

**STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION IN BUSINESS
ENGLISH CLASSES: A LIFEComp-BASED APPROACH**DOI: [10.56177/AUA.PHILOLOGICA.1.26.2025.art.26](https://doi.org/10.56177/AUA.PHILOLOGICA.1.26.2025.art.26)

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Abstract: *This article explores communication competence within LifeComp, the European framework for personal, social, and learning-to-learn skills. It highlights communication as a multifaceted skill essential in today's diverse, digital, and globalized educational context. Emphasizing clear, empathetic, and context-sensitive expression, the study presents methods to identify, assess, and develop this competence through interactive, collaborative, and student-centered approaches. Drawing on Business English course examples, it illustrates the use of applied tasks and educational technologies to integrate communication into learning. The article concludes that fostering this competence improves academic outcomes and prepares students for effective communication in a dynamic professional environment.*

Keywords: transversal competences; communication; intercultural education; Business English; active learning; communicative adaptability; student-centered education; LifeComp Framework.

I. Introduction

In the 21st century, universities have shifted from solely transmitting disciplinary knowledge to fostering transversal competences—flexible, transferable skills essential for employability, citizenship, and lifelong learning. Communication, collaboration, and critical thinking are widely recognized as foundational for personal and professional success, especially in the business world's intercultural and fast-paced environment. The European Commission's *LifeComp* framework addresses these needs by defining nine competences across personal, social, and learning-to-learn domains, with communication enabling effective interpersonal interaction, decision-making, and information evaluation.

Communication skills are critical in business, encompassing clear expression, audience adaptation, active listening, and dialogue, and are consistently prioritized by employers. University-level Business English courses offer an ideal setting to develop communication alongside linguistic and professional skills through real-world tasks like emailing, meetings, and case studies. These task-based, simulation-driven approaches align with *LifeComp* goals, supporting students' transition to diverse, international workplaces by enhancing employability, confidence, autonomy, and reflective learning.

This study explores how *LifeComp*'s communication competence can be integrated into Business English instruction, focusing on effective pedagogical strategies and task designs. It reviews relevant literature, outlines the teaching

context, and presents classroom activities with critical reflections. The paper aims to promote learner-centered, competence-based language education that prepares students to become reflective, collaborative professionals equipped for dynamic organizational environments.

The Practicality and Relevance of this Paper — Background and Context

This paper is grounded in six years of practical experience teaching Business English to undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, “Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca. Working with learners from diverse majors, we have developed and refined activities aimed at enhancing both language proficiency and key interpersonal, cognitive, and professional competences. The examples and strategies presented draw directly from our teaching portfolio and reflect authentic classroom dynamics, informed by observation, experimentation, and student feedback. This practitioner-based perspective enables a meaningful exploration of how *LifeComp*’s communication competence can be integrated into Business English instruction in pedagogically sound and adaptable ways. The study thus serves as both scholarly inquiry and practical resource for educators in economic and business education contexts.

Research Problem and Objectives

While embedding communication into Business English instruction holds clear pedagogical value, its implementation in Romanian university classrooms faces several challenges. These stem from systemic factors, student diversity, and the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students enter with highly variable English proficiency (A1–C2), often due to unequal access to quality language education, resulting in heterogeneous groups and uneven participation. The Romanian educational tradition of teacher-centered, exam-oriented instruction provides limited opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, or reflective learning, making competence-based approaches unfamiliar. Moreover, pandemic-era online schooling has contributed to students’ reluctance toward peer interaction and group work, with many showing a preference for individual tasks and limited communication skills. In this context, building a supportive, interactive learning environment becomes both crucial and complex.

This paper aims to explore strategies for addressing these challenges by: (1) adapting competence-based methods to diverse learner profiles; (2) facilitating the shift toward learner-centered instruction; and (3) promoting student engagement in collaborative tasks, even when initial motivation is low. The study contributes to the broader discourse on integrating life competences into higher education and offers practice-oriented insights for Business English educators.

Preliminary Remarks on Methodology

This qualitative, practice-based study adopts a reflective practitioner approach grounded in classroom observation and experience. It draws on authentic data from several academic years of Business English courses at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, “Babeş-Bolyai” University, including original teaching materials and student-generated content such as projects, presentations, dialogues, and written assignments submitted via the university’s Moodle platform. The analysis explores how these tasks supported the development of *LifeComp*’s communication competence and how students engaged with them. Rather than employing experimental methods, the study uses content analysis and a descriptive-interpretive framework to examine task design, interaction, and student output. This methodology offers a nuanced, context-sensitive perspective and provides actionable insights for Business English educators in similar teaching environments.

Ethical Considerations

This study follows core ethical principles in educational research, including confidentiality, informed consent, and responsible data use. Student-generated materials—such as projects and assignments—were collected via the university’s Moodle platform and used anonymously and non-evaluatively. Although formal ethical clearance was not required due to the reflective nature of the research and use of publicly submitted coursework, voluntary participation and academic transparency were maintained. Examples are presented solely for pedagogical purposes without disclosing personal data or focusing on individual performance. This approach upholds trust, integrity, and professional standards in educational research.

Limitations of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into integrating *LifeComp*’s communication dimension into Business English instruction but has several limitations. It is context-specific, based on experiences from a single institution—Babeş-Bolyai University—limiting generalizability to other academic settings with different curricula, student populations, or resources. The varied language proficiency of students affects consistency in engagement and assessment of communicative tasks. Additionally, the prevailing teacher-centered educational culture and the impact of COVID-19-related social isolation hinder student participation in peer interaction and teamwork, crucial for developing communication skills. The study’s reliance on qualitative, reflective methods limits statistical validation. Nonetheless, it offers meaningful contributions and highlights the need for future research with diverse samples, institutional comparisons, and longitudinal approaches.

II. The *LifeComp* Framework and Scholarly Literature: A Brief Overview

The *LifeComp* Framework, developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service, provides a structured model for the development of "personal, social, and learning-to-learn" competences that are essential for thriving in both professional and everyday life. According to the authors of the framework, it regards "personal, social and learning to learn as a set of competences applying to all spheres of life that can be acquired through formal informal and non-formal education, and can help citizens to thrive in the 21st century" (Sala et al. 2020:3). Conceived as a transversal framework, *LifeComp* reflects the growing consensus that education systems must go beyond subject-specific knowledge and equip learners with skills that support autonomy, adaptability, and civic engagement in an increasingly complex world.

As previously noted, the framework consists of three interrelated areas which were developed in 2018 by the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning—"Personal, Social, and Learning to Learn"—each subdivided into three competences, forming a matrix of nine core competences. The present paper focuses on one of these competences that fall within the Social and Learning to Learn areas: communication.

Communication in the *LifeComp* framework refers not only to the capacity to express oneself clearly and appropriately in various contexts, but also to the ability to actively listen, interpret messages, and adapt to intercultural and interpersonal dynamics. It emphasizes empathy, clarity, and purposefulness in both spoken and written interaction. According to Deardorff (2011, apud. Sala et al. 2020:50), "individuals engaged in communication in multi-cultural settings need to develop an attitude of openness and respect for cultural otherness. This entails self-awareness of their own cultural heritage and its influence on the way they perceive the world, including the tendency to interpret it from an ethnocentric point of view (i.e. the belief that own culture is better than others), the ability to shift temporarily into another perspective and to listen to others authentically" (Sala et al. 2020:50). Moreover, "the social context, the relationship between the speaker and audience, also sets rules on the intimacy level among speakers and the overall formality of the exchange" (Sala et al. 2020:50). In this context, effective listening becomes fundamental to understanding not only the content of the message but also the social cues, emotional undertones, and power dynamics embedded in communication. Recognized within the *LifeComp* framework as a key element of communication competence, listening is not a passive act, but rather an active, interpretative process that requires attention, empathy, and critical engagement. Its primary focus lies in "being aware of and able to monitor verbal and non-verbal communication, showing empathy, patience and interest, clarifying, summarizing and giving feedback to the other's message, and developing trust" (Donsbach 2008, apud Sala et al., 2020:51). This definition emphasizes the relational and dynamic nature of listening, which goes beyond simply decoding information and highlights

the importance of building mutual understanding and emotional connection. In the context of Business English education, developing effective listening skills is essential for preparing students to participate confidently and competently in real-life professional interactions, where attentiveness, clarity, and appropriate response are key to successful communication. Since classroom activities often mirror real-world business scenarios, listening becomes a foundational skill that supports a wide range of professional competencies, including negotiation, client interaction, and team collaboration. Nevertheless, it fosters intercultural awareness, enabling learners to interpret and respond sensitively to diverse communication styles and cultural expectations. By cultivating learners' listening abilities, educators not only enhance their students' engagement in classroom dialogue but also help reduce miscommunication and build the interpersonal agility required for both academic achievement and workplace effectiveness. This interpersonal agility becomes particularly valuable when students are required to work collaboratively, as effective communication is the foundation of successful teamwork.

All things considered, this competence is designed to be dynamic and interdependent. For instance, communication is a prerequisite for effective collaboration, while critical thinking enables deeper reflection and more meaningful contributions in team settings. Their development supports not only academic achievement but also employability, civic responsibility, and personal growth, aligning closely with the goals of lifelong learning and the European Skills Agenda. In educational practice, *LifeComp* serves as a flexible, non-prescriptive tool for curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and assessment planning. While it does not dictate specific methods, it offers a shared vocabulary and developmental descriptors that educators across disciplines can adapt to their teaching contexts. In this study, the *LifeComp* framework serves as a conceptual basis for examining the ways in which Business English teaching can effectively cultivate the competences of communication through authentic and meaningful pedagogical practices.

The Communication *LifeComp* Competence and its Relevance in Business English Education and Employability

This section explores the importance of communication, a core *LifeComp* competence, in Business English teaching in higher education. Recent pedagogical shifts emphasize transversal skills that enhance adaptability and lifelong learning, as noted by OECD (2018). Business English instruction offers a contextually and professionally relevant means to develop communication not just as a linguistic ability but as a socio-cognitive skill involving audience awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and strategic language use for business purposes. Scholars like Nickerson (2005) and Charles (2007) highlight the need to align language teaching with real professional tasks such as presentations and negotiations. Integrating communication into Business English aligns with broader educational goals to prepare students for complex, collaborative work environments, supporting both

academic growth and employability (Sala et al., 2020). This approach fosters graduates who are linguistically proficient, socially engaged, and adaptable to the demands of today's workforce.

III. COMPETENCE-BASED LEARNING TASKS – AN OVERVIEW

Data Presentation: Illustrating Competence Development through Student Work

This section demonstrates how *LifeComp's* communication competence has been purposefully integrated into Business English seminars by outlining pedagogically relevant tasks aligned with course objectives and the broader goal of fostering transversal skills. These tasks aim to develop students' clarity, audience awareness, and professional tone in communication. Authentic student work excerpts from the study's corpus illustrate learner engagement and the practical application of these competences. In our seminars, communication-focused activities encourage students to express ideas clearly, participate in meaningful dialogue, and adapt language appropriately to formal and informal business contexts. Representative examples follow.

1. Role-playing a job interview scenario:

- Students were required to prepare both as interviewers and candidates, using formal business English, appropriate register, and professional etiquette.
- The objective was to foster verbal fluency, confidence, and intercultural communication skills;

2. Crafting a short sales pitch¹:

- Students were required to prepare a short sales pitch in which they are supposed to advertise a hypothetical product or service.
- This task requires students to practice several core communication skills in a professional context:
 - Clarity and Conciseness - Crafting a pitch demands that students present their ideas clearly and succinctly, tailoring their message to capture the audience's attention effectively within a limited time frame.
 - Audience Awareness - Students must adapt their language, tone, and content to suit the expectations and interests of a specific audience, such as potential clients, fostering an understanding of situational appropriateness and pragmatics.

¹ Task retrieved from Farrall, C., Lindsley, M. (2008). "Professional English in Use – Marketing", Cambridge University Press, p. 37.

- Persuasive Communication - The pitch encourages the use of rhetorical strategies and persuasive language, helping students develop the ability to influence and motivate listeners—an essential skill in business interactions.
- Non-verbal Communication - When delivering the pitch orally, students also practice body language, eye contact, and vocal intonation, all vital for effective interpersonal communication.

3. Acting out dialogues on various business travel-related topics:

Students were required to work in pairs and write dialogues on the following topics:

1. Communicating with local contacts:

- Calling local contacts or partners to coordinate meeting logistics, arrange site visits, or seek local recommendations;
- Introducing yourself and your purpose for visiting to establish rapport and facilitate collaboration).

2. Managing time zones and communication gaps:

- Practicing scheduling calls or meetings across different time zones and coordinating communication with remote team;
- Clarifying meeting times and ensuring mutual understanding of time differences to avoid scheduling conflict).

3. Handling language barriers:

- Role playing scenarios for communicating with non-English speaking individuals or navigating language barriers in foreign countries;
- Using language translation tools or hiring interpreters to facilitate communication when necessary.

4. Networking and building relationships:

- Practicing introducing yourself and initiating conversations with fellow travelers, hotel staff, or attendees at networking events;
- Engaging in small talk and exchanging contact information to build professional connections and expand your network.

5. Preparing for business presentations or meetings:

- Rehearsing presentations or pitches in preparation for business meetings or conferences during travel;

- Seeking feedback from colleagues or mentors to refine your messaging and delivery before important presentations.

6. Providing travel updates to colleagues or managers:

- Discussing lessons learned and sharing insights gained from business travel experiences with colleagues or peers.
- Reflecting on challenges overcome, successes achieved, and areas for improvement in future travel endeavors.

Acting out dialogues on various business travel-related topics serves a pivotal role in developing the communication competence outlined in the *LifeComp* framework. This activity enables students to engage actively with realistic, context-specific language use while honing several key communicative skills:

- ***Practical language application*** - By simulating real-life business travel situations—such as booking flights, checking into hotels, or attending meetings abroad—students practice using relevant vocabulary, phrases, and expressions essential for effective communication in international business contexts;
- ***Interactive and dynamic communication*** - Acting out dialogues encourages spontaneous interaction, requiring students to listen attentively, respond appropriately, and negotiate meaning, thereby fostering both receptive and productive communication skills;
- ***Contextual awareness and cultural sensitivity*** - These role-plays expose students to cultural nuances and etiquette related to business travel, promoting awareness of how social context and intercultural differences influence communication strategies;
- ***Confidence and fluency building*** - Repeated practice through role-play reduces communication anxiety and builds fluency, helping students gain confidence in their spoken English within professional settings;
- ***Non-verbal communication skills*** - Acting out scenarios also develops students' ability to use and interpret body language, facial expressions, and tone, which are vital components of effective interpersonal communication.

To sum up, this activity supports the holistic development of communication competence by integrating linguistic, pragmatic, and interpersonal skills within authentic business contexts, thereby preparing students for real-world professional interactions.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined how the *LifeComp* framework—specifically the communication competence—can be effectively integrated into Business English education. Drawing on practitioner experience and student work from multiple academic years, it demonstrates that targeted classroom activities can cultivate communication as a transferable, assessable skill. This integration reflects a broader shift in higher education toward fostering holistic competences essential for employability. Activities such as role-plays, discussions, and reflective tasks mirror real-world professional scenarios, helping students develop confidence and adaptability.

While challenges persist—such as varying language proficiency, limited institutional focus on transversal skills, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—the findings suggest that learner-centered, competence-based approaches can overcome these barriers. Embedding *LifeComp* into Business English not only aligns with educational priorities but also supports students' growth as autonomous, socially aware, and workplace-ready individuals. The study thus contributes to ongoing efforts to embed life skills meaningfully and sustainably into higher education.

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