Fashion or the right choice? The role of training methods in Business English teaching

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1. Introduction

The information society is changing our lives in various dimensions. Language learning and language usage are not exceptions to that either. Language learning is no longer purely about acquiring the traditional skills of speaking, writing, reading and listening. As communication devices and platforms are rapidly developing, our ability to communicate in an accelerated pace in various ways has to keep up with this process. The world of business is one of the areas where people need to be able to communicate effectively through various communication channels such as telephone, e-mail and social media platforms. At the same time, as travelling becomes more accessible, personal communication also becomes more complex: business people need to be able to communicate not only in the office, but also at conferences, job assignments, site visits etc. This phenomenon also increases the importance of English language usage. The ability to communicate effectively in English has therefore become a must in the business world. In addition, accuracy is also an advantage as it creates a sense of proficiency in business partners.

Business English (BE) teaching is adapting to this phenomenon and one of its signs is the emergence of practice-oriented trainings offered by language schools and other language teaching institutions instead of traditional language classes. The aim of these trainings is primarily the development of skills needed for people working in a business environment. Therefore, one of the new roles of a BE teacher is to act as a trainer. "...a teacher is traditionally seen as someone whose task is to educate someone so that they can have more chance at succeeding in life… A trainer, on the other hand, is someone who is required to change a person's behaviour or ability so that they can do a specific job." (Frendo [2005] p.5)

In addition, it is also important to form the learner's way of thinking and attitude. The development of personal and professional competencies can be achieved more efficiently with training methods, because the active involvement increases the learners’ responsibility for their learning, and increases the efficiency of the process. If we look at services offered by language schools in Budapest, we also find evidence for the popularity of trainings offered for Business English language acquisition. For instance, "Business Class" targets language learners with the following trainings:
• business trainings tailored to the needs of the client,
• thematic mini courses for developing presentation and negotiation skills,
• language trainings aiming at learning special phrases used in business.  
  (https://business-class.hu/kepzesek/)

Another example is the wide palette of trainings offered by Conversum language school. Besides "general language trainings" offering the acquisition of the vocabulary of BE and grammar revision, there are specific trainings offered for skills development. These advertised trainings help the acquisition of the following skills and competences:

• assertive communication,
• management skills,
• conflict management,
• time management,
• intercultural communication,
• presentation techniques,
• feedback giving,
• negotiation techniques,
• socializing.

They also offer specific trainings targeting language acquisition in certain fields of business such as finance, marketing, HR, PR, customer service etc. Business communication trainings are also offered by the institution including skills like communication via e-mail, conference calls, small talk, presentation and negotiation techniques etc.(https://converzum.hu/nyelvtanulas/trening/nyelvi-treningek/)

These examples show that offering trainings for BE learners has become extremely fashionable nowadays.
2. Research Design

As the title of this paper suggests, the main question of my research is whether the use of training methods in BE teaching is an effective way of language acquisition or it is just a fashionable and profitable interactive teaching style that is not superior to traditional ways of language teaching.

Therefore, my main hypothesis was that there is a need among the students studying economic or business English for the development of their practical language communication skills via interactive teaching methods.

I have also set up hypotheses concerning the attitude of students towards the most popular interactive teaching methods. I assumed that while Economic/Business English students are open to these methods, some of them are averse to them. Examining the students' attitudes is essential as it can directly influence the success of the learning process.

Furthermore, as researchers make an important distinction between BE learners according to their experience in the business field, I was curious to know whether these two main groups - pre-experienced and job-experienced students - differ in their attitudes towards the interactive methods or not. Therefore, I also searched for evidence to support my hypothesis that job-experienced BE learners find it more important to develop their communication skills in the course of language learning than pre-experienced students.

In order to provide a complex examination of this dilemma, I first examined the approaches of the prevailing adult learning theories in relation to interactivity in the learning process and their relevance to language teaching. Then I took a closer look at the specific features of BE learners, including the skills that researchers consider as important in business communication. I also described the most popular interactive training methods that are currently acknowledged as effective for BE teaching.

In the second part of my research, I conducted a survey amongst university, language school and in-company students who are all studying or have studied BE recently. I collected data from the above target groups with the help of my self-developed questionnaire. The aim of the research was primarily to find out whether there is a need among the students for the
development of their practical language communication skills via interactive teaching methods. Furthermore, I also intended to collect evidence to support my other hypotheses.

In the following part I am going to summarize the implications of the most prevailing adult learning theories.
3. The impact of adult Learning Theories on Business English teaching and learning

In this chapter, I am going to describe the implications of learning theories that had the most significant impacts on the widespread use of the learner-centred interactive methodology in training adults. Based on the assumption that BE teaching and learning is highly practice-oriented, the analysis of the same theories can bring us closer to the understanding of the complexity of factors shaping BE teaching and learning approaches. As interactivity between the teacher and the students, as well as among students provides an opportunity for the students to practice their language skills through gaining practical experience, it is essential to highlight the approach of these theories towards the importance of interactivity in learning. These theories include behaviourism, cognitivism, humanism, social learning and constructivism (Laird [2003] p. 126-138) As Kolb's experiential learning cycle provides a practical framework for the role of experience in adult learning, I will conclude this chapter by briefly describing it.

The theory of behaviourism, which is one of the most influential theories on the training practice, regards the learning process as a sequence of stimulus and response and learning is defined as a change in behaviour due to the adequate stimuli. However, the theory has received much criticism for restricting the learning outcome to behavioural change. In spite of the criticisms, one of the areas where behaviourism is implemented into practice is actually the field of skill training. "Behaviorism has provided much of the foundation for skill or competency-oriented training and development." (Laird [2003] p. 128)

Furthermore, another factor of successful learning is motivation that can be influenced by the means of behaviourism. Giving positive feedback to the students, acknowledging their performance is a vital role of a teacher in BE trainings as well.

However, the role of interactivity in the learning process is not examined by behaviourist theorists, only the input and output of the learning process is the focus of their research. It is obvious that purely giving positive or negative reinforcement to a learner's attitude is not sufficient for the acquisition of business skills due to their complexity. Other factors of learning, such as the learner's needs, the mental processing of new information, and their
social interactions should also be taken into account for successful and effective teaching and learning.

Due to its shortcomings, in the 1970s and 1980s the behaviourist approach fell from favour in language teaching as well, which meant in practice that drilling was not considered very useful any more. "It was seen as mindlessly repetitive, and there were 'numerous strong criticisms of the idea that habit-forming by itself offers a full explanation of how languages are learned - it fails to allow for the role of the human mind in learning, of consciousness, thought, and unconscious mental processes.'" (Hall cited in Harmer [2015] p.45)

Whereas behaviourism only examines the impact of the environment on the learner's behaviour, *cognitivism*, on the other hand, focuses on the cognitive processes of the learner's mind. It emphasizes the importance of linking new information to previously learned information and the active role of the learner in the learning process. Thus, this approach provides justification for teaching methods that require the active participation of the students.

In the area of language learning, Noam Chomsky argued for the importance of taking mental processes into account. "...language cannot just be the result of endless repetition, but is instead the result of mental processing based on the input we receive." (As cited in Harmer [2015] p. 42)

As this theory views the learning process as an internal mental process, it also implies that interactive training methods might not fit all, as some people might prefer other types of learning. This is one of the reasons why I examined the students' attitude towards interactive teaching methods in my research.

Although the role of mind is an important factor to consider for understanding the learning process, there are other aspects of the human nature as well. The importance of the learner's personality, life situation, life-history, feelings, needs and creativity are emphasized by the theorists of *humanism*. Its principles were established originally in the field of psychology. Humanist psychologists were interested in the person as a whole and the knowledge of a person's entire life history. In the field of learning, they emphasized the importance of personal involvement into the learning process. They also believed that human beings have
a natural desire for self-development and that a sense of discovery should come from within for significant learning.

According to the humanist approach, the teacher's main role is not to dominate, but to facilitate the learning process and also to consider the learners' needs. By facilitation, students are allowed to make responsible choices concerning the learning process that becomes self-directed in this way. (Laird [2003])

This appealing approach also made its contributions to the research of language learning. It had implications for designing activities that make students feel better, and it highlighted the importance of good rapport between the student and the teacher. Furthermore, it emphasized the importance of how teachers give feedback. (Harmer [2015] p.51-52)

These aspects can be best related to autonomous learners who can and want to take responsibility for their learning. Learner's autonomy can be increased by the degree of interactivity between the student and the teacher, and therefore the assumptions of the humanist theorists provide justification for the use of interactive teaching methods in language learning.

However, one of my assumptions in my research was that the students are to a certain extent reluctant to participate in interactive exercises and one of the anticipated reasons was that they do not want to reveal their inner selves in the classroom. Harmer suggests that it is unclear to what extent the learners are willing to open up about their emotions, beliefs and personal issues: "We know that affective engagement (how people feel) helps students to remember things (like new vocabulary, etc.) and we know that people learn better when they feel positive about it. How much we want to ask them to reveal about their inner selves is less clear, however." (Harmer [2015] p. 52)

It is also essential to refer to an empirical study that intended to find out whether student-centred or teacher-centred teaching style is more efficient for learning. While the teacher-centred approach is rather related to the concept of behaviourism, the learner-centred teaching style is in close relation to the humanist approach. The research was conducted in the USA among teachers of Indian reservations in Montana and the results showed that
both(!) styles were effective as long as the teachers were consistent and not extreme in their teaching style. (Conti and Fellenz as cited in Galbraith et al. [2004])

Another study specifically focusing on an adult education programme with English-as-a-second-language classes amongst others, clearly proved that the learner-centred approach was more effective. "This process [acquiring reading, mathematics, and language skills] involves the student's self-concept, and acceptance by a caring teacher is important. Consequently, the learner-centred approach was most effective in these classes." (Galbraith et al. [2004] p. 83) Researchers attributed the results to the fact that the students were concerned about the long-term outcomes of acquiring the targeted skills, and the study results directly influenced their future.

However, not everybody finds that there is an irreconcilable conflict between humanist and behaviourist approaches. They argue that positive reinforcement is actually a way of facilitation. (Laird [2003] p.135) As a matter of fact, successful trainings and language classes in practice combine the different approaches according to the learners' needs, the targeted skills and personal teaching styles.

In order to understand the effectiveness of interactivity in the learning process, it is also important to study the role of interaction in the learning process. The theory of social learning focuses on learning through the interaction of people and observation of each other. This approach differs significantly from behaviourism due to its assumption that learning can occur without a change in behaviour.

There are several implication of these findings for interactive teaching. First, it implies that the facilitator should bear in mind that he/she not only teaches by giving input and instructions to the learners, but by being a role model. This fact calls for self-awareness from the trainer's side.

Second, based on the assumptions of social learning, interactive teaching methods are effective since providing more time and opportunity for practising skills in real-life situations. Similarly to cognitivists, the constructivists believe that new knowledge can only be acquired if the learner can relate it to his/her existing knowledge. However, constructivists also argue that all knowledge is context-bound and meaning is gained from learning
experiences. This view adds arguments to the simulation of real-life situations in the BE classroom through interactive teaching methods. This way the teacher is able to create a context for learning and can also build on the learner's previous knowledge so that the student can interpret and accommodate the new information or behaviour.

To conclude, it should be emphasized that although behaviourism and humanism had major influence, all theories contributed to the emergence of interactive teaching methodology. In spite of generalisations, each training is influenced to a different extent by the findings of the various theories according to the aims of the sessions and also depending on the preferences of the trainer.

3.1 Experiential learning

Interactive teaching methods tend to heavily build on experience as an invaluable asset participants bring into the learning process, and also on the new experiences they gain in the course of learning. Therefore, I find it important to dedicate a chapter to highlighting some of the most important aspects of experiential learning.

First, it is essential to clarify what we mean by experience. The Oxford Dictionary describes experience as:

"The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition; of consciously affected by an event; a state or condition viewed subjectively…"(Laird [2003] p. 22)

Researchers also emphasize the subjective nature of experience. Different people interpret the same experience in different ways. In addition, people will recall a certain experience in different ways at different points of time since "memories of experiences are not fixed but are dynamic." ((Laird [2003] p. 23) The subjectivity of experiences explains the importance of reflection to our experiences.

Kolb regarded learning as the outcome of experience. "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." (Kolb [1984] p. 38 in Beard, Colin and Wilson, John P. [2015] p.23) But how?
Researchers dedicated most of their efforts to find the link between experience and learning. This is shown by the fact that Beard, Colin and Wilson collected ten different definitions of experiential learning. (Beard, Colin and Wilson, John P. [2015] p.25) They concluded their analysis of these definitions by expressing their view that experience results in learning if and only if the learner reflects on the experience. "We have to engage with the experience and reflect on what happened and why. Without this, the experience will tend to merge with the background of all the stimulants that assail our senses every day."(Beard, Colin and Wilson, John P. [2015] p.28)

Kolb's learning cycle provides practical guidance to understand how learning, experience and reflection are related to one another. He broke down the learning process into four main steps as shown in Figure 1.

![Kolb's experiential learning model](Laird [2003] p. 146)
The learning cycle has significant implications for learning strategies which leads us to the subject of selecting effective teaching methods.

Laird [2003] assigned examples of effective teaching strategies to the different stages of the learning cycle. Based on his classification, in Table 1. I show examples of interactive teaching methods for each stage that are acknowledged as relevant in BE lessons.

**Interactive Business English teaching methods at the stages of Kolb's learning cycle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kolb's Stage</th>
<th>Example Learning/Teaching Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Experience</td>
<td>Simulation, case study, modelling real-life situations, presentation by the student, role-play, problem solving exercises, watching videos, films, games, working with online applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe and reflect</td>
<td>Discussion in large group, brainstorming, pair work, group work, designated observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract conceptualization</td>
<td>case study, written assignment related to simulations and role-plays e.g. report writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active experimentation</td>
<td>on-the-job experience, e.g. meetings, negotiations, small talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** (Learning/Teaching Strategies (Laird [2005] p.147) Adapted by Eszter Hegedüs-Varga [2018])

We have to state that processing interactive exercises involves a discussion phase as a rule, where learners can reflect on the situation, and also entails a conceptualization phase when they suggest possible solutions to the given problem.

It is worth noting that on-the-job experience also appears among the examples for learning. In the field of BE learning it is a direct benefit for job-experienced students that results from the life situation of the learner. In the case of pre-experienced learners who have no work experience, it is less likely to happen immediately. My research was extended to both types
of learners and therefore comparisons to the attitude of the two groups towards the interactive methods will be analysed.
4. The Business English learner

Business English is taught to various kinds of people in various forms. The most common distinction between the BE learners is based on work experience. BE learners without work experience are called *pre-experienced BE learners* (e.g. university students) while those who are working or have worked in the economic field are called *job-experienced BE students*. There is a third category called *general business-experienced learners* who already have work experience but they have general motives for learning business English such as finding a new job. (Frendo [2005])

If we consider that some of the learning theories emphasize the importance of relating experience to our existing knowledge, this distinction should have practical implications for the learning process of the two groups. Although existing knowledge might be seen as an advantage for learning BE, it can also be barrier in certain situations. Specifically, Beard, Colin and Wilson described experience as a "two-edged sword" (Beard, Colin and Wilson, John P. [2015] p. 19) as experienced people might not be as open to new ideas, concepts and methods as younger people.

There is a debate about whether course design for pre-experienced BE learners should reflect on real-business situations as they cannot relate these experiences to work yet. However, Juan argues for applying the same methodology as for job-experienced students in order to bring the world of business closer to them. According to him, BE teachers should "explore the effective teaching method in class, such as case study, simulation, role play, or other methods and put them into business English teaching to bridge the gap between campus and working positions. In this way, the adaptability and competition power of the graduates will be enhanced…." (Juan [2014] p. 112)

It is also important to point out that BE learning can take place in several settings such as in language schools, middle and higher education institutes, within companies. It can be carried out in groups of various sizes and also in a one-to-one setting. In the latter case, the application of interactive teaching methods is obviously limited, e.g. group work and simulations, role-plays designed for more than two participants is not possible.
As for BE teaching it is important to mention the skills that need to be developed according to the experts. Speaking skills include socializing, small talk, speaking on the telephone, presentations and meetings. Whereas writing skills primarily mean the proficiency to write e-mails, reports, contracts, CVs, agendas and minutes. (Frendo [2005])

Interactivity obviously has relevance mainly in developing speaking skills but it is emphasized by some experts that oral and written business tasks are usually interrelated. Therefore, the course design needs to reflect that (Evans [2013]).
5. Training methods in Business English teaching

In this chapter I will briefly describe training methods that could be relevant for BE teaching. I will then discuss in detail the methods that are mostly recommended for BE courses and present the arguments for their use.

It is quite obvious that in any learning situation, in order to let learners learn by experiences it is necessary to involve them in activities. Based on the level of participation, Laird classifies instructional methods into 5 main categories. (Laird [2003])

*Low participation.* These methods include methods like lectures, readings and demonstrations and do not fall into the scope of interactive teaching methods.

*Some participation.* These are methods such as skits, field trips and note taking, and they involve a limited degree of interactivity.

*Medium participation.* Laird classified here methods such as topical discussions, panel discussions and behaviour modelling.

Pair work and group work belong to this type of activity when students need to talk about a given topic. In my view, in BE teaching, it can especially useful when students prepare for a role-play or a simulation.

Panel discussions are usually questions & answers sessions where participants come up with questions based on prior reading assignments. This exercise can be made interactive if the students are to answer each other's questions.

In my opinion, panel discussions can be regarded as a form of simulation and could be extremely useful for advanced level BE students. People working in the business field - especially in higher positions - are often invited to attend conferences where they have to take part in panel discussions. These events can be extremely stressful as questions are usually not pre-determined. Therefore participants do not have the possibility to rehearse as in case of delivering a presentation.
Behaviour modelling is about observing a role model for acquiring a certain skill. In itself, it is not an interactive method, but if it is followed by an activity where students try out the certain skill, then it can generate learner participation.

I highlighted this type of activity as it has much relevance in the business field. As Laird states "Typical behaviors to model would be managerial skills such as making assignments, delegating, counselling, asserting, or disciplining." (Laird [2003] p.164.) In BE teaching, an example of behaviour modelling could be that of observing TED talks. It is an effective method to teach presentation skills and persuasive talk.

Moderate participation. One of the examples given by Laird for this category is performance tryouts. In BE teaching it can be related to presentation simulations where students deliver them and then feedback is given by the teacher and/or the peers. In that way the task has become interactive.

High participation. This category is the widest. Thus, I will limit my summary to those types of activities that are most frequently recommended in BE teaching. These are case studies, team tasks, role-plays, simulations and games.

5.1 Case studies

Using case studies basically means providing students with problems and background information to solve them. The theoretical background for this kind of learning was set by Freire who advocated teaching through problem posing and learning through problem solving. According to him, "'problem posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality' and it 'strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality'" (As cited in Beard, Colin and Wilson, John P. [2015] p. 258)

According to Frendo, using case studies for teaching BE has the following advantages.

- It enables students to analyse a specific business-related problem from different aspects.
• It is suitable for both job-experienced and pre-experienced students - though the latter should usually be given more background information than the former group
• They are capable of simulating real problems of the specific job requirements of the learners.
• It provides variety and useful language practice in the BE lesson.
• Learners can practice various business skills through case studies e.g. reading, speaking, negotiating, presenting etc. (Frendo [2005] p. 57-59.)

Sampath and Zalipour emphasize that when using case studies, learners act as decision-makers, practising the evaluation of different alternatives, creating strategies and formulating recommendations for a solution. Furthermore, as case studies are derived from the real business world, students are placed in an authentic context. Also, learners can develop their own approach and understanding of the business problems. (Sampath and Zalipour [2009]).

5.2 Team tasks

Providing students with problems and projects to work on in pairs or groups clearly generates interactivity in the learning process. Task-based learning is one of the popular methods advocated by researchers of language teaching. The main idea is that students are first given a task to perform and only when they have completed it does the teacher discusses the language used for the performance of the task. (Harmer [2015]) Frendo points out that while this method has its clear advantages in BE teaching, there are also some drawbacks that might decrease the efficiency of the method.

"The great advantage for business English learners is that the language produced while doing a task can be immediately relevant. The disadvantage is that it is often difficult to predict exactly what will happen during a task, which can make them difficult to plan or assess. (...) In addition, some tasks can be completed with a minimum of language input from the participants, which makes them not necessarily the best way to provide maximum exposure to useful language." (Frendo [2005] p.13)
Nevertheless, Evans argues for a strong task-based approach in BE teaching justifying his opinion by extensive empirical research conducted at Hong Kong based companies. Participants were asked to make a "professional diary" of their typical business week, registering the activities they carried out. They were then interviewed about these tasks. The survey was complemented by a detailed questionnaire that asked the participants about how often they needed to carry out certain oral and written business communication activities. Based on the findings, Evans concluded that BE lessons should be built around oral and written activities linked to one another to simulate real business life situations. However, he himself admits that some of the interviewees denied that BE courses could efficiently prepare them for the challenges related to their jobs. (Evans [2013])

"...some participants, in fact, dismissed the idea that BE courses could prepare them for life in Hong Kong's frenetic, unforgiving business world. It could be argued, therefore, that BE courses should seek primarily to develop students' language proficiency and skills (for example through traditional exercise types), which they can apply and further enhance and refine when they enter or return to the workplace." (Evans [2013] p. 292)

5.3 Role-plays and simulations

Role-play is about acting out a situation where students are assigned to different roles. Whereas learners act someone else's role in a role-play, in simulations the participants play themselves and act out what they would actually do in the given situation.

Both exercise types can be carried out by pre-experienced BE students as well, however - similarly to case studies - additional background information might be needed for their preparation because of the lack of experience. The advantage of these tasks is evidently the chance to practice real-life situations in a safe classroom environment. Harmer lists three more advantages of role-plays:

- they are entertaining, therefore motivating,
- students can hide behind their roles, therefore hesitant learners are more likely to open up and share their opinion,
students can practise the use of a wider range of vocabulary then in more focused activities. (Harmer [2015] p. 392-393)

Frendo points out that it can be challenging to design simulations where nobody has to take on someone else's role. For instance, in a buyer-seller negotiation if both participants come from the purchasing department then one of the students has to take on the role of a sales manager. (Frendo [2005] p. 56)

Probably the most significant disadvantage of role-plays is that some people are reluctant to take on someone else's role if it is not coherent with his/her beliefs, values, personality etc. (Laird [2003]) This problem leads us to the underlying principles of the humanistic approach, and it was one of the reasons why my research also included the survey of the students' attitudes towards role-plays.

5.4. Games

According to Laird "games result when simulations are made competitive and teams compete to see who makes the more effective decisions." (Laird [2003] p. 177) In addition, games can serve several purposes when incorporated into a BE lesson. For instance, they can serve as warm-up activities, they can motivate students to communicate, they can add variety and amusement to the class or they can enhance thinking "outside the box".

We can conclude that there are various interactive teaching methods that can be useful in designing a BE lesson. In the second part of my thesis I will present my empirical research I have made to get access to empirical data reflecting the opinion of pre-experienced and job-experienced students about these methods. The scope of the research was limited to the methods that are generally acknowledged in the literature as useful in BE teaching: pair work, group work, case studies, role-plays, simulations, problem-solving tasks, project work and games.
6. Survey analysis

I have conducted a survey to examine whether there is a need among students studying economic or business English for the development of their practical language communication skills via interactive teaching methods.

For the survey I used my own questionnaire that was specifically designed for this research. The questionnaire - see Appendices - included 17 questions, including 4 asking for statistical data about the nationality of respondents, the location and length of BE learning, and about job experience. The questionnaire further comprised of 8 items using continuous scales, 3 items using categorical scales and 2 items using open-ended questions.

The web-based questionnaire was initially sent to university students and Hungarian language schools electronically. Respondents were chosen based on their availability as response was voluntary. Since the number of job-experienced respondents was significantly lower than that of the pre-experienced students, in order to have a fairly even ratio of the two groups the printed form of the questionnaire was later distributed among further 10 job-experienced BE learners. As a result, 46 pre-experienced and 30 job-experienced students returned the questionnaire that added up to a total of 76 respondents.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to their job experience.

![Bar chart showing the distribution of respondents based on work experience.](image)

**Figure 2** The distribution of respondents based on work experience

Among the students, there were 62 Hungarian and 14 non-Hungarian respondents. As the majority of respondents were Hungarians, generalizations can only be applied to the
Hungarian population of BE learners. Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents according to their nationality.

**Figure 3** The distribution of respondents according to nationality

The last question related to statistical data referred to the location of language learning. Figure 4 shows that the majority of respondents study economic/business English at university.

**Figure 4** The distribution of respondents according to the location of language learning

The rest of the questions were seeking answers to the hypotheses of my research.
Table 2 shows my hypotheses and the corresponding items of the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hypothesis</strong></th>
<th><strong>Item no. on questionnaire</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a need among the students studying economic or business English for</td>
<td>5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the development of their practical language communication skills via interactive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching methods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Economic/Business English students are open to interactive teaching methods.</td>
<td>9, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Some of the Economic/Business English students are averse to interactive</td>
<td>15, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching methods.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Job-experienced BE learners find it more important to develop their</td>
<td>4, 5, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication skills in the course of language learning than pre-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experienced students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Hypotheses and questionnaire items

6.1. Verification of the hypothesis

6.1.1 Assessment of the need for interactive teaching methods

As I mentioned it in Chapter 4, experts define four speaking skills that are essential to be developed in a BE lesson: socializing with business partners, speaking on the telephone, holding presentations and taking part in negotiations. Therefore, question no. 5 of my questionnaire asked the students' opinion about how they assess the importance of these skills. Figure 5 shows the average ratings of the students for each skill, also highlighting the results for the groups of pre-experienced and job-experienced students.
The results show that both groups find it important to develop their communication skills, justifying my main hypothesis. In addition, the sub-scores for the two groups support my sub-hypothesis that job-experienced students find it more important to develop their communication skills than pre-experienced ones, though there is only a very slight difference in the scores. In the case of negotiation skills, the difference of the average scores was insignificant (0.01).

There was also an optional, open-ended question asking respondents to add any other skills that they found important to develop in a BE class. There were two respondents who indicated the ability of abstract thinking as an answer which could be an area of further research to find methods that can effectively develop this skill.

In order to find evidence for my main hypothesis I also asked respondents to assess the efficiency of certain interactive teaching methods on a continuous scale of 1 to 6 (Item no. 10 of the questionnaire). The average results - shown in Figure 6 - were fairly high, suggesting that students find these methods effective in acquiring business communication skills.
It is important to note that while most methods were given a higher score by job-experienced students, the role-play and the case study method were appreciated more by the pre-experienced students on average. As for the case study method, the result might be attributed to the fact that the ratio of job-experienced students who have ever done a case study (36%) was lower than that of the pre-experienced students (52%). In case of other methods, the ratio of familiarity was higher among job-experienced students, therefore the lower ratio for role-plays cannot be explained by the lack of familiarity. In order to find the reason for the phenomenon, I also assessed the results of question no. 8 that asked the students to mark how often they do the selected exercises. My assumption was that if job-experienced students do role-plays less frequently than pre-experienced students, then it can explain the fact that they gave a lower rate for its efficiency. The results are shown in Figure 7 for pre-experienced and in Figure 8 for job-experienced students.
Figure 7 Frequency of selected exercise types practiced on average by pre-experienced students

The results indicate that pre-experienced respondents frequently do group work and role-plays, but hardly ever execute simulation, case studies and project work.

Figure 8 Frequency of selected exercise types practiced on average by job-experienced students
In case of job-experienced respondents, problem-solving group work and role-plays are applied frequently, but project work also occurs regularly. The frequency of simulations and case studies are fairly low, similarly to the pre-experienced group. As the distribution of answers for the frequency of role-plays was similar in the two assessed groups, further research would be needed to find out why job-experienced students gave a lower score to its efficiency.

Related to the assessment of the different interactive teaching methods, I also asked the students to mention any other types of exercises that they believe can effectively help acquire the skills needed in the economic field. Mostly, they mentioned traditional language exercises like listening comprehension, letter writing and book reading. There were also answers related to individual and team presentations supporting the idea that simulations of real business world situations are useful for the acquisition of skills needed in the economic field. Questions 12 to 15 were statements about the interactive teaching methods in case of which students needed to evaluate to what extent they agree with them. Statements 12 and 13 were expressing opinions in favour of interactive teaching methods, while items 14 and 15 were denying the superiority of interactive methods. The results shown in Figure 9 indicate that there is a strong support for the interactive teaching methods.

![Figure 9](image)

Figure 9 Average scores for statements no 12.-15. on a scale of 1 to 6
Nevertheless, answers to question 14 indicate that students find it possible that other teaching methods will clear out the interactive methods in the future. In addition, the lower scores given to question no 15 imply that students generally have a preference to interactive methods versus traditional ones. However, Table 3 shows that the deviation for the scores of statement no. 15 was quite high compared to that of the scores of other answers, indicating bigger variety of opinions to this provocative statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement no. 12</th>
<th>Statement no. 13</th>
<th>Statement no. 14</th>
<th>Statement no. 15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Standard deviation of scores for statements no 12.-15

Based on the results, we can conclude that traditional teaching methods are not necessarily rejected by students.

I also calculated average scores for these statements of Hungarian and Chinese students to assess whether there are any differences that can be attributed to the cultural factor.

Figure 10 shows that while Chinese respondents acknowledged the efficiency of interactive teaching methods, they expressed stronger support for traditional teaching methods than Hungarian respondents.

**Figure 10** Average scores of Hungarian and Chinese respondents for statements no 12.-15. on a scale of 1 to 6

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

12. Interactive exercises help the acquisition of the skills needed in the economic field.
13. Practising interactive exercises help me do my job better since they develop my communication skills needed in the...
14. Interactive exercises are nowadays popular in teaching Economic/Business English, but time will come when other...
15. By traditional language learning methods one can better acquire skills needed in the economic field than by interactive exercises.
Based on the findings above, we can conclude that the survey confirmed my main hypothesis that there is a need among the students studying economic or business English for the development of their practical language communication skills via interactive teaching methods. Apart from two exceptions concerning the method of case study and role-play, the research also provided evidence to the hypothesis that job-experienced BE learners find it more important to develop their communication skills by means of interactive exercises in the course of language learning than pre-experienced students.

In the next sub-chapter I will assess the results related to hypotheses no. 3 and 4 listed in Table 2.

6.1.2 The attitude of students towards interactive teaching methods

Question no. 9 referred to the popularity of interactive teaching methods. Specifically, students were asked to assess to what extent they like the selected exercise types. The results shown in Figure 11 indicate that while the average scores were fairly high for all selected methods, the deviation of scores was also high reflecting the controversial attitude towards these methods. Furthermore, the scores given by the Chinese respondents were slightly lower for all categories that could be attributed to cultural differences.

![Figure 11](image)

**Figure 11** Average scores and standard deviation of respondents for question no 9. on a scale of 1 to 6
In order to better understand these cultural factors I examined the answers given by the Chinese students to question no. 16 asking for the reasons for being averse to interactive teaching methods. I found that 8 (!) out of the 13 Chinese respondents indicated that they prefer the traditional teaching methods. In addition, 10 (!) out of the 13 respondents ticked that they feel themselves uncomfortable in a situation/role that is unfamiliar for them. At the same time, none of them indicated that they preferred to work alone, which could be attributed to the collectivist nature of the Chinese society. (www.hofstede-insights.com)

The same ratio of answers was significantly different for the Hungarian respondents. The summary of results shown in Figure 12 indicates that there are indeed several factors that make students averse to interactive teaching methods. Here I also disclosed the exact ratios in order to highlight the two categories that were not chosen by any Chinese respondents.

**Figure 12** Ratio of Hungarian and Chinese respondents choosing predetermined reasons for the dislike of interactive teaching methods
It is worth noting that whereas Chinese respondents have not indicated a dislike towards working with students of lower levels of English, 31% of Hungarian respondents ticked this choice. Furthermore, 29% of the Hungarians indicated that they preferred to work alone. These significant differences can also be attributed to cultural factors, specifically to the rather individualist nature of the Hungarian society. (www.hofstede-insights.com)

In general, the differing choices for the given options might also be attributed to the differing learning styles of students. This phenomenon leads us back to the importance of the mental processes of learning that is unique to individuals. As I mentioned it in Chapter 3, these mental processes are examined in depth by the theorists of cognitivism.

While question no. 16 was related to factors that make students averse to interactive teaching methods, question no. 17 was related to factors that make interactive teaching methods useful for business skills acquisition. The results shown in Figure 13 provide evidence to my hypothesis that students are open to these methods. They indicate that a significant ratio of respondents selected the predetermined reasons. Similar to the answers for question no. 16, the ratios of options chosen by Chinese and Hungarian respondents were different. (For the first option, Chinese responses were not taken into consideration as all of them indicated that they have no job experience.)

![Figure 13 Ratio of Hungarian and Chinese respondents choosing predetermined reasons for usefulness of interactive teaching methods](image)

**Figure 13** Ratio of Hungarian and Chinese respondents choosing predetermined reasons for usefulness of interactive teaching methods
In addition, another reason was indicated for the usefulness of these methods by one of the respondents who mentioned that these types of exercises appear in language exams. Based on the assessment of the results, we can conclude that it provides evidence for my hypotheses that whereas BE students are open to interactive teaching methods, some of them are averse to it.
7. Conclusion

Based on the assessment of my empirical research, we can conclude that there is a need for the interactive teaching methods among economic/business English students. Although some of them are averse to these methods, in general, they acknowledge their importance and efficiency in developing communication skills needed in the economic field. The assumption that job-experienced students have slightly differing attitudes towards interactive teaching methods was also justified by the survey in general.

Students also believe in these methods because they find them efficient for the learning outcomes, which is in line with the findings of the relevant professional literature.

It is worth mentioning that similar conclusions were drawn by a recent study published by Jelena Stepanova, a professor of the University of Latvia. She conducted an empirical research for her PhD dissertation at the Latvian Business College focusing on team-based learning (TBL). It is a method that enhances interactivity as it builds on group work. 40 students were asked to fill in a questionnaire related to their opinion about the method. The author found similar results as the students acknowledged the efficiency of the interactive method in developing their business and language skills.

The author concluded that:

- 100% of students felt that the lessons involving the TBL method was clear and interesting;
- 92% of respondents believed that the lessons increased their understanding of the subject;
- 87% of them confirmed that the classes improved their analytical and critical skills;
- 95% of them agreed that the lessons improved their skills to learn in teams.

(Stepanova [2017] p. 193)

It is also worth highlighting that she attributed the few negative feedbacks of the students to similar factors to the reasons I found in my own research for being averse to interactive methods. The identical factors are shown in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Factors causing negative attitude towards interactive teaching methods in the current research</strong></th>
<th><strong>Factors causing negative attitude towards TBL in Stepanova's empirical research</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with students whose level of English is lower</td>
<td>Poor language knowledge, not entirely homogeneous groups with absolutely equal language level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling uncomfortable in a situation/role that is unfamiliar to the student</td>
<td>Personal characteristics - shyness, lack of self-assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty to act out a situation in a foreign language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4** Corresponding factors causing negative attitude towards interactive teaching methods (Stepanova [2017] p. 194)

As an explanation to the shyness and lack of self-assurance, the author mentioned homesickness of international students that could be a relevant cause for Chinese students of my sample as well.

Based on the conclusions of my survey, the following recommendations can be given to BE teachers:

- interactive teaching methods should be frequently used in designing and holding BE classes;
- pre-experienced students should be provided with more explanations than job-experienced learners about the aims of simulating real-world business situations in order to better understand their efficiency;
- relaxed atmosphere should be created in the classroom to ease the natural resistance of the students towards interactive teaching methods;
- intercultural differences in groups need special attention as they may influence the attitudes of students to exercises requiring interactive involvement.
For successfully implementing role-plays, Laird offers the following tips for trainers:

- instead of one role-play involving the whole class, design small role-plays simultaneously going on;
- reinforce the experimental behaviour of the participants, not their theatrical performance;
- involve the trainees gradually to the role-play process by asking problem-posing questions;
- call the process something else e.g. a simulation. (Laird [2003] p. 173)

Furthermore, the differing answers provided by international students call for cultural awareness from the teacher's side. How students coming from different countries with different cultural background and different education systems should be treated in BE classes could be an area of further research.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the survey indicated that the students believe that individual and group presentations are also effective ways of learning, therefore further research about its role as an interactive teaching method could also offer teachers useful recommendations.
Bibliography


10. Sampath, Dilani and Zalipour, Arezou (2009): Practical Approaches to the Teaching of Business English. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Teaching and Learning, INTI University College, Malaysia. at https://my.laureate.net/Faculty/docs/Faculty%20Documents/INTI%20Conferences/Parallel%20Sessions%202/2C/2C-06-P150%20(Malaysia).pdf on 29.03.2018


Appendices
Dear Student,

I am attending the Trainer in English for Business one-year special further training degree programme at the Corvinus University of Budapest. I am conducting a research for my thesis concerning the role of training methods in Economic/Business English teaching.

Please take a few minutes to fill in the questionnaire below. I will only consider your answers for the evaluation of the results of the survey.

Thank you!

Eszter Hegedüsvarga

1. Your nationality:

2. Where are you currently studying Economic/Business English?
   o at university
   o at a language school
   o elsewhere:

3. How long have you been learning Economic/Business English?
   o for less than 1 year
   o between 1 and 3 years
   o for more than 3 years

4. Do you have work experience in the economic field?
   o Yes, I have worked for more than one year in the economic field.
   o Yes, but I have worked for less than one year in the economic field or I am/was an intern in the economic field.
   o I have no experience in the economic field.
5. Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale whether you find it important to develop the listed skills in Economic/Business English lessons. (1 - Not important at all, 6 - Very important, 0 - I don't know, I don't answer)

- presentation skills
- negotiation skills
- socializing with business partners
- communication via phone

6. Other, important skill to develop: .................................................................

7. Have you ever done the types of exercises listed below in Economic/Business English lessons?

- Pair work
- Role-play (playing a situation when you act someone else's role)
- Simulation (playing a situation when you act yourself)
- Case study
- Project work

8. Please indicate how often you do the interactive exercises on average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once/twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>More than once a week</th>
<th>I don't know, I don't answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problem-solving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>0</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>group work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale, to what extent you like the exercises listed below. (1- I don't like it at all, 6- I like it very much, 0- I don't know, I don't answer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Project work</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem-solving group work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Game</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. According to you, to what extent do the exercises listed below help acquire the skills needed in the economic field? Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale. (1- Not at all, 6- Very much, 0- I don't know, I don't answer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project work</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving group work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

11. Can you name any other types of exercises that you believe can effectively help acquire the skills needed in the economic field?

.................................................................................................................................................................

12. Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale to what extent you agree with the statement below. (1- I don't agree at all, 6- I fully agree, 0- I don't know, I don't answer)
Interactive exercises (pair work, role-play, simulation, case study, project work, problem-solving group work, game) help the acquisition of the skills needed in the economic field.

1 2 3 4 5 6 0

13. Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale to what extent you agree with the statement below. (1-I don't agree at all, 6-I fully agree, 0-I don't know, I don't answer, I don't work yet)

Practising interactive exercises help me do my job better since they develop my communication skills needed in the economic field.

1 2 3 4 5 6 0

14. Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale to what extent you agree with the statement below. (1- I don't agree at all, 6- I fully agree, 0- I don't know, I don't answer)

Interactive exercises are nowadays popular in teaching Economic/Business English, but time will come when other types of exercises will clear them out.

1 2 3 4 5 6 0

15. Please indicate it on a 1 to 6, growing scale to what extent you agree with the statement below. (1- I don't agree at all, 6- I fully agree, 0- I don't know, I don't answer)

By traditional language learning methods (e.g. listening comprehension, grammar tasks) one can better acquire skills needed in the economic field than by interactive exercises.

1 2 3 4 5 6 0

16. Please mark the sentence endings that you think are true for yourself. You can indicate more than one.

I don't like interactive exercises in my Economic/Business English lessons because

- I prefer the traditional learning methods.
□ I feel myself uncomfortable in a situation/role that is unfamiliar for me.
□ it hinders my learning process when I have to work with students whose level of English is lower than mine.
□ it is hard for me to act out a situation in a foreign language.
□ I prefer to work alone.
□ for another reason:..................................................................................................................

17. Please mark the sentence endings that you think are true for yourself. You can indicate more than one.

I find interactive exercises useful in my Economic/Business English lessons because
   □ they help me do my job better.
   □ the practical nature of these exercises contribute to the acquisition of business skills.
   □ team work with my peers help me acquire business skills.
   □ they are more engaging than the traditional language learning exercises.
   □ for another reason:..................................................................................................................

Any other comments
...........................................................................................................................................................

Thank you!