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ВЕСТНИК

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OF ARMENIAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

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INTEGRATION OF FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS DURING BUSINESS ENGLISH LESSONS AT ARMENIAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

The aim of the present paper is to show how the four important skills relevant to linguistic competence can be integrated in an eighty-minute lesson and provide information on strategies and procedures that can be applied to effectively achieve this. Business English courses at ASUE aim at developing the skills that are significantly essential to graduates of economics who are planning to further work in business domain performing various jobs at banks, insurance companies, marketing agencies, accounting and auditing firms, etc. These job positions require a good command of English along with excellent writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. Therefore, the lesson plans of Business English should target developing these four skills simultaneously to help the students to address these gaps and successfully cater to their job needs.

Key words: *Business English, lesson plan, skills integration method, authentic materials.*

JEL: D83, I23

Introduction: Business English course at ASUE focuses on the students' immediate needs as they are going to enter the job market in various positions where they will need effective communication skills in a professional setting. Business English significantly differs from General English, first of all, in terms of content where the topics might be related to the work place or world of business. The skills are business communication skills like delivering presentations, conducting interviews and negotiations rather than discussing everyday topics. As it appears, Business English instructors teach the functions of business discourse

that is most applicable to the students' professional lives. In fact, the principles of English for Specific Purposes, one of the components of which is Business English, emerged from the necessity of English being used for different purposes depending on the context in which the language is used. Functional Business English courses, therefore, focus on specific discourse features, language skills, and communication strategies that are useful in particular business situations.

At ASUE, the English language is taught as ESP and the course is designed for 164 classroom hours within two academic years. It is assumed that the development of all these four skills is plausible through an integrated approach, which is widely used at ASUE when teaching Business English.

Literature Review: Since Business English courses are needs driven, accurate determination of those needs is crucial to the process. According to S. Donna, a Business English instructor should pay a great deal of attention to **investigating, analyzing and fulfilling their students' needs in order to have a successful Business English course.**¹ Therefore, a well-thought students' needs analysis which should be conducted taking into consideration linguistic (discourse analysis) and extralinguistic factors (the situation and purpose for Business English use) is considered to be a basic component of any language course design.

In their book 'Teaching Business English', M. Ellis and Ch. Johnson outline some of the basic characteristics of the skills and strategies that Business English students should acquire for effective workplace communication.² These are as follows:

- Confidence and fluency in speaking;
- Skills for organizing and structuring information;
- Sufficient language accuracy to be able to communicate ideas without ambiguity and without stress for the listener;
- Strategies for following the main points of fast, complex, and imperfect speech;
- Strategies for clarifying and checking unclear information;
- Speed of reaction to the utterances of others;
- Clear pronunciation and delivery;
- An awareness of appropriate language and behavior for the cultures and situations in which they will operate.³

The examination of the the above-mentioned skills leads to the idea of integrating the four most important aspects of language in one lesson to enable teachers to provide the students of Business English with required linguistic competence.

Apparently, H. Widdowson was the first linguist who advocated the integration of the four language skills, emphasizing the idea that the use of

¹ Donna S., Teach Business English, Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 2.

² Ellis M., Johnson Ch., Teaching Business English, Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers, Oxford University Press, 1994.

³ Ellis M., Johnson Ch., Teaching Business English, Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 35.

language occurs in the form of discourse and in specific contexts, and not in **discrete 'units'**.⁴ According to R. Oxford the integrated skill approach leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication by interweaving the four primary English language skills during instruction and this approach is also advantageous for **teachers as it enables them to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time.**⁵ Though R. Oxford admits that it is possible to teach one or two skills in absence of the others in the classrooms, discrete skill approach would fail to prepare the learners for academic, job oriented, or everyday communication. In line with this, J. Harmer concludes that skill integration maximizes learning opportunities for different students in class.⁶ Moreover, M. Tajzad and S. Namaghi find that although segregated skills teaching may help students develop their knowledge of the language, it prevents them from using the knowledge in actual communication.⁷

According to R. Carol, the implementation of an integrated skills approach offers some advantages. Skills integration

- provides continuity in teaching-learning/program because in this approach tasks are closely related to each other,
- activities can be designed to provide input before output,
- provides realistic learning as it allows for the development of four skills within a realistic communicative framework,
- provides chances to know and reorganize the language learned by students in different contexts,
- increases confidence to a weaker or less confident learner.⁸

It is common knowledge that course planning and development require flexibility, as teachers must be ready to alter and adapt their plans as needed. Since each situation and each course is different depending on the department where it is delivered, the teacher should be ready to accommodate changes if necessary. And, first of all, the adjustment and adaptability refer to the materials that are provided which should be certainly of authentic origin. It is widely admitted by foreign language teaching methodologists that the use of authentic materials is a relevant feature in ESP methodology.⁹ They serve as a link between the formal environment of the classroom and the real world.¹⁰ In fact, there is a wide range of advantages of using authentic materials in the classroom. They are **relevant to the students' lives and needs and provide students with authentic use** of language, vocabulary, structures, and cultural information which, ultimately,

⁴ Widdowson H.G., *Teaching Language As Communication*. Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 144.

⁵ Oxford R.L., *Integrated Skills in the ESL/EFL classroom*, *ESL Magazine*, 16 (1), 2001.

⁶ Harmer J., *How to Teach English*, Pearson Education Limited. Essex, England, 2007.

⁷ Tajzad M., Namaghi S.A.O., **Exploring EFL Learners' Perceptions of Integrated Skills Approach: A Grounded Theory**, *English Language Teaching*, 7(11), 2014, pp. 92-98.

⁸ Carol R. *At the Chalkface: Practical Techniques in Language Teaching*, *ELT Methodology*, Longman, 1990, pp. 73-74.

⁹ Safont M.P., Esteve M.J., *Online Resources for the EAP Classroom: Ways of Promoting EFL Learners' Autonomy*, *Linguistic Studies in Academic and Professional English*, Castellón, Universitat Jaume I, 2004.

¹⁰ House S., *Authentic Materials in the Classroom, Didactic Approaches for Teachers of English in an International Context*. Salamanca, 2008, pp. 53-70.

increases **students' interest and motivation**. There are plenty of real source materials on the Internet that can be effectively used in Business English course like annual reports, business articles, professional journals, business proposals and plans, presentations and videos referring to the business domain, to name a few.

The type of material a teacher selects depends on the students' proficiency level, the nature and duration of the course, and the resources that are available to the teacher. Courses delivered at ASUE are frequently hybrids, which include texts from Business English coursebooks, teacher-developed materials, and tasks **and projects that parallel students' future work lives**. Regardless of what combination of materials the teacher uses, it is important to bear in mind that they **should be relevant to the students' future work, contribute to the students' progress** toward meeting their linguistic objectives, which means they should be **at the correct level to suit the students' language abilities**. Moreover, they should be engaging, business-focused, up-to-date, and multifaceted. In addition, when designing a course a teacher should make sure that the materials are unified and appropriately sequenced. Once suitable authentic materials are selected, the teacher begins creating activities that allow students to benefit from the natural and rich linguistic features found in real-life communication. He/she analyzes the level of the text (the complexity of the structure, vocabulary, and content) and how it corresponds to the students' needs and interests. The length of the text and amount of time necessary to work with it meaningfully versus its benefit to students are also considered.

Of course, it should be taken into consideration that using newly created materials for the first time could present problems if the tasks are not suited to **students' proficiency level or if they are not thoughtfully designed and developed** to meet their needs. For example, simply asking the students to read an article from a business journal without any planned pre-reading, during, and post-reading activities could render the task ineffective. Thus, the teacher should think carefully about how to use the text for vocabulary enrichment, analysis of idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures. The text can also serve as a focal point for a discussion, a problem-solution task, or even a written response or an oral presentation. In this case, the teacher will use the materials in a purposeful and structured manner.

Research Methodology: The research in question required the analysis of language teaching methodology theories touching upon the issues of teaching Business English for special purposes and different approaches to integrated and segregated skills teaching. This included the examination of the theories of such famous English language teaching methodologists as H. Widdowson, M. Ellis, Ch. Johnson, R. Oxford, R. Carol, S. House, J. Harmer, etc.

Social and pedagogical analyses enabled me to take a deep dive into the students' **needs and gaps evaluation**. **Despite the fact that as an English language teacher at ASUE I was aware of the Business English course content developed by the chair of languages, I conducted my own survey evaluating students' needs** among 150 ASUE freshmen students to get the whole picture of their objectives. This helped me in achieving an effective compatibility of the requirements

imposed by specialization programs and syllabi of the university and the wants that were requested to be covered by students. This was followed by a selection of authentic materials both for reading and listening and development of appropriate activities and tasks. The process was finalized with an experiment conducted through an eighty-minute lesson plan and lesson delivery integrating all four linguistic skills and being exclusively based on authentic materials.

Analysis: Taking into consideration the above-discussed strategies and linguistic competence that the students of ASUE should possess and having them surveyed to fully understand their needs, I embarked on the lesson plan design integrating all four skills and addressing startup companies.

Setting and class profile – The group consists of 22 intermediate level students. The learning context is an ASUE classroom where learners have eighty-minute lessons twice a week. This is a monolingual class where all learners are Armenians. All the learners know each other and are on good terms with each other, which, on the one hand, creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom and, on the other hand, challenges me, as the teacher, as they tend to use their own language when communicating with each other in pairwork and groupwork. The general age of the learners ranges from 18 to 20. There are 7 males and 15 females in the class. All of them learn Business English as part of their university syllabus. They enjoy games, communication activities and working together.

Objectives - By the end of the lesson, the learners will have developed their reading for the gist skills with the help of a task on extracting specific information from the text through a matching exercise in the context of the stories of successful start-ups. They will have also improved their understanding of the listening text in the context of a story in the same context. They will have learnt specific vocabulary items related to start-ups and will have revised the principles of forming number noun modifiers. They will be able to engage in conversations related to the success of start-ups as well as will have developed skills for creating a piece of writing on the success of start – ups supported by their opinions.

Materials – **students’ worksheets, pen/pencil, paper, a computer, a projector.**

WORKSHEET *START-UPS*

SPEAKING

- I. Discuss the following questions then report to the class.
 1. What do you know about startups?
 2. Could you name any famous successful startups?
 3. What are the advantages of startup companies and what are the difficulties that startups might face?
- II. Match the words below with their definitions.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1) start-up | a) unpleasant or of bad quality |
| 2) venture | b) a newly emerged business venture that aims to develop a viable business model to meet a marketplace need or problem |
| 3) to afford | c) someone who establishes an organization |
| 4) founder | d) to hold a group discussion to produce ideas |
| 5) to brainstorm | e) to begin something such as a plan or introduce something new such as a product |
| 6) to launch | f) to have enough money to pay for |
| 7) investment | g) to start a new business |
| 8) to set up | h) the act of putting money, effort, time, etc. into something to make a profit |
| 9) crappy | i) new activity, usually in business, that involves risk or uncertainty |

III. Fill in the gaps with some of the words presented in exercise I in the appropriate grammatical form.

- Lucy is trying to get ____ for her research.
- ____ are very vulnerable in the business world and they need to generate revenue quickly.
- They ____ and mapped plans for dealing with problems like affordable housing and the budget shortfall.
- René Descartes is regarded as the ____ of modern philosophy.
- The airline will ____ its new transatlantic service next month.
- The group plans ____ an import business.

READING

IV. Read the stories of the most successful startups and, using your background knowledge about the companies given below, try to find out which company each story belongs to.

Instagram, Uber, Facebook, AirBnB

THE INSIDE STORY OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL START-UPS

The most successful startups never had it good when they actually started. In fact, for most of them, the product looked completely different, served a different need and market! They all began with a simple idea and look where they are.

1. _____

This is a story of 3 guys and how they went from renting mattresses to a *ten-billion company*. In 2007, two designers couldn't afford the rent on their San Francisco apartment. There was a design conference coming to San Francisco and the city's hotels were fully booked, so they came up with the idea of renting out three airbeds on their living-room floor and cooking their guests' breakfast. They set up a simple blog and got three renters for \$80 each. After a small success, they enlisted a former flatmate and a computer science graduate, Nathan Blecharczyk, to develop the website and join the venture.

2. _____

This is a story of two guys who made an app in flat 8 weeks. Kevin Systrom, a Stanford graduate who worked on Google's Gmail, spent his weekends building

an app that allowed location-aware photo and note-sharing, naming it Burbn. **That's how Kevin** met Mike Krieger, an early Burbn user and this startup's founder. Later, Burbn was reduced to photos only.

3. _____

After a conference in Paris, Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp were complaining about the many crappy things we all have to deal with in life, including finding a cab. The next thing you know, the two were already brainstorming, thinking about ways to find cars at the right place, at the right time.

4. _____

A *nineteen-year-old* lad and a second-year Harvard student, Mark Zuckerberg launched an internal social networking site for Harvard students. Soon after the site got popular among students, it expanded its reach to other universities. In 2004, the site moved its operations base to Palo Alto, California and received its first investment from PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel.¹¹

WRITING

- V. As you read the stories, using the vocabulary presented above, write down your ideas concerning the key to success of the discussed companies and exchange it with your partner.
- VI. Look back at the text and pay attention to the word combinations containing number noun modifiers that are in italics. Can you give your own examples of such cases?

LISTENING

- VII. Bill Gross has founded a lot of start-ups, and incubated many others -- and he got curious about why some succeeded and others failed. So he gathered data from hundreds of companies, his own and other people's, and ranked each company on five key factors. He found one factor that stands out from the others -- and surprised even him. Visit the following website: https://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gross_the_single_biggest_reason_why_startups_succeed and complete the tasks below:
1. Why did Bill Gross name his company Idealab?
 2. What are the five factors that Bill Gross examined thoroughly?
 3. What was the percent that the factor of timing gained among the other factors?
 4. Which company does Bill Gross mention as the one that failed despite having a good business model and enough funding?
 5. Which companies does Bill Gross mention as the ones having right timing and therefore great success?
 6. Bill Gross always wanted to quote boxer Mike Tyson. True/False
 7. According to Bill Gross the companies that had intense funding succeeded more. True/False
 8. Today, it is very easy to get funding for startups. True/False

¹¹ The text has been adapted from <https://arkenea.com/blog/how-successful-startups-started/>.

Teacher's notes

- I. The teacher asks students to look at the questions and in pairs discuss them. She/he monitors and helps where necessary, then elicits ideas from students as a whole class discussion. *Time: 12 minutes*
- II. Next, the teacher asks the students to match the words related to start – up vocabulary with their definitions.
Key: 1.b, 2. i, 3. f, 4. c, 5. d, 6. e, 7. h, 8.g, 9.a. *Time: 8 minutes*
- III. The teacher asks students to fill in the gaps with some of the words presented in exercise II in the appropriate grammatical form.
Key: 1. Funding 2. Start-ups 3. brainstormed 4. founder 5. launch 6. set up. *Time: 6 minutes*
- IV. The teacher distributes different success stories to students, writes the names of the start-ups on the blackboard and asks students to guess which companies the certain story belongs to.
Key: 1. AirBnB 2. Instagram 3. Uber 4. Facebook. *Time: 10 minutes*
- V. The teacher asks students to jot down their ideas concerning the key to success of the discussed companies (about 100 words) using the presented vocabulary. Then students should exchange their notes and check their **peers' writings at home**. *Time: 17 minutes*
- VI. The teacher asks students what they know about the language structure **'number noun modifier'** and then asks them to find the examples in the text and also to give examples of their own. The teacher can provide the students with the information that number and a noun may combine to quantify a characteristic of a noun. The number noun modifier is placed before the 'head' (main) noun. The noun takes singular form (unless the noun exists as plural form only). *Time: 7 minutes*
- VII. The teacher plays a video twice, the students answer the questions related to the listening part. *Time: 20 minutes*
Key: 1) Bill Gross named his company Idealab for how much he worships the 'aha!' moment when you first come up with the idea.
2) Ideas, team, business model, funding, timing
3) timing made 42 percent
4) Z.com
5) Airbnb, Uber, Citysearch, YouTube
6) False
7) False
8) False

As is can be seen, this lesson plan targets all four skills and is fit for intermediate students. It covers the topic about start-up successes, which is a very interesting issue for Business English students. At the start of the lesson, I clarified the content objectives of the lesson as, being aware of their lesson goals, the students become more study-oriented and conscious about what they should pay more attention to. The warm-up stage of the lesson consists of two parts. **First of all, the discussion generated the students' interest in the lesson. This also helped me establish a link with the upcoming lesson.** The second part on vocabulary pre-teaching includes a matching exercise with the target vocabulary

of the reading text. This exercise and the following one contributed to the retention of the unknown topical vocabulary and prepared students for a successful reading experience. This vocabulary is intentionally typed in bold in the text so that students had yet another chance to pay attention to the new words. The same words were also used later in their writing task, so there was another opportunity to learn the words.

Exercise IV is reading comprehension whose text was taken from an authentic source, namely, from the website of an American company involved in custom software development which helps startups to grow fast. The text comprises 4 stories about successful start-up companies. In this exercise, the reading strategy of metacognition defined as **'thinking about thinking' is applied** with students taking control over their reading, as they knew the exact purpose of their reading, were able to preview the text and adjust their reading speed to fit the difficulty of the text, thus monitor their understanding of the text. After reading, they had their comprehension of the text tested through turning to the text for information and combining it with their background knowledge they matched the appropriate companies.

Exercise V focused on writing skills of the students where they should select a company, rationalize its key to success, support it with their opinions and using the presented vocabulary provide a written item consisting of 100 words. This was followed up by peer checking at home, as there was not enough time to do it in class. At the next lesson, the results of peer evaluation were monitored and checked.

In exercise VI, the students were able to revise the target language structure, which is number-noun modifiers, and the examples provided by the students enabled me to make sure that students had internalized the language material.

The listening exercise involved a video with authentic language elaborating on the start-ups that either succeeded or failed in their business.

As is known, the basic framework of a listening lesson comprises three main stages. The pre-listening stage helps the learners to prepare to listen by activating their schemata or having them make predictions about the context of the listening task. In the while-listening stage, the learners focus their attention on the listening text and develop their listening comprehensions skills. In the post-listening stage, the learners will be able to develop their summarizing and listening for specific information skills when answering the questions (true or false and special questions) that follow this part.¹²

It should be mentioned here that the listening task in fact proves to be the most challenging activity for a majority of students due to certain reasons. Based on her own teaching experience, L. Bekaryan points out the following obstacles and proposes solutions to them:

- Affective factors, such as lack of interest and concentration;
- Problems affecting the interpretation of the spoken message;
- Insufficient visual interpretation;

¹² Wilson J.J., How to Teach Listening. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2012.

- Scarce systemic knowledge;
- Lack of control over the pace of speech and the inability to get things repeated.¹³

In fact, when doing the listening activity, the students did not experience the above-mentioned difficulties accounting for the fact that the topic was interesting to them. Moreover, they did not have problems with interpreting the message of the speaker either as the topic was more or less discussed previously at the start of the lesson. The same goes with the factor of insufficient visual interpretation as they were able to see the speaker, Bill Gross himself, and follow his facial expressions and body language which, surely, enabled them to comprehend the information with a greater ease. As is known, systemic knowledge problems occur due to the lack of language knowledge, a factor that had been overseen by **me as I provided them with the ‘blocking’ vocabulary items during the pre-teaching stage.** Watching the video twice enabled my students to overcome also the problem of lack of control over the pace of speech and the inability to get things repeated as after they had watched the video once, the students were able to ask and discuss all the questions they had and the second time listening served as a means of complete clarification and confirmation of the conveyed message.

The assessment component of this lesson was designed as formative where results are analyzed mathematically with raw scores and percentages of right and wrong. In this case, it included gap-fills, sentence completion, matching and true-false questions. A majority of the students (19 students) did a minimum of 75 percent of the tasks correctly, thus I considered they had successfully met the lesson objectives. Besides that, in the writing part of this lesson plan peer-evaluation was applied where students should use the presented vocabulary and **could assess their peer’s work which was later assessed by me. It should be mentioned here that in addition to these types of assessment, after each third lesson I administered a formative assessment test based on the material from the three units. This serves as a second ‘filter’ for assessing the students’ knowledge.**

Conclusions: High-level linguistic competence necessarily comprises profound knowledge of four skills that are speaking, reading, writing and listening. These skills shape the overall ability of students to make a potential employee for their future careers. This holds true for the students of economics who are going to assume responsible positions in various domains such as banks, insurance companies, marketing agencies, accounting and auditing firms, etc. Guided by the necessity of providing our students with the linguistic needs they aspire to obtain, Business English courses and lesson plans at ASUE tend to regularly include the above-mentioned four skills in eighty – minute lessons to secure the achievement of linguistic goals. The experiment shows that integrated skills approach proves to be a plausible and an effective method to be applied in such cases providing that the materials are based solely on authentic sources and each activity and task is designed and developed in a thoughtful manner to address the linguistic gaps of students. As the present paper shows, by designing

¹³ Bekaryan L., **Developing Learners’ Top-Down Processing Skills in Listening**, Armenian Folia Anglistika, International Journal of English Studies, 1 (15), 2016, pp. 79-80.

lesson plans and administering lessons, based on integrated skills approach, teachers will extend their students an opportunity to get an insight into a certain topic which will include knowledge of the target vocabulary as well as help them communicate on adjacent topics and develop their English language skills both in spoken and written formats.

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ԼՈՒՍԻՆԵ ՀԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ*ՀՊՏՀ լեզուների ամբիոնի վարիչ,**բանասիրական գիտությունների դոկտոր, դոցենտ***ՀՊՏՀ-ում գործարար անգլերենի դասերի ընթացքում չորս հմտությունների ինտեգրումը.**–

Հոդվածի նպատակն է ցույց տալ, թե ինչպես կարելի է ութսուն րոպե տևողությամբ դասի ընթացքում միասնականացնել լեզվական իրազեկության համար կարևոր չորս հմտությունները, ինչպես նաև տեղեկություն տրամադրել այն արդյունավետ կերպով իրականացնելու ռազմավարությունների և գործընթացների վերաբերյալ: ՀՊՏՀ-ում գործարար անգլերենի դասընթացը նպատակաուղղված է տնտեսագետ ուսանողների կարևոր հմտությունների զարգացմանը, որոնք հետագայում տարաբնույթ աշխատանքներ են կատարելու գործարար ոլորտում՝ բանկերում, ապահովագրական ընկերություններում, մարքեթինգային գործակալություններում, հաշվապահական և աուդիտային ընկերություններում և այլն: Նշված ոլորտներում պահանջվում է անգլերեն գրելու, ընթերցելու, խոսելու և ունկնդրելու գերազանց իմացություն, հետևաբար՝ գործարար անգլերենի դասապլանները պետք է համաժամանակորեն թիրախավորեն այս չորս հմտությունների զարգացումը, որպեսզի օժանդակեն ուսանողներին՝ բարելավելու իրենց աշխատանքային կարողությունները:

Հիմնաբառեր. *գործարար անգլերեն, դասապլան, հմտությունների ինտեգրման մեթոդ, բնագիր նյութեր*

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ЛУСИНА АРУТЮНЯН*Заведующая кафедрой языков АГЭУ,**доктор филологических наук, доцент***Интеграция четырех навыков во время уроков делового английского языка в Армянском государственном экономическом университете.**–

Данная статья является попыткой интеграции четырех важных навыков лингвистической компетенции в течение одного урока и предоставления информации о стратегиях и методах, которые могут быть применены для эффективного достижения данной цели. Курс делового английского языка в АГЭУ целенаправлен на развитие навыков, которые существенно важны для студентов-экономистов, так как предполагается, что в будущем они будут работать в сфере бизнеса и экономики, занимая различные должности в банках, страховых компаниях, маркетинговых агентствах, бухгалтерских и аудиторских фирмах. Такие позиции требуют отличного знания английского языка с наличием навыков говорения, чтения, письма и аудирования. Следовательно, планы уроков курса делового английского языка должны быть нацелены на одновременное развитие вышеуказанных четырех навыков, способствующих лучшей перспективе карьерного роста студентов.

Ключевые слова: *деловой английский язык, план урока, метод интеграции навыков, аутентичные материалы.*

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