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**FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA – AN EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN  
TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH**

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*Abstract: The purpose of this article is to identify the main skills required by the employers in the framework of the 2020 European Entrepreneurship plan. After a brief presentation of the current European situation, of Europe 2020 strategy and of the main foreign direct investments in Romania, the authors focus on the language skills of students, skills that are extremely important for the personal and professional development of any future employee or entrepreneur. Their purpose is to show how linguistic skills can improve the professional perspectives of young graduates and entrepreneurs, using the case of Babeș-Bolyai University as an example of good practice in teaching foreign languages and endowing students with language skills.*

*Keywords: entrepreneurship, linguistic skills, employability, foreign direct investments, labour market*

### **Introduction**

In today's globalised world, young people are not encouraged to start their own business due to both the absence of business knowledge and the lack of start-up capital necessary for the setting up of a business. Young people lack motivation, which is often the 'engine' of a successful business. They also lack the necessary start-up capital, and most of the times the access to funding is expensive and bureaucratic. Furthermore, young people feel (and most of the times, they are right!) they are not trained to form an entrepreneurial mentality. Most young people complain about the fact that the current educational system does not offer support in understanding and knowing the reality of the current economy.

From a motivational point of view, young people are rather drawn to finding a job within a company than to starting their own business. The fear of failure, their lack of experience, as well as the absence of viable role models are the factors that replace the motivation of starting their own business with that of finding a stable and well-paid job.

The purpose of this article is to find solutions to the above-mentioned problems, to show what can be done in order to provide students with linguistic skills, to promote their language abilities, to better prepare them for a more internationalised labour market. In this context, we will have a look at change the current state of things and at the action initiated by the European Union for 2020, to which Romania adhered. The purpose of this European action, adopted for all twenty-eight member states, is to deliver 'smart, sustainable and

inclusive growth’<sup>1</sup>. We will also have a look at the Romanian labour market, to see what it offers to young graduates and, therefore, to show how better linguistic skills could improve their opportunities to find a job.

### **Europe 2020 Strategy and The Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020**

The targets of these 2020 strategies focus on five main domains, namely: employment, research and development, climate change and energy sustainability, education, as well as fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Employment and education go hand in hand. The purpose of the strategy in the field of education is to reduce school abandonment below 10% and to increase the percentage of people over 30 who graduate a tertiary education institution. Furthermore, if Romania reduces the percentage of school abandonment, the population will be better prepared for the labour market, and they will have greater chances to find a job – therefore, the employability rate will increase. Otherwise said, ‘educational improvements help employability and reduce poverty’<sup>2</sup>.

Given the current state of market internationalisation, it is highly important for young people who want to find a good job or to set up their own business to have the possibility to communicate with other entrepreneurs, if not to find foreign business partners, at least to learn from their experience. Competitiveness is highly important and can be seen as an asset in the personal or professional development of an entrepreneur. Every market is different and, therefore, every experience brings new information that could be used to improve the young entrepreneur’s knowledge or to help them develop their business, to bring fresh air in the domestic market. Experience creates ‘real-world entrepreneurs’.

### **Overview of the Romanian Labour Market**

Our economy started its development after the revolution of 1989, after the collapse of the communist regime, and was characterised by instability and an increase in the number of unemployed persons. The period 2000-2008 was characterised by economic strengthening, which can be seen in the improvement of the business environment and the positive attitude of the foreign partners that resulted in direct foreign investments. The Romanian National Bank (BNR) published, in 2013, the data regarding the direct foreign investments from 2003 until 2012. The results show an obvious increase in the direct investments made by foreign companies in our country, from 1,946 million euro in 2003 to 2,138 million euro at the end of 2012. Even though the flow of direct foreign investments in 2012 increased by 17.8% as compared to the previous year, the flow of direct investments is still considerably low if we compare it to the flows in 2006-2009.

<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/priorities/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/priorities/index_en.htm), 04/03/2014.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibidem*.

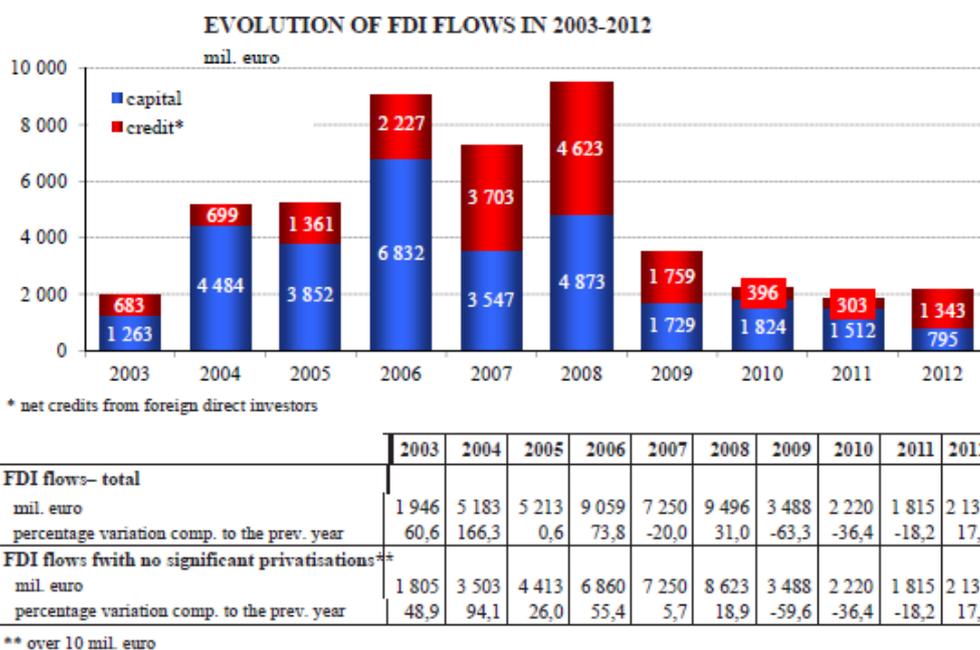


Figure 1. The evolution of foreign direct investments flow 2003-2012 (www.bnr.ro)

The foreign direct investments were mainly distributed to industry, finance and insurance, trade, energy and civil engineering.

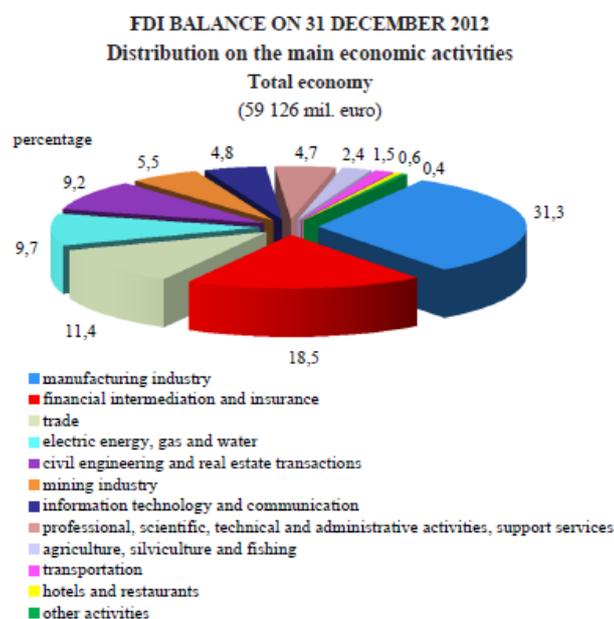


Figure2. The main economic activities (www.bnr.ro)

Unfortunately for the other regions, most of the foreign money invested goes to Bucharest (60.6%). Still, the percentages show a small decrease, as compared to 2010, when Bucharest attracted over 63% of the foreign direct investments.

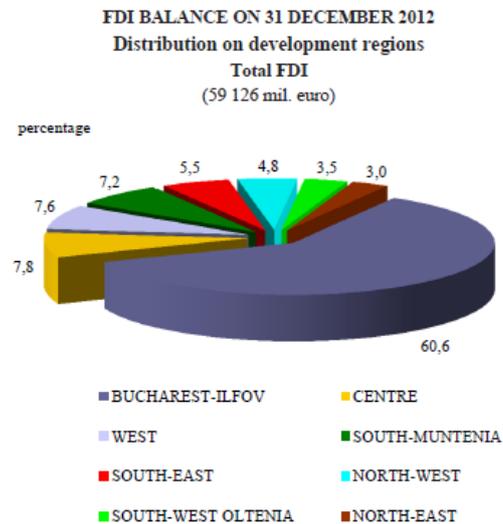


Figure 3. The main development regions (www.bnr.ro )

The main countries that invested in our economic branches can be seen in the chart below.

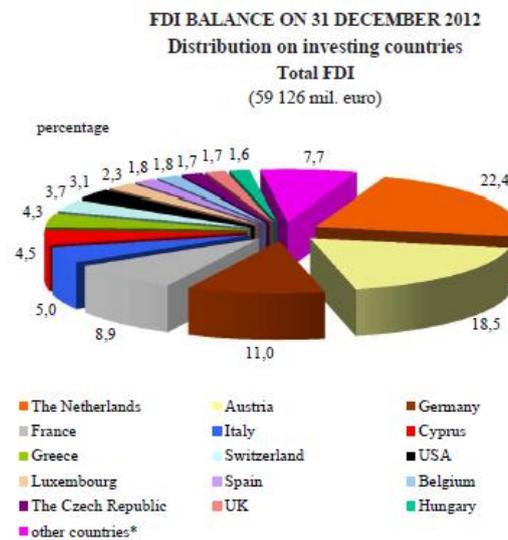


Figure 4. The main countries that invested in Romania in 2012 ( www.bnr.ro )

No.	Country	Companies with foreign capital		Value of the subscribed capital					
				Total in national currency		Total in foreign currency		Total in equivalent currency	
		No.	%	thousand Lei	%	thousand USD	%	thousand EUR	%
0	1	2		3		4		5	
	Total ROMANIA	192,416	50.88	129,484,939.1	52.10	50,548,651.9	51.61	37,692,344.7	51.61
1	THE NETHERLANDS	4,441	2.33	27,649,963.2	21.47	10,299,290.3	20.48	7,300,393.7	20.58
2	AUSTRIA	6,677	3.51	16,731,441.7	12.99	6,999,007.4	13.92	4,929,405.4	13.90
3	GERMANY	20,146	10.59	13,916,602.1	10.81	6,268,721.1	12.47	4,396,419.7	12.40
4	CYPRUS	5,403	2.84	9,456,811.0	7.34	3,426,996.6	6.82	2,444,950.1	6.89
5	FRANCE	7,616	4.00	8,182,760.3	6.35	3,016,768.0	6.00	2,108,311.5	5.94
6	GREECE	5,790	3.04	6,083,293.3	4.72	2,429,736.5	4.83	1,688,513.9	4.76
7	ITALY	37,029	19.46	6,092,775.7	4.73	2,270,524.8	4.52	1,614,616.8	4.55
8	SPAIN	5,097	2.68	4,300,107.5	3.34	1,595,453.6	3.17	1,128,849.1	3.18
9	LUXEMBOURG	771	0.41	4,089,169.4	3.18	1,461,800.4	2.91	1,040,933.7	2.94
10	PANAMA	225	0.12	229,715.5	0.18	1,363,960.4	2.71	948,023.8	2.67

Source: National Office of the Trade Registry

Table 1. Main investing countries in companies with foreign capital on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013

Foreign investments increased the number of places of work in our country. The candidates were asked not only to be well prepared in the respective field, to have the necessary specialty knowledge, but also to speak several foreign languages. Therefore, the ability to speak at least one foreign language is no longer an advantage but a must.

Foreign direct investments and the expansion of the trading activities abroad lead to the creation of new jobs. Statistics show that in 2012, 7,114 new jobs were created as a result of the FDI, as compared to 2011, when the number was of 5,985<sup>3</sup>.

Ranking by jobs created					
Rank	Country	2011	2012	Change	Share (2012)
1	United Kingdom	29,888	30,311	1.4%	17.8%
2	Russia	8,362	13,356	59.7%	7.8%
3	Poland	7,838	13,111	67.3%	7.7%
4	Germany	17,276	12,508	-27.6%	7.3%
5	France	13,164	10,542	-19.9%	6.2%
6	Serbia	13,479	10,302	-23.6%	6.0%
7	Turkey	7,295	10,146	39.1%	6.0%
8	Spain	9,205	10,114	9.9%	5.9%
9	Ireland	5,373	8,898	65.6%	5.2%
10	Romania	5,985	7,114	18.9%	4.2%
11	Slovakia	4,007	6,299	57.2%	3.7%
12	Czech Republic	5,168	5,508	6.6%	3.2%
13	FYRO Macedonia	3,040	4,670	53.6%	2.7%
14	Bulgaria	2,680	4,379	63.4%	2.6%
15	Hungary	5,237	3,941	-24.7%	2.3%
	Others	19,834	19,235	-3.0%	11.3%
	Total	157,831	170,434	8.0%	100%

Source: <http://www.eyeim.com/>, 11/03/2014

Table 2. Country ranking by jobs created through FDI in 2011-2012

Today, “different employers need graduates who have different capabilities. All value the analytical and reflective qualities that lie at the heart of a quality learning experience. But there is a growing emphasis by employers on the need for graduates to demonstrate a range of competences which will equip them to work in a global environment, in different countries, in multi-cultural teams, be innovative and enterprising and have strong language skills... Businesses have diverse and multiple needs for higher learning.”<sup>4</sup>

But in order to work in companies in which foreigners invest or in multinationals, young graduates in Romania not only have to be well qualified in their field of activity, but they also have to possess good linguistic skills. This idea is also supported by the survey conducted by the Eurobarometer for the European Commission regarding the employers’ perception on the graduates’ employability. 201 Romanian companies, both public and private, were included in the research, and 35% of them declared that 1 out of 5 employees are graduates. Most of the graduates hired by these companies had a diploma in economics and business administration or technical studies<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.eyeim.com/press.htm>, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.edge.co.uk/>, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

<sup>5</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_304\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_304_en.pdf), 12<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

In what the skills and aptitudes relevant for the employment process are concerned, the study shows that, in Romania, the following have been evaluated as being the most important:

Skills and aptitudes	Percentage
Teamwork	80%
Ability to use the computer	79%
Ability to adapt to new situations	70%
Communication skills	70%
Analytical and problem-solving skills	66%
Planning and organizational skills	61%
Decision-making skills	47%
<b>Foreign language knowledge</b>	<b>42%</b>

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_304\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_304_en.pdf), 12/06/2011

Table 3. Skills and aptitudes valued by employers

For all the above-mentioned reasons, it is obvious how important it is for every future employee or entrepreneur to have linguistic skills, to master at least one foreign language. Even if English is today's *lingua franca*, it is important to remember the fact that any other foreign language can be a real asset for a person.

### Foreign languages at Babeş-Bolyai University

Specialists in the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics strongly support the idea according to which bilinguals and multilinguals have an advantage in the recruitment process compared to monolinguals. "In tourism, marketing, retailing, airlines, public relations, banking, information and communications technology, accountancy, business consultancy, secretarial work, hotels, law and teaching, for example, bilingual and multilingual employees often have the competitive edge when applying for a post or for promotion."<sup>6</sup>

The strong connection between bilingualism or multilingualism and the employment market has also been proved by the fact that those who master several languages may use this for the prosperity of the businesses in order to act on the market trying to satisfy their customers' needs.

From this perspective, Babeş-Bolyai University is an example of good practice. Founded initially in 1581 as a Jesuit college, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the university became one of the most important universities of the region and of the country. Given the strong multicultural background of Transylvania, the Senate of the University

<sup>6</sup> Colin Baker, 2001, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Multilingual Matters LTD: Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto-Sydney, pp. 417-418.

decided, in 1995, to organise the institution on three lines of study—Romanian, Hungarian, and German<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, apart from specialisations offered in the three above-mentioned languages, Babeş-Bolyai University also offers specialisations in different foreign language to increase the students' chances to find better jobs in Romania or abroad. As such, the university offers 14 specialisations in English, French, Russian, and Italian at bachelor's level, as well as 38 specialisations in the above-mentioned foreign languages at master's level.

Students enrolled at Babeş-Bolyai University have to study a foreign language for at least two semesters, depending on the faculty they belong to. For instance, students enrolled at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences take compulsory foreign language courses for two semesters, while students enrolled at the Faculty of Business, for example, have to take compulsory foreign language courses for four semesters (until 2012, there were six semesters of compulsory language courses). The good thing about teaching foreign languages at Babeş-Bolyai University is that most language courses are actually *content and language integrated learning* courses, i.e. foreign languages are used to teach specialised courses, helping therefore students to improve their linguistic skills, by endowing them with specialised vocabulary in their field of study.

It is extremely important for students to be aware of the importance languages have in their personal and professional development. This was the reason why, in 2011, we carried out a research<sup>8</sup> on the attitudes of students towards foreign language learning. The questionnaire applied was made up of 32 questions, separated into three distinct parts. The first part, *General Information*, gathered information on the faculty where the students were enrolled, as well as on the year of studies. The second part gathered information on the *students' linguistic skills*, by addressing questions referring to their mother tongue, the number of foreign languages known, the age when they started to learn foreign languages, the enumeration of the foreign languages they spoke, as well as a section where students were asked to *self-evaluate their language skills* as per the European Framework of reference for Languages.<sup>33</sup> 33 male students and 107 female students participated in our research.

The analysis of the questionnaires applied showed that nine of the male respondents declared knowing only one foreign language; sixteen declared knowing two foreign languages; eight of them declared knowing three foreign languages. As to the female sampling, things are a bit different as out of the 107 female respondents, only two declared knowing one foreign language, forty-five know two foreign languages, forty know three foreign languages, fourteen know four foreign languages and three declared knowing five foreign languages.

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.ubbcluj.ro/en/despre/>, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

<sup>8</sup> The survey was carried out in Romania and Italy—as part of a Ph.D. research—and was applied to students enrolled at Babeş-Bolyai University and at “La Sapienza” University of Rome, who agreed to take part in our survey on language teaching in their universities.

Further, the purpose of the questionnaire applied was to see whether students were aware of the importance of foreign languages or not. We included in the questionnaire an open question (“Is foreign language knowledge important from your point of view? Please motivate your answer”), and, consequently, we were able to classify the answers according to their types:

- foreign languages are important for the students’ personal development and
- foreign languages are important for the students’ professional development.

It is very important to see that students are aware of the necessity to learn foreign languages, and to learn as many and as varied as possible. That is why, we included a question asking them to mention which languages are the most important from their point of view.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	126	90,0	92,0	92,0
	French	1	,7	,7	92,7
	German	7	5,0	5,1	97,8
	Chinese	3	2,1	2,2	100,0
	Total	137	97,9	100,0	
Missing	System	3	2,1		
Total		140	100,0		

Table 4. The first foreign language mentioned as being the most important nowadays

Seeing that English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese are the languages that have been mentioned the most, we further asked the students which languages they studied at the faculty they enrolled, in order to see whether their linguistic needs were being covered or not.

Even though the survey was carried out in 2011, the percentages and students’ opinions have not changes too much. English still is the most widely taught foreign language in our university, as the results also showed. English tends to dominate the scene as a lingua franca in various domains of human life. It is, certainly, the synonym of globalization all around the world. It has become such a powerful language and such an important tool for communication that today we are surrounded by it everywhere. From newspapers to TV channels, from movies to music, from scientific articles to specialty books, we see or hear English almost anywhere we go. That is why, as some European Union recommendations state, English is no longer a necessity, but a must.

**Babeş-Bolyai University – an example of good practice in teaching business English**

Teaching business English is different from teaching general English, first of all because the objectives are different. If, when teaching general English, the purpose is to endow students with language skills to make them able to communicate in English in, let us say, a more informal environment, when teaching business English we always focus on the business world.

Why do we believe that our university is an example of good practice in teaching Business English? Because we focus on the practical aspects! As stated at the beginning of this article, students usually complain about the fact that courses are too theoretical and we try to make them more practical.

Most of our students are adults who are already in contact with the business world. They are either employed in a company or they run their own business. Therefore, their level of knowledge is already better than that of other students and their interest is higher because most of them have to communicate with foreign business partners.

As such, the business English course concentrates a lot on their communicative skills. Students usually have to do more talking than the professor. Business English courses focus on four main aspects: speaking, listening, vocabulary and writing in the business world. A course syllabus, depending on the faculty we teach at, contains the following topics:

- Being international (speaking before an international audience, giving presentations, being aware of cultural differences);
- Training (online training vs. face-to-face training);
- Partnerships (public and private initiatives);
- Energy (natural resources, alternative resources, the future of energy);
- Employment (the future of work, work relationships, types of employment);
- Business ethics (ethics in the business world, CSR, solving unethical problems);
- Finance and banking (types of banks, types of services, types of finance, financial vocabulary);
- Consultants (external vs. in-house consultants, their roles);
- Business strategy (company goals, objectives, targets, mission statements);
- New business (start-ups, entrepreneurs, funding, market research, SMEs);
- Project management (initiation, definition, implementation, tasks, project manager, deliverables). (source: *Market Leader Advanced*, Pearson Longman, 2006)

Each of these topics is supported by articles taken from financial magazines, such as the Financial Times or The Observer. Every business English course starts with a speaking part where students are asked to guess what the unit will be about or to comment on certain quotes. This is the warm-up part where they have to do all the talking. Debates usually arise

and students try hard to support their ideas with arguments from their own professional experience. This is a win-win situation, as the other colleagues can learn from the speaker's experience, but the professor as well can learn new things.

The second part of the course includes listening exercises, where students get used to different expressions used in the business world. This is where they can implement the listening strategies that are presented to them during the introductory course (top-down strategies or bottom-up strategies). The recordings played are always related to the topic taught during that class.

The third part of the course consists of reading comprehension exercises where students have to read authentic articles extracted from business magazines, such as the Financial Times.



Source: *Market Leader Advanced*, Pearson Longman

In this part, students are again asked to implement the reading strategies that have been presented to them during the introductory course (skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading). Unknown words and expressions are explained and new vocabulary is explored and introduced according to the topic.

The final part of the course usually has to do with role-play. Students may be asked to play different business roles, according to the situation given. For instance, students are asked to work in pairs. Student A has to pretend he/she is speaker at an international conference and he/she is a specialist in intercultural communication. Student A has to seize this opportunity and do networking in order to learn more from his/her colleagues, to present his/her company's activities and, eventually, to establish future business meetings. Student B is attending the same conference and he/she works as HR specialist in a multinational company.

Student B is interested in Student A's company and experience and would like to invite Student A to deliver a speech to a group of employees from his/her company. This task is related to the unit on international presentations and networking in business and its purpose is to familiarize students with certain expressions they could use in the business environment, whether they deal with formal or informal situations.

At the end of each class, the new vocabulary is revised and homework is assigned accordingly. Assignments are always given to students asking them to do some research on a certain topic, for instance they could be asked to write a business plan for a start-up or they could be asked to do some research on a company that has financial problems and try to come up with solutions for those problems.

### Conclusions

Teaching business English can be fun and can have several advantages for both students and the professor teaching it. They all have the opportunity of learning new things and new vocabulary as the business world is a world that is constantly changing, new situations and vocabulary appear. Students are usually more motivated to learn business English as they are employed and use the language or they are young entrepreneurs wanting to expand their business on foreign markets.

However, teaching business English can also face some disadvantages. Usually, professors are not specifically trained to teach business English, therefore they have to learn as they teach, which is not an easy thing to do.

Also, some business English textbooks can be boring. Long texts, uninteresting activities for students or obsolete information, teaching business English also means always being up to date with the business world and with the latest products and services. That is why we, as business English teachers, have to be familiar with the companies operating on the market or with the services they offer, as well as with the new changes on the market.

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