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PEDAGOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DIAGNOSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AMONG ECONOMICS STUDENTS

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Abstract:
This article examines the pedagogical and methodological foundations of diagnosing English language competence among students majoring in economics. Particular attention is paid to identifying students' levels of language competence, assessing their existing knowledge and skills, and adapting instruction to individual needs in the context of teaching English integrated with professional activities. The theoretical approaches, fundamental principles, and methodological instruments of diagnostic assessment are also analyzed. The study proposes a diagnostic model based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach. The model provides for the interconnected assessment of linguistic, communicative, professional-terminological, pragmatic, and strategic competences. Based on theoretical and methodological analysis, the article substantiates the potential for using diagnostic findings to improve course content, develop differentiated tasks, and prepare students for professional communication.
Keywords: English language competence, pedagogical diagnostics, methodological approach, economics education, professional communication, ESP, CEFR, diagnostic assessment, linguistic competence, differentiated instruction.

Introduction

The globalization of the world economy, increasing competition in the international labor market, and the transnational nature of economic relations are generating new demands for foreign-language teaching in higher education institutions. In particular, developing economics students' ability to communicate professionally in English, analyze international economic information, work with field-specific documents, and substantiate their views in academic and practical contexts has become an important pedagogical task.

Today, the professional competence of an economist is not limited to knowledge of economic theory, finance, accounting, or management. In the context of international cooperation, specialists are also expected to understand economic information in foreign languages, prepare analytical reports, participate in negotiations, and communicate effectively in professional settings.

Therefore, identifying students' existing proficiency, examining their communicative needs, and organizing instruction on the basis of relevant diagnostic data are essential in teaching English to economics students.

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The effectiveness of English-language instruction largely depends on how accurately students' initial competence is identified. Traditional assessment may be limited to knowledge of grammar rules, word translation, and answers to test questions. However, this approach does not fully reflect students' ability to use English in real professional situations.

This creates a need for comprehensive pedagogical and methodological approaches to the diagnosis of English language competence.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, makes it possible to describe language competence according to criteria associated with communicative activities, linguistic resources, and strategies [1]. Its updated version also addresses activities such as interpreting information, mediating meaning, and collaboratively constructing meaning, in addition to written and spoken communication.

This approach is particularly relevant for economics students because interpreting economic information, explaining statistical indicators, drawing conclusions from tables and graphs, or discussing international economic problems requires the simultaneous application of several language competences.

In the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach developed by T. Dudley-Evans and M. J. St John, language teaching content is linked to learners' professional needs, field-specific discourse, and communicative tasks [2]. Accordingly, alongside determining students' general English proficiency, it is necessary to assess their ability to use language in professional contexts.

Accounting for individual differences among students is another important aspect of pedagogical diagnostics. Students in the same group may have varying levels of vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, listening comprehension, and speaking skills. Ignoring these differences can make lessons too difficult for some students and excessively easy for others.

Thus, pedagogical diagnostics should be viewed not only as a means of measuring knowledge but also as a tool for identifying learning needs, planning educational activities, and determining directions for further development.

The aim of this study is to analyze scientifically the pedagogical and methodological foundations of diagnosing English language competence among economics students and to develop a diagnostic assessment model combining general language skills with professional communicative needs.

To achieve this aim, the following research objectives were established:

• To examine the theoretical and pedagogical foundations of diagnosing English language competence.

• To identify diagnostic criteria corresponding to the professional language needs of economics students.

• To systematize diagnostic assessment instruments based on CEFR and ESP approaches.

• To propose a methodological model for assessing students' linguistic, communicative, and professional competences.

• To substantiate ways of using diagnostic results to improve English-language teaching.

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Methods

This study is theoretical and methodological in nature. It employs analysis of scholarly literature, comparative study, systematization, pedagogical modeling, and the design of assessment criteria.

Its methodological framework consists of competence-based, communicative, activity-oriented, learner-centered, and professionally oriented educational approaches.

Competence-Based Approach

The competence-based approach involves assessing students not merely by their ability to recall individual grammar rules or lexical items, but by their ability to apply them effectively in specific situations.

For economics students, this approach is reflected in the diagnosis of skills such as explaining economic concepts in English, comparing financial indicators, discussing business problems, and analyzing international economic information.

From this perspective, diagnostic assessment must distinguish between knowledge about language and the ability to use language.

For example, a student may know the translations of economic terms such as inflation, unemployment, gross domestic product, and investment. However, an inability to use these terms to explain an economic situation may indicate insufficiently developed professional communicative competence.

Communicative Approach

The communicative approach is based on learning and assessing language as a means of real interaction.

Accordingly, diagnostic tasks should be organized around authentic communicative situations or situations closely resembling professional activities.

Economics students may be asked to:

• prepare a short presentation about the activities of an international company;
• explain changes shown in an economic graph or table in English;
• answer questions during a business meeting;
• read an economic news item and summarize its main conclusions;
• write a professional business email.

Such tasks make it possible to determine students' ability to use language resources in practical activities.

Professionally Oriented Approach

The professionally oriented approach involves diagnosing English language competence among economics students in direct relation to their future professional activities.

D. Douglas emphasizes that in language assessment for specific purposes, task content and assessment methods should be selected on the basis of relevant professional communication situations [3].

Accordingly, it is proposed that, alongside general language tests, assessment of economics students' English competence should incorporate economic texts, professional dialogues, analytical writing tasks, and oral presentations of economic information.

Diagnostic Criteria and Indicators

A diagnostic framework comprising five interconnected components was developed within this study to assess English language competence.

Competence component	Diagnostic indicator	Assessment instrument
Linguistic	Grammar, vocabulary, and accuracy of sentence construction	Test, written task
Communicative	Clear expression of ideas and participation in interaction	Interview, role-play
Professional-terminological	Appropriate use of economic terminology	Terminology test, text analysis
Pragmatic	Adaptation of speech to purpose and situation	Business case, email
Strategic	Summarizing and interpreting information and overcoming communication difficulties	Presentation, graph analysis

These components are designed to ensure a comprehensive diagnostic process that assesses not only students' knowledge of language rules but also their ability to use English when performing professional tasks.

Assessment instruments should be selected with regard to content relevance, clarity, consistency of scoring, and appropriateness for students' levels of preparation.

Results

Comparative analysis of theoretical sources and systematization of diagnostic criteria resulted in the proposal of a comprehensive pedagogical and methodological model for assessing English language competence among economics students.

The model is based on the principle of evaluating general language proficiency and professional communicative abilities as interconnected yet separately observable indicators.

A Staged Model for Diagnosing English Language Competence

The proposed model comprises four main stages.

Stage 1. Preparatory and diagnostic: investigating professional language needs, preparing entry tests, and establishing criteria.

Stage 2. Comprehensive assessment: evaluating Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking, and professional communication.

Stage 3. Analytical and interpretive: interpreting results against established criteria and identifying individual difficulties.

Stage 4. Corrective and developmental: determining individual learning pathways, assigning differentiated exercises, and conducting reassessment.

At the first stage, students' learning needs are identified and diagnostic instruments are developed. At the second stage, the principal language activities and professional communicative skills are assessed. At the third stage, linguistic and communicative difficulties experienced by students are systematized on the basis of the results obtained.

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At the fourth stage, measures to improve instruction are determined on the basis of diagnostic data.

These stages are closely interrelated. Diagnostics is therefore organized not as a one-time examination but as a continuous pedagogical process that supports the monitoring and improvement of learning.

Content of Diagnostic Assessment Instruments

A set of tasks encompassing general language skills and professional communication was developed to diagnose English language competence among economics students.

Reading comprehension. Students are offered English-language texts on topics such as international trade, inflation, economic growth, investment, and the labor market. They are expected to identify the main idea, extract significant economic information, and interpret the author's conclusions.

Listening comprehension. Audio recordings of economic news, business conversations, short lectures, and financial reports are used. Assessment focuses on understanding the main message, distinguishing numerical information, and recording essential details.

Speaking competence. Students are assigned tasks involving expressing opinions about economic processes, interpreting graphs and charts, and interacting in business-related situations.

For instance, the task "Describe the main factors affecting inflation in a developing economy" helps identify a student's ability to present economic concepts logically and coherently in English.

Writing competence. Students may be asked to summarize an economic report, compose a business email, or produce an analytical text based on given statistical data. Grammatical accuracy, logical organization, professional register, and terminological precision are assessed.

Professional terminological competence. Students' ability to understand economic vocabulary and use it in context is assessed separately. Tasks may, in particular, require students to explain the meanings of supply and demand, interest rate, exchange rate, fiscal policy, monetary policy, and economic growth and relate these concepts to economic situations.

Proposed Criteria for Assessing Competences

A 100-point diagnostic scale is recommended in the methodological model to summarize assessment results.

Diagnostic domain	Maximum score
Reading comprehension	15
Listening comprehension	15
Speaking	20
Writing	20
Professional terminology	15
Integrated professional communicative task	15
Total	100

This allocation is a methodological design proposed by the author. Its effectiveness and diagnostic accuracy must be evaluated through practical testing.

Care should be taken to avoid overlap between tasks. For example, an integrated task should assess the ability to perform a professional activity that has not already been evaluated through separate speaking or writing tasks.

The following working levels may be used for an initial pedagogical analysis of the results:

Score range	Diagnostic description	Methodological recommendation
0–39	Basic preparation	Develop foundational language skills
40–59	Developing preparation	Intensify communicative exercises
60–79	Sufficient preparation	Increase the proportion of professional tasks
80–100	High preparation	Use complex professional and analytical tasks

It should be emphasized that these score ranges are not directly equivalent to the official CEFR levels A1–C2. To determine a CEFR level, test items and scoring rubrics must be aligned with the relevant descriptors, standardized, and empirically validated.

Potential Uses of Diagnostic Data

The model developed in this study makes it possible to distinguish three main directions for using diagnostic data.

First, identifying individual learning needs. For example, if a student comprehends economic texts well but experiences difficulty speaking, it is advisable to increase the proportion of dialogues, presentations, and economic discussions in that student's learning activities.

Second, organizing differentiated instruction within study groups. Economic texts, terminology exercises, and communicative tasks of varying difficulty can be developed for students studying the same topic.

Third, aligning the English-language curriculum with students' needs. Difficulties identified through diagnostics can serve as a basis for revising course content, task complexity, and assessment instruments.

Thus, the main outcome of the proposed model is the development of a theoretical and methodological framework for assessing English language competence among economics students, together with directions for its implementation in the educational process.

Discussion

Comparison of the diagnostic model developed in this study with existing scholarly and methodological approaches reveals several distinctive features.

Above all, the primary purpose of diagnostic assessment is not merely to record a level of knowledge, but to generate pedagogical information necessary for improving instruction.

In their research, P. Black and D. Wiliam regard formative assessment as an important instrument for improving educational effectiveness [4]. According to this approach, assessment results should directly influence the subsequent learning activities of teachers and students.

This theoretical perspective is also relevant to diagnosing English language competence among economics students. Assessment results enable teachers to determine which topics need revisiting, which communicative tasks should be made more challenging, and which students require additional support.

However, diagnostic and formative assessment should not be treated as identical concepts. Diagnostic assessment primarily identifies learners' existing preparation and learning difficulties, whereas formative assessment supports continuous feedback and the improvement of learning throughout instruction. The two approaches can complement one another.

Another important aspect of assessing language competence among economics students is the relationship between professional content and language skills.

Traditional language tests frequently employ general-interest texts and standard communicative situations. While useful for determining general proficiency, such tasks do not always adequately demonstrate students' ability to work with economic information.

The advantage of the ESP approach in this respect is that it assesses language competence through authentic tasks or tasks closely approximating professional activities [2].

For example, when an economics student compares trade volumes between countries, explains trends in economic growth, or draws conclusions from financial indicators in English, several competences are employed simultaneously.

The student must know economic terminology, construct grammatically correct sentences, interpret information logically, and choose speech strategies suited to the audience.

At the same time, excessively difficult professional tasks may lead to misinterpretation of diagnostic results. In particular, a first-year student whose knowledge of economics is not yet sufficiently developed may be unable to complete a complex macroeconomic task despite having a good command of English.

In such a case, a low score may reflect a lack of subject knowledge rather than weak language competence.

Therefore, students' stage of preparation in economics-related subjects should also be considered when designing diagnostic tasks.

For instance, first-year students can complete tasks involving basic concepts such as price, demand, supply, and market. In later years, more complex communicative situations concerning international trade, inflation, monetary policy, financial markets, and investment processes may be appropriate.

The reliability of diagnostic instruments is another important methodological issue. In particular, in speaking and writing assessment, the subjective views of assessors may affect results.

To reduce this risk, it is recommended to use explicit scoring rubrics, explain common criteria to assessors, and, where necessary, have written and oral performances evaluated by two experts.

Furthermore, the validity and reliability of the proposed diagnostic model must be determined before practical implementation. For this purpose, pilot testing, analysis of task difficulty, examination of inter-rater agreement, and investigation of factors affecting students' results are advisable.

An important feature of the proposed model is its attempt to connect diagnostic results with pedagogical decisions. Assessment is not viewed as an end in itself, but as a means of individualizing instruction and preparing students for professional communication.

Moreover, developing English language competence among economics students requires methodological collaboration between foreign-language teachers and faculty members teaching economics. Such cooperation may be useful for selecting appropriate professional texts, refining the content of terminology tasks, and designing communicative activities closely resembling actual economic practice.

The main limitation of this study is that the proposed diagnostic model has not yet been empirically tested with actual students. Therefore, definitive statistical conclusions regarding its effectiveness cannot be drawn. Future research should pilot the model with economics students at different proficiency levels, examine relationships between diagnostic results and academic achievement, and refine the assessment criteria.

Conclusion

Diagnosing English language competence among economics students is an important pedagogical component of professionally oriented language teaching in contemporary higher education.

The theoretical and methodological analysis conducted in this study leads to the following conclusions.

First, the diagnosis of English language competence should not be limited to grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. It needs to encompass students' linguistic, communicative, professional-terminological, pragmatic, and strategic competences in an integrated manner.

Second, combining CEFR and ESP approaches provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for comprehensively assessing both general language preparation and professional communicative abilities among economics students.

Third, tasks such as analyzing economic texts, interacting in business situations, interpreting statistical indicators, and producing professional correspondence strengthen the professional relevance of diagnostic assessment.

Fourth, diagnostic assessment results can provide essential information for identifying individual differences among students, organizing differentiated instruction, and improving curricula.

Fifth, the effective organization of diagnostics depends on the relevance of task content, clarity of assessment criteria, reliability of results, and their use in pedagogical decision-making.

In conclusion, establishing a scientifically grounded pedagogical and methodological system for diagnosing English language competence among economics students is an important prerequisite for improving professionally oriented language education.

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Subsequent experimental testing of the proposed diagnostic model will make it possible to determine its practical effectiveness and provide stronger support for scholarly conclusions aimed at developing English-language teaching methodology in economics education.

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