

Interdisciplinary and Authentic Language Teaching in International Business Schools: Building Bridges Between Education and Professional Practice

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article met en lumière le rôle central de l'interdisciplinarité et de l'authenticité dans l'enseignement des langues au sein des écoles de commerce internationales. À travers des initiatives pédagogiques concrètes développées en collaboration avec des partenaires institutionnels, des experts professionnels et différents départements académiques, il montre comment l'intégration de contextes réels favorise l'engagement des étudiants et les prépare au monde professionnel. Ces exemples illustrent également l'importance de la coopération interdépartementale et institutionnelle dans le développement d'une pédagogie innovante et ancrée dans la réalité professionnelle.

Mots-clés : interdisciplinarité, authenticité, enseignement des langues, compétences interculturelles, apprentissage expérientiel, collaboration académique et industrielle

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the central role of interdisciplinarity and authenticity in language teaching within international business schools. Through concrete pedagogical initiatives developed in collaboration with institutional partners, industry professionals, and academic departments, it shows how real-world contexts enhance student engagement and prepare them for professional environments. These examples also demonstrate the importance of interdepartmental and institutional cooperation in developing innovative, practice-oriented language teaching.

Keywords: interdisciplinarity, authenticity, language teaching, intercultural competence, experiential learning, academic-industry collaboration

Introduction

In international business education, language learning plays a crucial role in preparing students to operate in multicultural and multilingual professional environments. However, traditional language teaching methods often remain confined to the classroom, disconnected from the professional context in which students will eventually work. This gap can reduce student engagement and limit the perceived relevance of language learning.

To address this challenge, interdisciplinary and authentic teaching approaches have gained increasing importance. By connecting language learning with professional practice, students can develop not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness and professional skills. Experiential learning theory emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through meaningful experience and active engagement¹. In business schools, this means integrating real-world professional situations into language education.

Such initiatives are particularly effective with students who have reached an upper-intermediate to advanced level of German (CEFR B1+ - C1), enabling them to participate actively and confidently in complex professional simulations and authentic interactions.

The initiatives presented in this article illustrate how interdisciplinary collaboration among language departments, corporate partners as well as other academic and institutional actors can transform language learning into a dynamic and professionally relevant experience.

The Transformative Impact of Authentic and Experiential Learning

Recent developments in language education emphasize the importance of connecting classroom learning with authentic professional contexts to enhance student engagement and perceived learning relevance. Research has shown that students' motivation to engage in foreign language learning is strongly influenced by their perception of its applicability to future professional environments². In international business schools in particular, language learning is

¹ To see the definition of experiential learning, see Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 22-23

² Ledford, J. R. (2022). *Learner perceptions of the value of language study in higher education*. Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence, 6(1), 71

most effective when students can situate linguistic practice within meaningful disciplinary and professional situations.

From this perspective, knowledge acquisition does not occur only through theoretical teaching but also created through participation in authentic tasks, which require learners to mobilize both linguistic and disciplinary competences. Integrating professional simulations and industry collaboration allow students to engage in learning situations that mirror real professional communication practices.

This article adopts a qualitative approach drawing on pedagogical initiatives implemented within German language courses in an international business school context. The study examines how professionally oriented learning environments contribute to students' engagement and perceived relevance of language learning.

The analysis is based on several teaching interventions carried out between 2021 and 2026, including industry partnerships and professional guest lectures. Data nourishing this reflection derive from classroom observations and professional feedback provided during industry interactions.

The objective is therefore exploratory: to analyze how authentic professional exposure and interdepartmental collaboration reshape students' relationship to foreign language learning. The initiatives presented function as case studies, assessments and professional visits highlighting the pedagogical potential of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration with Industry: The KPMG Germany Case Study Initiative

One of the most impactful interdisciplinary initiatives developed in recent years is a collaboration with KPMG Germany, one of the “Big Four” accounting firms. This partnership enables students to work on authentic case studies provided by professionals, creating a direct connection between academic learning and professional practice.

The initiative includes two key online events. The first session is an introduction between students and KPMG professionals to present the case study. Students gain insight into real business challenges and have the opportunity to interact directly with professionals working in

Germany. This initial contact helps reduce psychological barriers and increases students' confidence in using German in a professional context.

Over the following weeks, students work in teams to analyze the case study and develop solutions. They must use German as a working language while applying business knowledge acquired in other courses. In the second event, students present their solutions to KPMG professionals, who provide direct and constructive feedback. This interaction allows students to experience authentic professional communication and understand industry expectations.

Recent research shows that working in a foreign language in team-based professional contexts enhances creativity, problem-solving abilities, and professional competence. As Muehlfeld et al. suggest, “*using a foreign language may potentially enable unfamiliar associations and facilitate ‘thinking-out-of-the-box’ among individual team members*”³. Beyond the immediate learning experience, this collaboration also creates opportunities for internships in Germany, particularly in audit and ESG⁴-related fields. Students benefit from direct exposure to international career paths, reinforcing the practical relevance of language learning.

Integrating Professional Expertise into the Classroom: The Allianz Trade Initiative

Authenticity in language learning can also be achieved by bringing professionals directly into the classroom. A recent initiative involved inviting an ESG specialist from Allianz Trade, a German professional working in Paris, to speak to students. This event was made possible through close collaboration with the school's Corporate Relations Department, whose support was essential in establishing contact and organizing the intervention.

This interdepartmental cooperation illustrates how language teaching can benefit from broader institutional collaboration. Corporate relations teams play a crucial role in connecting academic programs with industry partners, strengthening the interdisciplinary dimension of language education.

³ Muehlfeld, K., Loderer, A., Semrau, T., & Wilken, R. (2025). *Foreign language use and the creative performance of dyadic teams*. *Management International Review*, 65, 150

⁴ Environmental Social Governance

During her presentation, the guest speaker shared her international career path and discussed the importance of intercultural competence and language skills in professional environments. She also introduced students to ESG challenges in the insurance sector and highlighted career opportunities for graduates.

Such experiences provide students with authentic exposure to professional language use and demonstrate the practical value of their language skills. CEFR⁵-based interdisciplinary approaches have been shown to enhance both language learning and subject-matter competence, reinforcing student motivation and engagement ⁶.

Interdisciplinary Assessment: The Green Innovation Negotiation Project

Another innovative initiative involves a final project in which students simulate a negotiation between a German and a French company seeking to establish a partnership within the field of green innovation. This project integrates language learning with business strategy, sustainability, and intercultural communication.

Students work in teams representing different companies and must prepare negotiation strategies, develop arguments as well as conduct negotiations in German. Their performance is evaluated by an interdisciplinary jury composed of a German professor teaching business subjects and a German language professor.

This interdisciplinary evaluation reinforces the authenticity of the exercise and reflects real-world professional situations in which communication skills and business competence are closely interconnected. Students must demonstrate linguistic accuracy and strategic thinking.

Through this experience, students develop confidence in their ability to use German in professional contexts while strengthening their overall professional competence.

⁵ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), for definition see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

⁶ Ruiz Hidalgo, D., & Ortega-Sánchez, D. (2023). *CLIL methodological approach in the bilingual classroom: A systematic review*. *International Journal of Instruction*, 16(3), 917

Conclusion

Interdisciplinary and authentic approaches to language teaching create meaningful connections between academic learning and professional practice. By integrating real-world case studies, collaboration with industry partners, and interdisciplinary evaluation, language education becomes a space where students develop linguistic proficiency alongside intercultural and professional competence. Institutional support, including cooperation with corporate relations departments and faculty across disciplines, further strengthens the sustainability and impact of these initiatives. While the examples described are only a few, they demonstrate how interdisciplinary cooperation can inspire further innovation and partnerships. In a globalized environment, language education plays a crucial role in preparing students to communicate effectively and engage confidently in international professional contexts.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank KPMG Germany for their continuous support and collaboration over the past years, particularly David Frieder Lempp, Full Professor at the Department of International Negotiation and Conflict Management, as well as Cécile Cras, Corporate Relations Manager, Direction Relations Entreprises, Relations Entreprises France, for their invaluable contribution in facilitating professional interventions and supporting interdisciplinary initiatives. Special thanks also go to Julia Elena Taubenberger, Sustainability Expert, and Jessika Manrique, Campus Manager at Allianz Trade La Défense, for their participation in the classroom sessions and for sharing their professional expertise with the students.

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