

Journal of Languages for Specific Purposes (JLSP)

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The purpose of this journal is to create a communication platform for foreign language teachers with academic activity in non– philological fields and it aims to facilitate exchange and sharing of experience and ideas. Given the specificity of their intermediate status, between philology and various fields of specialty, these teachers – researchers at the same time – need their own forum to express the aforementioned dichotomy and pluralism. It is this role that the journal wants to assume, offering its contributors help in their didactic activity, through the exchange of experience between academics. At the same time, the journal shall provide these specialists, besides new perspectives, a large recognition and professional prestige for the research work they undertake.

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COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS ENGLISH – NEW CONTEXTS AND NEW APPROACHES IN TEACHING IT

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Abstract: *The reflection of time in teaching Business English is definitely an immense one, as language is about communication and the development of learning it, walks hand in hand with the societies which give rise to it. What does this mean? Being human activities, both teaching and learning a foreign language are as well social as they are linguistic. The development of the societies led to an unbelievable technological development which comes as an aid in the process of teaching and learning Business English. Among some other factors, the gradual economic globalization has led to a great demand on teaching English for specific purposes, as part of English Language Teaching. Being widely used in a globally connected world, the importance of Business English is increasing more and more, as the market is dominated by multinational companies which need their staff to be fluent in English. Thus, teachers face the need of keeping the pace with the fast-developing technological world, try to find new methods of boosting the teaching process. Moreover, teaching Business English has already developed its own methodology, involving specific language, specific types of communication in a certain context, as it is designed to meet the exact needs of the learners. The general term of Business English is centered on the appropriate language, approaching it in terms of vocabulary, grammar, case study, and discourse. The goal of all the persons involved in this complex process is to create users of the language who communicate effectively, in correspondence as well as in face to face situations. The present paper approaches new ideas, new methods that can be put into practice in the process of teaching Business English. The topics of the Business English include business phrases, terms of sale, advertising, marketing, tourism, management – all these requiring the teacher's ability to select, develop, combine the material in order to boost the results of the students involved in the process of learning.*

Keywords: *Business English; teaching methods; communication in business; teaching strategies*

1. Introduction

Due to the development of the two most important English-speaking countries in the world, The United States of America and the United Kingdom, as well as a consequence of globalization, English has become the lingua franca, the common language of the international communication, in all the fields of life. In 1996, Richards claimed that the lingua franca 'is originated in the Mediterranean region in the Middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds.

Beginning with those days, English has become the main means of communication between different linguistic groups in a multilingual speech community. The development of a common language of communication has appeared along with the necessity of carrying out different commercial activities and trading between different parts of the world. Along with the development of the commercial activities, the necessity of developing a common language started to be considered as a key factor, so people all over the world started learning English and started speaking it fluently. This is the way English has become the common language of the international trade.

2. Literature review

The development of life, in general, has brought about another great demand, in another aspect regarding English Language Teaching, that of teaching English for Specific Purposes. In other words, the preparation of the students to communicate effectively in different domains of activity has come as a result of the needs analysis. We all know that communication differs from one field to another, depending on the field of activity and the work situation. Consequently, we have English for Science, English for Law, English for Politics, English for Agriculture, Business English, so on and so forth, all these forming the family of English for Specific Purposes. Many years ago, teachers all over the world were asking themselves what the characteristics of the language the students needed in order to succeed were and what the best methods available for answering the question were. Thus, the advocates of English for Specific Purposes have come to the conclusion that the curricula should be based on accurate, systematic and empirical measures of the tasks students must perform after graduating faculty and also measures of their needs. In 2002 Savignon argues that *“a language for a purpose means the use of English for real and immediate communicative purposes.”* In other words, students need to acquire knowledge of English not for the sake of having general education but knowledge based on needs analysis, accuracy and real-life situations.

As we have mentioned above the cultural background plays an important role in the educational process and in communication in business. In order to understand cultural variations, and their importance in teaching Business English Communication, Goddard and Wierzbicka say that *“there are differences in values, communication styles, traditions and behaviors and we must understand this if we want to be successful.”* People coming from different cultural backgrounds will always act differently and these variations can affect negotiation, customer relations, teamwork, etc.

There are several cultural differences in Business Communication, among which we mention:

- Direct Communication is clear, straightforward, saying exactly what they mean (e.g. the Netherlands, Germany) while Indirect Communication use more subtle, polite ways of expressing opinion, in order to avoid conflict (e.g. Middle East, China, Japan);
- Levels of formality: there are formal cultures which expect respectful titles, well structured business interactions based on polite language (e.g.

France) while informal cultures which prefer relaxed conversations, having first-name basis;

- Hierarchical and egalitarian cultures: in the hierarchical cultures, decisions are made by the senior leaders and respect is demanded (e.g. Germany, China) whereas in the egalitarian cultures, input from all the employees is valued (e.g. Sweden, Denmark);
- Time orientated cultures: monochronic cultures value punctuality and deadlines, being based on the saying *Time is money!* (e.g. Germany) whereas polychronic cultures are more flexible and relationships are prioritized over scheduled which are strict (e.g. Middle East, Latin America).

3. Business English Communication- definition

Communication in Business English is defined as the exchange of information, ideas and messages, whether within an organization or outside of an organization, in a professional context. There are several types of communication in Business English, according to the way it is provided, we have verbal (spoken interactions, presentations, meetings, phone calls, etc), written (emails, reports, contracts, proposals, etc) and non-verbal communication (body language, voice tone and facial expressions), all of these having as a final target, the efficient operation of the business. Why is it important to learn how to communicate in business English?

The answer is based on the benefits good communication can provide:

- It ensures a clear understanding of the tasks of the persons involved in the process and the goals of the process;
- It increases efficiency, effectiveness and productivity;
- It ensures a strong relationship between the employees and employers, the employees and the clients and within the employees in the company;
- Teamwork and collaboration is strongly enhanced by good communication;
- It enhances problem-solving and decision-making;

4. General aspects on teaching Business English Communication

As we have mentioned above Business English is largely used in international trade and it is one of the examples of the English language for a Specific Purpose. During the last years, Business English has become increasingly important and the employers have become more and more aware of the fact that their staff need to be fluent users of this language. But how can we, teachers, offer courses that have as result students who are able to use Business English fluently? Teaching Business English Communication involves more than teaching language skills. The teachers must take into consideration aspects like business-specific vocabulary, professional etiquette, and cross-cultural communication. The goal of every Business English course is to make the students communicate effectively in a business environment, regardless the means of communication: in correspondence, face to face meetings or other methods. The term Business English or English for Business Purposes shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design, selection of materials, and the design of the course. Just like the other varieties of ESP, Business English is not a different kind of language

but rather a branch of the English language on the whole. Therefore, as Moeller, A. K., Ketsman, O., Masmaliyeva, L. say *'a course of Business English must include topics related to Business communication, whether written or spoken, advertising, marketing, management, accounting, human resources, and so on and so forth'*. Thus, teaching Business English requires the teacher to be aware of the subject matter and of the English language teaching skill. At this stage, the teacher's role is to combine the two fields mentioned above. The stress should not be put just on grammatical elements but also on cultural issues as well as on the functions of the language. The strategies on problem solving, the improvement of the analytical skills, the strengthening of the grammatical and lexical competences should intermingle in order for the students to become fluent users of Business English. Moreover, the greatest challenge for the teachers is to keep the pace with the rapidly changing language, to be able to comprehend the fact that the language changes very fast and there is huge need to eliminate the gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language spoken by natives and the language spoken in professional environment. When teaching Business English, another important aspect is the students' age as they are already adults so the motivation of going through all the learning stages differs significantly from those ones who are in secondary schools and even high schools. However, there is always a certain need to learn English and the fact that the students are aware of their needs give them the necessary support and determination to fulfil them. As Hutchinson says, *'a mutual agreement between the student and the teacher is necessary which includes gathering important information such as purpose, content area, place and time of prospective language use, etc'*. Every teacher must have a certain level of flexibility when teaching students, as the educational process may suffer changes and all the modifications need some time to be implemented. Changes in the educational process may bring about chaos if the teacher does not have long-term control over the whole course.

5. Teaching Business English Communication today

The development of the technology at hand has brought about a change in teaching Business English Communication, meaning that new workplace demands and the changes in the ways professionals interact globally have given rise to new trends and tendencies.

Thus, we can mention some of the new tendencies that appeared along with the appearance of the Artificial Intelligence. According to Zhang, J., Li, Fei *'teachers can easily create **virtual business simulations** which can provide students real-life business scenarios'*. Another trend worth mentioning is the **task-based learning** which goes hand in hand with **scenario-based learning** where the lessons focus on real workplace situations where students have to negotiate, have to solve problems and have to make decisions. Moreover, teachers need to put emphasis on **intercultural communication** where students are provided business environments in which handling cultural differences is essential. **Business-task based games** where workplace scenarios are stimulated can also enhance learning Business English Communication. **Writing ethical business emails and reports** can also be appreciated by the students and can provide them useful tasks in developing Business English Communication.

5.1. Teaching Business English Communication strategies

Researchers have come to the conclusion that effective communication is essential for the success of companies in today's globalized world. Teachers must have innovative strategies that enhance the learner's practical skills and confidence. Research shown that the most efficient strategy for teaching Business English communication is the blended approach that integrates both theory and practical applications, depending on the learner's needs, learning styles and industry requirements. By providing the students with authentic materials, students read, see, and feel real language purposefully, capturing multiple nuances of a word, phrase or collocation that cannot be otherwise be introduced and recorded. Kustec, A. says that *'Words reflect the culture in which the language is spoken and do not always capture the meaning associated with the concept.'* Furthermore, Jiang Y, Ruan X, Feng Z, Jiang P. say that *'...every person possesses his or her mental model of the way things are supposed to look, that is developed through interaction with the system.'* This mental model is not a universal thing, differing from person to person and from culture to culture. Things can look and sound differently in another culture and this can create a sense of confusion and frustration. In order to avoid the sense of confusion and frustration, students must be provided with appropriate materials. We suggest the following strategies:

- Task-Based Learning

Research shows that language learning is more effective and efficient when students learn to communicate in real-life situations, exchanging information, expressing emotions and desires. Moreover, when students are given real company documents, reports and meeting minutes, this approach gives a greater desire to communicate using Business English.

- Simulations of real-life Business Communication

Students are given the chance of practicing in a safe environment when they face mock meetings, negotiations and interviews. This helps them a great deal to overcome the fear of speaking in front of a certain audience, building confidence and preparing students for professional success. On the other hand, discussions, debates and case study analysis give the students the chance to express their ideas in a free and way.

- Cross-cultural Business Communication

Students must be prepared for working in different cultural environments since multinational companies often hire employees from different cultures. This is a crucial aspect of international business. In this respect, students must be provided materials that teach cultural differences in meetings, in writing emails and also business etiquette. Role-playing for cross-cultural business scenarios, more exactly how to negotiate with different cultures is a much needed and extremely useful teaching strategy. Incorporating cross-cultural awareness into students' courses, teachers develop in students the ability to face global business environments in a more effective way and also their adaptability to different business environments.

5.2. Developing communication skills in the era of the Artificial Intelligence

There is no need to say that the increasing development of technology and the globalized market has led to the increasing need for good if not excellent communication in English. There are a lot of traditional ways to increase the students' ability to communicate in different business environments, however, as ChanLin, L.J. claims *'the appearance of the Artificial Intelligence as a viable aid in*

the field of language teaching, has represented a giant leap that just a few would have thought of, bringing new ideas and new opportunities to all aspects of the teaching/learning process. A major and promising tool in the field of language acquisition has emerged, the new technological development enhancing the development of the students' communication skills. It has already been shown by Rusmiyanto, R., Huriati, N., Fitriani, N., Tyas, N., Rofi'i, A., & Sari, M. *'that the function of AI in the development of communication skills in Business English is an extremely important one and it has already gained a lot of strength.'* The strength comes from the fact that Artificial Intelligence can provide teachers with a lot of personalized and interactive learning activities which can have long-term effects for the communication abilities of the students. The appearance of machines, computers, and other artifacts having human-like intelligence has led to an enormous development in the field of language acquisition, being characterized by improvement in adaptability, decision-making and learning.

6. Conclusions

Over the last 10 years, due to globalization of the market, technological advancement and changing workplace dynamics, we have witnessed a continuous and significant evolution of Business English Communication. The appearance of digitalization and the impact of the remote work has given the opportunity of tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams to reshape the business interactions, requiring students who master clear and concise communication in Business English. Cultural awareness in communication has been highlighted by the global business interactions, where the people involved in businesses must understand cultural differences in business etiquette and negotiation styles. Hence, students in economics need to acquire strong Business English communication skills, master critical thinking and a large variety of language skills. Moreover, communication based on soft skills like active listening, persuasion and empathy along with the need of strong communication skills are needed in future employees. Students must be taught strong communication skills in order to build trust, manage conflicts and collaborate effectively, however, tone, clarity, and emotional intelligence are crucial variables that must be mastered by future employees, for avoiding misunderstandings in the globalized business landscape. The mastering of clear speech and engaging presentations, as well as visual communication skills are also important aspects that have to be mastered by future employees. For teachers, integrating cross-cultural training, virtual real-life situations and materials will enhance efficiency and will help them provide future employees that will be able to adapt successfully in the modern business environment.

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EVALUATING AUTHENTIC BUSINESS SPANISH TASKS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN DIFFERENT TEACHING MODALITIES

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Abstract: *The present study delves into the field of Spanish for specific purposes (SSP) by assessing a series of authentic tasks implemented in two Business Spanish courses at distinct institutions in the United States with differing modalities: 1) a small private university on the East coast (n=18) with a face-to-face teaching modality and 2) a large public university in the Midwest (n=9) with an online asynchronous modality. The tasks, previously identified through a Needs analysis (author, 2017), included finding a real job offer in a Spanish-speaking country, preparing a Curriculum Vitae, writing a cover letter, and performing a mock job interview. These tasks required individual and collaborative work throughout the semester. At the end of the term, students completed an anonymous survey consisting of nineteen quantitative and qualitative questions evaluating the tasks' relevance, usefulness, and difficulty. Overall, results revealed that participants from both institutions and modalities valued the usefulness of this task sequence, often rating it as equally or more useful than the rest of the course content, while identifying the job interview as the most challenging task. Furthermore, notable differences between teaching modalities emerged, with online asynchronous students expressing a desire for additional peer interaction compared to the face-to-face counterparts. These findings shed light on the importance of developing, implementing, and adapting SSP authentic tasks to closely resemble real-world job expectations upon graduation while also considering the unique needs of diverse educational settings and modalities. This study provides valuable insights for instructors and program directors in Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) to develop curricula that better prepare students for globalized workplaces.*

Keywords: *Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP); Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT); Business Spanish; Teaching Modality*

1. Introduction

The demand for Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) courses at universities in the United States (US) has been steadily increasing over the last two decades (Doyle, 2018; Klee, 2015; Sánchez-López, 2012, 2013). Several factors contribute to this growing popularity. The Modern Language Association (MLA), in its 2007 report on higher education in the US, recommended that modern language departments offer more interdisciplinary courses beyond traditional literary or cultural studies to enrich the curriculum and to attract a more diverse pool of students. Additionally, it

was suggested that offering these courses could help counteract the overall decline in language program enrollment in the US. Furthermore, students perceive these courses as providing a professional edge in their language skills, enhancing their CVs and better preparing them for the job market (e.g., Author, 2017; Martinsen, 2015; Thompson & Brown, 2019). This study builds on these insights by incorporating student voices, offering a deeper understanding of how learners perceive and evaluate task-based approaches in SSP courses. By foregrounding student perspectives, this research adds a critical dimension to LSP literature, emphasizing the importance of learner feedback in shaping effective pedagogical practices that align with real-world professional needs.

Another important consideration is the teaching modality. Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, more courses are being offered in hybrid or online formats (e.g., Kapitanovic, Duvnjak & Crnica, 2021; Sellnow-Richmond & Strawser, 2020; Watson, Templet, Leigh, Broussard & Gillis, 2023). The impact of different teaching modalities on the effectiveness of SSP courses, which inherently include strong practical and hands-on components, remains an area requiring further investigation. This study aims to explore these dimensions, comparing students' assessment of SSP tasks across different teaching formats.

2. Background

Designing and implementing SSP courses is a complex endeavor that requires the pre-identification of the tasks to be included in the course syllabus. The teaching approach underlying this process is Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), a highly influential and widely accepted methodology. TBLT supports the value of learning by doing, also referred to as 'experiential learning' (Dewey, 1933), making it particularly suitable for Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses. This approach emphasizes students learning to perform specific tasks in the target language within a professional context (e.g., conducting a job interview, writing a business report, making a phone call to place an order).

Additionally, authentic tasks provide language learners with a clear purpose for participating in classroom communication, enabling them to see tangible results by achieving the task's goal (Long, 2015; Norris, 2011). This approach also offers a strong motivational component (e.g., Brown, 2016; Buendía, 2013; Hayes, 2022, Torres & Serafini, 2016). However, as suitable as the TBLT approach seems to be for LSP, it has not been commonly applied in LSP research (e.g., Brown, 2016; Long, 2015; Author, 2017; Serafini, Lake & Long, 2015), and the same can be said for Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) (Sánchez-López, 2012, 2013; Serafini & Torres, 2015).

According to Sánchez-López (2013), Modern language departments, where Spanish can be one of the languages taught, face increasing pressure from the university administrations to offer courses that meet new societal demands, such as language for occupational or professional purposes. She adds that while the field of SSP has made significant advances over the past two decades, some aspects remain unaddressed, particularly the application of a task-based approach to syllabi and material development. As a result, instructors of SSP working within a task-based framework often face a shortage of suitable materials, since traditional Spanish textbooks are not tailored to the specific needs of students. Another challenge in the field is that, in many departments, non-expert instructors

are in charge of teaching these courses, but they lack the training to appropriately implement their SSP courses (e.g., Author, 2017; Serafini & Torres, 2015). This lack of preparation can negatively impact student outcomes (Klee & Tedick, 1997; Lynch, Klee, & Tedick, 2001). In addition, inadequate professional preparation has hindered research and program quality in SSP (Lafford & Ramírez, 2018; Swales, 2000; Tano, 2019).

In recent years, studies such as those by Serafini and Torres (2015) and Author (2017) have sought to address this gap, by conducting Needs Analysis (NA), which is crucial as the first step in developing an SSP course. They identified the most important tasks by triangulating data, surveying business graduates, instructors, and professionals, and then asked business majors to rate the difficulty and frequency of these tasks. This process enabled the authors to categorize tasks into different "task types" for pedagogical purposes. More recently, scholars have emphasized the importance of conducting a NA as a mandatory step to better understand learners' needs to learn in specific contexts and to inform course content. For example, Tano (2017, 2019) designed a NA to understand the linguistic needs of businessmen and CEOs who regularly use Spanish in the workplace, and subsequently designed a task sequence to address these needs. Moreover, Catalá-Hall (2023) provided a thorough review of previous NAs, and pointed out the importance of triangulating data (i.e. collect data from at least three sources) to increase the robustness and reliability of findings. She presented a sample NA that could be presented to hypothetical students pursuing a Master's degree at the University of Barcelona.

The present study aims to build on some of the tasks identified in the NA by Author (2017) and extend the research by evaluating students' perceptions of these tasks regarding their usefulness and difficulty when included in a semester-long Business Spanish curriculum. Additionally, this study seeks to compare the implementation and outcomes of SSP tasks at two different universities in the US and their respective course modalities, face-to-face and online asynchronous, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness and adaptability of these tasks across diverse educational contexts. The northeastern university's face-to-face format allows for immediate interaction, feedback, and peer collaboration, which can significantly enhance the learning experience, especially for language learning. Conversely, the midwestern university's online modality offers flexibility and accessibility, catering to students who may have scheduling constraints or prefer a remote learning environment. The diverse teaching modalities provide a better understanding of how different delivery modes impact the effectiveness and reception of SSP tasks. By evaluating students' perceptions across these variables, the study aims to identify best practices and potential areas for improvement in SSP task design and delivery.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on SSP, highlighting the importance of adaptable and context-specific pedagogical strategies that address the unique linguistic and professional needs of a broad range of students. Importantly, incorporating TBLT and NA into an LSP framework allows for the creation of practical, authentic tasks that provide students with tangible skills applicable to their careers while also ensuring that curricular decisions are informed by both learner needs and real-world professional expectations. Furthermore, comparing student perceptions across different delivery modes (face-to-face and asynchronous online) provides valuable insights into how this variable

influences the reception and effectiveness of task-based approaches and shapes students' learning experiences, engagement, and professional preparedness. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing inclusive, flexible SSP courses that cater to the diverse needs of learners in varying educational environments.

With this in mind, the present study intended to answer the following research question:

How do students in two semester-long Business Spanish courses taught under different modalities perceive the usefulness and difficulty of a sequence of authentic professional tasks integrated in the course design?

3. Method

3.1 University context and course modality

The present study collected data from students at two universities within the United States that differ in a variety of aspects¹. One of them is a private suburban college on the northeast coast with a relatively small student body, about 4900 undergraduate students. The undergraduate Spanish course that students attended was SPAN 3231b: Career-oriented Spanish for Business. It was offered in an in-person format (face-to-face) twice a week. The second university is public and urban and located in the Midwest. Its student body is relatively large, with about 11,000 undergraduate students. The undergraduate course students from the present study were enrolled in SPAN 3782: Spanish for International Business, and it was offered online and asynchronously, that is, without any face-to-face interaction. Other than the different modality type, both courses had a very similar structure and course content, combining the sequence of professional tasks with current news and cultural topics related to Spanish-speaking countries as well as textbook exercises. To prepare students for the sequence of tasks, instructors incorporated various scaffolded activities. For example, writing assignments such as CVs and cover letters included stages of drafting, peer editing, and instructor feedback. For the job interview task, students practiced with mock scenarios and guided prompts. This similarity in course structure and content ensures a comparable evaluation of how different delivery methods impact the learning experience and outcomes.

3.2 Participants

Participants were a total of 27 undergraduate students enrolled in two upper-level business Spanish courses, with ages ranging between 18 and 34 years of age. Students had completed between 3 and 10 courses within the Spanish program, and they self-rated their proficiency level in Spanish as intermediate or intermediate-advanced. If these numbers are broken down by university, of the 27 respondents, 18 were students at the private northeastern university, and the

¹ While this study provides descriptive information about the two institutions where data was collected (e.g., private vs. public, northeastern vs. midwestern), the type of institution was not analyzed as a variable affecting the results. The primary focus of the study remains on comparing the two teaching modalities (face-to-face and online asynchronous) while acknowledging the contextual differences between the two educational settings.

remaining 9 at the public midwestern university. The manuscript authors were instructors of the SSP courses at the said universities.

Of the 18 students at the private northeastern university, 11 of them were female and 7 male, with ages ranging between 18 and 22. 16.7% self-rated their proficiency in Spanish as very advanced, 72.2% as advanced and 11% as intermediate. The majority ($n = 12$) were minoring in Spanish, with majors in other disciplines in the humanities or the business school, and 6 of them were completing a major in Spanish. At the time of the study, participants from this university had completed an average of 6 years of formal instruction in Spanish. They had completed between 3 and 10 Spanish courses, with 12 of respondents having completed between 3 and 5 courses and 6 of them between 5 and 10.

Participants from the public midwestern university included 8 female and 1 male students with ages ranging from 19 to 34. In terms of their overall proficiency level in the target language, all participants self-reported intermediate to very advanced proficiency. Similar to the students at the northeastern university, the majority were minoring in Spanish while only 2 were majoring in Spanish. At the time of the study, participants from this university had completed an average of 5.5 years formal instruction in Spanish, and had taken between 1 to 10 Spanish courses at the university level.

3.3 Instrument

The survey employed in this study was designed by one of the researchers and first piloted with a smaller group of students in a previous offering of the Spanish for Business course in the Fall of 2023. The final version used in the present study consisted of 19 questions including both quantitative (Likert-scale) and qualitative (open-ended) items. These open-ended questions served as a follow-up to previous likert-scale questions so that more detail could be provided in the responses. Of these 19 questions, 7 were personal/background information questions (i.e., gender, age, number of Spanish classes taken), and the remaining 12 were task-specific questions (i.e., how difficult the tasks were, how useful they found them). Once the survey had been finalized, questions were put in a google forms document in order to be distributed to participants at both institutions. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

3.4 Procedure

Both instructors informed students in their classes that they would complete a short survey to assess the sequence of real-world tasks (finding a job offer, completion of CV, cover letter and job interview) that they had completed during the Spring 2024 semester. Surveys were distributed via email using a link that took them to the survey on Google forms and students completed them outside class. Students were instructed that completion of the survey was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from completing it at any time, that their responses would be anonymous, and that it would not affect their final grade in any way. They did not receive any extra credit or other type of compensation in exchange for participating in the study. Once completed, researchers could access their responses in the Google forms document. IRB approval was obtained to conduct this research with protocol number 4272.

4. Results

A summary of the participant's responses is presented below. The open-ended qualitative responses were also analyzed for recurring themes and patterns regarding their perceived usefulness and difficulty of each task.

When asked to rate how much business Spanish they learned (1 = very little and 5 = a lot) after completing the sequence of tasks, both groups responded favorably. However, as indicated in Table 1, more participants from the northeastern university (face-to-face) (50%) reported that they found the tasks "very useful" over twice as much as those from the university in the Midwest (online) (22.2%). Regarding their perceived overall usefulness (1 = not useful at all; 5 = very useful), participants from both institutions evaluated the sequence of tasks as useful or very useful for their future careers (see Table 2). Similar to the previous item, participants from the northeastern university selected the highest rating (very useful) to a greater extent (77.8%) than those from the midwestern university (55.6%).

For the next item, participants had to assess the usefulness of the 'real-world' tasks in relation to the rest of the course content. While more than half of the participants from the northeastern university (55.6%) reported finding the tasks more useful than the rest of the course content, only 22.2% from the midwestern university supported this statement. Instead, the majority of the participants from the latter institution (77.8%) indicated that the focal tasks were just as useful as the rest of the curriculum material, compared to 44% of participants from the northeastern university. When asked to elaborate on their response by providing a written explanation for this particular item, the qualitative data from the latter institution emphasized the lasting relevance and practical value of the tasks in contrast to the rest of the course content such as the textbook exercises, which were viewed as less pertinent and lacking long-term utility:

"This is the first time I have completed an assignment for a Spanish Class that will continue to be applicable to my professional career after the course ends (i.e. now having a CV and cover letter in Spanish). Textbook exercises just don't resonate with me in the same way, and don't offer the same longevity."

While participants from the midwestern university also highlighted the practical application of the target tasks due to their direct relevance to participants' career aspirations, the majority commented on the equal importance and utility of both the real-world tasks and the rest of the class content as shown in the following example:

"The 'real-world' tasks were very important. I do think the cultural lessons about countries and discussions about current news in Spanish speaking countries are just as important, though. Those were useful to learn new vocabulary and new topics to discuss in the Spanish speaking business world."

Participants were also asked if the content covered in the focal courses (including the real-world tasks) was more useful than the material in other Spanish courses they have taken at the university level. An overwhelming majority of participants from the northeastern university responded yes (88%) and only 11.1% rated it as equally useful. In contrast, for the midwestern university, 22.2% of students rated

the content as more useful, 11.1% rated it as less useful, and 66.7% found it as useful as other Spanish courses they have taken. Responses for this item revealed that participants from the former institution valued the relevance and practical application of the material. The majority of participants mentioned that this class provided valuable real-life practice that they could see themselves using in the future, unlike previous courses that felt more like general grammar or history lessons. For instance, one of the participants responded:

"I only really learned general grammar and history in Spanish in other courses instead of real-world skills."

The practical skills gained in this class, such as writing resumes and cover letters in Spanish, were particularly appreciated for their applicability in both personal and professional contexts. Students who had not previously taken business or finance-related courses found the introduction to these concepts particularly helpful. They felt that the skills learned in this class were more likely to be remembered and used, as opposed to content from other courses which they struggled to recall or found redundant. This can be seen in the following response:

"I would say it's more useful because it's real-life practice. I have also never taken a business class before, so I feel like the majority of concepts were very new to me. . . so I found this class to be extremely helpful in understanding those basic concepts. In conclusion, as a beginner in the subject, I found this class really great."

Table 3 presents Likert ratings of perceived usefulness expressed in percentages for each individual task performed. As Table 3 shows, among participants in the northeastern university 55.6% found creating a CV to be the most useful task, followed by the cover letter (38.9%), and the job interview (33.3%). In contrast, only 16.7% considered searching for a job offer as useful. Overall, 50% of these participants found all tasks collectively to be useful. Participants from the midwestern institution also rated the CV highly, with 33.3% finding it useful. The same percentage found the job interview beneficial. Participants in this group found the cover letter (22.2%) and searching for a job offer as the least useful tasks (11.1%). About half of the participants (55.6%) found all tasks collectively useful. This can be seen in the following two responses:

"They are lasting documents that will grow with me as my career develops, they are also something tangible/deliverable. The job interview exercised my previously developed abilities in formal conversation."

"I found all of them useful, because they all go hand in hand - they touched on different topics that went along with getting a job. I think not having gone through one of them, for example what job interviews are like, then that would've missed the point of what this class is about."

In terms of difficulty (see Table 4), both groups gave similar ratings for each task. 55.6% of respondents from each institution found the job interview to be the most difficult task, followed closely by writing a cover letter (50% face-to-face, 44.4% online). Creating a CV was equally difficult for both groups (22.2%), and searching for job offers was the least challenging task (11.1% face-to-face, 12.2% online).

When asked to justify their responses, the majority of participants from both institutions commented that the job interview was particularly difficult due to unfamiliarity, the added pressure of speaking in Spanish, and the anxiety of real-time responses. Additionally, both groups agreed that the cover letter task posed challenges due to limited job experience and the requirement for company-specific customization:

“Cover letters are very difficult to do, even in English. It has to be specific to each company which is hard.”

General difficulties also included time management, coordinating with partners, and maintaining confidence in Spanish-speaking abilities. Notably, participants from the midwestern institution highlighted that the virtual format of the course added complexity to each task, particularly to the job interview, which is reflected on this response:

“The job interview was the most difficult because, in this setting specifically, everything was online. While I realize some job interviews are completely virtual, I had a hard time communicating effectively.”

Finally, the questionnaire included an open-ended question that asked participants to explain what they liked (or disliked) the most about completing the target sequence of tasks. The majority of respondents from both groups highlighted the positive aspects of the course and the tasks, specifically. Overall, participants appreciated the practical application of learning material, the organization of the tasks, noting clear directions and useful examples. Half of the respondents from the midwestern university expressed a preference for in-person classes to enhance speaking practice and peer interaction, as seen below:

“I think I would've liked to take this class in person. I prefer to take Spanish classes in person in general, but this semester I had to go all online. I would suggest if the opportunity arises, that students opt to take this course in person to get more speaking practice and peer interaction.”

Participants noted that they would benefit from direct communication, immediate feedback, and interaction that a face-to-face course can offer. Moreover, participants from this university suggested including more multimedia content, particularly video lessons to enhance listening skills, solidify comprehension of the course content, and foster more interaction with the instructor. On the other hand, participants from the northeastern university emphasized collaboration with classmates and peer comparisons as beneficial for developing understanding and ideas.

Table 1. Perceived assessment of learning from sequence of tasks (Reported in Percentages)

Institution	1	2	3	4	5
Face-to-Face (<i>n</i> = 18)	0%	5.6%	5.6%	38.9%	50%
Online (<i>n</i> = 9)	0%	11.1%	11.1%	55.6%	22.2%

(1 = very little and 5 = a lot)

Table 2. Perceived usefulness of sequence of tasks (Reported in Percentages)

	1	2	3	4	5
Institution					
Face-to-Face (<i>n</i> = 18)	0%	5.6%	5.6%	16.7%	77.8%
Online (<i>n</i> = 9)	0%	0%	22.2%	22.2%	55.6%

(1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful)

Table 3. Perceived usefulness of each task (reported in percentages)

Task	Searching for job offer	CV	Cover letter	Job interview	All of them
Institution					
Face-to-Face (<i>n</i> = 18)	16.7%	55.6%	38.9%	33.3%	50%
Online (<i>n</i> = 9)	11.1%	33.3%	22.2%	33.3%	55.6%

(1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful)

Table 4. Perceived difficulty of each task (reported in percentages)

Task	Searching for job offer	CV	Cover letter	Job interview	All of them
Institution					
Face-to-Face (<i>n</i> = 18)	11.1%	22.2%	50%	55.6%	0%
Online (<i>n</i> = 9)	12.2%	22.2%	44.4%	55.6%	0%

(1 = not difficult at all and 5 = very difficult)

5. Discussion

The present findings reveal that participants, for the most part, value the learning process and the usefulness of the tasks included in the course curriculum. The practical nature and real-world applicability of these tasks seemed to be factors much appreciated by students at both institutions. Specifically, completing a CV and a cover letter in Spanish were viewed as valuable tasks, as these documents are easily adaptable for future job searches in a Spanish-speaking country. Additionally, conducting a job interview provided them with significant experiential learning applicable to future occasions. This finding is in line with the works of Author (2017), and Serafini and Torres (2015), among others, who advocate for the

inclusion of authentic tasks in language courses to enhance learners' practical language use and motivation. (e.g., Baralt & Gómez, 2017).

Notably, at both institutions the preparation of the CV was rated as the most useful task out of the four. This could be explained in light of the importance that a CV conveys in the job search process, since it is the first document employers are going to evaluate. If employers do not perceive the candidate's CV as the right fit for the position, the submission of a cover letter and conducting a job interview might not take place.

In relation to the difficulty of the tasks, it could also be expected to see the job interview rated as the most difficult task. Whereas the completion of a CV or a cover letter are presentational tasks, where students can devote more time to them, a job interview is an interactional type of task, requiring specific responses to questions that might not be known beforehand. This might entail greater stress and nervousness. This suggests the need for further guidance and practice, particularly for tasks that students found difficult, such as job interviews and cover letters. While students do value these practical tasks, they also require sufficient support and scaffolding to perform them effectively and confidently, aligning with observations by Sánchez-López (2013) and Serafini and Torres (2015) regarding the importance of adequate training and support in task-based language courses.

The study also revealed notable differences between the two groups of students in their evaluation of real-world tasks versus other course content. Specifically, more than half of the participants from the northeastern university found the real-world tasks to be more useful than the rest of the course content; in contrast, the majority of the participants from the latter institution indicated that the focal tasks were just as useful as the rest of the curriculum material. In other words, students from the midwestern university notably emphasized the importance of balancing real-world tasks with the broader course content. They valued the practical application of the tasks while also recognizing the cultural and linguistic insights provided by the other components of the curriculum. Previous research has shown that different teaching modalities can significantly affect student engagement and learning outcomes (e.g., Sellnow-Richmond & Strawser, 2020). Thus, the appreciation for cultural and linguistic components in the midwestern university could be attributed to the online format's potential to offer a broader range of content types and learning activities. The flexibility of asynchronous online learning environments allows for the integration of diverse materials that can cater to various learning preferences. On the other hand, the face-to-face format typically supports more interactive and immediate feedback mechanisms, which could have enhanced the perceived effectiveness of practical tasks. In contrast, online asynchronous formats may require students to be more self-directed, potentially leading them to value a broader range of course content equally, as they must integrate various learning resources independently.

The study also revealed differences in how students from the two universities perceived the usefulness of the Spanish for Business course content compared to other Spanish courses they had taken. The data from the northeastern university revealed that when compared to traditional Spanish courses, such as those focused on literature or culture, the business Spanish courses were rated more favorably in terms of their practicality and relevance. Students appreciated the tangible outcomes of their efforts, which were directly applicable to their professional lives, echoing the findings of Catalá-Hall (2023) and Doyle (2018),

who have underscored the necessity for language courses to evolve and meet the specific demands of the professional world. In contrast, students from the midwestern university, who participated in an online asynchronous course, found the course content to be as useful as their other Spanish courses. This perception could be attributed to the widespread implementation of TBLT in other Spanish courses at the midwestern university, an approach that addresses the communicative needs of learners by focusing on tasks that reflect authentic language use (Long, 2005, 2015). As a result, students may perceive all their Spanish courses, not just the business Spanish course, as highly useful and relevant to their career goals.

Overall, a similar pattern was detected in the responses from both institutions in that students valued tasks that had clear practical applications and contributed directly to their professional development. These findings suggest that while TBLT is effective across different teaching modalities, the mode of delivery can significantly impact students' experiences and perceptions. For face-to-face courses, leveraging the immediacy of interaction and feedback is crucial to maximize the benefits of practical tasks. On the other hand, in online asynchronous courses incorporating more interactive and collaborative elements as well as providing opportunities for real-time feedback can help mitigate the drawbacks associated with the lack of peer interaction and immediacy.

Ultimately, by incorporating student voices, this study offers a unique contribution to LSP literature, emphasizing the importance of learner perceptions in assessing and refining task-based approaches. The findings reinforce the value of aligning curriculum design with student needs and professional realities, ensuring that SSP courses remain relevant and impactful.

6. Limitations and future directions

While the present study provides valuable insights into the needs of SSP learners, it is not without limitations. The sample size is relatively small and unequal when comparing both groups, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The sample size was dependent on the course enrollments. Future studies should aim to replicate this research with larger populations to extend the present findings. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the pedagogical impact of task-based curricula for SSP on learner outcomes over more than one semester would provide deeper insights into the long-term efficacy of these programs.

This study only focused on a specific set of real-world tasks—finding a job offer, preparing a CV, writing a cover letter, and performing a mock job interview. While these tasks are undoubtedly relevant and practical, they represent only a subset of possible tasks that could be included in a Spanish for Business curriculum. Future research should evaluate a more comprehensive array of real-world tasks, such as those identified by previous NAs (Author, 2017; Serafini & Torres, 2015) across different teaching modalities and contexts to provide a holistic view of their effectiveness.

Finally, the comparison between face-to-face and online asynchronous modalities highlighted important differences in student perceptions. However, the study did not explore other potential modalities, such as hybrid or synchronous online formats, which might offer different advantages and challenges. Related to course modality, lack of peer interaction in the online asynchronous format was noted as a

drawback by some students suggesting that further research should examine how varying levels of interaction in different teaching modalities impact students' perception of the tasks.

7. Conclusion and implications

The present study contributes to the growing literature in the SSP field by assessing the usefulness and difficulty of a series of authentic tasks, previously identified through a Needs Analysis (Author, 2017), implemented in two Business Spanish courses taught under two different modalities: in person face-to-face vs. online asynchronous. A key finding is the significant value students place on task-based approaches that directly support professional goals. Participants from both institutions recognized the long-term usefulness, relevance, and practicality of the tasks. These findings validate the inclusion of carefully designed, context-specific tasks in SSP courses as a means to address learners' professional needs while maintaining learners' motivation. Assignments such as creating a CV or conducting a job interview in Spanish foster experiential learning and provide tangible outcomes that enhance students' preparedness for real-world scenarios.

Another significant insight is the nuanced impact of teaching modalities on the student learning experience. While students across both modalities seemed to benefit from the task sequence, those in an asynchronous online modality place greater value on the rest of the course content than those in the face-to-face format. Additionally, the face-to-face format offered immediate interaction and feedback, which students found particularly effective in building their confidence and improving performance. Conversely, the online asynchronous format presented unique challenges, such as limited peer interaction, which highlights the importance of integrating collaborative elements and providing robust instructional support in digital learning environments. As online and hybrid learning options continue to expand, understanding how these modalities influence student outcomes is vital for designing effective SSP courses. The varied responses from students in different modalities suggest that SSP courses must be adaptable, leveraging the strengths of the teaching format to maximize student engagement and outcomes.

Ultimately, this research serves as a call to action for institutions to prioritize SSP courses as a means of equipping students with the skills necessary to thrive in globalized professional environments. By addressing the unique needs of diverse student populations and adapting to different educational settings, SSP courses can play a transformative role in preparing students for meaningful engagement with the Spanish-speaking world in their careers.

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Appendix A – Survey questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?

Male	Female	Non-binary	Other
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3. What year are you in?

First	Second	Third	Fourth
-------	--------	-------	--------
4. Are you completing a major or a minor in Spanish?
5. How many Spanish courses have you taken at the university?
6. How many years have you studied Spanish?
7. How would you rate your overall Spanish proficiency as of today? 1 (beginner) to 5 (very advanced)
8. From 1 (very little) to 5 (a lot), how much business/professional Spanish did you learn by completing the sequence of "real-world" tasks?
9. From 1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful), how useful do you think completing the sequence of tasks will be for you in the future if you have to look for a job in a Spanish-speaking country?

10. Did you find completing the sequence of tasks more useful than the rest of the class content covered during the semester?
Yes No As useful as the rest of the class content
11. If you answered "yes" or "no" to the previous question, why did you choose that answer?
12. Which task(s) have you found more useful to complete? You can select more than one option.
Looking for a job offer CV Cover letter Job interview All of them
13. If you selected one or more of the options in the previous question, why did you find it/them more useful?
14. Which task(s) did you find more challenging/difficult to complete? You can select more than one answer
Looking for a job offer CV Cover letter Job interview All of them
15. If you selected one or more of the options in the previous question, why did you find it/them more challenging/difficult?
16. In addition to the preparation of the CV, cover letter and job interview, is there any other "real-world" task (or tasks) that you would like to have completed?
17. If you had to compare the content we have covered in this class (including the real-world tasks), with other Spanish classes you have taken, would you rate this class content as being more useful than your other classes?
18. If you answered "yes" or "no" to the previous question, why did you choose that answer?
19. Overall, what did you like (or dislike) the most about completing this sequence of tasks this semester? Any other comments?

THE IMPACT OF INTERACTION ON SECOND-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LISTENING

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Abstract: *The interaction hypothesis of second-language acquisition states that the development of language proficiency can be facilitated by face-to-face interaction and communication between native speakers of the language and language learners. This paper examines the relationship between interaction and listening of learners in the second language classroom. The study compared the comprehension of 8 non-native English speakers in a Ghanaian junior high school on directions to a listening comprehension task presented by a proficient speaker of English. The learners were divided into one experimental group and one control group and compared under two input conditions: pre-modified input, in which the proficient speaker presents the tasks using language that has been modified by decreased complexity, increased quantity, and redundancy; and interactionally modified input, in which the tasks are presented using language that had not been pre-modified but had enough opportunities for interaction with the proficient speaker. The study found that repeating and rephrasing the language to explain the directions during interaction resulted in increased comprehension. The study's findings support longstanding claims about the importance of interaction in promoting second-language listening comprehension. These findings also provide recommendations for reorganizing classroom interaction to meet learners' needs for comprehensible input.*

Keywords: *interaction; second-language listening; comprehensible input; experimental group; control group*

1. Introduction

If one wants to socialize and function effectively and efficiently in life, one's command of language skills is essential (Owusu et al., 2015:466). This function of language is crucial for the second language learner in the Ghanaian context since

English, the official language of the government, business, education, media, and legislature, is a core subject in which every learner is expected to excel. Therefore, learners are supposed to increase efforts in learning this language to meet the demands of authorities in the formal sector. Because of this, conducting frequent scientific studies in this field is welcomed and necessary.

Until the late 20th century, it had long been held by second language teachers and researchers that simple exposure to a language could facilitate its acquisition. This idea stemmed from observing children who grow up immersed in environments where a language is spoken. In the second half of the 20th century, the works of some scholars (i.e. Krashen, 1982; Long, 1981, Swain, 1985, and Long, 1996) claimed that the exposure of learners to a target language is not a sufficient condition for second language acquisition.

In classical second language studies, the Input Hypothesis argues that the learner must comprehend input if it is to facilitate the acquisition of the target language (Krashen, 1980). Such input is what Krashen termed as Comprehensible Input. Understanding spoken and written language is what the Input Hypothesis sees as the only mechanism that results in linguistic competence. Since then, several studies have focused on what makes input comprehensible. Long's interaction hypothesis (1985, 1996) argues that interaction facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that speakers make to their language in such discourse and that provide learners with the input they need. Thus, native speakers of languages modify their speech by making it simpler for non-natives to understand (Long, 1985, 1996). Pica's work suggests that modifications are made to input through interaction. This input becomes interactionally modified input. Pica (1987) also argues that this form of input aids comprehension more than input modified beforehand.

In Ghana, English is the language of instruction from upper primary onwards. Therefore, students must be able to comprehend the content of their lessons and their teachers' instructions, especially in the language classroom since comprehension is an important step in language acquisition.

However, most language classrooms in Ghana do not have native speakers of English (i.e. British, American, Canadian, etc.). That notwithstanding, several classrooms have fluent English language teachers who can use the language with native-like proficiency. So, a thorough investigation of the role of interaction in listening comprehension for students in Ghana is needed. Knowledge of the proper conditions under which comprehension is successful will provide guidelines for restructuring interaction in the classroom to serve learners' needs for comprehensible input. Consequently, the objectives of the study were to:

- I. examine the effects of interactionally modified input on the listening comprehension of non-native speakers of English.
- II. investigate the kinds of modifications that are made to input during interaction.

1.1 Hypothesis

The hypothesis was formulated to answer the research questions: (1) "Does interaction assist in the comprehension of the target language?" (2) "How does interactionally modified input differ from premodified input?" This hypothesis was that the subjects in Condition 2 (i.e., interactionally modified input group) of research question 1 would show greater comprehension of the directions than

those in Condition 1 (i.e., premodified input group). From this major hypothesis, three minor experimental hypotheses were formulated.

1. The mean score for selecting the correct item on the task would be higher for subjects in Condition 2 than for those in Condition 1.
2. The mean score for placing the item in the correct position on the board would also be higher for subjects in Condition 2 than for those in Condition 1.
3. The mean total score for selection and placement on the task would be higher for subjects in Condition 2 than for those in Condition 1.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The Role of Input in Second Language Acquisition

The role input plays in second language acquisition first received widespread attention in the 1970s and 1980s. It was around this period that Stephen Krashen propounded the Input Hypothesis. Krashen's most notable claim is that learners progress in their knowledge of the language when they comprehend language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level (Krashen, 1977). Krashen (2003) called this level of input "i+1", where "i" is the learner's interlanguage and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. According to him, this form of input is called comprehensible input. With this knowledge, Krashen and Terrell (1983) devised an approach to teaching language that focused on providing the learner with substantial amounts of comprehensible input through games and dialogues. The Natural Approach requires interaction between teachers and students and among students for many of its activities.

The Input Hypothesis was later refined as the Optimal Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 2020). In this hypothesis, input is not merely comprehensible but also optimal. In addition to comprehensibility, optimal input has three other characteristics. Firstly, it is interesting. As Mason and Krashen (1982) put it, it is "so interesting that you temporarily forget that you are listening to or reading in another language" (Mason & Krashen, 2020, p. 1). Secondly, it is rich in language; which means that the language supports the reader in understanding new aspects of the language. And lastly, it must be abundant, thereby providing new opportunities for acquiring a new language.

The relation between input and interaction for language has been further studied. A study by Rowe and Snow (2020) showed that input best facilitates language acquisition when it is interactive. Zhang (2009) argues that input, interaction, and output are three related concepts that facilitate the development of oral fluency.

This study holds those one or more of these three factors, when missing, account for the inability of many Chinese learners of English to speak the language fluently. Shin (2020) also suggests a close connection between the language children are exposed to (input) and how this is related to their acquisition of certain grammatical structures in Korean.

With this, it is evident that input plays an important role in the acquisition of linguistic competence.

2.2 The Interaction Hypothesis

The Interaction Hypothesis (IH) has been referred to as the input, interaction, and output model (Block, 2003). Various writers have given IH different nomenclatures. For example, it is known as the interaction theory by Carroll (1999), the oral

interaction hypothesis by Ellis (1991), and the interaction approach by Gass and Mackey (2007). However, Michael Long first proposed IH in his book "Input, Interaction, and Second Language Acquisition" (Long, 1981). The hypothesis posits that languages are acquired by interacting with speakers of those target languages (Linton, 2023). The hypothesis makes two main claims; that comprehensible input is required for second language acquisition; and that comprehensible input is the result of negotiations for meaning in conversations (Linton 2023). Comprehensible input, therefore, is a result of modified interaction. Modified interaction refers to the various modifications that native speakers and other more knowledgeable users of the language (such as teachers) create to render their input comprehensible to learners. Native speakers often slow down their speech to second language users, quite like adults do to children.

Ellis (1991) indicates that the original hypothesis as proposed by Long (1985) advances two main claims about the role of interaction in second language acquisition:

1. Comprehensible input is necessary for second language acquisition.
2. Modifications to the interactional structure of conversations taking place in the process of negotiating a communication problem help to make input comprehensible to a second language learner.

2.3 Interaction in Second Language Acquisition

The impact of conversational interaction on learning has been discussed in academic circles for nearly a century. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that through informal and formal conversations, adults convey how their culture interprets and responds to the world. In his Sociocultural Theory of Mind (Vygotsky, 1978), he postulates interaction as the causative condition for SLA, as well as for other areas of learning. The theories of Vygotsky convincingly demonstrated the importance of interaction for Second Language Acquisition and were widely used by other scholars in SLA studies. Many of his findings have influenced interactionist research to date. One aspect of his theory of cognitive learning is the idea that language is used to generate and test hypotheses and that cognitive activity will be apparent in dialogue (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). This concept is used by Swain and Lapkin (1998) in support of their assertion that dialogue is both a means of communication and a cognitive tool. The student participants in this study worked out a storyline and wrote it out during the task. As they did so, they encountered linguistic problems. To solve them, the students used their first language (L1) and second language (L2) to communicate with each other and as tools to aid their L2 learning.

In a study on question formation in ESL, Mackey (1999) examined the relationship between different types of conversational interaction and SLA. In this study, adult ESL learners of various L1 backgrounds participated in task-based interaction to increase their ability to form questions in English. The results of this study supported claims concerning a link between interaction and grammatical development. Brown (2007) points out that the interpersonal context where a learner operates takes on great significance, so the interaction between learners and others should be the focus of observation and explanation. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that interaction led to such development. Similar studies have shown a link between interaction and lexical acquisition (Ellis et al., 1994), and production (Gass & Varonis, 1994).

2.4 The Role of Interaction in Listening Comprehension

Perhaps the most prominent research done on the role of interaction in listening comprehension is that of Pica *et al.* (1987). This study tested the listening comprehension of adult learners of European and Asian first language backgrounds in low-intermediate ESL classes under the two input conditions of premodified input and interactionally modified input.

This study described two types of linguistic environments in which the interaction promotes comprehension. Pica *et al.*, (1987) proposed that there is one environment in which input is modified for the learner's comprehension. This is mostly in instructional settings. In these settings, what is provided is premodified input. Then there is an environment in which both conversation participants modify their output as found in naturalistic settings. The second environment was found to be most productive for comprehension as the input found in this environment is modified through interaction.

This study also found that NS-NNS interactional modifications in the form of comprehension and confirmation checks and clarification requests served as a mechanism for NS modification of input, either by encoding or, more frequently, by triggering repetition and rephrasing of input content, and thus played a critical role in comprehension. A similar study is needed to investigate the kinds of environment needed for optimal listening comprehension among Ghanaian basic school learners of English.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This quantitative study was chosen to test the hypotheses already presented in this study. It would help in describing numerically the full impact of interaction on listening comprehension. The design used in this study is experimental. This design was chosen to establish causation between the two variables of interaction and listening comprehension. The interaction was the manipulated variable. The study was cross-sectional as data was collected at one point in time, specifically two days on the 6th and 7th of April, 2024. The subjects were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The subjects carried out a listening comprehension task. This task was planned to be a good measure of comprehension and provide an appropriate context for interaction. For this reason, a communication game often used in English as a Second Language teaching was employed.

The task required the non-native speakers (NNSs) to listen to a proficient speaker (for convenience, the proficient speaker will be abbreviated as NS). The NS gave directions for choosing and placing 10 items on a small board illustrated with an outdoor scenery. The individual items were two-dimensional cutouts, representing a variety of plant, animal, and human figures, each of which shared at least one feature, such as shape, colour, or size with one other item. The board itself was illustrated with scenery, including figures similar to those on the cutouts, as well as landmarks, such as a pond, patches of grass, a skyline, roads, vehicles, and other objects.

Each direction the NS gave included a description of the cutout to be picked and a

further description of the place on the board where it was to be placed. Comprehension was measured by the number of items the subject selected and placed correctly. One point was given for correct selection and one point for correct placement. The interactions were recorded on audio, and transcriptions were made from the recordings.

Two versions of the directions to the task were developed: a baseline version and a linguistically modified version. The baseline version was linguistically unmodified. This means that the directions were compiled from a recording of the interaction of two proficient speakers on the same task. The baseline version was then modified to produce the linguistically modified version by reducing the complexity of the language, increasing the number of words per direction, and increasing the repetition of content words per direction. This ensured that both the linguistically modified and baseline versions had similar content but differed only in quantity, redundancy, and complexity. Table 1 gives examples of the modifications made to the baseline version, as used by Pica et al. (1987).

Table 1: Examples of Modification of Selected Linguistic Features in Input Directions

Complexity	
Baseline	[In the center of the crossroads, [right where the three meet,] put the dog in the carriage.]
Modified	[Put the dog in the middle of the three roads.]
Quantity	
Baseline	Moving to the top right corner, place the two mushrooms with the three yellow dots in that grass patch, down toward the road. (23 words)
Modified	Move to the top right corner. Take the two mushrooms with the three yellow dots. Put the two mushrooms on the grass. Put the two mushrooms on the grass near the road. (32 words)
Redundancy	
Baseline	Place the two mushrooms with the three yellow dots in that grass patch, down toward the road. (no repetition)
Modified	Take the two mushrooms with the three yellow dots. Put the two mushrooms on the grass. Put the two mushrooms on the grass near the road. (3 repetitions)

Source: Field Data, 2024

The task was pretested to ensure that it was a reliable measure of listening comprehension. The linguistically modified directions were tested on 4 proficient speakers of English who demonstrated 100% accuracy on all items.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure

The study's target group was basic school English learners, and non-native

speakers of English were preferred. The pupils of Abuontem M/A Junior High School in the Mampong Municipality of the Ashanti Region were chosen for the study. The school has three classes at the JHS level: B7, B8, and B9 (A and B), and a population of 113 pupils. The purposive sampling method was used to select the B9 (A) pupils, with a total population of 17 pupils.

It was necessary to find subjects with low intermediate fluency in English as more proficient subjects would pass the listening comprehension test without needing interaction. A short reading comprehension test was, therefore, administered. Subjects (participants) who scored less than 40% on this test were determined to be speakers of low-intermediate fluency. Unfortunately, all 17 pupils (from the B9 [A] class) of such speakers were found. From this number, a sample size of 8 (50%) (i.e. 5 females and 3 males) was selected using a simple random sampling method. The decision was to select 8 low-intermediate fluent participants because this pilot study was to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the selected intervention (control and experimental) (Lancaster et al., 2004). Thus, this study is the onset of a series of comprehensive studies that would involve (1) all the pupils in B9 (A and B) who have both high and low intermediate fluency in English, and (2) selected participants (subjects) from B7 and B8 of the same school. Again, this limited sample size method aligns with Junqueira and Payant (2015) where the views and procedures of an L2 MA TESOL student-teacher were investigated in the study.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Hypothesis

The study's major hypothesis was strongly supported by the results, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Comparison of Mean Comprehension Scores of Subjects in the Two Experimental Conditions

Subjects	Mean selection score		Mean placement score	Mean combined score		
Condition 1: premodified	73%	7.25	63%	6.00	68%	13.25
Condition 2: interactionally modified	85%	8.50	80%	8.00	82.5%	16.50
Difference between Conditions 1 & 2	12%	1.25	23%	2.00	18%	3.25
<i>T</i>	-2.23		-3.45	-2.84		

Source: Field Data, 2024

From Table 2, the null hypothesis is rejected; and the p for the mean combined score is 0.0296. This is statistically significant, meaning that interactionally modified input leads to better comprehension and performance than premodified input. From the study, the selection score CI is (-0.535,3.035). While the placement score is

CI: (0.154,3.846), the combined score CI: (-0.391,6.891). The interpretation is that for the selection scores, the CI includes 0, meaning the difference may not be statistically significant. The CI does not include 0 for the placement scores, supporting statistical significance. However, for combined scores, the CI slightly includes 0, suggesting marginal significance. So, the final confidence interval for the combined scores is (-0.391,6.891). This shows improvement in the interactionally modified condition, but the result is weaker than for placement scores alone.

Therefore, the results obtained from Table 2, support the first minor hypothesis; the mean score for selecting the correct item on the task would be higher for subjects in Condition 2 than for those in Condition 1. This is to say that the subjects who received interactionally modified input scored higher than those who received pre-modified input in selecting the correct item, with a percentage difference of 12%. The mean scores of both groups showed a *t*-statistic of -2.23, suggesting that there is evidence to support the idea that the two groups have different average values. The second hypothesis was that the mean score for placing the item in the correct position on the board would also be higher for subjects in Condition 2 than for those in Condition 1. This hypothesis was also accepted. Subjects who received interactionally modified input scored 20% more in placement than subjects in the control. The *t*-statistic of -3.45 also suggests that the mean score of the experimental group (8.00) is higher than that of the control group (6.00). Finally, the third minor hypothesis of the study, the mean total score for selection and placement on the task, which would be higher for subjects in Condition 2 than for those in Condition 1, was also accepted. The experimental group scored 18% more than the control group. The *t*-statistic of their means was -2.84. This *t*-statistic indicates a significant difference between the means of the two groups being compared. The negative value suggests that the means of the control group (13.25) is significantly lower than the mean of the experimental group (16.50). With this, the hypothesis was accepted that the subjects in Condition 2 would show greater comprehension of the directions than the subjects in Condition 1.

4.2 Differences Between Premodified Input And Interactionally Modified Input

The features of premodified input and interactionally modified input are described to answer the research question, how does interactionally modified input differ from premodified input? It is, therefore, necessary to compare the quantity, redundancy, and complexity of the directions in premodified input and interactionally modified input. This is done in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Comparisons of Mean Quantity, Redundancy, and Complexity in Baseline, Premodified, and Interactionally Modified Input

Input	Quantity	Redundancy	Complexity
Baseline	15.37	0.32	1.37
Condition 1: premodified input	31.77	7.13	1.04
Condition 2: interactionally modified input	47.65	16.03	1.00
Difference between Conditions 1 & 2	15.88	8.9	0.04

Source: Field Data, 2024

In Table 3, quantity was counted as the number of words per subject per direction. While the premodified input saw 16 more words added on average to the baseline version, the interactionally modified input added around 32 more words on average, significantly increasing the quantity. Redundancy was counted as the number of repetitions of content words (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) per subject per direction. The baseline version had very little redundancy (0.32) as in most conversations between native or proficient language speakers. This level of redundancy was increased by 7 more repetitions in the premodified input. However, the interactionally modified input saw an increase of about 9 words over the premodified input.

Complexity was more difficult to measure as the time and skills needed were unavailable to the researcher. However, a method used by Pica et al. (1987) measured complexity as the number of S-nodes/T-unit where s-node refers to a sentence in a phrase structure tree and t-unit refers to a main clause with all its dependent clauses and phrases. Using this measure in a few random sentences in the directions, it was evident that directions in the interactionally modified input had slightly less complexity than directions in the premodified input. These results may not be conclusive.

It is safe to say, however, that interactionally modified input has more quantity and redundancy than premodified input.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary

This study set out to investigate the impact of interaction on the listening comprehension of non-native speakers of English. Specifically, it sought to examine the effects of interactionally modified input on the listening comprehension of non-native speakers of English and to investigate the kinds of modifications that are made to input during interaction. With the aid of a listening comprehension task, an experiment was conducted to investigate the relation between two variables: interaction (the independent variable) and listening comprehension (the dependent variable). The sample used for this study consisted of 8 junior high school students with low intermediate proficiency in English.

The results of the study supported the hypothesis that the subjects in the experimental group would demonstrate greater comprehension of the directions given by the NS than subjects in the control group. In answering the first research question, "Does interaction assist in the comprehension of the target language?" the findings show that when provided interactionally modified input, subjects demonstrated greater comprehension of directions given by the NS. In answering the second research question, (i.e., "How does interactionally modified input differ from premodified input?"), the findings show that interactionally modified input possesses a higher number of words and repetitions of content words which aid comprehension. It could also decrease the complexity of sentences used in giving directions.

5.2 Value to Second Language Acquisition

This research provides additional knowledge to research in second language studies, specifically research in the theories of second language acquisition. It provides additional support to the claims of the interaction hypothesis on low-

intermediate fluent speakers of the English language. This hypothesis states that modifications to the interactional structure of conversations taking place in the process of negotiating a communication problem help to make input comprehensible to a second language learner (Ellis, 1991). As shown by the findings, interaction does assist in comprehension. This research also aids in identifying the features of interactionally modified input that make it different from premodified input. The findings of this study show that interactionally modified input has more quantity and redundancy and possibly less complexity than premodified input.

Additionally, this research has implications for teaching listening comprehension in Ghana. The typical Ghanaian classroom has few opportunities for personalized interaction between learners and teachers. As a result, students receive only premodified language input, if any at all. The findings of this study suggest that more interaction should be provided between teachers and learners or, if possible, between more proficient speakers of English and students.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

A lack of skill and time made it difficult to measure the exact difference in the level of complexity between premodified input and interactionally modified input. This is an area that could be further researched in the future to determine the relation between the complexity of language structures and interactionally modified input. This study looked at the relationship between interaction and listening comprehension. However, other areas of language could potentially be influenced by interaction. There is a need for research into other language skills such as speaking and reading.

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EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHATGPT AT SEEU IN NORTH MACEDONIA: POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *This study examines students' views and experiences regarding the use of ChatGPT at South East European University (SEEU) in North Macedonia, focusing on its benefits and challenges. A review of existing literature highlights the increasing interest in Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT in educational settings, emphasizing their potential to support language learning, offer personalized feedback, and boost student engagement. However, concerns are also raised about the possible drawbacks of AI in education, including the risk of over-reliance, which might hinder critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Ethical issues, such as academic integrity and the reliability of AI-generated responses, are also frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to writing tasks and assessments. There is additional concern that dependence on AI may limit students' ability to learn independently. The study uses a questionnaire to explore the challenges and benefits of integrating ChatGPT into EFL education. The findings suggest that while students perceive ChatGPT as a useful resource for learning and support its use for specific academic purposes, acceptance varies depending on the task and individual attitudes toward AI in education. The data recommend that ChatGPT should serve as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for independent thought and creativity, and stress the importance of verifying the accuracy of AI-generated content.*

Keywords: *ChatGPT; Students' Perspectives; SEEU; Learning*

1. Introduction

In the era of technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed various sectors, including education around the globe where AI tools are increasingly being integrated to enhance teaching and learning experiences of diverse learners. Among these tools, ChatGPT—a sophisticated language model developed by OpenAI—has gained significant attention for its potential to support language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language at SEEU in North Macedonia. As universities seek to leverage innovative technologies to improve student engagement and learning outcomes, understanding the implications of AI tools like ChatGPT becomes essential for more effective teaching and learning.

The integration of AI in education, especially language learning, offers numerous benefits. First of all, the application of AI can provide personalized feedback and provides immediate support for writing and grammar, which are crucial for

language acquisition. Recent studies have highlighted that AI tools can enhance language learners' motivation and autonomy by offering flexible, self-directed learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting (Lai & Li, 2022). These tools are particularly valuable for EFL learners who often face challenges in practicing English due to limited access to native speakers or immersive language environments.

Despite these advantages, the adoption of AI in language education also presents significant challenges. Concerns have been raised about the potential over-reliance on AI, which could hinder students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Zou & Xie, 2023). Furthermore, issues related to academic integrity and the accuracy of AI-generated content pose ethical dilemmas for educators and students alike. The lack of clear guidelines on the appropriate use of AI tools in academic settings adds to these concerns, making it imperative to explore how students perceive and use these technologies.

However, significant research gaps remain regarding their long-term effectiveness, particularly in higher education contexts, where critical thinking and autonomy are core objectives (Jones et al., 2021; Kumar & Patel, 2020). Concerns are raised about the possible drawbacks of AI in education, including the risk of over-reliance, which might hinder critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Chen & Wang, 2023). Ethical issues, such as academic integrity and the reliability of AI-generated responses, are also frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to writing tasks and assessments (Brown, 2022). Furthermore, little research has explored the specific attitudes of EFL students toward AI tools like ChatGPT, particularly in the Balkans region.

Based on all these opportunities and challenges, this study aims to explore students' perspectives and experiences with using ChatGPT for learning English at South East European University (SEEU) in North Macedonia. This research is motivated by the need to understand the real-world implications of integrating AI tools into EFL learning, particularly in higher education contexts where digital literacy and academic integrity are critical. By examining students' attitudes, perceived benefits, and potential challenges associated with ChatGPT, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform educators and policymakers on the effective integration of AI in language education. Also, the results of the study will raise students' awareness about all benefits and challenges the use of AI might pose.

The findings of the study present and discuss the results collected from a students' questionnaire highlighting key themes from student responses and offer some recommendations for a more effective use of AI tools in EFL teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

With the rapid developments in technology, teachers around the globe had to integrate different technology tools in the classroom. Recently, with the discovery of the AI model, ChatGPT, there is a need for more research discussing its potential benefits and challenges for both teachers and students. "Artificial intelligence will only add value to the quality of training. There have been lots of arguments around the development of artificial intelligence as having more potential to change higher education than any other technological advancement"

(Akinwalere and Ivanov, 2024, p.3).

Generally, AI has revolutionized language learning by offering adaptive and personalized educational experiences. Tools like ChatGPT provide instant feedback, simulate real-life conversational practice, and assist with writing and grammar corrections, which are crucial for language acquisition (Lai & Li, 2022). Research shows that AI technologies can enhance learner engagement by offering interactive and flexible learning opportunities, making them particularly effective for self-directed learning (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). Additionally, AI-powered platforms can address the varying proficiency levels of students, offering tailored support that traditional classroom settings may not always provide (Hwang et al., 2020).

Several studies have emphasized the advantages of integrating ChatGPT and similar AI tools into EFL education. For example, ChatGPT can serve as a virtual language partner, enabling students to practice conversational English in a low-pressure environment, which can reduce anxiety and build confidence (Zou et al., 2023). Moreover, the tool's ability to provide immediate corrections and suggestions can significantly improve writing skills, particularly in grammar and vocabulary development (Jia & Yu, 2021). AI tools also encourage autonomous learning, allowing students to engage in language practice beyond the confines of the classroom, thereby fostering lifelong learning skills (Hajar, 2022).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Mai et al. revealed that "a SWOT analysis of the use of ChatGPT in teaching and learning has revealed a spectrum of strengths and promising opportunities, but it also comes with certain weaknesses and threats (2024, p.14).

Despite the promising benefits, the use of AI in language learning presents several challenges. One of the primary concerns is the accuracy of AI-generated content. While ChatGPT can produce coherent and contextually relevant responses, it is not infallible and may sometimes generate incorrect or misleading information (Bender et al., 2021). This raises concerns about students' reliance on AI tools for learning, potentially compromising their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Søgaard, 2022). Furthermore, issues related to academic integrity have been highlighted, particularly in cases where students might misuse AI tools to complete assignments without proper understanding or effort (Gao & He, 2023).

Ethical considerations are also a significant part of the discourse surrounding AI in education. Scholars argue that the widespread use of AI tools could lead to a decline in traditional literacy skills if not properly managed (Selwyn, 2020). Additionally, the lack of clear guidelines and policies regarding AI use in academic settings poses a challenge for educators aiming to maintain academic standards while embracing technological advancements (Jones, 2022).

Understanding students' attitudes towards AI tools like ChatGPT is crucial for their successful integration into educational contexts. Studies indicate that students generally view AI positively, recognizing its potential to enhance language learning through personalized support and interactive practice (Lim & Gruba, 2019). However, some students express concerns about the ethical implications and the potential for over-reliance on AI, which could lead to reduced motivation for independent learning (Zhang & Zhu, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to provide guidance on the effective use of AI to maximize its benefits while addressing students' concerns.

The use of AI tools in higher education, particularly in EFL programs, requires a strategic approach to ensure that technology complements, rather than replaces, traditional teaching methods. Educators are encouraged to integrate AI in a way that supports active learning and critical engagement, thereby preparing students for a digitally driven workforce (Redecker, 2017). Incorporating AI literacy into the curriculum can help students develop the skills needed to critically evaluate AI outputs, promoting ethical use and fostering digital literacy (Blayone et al., 2020). Furthermore, Basic et.al.(2023) conducted a study in academic settings. The results showed that ChatGPT has been shown to help students generate content quickly and improve the quality of their writing by offering suggestions for structure and style. Yet, concerns arise around issues like accuracy, plagiarism, and over-reliance on AI-generated text. Students who relied heavily on ChatGPT produced less authentic text and achieved lower scores compared to those who engaged more critically with the writing process. Also, in their study, Abass et.al.(2024) examined the causes and consequences of generative AI usage among university students. The data collected showed that when students faced higher academic workload and time pressure, they were more likely to use ChatGPT. The reviewed literature suggests that while AI tools like ChatGPT offer significant potential to enhance EFL learning by providing personalized support and fostering engagement, there are notable challenges related to accuracy, ethics, and student dependence. As AI continues to shape the educational landscape, it is essential to develop clear guidelines and best practices for its use in language learning. Future research should focus on exploring long-term effects of AI integration on language proficiency and student outcomes, as well as developing strategies to balance the benefits of AI with the need for critical and autonomous learning especially in a context like that of North Macedonia.

3. Research Methodology

This research was conducted during the academic year 2023/2024 at SEEU, a multilingual university located in Tetovo, North Macedonia. The study participants are 52 students enrolled in the BA program in English Language and Literature. They cover various nationalities, including Albanians, Macedonians, Turkish, Roma, and others, and represent both genders, male and female.

The research instrument, was the student questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the student questionnaire were ensured through a systematic process grounded in the reviewed literature. The questionnaire, comprising 18 items, was carefully designed to capture key dimensions such as participants' awareness of ChatGPT, its perceived usefulness, associated challenges, and future recommendations for its use. The questionnaire was shared via Google Docs and was analyzed carefully.

The research questions which guide this research are:

How do students perceive the use of ChatGPT for learning purposes?

What are the potential benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in educational contexts?

How do students perceive the usefulness of ChatGPT in their learning process?

4. Results

The main data collection method was a student questionnaire. The aim of the

student questionnaire was to gather insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards the use of ChatGPT for learning purposes and their usefulness.

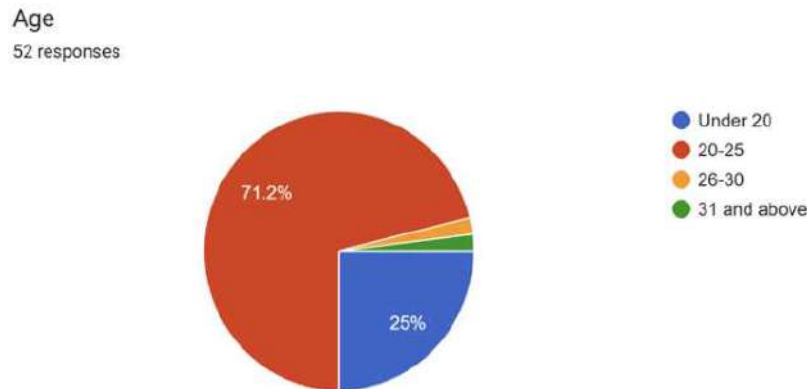


Figure 1: Participants' age

The results in Figure 1 show that 71.2% of the participants are between 20-25 years old, 25% are under 20 years old and the remaining participants are above 26 years old. These findings suggest that the study mainly accounts for a youthful demographic, which may influence the perspectives and experiences shared regarding the research topic.

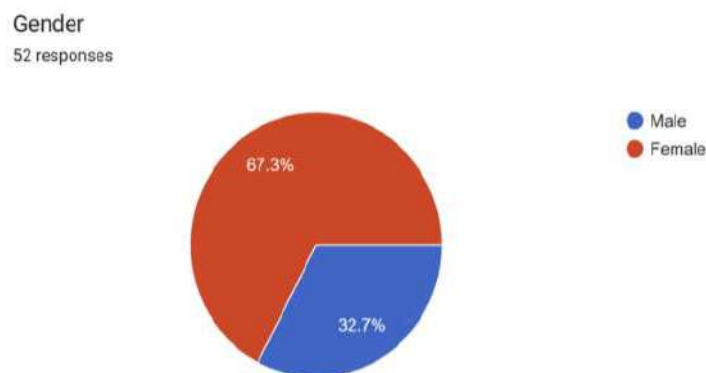


Figure 2: Participants' Gender

The results in Figure 2 show that out of the total number of the study participants 67.3% are female students and 32.7% are male students. The findings reveal a gender imbalance among the participants, with a higher proportion of female students, which is typical for language studies students' gender.

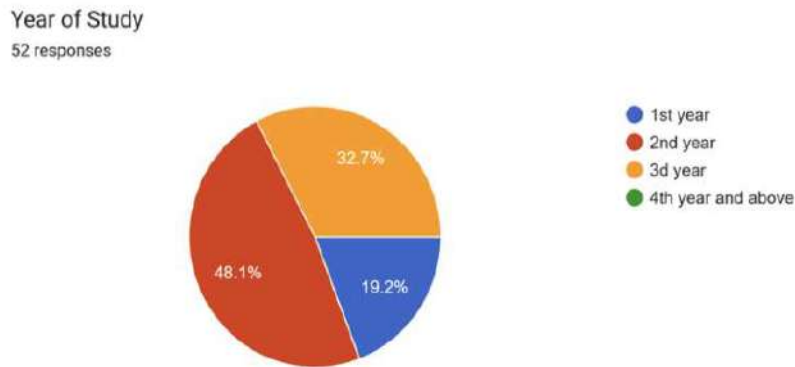


Figure 3: Year of study

Building on the findings from Figure 3, the results indicate that 48.1% are second year students, 32.7% are third year students and 19.2% are first year students. This distribution suggests that the study may primarily reflect the perspectives and experiences of students who are more advanced in their academic journey.

Part 2: Students' general awareness of ChatGPT

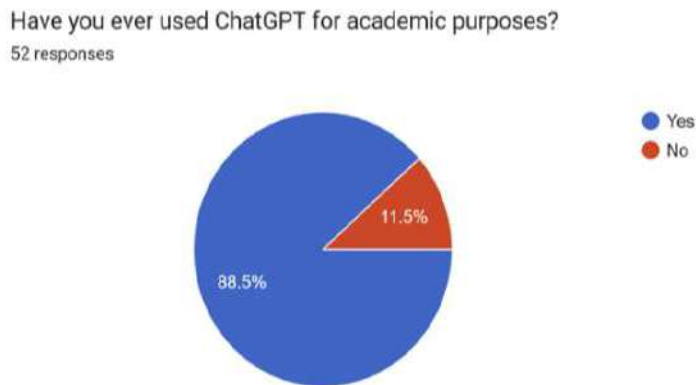


Figure 4: General use of ChatGPT

Analysing the results of Figure 4, it can be concluded that 88.5% of the participants have used ChatGPT for academic purposes while only 11.5% have not used it. These findings suggest a strong trend towards integrating AI into the academic routines of students, which could have significant implications for future teaching methodologies and learning strategies.

If yes, how often do you use ChatGPT for your studies?

52 responses

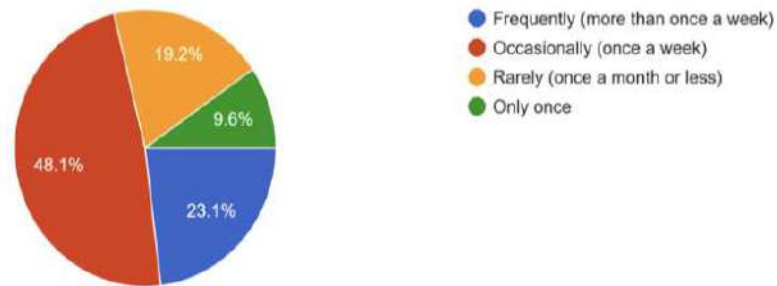


Figure 5: Frequency of ChatGPT use

Based on Figure 5 results, it can be concluded that 23.1% of the participants use ChatGPT frequently, 48.1 % of them use it occasionally, 19.2% of them rarely use it and 9.6% reported to have used it only once. These results highlight the diverse engagement levels with ChatGPT, which could be influenced by different factors.

How would you describe your understanding of how ChatGPT works?

52 responses

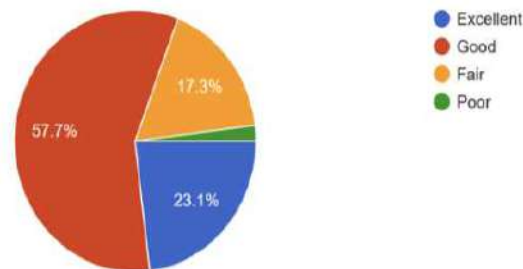


Figure 6. Understanding of how ChatGPT works

Building on the results in Figure 6, it is indicated that 23.1% of the participants have excellent knowledge of how ChatGPT really works, 57.7% have good knowledge, 17.3% fair and only 1.9% have poor knowledge. These findings suggest that the students now only use ChatGPT but they are familiar with its capabilities which could lead to more effective and responsible usage.

Part 3: Perceived usefulness of ChatGPT

a. ChatGPT helps me understand complex topics in my Studies.

52 responses

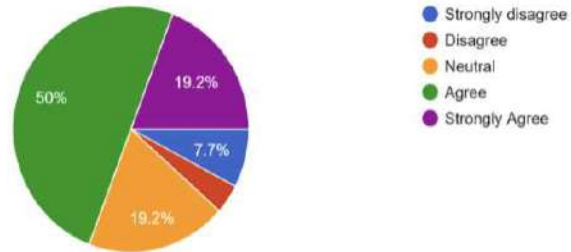


Figure 7:Perceived usefulness of ChatGPT

The findings in Figure 7 show that the majority of participants find ChatGPT helpful in understanding complex topics, with 69.3% agreeing to some extent. Half of the participants (50%) agree, and 19.3% strongly agree. However, there is still a small percentage (3.8%) who strongly disagrees, and 7.7% disagree, suggesting that, for some students, ChatGPT may not be as effective in helping them grasp difficult concepts. The neutrality of 19.2% of participants suggests that while ChatGPT might be beneficial for many, its impact may vary depending on individual needs or expectations.

b. ChatGPT improves my writing skills in English.

52 responses

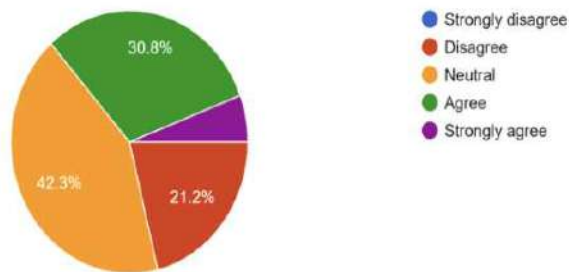


Figure 8: Improvement of writing skills

Figure 8 findings show that 21.2 % of the participants disagree that ChatGPT helps them to improve their writing skills, 42.3% are neutral, while 30.8% of the participants agree, and only a small 5.7% strongly agree. The data highlights the need for more targeted guidance on how to integrate generative AI tools effectively into educational practices to maximize their benefits for student learning.

c. ChatGPT is a reliable source of information.
52 responses

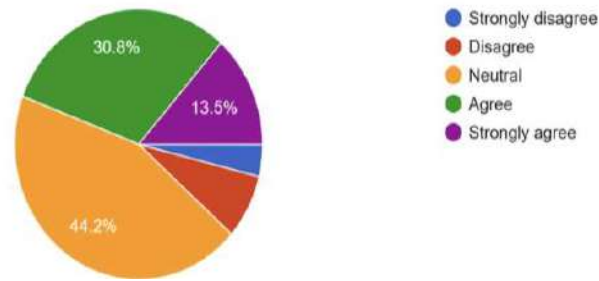


Figure 9: ChatGPT reliability

Building on the results in Figure 9, it can be seen that 13.5% of the participants indicated that they strongly agree that ChatGPT is a reliable source of information, 30.8% agree, which accounts for almost half of them, 44.2% are neutral. On the other hand, 7% of them disagree and only 4.5% strongly disagree. These findings suggest that while a significant number of users recognize the potential of ChatGPT as a reliable information source, there is still a considerable level of scepticism among the participants.

d. ChatGPT saves time when working on assignments.
52 responses

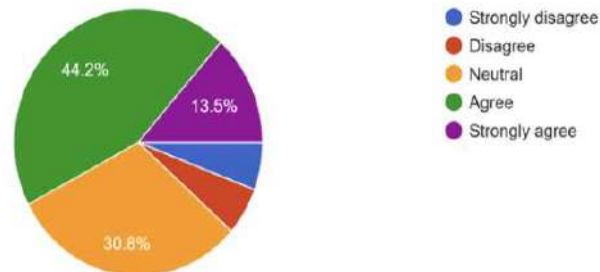


Figure 10: Time spent on assignments

Analysing the results in Figure 10, we note that the participants gave different responses. 13.5% of them strongly agree that ChatGPT saves time when working on assignments, 44.2% agree on this, 30.8% are neutral; 5% disagree and 9.6% of them strongly disagree on this statement. These results suggest a generally positive outlook on ChatGPT's ability to enhance productivity by saving time.

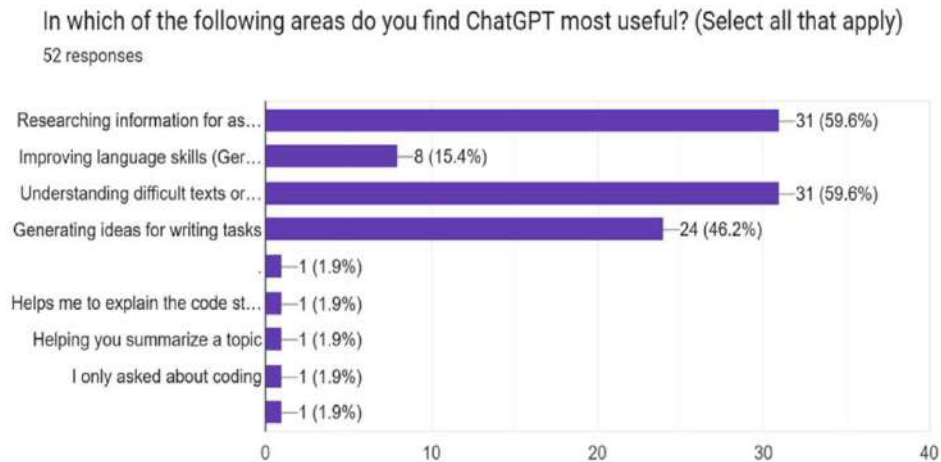


Figure 11:Usefulness of areas

Based on the results presented in Figure 11, 59.6% of the participants reported that they find ChatGPT to be most useful for researching information, similarly, another 59.6% reported to understand difficult texts while 46.2% of them find it most useful to generate ideas for writing tasks. Yet, only 15.4% indicated ChatGPT to be useful for improving language skills. Overall, the data indicate that the participants perceived its usefulness to support research and comprehension particularly in terms of accessing information and simplifying complex texts. However, it is less recognized in developing language skills.

Part 4: Challenges and concerns in using ChatGPT

a. ChatGPT's responses are not always accurate or relevant.

52 responses

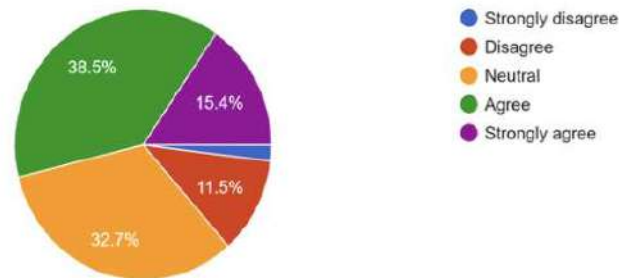


Figure 12: Relevance of ChatGPT responses

Based on Figure 12 results, it is evidenced that 15.4% of the participants strongly agree that ChatGPT responses are not always accurate or relevant, 38.5% agree, 32.7% are neutral, on the other hand, 11.5% perceive the responses of ChatGPT not to be always accurate or relevant. Overall, while ChatGPT is valued for its

convenience and versatility, these findings suggest that users should approach its outputs with caution, ensuring a critical review process to maximize its benefits while minimizing the risk of misinformation.

b. ChatGPT makes me over-reliant on technology for my studies.

52 responses

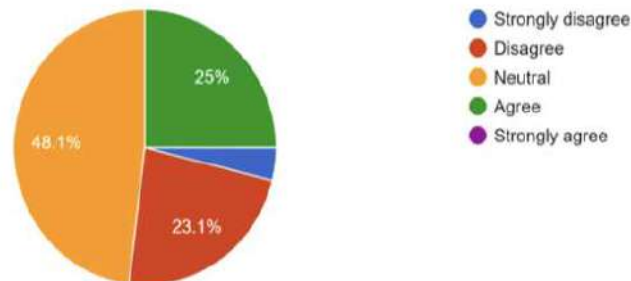


Figure 13: Technology over-reliance

Building on the results of Figure 13, it is evident that 25% participants agree that ChatGPT makes them over-reliant on technology for their study purposes, 48.1% are neutral while 23.1% disagree and a small percent of the participants 3.8% strongly disagree. The data imply that users need to strike a balance in integrating AI tools into their learning process, ensuring they enhance rather than replace independent academic skills.

c. Using ChatGPT hinders my critical thinking skills.

52 responses

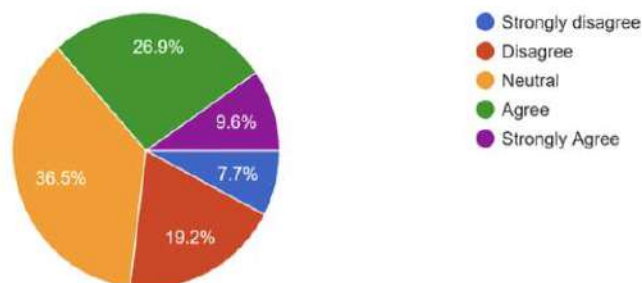


Figure 14: Opinions on critical thinking

Looking at the results presented in Figure 14, one can conclude that 9.6% of the participants strongly agree that ChatGPT hinders their critical thinking, 26.9% agree with it, 36.5% are neutral. However, data show that 19.2% disagree that it hinders critical thinking and 7.7% strongly disagree. The mixed responses likely point to the fact that ChatGPT's impact on critical thinking depends on how it is

used. When used accurately, it may enhance learning, but if over-relied upon, it could risk reducing the effort required for deeper analysis and independent thought.

d. I am concerned about potential ethical issues related to the use of AI tools like ChatGPT.

52 responses

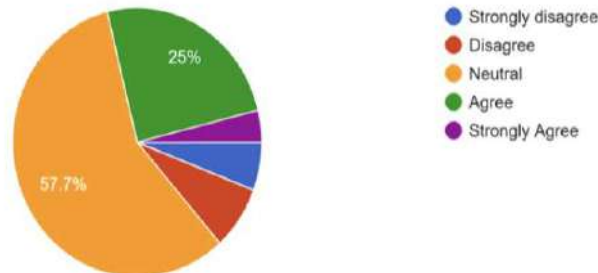


Figure 15: Potential ethical issues

Building on the results presented in Figure 15, it can be concluded that only 3% of the participants strongly agree that he/she is concerned with ethical issues related to the use of ChatGPT, 25% of them agree, surprisingly 57.7% are neutral for this issue. However, 8% of them disagree and 6.5% strongly disagree. The data could reflect a lack of awareness of the ethical implications, or it may indicate that students perceive the tool's benefits as outweighing the potential ethical risks.

Part 5: Challenges faced

What challenges do you face when using ChatGPT? (Select all that apply)

52 responses

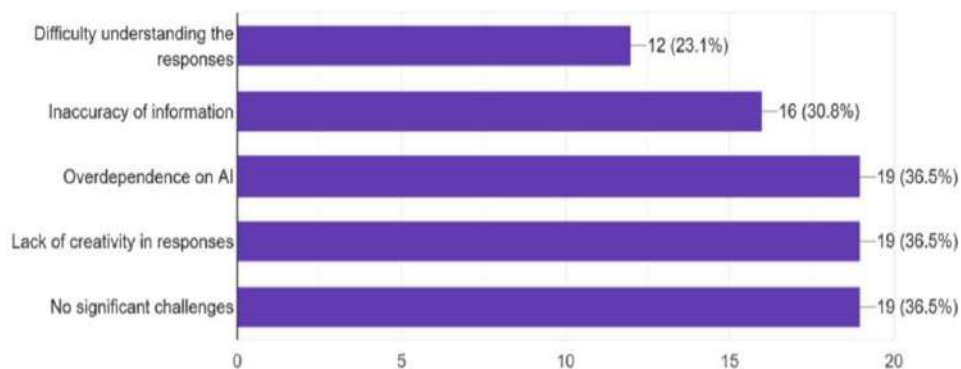


Figure 16: Challenges faced using ChatGPT

Figure 16 results show that 23.1% of participants expressed difficulty in understanding the responses provided by ChatGPT. Additionally, 30.8% of participants expressed doubts about the accuracy of the information provided.

Furthermore, 36.5% of participants indicated that ChatGPT could lead to overdependence on AI and a lack of creativity in responses, while another 36.5% reported seeing no significant challenges. These results highlight the importance of using ChatGPT wisely but as an additional tool rather than to replace independent thinking and creativity, and that all users remain vigilant about verifying the accuracy of AI-generated content.

Part 6: Future Use and Recommendations

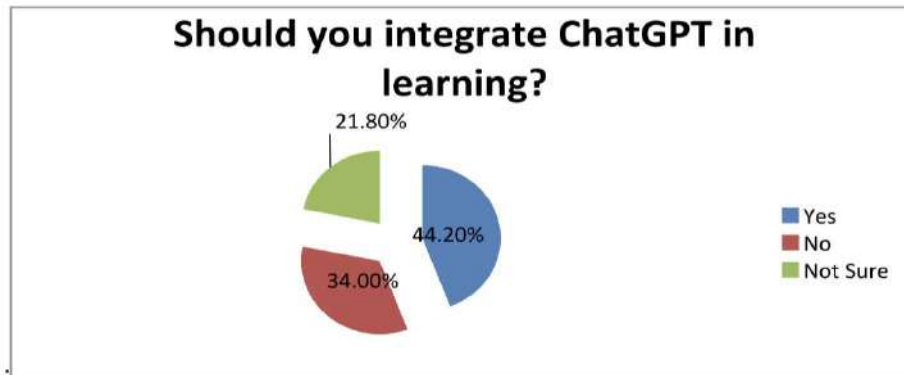


Figure 17: Opinions on future use of ChatGPT

The data presented in Figure 17, 44.2% of the participants indicate that see value in using ChatGPT for learning, suggesting a positive perception of its potential benefits. However, a significant 34.0 % does not recommend it, possibly due to concerns over its limitations or effectiveness in academic contexts. The remaining 21.8% are uncertain, highlighting a degree of ambivalence or lack of clarity regarding the tool's impact on learning. These results suggest that while ChatGPT is regarded positively by many, its widespread adoption in educational settings may depend on addressing concerns and ensuring that its use aligns with effective learning practices.

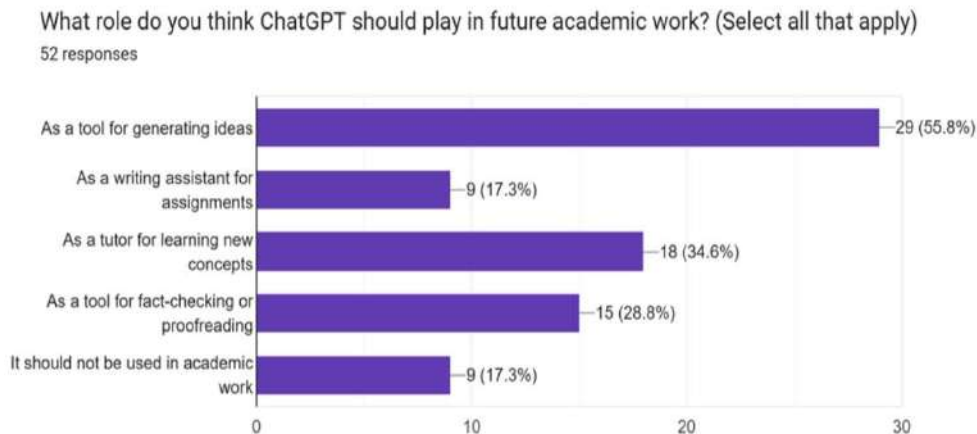


Figure 18: The role of ChatGPT in the future

Analyzing the results presented in Figure 18, 55.8% of participants believe that ChatGPT should be used in academic work as a tool for generating ideas, 34.6% view it as a tutor for learning new concepts, 28.8% find it useful for fact-checking and proofreading, and 17.3% consider it a writing assistant for assignments. However, 17.3% of participants indicated that ChatGPT should not be used in academic work at all. These findings highlight that while there is strong support for using ChatGPT in certain academic tasks, its acceptance may vary depending on the specific function and different users' attitudes toward AI in education.

Conclusion

This study examined students' awareness and experiences with ChatGPT in academic work, highlighting its benefits and challenges. While students frequently use ChatGPT, many lack a deep understanding of how it functions and question its effectiveness in aiding complex problem-solving, improving writing skills, or serving as a fully reliable information source. The tool is generally perceived as helpful for understanding challenging topics, though opinions on its effectiveness vary, reflecting individual learning preferences. Participants value ChatGPT for generating ideas, fact-checking, proofreading, and learning new concepts, yet concerns about over-reliance, misinformation, and reduced critical thinking persist. Ethical issues, such as the accuracy and reliability of AI-generated content, and the risk of stifling creativity, further underscore the need for cautious integration. While some students view ChatGPT as a productivity-enhancing resource, others are skeptical about its broader educational utility. The findings suggest that ChatGPT should complement, not replace, independent thinking and creativity. As its adoption in education grows, regular feedback from students and educators will be essential to refine its use and ensure it meets diverse learning needs. Future research should explore ways to optimize ChatGPT for areas like language skill development and expand its potential across educational contexts.

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INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR CRITICAL THINKING: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL GAMES AND CONCEPT CHECKING QUESTIONS IN MOROCCO

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Abstract: *This research examines the impact of educational games and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs) on the enhancement of critical thinking abilities in middle school pupils in Morocco. The study, conducted at TAZI School in Casablanca, compared two student groups: one group experienced new teaching strategies, such as educational games and CCQs, while the other got conventional instruction. The findings indicated that students using educational games and Concept Checking Questions exhibited notable improvement in their critical thinking skills, whereas those in the conventional training cohort saw a deterioration. These results emphasize the need to use interactive, student-centered pedagogical approaches to improve cognitive development and engagement in Moroccan education. The research emphasizes the possibility of using creative and inquiry-based methodologies, such as educational games and Concept Checking Questions, to enhance critical thinking among middle school students, providing significant insights for educators seeking to refine classroom procedures.*

Keywords: *educational games, concept checking questions (CCQs), critical thinking abilities*

1. Introduction

Critical thinking is universally acknowledged as an essential talent that students must possess to effectively traverse the intricacies of the 21st century. It encompasses the capacity to examine data, make logical judgments, and devise innovative solutions to problems. Developing critical thinking abilities is crucial in Moroccan middle schools to provide pupils with the necessary skills to tackle academic and real-life obstacles. Nevertheless, conventional instructional techniques sometimes fail to adequately cultivate these abilities, underscoring the want for inventive ways.

Recent educational research has examined many approaches to improve critical thinking, with a notable emphasis on the utilization of educational games. These interactive tools facilitate student engagement in learning tasks that necessitate problem-solving and decision-making, therefore fostering the development of critical thinking skills. Research has demonstrated that these games can establish a captivating educational setting that stimulates pupils and improves their cognitive abilities. Nevertheless, most of this research has been carried out in Western contexts, resulting in a lack of comprehension regarding their influence on Moroccan educational environments.

Empirical research has shown that the utilization of educational games in different educational settings leads to favorable results. For instance, Papastergiou's (2009) study revealed that educational games had a substantial impact on enhancing high school students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to a study by Tobias, Fletcher, and Wind (2014), educational games were found to improve cognitive skills and increase engagement among middle school pupils. The results indicate that educational games have the potential to improve critical thinking abilities. However, most of the studies on this topic have been carried out in Western environments, which limits our knowledge of their effects in non-Western settings, like Morocco.

Despite a growing collection of literature on games for education, there is a dearth of research on their impact on critical thinking skills in middle schools in Morocco. Classical Moroccan education has been dependent on the memorization of information through repetition and instruction that is centered around the teacher, which has failed to effectively foster the development of critical thinking skills. Considering Morocco's unique cultural and educational context, it is paramount to investigate the potential incorporation of educational games into the curriculum. The objective of this integration is to foster the growth of critical thinking skills in middle school students.

The primary objective of this sort of experimental research is to investigate the impact of educational activities on the development of critical thinking skills among middle school pupils in Morocco. The objective of this research is to compare the outcomes of students who receive traditional instruction with those who are exposed to educational activities to provide insights into successful instructional methods that can be implemented in Moroccan educational environments.

The study implemented a quasi-experimental design that covered pre-and post-tests to achieve this objective. The participants were divided into two separate groups. One group was given instruction using instructional games, while the other cohort received conventional instruction and functioned as the control group. The objective of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of educational games by evaluating the ability to think critically of students both before and following the intervention. The primary question driving this investigation is: What is the influence of educational games and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs) on the enhancement of critical thinking abilities in middle school pupils from Morocco?

2. Literature Review

There has been a growing emphasis in educational research on the significance of cultivating critical thinking abilities in students. Essential for students to effectively examine information, make reasoned decisions, and solve issues, critical thinking is the capacity to engage in reflective and autonomous thinking. It is widely regarded as an essential component of a high-quality education, as it provides pupils with the necessary abilities to navigate a constantly evolving and intricate environment. Although traditional education systems, like those in Morocco, are widely acknowledged as important, there is a rising worry that they are not effectively developing these abilities in pupils.

An effective method for improving critical thinking skills and academic achievement is the utilization of educational games [(Alfaro-Ponce et al., 2023) (Turner et al., 2018) (Turner et al., 2018) (Bosma et al., 2020) (Flach et al., 2012) (Mao et al.,

2021) (Clegg et al., 2014)]. Educational games are interactive instruments that include students in learning activities that require problem-solving, decision-making, and strategic thinking. Studies have demonstrated that these games can establish an immersive and stimulating educational setting, which is essential for cultivating analytical reasoning abilities. (Gee, 2003) and (Prensky, 2003) conducted studies that demonstrate how educational games may replicate real-world situations, prompting students to engage in critical thinking and apply their knowledge in practical settings. These studies highlight the capacity of instructional games to enhance higher-order thinking skills.

What is more, the development of students' critical thinking skills is significantly influenced by CCQs, which ensure a profound comprehension of concepts, foster analytical thinking, and encourage problem-solving. Educators can evaluate the extent to which students understand the fundamental components of a subject by posing specific questions, thereby enabling them to engage with the material more deeply and surpass basic understanding (Brown, 2014). CCQs encourage students to assess their comprehension, apply concepts in a variety of contexts, and consider alternative viewpoints, thereby promoting critical thinking and an open-minded approach (Harmer, 2008). These questions also facilitate the development of problem-solving skills by encouraging students to implement their knowledge in practical situations and to think critically (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Additionally, the integration of CCQs into classroom activities fosters student engagement and active learning, thereby fostering a more analytical and reflective learning approach (Nunan, 1999). In general, CCQs are indispensable instruments for improving students' capacity to engage with intricate concepts and think critically.

Furthermore, empirical research has shown that the utilization of instructional games in different educational settings leads to favorable results. For instance, a study conducted by (Papastergiou, 2009) discovered that educational games had a substantial positive impact on the critical thinking and problem-solving skills of high school students. According to a study conducted by (Tobias et al., 2014), educational games were found to improve cognitive skills and increase engagement among middle school pupils. The findings indicate that educational games have the potential to effectively improve critical thinking skills. However, much of the research in this area has been carried out in Western settings, which creates a lack of knowledge on their influence in non-Western contexts, such as Morocco.

Furthermore, aside from the overall advantages of educational games, there have been specialized research studies conducted to investigate their influence on different cognitive abilities. For instance, a study (Annetta et al., 2009) discovered that the utilization of educational games resulted in enhanced scientific reasoning and critical thinking skills among middle school pupils. In a meta-analysis undertaken by (Wouters et al., 2013) , it was found that students who played educational games saw notable enhancements in cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking. These studies offer strong evidence supporting the cognitive advantages of instructional games.

Although these studies show promise, research is scarce on the effects of educational games in the Moroccan school setting. The Moroccan education system has historically prioritized the practice of rote learning and memorization, which failed to successfully cultivate critical thinking abilities. Introducing educational games has the potential to revolutionize the learning environment by

increasing engagement and fostering the development of advanced cognitive skills. This study seeks to fill this void by examining the influence of educational games on the development of critical thinking abilities in Moroccan middle school pupils.

Moreover, the importance of this study is in its capacity to offer empirical proof regarding the efficacy of educational games in a non-Western setting. Due to the scarcity of research on this subject in Morocco, this study aims to make a valuable addition to the expanding corpus of literature on innovative pedagogical approaches. The study intends to offer practical recommendations to educators in Moroccan middle schools on efficiently implementing educational games to promote critical thinking skills in pupils.

Prior studies have predominantly concentrated on educational contexts in the Western world, resulting in a lack of comprehension regarding the adaptation and implementation of instructional games in many cultural environments. (Anderson & Barnett, 2013) investigated the utilization of educational games in scientific education in the United States, whereas (Kebritchi et al., 2010) analysed their influence on mathematics learning in American schools. These studies emphasize the necessity of doing research that considers cultural and educational variations in various contexts. This study seeks to address this deficiency by examining the influence of educational games on Moroccan middle school pupils.

Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the tangible difficulties and potential advantages linked to the incorporation of educational games into the Moroccan curriculum. According to a study conducted by (Wu et al., 2012), the effective integration of educational games into the learning process necessitates a thorough examination of elements such as teacher preparation, alignment with the curriculum, and student involvement. This study seeks to examine the aspects involved in effectively integrating educational games into Moroccan middle schools to promote critical thinking skills.

In conclusion, the integration of educational activities is an effective way to enhance the critical thinking skills of students. While previous research has demonstrated the potential of these strategies when implemented individually, there is a dearth of studies that investigate their impact in the educational context of Morocco. The purpose of this research is to examine the incorporation of educational games as a method of improving the critical thinking abilities of middle school students in Morocco. The objective of this research is to improve educational practices and student outcomes in Morocco by providing empirical evidence and concrete recommendations.

3. Methodology

The study used a pre-test and post-test methodology to evaluate the critical thinking abilities of Moroccan middle school students. The pre-test assessed students' skills before the intervention, while the post-test measured any improvements after the intervention. The researcher analysed the scores using paired t-tests using SPSS software. This allowed comparison of average critical thinking scores between the pre-test and post-test stages in both control and experimental groups. The analysis provided insights into the effectiveness of the educational intervention, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of educational games on critical thinking.

In addition, a group of fifteen second-grade students were selected for Test-Retest piloting (Thabane et al., 2010), and they were given pre- and post-test evaluations that followed the same format as the main test used in the study. The initial phase had a duration of twenty days and played a crucial role in verifying the reliability and validity of the test tool. The utilization of a representative sample resulted in enhanced evaluation consistency over a period of time (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, 2007). The test's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, indicating a strong level of internal consistency. The test's validity was confirmed through pilot testing conducted. The high values of Cronbach's Alpha indicate that the results obtained are reliable and accurate, as demonstrated below:

Table 1. Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	15	100,0
	Excluded ^a	0	,0
	Total	15	100,0

The analysis covered a total of 15 cases, which accounted for the entire dataset. All cases were included in the analysis, as evidenced by a 0% exclusion rate. Therefore, the dataset consists of a total of 15 instances, representing the whole data set at 100%. This signifies that all data points were deemed legitimate and utilized in the analysis. The application of listwise deletion, which involves removing cases with missing data across all variables, guaranteed that the results were not influenced by any missing data.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,979	2

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the scale is 0.979, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The high alpha value suggests a good correlation among the items, indicating that they measure the same underlying construct with high reliability. The scale's outstanding reliability guarantees the production of consistent and predictable results. The high level of internal consistency highlights the scale's efficacy in precisely measuring the intended concept. The scale's measures are supported by this high level of reliability, which enhances its strength and credibility.

The experimental study carried out at TAZI School in Casablanca, Morocco, followed rigorous ethical requirements throughout its implementation. The teacher-researcher acquired formal permission from the school to conduct the study and took measures to prioritize privacy and anonymity, while also protecting the respect, rights, and safety of all participants. The ethical considerations of the study encompassed not just its design, but also the collecting, storage, and analysis of data, demonstrating a commitment to the highest levels of professionalism and honesty. In addition, the teacher-researcher was diligent in avoiding any bias or personal tendencies during the intervention, thereby upholding educational ethics.

The adherence to ethical principles not only upheld the fundamental values of research ethics but also reinforced the reliability as well as credibility of the academic results in the field of education. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study made a major contribution to the credibility of the educational research domain.

Participants

Table 3. Sample of the study

Group	Total Students	Girls	Boys	Proficiency Level
Experimental	25	16	9	Pre-intermediate to Intermediate
Control	25	14	11	Pre-intermediate to Intermediate

The study had a total of 50 middle school pupils, with an equal distribution of twenty-five students in both the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group consisted of 16 female and 9 male participants who were exposed to a treatment involving educational games aimed at improving their critical thinking skills. The control group, consisting of 14 female and 11 male participants, received traditional instruction without the use of educational games. Both groups had skill levels that ranged from pre-intermediate to intermediate, ensuring a comparable starting point for evaluating the effectiveness of the instructional methods. The assignment of students to groups was determined by their existing school plans and intact classroom setups, to maintain the natural educational environment while fulfilling the institution's educational goals and limitations.

Procedure

This investigation entailed the allocation of second-year pupils from Tazi Middle School in Casablanca, Morocco, to an experimental group and a control group. Prior to the intervention, each participant completed a pre-test to evaluate their critical thinking abilities. The experimental group was administered a treatment that involved educational puzzles, which necessitated students to solve problems using the hints provided by the teacher. These puzzles were derived from the Portal English manual and were specifically designed for their level. Additionally, they were provided with puzzles from the story of "Huck Finn" by Mark Twain. The puzzles necessitated students to analyse the events of the narrative and vocabulary items, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, thereby enhancing their analytical and problem-solving abilities.

The teacher-researcher implemented a variety of strategies during the intervention, with a particular emphasis on *Concept Checking Questions*. To foster the development of students' analytical abilities, CCQs were implemented to necessitate a profound comprehension, analysis, and application of concepts, as opposed to the casual memorization of information. In the meantime, the control group was provided with conventional instruction. The treatment was administered for a single semester, during which students in both groups were required to study for three hours each week.

4. Results

The findings of the study are significant in that they demonstrate the influence of educational games on the development of critical thinking skills among Moroccan middle school students, with a particular emphasis on the function of CCQs in the educational processes. To evaluate the intervention's efficacy, the analysis employed paired t-tests to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups. The descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores of the control and treatment groups are presented in the following Table:

Table 4. Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pretest_C	12,04	25	2,010	,402
Posttest_C	11,80	25	1,871	,374
Pair 2 Pretest_E	11,40	25	2,291	,458
Posttest_E	15,92	25	2,290	,458

The control group showed a minor decline in critical thinking skills, while the experimental group showed a significant enhancement, with a mean pre-test score of 11.40 and a post-test score of 15.92, indicating that the guided intervention positively impacted their critical thinking abilities. The results of the paired samples t-tests are summarized in the following Table:

Table 5. Paired Samples Test

Table 1. Paired Sample t-Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest Posttest Control Group	,240	,970	,194	-,160	,640	1,238	24	,228
Pair 2	Pretest Posttest Experimental Group	-4,520	2,801	,560	-5,676	-3,364	-8,070	24	,000

The study found that the control group showed no significant improvement in critical thinking skills, while the experimental group showed a significant improvement, with a mean difference of -4.520 between pre-test and post-test

scores, indicating a significant improvement in critical thinking skills. This suggests that the experimental group's skills were significantly improved.

The results were significantly influenced by the incorporation of CCQs into the educational activities. To guarantee that students comprehended the concepts elucidated in the games, CCQs were implemented. CCQs facilitated a more profound understanding and cultivated critical thinking by mandating that students analyse and apply their knowledge. CCQs substantially contributed to the observed improvements in the experimental group's scores by facilitating students' critical engagement with the material, thereby improving their problem-solving abilities.

In general, the experimental group's significant improvement emphasizes the efficacy of integrating educational activities with CCQs to promote critical thinking. The critical thinking skills of the control group, which did not receive this interactive component, failed to show any substantial alterations. This emphasizes the additional value of CCQs in the educational games' intervention, which illustrates their influence on the improvement of students' critical thinking abilities and the encouragement of the efficacy of innovative teaching methods in Moroccan middle schools.

5. Discussion

In recent years, there has been an increasing acceptance regarding the significance of critical thinking skills for students, particularly as they navigate the complex realities of the modern world. The present study aimed to investigate the influence of educational games on these abilities in the context of Moroccan middle schools, with a particular emphasis on whether this method could improve students' capacity to think critically and solve problems more efficiently.

The study found that the development of critical thinking skills among Moroccan middle school pupils is significantly enhanced by the combination of educational games and CCQs. The experimental group, which participated in educational games as part of their learning activities, displayed a significant improvement in their critical thinking abilities in comparison to the control group, which received conventional instruction. This outcome is in accordance with prior research that has demonstrated the efficacy of educational games in enhancing student engagement and cognitive abilities (Papastergiou, 2009; Tobias, Fletcher, & Wind, 2014; Wouters et al., 2013).

The potential of educational games to establish an interactive and stimulating learning environment is emphasized by the substantial increase in the post-test scores of the experimental group in comparison to their pre-test scores. The result is consistent with the research conducted by (Bosma et al., 2020) which underscores the advantages of incorporating educational games into teaching practices. The experimental group's results, which showed a mean post-test score of 15.92 compared to 11.40 in the pre-test, underscore the efficacy of this pedagogical approach in improving critical thinking abilities.

Furthermore, the integration of CCQs was instrumental in strengthening the advantages of educational games. Those questions are intended to evaluate and enhance students' comprehension of the subject matter, thereby encouraging a more reflective and analytical approach to learning (Brown, 2014; Harmer, 2008). The results of this study indicate that CCQs not only guaranteed students'

understanding of the game content but also promoted a more profound involvement with the material.

In contrast, the control group, which received no advantage from the interactive and engaging nature of instructional games or the structured use of CCQs, exhibited only a slight decline in critical thinking skills over the same period. This emphasizes the constraints of conventional instructional methods in the development of higher-order thinking skills and demonstrates the necessity of innovative educational strategies.

In a non-Western context, such as Morocco, where traditional pedagogical methods have predominated, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the implementation of educational games and CCQs. The positive results that have been observed indicate that the integration of these tools into the Moroccan curriculum has the potential to considerably improve the critical thinking skills of students. This is especially pertinent considering the Moroccan education system's historical prevalence of rote learning and memorization, which have been demonstrated to be less effective in the development of critical thinking skills.

In general, the results suggest that educational games and CCQs have the potential to revolutionize the learning experience in Moroccan middle schools, providing a promising alternative to conventional teaching methods. These tools can assist students in the acquisition of critical thinking skills that are essential for their academic and personal success by promoting a more interactive and reflective learning environment.

This study highlights the potential of incorporating educational games and CCQs into Moroccan middle school curriculums to improve critical thinking abilities. By incorporating games and CCQs, teachers can create an interactive learning environment, focusing on problem-solving and decision-making activities. This approach enhances the dynamic nature of learning and encourages cognitive development. The study suggests that traditional instructional methods may not adequately develop critical thinking skills, highlighting the need for innovative teaching methods. The study suggests that educators and policymakers should consider integrating educational games and CCQs into a comprehensive approach to improve students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

This study explores the potential of educational games and CCQs in enhancing student engagement and critical thinking. It suggests that these tools promote active learning, creative thinking, and analytical problem-solving. The study's implications apply to Morocco's educational environment, where conventional teaching methods are becoming less effective. The study suggests a shift towards interactive, student-centred teaching practices to improve academic performance and equip students with the necessary skills for the modern world. Adopting these strategies can lead to a more effective and enjoyable learning experience for students.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the present study illustrates that Moroccan middle school students' critical thinking abilities are substantially improved by educational games and CCQs. These results are noteworthy because they offer evidence of effective pedagogical strategies that can be incorporated into educational practices to promote critical thinking. The research has several limitations, despite the

promising results. The study's brief duration and the sample size of 50 students may not be reflective of the broader population, which restricts the evaluation of long-term impacts. In addition, the findings' generalizability may be impacted by the fact that the research was limited to a specific school. To assess the long-term effects, future research should evaluate larger, more diverse samples and extend the intervention period. The integration of qualitative methodologies, such as student interviews, could offer a more profound understanding of the impact of educational games and CCQs on critical thinking. This study underscores the significance of integrating innovative pedagogical strategies to improve critical thinking skills for curriculum designers, policymakers, and teachers. The integration of these methods into the curriculum can have a substantial impact on the cognitive development of students and their readiness for complex problem-solving in a variety of contexts.

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EXPANDING HORIZONS: THE ROLE OF KOREAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES PROGRAMS FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *This article examines the possibility of teaching Asian languages—specifically Korean—within the framework of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) in Romania, particularly for business communication. As Romania's economic ties with East Asian countries continues to strengthen, there is a growing demand for professionals equipped with both linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding to navigate these partnerships effectively. The article begins with a literature review on LSP, highlighting global trends in Asian language learning and existing research in Romania. It discusses the benefits of cultural competence in business and the competitive advantages that language proficiency can provide in the global market. By proposing a conceptual framework for implementing Korean LSP programs, this article highlights how these initiatives can enhance Romania's workforce competitiveness, foster deeper business relationships, and strengthen the country's position in the global economy. The findings aim to serve as a foundation for future empirical research and practical applications in language education.*

Keywords: *Language for Specific Purposes (LSP); Asian languages; Business communication; Business Korean; Cultural competence; Professional language training*

1. Introduction

The globalized nature of today's economy requires a workforce that is proficient in multiple languages, particularly those that dominate the global market. While English has long been the lingua franca of international business, there is an increasing demand for proficiency in less conventional languages such as Korean, Chinese, and Japanese. This demand is driven by the economic rise of East Asian countries and their growing influence in global trade and business. For countries like Romania, where traditional language education has focused on European languages, such as English, French, German, languages that we traditionally consider to be lingua francas as far as day-to-day or business communication is concerned, there is a unique opportunity to expand the scope of language education to include Asian languages through programs that emphasize Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), and not only.

Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is an approach to language teaching that focuses on the specific linguistic skills needed in professional and academic contexts. Unlike general language education, LSP programs are tailored to the needs of specific fields such as business, medicine, law, tourism, engineering, and so on. The importance of LSP is increasingly recognized in a world where professionals are expected to not only communicate effectively in a second language but also navigate complex cultural situations and industry-specific terminology and jargon. In this regard, the inclusion of Asian languages like Korean, Chinese, and Japanese in LSP programs can provide Romanian students and professionals with significant advantages.

This article aims to explore the importance of teaching Korean for specific purposes in Romania, with a particular focus on business communication. The relevance of this topic is supported by Romania's growing economic ties with East Asian countries. According to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.mae.ro>), Romania has been expanding its trade relations with China, South Korea, and Japan over the past decade, making proficiency in these languages, and cultural proficiency, increasingly valuable for Romanian businesses and professionals. Furthermore, understanding the cultural nuances of these countries is crucial for building successful business relationships.

By investigating these aspects, this article seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the importance of Korean, and other Asian languages in LSP programs, particularly in the context of business communication in Romania. We argue that such initiatives could greatly increase the employability of Romanian graduates, promote economic growth, and strengthen Romania's position in the global market.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and documented trends to explore the possible role of Korean language instruction within Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs in Romania. The qualitative nature of this research is justified by the need to provide a conceptual framework and theoretical foundation for future empirical studies and practical implementations.

In our paper we adopted a descriptive and analytical methodology grounded in the following key elements:

- a. Literature review as a primary method, as the study tries to draw upon a wide range of scholarly works, reports, and documented practices related to the teaching of Korean and other Asian languages within LSP frameworks, as well as global trends in business communication and cultural competence. The literature was selected based on its relevance to LSP education principles (e.g., Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), cultural competence in business contexts (e.g., Sung, 2015; Debaty, 2022) and existing language education practices in Romania (e.g., Han, 2019; Dragan, 2018).

- b. Case examples and contextual analysis in order to contextualize the findings. Real-world examples of Romanian businesses engaging with South Korean partners are referenced. These cases illustrate the practical applications of Korean language proficiency and cultural competence in business scenarios. We gathered real-life data on economic relationships between Romania and South Korea, on institutional capacity of Asian language programs and case studies and references to educational initiatives.

This paper is a qualitative study aimed at providing a conceptual framework for future empirical research, therefore it is focusing on the analysis of existing literature and documented trends in LSP to explore the role of Korean language instruction within such programs in Romania. Qualitative research is characterized by its emphasis on understanding complex phenomena through in-depth examination and interpretation of non-numerical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:282). Unlike quantitative methods that rely on statistical analysis, qualitative research seeks to provide rich, contextual insights into the subject matter by analyzing texts, case studies, and existing practices. Thus, this study applies a descriptive and analytical framework, grounded in Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) LSP model and supported by principles from Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) work on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). We tried to deliver a systematic review of LSP education principles, cultural competence in business contexts and existing language education practices in Romania, whilst analysing trends and statistics.

2.2. Scope and Limitations

Since our study focuses on laying the groundwork for implementing Korean language programs tailored to business communication in Romania, and it is a qualitative study, its primary goal is to explore existing research, identify gaps, and propose practical recommendations. Thus, a limitation, and one that we are hoping to address in future studies, is the lack of data collected through surveys, interviews, or other direct forms of research. Instead, we relied on analysing what's already available, such as academic articles, reports, and real-world examples of Romanian businesses engaging with South Korean partners. By doing this, we aimed to provide a detailed and insightful understanding of how Korean language instruction could be integrated into Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs. The study is designed to offer a conceptual framework and a strategic blueprint that future researchers, educators, and policymakers can build upon.

Another limitation is that the study focuses primarily on business communication as the target context for Korean language instruction. There may be other professional fields, like tourism or diplomacy, where Korean LSP programs could also be valuable. Expanding the scope to include these areas could provide a more comprehensive picture of the potential impact of Korean language education in Romania.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a solid foundation for understanding why Korean language and cultural competence are important and how they can be effectively taught. By highlighting the need, the challenges, and the possible solutions, this research paves the way for future studies and practical initiatives that can bridge the gap between Romania and East Asia.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Overview of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) in Language Education

Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is a branch of language education that focuses on teaching specific linguistic skills adapted to the needs of particular professional or academic contexts. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987:15-16), LSP emerged in response to the increasing demand for specialized language training that could better meet the professional requirements of various fields. Unlike general language courses, LSP programs are designed to address specific vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills needed in areas such as business, law, medicine, tourism and so on (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Research has shown that LSP programs are highly effective in enhancing language learners' ability to communicate in professional settings. Basturkmen (2010:34) highlights that LSP is characterized by a focus on the needs of learners, as "needs analysis is a key component in ESP course design and development", task-based learning, and contextualized language use. These features make LSP an ideal approach for teaching languages that are necessary for specific and varied professional purposes, including business communication. By emphasizing real-world tasks and professional scenarios, LSP courses can significantly improve learners' language proficiency and prepare them for the specific communicative challenges they will encounter in their careers.

3.2. Global Trends in Asian Language Learning for Business

The increasing importance of Asian economies in the global market has led to a growing demand for proficiency in Asian languages, particularly for business purposes. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese are among the most studied Asian languages worldwide, especially in regions where economic ties with Asia are strong. According to a report by The Centre for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA), there has been a significant rise in the number of students enrolling in Asian language courses across Europe and North America. Liu and Shibata (2008:40-43) state that the reasons for students taking Asian language classes are cultural understanding and administrative orientation. A more recent report, put together by Duolingo (2023) states that Korean, Chinese and Japanese were among the most popular languages accessed on the platform.

Several studies have explored the benefits of learning Asian languages for business communication. For example, Kubota and McKay (2009:594) discuss how language proficiency not only facilitates business transactions but also helps build trust and rapport in business relationships, which are crucial in many Asian cultures. Similarly, Sung (2015: 268) notes that understanding the subtleties of Korean language and culture can provide businesses with a competitive advantage, particularly in negotiations and long-term partnerships.

Despite the growing interest, the integration of Asian languages into LSP programs remains limited in many parts of the world. We argue that there is a need for more specialized curricula that cater specifically to business communication in Asian languages. This includes developing materials that focus on industry-specific vocabulary, business etiquette, and cultural nuances, which are essential for effective communication in the Asian business context.

3.3. Existing Research on Teaching Asian Languages in Romania

In Romania, language education has traditionally focused on European languages such as English, French, and German. However, we cannot oversee the importance of diversifying language programs to include non-European languages, particularly in response to Romania's expanding economic relationships with countries like China, South Korea, and Japan. Despite the fact that the demand for Asian languages in Romania is still relatively low compared to European languages, there is a clear trend towards diversification (Eurostat).

Several studies have explored the potential benefits and challenges of integrating Asian languages into Romanian education. Research by Wang (2016:37) highlights the success of initiatives to promote Chinese language learning in Romanian primary and secondary schools, particularly where cultural exchange programs have generated enthusiasm among students. Similarly, Dragan (2018:98), Lungu (2018:109) and Focsanean (2013:73) document growing interest in Japanese language courses, especially in tertiary education, where students aiming for careers in technology and business see Japanese as a strategic asset.

As far as Korean language is concerned, Han (2019:93) lists the Romanian institutions which offer Korean Language classes, and goes further noting the interest in Korean language and culture, saying that "If 10 years ago the fans of Korea were between 14 and 26 years old, now their number has increased dramatically, and the age level has dropped, reaching somewhere between 7 and 8 years and covering both the abovementioned age segments, but slowly expanding to the adult, mature, high-end consumer of K-pop, K-drama, and Korean cuisine." (96) Overall, the existing research tackles both the promise and obstacles of teaching Asian languages in Romania. With adequate support and resources, Romanian institutions could meet the growing demand for Asian language skills and prepare students for a diverse range of professional opportunities in East Asian markets.

4. The Importance of Teaching Korean for Business Communication

4.1. Economic Ties Between Romania and Asian Countries

Romania's economic relationship with East Asian countries has been steadily growing over the past two decades. As of 2022, China, South Korea, and Japan were among Romania's top trading partners outside of the European Union. Trade with China alone accounted for a significant portion of Romania's total imports and exports, highlighting the importance of the Chinese market for Romanian businesses (Statista 2023). Similarly, Japanese (JETRO, 2023) and South Korean (Pavalasc, 2024; Agerpres, 2023) companies have made substantial investments in Romania, particularly in the automotive and electronics sectors, contributing to job creation and technological advancement.

In this context, proficiency in Asian languages is increasingly valuable for Romanian professionals who wish to engage effectively with these key markets. Learning these languages can help Romanian businesses navigate complex trade negotiations, build stronger partnerships, and better understand the cultural nuances that influence business practices in Asia. For example, in many East Asian countries, business relationships are built on trust and long-term engagement rather than short-term transactions. Being able to communicate in the local language can facilitate deeper connections and more successful negotiations.

Ties with South Korea have been growing steadily. The Romanian Agency for Investment and External Commerce recently gave a detailed report on the economic ties between Romania and South Korea, saying:

“According to Romanian statistics, the total volume of trade between Romania and the Republic of Korea amounted, in 2023, to USD 1,205.8 million, being 5.5% higher than the previous year. Romanian exports to the market of the Republic of Korea registered an increase of 35.6%, compared to 2022, reaching USD 580.5 million (28th place among the destination countries of products delivered from our country and 3rd place in Asia).

Romania's imports from the Republic of Korea decreased by 12.5% compared to 2022, reaching USD 625.3 million (29th place in the list of partner states, suppliers of products in our country and 3rd place among Asian states, after the Chinese Republic and India).

Currently, 284 commercial companies with Korean capital are registered in Romania, with a subscribed capital of USD 123.6 million, which places this country in 31st place among the investing states in our country. The real value of Korean investments in Romania is higher than the one shown in the Romanian statistics, many of them being made by subsidiaries from other countries of Korean companies.” (ARICE, 2024)

Notable South Korean corporations, including Samsung, LG, and Daewoo, have established substantial operations within Romania, emphasizing the country's potential as a strategic European base for South Korean businesses. The ongoing expansion of these companies reflects both an increase in trade volume and a deepening economic interdependence between Romania and South Korea. Moreover, as the interest in making business ties with Romania increases, every year, business matchmaking events take place between Korean And Romanian companies from various domains of activity, such as the cosmetic industry, telecommunications, agriculture, engineering, alternative energy and so on.

4.2. Benefits of Cultural Competence in Business

Cultural competence, or the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures different from one's own, is a critical skill in today's globalized business environment. This is especially true when dealing with Asian markets, where business practices are often heavily influenced by cultural norms and values. For instance, concepts such as *guānxi* 关系 in China (the importance of networks and strong relationships), *nemawashi* 根回し in Japan (the process of

building a foundation in business), and *jeong* 정/情 in Korea (principle based on loyalty and connection) are pivotal to conducting successful business in these countries (Yang, 2006:288, Glisby, 2018:19, Yang, 2011:164). By learning Asian languages, Romanian professionals not only gain linguistic skills but also develop a deeper understanding of these cultural concepts. This cultural competence can lead to more effective communication, stronger business relationships, and a better ability to navigate cultural differences that could otherwise lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. As Debaty (2022:31) suggests, language is more than just a tool for communication; it is a gateway to understanding the values, beliefs, and practices of another culture. This is exactly why, at the moment, LSP education in many institutions focus on cultural aspects as well.

In today's interconnected world, intercultural communication and cultural awareness are more important than ever. They refer to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds, acknowledging and respecting diverse perspectives, values, and communication styles. As globalization brings people and nations closer together, the need for intercultural competence has expanded beyond personal interactions to encompass professional, academic, and diplomatic spheres (Alexa, 2022:6).

Effective intercultural communication allows individuals and organizations to navigate cultural differences with proper understanding, which is crucial for reducing misunderstandings, building trust, and promoting collaboration. This competence is especially critical in international business, where subtle differences in etiquette, values, and expectations can influence negotiation outcomes and partnership success. For example, cultural concepts such as the previously mentioned *guanxi* in China or the idea of "face" in many Asian cultures (Hooker, 2012: 395) play significant roles in business contexts. Misinterpreting these cues can lead to unintentional offense or breakdowns in negotiations.

Beyond professional contexts, intercultural communication enriches personal relationships, enhances creativity, and broadens one's worldview. By engaging with diverse perspectives, individuals learn to think more flexibly, adapt to new situations, and appreciate the complexities of global society. This skill is especially valuable in multicultural environments, such as workplaces, schools, and international communities, where collaboration across cultural lines can inspire innovation and strengthen teamwork.

Ultimately, intercultural communication is fundamental in building respect, understanding, and cooperation among people from different backgrounds. As societies become more diverse and interdependent, this skill will remain vital for promoting peaceful coexistence, productive interactions, and a more inclusive global community.

4.3. Key Cultural Concepts in Korean Business Communication

Cultural competence, or the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, as we previously mentioned, is a fundamental component of LSP education. Successful business communication with South Korean partners requires more than just linguistic proficiency; it demands an understanding of the cultural values that shape professional interactions. Integrating cultural competence into LSP programs is essential for preparing Romanian professionals to navigate these cultural intricacies effectively.

The following key concepts highlight foundational aspects of Korean business culture that should be incorporated into LSP curricula.

a. *Jeong* (정) – Building Emotional Bonds and Loyalty

Jeong is a deeply rooted concept in Korean culture, representing emotional bonds and a sense of loyalty that develops over time. In business contexts, this translates to a preference for trust-based, long-term relationships over transactional engagements. Yang offers an example of *jeong* in a professional setting, saying that: “Among others, after-work gatherings are considered to be very important, along with attending personal events such as weddings and funerals. It is quite common in Korean organizations that you travel to a colleague’s hometown to stay overnight at his/her parents’ funeral to show your support and empathy. By engaging in very personal affairs, especially during difficult times, you and your colleagues in the organization build strong bonds and, consequently, experience *jeong* together. In the same vein, when attending these personal events, people usually give an envelope containing some money to their friend or colleague.” (2016:287-288)

For Romanian professionals, cultivating *jeong* involves demonstrating sincerity, patience, and commitment. Engaging in relationship-building activities, such as informal meetings or social gatherings, can help establish the trust necessary for successful partnerships. Therefore, regularly keeping in touch with Korean partners, remembering personal milestones, and showing genuine interest in their well-being fosters a sense of *jeong* that can strengthen business relationships.

b. *Nunchi* (눈치) – The Art of Social Awareness

Nunchi refers to the ability to read the room and understand unspoken cues during interactions, and it can directly be translated as “eye measure” (Debaty, 2022:26). This skill is vital in Korean business settings, where indirect communication is often preferred to avoid conflict or embarrassment. As per Choi and Choi (1992:51), this concept covers two different contexts, one of them being “indirect communicative exchanges”, and the other being “figuring out” the state of the affairs.

Romanian professionals can develop *nunchi* by paying close attention to body language, tone of voice, and pauses during discussions. Sensitivity to these subtle cues can help avoid misunderstandings and demonstrate respect for Korean communication norms. If a Korean business partner responds with prolonged silence or avoids direct disagreement, it may signal hesitation or discomfort. Adjusting one’s approach accordingly can help maintain a harmonious atmosphere.

c. *Inhwa* (인화) – Promoting Harmony and Consensus

Inhwa, or harmony, is a guiding principle in Korean business culture, particularly in hierarchical environments. Decisions are typically made collectively, and preserving group cohesion is prioritized over individual opinions. Debaty explains that *inhwa* not only expresses “(the) need to respect parents and other authority figures, such as rulers, elders, leaders, and those with a high rank in hierarchy”, while in business “workers must obey their employers’ and supervisors’ orders and expect to get satisfaction from them”, but also that “it does not mean that their efforts to preserve the relationship are one-sided ... both parties have the responsibility to maintain harmony by protecting each other’s face.” (2022:28)

Romanian professionals should be prepared for collaborative decision-making processes that may take time. Supporting group consensus and showing respect for team dynamics can enhance cooperation and mutual trust. During negotiations, for example, expressing patience and valuing each participant's input helps create a sense of shared purpose, reinforcing *inhwa*.

d. *Kibun* (기분) – Preserving Dignity and Respect

Kibun encompasses a person's dignity, emotional state, a sense of pride, and good behaviour (Chaney and Martin, 2011). In Korean culture, maintaining *kibun* is essential for positive interactions, as causing someone to lose face can damage relationships. Debaty says about this concept that: "... features of indirect communication, such as avoiding saying "no" or sharing bad news, are used to preserve each other's *Kibun*. In a business context, more specifically, Korean people always try to remain polite, friendly, and to accomplish things with the best intention. Since a manager's *Kibun* can be damaged by a lack of respect from his/her subordinates, the latter will typically avoid such conduct" (26). Lee explains how the concept of *kibun* could be misinterpreted by giving the following example: "Americans usually like to do business directly. They present their opinions and feelings by giving direct and clear answers. Sometime, they even seem argumentative to those who are from other countries. In this case, there is a very high chance that Americans would hurt Koreans' *Kibun*, and thus, it is hard for the two parties to achieve agreement on business. Therefore, it is very important for foreigners, like Americans to understand the culture of *Kibun*, and be prepared and practice picking up their non-verbal and body languages to know the actual meaning. On the other hand, Americans should try to avoid too argumentative or aggressive when doing even small business with South Koreans." (Lee, 2012, 185)

Therefore, in a business context, in order to preserve *kibun*, Romanian professionals should offer constructive feedback in a respectful manner, avoiding direct criticism or confrontation. Acknowledging achievements and showing appreciation also help maintain positive morale. Instead of pointing out mistakes directly, framing suggestions in a supportive and respectful way helps protect the *kibun* of Korean colleagues or partners.

e. Hierarchy and Respect (존경)

Hierarchy lies at the foundation of Korean society and is deeply woven into both social and professional interactions. Rooted in Confucian values, the emphasis on respect for age, seniority, and rank continues to influence the way Korean people communicate and make decisions. Understanding this hierarchical structure is essential for Romanian professionals seeking to build successful business relationships with their Korean counterparts.

In Korean culture, hierarchy shapes interactions from a young age. Children are taught to respect their elders, use honorific language and observe customs that reinforce social order. These practices are not limited to family settings; they extend to schools, workplaces, and broader social interactions.

For instance, in everyday conversations, Koreans will carefully consider factors like age, social status, and professional rank to determine the appropriate level of formality. Using the wrong form of address or failing to show the expected level of deference can cause discomfort or even damage relationships. Hierarchy and respect are also evident in speech, as Korean language has casual and honorific

language, marked by differences that appear not only at a grammatical level, as it does in most languages that have deference in speech, but also at the level of vocabulary. Then, in Korean there are 6 different registers that have to be used according to the relationship between the people involved in a conversation.

In Korean business settings, these cultural values translate into well-defined hierarchical structures that guide workplace dynamics and decision-making processes. Hierarchy in business serves several purposes: it will highlight a clear chain of command. Decisions typically flow from the top down. Senior leaders are expected to provide guidance and direction, while junior employees follow instructions and show deference. This structure helps maintain order and clarity within organizations. Then, there is the respect for experience and expertise, as age and tenure are often associated with wisdom and reliability. Senior employees, who have accumulated years of experience, are given the authority to make key decisions. Younger or newer employees are expected to demonstrate humility and a willingness to learn.

As far as business etiquette is concerned, formalities such as bowing, addressing people by their titles (e.g., *sajangnim* for a company president), and giving or receiving business cards with both hands are ways to demonstrate respect for hierarchy. These customs might seem rigid to those unfamiliar with Korean culture, but they are crucial for showing sincerity and professionalism.

4.4. Enhancing Competitive Advantage in the Global Market

Incorporating Asian languages into the Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs in Romania could significantly enhance the competitive advantage of Romanian professionals and businesses in the global market. With East Asia continuing to grow as a major economic hub, proficiency in languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean can open up new opportunities for trade, investment, and collaboration. Companies with employees who are fluent in these languages and culturally aware are better positioned to enter Asian markets, negotiate favourable terms, and build long-lasting partnerships.

Moreover, for Romanian students, acquiring skills in Asian languages can broaden their career prospects. As businesses increasingly seek to expand their operations into Asia, there is a growing demand for professionals who can bridge the language and cultural gaps between Romania and its Asian partners. According to a report by Hulett (2019), multilingual employees are seen as a valuable asset by companies that operate internationally, as they can help facilitate smoother communication and reduce the risk of cultural miscommunication.

4.5. Relevance to Romanian Educational and Economic Policy

The importance of teaching Korean for business purposes also aligns with broader educational and economic policies in Romania. We have mentioned that the economic ties with South Korea, Japan and China are on an ascending path. By integrating Asian languages into LSP programs, Romanian educational institutions can better prepare students for the demands of the global economy and support the country's economic goals.

Furthermore, promoting the study of Asian languages can enhance Romania's attractiveness as a destination for foreign investment. Companies from China, South Korea, and Japan that are considering investing in Romania may be more inclined to do so if they find a local workforce that is not only skilled but also

culturally and linguistically prepared to engage with Asian partners. As Romania seeks to strengthen its position in the global market, cultivating language skills that align with its economic interests is a strategic move.

5. Feasibility and Interest in Learning Asian Languages in Romania

5.1. Current Demand for Asian Languages in Romania

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the interest among Romanian students and professionals in learning Asian languages, particularly Korean. This trend is largely driven by the growing interest in Asian pop culture, as noted by Han (2019:93) and Dragan (2018:98). Romania's growing economic ties with East Asia and the increasing presence of Asian businesses within the country are at fault as well. The demand is not limited to students alone; professionals in fields such as business, tourism, and international relations have also shown a keen interest in acquiring Asian language skills. The Korean Cultural Centre in Cluj-Napoca alone has individuals employed in various domains participating in general Korean Language classes.

5.2. Institutional Capacity and Availability of Language Programs

While interest in Asian languages is growing, the availability of language programs structured to meet this demand remains limited in Romania. Currently, only a few universities offer courses in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, and most of these are part of general language studies programs rather than specialized LSP curricula. For example, the University of Bucharest and Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca offer degree programs in Korean, Japanese and Chinese studies, but these programs do not specifically focus on language for business or for professional purposes (University of Bucharest, 2023; Babes-Bolyai University, 2023).

Aside the two aforementioned state universities, there are a number of other institutions which offer classes for those who desire to learn the 3 languages, but again, without a specific focus on LSP, but rather general use. Japanese is also being taught in a number of private universities such as Hyperion University, Romanian-American University and "Dimitrie Cantemir" University in Bucharest. Some secondary and tertiary education institutions offer Japanese classes as well, such as "Ion Creanga" and "Emil Racovita" National Colleges in Bucharest, and "Mihai Eminescu" National College in Suceava. And then we have other cultural centers and institutions that aim at promoting Japanese language and culture in Romania, such as Babes-Bolyai Japanese Cultural Centre and Sembazuru Centre in Cluj-Napoca, East-Asian Studies Centre in Timisoara, Japanese Cultural Centre in Oradea, Murasaki Centre, Akino Centre, Sakura Japanese School in Bucharest and the Sakuranbo Association in Constanta (Japanese Embassy in Romania, 2023).

Korean Language is also taught in a number of private Universities, such as the Romanian-American University, and "Titu Maiorescu" University in collaboration with Sejong Cultural Centre. Other Cultural centers and institutions that teach Korean language are: the FIDES Centre for Foreign Languages, Arirang Academy, Romanian-Korean Studies Centre in Bucharest, the Korean Cultural Centre in Cluj-Napoca, Shilla Association in Timisoara, Sejong Centre in Iasi and others.

Chinese language is taught through the Confucius Institute, a Chinese institution that actively promotes Chinese language and culture in multiple cities in Romania, such as Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest, Brasov, Sibiu and others.

5.3. Potential Challenges in Implementing LSP Programs in Asian Languages

Implementing LSP programs in Asian languages in Romania presents several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure their success. One of the primary challenges is the shortage of qualified teachers who are proficient in Asian languages and possess the necessary skills to teach them in a professional or business context. There are currently very few Romanian educators who are trained in both the language and the specific cultural and business practices of East Asian countries. This can interfere with the development of effective LSP programs in these languages. To overcome this, a solution would be to develop specialized training programs to equip existing current Korean language instructors and Korean language graduates with LSP teaching skills, and collaborate with universities in South Korea to offer certification courses or exchange programs for Romanian teachers.

Another challenge is the lack of sufficient teaching materials that are specifically designed for LSP in Asian languages. Most available resources focus on general language learning rather than specialized language use in business settings. Developing high-quality, context-specific teaching materials will require collaboration between Romanian educators, language experts, and business professionals familiar with Asian markets. Additionally, obtaining funding for such initiatives may be challenging, as institutions may need to prioritize their resources towards more established language programs.

Moreover, there is the misconceptions about the difficulty of learning Asian languages. Many students and professionals in Romania may perceive Asian languages as too complex or irrelevant to their careers, leading to lower enrolment in such programs. Addressing these misconceptions through awareness campaigns, showcasing success stories, and demonstrating the tangible benefits of Asian language proficiency in business can help increase interest and participation, and one way to do so is to organize outreach programs to showcase the simplicity and logical structure of both *hangeul* and Korean grammar structure. Highlighting success stories of individuals who have learned Korean and benefited professionally could also change public perception. Moreover, using interactive learning tools such as mobile apps, gamification, and online platforms to make learning Korean more engaging and accessible could make it more popular. And lastly, offering introductory courses focused on essential business vocabulary and phrases to help students gain confidence before tackling more complex language structures could make the endeavour seem less difficult.

5.4. Opportunities for Expansion and Collaboration

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for expanding LSP programs in Asian languages in Romania. One promising approach is to use digital technologies to provide flexible, accessible language learning options. Online courses through teaching platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, mobile apps, and virtual exchange programs can make learning Asian languages more accessible to a broader audience, including working professionals who may not

have the time to attend traditional classes.

Additionally, Romanian educational institutions can collaborate with Asian cultural and educational organizations to develop tailored LSP programs. By building these partnerships, Romanian institutions can enhance their capacity to offer high-quality LSP programs in Asian languages and create a more culturally enriching learning environment.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity to integrate Asian language learning with other disciplines such as international business, economics, and cultural studies. Interdisciplinary programs that combine language learning with business and cultural studies can provide a more inclusive education, preparing students to navigate the complexities of working with Asian partners. Such programs can attract a diverse group of students interested in careers that require both language proficiency and cultural competence.

All things considered, the growing interest in learning Asian languages among Romanian students and professionals presents a unique opportunity to expand Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs in these languages. While there are challenges related to teacher availability, resource development, and cultural perceptions, these can be addressed through strategic investments in education, international collaboration, and innovative approaches to language teaching. By implementing LSP programs in Asian languages, Romania can enhance its economic ties with East Asia, support its global business aspirations, and equip its workforce with the skills needed to succeed in a multicultural business environment.

6. Recommendations for Implementing LSP Programs for Asian Languages in Romania

To successfully implement Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs for Asian languages in Romania, it is crucial to design curricula that align with the specific needs of the market. These programs should not only focus on language proficiency but also incorporate relevant cultural, economic, and business practices specific to each Asian language and country. For instance, a curriculum designed for Korean LSP could include modules on business etiquette and corporate culture, which are essential for effective communication and relationship-building in Korean business contexts.

Another significant challenge in implementing LSP programs for Asian languages is the shortage of qualified teachers who possess both language proficiency and the skills to teach within a specific professional context. To address this, educational institutions should encourage students who learn Asian languages to enrol in teacher training programs that focus on pedagogical skills, which will aid in a better performance as future teachers.

To expand access to LSP programs for Asian languages, institutions could turn to digital tools and online learning platforms. Online courses offer flexibility, making them accessible to a wider range of learners, including working professionals who may not have the time to attend traditional, in-person classes. These platforms can also facilitate the integration of multimedia resources, such as video tutorials, interactive simulations, and virtual reality experiences, which can enhance the learning experience. For example, the use of AI and various online platforms could enable students to participate in simulated business meetings with Japanese or

Chinese clients, providing a realistic and immersive environment to practice language skills and cultural etiquette. Online learning platforms can also support the development of collaborative projects with peers and professionals from Asian countries, fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

To increase interest and enrolment in LSP programs for Asian languages, it is essential to actively promote the benefits of learning these languages for professional purposes. Awareness campaigns could be conducted in collaboration with industry leaders, highlighting success stories of Romanian professionals who have successfully leveraged their Asian language skills in their careers.

Additionally, universities and cultural institutions could organize workshops, seminars, and networking events that showcase the importance of Asian language proficiency in today's globalized business environment. Featuring guest speakers from businesses with strong ties to Asia could provide students and professionals with insights into how language skills can enhance career prospects and facilitate successful international collaborations.

7. Conclusion

In a world that is increasingly interconnected, proficiency in Korean, and other Asian languages, has become a valuable asset for professionals who are involved in international business. As Romania continues to strengthen its economic ties with South Korea, the need for Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) programs in Korean has never been more evident. This article has highlighted the significant benefits of implementing Korean-focused LSP programs, showing how such initiatives enhance the competitiveness of Romanian businesses in sectors such as technology, automotive, and energy, while providing professionals with essential language and cultural skills necessary to navigate complex negotiations and establish strong partnerships.

Moreover, LSP programs can contribute to Romania's broader economic and diplomatic goals. By helping professionals acquire specialized language skills and cultural knowledge, Romania can position itself as a valuable partner to Asian economies, attracting investment and trade. The ability to communicate in an Asian language, paired with an understanding of local business etiquette and cultural practices could pave the way for more international collaborations.

In conclusion, the implementation of LSP programs for Asian languages in Romania is not only a strategic educational initiative; it is an investment in the country's future economic growth and international standing. By recognizing the value of language skills as a bridge to deeper understanding and more effective communication, we can form a generation of professionals who do not only speak Asian languages but are also able to navigate the nuances of global business. This, in turn, will ensure that Romania remains a competitive and influential player on the world stage.

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THE ETERNAL WORD (JOHN 1: 1 – 18) – A LINGUISTIC EXAMINATION

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Abstract: *Many commentaries have spoken highly of this prelude in the Gospel of John – The Eternal Word. Its style and structure have been highly praised. There is no doubt that this text is quite popular and is often quoted by pastors when giving a sermon on the divinity of Jesus Christ. Indeed, in the Roman Catholic liturgy, this is the Gospel passage read during the Christmas day Mass every year. From the literature, therefore, the message of this passage has greatly contributed to its acclaim. However, the point of interest in this study is that, though the relevance of the message may have played a part in the high acclaim the passage has garnered, the organization of the text from New King James English version itself has played an equally important role in ensuring the popularity of the passage. As argued in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the texture and organization of a text can contribute immensely to the delivery of the message. Accordingly, the main objective of this study was to investigate how the structural organization of the message of John 1: 1 – 18 has contributed to its dissemination. The theory that is applied in the study is aspects of the Textual Metafunction of Halliday's SFL. This is a text-based model for which John 1: 1 – 18 (the New King James version) is taken as a textual artefact for linguistic exploration. In line with the principles of SFL, the clauses of this biblical text were qualitatively examined, focusing on its textual organization and cohesion. It was found that the prevalent thematic choices, thematic progression and cohesive elements have been strategically used to project the Christology of Jesus, consistently referred to as the Word, the Light, the Life and God.*

Keywords: *thematic progression; thematic structure; topical theme; cohesion; systemic functional grammar; textual metafunction*

1. Introduction

This section of the Gospel according to John has been highly praised for several reasons. Indeed, as expressed by Kuhn (2013: 1):

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this text in shaping the Christian conception of Jesus' divinity, incarnation and the Trinity.

Gerber (2017) equally observes that the passage is a remarkable and profound text. This is because, as he argues, it is not just a mere introduction to the whole of John's Gospel, but its popularity lies in the fact that it is a summation of the entire book of John's Gospel. To him, this passage introduces the main themes of the whole Gospel of John.

Not surprisingly, the Gospel is considered to be the most carefully organized of the four Gospels because of its artistic unity of ideas (Branick, 1998). It has a structure which aids immensely in understanding the whole Gospel of John. For instance, the theme of Jesus as God runs through this passage which can be viewed as the prologue to the whole Gospel (Kummel, 1975; Cousar, 2006; Gerber, 2017). It announces the incarnation of Jesus Christ and affirms Christ as the true Son of God. In it, John reveals the divine nature of Christ and describes him as the Word of God who was together with God from the beginning (Lake and Lake, 1938). Indeed, throughout the text, John emphasizes two principal themes:

- that Christ is the divine word made flesh (John 1: 14).
- that the people who responded and accepted his message “became children of God” (John 1: 12).

In our view, these ideas and interpretations given to the text have formed the basis for the high praise the text has received.

However, we argue that, in addition to the message, there is the added fact that the text has organizational value such that it is recognized as a well- structured piece. This organization – both in the choice of words and other stylistic elements – has contributed, in no small measure, to its dissemination. Accordingly, it is our goal in the study to unravel the structure of this text using the textual metafunction of Halliday’s SFL with a specific focus on thematic structure, thematic progression and cohesion. Thus, the main objective of this study was to ascertain the contribution of the organization of the message of the Eternal Word to its dissemination.

In pursuit of this goal, we attempted to provide answers to the following research questions:

- how has thematic structure enhanced the biblical text?
- How has thematic progression been effectively deployed in the text?
- how have cohesive elements used to achieve coherence in the text?

2. Thematic structure, thematic progression and cohesion

As has been stated earlier, this study uses aspects of the textual metafunction as its theoretical basis. Specifically, it employs the thematic structure, thematic progression and cohesion to unpack John 1: 1 – 18. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) argues that every text has a tripartite meaning potential in the sense that it is able to refer to goings on in the real world, indicate relationships between the speaker/writer and the audience/addressee and to organize linguistic elements in a meaningful manner. These are meanings that have been referred to in SFL as ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The textual metafunction, which is the focus of this paper, draws attention to how the organization of linguistic elements in a text is itself meaningful. This functional organization includes the organization of the thematic structure of clauses, the pattern of thematic progression and the cohesion of linguistic elements (Bloor & Bloor, 2004; Thompson, 2014; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 89), every clause has a thematic structure which is made up of a Theme – “that which locates and orients the clause within its context” or “the point of departure of the message” – and a Rheme – “all the rest of the clause” after the Theme is taken (Thompson, 2014: 147). “The thematic structure is significant in signalling the way ideas have been organized in

a clause. In a communicative situation, participants position given information in the Theme unit and a new information in the Rheme.

Closely related to the Thematic structure and also relevant for organization of ideas is Thematic progression which has to do with how the ideas in the text have been developed. Speakers have a choice of focusing on a preceding Theme or Rheme in developing their message. Similarly, they may introduce a completely new Theme. Depending on the Thematic progression method adopted by a speaker, we can have a linear, constant, derived and ruptured progression, or a hyper-Theme. Whereas a hyper-Theme is an overriding Theme, subsuming other themes (Danes, 1974), a constant Theme is formed from a preceding one. However, a Thematic progression is linear if it is developed from a preceding Rheme. A derived Theme is generated from a hyper-Theme, whereas a ruptured Theme breaks away from previous Themes and Rhemes to introduce an entirely new Theme (Thompson, 2014).

The last element of textual organization examined in this paper is cohesion which engenders coherence in texts. Martin (2015: 61) defines cohesion as the process whereby meaning is channelled into a digestible current of discourse instead of spilling out formlessly in every possible direction". The two major aspects of cohesion are structural and lexical subtypes both of which are explored below.

3. Methodology

The biblical version used for this study is the New King James English version of the Bible. Of the myriads of English versions of the Bible, we settled on the New King James due mainly to its popularity and acceptability (Britannica, 2024). Admittedly, for a proper exegetical study, both the Greek and English versions of the Bible are required (Dvorak & Walton, 2015). However, since this study is framed within systemic functional linguistics which espouses that language use for all manner of purposes, including translations, involves constant engagement of choices (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This makes the user of language an active agent every step of the way. Thus, though the Greek version of a biblical passage may have a special charm to it, depending on the quality of the translation, one version may be more popular.

On the basis of the above, we deemed purposeful sampling (Stratton, 2024) suitable for the study. Thus, it must be admitted that any other popular English version could have been chosen for this study. The findings of this study, therefore, cannot be conclusively taken to reflect the reality for all the English versions of John 1: 1 – 18.

Additionally, SFL is clause-based. That is, its metafunctions are analyzed based on the clause structure. Accordingly, the clauses of John 1: 1 – 18 were sorted and analyzed for their thematic structure, progression and cohesion.

4. Analysis

The assumption in textual metafunction is that language in a well-written text is structured to ensure the proper organization of ideas. Accordingly, in analyzing John 1: 1 – 18, the interest lies in unravelling its:

- thematic structure.
- thematic progression.

- cohesive elements.

4.1 The thematic structure

According to Bloor & Bloor (2004), the identification of **Theme** in a clause is based on word order. Thus, based on our definition of Theme and Rheme above it is possible to divide the text into the following thematic components:

Table 1: *Theme and Rheme structure of John 1: 1 – 18*

THEME	RHEME
In the beginning	was the Word
and // the Word	was with God
and // the Word	was God.
He	was in the beginning with God.
All things	were made through Him,
and // without Him	nothing was made
that	was made.
In Him	was life,
and // the life	was the light of men.
And // the light	shines in the darkness,
and // the darkness	did not comprehend it.
There	was a man sent from God,
whose name	was John.
This man	came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light,
That // all	through him might believe.
He	was not that Light,
but // (he)	was sent to bear witness of that Light.
That	was the true Light
which	gives light to every man coming into the world.
He	was in the world,
and // the world	was made through Him,
and // the world	did not know Him.
He	came to his own,
and // His own	did not receive him.
But // as many as	received Him,
to them	He gave the right to become children of God,
To those	who believe in His name:
Who	were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
And // the Word	became flesh
and // (the Word)	dwelt among us,
and // we	beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
John	bore witness of him
and (John)	cried out, saying,
“ This	was He of whom I said,
‘ He who comes after me	is preferred before me
for He	was before me.”

An interpretation of the above analysis of the topical theme structure reveals the following:

- The lexical choices in the two categories above reinforce the idea of the Christological message in the text – the divine nature of Christ and the fact of Christ's symbiotic relationship with God. They are echoes of what is stated in Colossians 1:15:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created...

- Christ is part of the creation story in Genesis. This view is echoed in Colossians 1:16 – 17:

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...

Observably, the Theme types are distributed in such a manner that every clause in the text bears reference to Christ (the Word, the Light, the Son). This, we believe, is aimed at keeping the image of Christ before the reader throughout the passage. This is not surprising, given the fact that the main character of interest in the passage is Christ. Therefore, Huntsman (2019) would note about the Gospel of John that its central purpose is to proclaim that Christ is divine – the Son of God, present with God at the beginning of creation. And this text captures it more forcefully in that even though the second category of the themes above does not make direct reference to Christ, there are oblique references to him, lodged in the Rheme of the clauses. This supports Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) observation that the theme is the point of emphasis in a clause.

4.2.2 Textual Theme

The following occurrences of textual themes were found in the text:

<i>and</i> (14)	<i>that</i> (1)
<i>but</i> (3)	<i>for</i> (2)

In very relative terms, they are few compared to the topical themes. In our view, the reason is simple. The message is delivered straight – in simple sentences, mainly. But the most noticeable point about the textual themes is the predominance of the connective – *and*. It is striking that this is the most preferred connective in the passage. This use of *and* as a connective is meant to perform continuative, additive and contrastive functions. These functions are distributed in the text as follows:

Table 3: Distribution of Textual Themes

	Frequency	Percentage
Continuative	8	57.14
Additive	3	21.43
Contrastive	3	21.43
Total	14	100

As a continuative connective, *and* is used in 8 clauses (57.14%) as in the following:

- In the beginning was the word
and the word was with God
and the word was God

- **And** the life was the light of men
and the light shines in the darkness
and the darkness did not comprehend it.

From the extract above, it is obvious that the continuative **and**, in all these cases, serves as extension and stylistic marker. That is, the message expressed in the preceding clause is extended in the following clause. Thus, the information in the first clause is given further expansion. This ensures that the main idea remains unchanged in the subsequent clauses. Besides, and more importantly, the continuative performs a reiterative function typical of narratives. It occurs in paratactic relations whose function, essentially, is to ease the flow of the story. These are characteristic of the “mnemonic devices” of biblical texts which were written “in a primarily oral culture” (Bloomberg and Markley, 2010: 99).

4.2.3 Interpersonal Theme

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), interpersonal Theme involves the use of vocatives, mood, and mood-making elements. These elements are used in a text to indicate a writer’s attitude or comment on the message of the text. It represents a writer’s presence in a text. It is clear from the analysis that interpersonal themes are completely absent in this text. That is, the message is presented as a series of *facts*.

4.3 Thematic Progression

The text exhibits very fascinating thematic progression patterns. As can be observed in Table 4 below, these Thematic progression patterns project the focus of the message and set the text for ease of memorization.

Table 4: *Thematic progression patterns*

Clause	Progression
In the beginning was the Word	Hyper-Theme
and the Word was with God,	Linear
and the Word was God.	Constant
He was in the beginning with God.	Constant
All things were made through Him,	Derived
and without Him nothing was made	Linear
that was made.	Constant
In Him was life,	Ruptured
and the life was the light of men.	Linear
And the light shines in the darkness	Linear
and the darkness did not comprehend it.	Linear
There was a man sent from God	Ruptured
whose name was John.	Linear
This man came for a witness.....	Linear
that all through him might believe.	Derived
He was not that Light	Constant
but (he) was sent to bear witness of that Light.	Constant
That was the true Light	Linear
which gives light to every man coming into the world.	Linear

He was in the world	Derived
and the world was made through Him,	Linear
and the world did not know Him.	Constant
He came to His own	Linear
and His own did not receive Him.	Linear
But as many as received Him,	Constant
to them He gave the right to become children of God,	Constant
to those who believe in His name:	Constant
who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh...	Constant
And the Word became flesh	Derived
and (the Word) dwelt among us,	Constant
and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only....	Linear
John bore witness of Him	Derived
and (John) cried out.	Constant
And of His fullness / we have all received.....	Linear/Derived
For the law was given through Moses,	Ruptured
but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.	Derived
No one has seen God at any time.	Ruptured
The only begotten Son , who is in the bosom of the Father	Derived
He has declared Him.	Linear

Based on the definition of hyper-Theme above, the first clause of the text, ***In the beginning was the Word***, is a hyper-Theme. Before this, there is no preceding theme. This theme is overriding in the sense that it echoes the core message in the text that Christ (the Word) was part of the creation story. After this, there are several instances of Linear progression patterns involving situations where the Rheme of the first clause is also selected as the Theme of the subsequent clause. The following are examples of Linear progression:

*In the beginning was **the Word**
and **the Word** was with God*

*And the life was **the light** of men
And **the light** shines in the darkness*

In addition, there are several instances of the use of the constant Theme pattern, with the Theme of a preceding clause functioning as the Theme of the following clause as in the following:

*And **the word** was with God
and **the word** was God*

*And **the world** was made through him
And **the world** did not receive him*

There is equally the use of the derived progression patterns which are indirectly inferred from a hyper-Theme. The following are some examples from the text:

Theme	Source of derivation
<i>All things were made through him.</i>	<i>In the beginning was the Word And the Word was with God</i>

That all through him *this man came.....to bear witness of the light*
might believe
He was in the world *he was in the beginning with God*
 He came into his own

The point of this derived pattern is that an element becomes highlighted as theme because there is some related idea somewhere in the text, which has given prominence to the element selected as Theme in the current clause. Thus, the derived Theme picks up an underdeveloped idea in preceding clauses or from a hyper-Theme and gives it a focus (Thompson, 2014) thereby ensuring that its import is not lost on the audience. This strategy enables the message presented to be adequately developed.

Lastly, there are ruptured Themes which break away from ideas already introduced or developed. As defined earlier, these are themes which shift from the idea being discussed to introduce a new one. For instance, “*In Him was life*” is a ruptured Theme which shifts the discussion from the *Word* as part of creation to introduce a new dimension about the Word as “*the life and light of mankind*”. The following is another ruptured Theme:

- and **the darkness** did not comprehend it.
 There was a man sent from God – the shift is from Christ as light in the midst of darkness to **John** as a messenger.

Thus, the ruptured theme may be used as a kind of a boundary, as is the case in the text of this study, to mark the subsections of texts and for that matter the messages/meanings within texts.

The choices of Thematic progression patterns in this biblical text indicate a strategic arrangement of ideas. Constant Themes are employed to drum home the same message whereas linear Themes are used to give prominence to ideas backgrounded in Rhemes. These are complemented by the strands of derived and ruptured Themes to project and solidify the core message of the text.

4.4 Cohesion

Cohesion is that aspect of the textual metafunction which focuses on the function of language to create coherence in texts. This is a principal mark of a text – its texture (Halliday & Hassan, 1976). It is mostly through cohesive elements that coherence is achieved in texts. In this specific analysis, we are concerned with coherence achieved through lexical and grammatical/structural cohesive processes in John 1: 1 – 18.

4.4.1 Lexical cohesion

Lexical cohesion is achieved through the use of the following repetition, metaphors and oppositeness (Thompson, 2014).

Repetition appears to be the most common process used to keep the core message of the text – the divinity of Christ – alive in the mind of the reader. Examples of the repeated lexical items found in the text are captured in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Cohesion through repetition

Word	Freq	Word	Freq
Word	5	World	4

God	7	Received	2
Light	7	Grace	3
Life	2	Father	2
John	4	Glory	1
Darkness	2	Witness	3
Man	3	flesh	2

In addition to these repeated words, there is also the repetition of the 3rd person pronouns and determiners, as shown in the following structures:

He was in the beginning with God	In him was life
All things were made through him	He was in the world
And without him , nothing was made	The world was made through him
He came to his own	The world did not know him

The use of lexical and structural repetition creates a great deal of unity and connectedness. As Berlin (1989: 35) puts it, repetition unifies distinct elements of discourse and strengthens the force of argument, leading to a logical progression. So doing, one does not miss the central message presented in a text. In this passage, as we have seen, the emphasis has been on the nature of Christ (the Word). Not surprisingly, the repeated lexical items reinforce this idea in the minds of the audience.

Metaphor is one of the cohesive devices in the text. There are instances such as the following where Christ is referred to in metaphoric terms.

<i>Word</i>	<i>Light</i>
<i>life</i>	<i>Son</i>

The words – *life*, *Word*, *Light* – are direct references to Jesus Christ, while the words - *darkness*, *flesh*, *world* – represent the forces which rejected Christ. These metaphorical choices reinforce the contrastive information highlighted in the text:

And the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them /He gave the right to become children of God,

Oppositeness is another cohesive element. According to Huntsman (2019), the message of Christ's divine nature is presented in dualistic, opposite terms in John 1: 1 – 18. We note this in the following contrasts:

Structure	Opposite item
through him	without him
light	darkness
blood and flesh	will of God
the law	grace and truth
through Moses	through Jesus Christ
born of flesh	born of God
spirit	flesh
the world was made through him	the world did not know him

These contrasts leave such a lasting impression on the reader that they are easily attracted to the text. Besides, they facilitate memorization.

4.4.2 Structural cohesion

Structural/grammatical cohesion is achieved through repeated structures (Thompson, 2014). In the biblical text of this study, the structural repetitions are as follows:

In the beginning (2 times)
Through him (5 times)
His own (2 times)
Was (were) made (4 times)

These repeated structures continue to reinforce the message. This is because each repeated structure entrenches more and more the message of the text. As argued above, memorability is enhanced through this process of information dissemination.

5. Conclusion

This study used aspects of the textual metafunction of systemic functional linguistics to analyze the structural organization of the New King James version of John 1: 1 – 18. Specifically, it adopted thematic structure, thematic progression and cohesive elements as linguistic tools to explore how the organizational structure of this biblical text contributes to its acclaim. The analysis conducted in this study reveals that Thematic structure of John 1: 1 – 18 is carefully organized to highlight the central message of the text. This is emphasized by the choices of patterns of Thematic progression. Accordingly, though constant and linear patterns of progression predominate, these are complemented by derived and ruptured patterns. This shows that the ideas of the text are adequately developed. Through the dominance of constant and linear Themes, the central message of the pre-eminence and divine nature of Christ is adequately presented. Finally, it was found that the text is rich in cohesive elements of repetition, oppositeness and metaphors. The blend of these elements makes John 1: 1 – 18 not only interesting to read but also memorable. The value of this study has been underscored by Dongell (2014) who notes that it is a worthwhile effort in biblical studies to show a direct and unassisted commitment to the text itself through a structural analysis. It is clear from this analysis that the deliberate structural choices have created a tight cohesive and easy to memorize unit. It has been argued in this study that the cohesive strategies of this text may have contributed enormously to the popularity of this biblical text.

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DIGITALE LEHR- UND LERNMITTEL ZWISCHEN ANZIEHUNGSKRAFT UND WIRKSAMKEIT

DIGITAL TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOLS BETWEEN ATTRACTIVITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

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Zusammenfassung: *In den letzten Jahrzehnten wechselten sich weltweit unterschiedliche Trends und Ansätze im Bildungswesen im Allgemeinen und so auch im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Für neue Zeiten sind wohl auch neue Unterrichtsmethoden nötig, die Jugendlichen dieses Millenniums stellen das Lehrpersonal vor neue Herausforderungen. Dabei wird Digitalisierung allmählich unumgänglich und für die junge Generation sogar selbstverständlich. So gehen wir in dieser Studie der Frage nach, ob und wie sie künstliche Intelligenz (KI) verwenden und in erster Linie, ob digitale Lehr- und Lernmittel auch zur größeren Lerner-motivation und -wirksamkeit führen. Da das u.W. im Falle rumänischer Wirtschafts-studierender noch nicht untersucht wurde, besteht die Originalität der Studie darin, einen orientierenden Einblick in diesen Sachverhalt gewähren zu wollen. Die zu diesem Zwecke eingesetzte Methodologie besteht in einer anonymen Umfrage zu den oben erwähnten Sujets und in einem im Sommersemester des akademischen Jahres 2023-2024 unter den Studierenden der Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität von Großwardein (Oradea) im ersten Jahrgang durchgeführten Experiment. Die Untersuchungs-subjekte wurden einer Kontroll- bzw. Experimentalgruppe zugeordnet, in denen dieselben Spracheinheiten – Genus des Substantivs und Lexik zum Thema Lebensmittel – einerseits mit traditionellen, andererseits mit digitalen Mitteln geübt wurden. Für die Überprüfung des Behaltens des gelernten Materials haben die Studierenden in beiden Gruppen – wegen der Vergleichbarkeit in ungefähr gleicher Zahl – kurze unbenotete Tests ausgefüllt. Es wurden sogar die Resultate womöglich beeinflussende Variable, wie vorherige Erfahrungen mit der deutschen Sprache, Lernbereitschaft und -vermögen, konkretisiert in den Noten des vorherigen Semesters, in Betracht gezogen. Von den anfangs formulierten drei Hypothesen ergaben unsere Untersuchungen eindeutige Antworten nur zur Bekanntheit und Verwendung von KI unter der jungen Generation und zu ihrer Präferenz angesichts der Lehrmittel und -methoden. Die erste Annahme wurde bestätigt, die zweite gegensätzlich zu unseren Erwartungen aber verworfen, während die dritte hinsichtlich der höheren Wirksamkeit digitaler Lehr- und Lernmittel mangels klarer, relevanter Resultate weiterhin offenbleibt und so Raum für erweiterte Studien bietet.*

Abstract: *In the last decades all over the world emerged different trends and approaches in education in general, thus in teaching foreign languages too. New*

times are likely to need also new teaching methods, young people of this millennium put teachers in front of new challenges. Little by little, digitalisation becomes unavoidable, for the young generation even natural. Thus, in this study we would like to find out, how they use artificial intelligence (AI) if at all and above all if digital teaching and learning tools lead to more student engagement and effectiveness. As this issue, as far as we know, has not been researched in case of Romanian Economics students yet, the originality of this study resides in wanting to give an insight into this matter. The research methodology applied for this reason consists of an anonymous survey related to the abovementioned topics and of an experiment conducted in the summer term of the academic year 2023-2024 among first year students of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Oradea. Those taking part in the experiment were assigned to a control and an experimental group, respectively, where the same language issues – gender of the noun and vocabulary to the topic food names – were dealt with by means of traditional on one and digital tools on the other hand. To check retaining the staff drilled, students of both groups – for reasons of comparability in approximately the same number – had to take short nongraded tests. Variables possibly influencing the results: like previous experience with German language, willingness and capacity to learn, materialised in the grades of the previous term, were also taken into consideration. From the three hypotheses formulated at the beginning, our research produced clear-cut answers only to that related to knowing and using AI by the young generation and to their priority concerning teaching methods and tools. Our first supposition was confirmed, the second one, contrary to expectancy, not validated while in lack of plain, relevant results, the third one related to increased effectiveness of digital teaching and learning tools still remains undecided offering space for extended studies.

Schlüsselwörter: *digitale Lehr- und Lernmittel; künstliche Intelligenz; traditionelle Übungen; Kontroll- und Experimentalgruppe; Wirksamkeit; erhöhter Lernspaß*

Keywords: *digital teaching and learning tools; artificial intelligence; traditional exercises; control and experimental group; effectiveness; increased learning engagement*

1. Einführung. Problemstellung

In den letzten Jahrzehnten haben sich nicht nur die Unterrichtsmethoden, -ansätze, sondern auch die zu unterrichtenden Jugendlichen beachtlich verändert und die zwei Phänomene bedingen sich gegenseitig. Mit dem kommunikativen, dann projektbasierten Ansatz, der Erübrigung des Informationsbehaltens und deren Wiedergabe bzw. der steigenden Digitalisierung hat die Generation der Jahrhundertwende solche grundsätzlichen traditionellen Kompetenzen wie Memorisierungs-, Analyse- und Synthesisierungsfähigkeit verloren, die für das Erlernen neuer Sachen und das Zurecht-kommen im Privat- und Berufsleben weiterhin wichtig wären. Dazu kommt noch ihre Abneigung gegen Anstrengung, die Google- und Appgeneration möchte alles im Handumdrehen und leicht erhalten.

Der Lernprozess ist aber alles andere als schnell und mühelos. Lernen im Allgemeinen und das Erlernen einer Fremdsprache umso mehr stützen sich auf Memorisierung, Wiederholung, Analyse um der grammatischen Richtigkeit willen und dafür braucht man lange Zeit bis man zur Automatisierung kommt. So sind trotz der Digitalisierung auch für die Generation Z und Alpha diese Kompetenzen nötig und die Aufgabe der Lehrenden liegt darin, ihnen diese beizubringen. Leicht gesagt, schwer durchzuführen. Es ist schon lange klar, dass man diese Generation nur mit den traditionellen Methoden, Mitteln nicht unterrichten kann, Lehrende sollen sich auch den neuen Zeiten anpassen und das Digitale, sogar die künstliche Intelligenz (KI) in den Unterricht einsetzen. Das kann sogar ihnen Vorteile bieten, da ihnen viel Zeit bei der Unterrichtsvorbereitung, Zusammenstellung von Lernmaterialien und Übungen erspart wird. Die Bedingung dafür ist aber die kritische Haltung und so das ständige Überprüfen der Online-Materialien. Die durch KI erstellten Texte und Übungen können nämlich stilistische Mängel, Fehler oder eine unnatürliche Sprachverwendung, wie in den Grafiken unten, aufweisen.

Grafik 1: Beispiel für unnatürliche Sprache

Quelle: Screenshot einer von der App *to-teach.ai* kreierten Übung. Stellenweise sollte der unbestimmte statt des bestimmten Artikels verwendet werden.

Grafik 2: Beispiel für stilistische Probleme

Edit

Title

Possessivpronomen

Task

Wähle die richtige Form

Question

Delete

Heute Morgen hat _ (Ich) Vater mir ein neues Fahrrad gekauft.

☐ sein
☐ dein
☒ mein

Question

Delete

_ (Du) Haustier ist so niedlich! Es hat große, braune Augen.

☐ ihr
☐ mein
☒ dein

Question

Delete

Gestern habe ich mit _ (Ich) Schwester im Park gespielt.

☐ ihrer
☐ deiner
☒ meiner

Question

Delete

Kannst du mir bitte _ (Du) Bleistift leihen? Ich habe meinen verloren.

☐ ihren
☐ meinen
☒ deinen

Question

Delete

_ (Er) Mutter hat ihm ein leckeres Frühstück gemacht.

☐ ihre
☒ seine
☐ unsere

Question

Delete

Ich habe _ (Wir) Lehrer gefragt, ob wir heute früher aus der Schule gehen

☐ ihren
☐ meinen
☒ unseren

Question

Delete

_ (Sie) Bruder hat gestern Abend einen neuen Film im Kino gesehen.

☐ seine
☒ ihr
☐ unser

Question

Delete

_ (Sie) Eltern sind sehr stolz auf ihre Leistungen in der Schule.

☐ meine
☒ ihre
☐ seine

Save

Quelle: Screenshot einer von der App *to-teach.ai* generierten Übung

Besser klingt beim ersten Satz die Variante mit Personalpronomen im Dativ an erster Stelle und dem Possessivpronomen an zweiter: Heute Morgen hat *mir mein* Vater ein neues Fahrrad gekauft.

Wahrscheinlich kommen im Falle der englischen Sprache dank der viel größeren Zahl der Eingaben ins System solche Unzulänglichkeiten seltener vor.

Dass die digitalen Tools im Unterricht zu mehr Lernspaß führen, ist sicher, zweifelhaft ist aber, ob sie außerdem auch die Steigerung der Lernermotivation und der Wirksamkeit mit sich bringen. Das hoffen wir durch diese Studie zu erfahren und gehen dabei den folgenden drei Hypothesen nach:

- Die Generation Z kennt und wendet KI an.
- Sie ziehen im Unterricht Online-Aufgaben den traditionellen Mitteln und Übungen vor

- Digitale Lehr- und Lernmittel steigern womöglich die Lernlust, führen aber nicht unbedingt zu mehr Wirksamkeit im Lehren und Lernen.

2. Literaturrecherche

Zahlreiche Studien beschäftigen sich in den letzten Jahren – generiert auch durch die Erfahrungen mit dem Online-Unterricht während der Corona-Pandemie – mit unterschiedlichen Formen und Aspekten der Digitalisierung im Unterricht, darunter kürzlich sogar mit der komplexen Problematik der Anwendung der KI. Die theoretischen und pragmatischen Ansätze lassen Raum für Inventarisierung, Darstellung der digitalen Mittel, Plattformen, Einsatzmöglichkeiten, für die Analyse, Hinterfragung, experimentelle Bewertung ihrer Wirksamkeit bis hin zur Präsentation konkreter Fallbeispiele und konkretisieren sich in lerner- (Deribigbe u.a., 2022; Boubker, 2024), lehrer- (Elm u.a., 2023; Reichert-Schlaß u.a., 2023; Kiryakova u. Angelova, 2023; Kallunki u.a., 2023; Grossek u.a., 2024) bzw. technologie- und prozessorientierten Artikeln (El Hajj u. Harb, 2023) – sogar mit einem kritischen, selbstreflexiven Ansatz zur eigenen Tätigkeit (Parra u. Chatterjee, 2024) – zu verschiedenen Fachgebieten und Komponenten der Bildung einschließlich der Auswertung des Kenntnisstandes und Gelernten. Da sich vorliegende Studie hauptsächlich auf das Lehren und Lernen von Fremdsprachen mit Hilfe von Online-Mitteln konzentriert, werden Artikel mit der entsprechenden Thematik in Betracht gezogen.

In diesem Sinne betonen Almelhus (2023), obwohl nur durch eine theoretische Bestandsaufnahme von Arbeiten zum Thema, die Rolle der KI durch den Einsatz von unterschiedlichen Sprachlernsystemen in der Aneignung/Übung der Aussprache in einer Zweit- oder Fremdsprache, des Weiteren Zadorozhnyy u. Lai (2024), ebenfalls eher theoretisch orientiert, sowie Gayed u.a. (2022), Mohammad u.a. (2023) schon experimentell, wie Chatbots und Schriftassistenten wie AI KAKU, QuillBot und andere in der Förderung der Schreibfertigkeiten (Wörterreichtum, Flüssigkeit des Schreibens, Paraphrasierungs-fähigkeit, Wortwahl) von Hilfe sein können.

Ebenfalls pragmatisch fällt die Literaturrecherche von Katsarou u.a. (2023) zu Studien über das didaktische Potenzial von stimmbasierten, intelligenten virtuellen Assistenten (Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant usw.) im Englischunterricht mit Hinblick auf Lernergebnisse, Lernermotivation und Leistung aus. Die einbezogenen Beiträge berichten sowohl über positive Aspekte (bessere Aussprache und Sprechfertigkeit, weniger Sprachhemmung, positive Einstellung usw.) als auch Schwächen von den untersuchten KI-Mitteln (verfehlte Aussprache, verspätete Reaktion, Verständigungsprobleme vonseiten des Assistenten, robotartiges Verhalten und andere).

Auch Online Kommunikations- und Visualisierungsmittel, unterschiedliche Lernapps, sogar WhatsApp haben sich für den Einsatz im Unterricht oder Selbstlernen als nützlich erwiesen, da sie nicht nur auf die Lernereinstellung- und motivation, sondern, stellenweise auch experimentell bewiesen (Martyushev u.a., 2021; Nasim u.a., 2022; Alwadei u. Mohsen, 2023; Bouzaiane u. Dayananda, 2023; Azamatova u.a., 2023; Al Mahmud, 2023; Shakhmalova u. Zotova, 2023; AbdAlgane und Othman, 2023), andernorts etwas salopp und in ungepflegter Form präsentiert (Todescu, 2019) zu einem gewissen Maße auch auf die Festigung des Gelernten, die Ausdrucksfähigkeit, Denkprozesse (Yang, 2023) und die

Lernerleistung in verschiedenen sprachlichen Teilkompetenzen, wie Schreibfertigkeit, Lese- und Hörverständnis, mündliche Kommunikation, Vokabellernen (Erkennen und Formulierung, einschließlich grammatischer Einheiten) positiven Einfluss haben.

Zum vollständigen Bild gehört aber auch die Feststellung von Bouzaiane und Dayananda (2023), dass Lernende dank digitaler Mittel nicht unbedingt bessere Leistungen beim Testen erbringen. Lehrerseits lassen sich nicht nur vorteilhafte Aspekte der digitalen Werkzeuge im Lehren und Lernen entdecken. Die didaktischen Überlegungen betreffen die Qualität des Lernens angesichts seiner Tiefe und Gründlichkeit: "There is a risk that the digital tools used in teaching do not contribute to deep learning. Rather, students tend to consume the course content and look for shortcuts." (Es besteht die Gefahr, dass die im Unterricht verwendeten digitalen Mittel nicht zum tiefen Lernen beitragen. Die Studenten blättern eher den Kurs durch und suchen nach abgekürzten Varianten.) (Elm u.a., 2023, S. 13). Außerdem beeinflusst die unkontrollierte Verschiebung des Unterrichtswesens auf das Gebiet des Digitalen, vor allem die Benutzung der KI – wie experimentell bewiesen – die Selbstregulierungsfähigkeit der Lernenden auf negative Weise: "Striking a balance between AI assistance and fostering student agency is essential to ensure that students actively participate in their own learning journey and develop crucial skills for the future." (Wesentlich für das Gleichgewicht zwischen Hilfeleistung durch KI und der Förderung der Selbstregulierungsfähigkeit der Lernenden ist das Sicherstellen, dass Studenten aktive Teilnehmer auf ihrem Lernweg sind und für die Zukunft entscheidende Fertigkeiten entwickeln.) (Darvishi u.a., 2024, S. 12). Gleich in diesem Sinne warnen Kiryakova und Angelova (2023) vor deren Einsatz im Unterricht nur als Selbstziel und Modetrend.

Interessanterweise mögen auch manche Lernende diesen Skeptizismus teilen: "I feel that on WA (WhatsApp), we are not very responsible in our learning." (Ich habe das Gefühl, dass wir auf WA (WhatsApp) für unser Lernen nicht besonders verantwortlich sind), oder "I think WA can distract us from learning as I cannot focus on the learning because I can use it for socializing at the same time" (Ich denke, WA kann uns vom Lernen ablenken, da ich mich nicht auf das Lernen konzentriere, weil ich es gleichzeitig für Unterhaltung anwenden kann.) (Bouzaiane und Dayananda, 2023, S. 557).

Hinzu kommen noch ethische, wegen der übertriebenen Verwendung auftauchende gesundheitliche – physisch und geistlich – Bedenken und Sorgen um den Verlust der kritischen Denkfähigkeit anwenderseitig.

Als Fazit lässt sich feststellen, ein gesundes Gleichgewicht zwischen digitalen und traditionellen didaktischen Mitteln und Methoden, die Herausbildung und Förderung analytischer und synthetischer Fertigkeiten bildet den Schlüssel zum erfolgreichen Lernen und Lehren, denn: "... using technological tools does not automatically translate into effective teaching and learning, ... even though it is essential to assist students in building transfer-able skills." (... das Verwenden von technischen Mitteln führt nicht automatisch zum effizienten Lehren und Lernen, ... obwohl es entscheidend ist, damit Lernende umsetzbare Fertigkeiten herausbilden.) (Oliveira und de Souza, 2021 in Deribigbe u.a., 2022, S. 16).

Unser Beitrag zum aktuellen Forschungsstand wäre ein orientierender Einblick in den Wirkungsmechanismus dieser Mittel unter rumänischen Wirtschaftsstudenten an der Universität von Großwardein (Oradea).

3. Methodologie

Um den in der Einleitung formulierten Hypothesen nachzugehen, haben wir im zweiten Semester des akademischen Jahres 2023-2024 Studierende des I. Jahrganges der Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität von Großwardein (Oradea), Rumänien, die Deutsch als erste oder zweite Fremdsprache studieren, in die Untersuchung einbezogen. Unsere Wahl fiel nur auf die Erstjährlern, denn in diesem Jahrgang unterrichten wir zwei unterschiedliche Serien von Studierenden, was für die Zwecke der Studie notwendig war. Als Nachteil dieser Wahl ist die beschränkte Zahl der Untersuchungssubjekte zu verzeichnen, da relativ wenig Studenten Deutsch studieren und leider noch weniger die Stunden auch tatsächlich und regelmäßig besuchen. Dieses Letztere ist übrigens auch für die anderen zwei, an der Fakultät unterrichteten Fremdsprachen – Englisch und Französisch – gültig.

Für die Untersuchung der ersten zwei Hypothesen wurden die Deutschstudierenden beider Serien – insgesamt 23 Personen – darum gebeten, die rumänische Variante folgenden Fragebogens anonym zu bearbeiten.

Fragebogen

1. Ich behalte die Information besser:

- a) wenn ich der Vorlesung/den Erklärungen des Lehrers zuhöre
- b) wenn ich ein geschriebenes Material durchlese
- c) wenn ich der Vorlesung des Lehrers zuhöre und das geschriebene Material durchlese
- d) wenn ich mir ein Video dazu anschau
- e) wenn mich das Sujet interessiert, in jedwelcher Form
- f) wenn mich das Sujet NICHT interessiert, in **keiner** Form

2. Für das Üben des Gelernten/Gelehrten bevorzuge ich:

- a) ausgedruckte Übungen
- b) Übungen traditioneller Art aber in elektronischer Form
- c) Online Übungen/Spiele
- d) Projekt als Teamarbeit, dessen Resultat ein Produkt ist

3. Für das Üben einer Fremdsprache bevorzuge ich:

- a) ausgedruckte Übungen
- b) Übungen traditioneller Art aber in elektronischer Form
- c) Online Übungen/Spiele
- d) Projekt als Teamarbeit, dessen Resultat ein in derjenigen Sprache erstelltes Produkt ist

4. Hast du von KI gehört?

- a) ja
- b) nein
- c) ich weiß nicht, vielleicht

5. Hast du KI schon benutzt?

- a) ja
- b) nein
- c) ich weiß nicht, vielleicht

6. Wenn du KI schon benutzt hast, für welche Zwecke?

- a) Zusammenfassung von Texten
- b) Dokumentierung
- c) Erstellen von Referaten
- d) Korrigieren eines von mir erstellten Textes
- e) Lernen
- f) Kommunikation in einer Fremdsprache
- g) andere: gib Beispiele:

7. Ich finde das Verwenden der KI:

- a) bedingungslos nützlich
- b) unter der Bedingung der durchdachten Verwendung nützlich
- c) unsicher
- d) unethisch
- e) unter der Bedingung der Angabe ihrer Verwendung erhebt das keine ethischen Überlegungen
- f) kontraproduktiv, denn es erzeugt Trägheit und verdrängt das kritische Denken
- g) ich habe keine Meinung

Die Frage der (Un)wirksamkeit der digitalen Lehrmittel- und -methoden ließ sich durch ein Experiment untersuchen, in dem die Resultate einer Kontroll- und einer Experimentalgruppe miteinander verglichen wurden. Die Teilnehmer der Kontrollgruppe waren Deutsch-studierende, die in unterschiedlichen wirtschaftlichen Fachrichtungen (Betriebswirtschaft, Marketing, Tourismus, Finanzwesen und Internationale Handelsbeziehungen) auf Rumänisch studieren, während die Experimentalgruppe aus zwei englischsprachigen Fachrichtungen (Internationale Handelsbeziehungen auf Englisch bzw. Unternehmensführung) bestand. Diese Aufteilung wurde noch vor dem Start der Untersuchung im Spiegel der annähernd gleichen Zahl der Deutschstudierenden in den zwei Serien – rumänisch- bzw. englischsprachig – und daher der Vergleichbarkeit der untersuchten Gruppen gemacht. Es wurden sogar die Resultate womöglich beeinflussende Variable, wie vorherige Erfahrungen mit der deutschen Sprache, Lernbereitschaft und -vermögen, konkretisiert in den Noten des vorherigen Semesters, in Betracht gezogen. Zwar gibt es in der Experimentalgruppe womöglich mehr Studierende mit vorherigem kürzerem/längerem Studium der deutschen Sprache als in der anderen Gruppe, waren die Lernergebnisse der Untersuchungssubjekte am Ende des ersten Semesters fast identisch: 8 bzw. 8,007 im Durchschnitt², was eine völlige Vergleichbarkeit der Resultate im durchgeführten Experiment gewährleistet. Als unerwarteter und die Durchführung bzw. das Resultat des Experiments beachtlich beeinflussender Faktor tritt aber die große Fluktuation in der Zahl der Stundenbesucher auf, was sowohl zeitliche Verschiebungen als auch die drastische Verringerung der repräsentativen Gruppen ergab.

² In Rumänien werden Noten von 1 bis 10 gegeben, wo 10 die beste Bewertung ist.

In beiden Gruppen (Kontroll- und Experimentalgruppe) wurden dieselben drei sprachlichen Phänomene, sowohl grammatische als auch lexikalische Einheiten verfolgt. Da die Deklination des Artikels eine Grundproblematik der deutschen Sprache ist, wurden in beiden Gruppen auch digitale Mittel in der Form eines Simpleshow-Videos für die Erklärung der vier Fälle eingesetzt. Um den Ausgangsstand und die eventuelle Wirksamkeit des Erklärvideos zu überprüfen, wurden die Studierenden vor und nach dem Anschauen der Aufnahme darum gebeten, je einen Satz auf Rumänisch zu schreiben, in dem ein bestimmtes Substantiv in einem verzeichneten Kasus steht.

Das Genus der Substantive bzw. Vokabellernen zum Thema Lebensmittel wurden in der Kontrollgruppe (rumänische Fachrichtungen) mithilfe von traditionellen Lehrmitteln und Übungen behandelt, während in der Experimentalgruppe (englische Fachrichtungen) für dieselben Sujets Online-Spiele (<https://www.classtools.net/>) zum Einsatz kamen. Das Behalten des richtigen Genus bzw. der Bezeichnung der Nahrungsmittel wurde kurz nach Lösung der betreffenden Aufgaben durch kurze Tests kontrolliert. Für die Überprüfung der langzeitigen Memorisierung wurde nach ungefähr anderthalb Monaten die Wiederholung desselben Tests für beide Sujets geplant. Das konnte aber wegen der schon erwähnten Zeitverschiebungen und Schwankungen beim Stundenbesuch leider nur hinsichtlich des Genus durchgeführt werden. Damit die Resultate des ersten und des Nachfolgetests vergleichbar sind, wurden die Tests nicht anonym abgelegt, den Studierenden wurde aber versichert, auf keine Weise dadurch beeinträchtigt zu werden. Wie sehr diese Generation von Online-Mitteln und -Quellen abhängig ist und u.E. aus gewissem Gesichtspunkt unreif ist, zeigt die Tatsache, dass manche von ihnen trotz der Darlegung unseres Forschungsvorhabens und der Vergewisserung, dass sie von den Resultaten in keiner Weise benachteiligt werden, bei Unsicherheit zwecks Nachschlagens schon zu ihren Handys greifen wollten.

4. Diskussion und Ergebnisse

Die anonyme Umfrage ergab Forschungsergebnisse zu den ersten zwei Hypothesen. Diese Daten wurden für die zwei Forschungsgruppen – Experimental- bzw. Kontrollgruppe – zusammen interpretiert. Wie erwartet, ist KI für beinahe alle Befragten bekannt, ungefähr 82% haben sie sogar verwendet. Als hauptsächliche Verwendungszwecke wurden Textzusammenfassung, Dokumentation, Textkorrektur, Kommunikation in einer Fremdsprache angegeben. Ein gewisses Maß an Inkonsistenz lässt sich schon feststellen, was die Resultate der Umfrage leicht relativiert. Eine Person sei nämlich nicht sicher, von KI gehört zu haben, hat sie doch verwendet, eine weitere habe keine Kenntnis von diesem Mittel, es aber schon benutzt. Die Meinung der Befragten ist über KI im Allgemeinen positiv: 60% finden sie bedingungslos bzw. unter der Bedingung der durchdachten Verwendung nützlich. Es gibt doch zirka je 13%, die sie für unsicher oder sogar kontraproduktiv halten. Interessanterweise wurde das Problem ihrer Kontra-produktivität in der Experimentalgruppe erhoben, die im Fremdsprachenunterricht auch mit Online-Mitteln und -Übungen in Kontakt gekommen ist. Vielsagend für die Mentalität der digitalen Generation ist, dass die Verwendung von KI für sie keine ethischen Bedenken ergibt.

Gegensätzlich zu unseren Annahmen behält diese Generation laut eigener Aussage die in traditioneller Form übergebenen Informationen besser. Ungefähr 70% der Antwortgebenden meinen, besser mit der Vorlesung der Lehrperson und ihren Erklärungen oder zusätzlich mit einem geschriebenen Material als mit Erklärvideos zurechtzukommen. So bevorzugen zirka 91% fürs Üben des Gelernten traditionelle Aufgaben in ausgedruckter oder elektronischer Form und würden nur ungefähr 43% zum selben Zweck Online-Mittel wählen. Im Falle des Fremdsprachenlernens sind diese Prozentsätze an die 74% gegensätzlich zu wieder zirka 43% zugunsten der traditionellen Übungen. Die anscheinende Unstimmigkeit in den Prozentangaben resultiert von der Möglichkeit der mehrfachen Antwortvarianten zu bestimmten Problemstellungen. Schlussfolgernd lässt sich die zweite Hypothese nicht bestätigen.

Die für die Bestätigung/Widerlegung der dritten Hypothese durchgeführten Experimente ergaben leider keine eindeutigen Resultate. Wie schon erwähnt, wurden diese Experimente von der großen Fluktuation im Stundenbesuch vonseiten der Studierenden zeitlich, durchführungstechnisch und teilweise sogar inhaltlich beachtlich beeinträchtigt. Die Ergebnisse wurden für die grammatische Einheit der Artikeldeklinations zusammen, – da das Erklärvideo zu dieser Problematik in beiden Gruppen behandelt wurde – während für die anderen zwei Spracheinheiten separat in der Kontroll- und Experimentalgruppe interpretiert.

Von den insgesamt 15 Studierenden, die sich die Videoaufnahme angeschaut haben, waren vor dem Anschauen des Lehrmaterials 10 Personen über die richtige Anwendung der vier Fälle nicht im Klaren, 4 waren unsicher und nur eine Person schien sie zu beherrschen. Nach dem Anschauen des Erklärvideos kamen schon 10 Personen mit den grammatischen Fällen zurecht, zwei waren noch immer unsicher und nur im Falle von 3 Studierenden führte dieses Hilfsmaterial zu keinem Ergebnis. Dieses anscheinend bessere Verständnis der Problematik ließ sich aber leider in einem benoteten Test zur Deklination des Substantivs nicht materialisieren, was mit den Befunden von Bouzaiane und Dayananda (2023) im Einklang steht. Die Studierenden erzielten nämlich in diesem Test eine Durchschnittsnote von 6,32 (aus 10), was man nicht einmal befriedigend nennen kann.

Der Beherrschungsgrad der grammatisch-lexikalischen Spracheinheit des Genus ließ sich in zwei Runden bewerten. Die Studierenden sollten zu 28, in der Kontrollgruppe auf traditionelle Weise, während in der Experimentalgruppe mithilfe von Online-Spielen geübten Substantiven den richtigen Artikel angeben. Als Bewertungsschwelle haben wir 21 richtige Angaben gesetzt. In der ersten Runde haben von den 12 Getesteten in der Kontrollgruppe 9 Studierende, d.h. 75%, diese Schwelle, also eine Leistung von wenigstens 75%, erreicht, in der Experimentalgruppe erzielten nur 33% (3 Personen von 9) dieses Resultat. Im für die Beobachtung der langzeitigen Memorisierung gedachten Nachfolgetest leisteten in der Kontrollgruppe 7 Personen (58%) und verblüffenderweise in der Experimentalgruppe schon 5 Personen von den untersuchten 8³ (62%) wenigstens 75%. Zu einem detaillierteren Bild zum längerfristigen Behalten des Gelernten gehören auch folgende Daten: In der ersten Gruppe haben je 2 Personen eine identische bzw. bessere und eine Person eine viel schlechtere Leistung gehabt. In der Experimentalgruppe erwiesen alle 5, wenigstens 75% erzielende Untersuchten,

³ Eine Person nahm an der 2. Runde nicht mehr teil.

bessere Resultate in der Langzeitmemorisierung. Diese Daten lassen sich in folgender Tabelle synthetisieren.

Tabelle 1: Experiment zum Artikellernen

	Kontrollgruppe	Experimentalgruppe
1. Test – gute Leistung	75%	33%
Nachfolgetest – gute Leistung	58%	! 62%

Quelle: eigene Schöpfung

Anscheinend tragen Online-Mittel zu einem besseren längerfristigen Behalten der Information bei, wegen zu geringer Erhebungsdaten und mangels eines Nachfolgetests im Falle der anderen untersuchten Spracheinheit können aber diese Befunde nicht validiert werden.

Der lexikalische Test zu Lebensmittelnamen konnte wegen der schon beklagten aus schwankendem Stundenbesuch resultierenden Zeitverschiebungen nur in einer Runde eingesetzt werden. Die Studierenden sollten 10 vorher schon geübte Lebensmittelnamen angeben. In diesem Test ist die Experimentalgruppe viel besser ausgefallen. Tabelle 2 gibt Auskunft über die Resultate.

Tabelle 2: Experiment zur lexikalischen Einheit **Lebensmittelnamen**

Personen- zahl	Kontrollgruppe – Leistung (9 Testsubjekte)	Personen- zahl	Experimentalgruppe – Leistung (6 Testsubjekte)
2	45% (4,5 Punkte aus 10)	1	95% (9,5 Punkte)
1	40% (4 Punkte)	2	85% (8,5 Punkte)
1	35% (3,5 Punkte)	1	~82% (8,25 Punkte)
2	30% (3 Punkte)	1	50% (5 Punkte)
2	20% (2 Punkte)	1	5% (0,5 Punkte)
1	5% (0,5 Punkte)		

Quelle: eigene Schöpfung

Dabei soll aber vermerkt werden, dass die 4 Personen in der Experimentalgruppe mit sehr guten Resultaten auch vorherige Deutschkenntnisse hatten. Dass in dieser Gruppe eine weitere Person mit keinen Vorkenntnissen in der deutschen Sprache doch besseres Resultat hatte als alle andere in der Kontrollgruppe, sagt u.E. wegen der geringen Fallzahl nichts Eindeutiges über die höhere Wirksamkeit der Online-Mittel im Unterricht aus. Indem man alle Befunde – bessere Leistung der Kontrollgruppe im Artikeltest, bessere Resultate der Experimentalgruppe im Nachfolgetest zur langzeitigen Memorisierung desselben Sujets und die Überlegenheit der Experimentalgruppe im Test zum Vokabellernen – in Betracht zieht, lässt sich die dritte Hypothese weder zweifelsohne bestätigen noch verwerfen. Eindeutig kann man aber aussagen, dass digitale Lehr- und Lernmittel im Allgemeinen mehr Spaß mit sich bringen und so das Lernen womöglich positiv beeinflussen.

5. Schlussfolgerungen und Perspektiven

Von den drei in der Studie formulierten Hypothesen konnte die erste angesichts der Bekanntheit des Begriffs und Mittels KI unter Studierenden völlig bestätigt werden. Die Annahme, dass rumänische Studierende der Generation Z Online-Mittel und -Aufgaben im Unterricht bevorzugen, entpuppte sich als falsch. Laut Angaben in der Umfrage behalten sie in traditioneller Form präsentierte Information besser und ziehen fürs Üben des Gelernten sowohl im Allgemeinen als auch im Fremdsprachenunterricht traditionelle Aufgaben in gedruckter oder elektronischer Form vor. So lässt sich die zweite Hypothese nicht validieren.

Die für die Ermittlung der dritten Hypothese hinsichtlich der Wirksamkeit von digitalen Lehr- und Lernmitteln durchgeführten Experimente ergaben Befunde, die weder die eindeutige Bestätigung noch die Verwerfung dieser Hypothese zulassen. In einem der drei untersuchten Segmente, nämlich dem Verstehen von grammatischen Problemen, schien das Erklärvideo von Nutzen zu sein, jedoch leisteten die Studierenden im benoteten Test zu diesem Sujet nicht besonders gut. In diesem Sinne stimmen unsere Befunde mit denen von Bouzaiane und Dayananda (2023) und teilweise mit den Feststellungen von Shakhmalova und Zotova (2023) überein. Im Falle des zweiten verfolgten Segments, und zwar der Bestimmung von Artikeln, zeigte die Kontrollgruppe in der ersten Runde viel bessere Ergebnisse auf, im Nachfolgetest fiel aber die Experimentalgruppe besser aus. Bei der dritten betrachteten Teilkompetenz – Vokabellernen – bewies jedoch die Experimentalgruppe eine viel höhere Leistung. Ihre Überlegenheit kann aber im beachtlichen Maße vorherigen Deutschkenntnissen zu danken sein. So können wir ungleich der schon erwähnten Autoren, Shakhmalova und Zotova, nicht zweifelsohne behaupten, dass digitale Lernmittel unbedingt wirksamer als traditionelle wären.

Zwar stellen die zu kleine Erhebungsauswahl, die sich während des Experiments noch verringerte, und die Zeitverschiebungen in dessen Durchführung klare Beschränkungen für die Relevanz der Studienbefunde dar, bieten aber zur selben Zeit Grund für zukünftige Perspektiven in der Erforschung der Problematik. In diesem Sinne denken wir an Bereicherung des Untersuchungsgegenstands mit weiteren unterschiedlichen sprachlichen Einheiten, Ausdehnung der Untersuchungszeit auf das ganze akademische Jahr und daher womöglich an die Steigerung der Zahl der im Experiment teilnehmenden Subjekte zwecks erhöhter Validität der Resultate.

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MOODLE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND TESTING. THE EMBEDDED ANSWERS QUESTION TYPE

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Abstract: *The Moodle platform has been used a lot lately in higher education not only for distance learning but also in hybrid classes and as an accessory to the regular form of instruction. This article discusses the usefulness of Moodle in producing tests for language teaching and learning. Allowing several self-evaluation tests and scheduled practice, learning through discovery and through practice is ensured if more attempts are set available. Final testing can also be safely implemented, but this empirical study shall particularly focus on how Moodle can be made into an invaluable tool, useful for innumerable types of language learning areas, from vocabulary to grammar aspects, through the provision of time-saving and appealing quizzes, beneficial both to language teachers and to students. The various tests or quizzes, after being created and implemented, set available within the application, shall then forth render instant, accurate, useful feedback to the students accessing and solving them, as well as to the teacher. Thus, Moodle quizzes are at the same time valid practicing instruments in classes or individual sessions, and means of regular assessments as well, being equally valuable in progress checking and self-checking. The exemplification in this article refers to one of the quiz question types that is most offering and at the same time most elaborate, both in producing it and in its outcome, namely the embedded answer question type. The expertise of the author in creating and using such an exercise type may be of help to other teachers who have the opportunity to use Moodle in their work and could make good use of the examples provided here.*

Keywords: *Moodle; language testing; quizzes; embedded answers question type.*

1. Moodle in language teaching and learning - chronology of the past decade

A decade ago, Moodle was still considered as lacking what would be needed to be quite proper for language teaching/ learning but its potential for future developments towards this goal was already visible: "Having in mind that it was not primarily created for language learning, Moodle platform cannot be the perfect tool for English language teaching and learning, regardless of the willingness and efforts of both students and teachers. However, as it is constantly being improved in all aspects, there are indications that in the future the Moodle platform might be an even more successful tool by which English language skills can be acquired." (Bošković et al. 2014, p.482)

1.1. A timely shift in perspective

Half a decade ago, the pluses that e-learning could bring in language teaching

were already renowned and Moodle now “contributes to the improvement of the efficiency of target language knowledge formation through the introduction of upgraded teaching educational materials; stimulates interest in the study of target languages using innovative information and communication technologies; responsiveness of the feedback and the possibility of direct consultation with the teacher in the educational environment of the Moodle platform.” (Bilotserkovets & Gubina, 2019, p.17) Also, the researchers noted the personal development, sense of responsibility, independence, and self-discipline that the platform helped build in the young generations that benefited from its implementation: “We join the opinion that working with Moodle enables students to develop self-discipline and habits to work independently with a target language learning materials, that includes recognizing the need for separate self-study without the help of a teacher; to develop the ability to learn through the integration of formal (regular courses and content uploaded on the Moodle platform) and informal learning outside the classroom and beyond the control of the teacher” (Bilotserkovets & Gubina, 2019, p.25)

More and more developments were witnessed in the use of Moodle for teaching languages, with users proclaiming opportunities and advantages as the following positive aspects mentioned in a paper not long before the start of the Covid pandemic: “ensuring effective independent work of students”, “optimal implementation of the content”, “the creation of a fairly extensive resource base”, “educational and methodological materials [...] in a more accessible and convenient electronic format”, “flexibility and mobility of learning”, “taking into account the specificities of students”, “opportunity to study at an individual pace” and “perform tasks at a convenient time” a.s.o. (Butova et al., 2019, p.52)

1.2. The useful must in the pandemic era

The necessity of extensively and exclusively resorting to distance learning devices in 2020 during the COVID pandemic meant a two-direction evolution about the use of Moodle in education. On one hand, Moodle was luckily already implemented to some extent in many institutions - as they had distance learning programs which were based on the e-learning platform - and this made it possible for them to soon, with a proper mobilization, resume and continue their activity. On the other hand, digitalization could no longer remain just an item in a good practices plan for future development, if not an instant ‘must’, to thoroughly master, rapidly apply, and make use of, so as activity could go on. Then, fortunately, this development somehow reached a point of no return: e-learning features, initially thought as a compromise, a temporary solution, only forcedly resorted to, turned to being recognized as handy facilities and useful tools in regular classes as well, and were kept in use along with the classic approaches. And thus, it was here to stay, not only for distance learning but as aid in full-time education as well.

The attractiveness of the online and of the e-learning platform is one important point that implements Moodle welcomed and advisable, as the more appealing a teaching-learning tool, the more likely it is to be effective as well: “While observing students' work in Moodle on different cases, projects, quiz tasks, we noticed that students demonstrated higher activity in virtual classes, which indicated an increase in motivation and interest. The level of readiness for virtual classes had increased.” (Ivanova, 2021, P.348)

As aforementioned, the Covid Pandemic had already hit by this time and with it,

Moodle became a necessity in many educational institutions around the world. As practice makes perfect and appetite develops by eating, it thus happened that a challenging and uncomfortable 'must' became slowly a much-appreciated instrument of real help.

Most benefits that would be enough to advocate for Moodle usage in language teaching, despite old opinions that it cannot be effective as it had not been designed for languages, are concisely put together by another group of researchers in 2021: "Moodle appears an effective tool to organize, maintain and assess the independent work of undergraduate students. The application of the Moodle platform has shown several advantages over the traditional forms like the accessibility of the materials, a wide range of interactive activities, the implementation of a student-centered individual approach, and sustainable motivation throughout the course. From the point of view of the instructor, the platform has also demonstrated some benefits more organized, unified, and logical structure of the tasks for independent work, the economy of time and effort for the marking, and clear and straightforward analytics, which makes the assessment and feedback less time-consuming and more individual." (Gudkova et al., 2021, p.9)

1.3. Current state

More recent developments allowed Moodle to be used in a targeted manner and directed to specific usages, i.e. with particular applications designed for precise purposes, from vocabulary introduction to language and communication practice or various grammar aspects reinforcements, as, for instance, remarked by Suriaman's survey on students' views, just a little more than one year ago: "effective teaching media are somehow urged to assist students to learn grammar. Moodle is assumed to give a positive contribution in relation to time and space issues as students can practice to use language independently wherever and anytime, they have." (Suriaman, 2023, p.21) also students "have chances to practice language via Moodle as it presents several quizzes and assignments, [...] may control their study progress. [...] Students' progress study is not controlled by the teacher only. It is automatically that students have conducted the self-assessment process." (Suriaman, 2023, p.22)

Of course, there is always room for better, as many researchers notice in their investigations that while some attributes of Moodle are extensively used, many of its facilities just stay idle: "The lack of utilization of Moodle resources, particularly Book and Label, and Moodle activities such as asynchronous Chats, Group Choice, Database, Glossary, Lesson, Questionnaire, Survey, Workshop, Wiki, and SCORM is evident and emphasizes the need to explore a wider range of tools to enhance teaching and learning through Moodle." (Horváthová, 2023, p.84) Merely noted and exemplified here, this situation holds with most users.

Currently, four years since Covid, the usefulness of Moodle in language learning and teaching is no longer a matter of if, but a question of how, to be most effective. "An essential factor in teaching foreign languages, regardless of platforms, methods, and implementation specifics, is the use of interactive technologies. [...] Scholars often discuss issues related to problem-based learning, using varied methodologies and tools for word memorization, improving grammatical skills, etc. [...] Teaching foreign languages through the Moodle learning platform has several undeniable advantages, including speed, quality, accessibility, and adaptability" (Hnatyshena et al., 2024, p.21)

As for what is to come in this respect, there will no doubt be a new great leap, with the current trends in information technology and artificial intelligence. IT is becoming nowadays if not always the engine of human activities, then at least the fuel of most, for sure. The AI emergence is skyrocketing particularly in the most innovative fields, and education, as one, obviously has to keep up with this explosion. "Future research could also explore a wider range of the possibilities offered by LMS platforms, such as the integration of mobile applications, gamified learning, and natural language processing tools. Investigating this broader set of opportunities could allow researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to better understand the potential benefits and any limitations of the wider use of learning management systems for language learning." (Qaddumi, 2024, p.268).

2. Effectiveness of Quizzes in Moodle

Moodle proves most effective with regard to using the quiz device. It can spare loads the time that would normally have been wasted with physical checking and correcting tests. The application once 'programmed' shall provide instant feedback to innumerable students at the same time, and this not only for one class but for years to come when the same curriculum is applicable to future generations.

Many types of exercises ensure not only diversity but also the possibility to assess linguistic competence by probing most various aspects of language acquisition, from vocabulary and morphology to grammar, syntax, or even translations. Exercises of matching, true or false, yes or no, multiple choices, or filling in the gaps can provide the base for the testing of whatever aspect of the language is desired. Here we can enumerate as many issues as one can think of: word-building with affixation or compound formation, family of words and changing the grammar value, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, choice of words or accuracy of translation, modals, auxiliaries, verbal tenses, phrasal verbs, countability and plural of nouns, adjectives and adverbs usage and so on.

Whatever the purpose, the first condition is that the exercises are properly designed and smartly employed. This will take a dedicated, creative, and technically skillful language instructor, i.e. teacher, who will, firstly, have to be willing to put in quite a lot of effort to then be able to produce valid, relevant as well as appealing quizzes, put the facilities provided by Moodle to good use, even in this field that might seem as not related to technicalities, namely language teaching, and learning.

The more the language instructor invests in the process, the more spectacular the results, first in the layout of the tests on the page of the discipline created for the students, then in the applicability of these tests along the teaching and learning process during regular classes, and ultimately and most importantly, in the usefulness of these quizzes for various circumstances that represent steps to the final goal of developing language skills - from self-evaluation, learning through testing and repetition, on-going assessment of language acquisition a.s.o., to even final examination.

3. Producing embedded answers (cloze) questions

A complex type of exercises that Moodle can provide is that of the embedded answer (cloze) question type.

After the creation of the quiz, when editing the questions for it, the embedded answer type can be selected from the question types window, by selecting the specific button as seen in Figure 1.

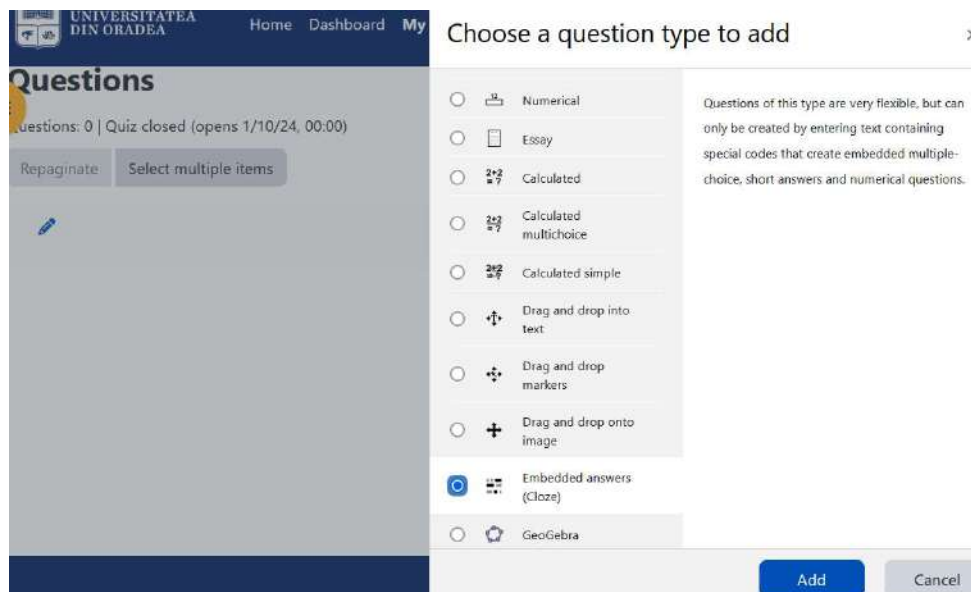


Figure 1: Quiz question selection page – Embedded answers

Source: intrinsic on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

Once this desired type is selected, the question creation page opens and the teacher can begin to encode. Directions and explanations on the Moodle site shall be needed to be able to create such exercises but luckily the platform provides direct access to the necessary webpage, directly from the encoding page, at the question mark button, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Question button directing to the explanatory Moodle page

Source: intrinsic on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

The aforementioned Moodle page, with indications specific for creating embedded answer questions open when pressing “More help” and all necessary information on how to encode these exercises can be learned from there. Figure 3 shows the menu and Figure 4 is the first part of the information provided within one of the titles in the menu.

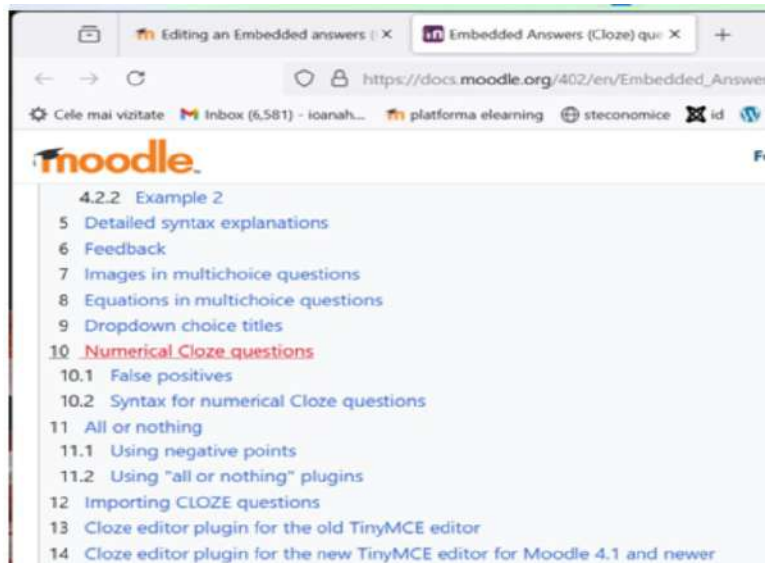


Figure 3. Menu of Moodle page for Embedded answers
Source: caption from
[https://docs.moodle.org/402/en/Embedded Answers \(Cloze\) question type](https://docs.moodle.org/402/en/Embedded_Answers_(Cloze)_question_type)

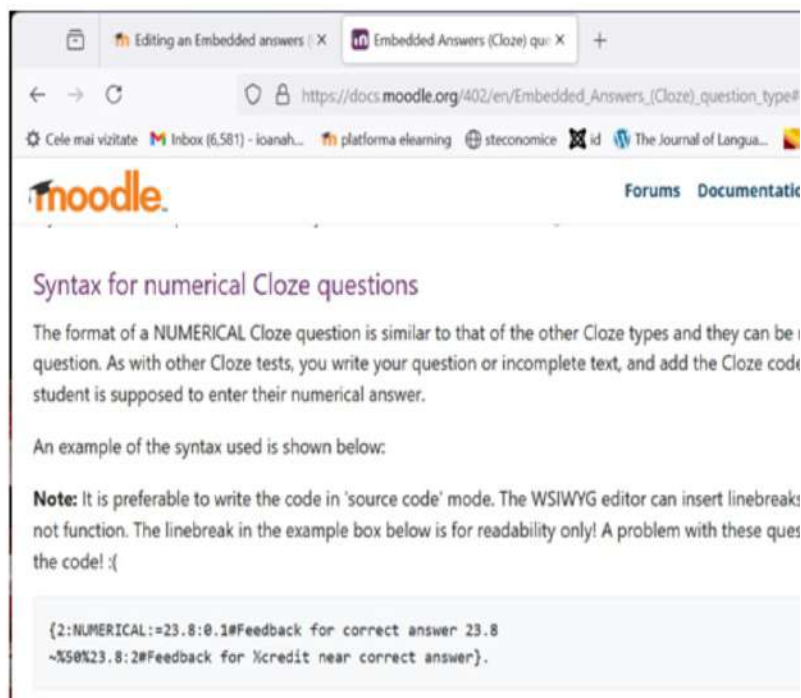


Figure 4. Explanations for numerical cloze questions on the Moodle page for Embedded answers
Source: caption from
[https://docs.moodle.org/402/en/Embedded Answers \(Cloze\) question type](https://docs.moodle.org/402/en/Embedded_Answers_(Cloze)_question_type)

3.1. 'Multichoice' and 'Short Answers'

The creation of an exercise based on two of the most common coding instructions for the embedded answers exercises, the MULTICHOICE and respectively the SHORTANSWER can be seen in Figure 5.

Choose from the 5 numbered structures those 3 that fit in the blanks (writing the corresponding number in each blank), select the correct variant from those given for the 5 option gaps (selection boxes with arrows) in the text and write the synonyms next to the 5 words beneath the fragment (as you can find them in the text):

1. short of money 2. well-appointed 3. paying in cash 4. youth hostel 5. out of pocket

As a reporter, he often had to travel extensively (1:MULTICHOICE:hadn't he~had he~didn't he~isn't it?). He always tried to find affordable accommodation because a (1:NUMERICAL:=2) apartment was too expensive and (1:NUMERICAL:=5) expenses were not very often (1:MULTICHOICE:payment of~back paid in~paying back from~paid back by~backing paid by) the company. When (1:NUMERICAL:=3), he was always very careful, almost suspicious, (1:MULTICHOICE:wasn't~isn't~didn't~was~did~is) he? People say that he used to check his (1:MULTICHOICE:exchange~cash~change~money~currency) several times, which means he (1:MULTICHOICE:is said to have been~was said to be~is said to be~was said to have been~said he was~says he is) a rather cheap person.

pricey={1:SHORTANSWER:=expensive}

frequently={1:SHORTANSWER:=often}

distrustful={1:SHORTANSWER:=suspicious}

verify={1:SHORTANSWER:=check}

individual={1:SHORTANSWER:=person}

Figure 5: Question text - Encoding for an Embedded answers exercise – using the instructions MULTICHOICE and SHORTANSWERS

Source: own design on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

The resulting test page, as it appears to the students accessing the test is visible in Figure 6. One of the arrow buttons was kept pressed when making the screenshot so that the variants for that gap could be also seen, variants from which the students will have to choose the right one to fill in that particular gap.

Question 1

Not yet
answered

Marked out of
13.00

Choose from the 5 numbered structures those 3 that fit in the blanks (writing the corresponding number in each blank), select the correct variant from those given for the 5 option gaps (selection boxes with arrows) in the text and write the synonyms next to the 5 words beneath the fragment (as you can find them in the text):

1. short of money 2. well-appointed 3. paying in cash 4. youth hostel 5. out of pocket

As a reporter, he often had to travel extensively . He always tried to find affordable accommodation because a apartment was too expensive and expenses were not very often the company. When , he was always very careful, almost suspicious, he? People say that he used to check his several times, which means he a rather cheap person.

pricey=

frequently=

distrustful=

verify=

individual=

exchange
cash
change
money
currency

Figure 6: Embedded answers exercise of MULTICHOICE and SHORT ANSWERS – quiz page resulted (with one arrow button pressed, for visualization of variants)

Source: own design on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

3.2. 'Numerical'

The creation of another exercise based on again a common coding instruction for the embedded answers exercises, the NUMERICAL one, can be seen in Figure 7. The resulting test page, as it appears to the students accessing the test is visible in Figure 8.

Question name ! Telephoning - specific lexical elements

Question text !

Choose the right British English terminology in each pair, writing 1 or 2

1. form or 2. dial {1:NUMERICAL:=2}

1. digit or 2. number {1:NUMERICAL:=1}

1. busy or 2. engaged {1:NUMERICAL:=2}

1. directory or 2. phone book {1:NUMERICAL:=1}

1. interior or 2. extension {1:NUMERICAL:=2}

1. give a phone or 2. make a call {1:NUMERICAL:=2}

Figure 7: Question text - Encoding for an Embedded answers exercise – using the instruction NUMERICAL

Source: own design on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025
<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

Choose the right British English terminology in each pair, writing corresponding box:

1. form or 2. dial

1. digit or 2. number

1. busy or 2. engaged

1. directory or 2. phone book

1. interior or 2. extension

1. give a phone or 2. make a call

1. put through or 2. give the connection

Figure 8: Embedded answers exercise – NUMERICAL – quiz page

Source: own design on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025
<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

In Figure 9 we can see the test page that resulted. The image shows its layout while being completed by the tested student (the instructor in this case, for exemplification purposes).

Question 1

Not yet answered

Marked out of 9.00

Flag question

Edit question

Choose the right British English terminology in each pair, writing 1 or 2 in e

1. form or 2. dial

1. digit or 2. number

1. busy or 2. engaged

1. directory or 2. phone book

1. interior or 2. extension

1. give a phone or 2. make a call

1. put through or 2. give the connection

Figure 9: Embedded answers exercise – NUMERICAL – quiz page being completed

Source: own design on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

Figure 10 shows the feedback page provided by the application after test completion, with the mistake identified and shown as such. The wrong answers generally appear as seen here, as crossed in red instead of ticked in green, and positioning the cursor on the explanation “incorrect” appears. In this case, it is clear that if this answer is incorrect the other one out of two would have been the correct one. In other circumstances, when the right answer is not so obvious from the context, the application also explicitly returns the correct answer in the feedback page.

Choose the right British English terminology in each pair, with each corresponding box:

1. form or 2. dial ✓

1. digit or 2. number ✓

1. busy or 2. engaged ✗

1. directory or 2. phone book Incorrect ✓

1. interior or 2. extension ✓

1. give a phone or 2. make a call ✓

1. put through or 2. give the connection ✓

Figure 10: Embedded answers exercise – NUMERICAL – test feedback page with an evident wrong answer

Source: own design on the page of the discipline for distance learning 2024-2025

<https://e.uoradea.ro/course/view.php?id=70942>

4. Conclusion

Moodle, the platform that many institutions use for distance learning or as a helping tool in regular classes, can be a very useful device. For exemplification, this study focused on a complex exercise type that can be created within the application for online quizzes, employing the models and instructions provided by the application itself.

Several examples of exercises that can be produced and implemented using the embedded answer question type prove its adaptability and hence applicability for numerous purposes in language acquisition assessment. The dissemination of the process of production of such exercises, here provided by rendering the exact encoding method and showing the precise way of using the most common instructions available, can be of much help to other language instructors who use Moodle in their activity.

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INFORMALITY IN GHANAIAN POSTGRADUATE THESES: A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Informality arguably has permeated almost every domain of language use in academia. This study thus explores informality in L2 postgraduate theses across four disciplines (i.e., English, Economics, Biology, and Civil Engineering). Using a corpus-based analysis and Chang and Swales' (1999) informality model, we identified 4,003 tokens of informal features categorised into eight types: sentence-initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs, unattended anaphoric pronouns, first-person pronouns, listing expressions, sentence-final prepositions, split infinitives, second-person pronouns, and direct questions. We found that sentence-initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs, unattended anaphoric references, and first-person pronouns were preferred across the four disciplines, collectively accounting for 92% of all informal features. Moreover, disciplinary differences in using informal features were evident, with significant variations between soft and hard disciplines. The study provides insights into how L2 postgraduates navigate disciplinary norms and conventions in their theses.*

Keywords: *Academic writing; corpus-based analysis; disciplinary variation; postgraduate theses*

1. Introduction

Academic writing is defined by its show of disciplinary variation (Afful & Twumasi, 2022; Zou & Hyland, 2022). In fact, it is not only how members write but also what they write about that differentiates them (Hyland, 2002). Among the differences one observes are varying appeals to prior knowledge, varying methods of proving reality, and varying methods of engaging readers. Academic texts, particularly theses, vary in terms of purpose, audience, content, and language. This suggests that L2 postgraduates require not only linguistic ability but also knowledge of the rhetorical elements that readers (and/or expert members) accept (Suen, 2022). Academic writing was characterised as formal (Chang & Swales, 1999; Swales & Feak, 2004), and as uptight, conservative, and difficult to change (Hyland & Jiang,

2017). Formal features are used by writers to create a sense of objectivity, anonymity and detachment (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). A writer may be advised to refrain from making explicit subjective representations of opinions, such as *I believe the reasons reside elsewhere*, in preference of more objective modality expressions, such as *It is likely that the reasons reside elsewhere* (Erdoğan, 2022).

Chang and Swales (1999) observed a growing shift in academic writing from a formal and impersonal approach towards a personal and informal style. Their findings piqued the interest of practitioners in the fields of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), prompting an exploration into informality in academic genres such as research articles (RAs). Hyland and Jiang (2017) posit that informality involves “linguistic features which establish a close relationship with readers by realising a relatively personal tenor which allows writers to make assumptions about a shared context” (p. 43). Hyland and Jiang’s (2017) perspective suggests that informality in academic writing can support writer-reader interaction with elements of subjectivity. Hyland and Jiang (2017) identified a discernible shift towards greater informality in academic texts spanning five decades (1965–2015) across various disciplines. Similarly, studies in diverse settings (e.g., Afful, 2016; Akoto & Afful, 2020; Dixon, 2022; Kyei et al., 2023; Xie, 2020) analysed specific informal features across disciplines. These studies demonstrated that informal features facilitate writer-reader engagement, asserting writers’ authority and identity, and effectively managing their voice and stance. Additionally, the studies revealed intra-and inter-disciplinary variation in using informal features.

Although these studies shed light on the influence of disciplinary diversity on rhetorical choices, there remains a gap in examining disciplines such as English, Economics, Biology, and Civil Engineering within a single study. Specifically, there is a need to explore the similarities and differences in the use of informal features by novice L2 writers across these fields. Therefore, this study examines informality in L2 postgraduate theses across the four disciplines. The study, thus, seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What informal features are employed in L2 postgraduate theses across disciplinary fields of English, Economics, Biology, and Civil Engineering?
2. What are the variations in informal features between soft and hard disciplines?

2. Theoretical Lens

Three theoretic models have been proposed to examine informality in academic writing: Biber’s (1988, 1995) multidimensional analysis, Heylighen and Dewaele’s (1999) formality score, and Chang and Swales’ (1999) taxonomy. This study employed the informality framework developed by Chang and Swales (1999), which has been widely acknowledged in style manuals, academic writing guides, and scholarly textbooks (e.g., Swales & Feak, 2012). The framework has also been validated in prior research as representative of informal academic writing styles (Lee et al., 2019; Tocalo et al., 2022). Chang and Swales (1999) analysed 40 style manuals to identify the most frequently cited grammatical features critical for achieving appropriate levels of formality in academic writing. Their work

incorporated insights from educators, students, and professionals, and it offers a robust foundation for understanding the core elements of academic formality. Hyland and Jiang (2017) adapted Chang and Swales' (1999) informality framework, replacing sentence fragments with second-person pronouns, due to the near absence of sentence fragments in academic writing. The list of the informal features is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: A List of Informal Features

S/N	Features of informality	Examples
1.	First-person pronouns – (I, we, me, us, my, our, mine, ours)	... “we” examined the ideational meta-function of punctuations.
2.	Unattended anaphoric pronouns (this, these, that, those)	“This” is his raw material.
3.	Split infinitives – an infinitive that has an adverb between “to” and the verb stem	The president proceeded “to sharply admonish” the reporters.
4.	Sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs	“And” I will blame her if she fails in these ways.
5.	Sentence-final preposition	A student should not be taught more than he can think “about”.
6.	Listing expressions	“and so on”, “etc.”, “and so forth”
7.	Second-person pronouns	you, your, yours
8.	Contractions	don't, can't, let's, etc.
9.	Direct questions	What can be done to lower costs?
10.	Exclamations	Someone should hire this man!
11.	Sentence fragments	But not for want of trying

As presented in Table 1, the comprehensive list of informal features, as delineated by Chang and Swales (1999) and Hyland and Jiang (2017), consists of eleven distinct grammatical elements: sentence-initial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs, first-person pronouns, unattended anaphoric pronouns, listing expressions, split infinitives, second-person pronouns, sentence-final prepositions, contractions, direct questions, exclamations, and sentence fragments.

3. Methods and Procedures

The study used postgraduate theses, specifically MA/MSc and MPhil theses, written between 1980 and 2022 from a Ghanaian public university. This period was selected due to the historical development of postgraduate programmes at the university, which initially only offered MA degrees before introducing MSc and MPhil programmes in the late 1990s. Additionally, obtaining theses from before 1980 was challenging due to the limited volume of postgraduate research, particularly in Economics, Civil Engineering, and English.

The study used Becher's (1989) model to classify disciplines into soft and hard disciplines, aligning with prior studies (e.g., Hyland & Jiang, 2016; 2017; 2018). The four disciplines analysed were English, Economics, Biology, and Civil Engineering. English was chosen for its emphasis on language data analysis, and problem-solving methodology. Postgraduate theses from the university's Department of Languages (pre-2010) and Department of English (post-2010) were examined. Economics was chosen for this study due to existing literature (Dahl, 2004, 2008, 2009; Greenlaw, 2003; Hunter & Tse, 2013; Owusu, 2018), highlighting the importance of supporting novice writers in making claims and engaging readers. Biology was also selected for two main reasons: its established academic history at the university, which dates back to the 1950s, and the aim to (in)validate the findings of Hyland and Jiang (2017) who reported a notable 24.8% rise in the use of informal features in Biology academic writing between 1965 and 2015. More so, Civil Engineering was chosen due to its intricate rhetorical practices in establishing credibility, as observed by Hyland (2004) in Engineering writing. Additionally, the field has been largely neglected in Applied Linguistics literature (Maher & Milligan, 2019), resulting in limited resources for writing instructors developing courses for master's students.

The study used purposive and random sampling techniques to create a balanced and representative dataset. Purposive sampling was first employed to select theses that were written by Ghanaian postgraduate students, and published between 1980 and 2022. This ensured that the selected theses accurately reflected the target group. After this initial selection, we randomly selected two theses from each discipline for each decade. Theses from 2009 onward were obtained from the university's institutional repository, while hard copies of those published before 2008 were sourced from the university's main library. ABBYY FineReader Professional Edition 9.0 was used to scan and convert the hard copies into Word documents. Given the focus of this study, thesis para-genres such as titles, abstracts, acknowledgements, keywords, appendices, and references were excluded.

The sampled theses were divided into five decades: 1980s (1980-1989), 1990s (1990-1999), 2000s (2000-2009), 2010s (2010-2019), and 2020s (2020-2022), ensuring both disciplinary balance and temporal representation. The corpus was constructed by selecting two postgraduate theses from each discipline for each decade, following related studies (e.g., Kuhl, Sharghinezhad & Rezaei, 2020). Table 2 presents an overview of the corpus size and composition for each decade.

Table 2: Corpus Size and Composition

	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Overall
English	44319	47194	46880	52249	63496	254138
Economics	40986	43525	33674	49758	22029	189972
Biology	21088	24389	36890	37421	44004	163792
Civil Engineering	36204	38568	32752	40851	30797	179172
Total	142597	153676	150196	180279	160326	787074

As depicted in Table 2, the corpora comprised 40 master's theses with a word count of 787,074 words. Variations in corpus sizes did not affect the findings, as frequencies of informal features were normalised per 10,000 words.

Informal features such as unattended anaphoric pronouns, sentence-initial conjunctions, sentence-final prepositions, second person pronouns, and direct questions were detected using AntConc 4.0.5 (Anthony, 2022), followed by manual verification. More complex features, such as split infinitives, were extracted using advanced search functions or wildcard settings. For instance, the term "ly" was employed to locate adverbs, and a list of contracted forms such as "'m, 're, 's" was created to identify contractions. Direct questions and exclamations were identified through the use of search terms "?" and "!", respectively.

The Log-Likelihood (LL) test was employed for statistical analysis to establish whether the observed differences were statistically significant. Frequencies for each informal feature were examined using Rayson's LL calculator (<http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>). A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was chosen, with any value equal to or exceeding 3.84 considered statistically significant (Rayson & Garside, 2000).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overall Distribution of Informal Features in the Corpus

Table 3 presents the raw and normalised frequencies (per 10,000 words) of the informal features found in the corpus. The normalised frequencies (NFs) are in parentheses. The study identified 4,003 occurrences of informal features within the corpus. Eight distinct types of informal features were also identified across the disciplines, albeit with quantitative differences. The number and forms of the informal features in this study differ from previous studies (e.g. Dhandi & Madjid, 2022; Sholihah, 2018; Praminatih et al., 2018; Tocalo et al. (2022). Sholihah (2018), for instance, found that Indonesian students used nine informal features in their thesis proposals. However, Dhandi and Madjid (2022) identified seven informal features. Praminatih et al. (2018) also identified eight informal features in thesis abstracts, including sentence fragments, whereas this study identified second-person pronouns.

Table 3: Distribution of Informal Features by Discipline

Informal Features	English	Economics	Civil Engineering	Biology	Total
1. Sentence-initial conjunctions/adverbs	597(23.49)	535(28.16)	155(8.65)	166(10.13)	1453(70.44)
2. Unattended anaphoric pronouns	425(16.72)	426(22.42)	269(15.01)	266(16.24)	1386(70.40)
3. First-person pronouns	620(24.40)	149(7.84)	34(1.90)	41(2.50)	844(36.64)
4. Listing expressions	44(1.73)	58(3.05)	40(2.23)	23(1.40)	165(8.42)
5. Split infinitives	10(0.39)	19(1.00)	11(0.61)	3(0.18)	43(2.19)
6. Second-person pronouns	20(0.79)	18(0.95)	3(0.17)	0(0.00)	41(1.90)
7. Sentence-final	17(0.67)	14(0.74)	4(0.22)	2(0.12)	37(1.75)

preposition					
8. Direct questions	19(0.75)	14(0.74)	0(0.00)	1(0.06)	34(1.55)
Total	1752(68.94)	1233(64.90)	516(28.80)	502(30.65)	4003(193.29)

The differences in the findings can be attributed to the distinct contexts (L1, L2 or L3), disciplines, genre types, and the level of the text producers as students (undergraduate/postgraduate) or experts. The use of informal features is shaped by various contextual factors such as the writer's linguistic background (native or non-native, L1 or L2), level of expertise (expert or novice), and the genre type (e.g., RAs, theses, proposals) (Boginskaya, 2022). While Tocalo et al. (2022) analysed Applied Linguistics RAs, Praminatih et al. (2018) and Sholihah (2018) focused on an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, with Praminatih et al. examining thesis abstracts and Sholihah using thesis proposals.

The test for significance in Table 4 confirms the effect of disciplinarity on the use of informal features.

Table 4: Inter-Discipline LL Values of Informal Features

Disciplines	LL	Significance Level: $p < 0.05$
English vs Economics	2.64	Not Significant
English vs Biology	292.78	Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	348.57	Significant
Economics vs Biology	218.95	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	262.31	Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	1.33	Not Significant

Table 4 shows the frequency variations of informal features across disciplines: English vs Economics (LL=2.64), English vs Biology (LL=292.78), English vs Civil Engineering (LL=348.57), Economics vs Biology (LL=218.95), Economics vs Civil Engineering (LL=262.31), and Biology vs Civil Engineering (LL=1.33). Statistical analysis revealed significant differences in four comparisons (English vs Biology, English vs Civil Engineering, Economics vs Biology, and Economics vs Civil Engineering) at the $p < 0.05$ level. The results indicate that Economics writers used informal features more frequently than their Biology and Civil Engineering counterparts. These differences reflect distinct disciplinary writing conventions and communicative styles. Meanwhile, the LL values for English vs Economics, and Biology vs Civil Engineering suggest that there was a statistically not significant difference in their frequencies. The lack of significant use of informal features in Civil Engineering and Biology aligns with expectations, considering that these disciplines are typically categorised as hard disciplines. This potentially bolsters the claim that in hard disciplines, "their insistence on formal style thus remains" (Chang & Swales, 1999, p. 154) and that they maintain an empiricist and positivist supposition that scientific studies are factual and, as such, most suitably crafted to be faceless and agentless. In fact, writers in Civil Engineering and Biology in the present study tended to downplay their involvement in the research and often used a less intrusive or personal style. They tried to distance themselves from interpretations in methods that most EAP teachers are familiar with, such as using

the passive voice as in extracts 1a & b, dummy 'it' subjects as in extracts 2a & b, and attributing agency to inanimate objects as in extract 3a & b.

Extract 1

- a. 44.74% of viral detection was found in this group compared to the other age groups. [Biology, 2022]
- b. This was confirmed in this study. [Civil Engineering, 2007]

Extract 2

- a. It was found that lactic and acetic acids were present in the dough. [Biology, 1999]
- b. It is assumed that the commercial and industrial demand area amounts to about 2570 of the domestic in the Urban area and of the domestic demand in the Rural areas [Civil Engineering, 1988]

Extract 3

- a. The figures show that the compressive strength of bamboo culms is very much lower ... [Civil Engineering, 1999]
- b. The figures show that the compressive strength of bamboo culms very much lowers the tensile ... [Biology, 1984]

As evident in Extracts 1-3, the writers chose to de-emphasise their contributions and instead directed attention to the findings. Through the use of passive voice, dummy "it" subjects, and attributing agency to inanimate objects, the writers effectively conveyed that their study's outcomes remain unaffected by individual influences, reinforcing the objectivity of their interpretations by "subordinating their voice to that of nature" (Hyland, 2008, p. 16). This is also supported by Basal and Bada (2012, p. 1783) who noted that "in the hard disciplines, researchers minimise their contribution in terms of their visibility."

The absence of statistical significance between English and Economics can be attributed to the fact that both disciplines fall under the category of soft disciplines. This finding supports Hyland's (2005) assertion that differences in purpose and methodological rigour between the hard and soft disciplines lead to inherent distinctions in rhetorical practices. The observed variations in the use of informal features among disciplines, particularly in the hard and soft disciplines, reinforce the notion that disciplinary differences influence the communicative choices and rhetorical resources employed by writers in academic contexts. Indeed, discipline-specific differences have been observed in several academic genres, including RAs (Hyland & Jiang, 2016), undergraduate essays (Jiang, 2015), postgraduate dissertations (Charles, 2006), university textbooks (Hyland, 1999) and academic lectures (Akoto, Ansah & Fordjour, 2021).

4.2 Informal Features across the Disciplines

Table 3 indicates that sentence-initial conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs were the most prevalent informal features across the four disciplines, occurring 1,453 times at a frequency of 70.44 tokens per 10,000 words. This finding aligns with previous studies (e.g., Praminatih et al., 2018; Sholihah, 2018). Sholihah (2018) noted a high frequency of sentence-initial conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs in these proposals. Likewise, Praminatih et al. (2018, p. 8) discovered that students

“quite often employed conjunctive adverbs at the beginning of the sentences”. The commonality in the findings could be attributed to students’ desire to achieve coherence, signal relationships between ideas, and create a smooth flow in their writings. It is further shown that unattended anaphoric pronouns had the second-highest NF (70.40) in the corpora. This finding supports Lee et al.’s (2019) claim that L2 students frequently incorporate unattended anaphoric pronouns.

Again, the study reveals that sentence-initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs, unattended anaphoric pronouns, and first-person pronouns accounted for 92% of all informal features in the corpus. This result corroborates previous studies (e.g. Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Ebrahimi & Fakheri, 2019; Sholihah, 2018; Yang & Pan, 2023). The study also found that split infinitives, second-person pronouns, sentence-final prepositions, and direct questions were less frequent in the corpus, consistent with findings in RAs (Chang & Swales, 1999; Hyland & Jiang, 2017) and L2 student writings (Lee et al., 2019). This study, as with the findings of Hyland and Jiang (2017), did not identify any instances of sentence fragments. The similarity between the present study and Hyland and Jiang (2017) supports the notion that sentence fragments are infrequently employed in the academic writing genre.

The thesis writers in the present study did not use contractions and exclamations. This finding can be explained by the fact that Ghanaian postgraduate thesis writers are possibly aware that these features are informal and must be avoided in written academic genres. Moreover, these features are generally discouraged in academic writing courses, such as Communication Skills, offered at various educational levels in Ghana, especially at the university level (Afful, 2007; Gborsong et al., 2015). As Chang and Swales (1999) revealed, non-native speakers of English generally acknowledged that contractions (except in quoted materials) and exclamations are not part of the academic writer’s repertoire. The finding further corroborates Leedham’s (2015) observation that L1 students employ more contractions than L2 authors. Leedham (2015) explained why these two groups’ use of contractions differ. She indicates that ESL students pay more attention to the limitations on contractions outlined in style guidelines and enforced by ESL instructors.

The NFs of the eight informal features identified in the four disciplines demonstrate discipline-specific variations in using informal features. English recorded the highest NF (68.94), followed by Economics (64.90), Biology (30.65), and Civil Engineering (28.80). These findings are similar to Hebib’s (2022) study, which revealed that Linguistics had the highest number of informal features, with Economics ranking second. Further, disciplinary differences in the frequency of sentence-initial conjunctions were noted across the four disciplines. Economics recorded the highest frequency with NF of 28.16, followed by English (23.49), Biology (10.13), and Civil Engineering (8.65). This finding contrasts with Hebib’s (2022) observations where sentence-initial conjunctions were most commonly used by writers in Linguistics far more than Economics, Biology, and Mathematics.

Regarding the unattended anaphoric pronouns, Economics had the highest NF (i.e. 22.42), followed by English (16.72), Biology (16.24), and, finally, Civil Engineering (15.01). In contrast, Hebib (2022) found that Mathematics had the highest number of unattended anaphoric pronouns, followed by Economics, then Linguistics, and finally, Biology. The divergent findings between Hebib (2022) and the present study are expected, considering the distinct genre types and disciplines involved in the studies.

Furthermore, first-person pronouns were more prevalent in English (NF: 24.40) than in the other three disciplines. This was followed by Economics (7.84), Civil Engineering (1.90), and Biology (2.50). English employed nearly double the NFs of first-person pronouns as Economics, Civil Engineering, and Biology combined (9.99). The prevalent use of first-person pronouns by English writers is consistent with the research conducted by Kuhl et al. (2020), who discovered that first-person pronouns were the most frequently employed in Applied Linguistics. Concerning listing expressions, the study found that Economics had the highest NF (3.05), followed by Civil Engineering (2.23), English (1.73), and Biology (1.40). Hebib (2022) rather found that listing expressions were most frequently used in Linguistics. Additionally, in contrast to the present study, Hebib (2022) observed that listing expressions did not appear in Biology. More so, split infinitives were most commonly found in Economics (1.00), followed by Civil Engineering (0.61), English (0.39), and Biology (0.18). This differs from Hebib (2022) who found that Linguistics mostly used split infinitives, followed by Biology, then Economics, and finally Mathematics. This disparity in findings may stem from the distinction between expert writers (Hebib, 2022) and novice writers (in the present study). On sentence-final prepositions, Economics had the highest NF (0.74), followed by English (0.67), Civil Engineering (0.22), and Biology (0.12). Generally, it can be noted that sentence-final prepositions were among the least employed informal features in the corpus. This finding corroborates the findings of prior studies. Among L2 academic writers, Tocalo et al. (2022:117) discovered “a less noticeable amount of using sentence-final prepositions.” Praminatih et al.’s (2018) findings revealed that EFL thesis writers used sentence-final prepositions less frequently. Hyland and Jiang (2017) also showed that across the disciplines in their study, one of the least employed informal features was the sentence-final preposition. Finally, direct questions occurred only in English (with NF of 0.75) and Economics (with a NF of 0.74). Direct questions were not used in Civil Engineering but were used in Biology (0.06). The findings show strong disciplinary variations in the distribution of direct questions, which is consistent with previous studies (Chang & Swales 1999; Hyland & Jiang, 2016) that found more questions in soft disciplines than in hard disciplines. This is partly due to the differences in how soft and hard disciplines conduct research and negotiate knowledge. Given the interpretative nature of knowledge in the soft disciplines (Jiang & Hyland, 2022), writers explicitly invite readers to follow an argument. Hard-discipline writers, on the other hand, “find their interpretations in established statistical or laboratory analyses, or rhetorically bolster their arguments through the replicability of experimental procedures” (Hyland 2002b, p. 538). The test for significance in Table 5 confirms the effect of disciplinarity on the use of individual informal features.

Table 5: Inter-Discipline LL of Individual Informal Features

Sentence-initial conjunctions	LL	Significance level: $p < 0.05$
English vs Economics	9.24	Significant
English vs Biology	105.60	Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	145.67	Significant
Economics vs Biology	153.52	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	199.75	Significant

Biology vs Civil Engineering	2.27	Not Significant
Unattended Anaphoric Pronouns		
English vs Economics	18.24	Significant
English vs Biology	0.14	Not Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	1.93	Not Significant
Economics vs Biology	17.41	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	27.18	Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	0.82	Not Significant
First-Person Pronouns		
English vs Economics	189.10	Significant
English vs Biology	386.25	Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	454.43	Significant
Economics vs Biology	50.24	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	71.41	Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	1.43	Not Significant
Listing Expressions		
English vs Economics	8.15	Significant
English vs Biology	0.68	Not Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	1.35	Not Significant
Economics vs Biology	10.89	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	2.36	Not Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	3.25	Not Significant
Split Infinitives		
English vs Economics	6.07	Significant
English vs Biology	1.52	Not Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	1.04	Not Significant
Economics vs Biology	10.72	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	1.72	Not Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	4.17	Significant
Second-Person Pronouns		
English vs Economics	0.32	Not Significant
English vs Biology	19.90	Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	8.83	Significant
Economics vs Biology	22.38	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	11.03	Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	3.90	Significant
Sentence-Final Prepositions		
English vs Economics	0.07	Not Significant
English vs Biology	7.87	Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	4.76	Significant
Economics vs Biology	8.43	Significant
Economics vs Civil Engineering	5.31	Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	0.51	Not Significant
Direct Questions		
English vs Economics	0.00	Not Significant
English vs Biology	20.28	Significant
English vs Civil Engineering	23.28	Significant
Economics vs Biology	11.60	Significant

Economics vs Civil Engineering	18.60	Significant
Biology vs Civil Engineering	1.48	Not Significant

The LL tests for sentence-initial conjunctions revealed statistically significant differences between English and Economics (9.24), English and Biology (105.60), English and Civil Engineering (145.67), Economics and Biology (153.52), and Economics and Civil Engineering (199.75) at the $p < 0.05$ level. This implies that at the five ends of the comparison, disciplinarity had an actual effect on sentence-initial conjunctions in Ghanaian postgraduate theses. Meanwhile, the distinction between Biology and Civil Engineering (LL=2.27) was not statistically significant. As already indicated, given their “hardness” nature, they may share some similarities. As shown in Table 5, the LL values for the differences in the use of unattended anaphoric pronouns were English vs Economics (18.24), English vs Biology (0.14), English vs Civil Engineering (1.93), Economics vs Biology (17.41), Economics vs Civil Engineering (27.18), and Biology vs Civil Engineering (0.82) at the $p < 0.05$ level. The results suggest that the use of unattended anaphoric pronouns differed significantly at three ends of comparison: English vs Economics, Economics vs Biology, and Economics vs Civil Engineering. This finding is supported by Dixon (2022), and Hyland and Jiang (2017), and Gao (2020). On the other hand, the LL values for the differences in unattended anaphoric references in English vs Biology, English vs Civil Engineering, and Biology vs Civil Engineering were not statistically significant. This arguably creates a picture of similarity rather than a difference in the use of unattended anaphoric pronouns between the three groups of writers, drawing attention to instances in the use of informal features where the Ghanaian postgraduate writers in English behave like their Civil Engineering and Biology colleagues.

Moreover, there were statistically significant differences in first-person pronouns in English vs Economics (LL=189.10), English vs Biology (LL=386.25), English vs Civil Engineering (LL=454.43), Economics vs Biology (LL=50.24), and Economics vs Civil Engineering (LL=71.41). The findings reveal that disciplinary variation significantly impacts on the use of first-person pronouns at the five ends of comparison. This result is consistent with those of previous studies (e.g. Melissourgou et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the observed difference in Biology vs Civil Engineering (LL=1.43) was not statistically significant. This could be because the writers in Biology and Civil Engineering are from the hard disciplines. As Hyland (2002) observed, author involvement in hard disciplines is more implicit than in the soft disciplines. Furthermore, the LL values for listing expressions across the disciplines were English vs Economics (8.15), English vs Biology (0.68), English vs Civil Engineering (1.35), Economics vs Biology (10.89), Economics vs Civil Engineering (2.36), and Biology vs Civil Engineering (3.25). The results suggest that there were statistically significant differences in listing expressions between English and Economics, and Economics and Biology. The differences observed between English and Biology, English and Civil Engineering, and Biology and Civil Engineering, however, were not statistically significant.

A statistical comparison of the observed differences in the use of split infinitives across the disciplines revealed that they were significant at three levels: English vs Economics (LL=6.07), Economics vs Biology (LL=10.72), and Biology vs Civil Engineering (LL=4.17). This confirms Gao’s (2020) study that reported statistically significant differences in the use of split infinitives between some disciplines.

Meanwhile, the observed differences were not statistically significant in English vs Biology (LL=1.52), English vs Civil Engineering (LL=1.04), and Biology vs Civil Engineering (LL=1.72).

Table 5 further indicates a statistically significant difference in the use of second-person pronouns between English and Biology (LL=19.90), English and Civil Engineering (LL=8.83), Economics and Biology (LL=22.38), Economics and Civil Engineering (LL=11.03), and Biology and Civil Engineering (LL=3.90). The results show that disciplinarity has a considerable impact on the use of first-person pronouns at the five ends of comparison. This finding is congruent with the findings of Yang and Pan (2023), who discovered significant differences in the distribution of second-person pronouns between disciplines. Nevertheless, the observed difference between English and Economics (LL=0.32) was not statistically significant. This phenomenon might be attributed to the close association of both domains with soft disciplines, potentially leading to the sharing of certain linguistic features (Ahmad, Mahmood & Siddique, 2023; Hyland, 2005).

A statistical analysis of sentence-final prepositions found significant variations between English and Biology (LL=7.87), English and Civil Engineering (LL=4.76), Economics and Biology (LL=8.43), and Economics and Civil Engineering (LL=5.31). According to the findings, the use of sentence-final prepositions demonstrates some degree of disciplinarity. This finding is supported by evidence from other corpus studies fields (e.g. Hebib, 2022; Hyland & Jiang, 2017). The significance test for unattended anaphoric pronouns was not statistically different between English and Economics (LL=0.07) and Biology and Civil Engineering (LL=0.51). Finally, the observed differences in the use of direct questions were statistically significant in English vs Biology (LL=20.28), English vs Civil Engineering (LL=23.28), Economics vs Biology (LL=11.60), and Economics vs Civil Engineering (LL=18.60). On the other hand, the observed differences between English and Economics (LL=0.00), and Biology and Civil Engineering (LL=1.48) were not statistically significant. This may provide credence to the notion that English and Economics share similar softness properties, whereas Biology and Civil Engineering share similar hardness properties (Hyland, 2009). The discussion suggests that informal features do not appear uniformly across disciplines. The extent of the variation appears to be influenced by disciplinary norms, conventions and epistemologies (Akoto, Amoakohene & Ansah, 2021).

4.3 Variations in Informal Features between Soft and Hard Disciplines

The present study, among other things, analysed the distribution of the informal features between 1980 and 2022 in the soft and hard disciplines. As illustrated in Table 6, the overall distribution of informal features reveals a similar pattern of frequency of occurrence. The three most common informal features used by both the hard and soft disciplines were first-person pronouns, unattended anaphoric pronouns, and sentence-initial conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs. This finding corroborates previous studies (e.g., Sholihah, 2018; Yang & Pan, 2023) that found that academic writers frequently employed first-person pronouns, sentence-initial conjunctions, and unattended anaphoric references.

Table 6: Overall Distribution between Soft and Hard Disciplines

Informal Features	Soft Disciplines	Hard Disciplines
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	English	Economics	Total	Civil Engineering	Biology	Total
1. Sentence-initial conjunctions	597(23.49)	535 (28.16)	1132(51.65)	155(8.65)	166(10.13)	321(18.79)
2. Unattended anaphoric pronouns	425(16.72)	426 (22.42)	851 (39.14)	269(15.01)	266(16.24)	535(31.25)
3. First-person pronouns	620 (24.4)	149 (7.84)	769 (32.24)	34(1.9)	41(2.50)	75 (4.40)
4. Listing expressions	44 (1.73)	58 (3.05)	102(4.78)	40 (2.23)	23(1.40)	63(3.64)
5. Split infinitives	10 (0.39)	19 (1.00)	29 (1.39)	11(0.61)	3(0.18)	14(0.80)
6. Second-person pronouns	20(0.79)	18 (0.95)	38(1.74)	3(0.17)	0(0.00)	3(0.17)
7. Sentence-final preposition	17 (0.67)	14 (0.74)	31(1.41)	4(0.22)	2(0.12)	6(0.35)
8. Direct questions	19 (0.75)	14 (0.74)	33(1.49)	0(0)	1(0.06)	1(0.06)
Total	1752 (68.94)	1233 (64.9)	2985 (133.84)	516 (28.80)	502(30.65)	1018(59.45)

The present study reveals that soft disciplines (133.84) used informal features more frequently than hard disciplines (59.45). The soft disciplines are noted for less rigidity as compared to the hard disciplines (Hyland, 2009). The LL values between soft and hard disciplines show significant variations in the use of informal features. Notably, first-person pronouns exhibited the highest LL value (599.21), indicating a substantial difference in usage between soft and hard disciplines. This is followed by sentence-initial conjunctions/adverbs, and unattended anaphoric pronouns. Listing expressions, split infinitives, second-person pronouns, sentence-final prepositions, and direct questions, also demonstrate significant disciplinary variation.

Hence, the disciplinary gatekeepers in the soft disciplines are arguably more tolerable to changes in rhetorical, linguistic and discursal choices than their hard discipline counterparts. Again, the prevalence of informal features is expected in the soft disciplines as these disciplines emphasise personal styles compared to the impersonal/detached style favoured in the hard disciplines (Ädel, 2022; Afful, 2010). The present finding supports Li and Lee (2013), Kuhl et al. (2020), and Mirzapour (2016) who reported that writers in soft disciplines employed more informal features in their writings than those in the hard disciplines. The log-likelihood results (see Table 7) confirm the impact of disciplinarity on the frequency of informal features between the soft and hard disciplines.

Table 7: LL Values between Soft and Hard Disciplines

Informal Features	Soft vs Hard (LL Value)	Significance Level: $p < 0.05$
1. Sentence-initial conjunctions/adverbs	405.3	Significant
2. Unattended anaphoric pronouns	45.57	Significant
3. First-person pronouns	599.21	Significant
4. Listing expressions	5.95	Significant
5. Split infinitives	4.00	Significant

6. Second-person pronouns	32.11	Significant
7. Sentence-final preposition	16.18	Significant
8. Direct questions	35.12	Significant

As shown in Table 7, the observed differences between soft and hard disciplines were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level in sentence-initial conjunctions (LL=405.3), unattended anaphoric pronouns (LL=45.57), first-person pronouns (LL=599.21), listing expressions (LL=5.95), split infinitives (LL=4.00), second-person pronouns (LL=32.11), sentence-final prepositions (LL=16.18), and direct questions (LL=35.12). Thus, the overall density of informal features varied considerably across the hard and soft disciplines. The informal features were significantly employed more frequently in the soft disciplines than in the hard disciplines. The highest LL value for both soft and hard disciplines was observed for first-person pronouns. This study somewhat supports Hyland's (2001a; 2001b; 2005) argument that academic writers in the hard disciplines can minimise their personal representation in their studies. They do this to shed light on the phenomena under inquiry, underlining the need to replicate research efforts and generalise conclusions. Kuhi et al. (2020) rightly argue that in the soft disciplines, a writer's style is viewed as an important component of his/her credibility in the work.

5. Conclusion

The study examined variations in the use of informality features across four disciplines (i.e. English, Economics, Biology, and Civil Engineering). Masters' theses written by Ghanaian students constituted the corpus for the study. A corpus-based approach was employed. The study realised statistical differences between disciplines within the soft and hard categories, and across soft and hard categories. The findings confirm the commonalities and differences in the use of these features based on the shared and distinct disciplinary norms, conventions and epistemologies. It is thus evident that informality plays a significant role in L2 postgraduate theses across disciplinary fields. The observed disciplinary differences in the use of informal features highlight the nuanced nature of academic writing practices across different fields.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into informality in L2 postgraduate theses. The study contributes to our understanding of how academic writers in L2 contexts engage with disciplinary norms in their writing. The findings support the move that academic writing in L2 contexts such as Ghana should adopt the discipline-specific approach which is championed within English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). This will enable the novice to familiarise themselves with the disciplinary culture as part of their socialisation and enculturation into their respective academic disciplinary discourse communities. It is, therefore, recommended that further studies be undertaken on specific thesis part-genres such as the abstract, statement of the problem and methodology to provide further insights into used and unused informality features that typify them.

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APPENDIX Postgraduate Theses Used

Discipline	Title of Thesis (Year of Publication)
English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Artistic aspects of Asafo Companies in Cape Coast (1981) 2. The human head in Akan art and belief: - a study of the head as in entity: the significant of its minor form, their symbolism and their spiritual values (1986) 3. Folktales as source material for children stories - a retelling of some Northern tales (1991) 4. Edibo: a study of the funeral performances of the Effutu of Winneba as drama (1997) 5. An introduction to folktales in Nkoranza traditional area (2000) 6. The artistry of Akan oratory: a study of selected speeches delivered in Ashanti royal courts (2001) 7. The Presentation of the African Woman in Chinua Achebe's

	<p><i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>, Amma Darko's <i>Faceless</i>, and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's <i>Coming to Birth</i> (2010)</p> <p>8. Championing the Cause of African Women: An Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's <i>The Joys of Motherhood</i>, Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> and Ama Ata Aidoo's <i>Changes</i>. (2014)</p> <p>9. Exploring code choices among upper primary school students: A case of selected schools in the ashanti region (2022)</p> <p>10. Discourse functions of antonymy in some speeches of John Dramani Mahama (2022)</p>
Economics	<p>1. Mobilising rural resources for development: the case of Ahafo Ano District (1982)</p> <p>2. The impact of manufacturing on rural economies: the case of the Wenchi factory (1984)</p> <p>3. Motivational strategies to improve performance and productivity in the Pharmaceutical industry in Ghana (1999)</p> <p>4. Human resource development and productivity in the timber industry "the case of Ghana (1999)</p> <p>5. Total quality management as a basis for achieving comparative advantage in this contemporary business concern: a case study of Coca-Cola Bottling Company Gh. Ltd. (2000)</p> <p>6. Estimation of economic cost of forest fire prevention and control (2000)</p> <p>7. The impact of exchange rate movements on import demand behaviour of Ghana (2016)</p> <p>8. Issues and challenges of export diversification in Ghana: firm level analysis (2016)</p> <p>9. The macroeconomic effect on public dept: An empirical analysis of Ghana (2021)</p> <p>10. The impact of financial development on manufacturing sector performance in Ghana (2021)</p>
Civil Engineering	<p>1. Bamboo-reinforce concrete slabs subjected to concentrated loading (1984)</p> <p>2. Re-appraisal of Water Supply Systems on the River Densu (1988)</p> <p>3. Stochastic live load studies in Ghana (1992)</p> <p>4. Structural performance of septic tanks constructed from clay bricks (1994)</p> <p>5. Development of an urban road maintainance management system for Tamale (2007)</p> <p>6. Correlation between Dynamic Cone Penetrometer (n-Value) and Allowable Bearing Pressure of Shallow Foundation Using Model Footing (2008)</p> <p>7. Incorporating joint flexibility in collapse risk assessment (2016)</p> <p>8. Strength and deformation characteristics of recycled polyethylene fibre reinforced concrete (2016)</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. The use of microbial and chemical indicators to detect the impacts of anthropogenic activities on urban groundwater quality: A case study of Madina Zongo (2022) 10. Valorisation of grafted polymers into briquette as green fuel for replacing wood charcoal (2022)
Biology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Effects of some extraneous factors on the bactericidal efficiency of ultraviolet radiation (1981) 2. Starter culture for corn grist fermentation (1989) 3. Screening for candidate <i>Bacillus</i> Spp. for the control of cultcine larvae (1990) 4. Foraging strategies and some morphometric characteristics of the African Honeybee (<i>Apis mellifera adansonii</i> L) in the humid forest environment (1991) 5. Morphometric, meristic and allozyme studies of black-chinned tilapia, <i>sarotherodon melanotheron melanotheron</i> (ruppell, 1852) (pisces: cichlidae), populations in coastal waters of Ghana (2000) 6. The prevalence of luteal phase defect among infertile women (2008) 7. Phytoremediation of Irrigation Water Using <i>Limnocharis Flava</i>, <i>Typha Latifolia</i> and <i>Thalia Geniculata</i> in a Constructed Wetland (2011) 8. Microbial and Chemical Processes Associated with Burukutu, a Ghanaian Fermented Alcoholic Beverage (2012) 9. Viral pathogens associated with pneumonia in HIV infected children in Ghana (2022) 10. Effect of ivermectin plus albendazole mass drug administration on intestinal parasites among lymphatic filariasis patients in Kassena Nankana District (2022)

THE IMPACT OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION ON BUSINESS TERMINOLOGY LEARNING

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Abstract: In today's globalized business environment, cross-cultural communication plays a crucial role in facilitating collaboration and understanding among professionals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Effective acquisition of business terminology is essential for successful communication, negotiation, and professional interactions. This study explores how cross-cultural exposure influences the learning and comprehension of business vocabulary among professionals and students. The research investigates three primary objectives: the impact of cross-cultural interactions on business vocabulary acquisition in English language, the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural differences in learning business terminology, and the effective strategies to enhance English business vocabulary acquisition in multicultural settings. The study incorporates theories such as Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's high-context vs. low-context communication framework to analyze cultural influences on business terminology. It highlights challenges such as lexical gaps, idiomatic expressions, and translation difficulties, which often lead to misinterpretations in professional contexts. To address these challenges, the study emphasizes the significance of bilingualism, translation, and digital learning tools in facilitating effective communication. AI-powered applications and virtual platforms have transformed business communication, offering accessible language training and real-time translation services. Additionally, experiential learning methods such as role-playing and business simulations are explored as effective tools for improving cultural awareness and communication skills. These methods provide students and professionals with hands-on experience in navigating multicultural business interactions. A quantitative survey-based methodology was used to collect data from 215 respondents, including business students, professionals, and foreign managers. The study employed stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across industries and cultural backgrounds. The survey assessed participants' experiences with cross-cultural communication, challenges in business terminology learning, and the effectiveness of various learning strategies. Findings from this research provide valuable insights into how international business interactions contribute to vocabulary development and propose strategies for improving cross-cultural business communication. In conclusion, this study underscores the necessity of cultural adaptability, effective translation methods, and digital tools in business terminology acquisition. By enhancing cross-cultural communication skills, professionals and students can improve their ability to navigate global business environments, fostering more effective and inclusive communication across cultural boundaries.

Keywords: *communication, business terminology, simulation, role-playing, translation, bilingualism.*

1. Introduction

In the business sector, where professionals from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds meet, cross-cultural communication is essential. It is crucial to comprehend business jargon across cultural boundaries in order to collaborate, communicate, and negotiate effectively. This paper investigates the effects of cross-cultural communication on professionals' and students' acquisition of business terminology.

The objectives of this research are: to investigate the ways in which cross-cultural contacts help in the development of business vocabulary, to determine how language and cultural differences make learning business terminology difficult and to investigate methods for enhancing the acquisition of business terminology in multicultural settings.

2. The Role of Cross-Cultural Exposure in Vocabulary Acquisition

Cross-cultural communication refers to the process of exchanging, negotiating, and mediating cultural differences in communication between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. Thomas & Inkson (2009), in their book, *Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally* Thomas & Inkson's (2009), referring to cross-cultural communication, highlight the importance of building and maintaining relationships across cultural boundaries.

The exchange of information between people from various cultural backgrounds is the fundamental definition of cross-cultural communication. Although the primary term has not changed, academics have added to it to highlight other aspects including language, conduct, ideals, and presumptions. The idea of high-context and low-context cultures, as proposed by Edward T. Hall in 1976, is essential to comprehending cross-cultural communication. High-context cultures, like those in Japan and the Arab world, rely on nonverbal clues and implicit signals, whereas low-context cultures, like those in the United States and Germany, prioritize direct and explicit communication (Hall, 1976). A framework for comprehending cultural variations in business communication is provided by Hofstede's *Cultural Dimensions Theory*. His dimensions – such as power distance and individuality versus collectivism – are frequently used to examine how different cultures approach hierarchy, communication, and decision-making. How cultural factors affect how people communicate is one of the main facets of cross-cultural communication. Numerous academics have put forth various models to account for these cultural differences. According to Hofstede's research, comprehension of these aspects is essential for cross-cultural communication to be successful, particularly in professional settings.

In international commercial dealings, where an awareness of cultural differences can make or break a contract, cross-cultural communication is especially important. While some cultures, like Japan or India, place more value on establishing relationships before addressing business, others, like the United States or

Germany, expect business encounters to be straightforward and effective. Also, there are cultures, like those in the U.S. or Germany, which tend to prioritize timeliness and schedules (monochronic), while others, including those in Latin America and the Middle East, have a more flexible view of time (polychronic) (Hofstede, 1984). According to Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner's book *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business* (2003), there are significant cultural differences between countries that have an impact on how businesses operate and are managed. In this context, culture is simply defined as "the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas." (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2003: 6)

Through exposure to a variety of professional contexts, international business encounters help people learn specialized business jargon. Professionals and students involved in cross-border communication get a more sophisticated and varied vocabulary as globalization links businesses around the world. Professionals communicate in real time and come across phrases unique to their industry used in context. Learners are exposed to both official and informal business expressions through conferences, trade negotiations, and business meetings. Also, people who operate in cross-border teams are exposed to a variety of business idioms, jargon, and technical phrases that are used in other nations. For instance, a finance student working on an international project may learn terms like "*hedging*," "*equity markets*," and "*foreign exchange reserves*" through discussions with foreign partners.

Negotiations, branding, customer relations, and financial communication are all significantly impacted by cultural context when it comes to how business phrases are interpreted. To guarantee successful cross-border communication, businesses operating in international markets need to be culturally sensitive and flexible. Therefore, attention should be paid to the following:

Recognizing Local Norms: Companies should investigate the communication preferences, cultural values, and negotiating strategies of their foreign partners.

Respecting Linguistic Differences: Employing corporate vocabulary that is appropriate for the culture guarantees clarity and guards against misunderstandings.

Adapting Formality Levels: While some cultures (like those in the U.S. and Australia) encourage direct and casual interactions, others (like those in South Korea and Japan) favor hierarchical, courteous communication.

3. Literature Review

The importance of business terminology learning in the context of cross-cultural communication cannot be overstated. In an increasingly interconnected world economy, the ability to effectively communicate business concepts across cultural boundaries is essential for collaboration, efficiency, and minimizing misunderstandings.

Business terminology represents the vocabulary employed by professionals in dialogues, negotiations, when building relationships, and its mastery is essential for success in international business environments. Thereby, language training is a fundamental component of business terminology learning, particularly in multicultural settings. Reynolds (2024) emphasizes that the challenges faced by professionals highlight the necessity for businesses to invest in language training

and cross-cultural communication skills, referring specifically to global supply chain participants as an example. Investing in learning specialized vocabulary becomes crucial for enhancing collaborative efficiency and reducing misunderstandings. Moreover, the role of cross-cultural communication competence in business ought to be correctly considered. Effective cross-cultural communication is imperative also in the case of expatriates working in subsidiaries of multinational corporations (Wang & Tran, 2012; Abugre, 2018) where language training impacts job performance and adjustment. Davidovitch & Khyzhniak (2018) argue that communicative training must account for cross-cultural features, such as differences in national character, perception of time, and social status. By incorporating these cultural nuances into language training programs, organizations can foster a more inclusive and effective communication environment. On the other hand, Ishchuk and Ishchuk (2023) highlight that language functions as a treasury of cultural values and beliefs, suggesting that understanding the cultural significance of terminology is crucial for effective communication in cross-cultural business settings. Thus, the need for language training programs to incorporate cultural education, enabling learners to appreciate the nuances of business terminology within different cultural frameworks, becomes of utmost importance.

The integration of technology in language training has been another constant that appeared in the consulted studies, showing that it greatly enhances learning outcomes. For instance, Mežek et al. (2015) found that exposure to subject-specific terminology through various media significantly improves learning outcomes; employing digital tools and platforms for language training can facilitate a deeper understanding of business terminology and effective communication in professional settings.

Another research direction regarding the studied topic focuses on pedagogical approaches which play an important role in facilitating cross-cultural communication and enhancing terminology learning. The flipped classroom model, as discussed by Koponen (2019), represents a transformative educational strategy that encourages active learning and engagement among students, allowing them to explore business terminology in a context that values interaction and collaboration providing a deeper understanding of cultural implications. Additionally, the integration of technology, such as digital tools and virtual communities, has been shown to enhance communication and terminology acquisition. Sinaga et al. (2024) and Luethge et al. (2016) argue that these technological advancements provide platforms for learners to engage with diverse cultural perspectives, enriching the understanding of business terminology within a global context. Cultural intelligence (CQ) emerges as a critical competency for effective cross-cultural communication. Bückner and Korzilius (2015) consider that role-playing simulations can significantly enhance cultural competence, enabling students to immerse themselves in real-to-life cultural landscapes more effectively. Huang (2023) also stresses this perspective by emphasizing the importance of leadership in adapting to multicultural environments. Leaders equipped with high levels of cultural intelligence are better positioned to facilitate cross-cultural interactions, thereby promoting an organizational culture that values diversity and inclusivity.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions provide a valuable framework for understanding the intricacies of cross-cultural communication in business contexts. Thampi et al.

(2020) illustrate the relevance of these dimensions in addressing cultural diversities among small business entrepreneurs in India, while Zhu (2023) highlights their significance in foreign language learning. Rapp et al. (2010), Williams and Zinkin (2008), and Alshahrani (2017) clarify how cultural dimensions influence not only communication styles but also the learning and application of business terminology in diverse cultural settings. Hofstede's dimensions extend beyond communication to encompass consumer behaviour and corporate social responsibility. Steenkamp (2001) stresses that an understanding of cultural dimensions is essential for businesses seeking to communicate ethically across diverse markets. As the global business landscape continues to evolve, further research is necessary to refine strategies that enhance cross-cultural communication and terminology use in both educational and professional contexts. This ongoing exploration will not only contribute to the academic discourse surrounding cross-cultural communication but also provide practical insights for organizations striving to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

4. Challenges in Business Terminology Learning Across Cultures

As language, communication styles, and cultural contexts vary so much, learning business terminology across cultural boundaries is a complicated and subtle process. Learning terminology is essential for success for global corporations and individuals operating in a variety of settings, but there are a number of obstacles that can prevent efficient learning.

4.1. Lexical Gaps

Translation Issues: Confusion may result from some business words having no direct translations in other languages. Terms like *"market share," "entrepreneur,"* and *"brand loyalty,"* for instance, might not translate well or might have distinct meanings in other languages.

Contextual Differences: Certain cultural circumstances can give a word or phrase a distinct meaning. For example, the word *"investment"* may relate mainly to monetary investments in certain cultures, but it can also allude to broader ideas like social or human capital in others. *"Investment"* is typically linked to financial capital, stock markets, venture capital, and economic growth in Western, capitalist-driven nations (such as the United States and the United Kingdom) while *"investment"* may also place a strong emphasis on social capital, such as networks and relationships, in Asian or Middle Eastern civilizations.

4.2. Colloquialisms and Idiomatic Phrases

Idiomatic phrases, analogies, and jargon unique to particular sectors or geographical areas are frequently found in business vocabulary. For non-native speakers or others who are not familiar with the expression's cultural context, they can be challenging to interpret. For example, for someone who is not familiar with Western corporate culture or who comes from a more hierarchical environment where this kind of thinking is less common, the phrase *"thinking outside the box"* may be difficult to comprehend or convey.

The impact of cultural differences on the use of business jargon and idioms should be considered, too. Idioms and business jargon are essential to corporate communication. They enable experts to communicate intricate concepts more

effectively and concisely. However, using idioms and jargon might be problematic when working in a cross-cultural or international corporate setting. The meaning, appropriateness, and efficacy of these statements are greatly impacted by cultural variations, which frequently result in misinterpretations or communication failures.

4.3. Figurative versus Literal Meanings

4.3.1. Business Jargon: A lot of business terminology and expressions, such as "*synergy*," "*value-added*," and "*benchmarking*," are utilized in particular ways in professional settings. These phrases might have different cultural connotations and are frequently industry-specific. For example, the word "*synergy*" may be taken more literally in some cultures, meaning physical cooperation, whereas in others it may only refer to cooperation for strategic gain. Physical teamwork, direct collaboration, and hands-on cooperation are closely associated with "*synergy*" in certain cultures, especially those that have a collectivist perspective. Working together in these cultures frequently entails being physically present and making contributions toward a common objective (e.g. in Japanese corporate culture, group harmony and *kaizen* (continuous improvement) are fundamental components of synergy; the concept of synergy as concrete cooperation is reinforced by employees physically working together in open-office layouts, holding collaborative meetings, and making decisions as a group). (<https://civillisable.com/>).

4.3.2. Idiomatic Expressions: By definition, idioms frequently contain figurative connotations that are not immediately clear from the terminology alone. Idiomatic phrases can cause misunderstandings when employed in cross-cultural communication, particularly if they are poorly translated or lack a direct translation in another language.

For example, for someone who has never heard the idiom before, the phrase "*hit the ground running*" – which means to begin a task with great vigor and enthusiasm – may seem absolutely ridiculous. Such an idiom could be taken literally and lead to confusion in a culture that values straightforward communication.

Jargon frequently presents a problem when working with multinational teams in global commercial contexts. Jargon can cause problems, especially for non-native speakers, even when English is the predominant language of communication. There may be no precise equivalent for some business words in other languages, or the translation may not have the same meaning. It may be challenging to translate terms like "*corporate culture*" or "*thought leader*" into other languages, and cultural context may affect how they are understood. In English, a company's principles, conduct, and workplace are referred to as its *corporate culture*. *Culture d'entreprise* is the closest translation in French, but it could place more emphasis on business customs than workplace dynamics. Although *kigyō bunka* is used in Japanese, there is no exact equivalent. However, Japanese corporate culture is more affected by hierarchy and group cohesion than the Western concept of innovation-driven culture. (<https://www.paularnesen.com/blog/an-essential-guide-to-japanese-business-culture>)

The idea of "*leadership*" may be perceived more hierarchically in some nations and may not correspond with Western ideas of "thought leadership" in the corporate setting. For example, while thought leadership in the West entails people changing

their industries by coming up with fresh concepts and questioning the status quo, *leadership* in China might be more concerned with the capacity to keep things under control, guarantee stability, and fortify bonds with both external partners and subordinates (for example, through *guanxi* or social connections). (<https://www.iexp.com/articles/chinese-leadership-5-critical-differences-with-the-west>).

Regional differences in business jargon can be substantial, even within the same language. For instance, there are various dialects of English spoken throughout the world, including British, American, and Australian English, each with its own idioms and business jargon. In American English, the expression "*getting down to business*" refers to beginning to concentrate on the primary tasks. But in the UK, the word "*getting to the point*" is more frequently used to convey the same meaning, albeit in a different way.

Businesses frequently employ trendy jargon or "buzzwords" in international business settings. These terms may be popular at the time, but their meanings vary depending on the cultural setting. These catchphrases are accepted and used in everyday speech in some cultures, yet they could be seen as superficial or perplexing in others. In Silicon Valley business culture, buzzwords like "*disruption*", "*innovation*" and "*pivot*" are commonly employed. However, in more conventional or conservative cultures, these terms may be perceived as ambiguous or excessively technical.

When professionals from different English-speaking regions work together, there may be misunderstandings or miscommunications due to the substantial disparities in business language between these regions. These regional variations are evident in corporate methods, workplace culture, management, and finance. For instance, in terms of titles, these are typically less formal in the United States. For instance, the term "*manager*" is frequently used in a variety of departments, and in smaller firms, the terms "*executive director*" and "*CEO*" are sometimes used interchangeably. Titles like "*Director*" or "*Managing Director*" (MD) are frequently more formal in the UK than in the US. Only senior leadership roles in non-profit organizations are referred to as "executive directors."

5. Strategies for Effective Business Terminology Learning

5.1. Digital Tools and AI-powered Language Learning Apps

The emergence of AI-powered language learning apps and digital tools has drastically changed how companies communicate across linguistic and cultural divides. Businesses are depending more and more on these technologies as globalization progresses in order to improve efficiency, overcome language barriers, and improve cross-cultural communication. This effect is noticeable in a number of areas, such as international business interactions, customer engagement, and employee training. Employees can easily access language learning resources thanks to digital tools and apps driven by artificial intelligence. Without the need for costly training programs or formal classes, employees may study languages at their own pace using applications like Duolingo, Babbel, Rosetta Stone, or Memrise. Businesses can make sure that their employees can communicate across borders even if they don't speak the language before thanks to this degree of accessibility.

5.2. Role playing and Simulation

Role-playing and simulation are two very powerful ways to help students develop their cross-cultural business communication abilities. By giving students practical experience navigating a variety of corporate settings, these experiential learning techniques aid in the development of their cultural awareness, adaptability, and effective communication skills.

By adopting various cultural identities or viewpoints, role-playing allows participants to practice communication techniques in a simulated setting. It gives professionals and business students a firsthand look at the difficulties and viewpoints of people from different cultures, which is crucial for developing empathy and understanding. Situations such as presenting concepts to a foreign team, engaging in international negotiations, or handling cultural misconceptions can all be simulated through role-playing. As participants learn to modify their behavior and approach according to the cultural context of the other person or group, it aids in the improvement of cross-cultural communication skills.

Role playing scenarios might include:

Negotiation Scenarios: In order to adjust to cultural variances in communication methods, students pretend to be business executives from various cultures and negotiate agreements.

Meeting Simulations: In multicultural business meetings, participants experience variations in body language, decision-making, and business procedures.

Exercises for Resolving Conflict: Students can practice their problem-solving and conflict-resolution abilities by acting out scenarios where cultural misunderstandings occur.

Networking Practice: At international business networking events, students engage as professionals and gain knowledge on how to handle cultural norms when making introductions and striking up conversations.

People can interact with scenarios that mimic actual cross-cultural interactions in a risk-free and immersive setting through simulation. It gives professionals and business students the chance to practice communication, problem-solving, and decision-making techniques that are crucial while negotiating cultural differences. Simulations foster empathy, adaptability, and understanding by simulating difficulties such as settling intercultural disputes or negotiating with international partners. Soft skills like active listening and cultural sensitivity, which are essential in today's global business environment, can be improved using this approach.

Simulated scenario examples include:

Virtual Business Negotiations: Students engage in role-based cultural differences in simulated international business negotiations through digital platforms.

Cross-Cultural Group Projects: Students from various backgrounds work together on a mock international business project that emphasizes the difficulties and solutions of teamwork.

Training in Customer Service and Sales: Students can improve their customer service skills by simulating client interactions across cultural norms.

AI-Powered Virtual Reality (VR) Training: By simulating cultural business environments, VR simulations give students a genuine opportunity to practice communication.

6. Methodology

6.1. Design and Method

This study looks at how cross-cultural communication affects learning and comprehending business terms using a quantitative survey-based methodology. The goal is to collect quantifiable information about the connection between cross-cultural encounters and how well business terminology is learned in global business contexts.

A survey design that is both descriptive and correlational was employed to examine how cross-cultural communication affects the acquisition of business terminology, to determine the main elements that affect terminology retention, such as language exposure, communication frequency, and cultural adaptability, and to analyze the efficacy of various teaching strategies in multicultural workplaces. Quantitative information was gathered from a wide range of respondents using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions. The target population is made up of, mainly, business students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea (both BS and MA), professionals, and foreign managers who communicate across cultural boundaries. To guarantee variety, participants were from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The age of the participants ranged between 18 and 50. The vast majority of the respondents (60%) were economic students and the rest of the respondents were professionals activating in the business environment.

The sampling method was stratified random sampling in order to guarantee representation from a range of business positions, industries, and nations and the sample size counted 215 responders. The survey contains four sections: demographics (age, sex, nationality, sector, and prior foreign business experience and the level of instruction in cross-cultural communication); communication methods and challenges (the frequency of encounters with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, common obstacles include language, cultural standards, and misinterpretations of nonverbal cues, and favorite methods of communicating (direct versus indirect)); the effectiveness of intercultural communication strategies (we have used the Likert-scale items - 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree - assessing: adaptability in communication styles, use of cultural awareness training, and effectiveness of digital tools for improving communication); performance indicators and business results (the efficiency of communication as perceived in negotiations, team collaborations, and conflict resolution).

We distributed the survey through online platforms (Google Forms), face to face encounters (university), corporate HR departments for employee participation. We collected the data over a period of 4 weeks (November-December 2024). The participants agreed to the study terms and no personal identifiers have been collected.

6.2. Interpretation of Results

The survey results indicate that the majority of respondents come from a business-related background, both in education and profession. A significant portion of respondents hold a Master's degree, indicating a high level of academic qualification. This suggests that many participants have pursued advanced studies, likely specializing in business, management, finance, or related fields.

Another large group has a Bachelor's degree, meaning they have completed undergraduate education in business disciplines.

A significant number of respondents (38.5%) reported using interactive exercises, which align with the principle of active learning. According to active learning theories (Settles, 2011), students who actively participate in the learning process as opposed to passively collecting information are more likely to acquire vocabulary. Theories such as constructivist learning claim that rather than merely memorization of vocabulary lists, students gain a deeper comprehension and retention of the content when they participate in activities that call for interaction and problem-solving. This is supported by the usage of role-playing scenarios, quizzes, and flashcards, which 43.5% of respondents said they used. These techniques promote active recall and repetition, which are proven to enhance vocabulary application in a variety of circumstances and improve memory retention.

When asked "Which method do you feel is most effective for learning business vocabulary?", the survey results show that respondents have used various methods to learn business vocabulary, including interactive exercises (38.5%), online platforms (46.2%), and immersive learning (43.5%). Many respondents have engaged in structured learning activities such as quizzes, flashcards, and role-playing scenarios. This method suggests a preference for active learning, which helps reinforce vocabulary through repetition and engagement. It indicates that learners value hands-on practice to build and retain business-related terminology. The use of AI-driven tools (e.g. language learning apps, virtual tutors) shows that learners are leveraging technology to enhance their vocabulary acquisition as AI platforms likely provide personalized learning experiences, instant feedback, and adaptive exercises tailored to individual progress. This trend suggests an increasing reliance on digital tools for business language development. Respondents have also learned business vocabulary through real-world exposure, such as workplace interactions, business meetings, networking events, and case studies. This method is highly effective as it enables contextual learning, where vocabulary is acquired in practical and meaningful settings. It suggests that learners benefit from experiencing business language in authentic professional environments.

In terms of communication challenges (Figure 1), the survey results highlight the key challenges respondents face in cross-cultural communication, including different communication styles, language barriers, and lack of knowledge about other cultures. Respondents pointed out that miscommunications might occur while interacting with individuals from cultures where indirect communication is typical, especially when it comes to deciphering non-verbal clues, gestures, or subtle hints. Confusion or apparent disrespect may result when a message is inferred rather than conveyed directly, causing one to misunderstand the underlying intent.

What are the biggest challenges you face in cross-cultural communication? (Select all that apply)
16 responses

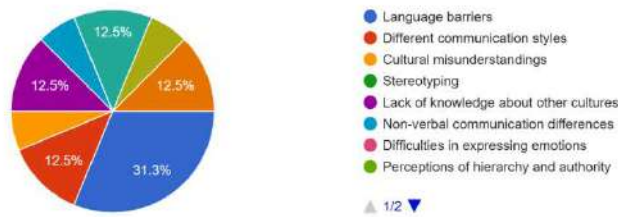


Figure 1: Challenges faced in in cross-cultural communication.
Source: own creation

Respondents who struggle with different communication styles likely face challenges in understanding indirect vs. direct communication, formal vs. informal speech, or high-context vs. low-context cultures. This suggests that misinterpretations or misunderstandings arise due to variations in tone, body language, or expectations around politeness and hierarchy. Businesses and professionals working in diverse environments may need cultural sensitivity training to navigate these differences effectively. Those who cited language barriers likely struggle with fluency, industry-specific jargon, or differences in accents and pronunciation. This challenge can lead to miscommunications, misunderstandings, and a lack of confidence in professional interactions. It suggests a need for enhanced language training, translation tools, and AI-powered language assistants to bridge the gap in business communication. The respondents who identified this as a challenge may feel unprepared to understand cultural norms, traditions, and expectations in business settings. This can result in unintentional offenses, ineffective collaboration, and difficulty building trust with international colleagues or clients. It highlights the importance of cross-cultural training, global business education, and exposure to diverse perspectives to enhance cultural awareness.

Regarding the effectiveness of communication strategies (Figure 2), the results show a preference for online platforms, AI – powered learning tools and interactive exercises.

Which method do you feel is most effective for learning business vocabulary?

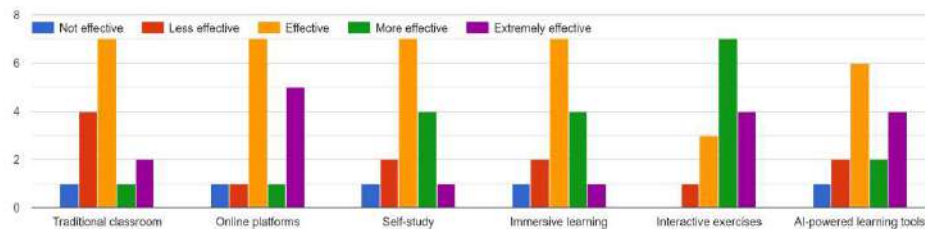


Figure 2: Effectiveness of communication strategies.
Source: own creation

Learners who find online platforms most effective likely value flexibility, accessibility, and diverse resources such as video lessons, business case studies, and discussion forums. Online platforms often combine interactive exercises and AI tools, making them a comprehensive learning option. This suggests that many learners prefer an all-in-one solution that integrates different teaching methods.

Respondents who favored interactive exercises likely value hands-on learning through quizzes, flashcards, role-playing, and gamification. This method is effective because it promotes active engagement, repetition, and immediate feedback, helping learners retain vocabulary. It suggests that learners appreciate structured learning methods that require direct participation.

Those who prefer AI-powered tools may appreciate personalized learning experiences, where AI adapts to their pace, progress, and needs. AI tools often offer contextual vocabulary learning through simulations, chat-based interactions, and real-time corrections. This preference indicates a shift toward tech-driven and autonomous learning, where learners benefit from instant explanations and customized exercises.

As for performance indicators and business results (Figure 3), the survey results assess the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in business activities, negotiations, team collaboration, and conflict resolution. Cross-cultural communication is seen as effective in conflict resolution which suggests that respondents are comfortable navigating disagreements in diverse settings, showing strong skills in diplomacy, active listening, and empathy.

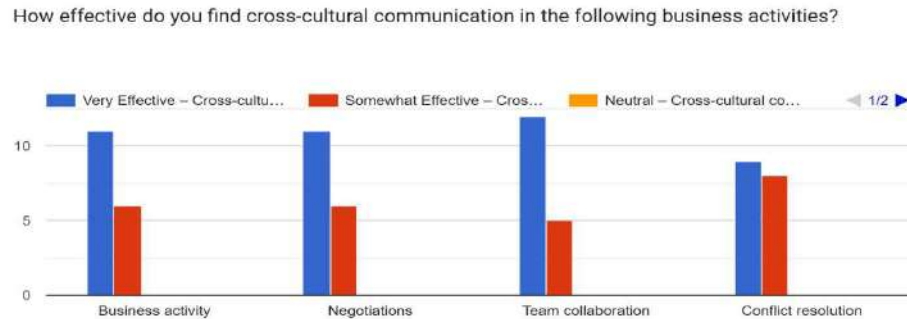


Figure 3: Performance indicators and business results.

Source: own creation

Also, respondents find cross-cultural communication effective in negotiations, which suggests they have adapted well to diverse communication styles, bargaining approaches, and decision-making processes. Businesses may benefit from cross-cultural negotiation training to help professionals navigate these differences and improve deal-making. The results indicate that effective cross-cultural communication in team collaboration suggests that respondents can work well in diverse teams, leveraging different perspectives and communication styles to achieve shared goals.

7. In conclusion

Role-playing, simulation, AI-powered learning tools, online platforms, immersive learning combine to provide a complete toolkit for professionals and business students aiming to succeed in a multicultural workplace. They develop cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and emotional intelligence in addition to practical language abilities, all of which are critical for fruitful cross-cultural communication. By incorporating these techniques into professional development and training, people are better equipped to handle the challenges of doing business internationally, form reliable international alliances, and steer clear of misconceptions that could impede success.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Please check the appropriate box

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Age*

18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		64+	
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2. Occupation*

Professional		Educator/Instructor		Researcher	
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Other (please specify): _____

3. Level of Education*

High School or equivalent		Bachelor's Degree		Master's Degree		Doctorate	
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Other (please specify): _____

4. Years of Engagement in Business Communication or Language Learning:*

Less than a year		1-2 years		3-5 years		6-10 years		More than 10 years	
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LEARNING METHOD PREFERENCES

5. What methods have you used to learn business vocabulary? (Select all that apply)*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Traditional classroom
<input type="checkbox"/>	Online platforms (e.g., language learning apps, websites)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-study (e.g., textbooks, flashcards)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Immersive learning (e.g., internships, travel)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Interactive exercises (e.g., role-plays, simulations)
<input type="checkbox"/>	AI-powered learning tools (e.g., chatbots, grammar checkers)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify): _____

6. Which method do you feel is most effective for learning business vocabulary?*

	Not effective	Less effective	Effective	More effective	Extremely effective
Traditional classroom					
Online platforms					
Self-study					
Immersive learning					
Interactive exercises					
AI-powered learning tools					

7. How often do you engage with each learning method?*

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
Traditional classroom					
Online platforms					
Self-study					
Immersive learning					
Interactive exercises					
AI-powered learning tools					

8. How effective do you believe the following methods are for acquiring business vocabulary?

	Not effective	Less effective	Effective	More effective	Extremely effective
Traditional classroom learning					
Online language learning platforms					
Interactive exercises (e.g., role-plays, simulations)					
Immersive learning experiences					
AI-powered learning tools					

VOCABULARY RETENTION

9. How easy is it for you to retain business vocabulary learned through each method?

	Not effective	Less effective	Effective	More effective	Extremely effective
immersive learning experiences (e.g., internships, travel) are for acquiring business vocabulary?					
AI-powered learning tools					
interactive exercises (e.g., role-plays, simulations) are for acquiring business vocabulary?					
online language learning platforms					

10. Do you feel that you remember the business vocabulary you learn after one week?*

yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	no	<input type="checkbox"/>
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11. Do you apply the business vocabulary you learn in real-world scenarios (e.g., work, presentations, meetings)?*

yes	
-----	--

no	
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MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

12. Which learning method do you find the most enjoyable or engaging?

(Open-ended or Multiple choice: Interactive exercises, podcasts, self-study, classroom learning, etc.)

13. Do you feel that learning business vocabulary through interactive methods and new technologies help you communicate more effectively in a business environment?*

yes	
-----	--

no	
----	--

CHALLENGES

14. What challenges do you face when learning business vocabulary?

(Open-ended: e.g., lack of practice, insufficient resources, time constraints)

COMMUNICATION METHODS AND CHALLENGES

15. How often do you interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds in a business setting?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never						Very often

16. What are the biggest challenges you face in cross-cultural communication? (Select all that apply)*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Language barriers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Different communication styles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cultural misunderstandings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stereotyping
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of knowledge about other cultures
<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-verbal communication differences
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulties in expressing emotions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Perceptions of hierarchy and authority
<input type="checkbox"/>	Different attitudes toward time (e.g., punctuality)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Misinterpretation of humor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resistance to adapting to new cultural norms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inadequate training in cross-cultural communication

<input type="checkbox"/>	Fear of offending others
<input type="checkbox"/>	Different conflict resolution styles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reluctance to ask questions or seek clarification
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

17. Which communication style do you prefer in a business setting?*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Direct and to the point – I prefer clear, concise communication with little to no small talk.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborative and open – I enjoy brainstorming and discussing ideas openly with others.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Formal and structured – I prefer well-organized, professional communication with a clear agenda.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Casual and friendly – I enjoy informal communication with colleagues, often using humor and a relaxed tone.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Written communication – I prefer emails or messages over face-to-face or verbal communication.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visual communication – I prefer using charts, presentations, or other visual aids to convey ideas.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consultative and inclusive – I like to involve others in decisions and seek input before moving forward.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

EFFECTIVENESS OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

18. On a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), please rate the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I can easily adapt my communication style when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.					
I actively use cultural awareness training to improve my business communication					
Digital tools (e.g., translation software, AI language assistants) help me overcome cross-cultural communication barriers.					
Role-playing and simulation exercises have improved my ability to communicate effectively across cultures.					
Bilingualism and translation tools enhance my ability to communicate in cross-cultural business settings.					

BUSINESS OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

19. How effective do you find cross-cultural communication in the following business activities?

	Business activity	Negotiations	Team collaboration	Conflict resolution
Very Effective – Cross-cultural communication significantly enhances the success of the business activity.				
Somewhat Effective – Cross-cultural communication has a positive impact, but its effect is limited.				
Neutral – Cross-cultural communication does not have a noticeable effect, or it is equally positive and negative.				
Somewhat Ineffective – Cross-cultural communication creates some challenges and limits the success of the activity.				
Very Ineffective.				

20. How confident are you in handling cross-cultural business interactions after receiving training or experience?

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

BUCHBESPRECHUNG

DORIS SAVA / ELLEN TICHY (Hrsg.): DEUTSCH ALS ARBEITSMARKTRELEVANTE ZUSATZQUALIFIKATION IN MITTEL-, OST- UND SÜDOSTEUROPA

BOOK REVIEW

DORIS SAVA / ELLEN TICHY (Editors): GERMAN AS ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATION RELEVANT ON THE LABOUR MARKET IN CENTRAL, EASTER AND SOUTH-EASTER EUROPE

Andrea Hamburg

Abteilung für Internationale Handelsbeziehungen, Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät, Universität von Oradea, Rumänien

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Buchbesprechung:

Deutsch als arbeitsmarktrelevante Zusatzqualifikation in Mittel-, Ost- und Südosteuropa

Doris Sava / Ellen Tichy (Hrsg.)

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Die in der Buchreihe *Berufssprache Deutsch in Theorie und Praxis* erschienene Neuveröffentlichung – 2024 – des Peter Lang Verlags, *Deutsch als arbeitsmarktrelevante Zusatzqualifikation in Mittel-, Ost- und Südosteuropa*, Hrsg. Doris Sava und Ellen Tichy, stellt die Auseinandersetzung einer ganzen Tagungsserie von 2016 bis 2022 mit der Problematik des studienbegleitenden bzw. fachrichtungsmäßigen Deutschunterrichts und deren Hintergrund in Süd-, Mittel- und Südosteuropa vor.

Der Band ist in vier große thematische Einheiten mit einer variierenden Beitragszahl aufgeteilt und wird durch ein Abbildungs- bzw. Tabellenverzeichnis

abgerundet. Die Überlegungen der Autoren umfassen Sujets wie Praxis- und Arbeitsmarktorientierung im Bildungswesen, interkulturelle und interdisziplinäre Aspekte, berufliche Kommunikation in unterschiedlichen Fachbereichen und Anwendung von Fachsprachen im Unterhaltungs-bereich.

In der ersten Einheit – Deutsch als Mehrwert für den lokalen und globalen Arbeitsmarkt – sind nur zwei Beiträge zu finden. Sunhild Galter startet ihre Studie mit einem Überblick auf das Lehrwerk-, Kurs- und Fortbildungsangebot im Bereich Deutsch als Berufssprache im deutschsprachigen Raum, um dann ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf die Lage in der Region Siebenbürgen und Umgebung, Rumänien zu richten, wo auch dank der Präsenz deutschsprachiger Firmen eine beachtliche Nachfrage nach Fachkräften mit guten Deutschkenntnissen in unterschiedlichen Fachbereichen zu verzeichnen ist. Die Online-Recherche ergänzt sie mit einer Umfrage unter Berufstätigen (Alterssegment 25 bis 45 Jahre) angesichts der Art und Weise der Erwerbung der Deutschkenntnisse und deren Rolle und Stelle in ihrem Berufsalltag. Im Spiegel des großen Bedarfs an deutsch-sprechenden Fachleuten wird auch die Nötigkeit der Erweiterung und Intensifizierung des deutschsprachigen Lernangebots als Fremd- und Berufssprache klar.

In der nächsten Studie beleuchtet Daniela Pelka nachfragebedingte curriculare Änderungen an polnischen Universitäten und deren Auswirkungen auf die germanistische Ausbildung. Nach einem diachronen Blick auf die Umwandlung der polnischen Germanistik von Binnen- zur Auslandsgermanistik, die nunmal statt theoretischer eine didaktische Orientierung hat, wird in der Gegenwart dieser Studiengang und deutschsprachiges Studium im Allgemeinen durch den Arbeitsmarkt als eine vom Lehramt in Richtung Praxis- und Berufsorientierung verschobene Entität dargestellt. Die Bezeichnungen der Fachrichtungen widerspiegeln das auch und solche Studiengänge werden sogar für Bewerber ohne sprachliche Vorkenntnisse angeboten.

Im Weiteren untersucht die Autorin drei germanistische Studieneinrichtungen vom Gesichtspunkt der Gewichtung der Berufs- und Fachsprachen im Curriculum und Studiumalltag und findet, dass sie an der Germanistik/Universität Oppeln und bei der Fachrichtung Deutsch im Wirtschaftsverkehr, Jan-Długosz-Universität/Tschenstochau durch wirtschaftliche und juristische Fachsprache, kombiniert mit Fachübersetzung und fachlichem Hintergrundwissen vertreten werden. Diese letztere Spezialisierung, wie es auch von ihrer Bezeichnung ablesbar ist, bietet vor allem berufspraktische Kompetenzen.

Die als Magisterstudium organisierte Fachrichtung Deutsch und Kommunikation im Business, Adam-Mickiewicz-Universität/Posen bietet sprachliche Kompetenz in mannigfaltigen Fachgebieten über das Wirtschaftliche hinaus. Die abschließenden Gedanken der Autorin weisen darauf, dass diese Verschiebung der traditionellen Germanistik in eine berufsorientierte Richtung sollte als keine Gefährdung, sondern als Chance für eine Wiederbelebung dieses Faches angesehen werden.

Die Einbeziehung von Lehrveranstaltungen in die Curricula, die über die klassischen philologischen Inhalte hinausgehen, darunter auch solcher, die auf die Berufs- und Fachsprachen fokussieren, und der Erwerb entsprechender Kenntnisse und Fertigkeiten eröffnet den Absolventen weitere berufliche Perspektiven, die mit

Sicherheit einen wichtigen Anreiz für die Aufnahme eines Germanistikstudiums darstellen. (S. 49).

In der nächsten Sektion des Sammelbandes – Deutsch als Berufs- und Fachsprache – interkulturell und interdisziplinär – sind Ellen Tichys Überlegungen über inter- und trans-kulturelle Aspekte in der Wirtschaftskommunikation im Spiegel der deutschen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zu Rumänien zu lesen. Mit frischen statistischen Daten – aus der Periode 2021-2023 – zur deutschen Beteiligung an der rumänischen Wirtschaft in Form von Direktinvestitionen, Auslagerung usw. belegt, beleuchtet die Autorin die Rolle von interkulturellem Training und transkulturellem Know-how unter Wirtschaftsagenten beider Sprachgebiete. In ihre komparative Analyse bezieht sie Kulturstandards – kulturell bedingte Mentalprogramme, womöglich im Wandel –, wie Personen- versus Sachorientierung im Umgang mit Sachverhalten, Beziehung zur Hierarchie und zum Status, Kommunikationsweise und Emotionalität ein, gegen die beide Kulturen, rumänisch und deutsch, gestellt werden. Auch wenn nicht alle, teilweise von anderen entliehenen Aussagen, hundertprozentig für die rumänische Seite passen, dienen sie als ausgezeichnete Orientierungshilfe für deutsche Führungskräfte interessiert an zukünftiger Kooperation.

Die dritte, umfangreichste Einheit – Deutsch als Berufs- und Fachsprache in der Praxis – umfasst acht Beiträge zu mehr oder weniger pragmatischen Aspekten der Sprachverwendung und -vermittlung angesichts weitverzweigter Fachgebiete.

Slavomíra Tomášiková setzt sich mit den Merkmalen von Fachtexten in der forensischen Ballistik mit Schwerpunkt auf die Herausforderungen in deren Übersetzung auseinander. Im einführenden, theoretischen Teil des Beitrags wird als Grundregel für den Übersetzer unabhängig vom Fachbereich des zu übersetzenden Textes die Beachtung der jeweiligen Adressatengruppe und des Gebrauchszwecks klargemacht. Leider wird in der Studie der pragmatischen Anwendung zu wenig Raum gewährt.

Der nächste Beitrag, gezeichnet von Martina Kášová, wendet sich den terminologischen Herausforderungen bei der Übersetzung von Fachtexten vom Deutschen ins Slowakische bzw. Tschechische und umgekehrt im thematischen Bereich der sozialen Dienste zu, verstärkt durch den Mangel an EU-übergreifender Einheitlichkeit in der Terminologie. Das und die Inkompetenz mancher Übersetzer kann schwerwiegende, womöglich tragische Folgen für die Beantragenden der Sozialdienste haben. Dementsprechend setzt die Übersetzer-/Dolmetscherarbeit einen komplexen Mix aus Sprach-, Fach-, interkulturellem und Hintergrundwissen über das Rechts- und Sozialsystem des jeweiligen Landes heraus.

Lenka Poľakovás Studie ist eine Art Vorbote für ein geplantes Lehrbuch zur Rechtssprache für Magisterstudierende in der Dolmetscher- und Übersetzer Ausbildung. Den von ihr eingeführten, auch im Titel des Beitrags vorkommenden Begriff, *Blocksprache*, erklärt sie, wie folgt:

[sie] zeichnet sich (...) dadurch aus, dass ihre sprachlichen Einheiten (d.h. etablierte, konventionelle Ausdrücke, Phrasen usw.) häufig verwendet werden, wobei ihr häufiges Auftreten ein natürliches Potenzial für ihre Automatisierung in der Dolmetscherausbildung darstellt. (nach Poľaková, 2018:46, S. 96)

Ziel der Studie und des erstellten Lehrmaterials ist es, den Studierenden den richtigen Umgang mit solchen floskelhaften Formulierungen der Strategie *Automatismus für Automatismus* gemäß, d.h. die Phrasen in ihrer Gesamtheit betrachtend und so mögliche Entsprechungen in der Zielsprache suchend beizubringen. Als hilfreich erweist sich in diesem Sinne auch das online verfügbare zweisprachige, von der Autorin zusammen-gestellte Glossar zur Rechtssprache.

Der von Blanka Jenčíková gezeichnete nächste Beitrag befasst sich ebenfalls mit dem Fachsprachenunterricht für zukünftige ÜbersetzerInnen und der Rolle von Parallel- und Hintergrundtexten in der Kompetenzbildung und Aneignung vom zur Übersetzung nötigen grundsetzlichen Fachwissen. Mit dem Einsatz von solchen Texten in den Unterricht – passive Phase – und später durch die Anforderung an Studierende, selber nach solchen Textsorten zu suchen – aktive Phase – wird bei denen die zur Übersetzer-/Dolmet-scherpraxis notwendige Recherchefähigkeit trainiert.

Translationswissenschaft ist auch das Sujet der Studie von Ioana Constantin. Da sie sich aber nicht Fachtexten, sondern schöngeistiger Literatur und feministischen Trends in deren Übersetzung zuwendet, scheint ihre Studie in diesem arbeitsmarktorientierten thematischen Band fehl am Platze zu sein. Den von ihr aufgeführten und kritisch behandelten Ansätzen entsprechend werden Übersetzungsprozess und -produkte zu Instrumenten der Machtausübung.

Ágnes Huber stellt in ihrer Studie eine neue, von Großunternehmen eingesetzte Lern- und Arbeitsmethode, Working Out Loud, als eine berufsorientierte Methode für den Umgang mit berufsorientierten Inhalten vor und sucht Antwort auf die Frage, inwiefern sie im Universitär- und Hochschulbereich anwendbar sei. Mit Beachtung ihrer Grundelemente – Sichtbarmachung und Verbesserung der eigenen Arbeit, Hilfeleistung an und Kooperation mit den anderen Teilnehmern und Aufbau eines sozialen Netzwerkes – wurde die oben erwähnte Methode in der Hochschulpraxis im Rahmen von zwei Kursen im Sommer-semester 2018/2019 bzw. 2021/2022 ausprobiert und ergab überwiegend positive Erfahrungen sowohl studenten- als auch lehrerseits. Natürlich lässt sich die Methode nicht in allen Arten von Stunden einsetzen, – so die Autorin – und das würde ich wegen der potenziellen großen Fluktuation beim Stundenbesuch mit der Bemerkung ergänzen: auch nicht in allen Studentengruppen.

Mihai Crudus lexikologisch orientierter Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit einem bisher nur spärlich behandelten Phänomen, nämlich dem Wortbildungsverfahren bei Fachsprachen, ganz konkret bei Arzneimittelnamen. Dabei stellt er fest, dass während Medikamenten-namen früher ganz willkürlich, ohne irgendwelchen sinnvollen Hinweis auf ihre Tauglichkeit oder das zu behandelnde Problem gebildet wurden, sind neuere zweigliedrige Komposita, wie Grippostad®, Tromcardin® usw. viel plastischer.

Der letzte Beitrag im dritten Teil des Sammelbandes, gezeichnet von Cornelia Pătru, erörtert die Resultate zweier Umfragen unter den Wirtschaftsstudierenden der Bukarester Universität (Rumänien) angesichts ihrer Motivation im und zum Erlernen einer L2-Fremdsprache, sei sie Deutsch oder Französisch.

Die zwei Studien in der vierten Einheit des Sammelbandes – Deutsch als Berufs- und Fachsprache mal anders: Spezialwissen und Fachsprachliches in Textsorten des Infotainments –, die vom im Bandtitel ausgesagten Konzept ebenfalls abweichen, wenden sich teilweise leichteren Themen zu, nämlich dem Sprachregister im Bereich des Infotainments und der Alltagsrealität. In diesem Sinne untersucht Doris Sava die sprachlichen Besonderheiten und Merkmale der in Massmediaprodukten angebotenen vielfältigen Horoskope, so wie: Andeutung der emotionalen Nähe, rhetorische Fragen, Ausrufe, Kurzformulierungen, bestimmte syntaktische und morphologische Bildungen, positive Äußerungen, Vagheit, Allgemeinaussagen, Verwendung von Fremdwörtern und Phraseologismen, Bezug auf die Astronomie und daher Pseudowissenschaftlichkeit u.a. Diese Analyse wird dann durch eine Literaturrecherche zum Thema erweitert.

Ausgangspunkt von Manuel Stübeckes Studie ist eine in den 1968er Bewegungen verankerte historische Gegebenheit in der Bundesrepublik der 80er Jahre, nämlich die Wendung der Jugendlichen unterschiedlichen religiösen Sekten und Gruppierungen zu und der damit verbundene linguistische Hintergrund, wie: Jugendreligionen oder -sekte, neue religiöse Bewegungen, Apologetik, Gehirn- und Seelenwäsche, Guru-Bewegungen, religiöser Supermarkt usw. Ohne die Absicht der Bagatellisierung der Folgen schlussfolgert er dabei, dass die womöglich übertriebene Beschäftigung mit diesem letztendlich Randphänomen wohl „ein Geschäft mit der (Sekten-)Angst.“ (S. 213) gewesen sei.

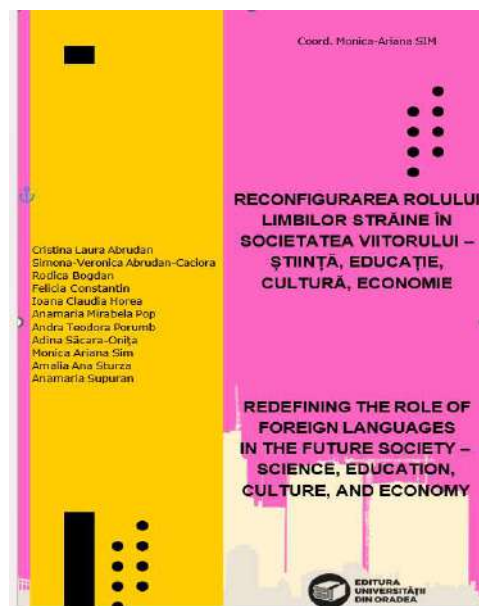
Neben dem Verdienst, solche weitverzweigte, stellenweise doch miteinander verbundene Sujets in einem Buch zusammenzubringen, weist der Band auch kleine Mängel, wie: fehlende Erklärung von Abkürzungen (S. 5, 95), hie und da unverständliche Sätze (S. 94) oder fehlerhafte Formulierungen (S. 103), Tippfehler (S. 162, 163, 165) auf, die beim Mitwirken von verschiedenen Autoren schwer zu vermeiden sind.

BOOK REVIEW

THOUGHTS ON 'REDEFINING THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE FUTURE SOCIETY: SCIENCE, EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND ECONOMY'

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Reviewed work:

Reconfigurarea rolului limbilor străine în societatea viitorului :
știință, educație, cultură, economie /
Redefining the role of foreign languages in the future society :
science, education, culture, and economy

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A recent release (December 2024), the result of research conducted by instructors of applied foreign languages from the University of Oradea, the volume *Reconfiguring the Role of Foreign Languages in the Society of the Future – Science, Education, Culture, Economy*, presents a collection of valuable research-based chapters that explore the intersection between foreign language teaching and the digital transformation shaping our world. It addresses pressing topics such as the integration of digital tools, the use of innovative teaching methods, and the importance of multilingualism in business, education, and cultural exchanges.

The volume follows a straightforward structure. It begins with acknowledgements and continues with the table of contents. Then the 218 pages of the volume develop, with chapters that approach the main theme of the volume.

The first chapter, *Teaching Business English in The Era of Digitalisation* by Cristina Abrudan focuses on digitalisation and examines the way in which this process is transforming the teaching of business English. Abrudan explores the potential of digital tools and platforms to engage students in authentic business contexts, ensuring that learners acquire language skills and the competencies needed to navigate today's global business environment. By integrating e-learning

tools, simulations, and virtual meetings, the chapter highlights the shift toward a more interactive, practical approach to business language education.

"The new educational paradigm is the one which prepares the workforce for the challenging future, being achieved through the introduction of new concepts such as digital tools, which help develop new competences, as well as blended learning, which combines the advantages of face-to-face learning and distance learning. In higher education, digitalization is about using the technology, more exactly the digital tools to facilitate new learning experiences and new opportunities for the learning and teaching processes." (p.19)

The following innovative chapter written by Simona-Veronica Abrudan-Caciara explores the growing trend of using games in education, especially in foreign language acquisition and is called *The Perspective of Thirty Duolingo Users on the Function of Mobile Technology and Gamification in the Process of Learning a Foreign Language*. The author presents convincing evidence on how mobile apps and game-based learning platforms improve language retention and student motivation. The chapter offers an in-depth analysis of various mobile apps and digital games, demonstrating how they create immersive learning environments and foster student engagement through interactive and competitive elements.

"Elements of games are present in most applications dedicated to foreign language learning. Gamified learning experiences rely on the integration of motivational elements commonly found in games: points, rewards that reflect performance, immediate feedback, competition, and the possibility to track peers' results on a leaderboard. It seems that gamification stimulates a more active engagement in the task and the learning group context while it allows for repetition, a more thorough study of words, topics, and rules, at the learner's own pace and availability." (p.31)

"*Preparing Students for the Business Environment Using Digital Tools and Learning Foreign Languages. Case Study: Flipsnack*" is the third chapter by Rodica Bogdan; it focuses on integrating digital tools into preparing students for the professional environment, using Flipsnack as a case study. The author illustrates how this digital is effectively used to simulate real business scenarios while supporting foreign language learning. The author highlights the importance of equipping students with both linguistic and digital competencies, thus preparing them to thrive in an increasingly digitalized business environment.

"Among the many areas where Flipsnack excels as a digital publishing tool, one particularly noteworthy domain is education. The platform provides comprehensive and effective digital tools and specialized plans for students, teachers, and universities. Notable academic institutions, including *Harvard University, Stanford University, the University of Washington, and Cambridge University Press*, have integrated Flipsnack into their digital

infrastructure. These institutions use the platform for internal communication with students and faculty, program and campus promotion, and digital publication of educational materials including courses, books, and assessments.“ (p.44)

Felicia Constantin presents the *chapter “Outils modernes pour faciliter l'accès aux langues étrangères et l'auto-apprentissage: Les extensions de navigateur web (Add-ons)/ Modern Tools for Stimulating Personal Multilingualism: Web Extensions”* exploring the way in which modern browser extensions and digital tools can stimulate personal multilingualism. Through practical examples of browser extensions that facilitate foreign language learning, the researcher shows how individuals can enhance their language skills independently, outside the traditional classroom setting. Her work is particularly relevant in an era where self-directed learning is becoming increasingly common, and she convincingly argues for the role of digital tools in promoting global multilingualism.

“Les extensions peuvent être abordées dans n'importe quelle perspective didactique. Tout élément compris dans Le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues est représenté, sous une forme ou une autre, dans ces outils, qu'il s'agisse des aspects qui concernent les compétences de l'apprenant/utilisateur, les opérations d'enseignement et d'apprentissage des langues, les tâches et leur rôle dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage des langues, la diversification linguistique et le curriculum, l'évaluation (CECRL, 2001), les échelles de descripteurs du CECR et les activités langagières communicatives et stratégiques (réception, production, interaction et médiation), la compétence plurilingue et pluriculturelle, ou bien les compétences langagières communicatives (linguistique, sociolinguistique, pragmatique) (CECRL, 2021).” (p.61)

In the fifth chapter - *Use of Moodle Platform in Higher Education Foreign Language Teaching, Learning, and Testing* - the author Ioana Horea examines the use of the Moodle platform in higher education as a tool for teaching, learning, and testing foreign languages. The chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of Moodle's features, such as its ability to host interactive courses, facilitate real-time assessments, and support asynchronous learning. Ioana Horea demonstrates how the platform fosters both collaborative and individualized learning experiences, making Moodle an essential tool for modern language teaching in universities.

“Moodle online tests prove particularly time effective in terms of correcting responses and offering feedback, facilitating these operations to be performed automatically and instantly, making the work of the instructor much easier in time, once the computer is instructed what to do. Thus, what might seem a painstaking endeavour, a difficult task and a nuisance for a language teacher, i.e. “programming” an IT device, can be made even fun in the

process, as creativity is of help and it smoothenes the aridity of the necessary technicalities.” (p.98)

The following research “*Improving Cross-Cultural Business Communication: The Role Of Digital Tools In Second Language Acquisition*” by Anamaria Mirabela Pop addresses the role of digital tools in improving cross-cultural communication in a business context. The author discusses how second language acquisition, supported by digital tools, is essential for effective communication in globalized environments. She presents specific tools and applications that help learners improve their intercultural communication skills, thus equipping them to navigate cultural nuances in business transactions and negotiations.

”Digital technologies for second language acquisition (SLA) have transformed language learning by introducing new techniques that address a wide range of learning styles, circumstances, and needs. These tools, which range from language learning apps to AI-powered platforms, virtual reality (VR), and collaborative digital environments, are gaining popularity for their role in improving business communication. Business contexts require specialized competencies, such as command of formal language, comprehension of industry-specific jargon, and cultural fluency – all of which digital solutions have been tailored to meet.” (p.102)

In “*La communication multilingue à l'ère numérique – Les avis en ligne/ Multilingual Communication in The Digital Age – Online Reviews*”, the author Andra Teodora Catarig investigates the impact of multilingual communication online, focusing on how online reviews (les avis en ligne) contribute to the digital discourse in multiple languages. This chapter explores the multilingual landscape of the internet, showing how users from various linguistic backgrounds contribute to online platforms and shape global consumer perceptions. It also discusses the challenges and opportunities presented by this multilingual digital environment, offering perspectives on the future of online communication.

“Quand ils déposent un avis en ligne, les touristes mettent en discours leurs expériences, leurs émotions et s'engagent dans un processus d'évaluation de leurs partenaires (les hôteliers) et de leurs structures d'hébergement. Le fait d'avoir passé du temps dans la structure évaluée, leur profil et leurs arguments les transforment en « experts », dont les futurs touristes tiendront compte lors de la réservation. D'autre part, les hôteliers mettent en œuvre des stratégies visant à maintenir une bonne réputation de leur unité d'hébergement, en répondant, surtout quand il y a des messages négatifs, aux problèmes soulevés par les clients.” (p. 117)

The following chapter entitled “*EU Und Die Fremdsprachen/ EU and Foreign Languages*” written by Adina Sacară-Onița discusses the European Union's initiatives and policies aimed at promoting foreign language learning among its member states. Adina Sacară-Onița examines the EU's role in fostering a

multilingual society and the importance of foreign languages in the economic, political, and cultural spheres of the Union. The chapter provides a detailed overview of various EU-funded language learning programs and their essential role in preparing citizens for the challenges of the globalized workforce.

"Die Sprache ist das Unterscheidungsmerkmal jeder Nation. Mit dem Beitritt zur Europäischen Union, die eine sprachliche und kulturelle Vielfalt repräsentiert, wird die Kommunikation innerhalb dieser Gemeinschaft zu einer Herausforderung. Wenn man bedenkt, dass in der Europäischen Union nicht weniger als 40 Sprachen gesprochen werden, kommt man zu dem Schluss, dass sich die Mitglieder dieser Gemeinschaft nur durch das Erlernen von Fremdsprachen gegenseitig verstehen können. Die Notwendigkeit, eine Fremdsprache zu beherrschen, ist die Voraussetzung für die Freizügigkeit innerhalb der Europäischen Union, insbesondere wenn man in einer anderen Region der Union arbeiten möchte. Aus diesem Grund unterstützt die Europäische Union das Erlernen, den Erhalt und die Verbreitung der europäischen Sprachen." (p. 137)

Monica Ariana Sim approaches the issue of the evolution of the teaching profession in the chapter "*The Teaching Profession in the Light of the Changing Landscape of Educational Technology – Opportunities and Challenges*" offering a detailed examination of how educational technology is transforming the teaching profession, particularly in the field of language education. The chapter discusses both the opportunities and challenges brought about by the integration of technology into the classroom. The author reflects on the changing role of teachers in a technology-driven environment, emphasizing the need for educators to adapt to new tools and methodologies while maintaining a student-centered approach.

"Teaching can be seen as both a science and an art thus proving the complexity of the profession. To support the former assumption, teaching involves the application of learned strategies, and pedagogical theories derived from cognitive science and educational psychology that future teachers thoroughly study during their academic years. As a result, teaching relies on empirical data and proven methods to enhance learning, making it a science rooted in research and theory (Hattie, 2009). However, teaching is not just about following a set of rules; it also requires creativity, empathy, and intuition which all support the second assumption in discussion and align more with the concept of art." (p. 160)

Evaluations, examinations, assessment aspects are approached by Amalia Sturza in her chapter "*Cumulative Assessment Versus Final Examination As A Means Of Improving Students' Academic Performancel*". The researcher compares the effectiveness of cumulative assessment with traditional final exams in foreign language education. Through case studies and empirical data, she explores how

continuous assessment methods can improve student outcomes by providing constant feedback and encouraging sustained effort. The chapter highlights the benefits of adopting a more holistic approach to assessment, which can lead to better academic performance and deeper language retention.

"The evolution of assessment methods is a testament to how higher education adapts to the complexities of an evolving world. The implications of these changes ripple far beyond the hallowed halls of universities. Employers seek candidates equipped not just with theoretical knowledge but the practical application and critical thinking that these new assessment methods foster. In ensuring our assessment strategies align with the needs of 21st-century industry, higher education plays the role of a responsive innovator." (p.183)

The last chapter by Anamaria Supuran entitled "*Recipe For Language Acquisition: New And Innovative Tools Empowering English Instruction In Food Science*" presents an interesting intersection between language education and the field of food science. It explores how innovative digital tools can enhance English language teaching for students in food sciences, offering creative strategies for integrating language learning into specialized content areas. This interdisciplinary approach makes language learning more relevant and equips students with both linguistic and technical skills necessary for their professional fields.

"The use of mobile applications, such as those included in the present study, for learning English vocabulary related to food science has several benefits, such as providing engaging everyday food-related vocabulary. Some applications' *video tutorials*, which focus mainly on recipe collections, are beneficial for visual learners. They provide clear and engaging instructions, support students in associating food terminology with actions, and reinforce comprehension and vocabulary retention." (p.213)

Together, these chapters offer a visionary analysis of how language education is being reshaped by digital tools and methodologies. The volume provides valuable contributions for educators, researchers, and practitioners interested in the future of foreign language learning in a world increasingly defined by technological innovation. This collective work is an essential read for anyone wishing to understand the changing dynamics of language teaching in the digital age.