**TEACHING BUSINESS NEGOTIATION SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
BALANCING IDEAL METHODOLOGY WITH PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS**

VÝUČBA ZRUČNOSTÍ V OBCHODNÝCH ROKOVANIACH V UNIVERZITNOM PROSTREDÍ:
IDEÁLNA METODIKA VS. PRAX

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Abstract: This article proposes a dual-path methodology for teaching business negotiations in English at the university level. Drawing on the ongoing KEGA project: Innovative Methods in Teaching Business Negotiations in English, it contrasts an ideal experiential model with a realistically adapted approach designed for large classes and limited contact hours. Using literature review, professional consultation, and curriculum analysis, the study outlines how blended learning, micro-simulations, and peer-led activities can sustain skill development under real constraints. Both models emphasize reflection, feedback, and intercultural awareness. The findings show that effective negotiation teaching relies on pedagogical design rather than resources, offering a scalable framework for modern higher education.

Keywords: business negotiation, experiential learning, blended learning, ESP, higher education.

Abstrakt: Článok sa zaoberá dvojitou metodikou výučby obchodných rokovaní v anglickom jazyku v univerzitnom prostredí. Na základe prebiehajúceho projektu KEGA *Inovatívne metódy výučby obchodných rokovaní v anglickom jazyku* sa porovnáva ideálny model založený na skúsenostiach s realisticky prispôsobeným prístupom určeným pre veľké triedy a obmedzený počet vyučovacích hodín. Na základe prehľadu literatúry, odborných konzultácií a analýzy učebných osnov štúdia sa opisuje, ako môže kombinované vzdelávanie, mikrosimulácie a aktivity vedené účastníkmi rokovania podporovať rozvoj zručností v reálnych podmienkach. Oba modely kladú dôraz na reflexiu, spätnú väzbu a interkultúrne povedomie. Zistenia ukazujú, že efektívna vyučba rokovaní závisí skôr od pedagogického dizajnu ako od zdrojov a ponúka škálovateľný rámec pre moderné vysokoškolské vzdelávanie.

Kľúčové slová: obchodné rokovania, zážitkové učenie, kombinované učenie, ESP, vysokoškolské vzdelávanie.

Introduction

Teaching business negotiation has long been recognized as a vital component of business education and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula (Alavoine et al., 2014; Kersten, 2022; Koester, 2014; Baber, 2022; Xie, 2023; Kesting, Smolinski, 2023; Yu, 2023). Negotiation, as both a communicative and strategic process, strenghtens nearly every aspect of professional interaction, whether managing contracts, resolving

conflicts, or building partnerships across cultures. Despite its evident importance, the pedagogy of negotiation has historically evolved more slowly than the realities of global business communication. Traditional approaches have often emphasized linguistic correctness and theoretical models of negotiation strategy, while devoting less attention to experiential, skill-based learning.

Earlier models of teaching business negotiations, particularly within ESP frameworks, were typically language-driven and content-centered. Students learned specialized vocabulary, formulaic expressions, and the stages of negotiation (opening, bargaining, closing) through scripted dialogues and written exercises. Such approaches offered useful linguistic foundations but often failed to replicate the complex dynamics of real negotiation, where emotions, intercultural sensitivity, and persuasive communication play decisive roles. The focus was largely on *what* negotiators say, rather than *how* and *why* they say it in specific contexts.

As globalization reshaped the business environment, however, negotiation became increasingly recognized as a multidimensional competence, combining language proficiency, strategic reasoning, emotional intelligence, and cultural adaptability. Over the past two decades, pedagogical trends have shifted toward experiential and competency-based learning, inspired by theories of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Nelken, 2009). For example, the use of simulations and role-play in negotiation teaching has been shown to enhance realism and provide greater opportunities for student reflection (Patton, 2009).

Contemporary approaches now emphasize *learning by doing*: students engage in role-plays, case studies, and scenario-based simulations that mirror real-world challenges. Negotiation classes increasingly integrate elements of psychology, communication theory, and intercultural studies to highlight the human dimensions of persuasion, empathy, and conflict management.

Technology has also opened new possibilities for blended learning, where students prepare through online modules or digital case studies and then apply their knowledge interactively in class (Kersten, 2022).

Yet, despite this methodological progress, a persistent gap remains between theory and practice, between what negotiation research prescribes and what universities can realistically implement. Large class sizes, limited teaching hours, and varying levels of student readiness often constrain the full application of experiential learning principles (Patton, 2009). Moreover, many ESP instructors, particularly non-native speakers or those without direct business experience, face challenges in simulating authentic business situations or providing individualized feedback to all learners. As a result, the teaching of negotiation in many higher education institutions still oscillates between theoretical instruction and simplified practice, leaving limited room for systematic skill development.

Bridging this gap requires a pedagogical framework that is both educationally sound and institutionally feasible. The challenge is to design methods that retain the depth of experiential learning while adapting to real-world constraints of time, scale, and resources (Alavoine et al., 2014). This need is particularly pressing in Central and Eastern European contexts, where negotiation teaching remains an emerging academic

field and where universities increasingly seek to align graduate competencies with employer expectations.

Responding to this challenge, the project *Innovative Methods in Teaching Business Negotiations in English* was initiated at the Faculty of Applied Languages, Bratislava University of Economics and Business. Its purpose is to redesign the teaching of negotiation as an integrative, skills-oriented process rooted in real business practice and intercultural awareness. The project combines empirical research (through employer surveys and professional consultations) with the creation of new teaching materials, including textbooks, a teacher's handbook, and a digital learning platform. Within this broader initiative, the present article focuses on the methodological dimension: how negotiation should ideally be taught versus how it can effectively be taught within the limitations of higher education.

Specifically, the article aims to:

1. Outline the conceptual foundations of an ideal methodology for teaching business negotiations, based on experiential, reflective, and skill-integrated learning;
2. Present an adapted model designed for large-class and time-limited environments; and
3. Discuss how pedagogical creativity, blended learning, and peer-based activities can reconcile the gap between theoretical ambition and institutional reality.

Rather than analyzing empirical results from the project's nationwide questionnaire, an aspect reserved for a separate publication, this paper concentrates on methodology. It explores how insights from research, industry consultation, and classroom practice can inform the design of effective and scalable teaching frameworks.

The discussion proceeds from a brief overview of the research and conceptual basis to a detailed description of the dual methodological models, the ideal and the adapted, and culminates in an analysis of their pedagogical implications. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate that innovation in negotiation pedagogy need not depend solely on extended contact time or abundant resources but on thoughtful curriculum design and pedagogical adaptability.

By articulating a dual-path model, this article contributes to ongoing debates on the modernization of ESP and business communication education. It argues that even within modest institutional frameworks, universities can cultivate graduates who are linguistically proficient, strategically agile, and interculturally competent negotiators. The paper thus positions the teaching of business negotiation as both a linguistic and socio-professional discipline, one that bridges the divide between academic theory and the dynamic realities of the global workplace.

Literature review

Research on negotiation education shows that negotiation skills develop most effectively through practical experience, guided reflection, and structured interaction. Foundational learning theories emphasize that learners understand complex skills such as negotiation best when they actively participate in tasks, observe outcomes, and

reflect on their performance, rather than only receiving theoretical explanations (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983). These theories highlight the importance of learning by doing and encourage teaching methods that give students repeated opportunities to apply strategies in realistic situations.

Studies in higher education further support this approach. Research on soft-skills development indicates that key negotiation abilities: *critical thinking*, *adaptability*, and *interpersonal awareness* are strengthened when students work through interactive activities that require cooperation, communication, and problem-solving (Lappalainen, 2009). Recent analyses of labour market needs also point out that employers value negotiation, empathy, and collaboration, which means universities must offer learning opportunities that help students practice these competences in meaningful contexts (Burke, Jayne, Snapp, 2022).

In ESP and communication-focused pedagogy, scholars increasingly agree that simulations, case studies, and structured reflection help students connect theoretical knowledge with real professional communication. Studies examining communication training in universities show that role-play, scenario-based tasks, and guided feedback can significantly improve students' confidence, clarity of expression, and ability to evaluate their own performance (Holik et al., 2023; Mabić et al., 2024). These methods support the development of linguistic, social, and strategic dimensions of negotiation, including empathy, emotional control, and constructive dialogue.

Overall, the existing literature clearly suggests that negotiation is a multidimensional skill that cannot be effectively taught through lectures alone. Successful teaching requires a combination of experiential learning, reflective practice, and interactive communication tasks. These insights form an important foundation for developing both the ideal and the adapted teaching methodologies discussed in this paper.

Methodology

As mentioned above, the methodology for this paper is based on work carried out in the long-term faculty project *Innovative Methods in Teaching Business Negotiations in English* at the Faculty of Applied Languages, Bratislava University of Economics and Business. The aim of the project is to identify and develop effective ways of teaching negotiation in English to students of economics and business. The methodological approach combines theoretical analysis, consultation with professionals, questionnaire data, and systematic reflection on current teaching practice. Together, these components form the basis for designing two complementary models: an ideal methodology and an adapted methodology suitable for real institutional conditions.

Theoretical and literature-based foundations

The first part of the research involved a thorough review of literature on negotiation pedagogy, experiential learning, communication training, and soft-skills development in higher education. The review confirmed that negotiation skills cannot be developed through theory alone. Students need active participation, reflection, and

practice in realistic situations. Based on this, a conceptual framework was created that integrates experiential learning, intercultural communication, and competency-based instruction. These prin-ciples guided the design of the ideal teaching model.

Consultation with industry professionals

The second component of the methodology involved qualitative consultations with professionals from a range of business sectors represented in the project´s questionnaire sample. These included experts working in manufacturing companies such as *Henkel*, *Clarios*, and *Johnson Controls*, as well as professionals from the finance and banking sector, including *Tatra banka*, *ČSOB*, and *Visa*. In addition, we consulted respondents employed in major consulting firms such as *Deloitte* and *EY*, and in several IT companies, including *IBM*, *Sygic*, and *Hewlett Packard Enterprise*. Representatives from legal services, notary offices, and smaller specialised firms were also part of the consultation group.

Through interviews and follow-up discussions, these professionals provided detailed insights into the practical skills they expect from novice negotiators entering their industries. Across sectors, they emphasized the importance of active listening, clear communication, critical thinking, adaptability, empathy, and problem-solving. Many of them also highlighted challenges that young professionals face, such as managing pressure, applying theory in real interactions, and demonstrating soft skills consistently during negotiations.

Their feedback played an important role in shaping the pedagogical focus of the project. It helped define the key competences that should be prioritised in negotiation training and informed the development of the questionnaire used later to validate and refine these findings.

Questionnaire-based validation

To verify and prioritise the findings from the literature review and professional consultations, a structured questionnaire was sent to 81 respondents from various industries. They were asked to evaluate the importance of specific negotiation skills and communication behaviours. The results confirmed that skills such as effective communication, problem-solving, and empathy are central to negotiation competence. These findings served as evidence for selecting the key skills embedded in the teaching models.

Curriculum reflection and analysis of teaching conditions

The final methodological step was a reflective analysis of current Business Negotiations in English courses offered at the university. Teachers participated in workshops and classroom observations to identify the main constraints that affect teaching quality. These included limited teaching hours, relatively large class sizes, inconsistent materials, and limited opportunities for detailed feedback. This analysis made it clear that while the ideal model is desirable, it is often not feasible under existing conditions. Therefore, an adapted model was developed to work effectively within these constraints.

Development of the two teaching models

Using the findings from all previous steps, the research team created the ideal methodology: a comprehensive design intended for small groups and extended contact time. It includes full-length simulations, detailed feedback, student journals, intercultural tasks, and multimodal assessment.

Consequently, the adapted methodology was designed as a more realistic model suited to large groups, shorter classes, and limited resources. It uses micro-simulations, blended learning, peer assessment, and simplified reflective tasks. It retains the core principles of experiential learning but delivers them in shorter, manageable units.

Both methodological models, the *ideal* and the *adapted*, were evaluated using a three-dimensional analytical framework developed for this project. The criteria included:

1. Learning authenticity: the extent to which teaching activities simulate real-life negotiation contexts;
2. Skill coverage: the range and integration of targeted soft skills within a course cycle;
3. Feasibility: the degree of alignment with institutional and logistical conditions.

The ideal methodology scored highest in authenticity and skill integration but lowest in scalability. The adapted methodology achieved a balance between pedagogical quality and practical implementation, proving that meaningful experiential learning can occur even within significant structural limitations.

Ethical and institutional considerations

All methodological experimentation and data collection were conducted within the ethical framework of the Bratislava University of Economics and Busines. Participation in surveys, consultations, and pilot courses was voluntary, with data anonymized for analysis. Classroom trials were treated as pedagogical innovation, and no individual student grades were used for publication purposes.

Research findings

The result of this research process is a dual-path model for teaching business negotiations: an *ideal*, resource-intensive version and an *adapted*, resource-conscious version. Both share the same conceptual foundation: experiential learning, reflection, feedback, and intercultural competence, but differ in scale, delivery mode, and assessment depth. This dual model offers educators a scalable methodological framework adaptable to local institutional realities. It ensures that negotiation teaching remains both educationally solid and manageable in practice, bridging the gap between theoretical excellence and everyday classroom practice. Ultimately, this approach shows that innovation in negotiation teaching depends less on resources and more on creatively applying sound teaching principles to real conditions.

Comparative overview of the two methodological models

The comparative analysis of the *ideal* and *adapted* methodologies reveals that effective teaching of business negotiations in higher education depends less on the quantity of teaching time or resources and more on the quality of pedagogical design and the coherence between learning objectives, activities, and assessment. While the *ideal model* represents an aspirational framework designed under optimal conditions, the *adapted model* demonstrates that pedagogical innovation and experiential learning can be meaningfully realized even in time- and scale-limited environments.

Both models share a core pedagogical DNA rooted in experiential learning and competency-based education. Each prioritizes active participation, reflective practice, and the integration of linguistic, interpersonal, and strategic negotiation skills. However, they differ significantly in their operational parameters and depth of engagement. The following table illustrates these contrasts by comparing the key dimensions of the ideal and adapted models for negotiation skills training.

Dimension	Ideal model	Adapted model
Class structure	2-3 hours weekly, small groups (8-12 students)	1.5 hours weekly, larger classes (20-25 students)
Learning format	Full-length role plays, multi-step simulations	Micro-learning modules and short simulations
Feedback system	In-depth instructor and peer feedback	Digital rubrics, peer/self-assessment, summary feedback
Content delivery	Entirely classroom-based experiential instruction	Blended / flipped classroom model
Assessment	Portfolios, journals, live performance	Simplified portfolios, selected reflective tasks
Authenticity	High (complex real-world scenarios)	Moderate (shorter, focusedcases)
Feasibility	Low to medium (resource intensive)	High (scalable and replicable)

Table 1: Comparison of ideal and adapted models for negotiation skills training
Source: Researchers´own

This structured comparison indicates that the adapted model achieves a pedagogical equilibrium, maintaining authenticity and experiential learning while optimizing instructional time and administrative resources.

Although the purpose of this paper is primarily methodological rather than empirical, the implementation of the adapted model during the 2024-2025 pilot courses generated valuable observational data and qualitative insights from both teachers and students. Student feedback collected through informal interviews indicated high engagement with micro-simulations and blended tasks. Learners appreciated the balance between structured activities and creative freedom in scenario development, noting that shorter, focused tasks helped them "*build confidence gradually*" and "*apply negotiation strategies without feeling overwhelmed*." These observations align with broader findings in negotiation pedagogy literature, where shorter, iterative simulations have been shown to support skill internalization and emotional regulation (Ari et al., 2024).

The modular structure of the adapted model allowed students to concentrate on individual skills, such as active listening, assertiveness, or empathy, while reflecting on their application. Teachers observed visible improvements in the precision of students' communication, confidence in role assumption, and ability to summarize and debrief. Furthermore, students demonstrated increased self-awareness through end-of-semester portfolios, often linking negotiation behavior to personality traits or cultural communication preferences. This suggests that even within reduced time frames, structured reflection remains an effective tool for promoting emotional intelligence and intercultural awareness.

From an instructor perspective, the adapted methodology enhanced classroom dynamics and pedagogical efficiency. The combination of blended learning and peer-led simulations reduced instructor workload while maintaining interactivity. Online preparatory materials, including short videos, terminology glossaries, and quizzes, significantly improved in-class readiness, enabling sessions to focus exclusively on performance and feedback. Additionally, the introduction of peer-assessment rubrics created a collaborative learning environment in which students became active evaluators of communication quality. This co-evaluative process mirrors real-world negotiation feedback loops, reinforcing the authenticity of the learning experience.

Pedagogical implications

One of the most significant implications of this research is that the integration of skills, the blending of language, communication, and strategic competencies, does not depend on extensive contact hours but rather on the deliberate design of structured activities. Through modular sequencing, instructors can ensure that each class meeting explicitly targets a core negotiation skill linked to a measurable outcome. For instance, one session might focus on framing arguments persuasively through short debates, while another emphasizes empathy and active listening through paraphrasing exercises. This task-based modularity enables progress and visible learning outcomes even in large classes. It also makes the teaching process transparent, allowing students to clearly understand which specific soft skills they are developing at each stage.

Another key implication concerns feedback practices. Traditional feedback in negotiation teaching tends to be time-intensive and instructor-dominated. The adapted model reconceptualizes feedback as a distributed process that engages both

peers and digital tools. By employing standardized rubrics, self-reflection prompts, and peer evaluations, instructors can maintain assessment quality while enhancing students' evaluative literacy, their ability to judge performance critically and constructively. This democratization of feedback shifts the focus from teacher correction to collective reflection, encouraging learners to internalize performance standards.

The role of blended and flipped learning also emerges as a cornerstone of the adapted methodology. By moving theoretical input online, students arrive in class already familiar with concepts such as BATNA, anchoring, or concession strategies, freeing valuable classroom time for practical application. This approach not only maximizes limited contact hours but also promotes autonomous learning—a critical attribute in professional negotiation contexts. Furthermore, online materials can be reused and expanded, creating a scalable repository of resources that supports long-term course sustainability.

However, one of the challenges inherent in flipped learning is the assumption that students will complete preparatory work diligently before class. Research suggests that learner accountability is a critical factor in the success of flipped models, as insufficient preparation can undermine active learning during in-class sessions (Abeysekera, Dawson, 2015). Students must therefore recognize their responsibility in engaging with pre-class materials, as this readiness directly impacts the depth of classroom interaction and skill acquisition. Encouraging metacognitive strategies and providing clear incentives for preparation, such as linking online tasks to in-class performance, can help foster this sense of responsibility (Bergmann, Sams, 2012). Ultimately, the effectiveness of flipped learning depends not only on instructional design but also on students' willingness to exercise due diligence in their learning process.

Peer-led and collaborative pedagogy represents another important dimension of the adapted model. The integration of peer-led simulations repositions students from passive participants to active facilitators. Assigning students to design scenarios, moderate discussions, or evaluate performance develops leadership and analytical skills alongside negotiation competence. This collaborative approach reflects the dynamic, dialogic, and participatory nature of negotiation itself. It also addresses the teacher-student ratio challenge in large groups, ensuring that interaction remains personalized despite scale.

Finally, the digitalization of assessment through portfolio-based practices offers significant advantages. The migration of reflective journals and evidence of learning to digital portfolios simplifies both monitoring and evaluation. Portfolios compile negotiation scripts, video recordings, and feedback summaries, providing a longitudinal view of progress. Digital portfolios are particularly effective in hybrid learning environments because they allow asynchronous reflection and integration of multimedia evidence. For instructors, this format enhances transparency and consistency in assessment; for students, it becomes a personalized record of development that can be reused in professional contexts, such as showcasing negotiation competence in job applications.

Broader educational and institutional impact

The adoption of the adapted methodology has broader implications beyond the context of a single university. It demonstrates how universities with limited contact hours can still implement pedagogically rich and skill-oriented courses through strategic instructional design.

The model's flexibility allows for easy integration across disciplines, business English, intercultural communication, and management studies, making it applicable to other faculties within and beyond the Bratislava University of Economics and Business.

Institutionally, the framework also lays the groundwork for the Negotiation Academy platform envisioned in the project's future phase. By systematizing teaching practices, digital resources, and alumni engagement, the Academy can function as a bridge between academia and industry, offering short courses and workshops based on the same scalable methodology.

The success of the blended model reinforces the need for universities to invest in teacher training in digital pedagogy. Many ESP instructors possess strong linguistic competence but require additional methodological support to manage technology-enhanced, skill-based teaching. The forthcoming *Teacher's Handbook* and training modules developed within the project aim to fill this gap, providing educators with templates, rubrics, and ready-to-use materials for immediate classroom application.

Conclusion and discussion

This paper set out to explore how business negotiation skills can be effectively taught in higher education by balancing ideal pedagogical principles with real institutional constraints. The dual-path model developed through this research, comprising an ideal methodology and an adapted methodology, demonstrates that experiential learning and competency-based instruction can be meaningfully implemented even in large classes with limited contact hours. Both models share a common foundation rooted in active participation, reflective practice, and the integration of linguistic, interpersonal, and strategic negotiation skills. However, they differ in scope and operational design, with the adapted model prioritizing scalability and feasibility without sacrificing authenticity.

The findings underline that successful negotiation teaching depends less on the quantity of resources and more on the quality of pedagogical design. Modular sequencing, blended learning, and peer-led activities emerged as key strategies for maintaining engagement and skill development under time and scale limitations. Student feedback from pilot courses confirmed high levels of motivation and confidence-building through micro-simulations and structured reflection, while instructors reported improved classroom dynamics and reduced workload due to digital resources and collaborative assessment practices. These outcomes align with broader trends in negotiation pedagogy, which emphasize iterative practice and distributed feedback as drivers of skill internalization and emotional regulation.

Despite these promising results, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is primarily methodological and relies on qualitative observations rather than extensive empirical data. While pilot implementations provided valuable insights,

further research using longitudinal and quantitative measures is needed to validate the effectiveness of the adapted model across diverse institutional contexts. Second, the success of flipped and blended learning depends heavily on student accountability. Ensuring that learners engage with preparatory materials remains a challenge, and future studies should investigate strategies for fostering learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness. Third, the adapted model, while scalable, may not fully replicate the depth of engagement offered by the ideal model, particularly in developing complex negotiation strategies and intercultural sensitivity.

Future directions for research and practice include expanding the adapted methodology to other disciplines and exploring its integration into interdisciplinary programs such as management and intercultural communication.

The development of the planned Negotiation Academy platform offers an opportunity to systematize resources, provide teacher training, and create a sustainable link between academia and industry. Additionally, empirical studies should examine the long-term impact of digital portfolios and peer-led simulations on professional readiness, as well as the role of technology in enhancing authenticity in virtual negotiation environments.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the modernization of negotiation pedagogy by demonstrating that innovation is achievable within real-world constraints. By combining experiential principles with flexible delivery modes, universities can equip graduates with the linguistic, strategic, and intercultural competences required for success in global business contexts. The challenge ahead lies in refining these models through evidence-based practice and ensuring that both educators and students embrace the collaborative and autonomous learning ethos that supports effective negotiation training.

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