty of integrating interactive activities, such as role-plays and cultural training, into the constrained weekly schedule. Although collaboration with industry professionals and the use of authentic materials offered valuable practical insights, respondents highlighted the ongoing need for further resources and professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching practices.

Proposed solutions and strategies

To overcome the challenges faced by non-native educators in teaching Business English and Business negotiation courses, various strategic measures can be adopted.

Enhancing cultural awareness among educators is crucial and can be achieved through specialized training programs focusing on diverse cultural norms and communication practices. Collaborations with cultural experts and professionals from local industries can provide practical workshops, enabling educators to develop nuanced understandings of global business etiquettes. These initiatives can further be supported by participation in international forums, which offer exposure to cross-cultural scenarios and valuable networking opportunities. Including intercultural competence as part of the curriculum can aid teachers in refining their skills to interpret and respond effectively to diverse non-verbal communication cues.

Addressing the complexity of business-specific language is essential to ensuring effective instruction. Targeted vocabulary training sessions, combined with industry partnerships, can prepare teachers with the necessary linguistic tools. Creating a glossary of frequently used business terms, tailored to reflect contemporary practices, can serve as a practical resource for classroom use. For instance, guest speakers from various sectors can provide context for technical jargon through first-hand examples, while collaborative exercises can help educators and students alike master relevant terminology.

Access to current, practice-oriented teaching materials can be facilitated by partnerships with companies that offer real-world case studies, negotiation frameworks, and simulation tools. Establishing such connections enables the integration of authentic resources into the classroom, enhancing the applicability of theoretical concepts. Platforms offering professional development courses, like those hosted online, provide an additional avenue for educators to access diverse materials and resources. Structured simulations led by experienced professionals, such as executives or business consultants, can offer students insights into real-life negotiation practices, bridging the gap between academic instruction and professional application.

Practical skill-building requires an experiential learning approach. Organizing hands-on workshops in collaboration with business associations can provide both educators and students with exposure to realistic negotiation scenarios. Professional development remains vital; by attending industry-specific training and conferences, educators can stay updated on best practices and emerging trends. Encouraging reflective teaching practices, such as peer review sessions, can create

a feedback loop for continuous improvement in instructional strategies and techniques.

Finally, enhancing language proficiency for non-native instructors should be prioritized through ongoing support systems. Resources such as pronunciation workshops, self-paced language practice tools, and peer-led discussions can be effective in improving fluency and confidence. Digital tools designed for language enhancement can serve as supplementary aids for refining communication skills. Engaging in language exchange programs or virtual platforms fosters continuous development, ultimately enabling educators to overcome linguistic barriers and excel in delivering engaging, high-quality instruction.

Conclusion

The paper has provided a detailed analysis of the challenges encountered by non-native assistant professors in teaching Business English and Business negotiations at the Slovak universities. These challenges include linguistic hurdles, cultural intricacies, complexities in conveying body language, and mastery of specialized business vocabulary. Although respondents have adopted measures such as targeted training, collaboration with industry professionals, and the integration of authentic materials, the limited instructional time remains a critical constraint, restricting opportunities for immersive role-plays and other interactive methods essential for developing negotiation skills. This time limitation also complicates the balance between delivering theoretical content and fostering practical application while addressing cultural awareness training effectively.

Future research should focus on evaluating the impact of proposed solutions, including advanced cultural competence programs, targeted approaches to business terminology instruction, and the systematic use of authentic and experiential materials. Additionally, investigating innovative pedagogical approaches and technological tools that alleviate time constraints and enhance simulation-based learning will offer valuable insights. By exploring these areas, subsequent studies can aid in refining instructional practices and provide non-native educators with enhanced resources and methodologies, thereby elevating the learning experience and fostering stronger outcomes for students.

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Author

Mgr. Ivana Kapráliková, PhD., Fakulta aplikovaných jazykov, Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave, e-mail: Ivana.kapralikova@euba.sk, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2994-5046>

Ivana Kapráliková (MA in English language and Education, MA in Politology, PhD) is an Assistant Professor of Business English, teaching Business English and Business negotiations at the University of Economics in Bratislava and Faculty of Economy at Pan-European University in Bratislava, Slovakia. Her research interests include lexicology, specializing in EU jargon analysing the documents of the European Union institutions and political discourse analysis of Central European politicians' rhetoric. She was a co-researcher on the project The influence of the web application Audioblog on language skills, listening and speaking, in teaching foreign languages and is currently involved in the project Innovative methods in teaching Business Negotiations in English in the context of successful employment of graduates of the University of Economics in Bratislava on the domestic and foreign labour market.