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Exploring the role of the discipline “English for business communication” in developing mediation skills among engineering students

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Abstract. *This study explores the role of the discipline "English for Business Communication" in developing mediation skills among engineering students, highlighting the importance of language proficiency and communication skills for future career advancement. **The paper aims** to assess the familiarity of engineering Master's students with the concept of mediation, explore students' perceptions of their language proficiency in handling mediation tasks, including mediating disputes, and provide recommendations for improving mediation-focused language instruction.*

Methods: *To achieve this goal, quantitative and qualitative methods were employed, including a survey and interviews with 64 ESL Master's students at a Ukrainian technical university. The survey featured questions with predefined answer options designed to evaluate students' understanding of mediation concepts and their self-assessed language skills. It also included Likert-scale prompts, with the data interpreted through medians and interquartile ranges to reveal central tendencies and variations.*

Results: *The study found that Master's engineering students recognize mediation as a vital tool for resolving conflicts in professional environments, with practical training significantly enhancing their understanding of mediation processes. In particular, the "Practical Course of English for Business Communication" helped develop essential skills such as active listening, specialized vocabulary, and cultural awareness. This facilitated smoother communication and better conflict resolution. Key challenges identified include difficulties in expressing ideas clearly, understanding diverse accents, and applying mediation strategies in real-world scenarios. Recommendations include the development of tailored language training programs, with a focus on professional mediation scenarios and intercultural competencies to further improve student readiness for professional negotiations.*

Conclusions: *This research underscores the importance of English for Business Communication courses in fostering essential mediation skills among engineering students. The findings reveal that familiarity of engineering students with mediation techniques, coupled with equipping them with proficient language skills, significantly*



contributes to successful negotiation processes within technical and business contexts. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating practical, stakeholder-oriented mediation training into the engineering curriculum while showcasing students' strong interest in additional language and mediation instruction aligned with their career goals. Furthermore, the crucial role of cultural sensitivity is unveiled in the research, asserting that English language proficiency is pivotal for future careers in globally interconnected business environments. Overall, this study paves the way for integrating mediation training into language education for engineering students, providing valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers.

Keywords: *mediation, language proficiency, business communication, cross-cultural awareness, foreign language knowledge*

Дослідження ролі дисципліни «Англійська мова для ділового спілкування» у розвитку навичок медіації серед студентів інженерного профілю

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***Анотація.** У цьому дослідженні розглядається роль дисципліни «Англійська мова для ділового спілкування» у розвитку навичок медіації серед студентів інженерних спеціальностей, наголошується на важливості мовної компетентності та комунікативних навичок для подальшого професійного розвитку. **Метою** статті є оцінка обізнаності магістрантів-інженерів щодо концепції медіації, аналіз їхніх уявлень про власні мовні навички для виконання медіаційних завдань, включаючи участь у розв'язанні конфліктних ситуацій між зацікавленими сторонами, а також надання рекомендацій для вдосконалення навчання медіації в контексті викладання мови.*

***Методи:** Для досягнення цієї мети були використані кількісні та якісні методи, зокрема опитування та інтерв'ю з 64 магістрантами, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну в технічному університеті України. Опитування включало питання із заздалегідь визначеними варіантами відповідей, спрямовані на оцінку розуміння студентами концепцій медіації, факторів, що впливають на формування навичок медіації через призму мовної підготовки, що забезпечує дисципліна «Англійська мова для ділового спілкування».*



Для отримання суджень респондентів щодо важливості вивчення дисципліни та подальшого опанування мовою та навичками медіації для побудови успішної кар'єри було використувалися шкала Лайкерта, а дані інтерпретувалися через медіани та інтерквартильний розмах, що дозволило визначити центральні тенденції та варіації.

Результати: *Дослідження показало, що магістранти-інженери визнають медіацію важливим інструментом для вирішення конфліктів у професійному середовищі, а практичне навчання суттєво покращує їхнє розуміння процесів медіації. Зокрема, дисципліна «Практичний курс англійської мови для ділового спілкування» сприяла розвитку ключових навичок, таких як активне слухання, спеціалізована лексика та культурна обізнаність. Це забезпечило більш ефективне спілкування та краще вирішення конфліктів. Серед основних викликів було виділено труднощі з чітким висловленням думок, розумінням різних акцентів та застосуванням стратегій медіації у реальних ситуаціях. У дослідженні запропоновано рекомендації щодо розробки адаптованих програм мовної підготовки з акцентом на професійні сценарії медіації та міжкультурну компетентність для підвищення готовності студентів до професійних переговорів.*

Висновки: *Дослідження підкреслює важливість курсів англійської мови для ділового спілкування у розвитку ключових навичок медіації серед студентів інженерних спеціальностей. Результати свідчать, що обізнаність студентів-інженерів з техніками медіації у поєднанні з володінням мовними навичками суттєво сприяє успішному веденню переговорів у технічних та бізнесових контекстах. У роботі акцентується увага на важливості інтеграції практичного, орієнтованого на зацікавлених осіб навчання медіації в інженерну освітню програму, а також демонструється сильний інтерес студентів до додаткових курсів з мови та медіації, узгоджених з їхніми кар'єрними цілями. Дослідження також виявляє ключову роль культурної чутливості, наголошуючи, що володіння англійською мовою є вирішальним для побудови*

успішної кар'єри у глобалізованому бізнес-середовищі. Загалом, це дослідження відкриває перспективи для інтеграції навчання медіації у процес мовної підготовки студентів інженерних спеціальностей, надаючи цінні висновки для викладачів та розробників навчальних програм.

***Ключові слова:** медіація, володіння мовою, ділове спілкування, міжкультурна обізнаність, знання іноземної мови*

Problem statement. In the context of an increasingly globalized and multicultural professional environment, effective communication and conflict resolution have emerged as critical competencies for success. Mediation, defined as the process through which a neutral third party facilitates dialogue and negotiation between conflicting parties to help them reach a mutually acceptable agreement (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2020), plays a vital role in fostering understanding and cooperation [6]. However, many engineering students experience a lack of the necessary language skills and mediation competencies to navigate the complexities of personal and professional relationships. This deficiency not only impedes their ability to engage in successful negotiations but also limits their overall professional development and effectiveness in diverse work environments.

The significance of this issue is underscored by the growing demand for professionals who can adeptly manage conflicts and facilitate collaboration in multicultural settings. As engineering projects often involve diverse teams and stakeholders, the ability to mediate effectively is essential for ensuring project success and maintaining positive working relationships. Research has shown that strong mediation skills can lead to improved teamwork, enhanced problem-solving capabilities, and more productive communication across various professional contexts. For instance, studies by Yates highlighted the importance of effective communication and goal-setting during negotiations in the engineering and construction industry [15]. While Bowling and Hoffman emphasized the critical role of personal qualities such as self-awareness and active listening in successful mediation outcomes [2]. Lee et al.

introduced the AGReMA statement, which provides guidelines for reporting mediation analyses in randomized trials and observational studies, emphasizing the need for transparency and consistency in reporting [9]. To illustrate the importance of mediation in professional contexts, consider a scenario where an engineering team faces a disagreement over project specifications. Without effective mediation skills, misunderstandings may escalate, leading to delays and increased costs. Conversely, a mediator equipped with strong language skills can facilitate a constructive dialogue, helping the team reach a consensus and move forward efficiently.

The novelty of this research lies in exploring the gap in understanding how language proficiency specifically influences mediation competence among engineering students.

By highlighting the relationship between language proficiency and successful mediation, the findings will offer valuable recommendations for educators and curriculum developers, ultimately enhancing students' readiness for professional negotiations and conflict resolution in their future careers.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. A comprehensive review of the literature highlights various perspectives on mediation and its application across different contexts. Several studies have examined the qualities, processes, and outcomes associated with effective mediation, shedding light on its role in dispute resolution, language learning, and business negotiations.

Personal qualities of successful mediators were studied and described in the work of Bowling, D., & Hoffman, D. [2]. They described the main three stages of development that mediators have experienced: (a) training in the basic skills of mediation; (b) developing a greater intellectual understanding of the process; and (c) seeking to develop the personal qualities that make us more effective dispute resolvers. The authors are sure that a mediator's character significantly impacts the negotiation process and its result. A good mediator must always attempt to develop such personal traits as self-awareness, presence, authenticity, congruence, and integration on his/her way to become a better mediator.

Yates, J. K. provided insight into the mediation process in the engineering and construction industry. The author defined what mediation is, and discussed the goals mediators attempt to achieve in the mediation process when they are dealing with disputing parties that are not able to reach an agreement. The way mediation is viewed and used in various cultural contexts was also investigated [15].

Anikó Tompos in her research stressed the importance of having common goals, one-off or long-term cooperation, and the opponent's personal traits rather than considering national culture-dependent values and behaviours, which can affect the process and outcome of international negotiations [1].

Pundziuvienė, D., Meškauskienė, A., Ringailienė, T., & Matulionienė, J. in their study explored the role of mediation in learning a host country's language in the UK and Lithuania. The authors investigated the use of non-linguistic competences to reduce linguistic and cultural barriers, encourage collaboration among language learners, and improve their competence in translanguaging. Their study's findings demonstrated the efficacy of mediated language instruction, which can enhance the productivity, significance, and individualization of language classes while offering a chance to utilize students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds in pertinent situational scenarios [11].

Qun Liu conducted a study aimed at providing a specific analysis and raising a discussion on the value benefits, principles, and language skills of business negotiations. Negotiation attitude, negotiation environment, and certain language skills are the most important parts of enhancing negotiation power. However, the author argued that negotiation skills are comprehensive knowledge and require extensive knowledge, eloquence, sharp thinking, and so forth [12].

Lina Guo studied the impact of mediation on the teaching-learning process. She emphasized the role of teachers' implementation of mediation methods in the formation of tools for independent learning. In the study, some aspects of the explicit method adapted for the teacher mediation were pointed out: first, using dialogic talk to assess what students know and where they are in the thinking process, then giving

knowledge of what they don't have systemically and eventually, monitoring the problem-solving process with students [10].

Moreover, the findings of the study conducted by Günaydın, Y. & Demir, E. also highlighted mediation as a pivotal tool for effective learning and language acquisition in particular and proved the connection between language instruction and mediation. The study proposes recommendations to foster further exploration of mediation through practical and stakeholder-oriented approaches. The paper made suggestions to encourage more research on mediation using practical and stakeholder-focused methods [7].

Identification of previously unsolved parts of the overall problem. There is a number of research in the field of mediation that explored different aspects of the mediation process and described the principal characteristics of good mediators. However, there hasn't been enough research done on the relationship between language competency and how it helps engineering students manage mediation responsibilities in technical and business contexts, especially during negotiation processes. With our work, we aim to inspire ESL teachers to make certain changes in the curriculum of the discipline “English language” and find more appropriate approaches and techniques for teaching English that are crucial for boosting the development of mediation skills in students. We hope that having read the results of the study ESL teachers will consider the discipline “English for Business communication” as an essential instrument that can help students communicate and meet professional challenges in the professional area with more confidence if they know how to behave themselves as good mediators. We seek to draw the attention of ESL educators to the critical issue of engaging engineering students in technical dispute resolution within the context of English language instruction.

Formulation of the article's objectives. This paper aims to determine to what extent students who obtain a Master's degree in engineering are familiar with the concept of mediation and examine the impact of the discipline “Practical Course of English for Business Communication” on the formation of personal characteristics of

engineering students as mediators in the negotiation process (for example, obtaining skills necessary to be good at active listening, reframing, focusing on interests, prioritizing issues, and helping the parties generate options, etc.). In addition, we attempt to assess students' perception of their language proficiency for handling mediation tasks.

To reach this aim, the following tasks are to be completed:

1. With the help of a survey to establish students' views on the contribution of their knowledge obtained from the discipline "Practical course of English for business communication" on the development of skills that are important for mediation in professional settings.
2. To analyze factors that cause challenges for students on the way to achieving success in the negotiation process.
3. To outline recommendations to ESL teachers who teach Business English to engineering students on engaging students in mediation tasks in engineering more effectively.

In the study, we hypothesize that students are aware of some practical techniques and methods for resolving disputes through constructive communication. However, there is a necessity to work toward a deeper understanding of how and why mediation works, particularly in contexts requiring effective language use as an effective mediation tool. We assert that language proficiency plays a crucial role in mediation because it enables clear expression of ideas, active listening, and the use of culturally appropriate phrases to bridge differences. Enhancing students' language skills, especially in business and technical contexts, is essential for equipping them to navigate complex negotiations and foster productive dialogue in professional environments.

Materials and methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering data were applied in the research. The data was collected through an opinion survey and interviews with 64 ESL students obtaining a Master's degree in engineering from a Ukrainian technical university. The survey consisted of 12 questions aimed at gathering

information about different aspects of preparing ESL students for successful professional negotiations through mediation practices.

The survey comprised 2 types of questions: multiple choice and a Likert scale. To analyze responses from the Likert scale prompts, we calculated the Interquartile Range (IQR), which provided insights into the central tendency and highlighted the spread of opinions around the median.

The core questions in the survey used for this study can be found in Appendix 1. This research complies with ethics, all respondents volunteered to participate in the survey and gave their consent.

Presentation of the main research material. The English for Business Communication discipline itself offers students many opportunities to encounter and understand the concept of mediation. Through role-playing activities and case studies, students practice resolving conflicts and facilitating communication in professional contexts.

In order to start our research, we had to find out to what extent the respondents were familiar with the concept of mediation. With this aim they were asked to rate their familiarity with the measures on a scale from “not at all familiar” (1) to “very familiar” (5). The majority of respondents (66%) reported a score of 4 (moderately familiar) or 5 (very familiar) are classified as being familiar with the term mediation and its principles and practical applications. Conversely, respondents scoring 1 (not familiar at all), 2 (slightly familiar), or 3 (somewhat familiar) may require further exposure and training to improve their understanding of mediation and its applicability in professional and engineering contexts.

The next question of the survey was intended to investigate students' comprehension of the idea of mediation in engineering by offering some situations in which mediation techniques could be used. The responses revealed a variety of viewpoints regarding mediation's role in the engineering context, from resolving disputes to encouraging cooperation and communication.

Most respondents (31%) primarily associate mediation with resolving conflicts within project teams (Figure 1). This suggests a strong perception of mediation as a tool for maintaining harmony and addressing disagreements in collaborative technical settings. Just under a third (29%) view mediation as a tool for balancing priorities and achieving consensus in decision-making. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) acknowledge mediation's role in bridging communication gaps and ensuring alignment among stakeholders. Fewer students (17%) see mediation as a way to promote collaboration and shared learning, focusing on its role in teamwork and professional growth.

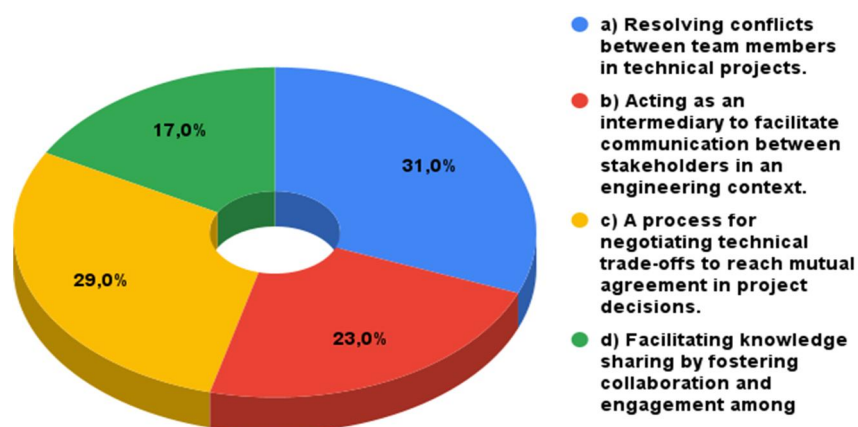


Figure 1. Respondents' understanding of the concept of mediation in engineering

Finding out what respondents believe to be the essential components of effective negotiations was the focus of the survey's next question. The responses were able to provide light on how they viewed the relative significance of language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and other elements in promoting successful negotiating results.

According to the survey results, 40% of respondents believe that the consideration of cross-cultural differences is the primary factor contributing to successful negotiations (Figure 2). This highlights the importance of understanding and respecting cultural diversity when preparing for and conducting negotiations, particularly in international or multicultural business settings. 33% of respondents prioritize proficiency in a foreign language, emphasizing its role in facilitating clear

communication and ensuring success in business negotiations. This indicates that language skills are considered crucial, but not as critical as cultural awareness.

Finally, 27% of respondents think other factors, such as negotiation strategies or interpersonal skills, play a more significant role than foreign language skills or intercultural competence. This suggests a recognition that successful negotiations depend on a broader set of factors beyond just language or cultural considerations.

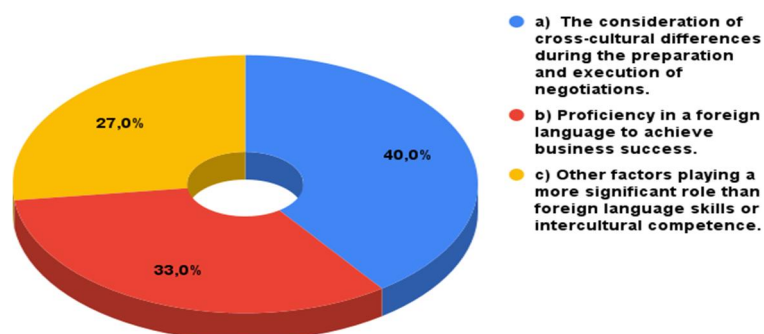


Figure 2. Primary Factors Contributing to Successful Negotiations

The responses to the question regarding the sufficiency of language knowledge for handling mediation tasks in the respondents' field reveal varying levels of confidence in their language proficiency.

The calculation of the median (Mdn) and the Interquartile Range (IQR) shows that the majority of respondents (56%) believe their current language knowledge is moderately sufficient for handling mediation tasks in their field (Mdn =2, IQR=2) (see table 1). This indicates that while most feel somewhat prepared, there may be room for improvement in language proficiency for effective mediation. A smaller portion (27%) feels extremely confident in their language skills, suggesting that they may have a higher level of proficiency, which is considered adequate for engaging in mediation processes and/or performing the role of a mediator.

However, 17% of respondents feel their language knowledge is not adequate at all, indicating a clear gap in skills that could hinder their ability to engage in mediation tasks effectively. This highlights the need for additional language training and support.

According to the survey results, the most frequently selected language skill for successful mediation was active listening and paraphrasing skills (34%), which suggests that respondents see these abilities as crucial for ensuring clear understanding and fostering effective communication during mediation processes (Figure 3).

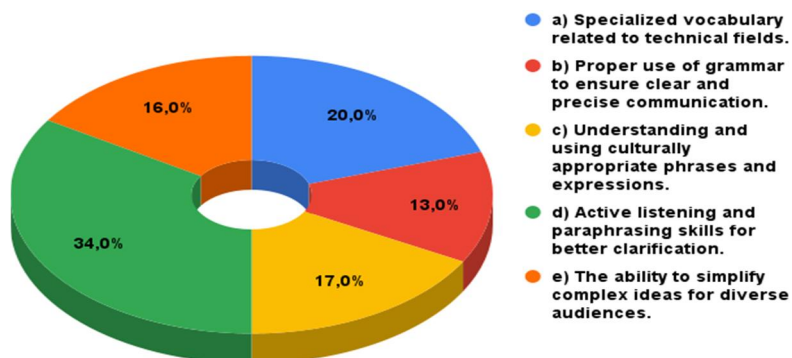


Figure 3. Key Language Skills for Effective Mediation

Specialized vocabulary related to technical fields was also highlighted by 20% of respondents, indicating the importance of having a strong command of terminology in technical areas for effective mediation in engineering contexts.

Culturally appropriate phrases and expressions, selected by 17%, show an understanding of the significance of cultural sensitivity in communication, especially in international or diverse work settings.

A smaller proportion of respondents (16% and 13%) emphasized the ability to simplify complex ideas and the importance of proper use of grammar and. These results suggest that while these skills are recognized as important, they are less frequently prioritized compared to other language competencies, such as using culturally relevant expressions and specialized technical vocabulary.

The next question addressed a crucial aspect of business communication by asking respondents to identify the most challenging skills to engage into business communication they encounter. It provides valuable insights into the areas where individuals may need further development to communicate effectively in professional environments.

The majority of respondents (37%) found expressing ideas clearly and persuasively to be the most challenging aspect of business communication. This suggests that clarity and effective persuasion in communication are key difficulties for many individuals in professional settings (Figure 4).

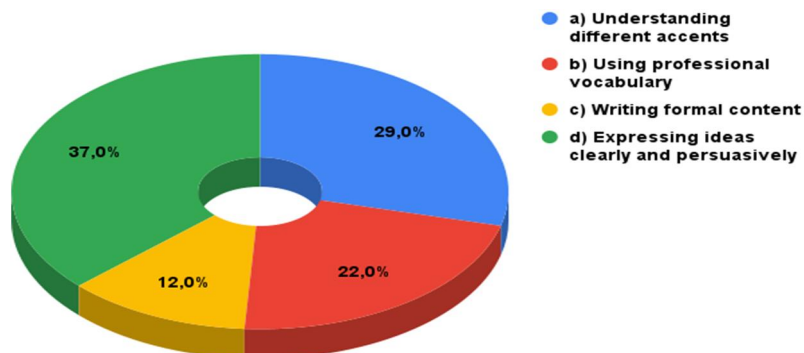


Figure 4. Most Challenging Business Communication Skills

A significant proportion (29%) also reported challenges with understanding different accents, indicating that listening comprehension across varied speech patterns is another common barrier in business communication.

While a smaller portion (22%) cited the use of professional vocabulary as challenging, this highlights the importance of mastering industry-specific language. Finally, 12% of respondents found writing formal content to be the most difficult, reflecting the complexity of crafting clear and formal written communication in business contexts.

The survey included a question about the mediation strategies utilized in online English lessons. Mediating communication was the most frequently chosen strategy (47%), indicating a strong focus on facilitating dialogue and interaction. Acting as an intermediary in informal situations ranked second (34%), reflecting an emphasis on adaptable interpersonal skills. Mediating a text, selected by 19% of respondents, appeared less prominent, suggesting that textual mediation plays a more supplementary role in these lessons.

The responders were asked about the impact of the English for Business Communication course on the development of participants' mediation skills. The responses indicated differing views on how much the English for Business

Communication course has influenced the development of mediation skills. A large portion of respondents (34%) indicated that the discipline significantly contributed to their mediation skills (Mdn =2, IQR=2) (See table 1). It suggests that the module has played a meaningful role in enhancing their abilities in this area. Additionally, 20% of respondents felt that the contribution was very significant, reinforcing the positive influence of the module on their development.

On the other hand, 25% of respondents reported a more moderate level of impact, suggesting that while the discipline helped, it might not have been as comprehensive or effective for some students. A smaller percentage (13%) felt that the module had little impact, and 8% indicated that it had no impact at all, indicating that there are some students for whom the course did not lead to noticeable improvements in mediation skills.

Overall, the findings indicate that although many responders have benefited from the English for Business Communication discipline, there is still an opportunity for improvement, particularly for those who believed it had little to no influence.

The following question assessed the participants' views on the significance of English for their future business careers.

The results of the survey indicated that most respondents view English as a key factor in their professional development (Mdn = 2, IQR = 2) (See table 1), reflecting a consistent level of agreement with its importance. 34% of participants consider it very important, another 26% regard it as important emphasizing its crucial role in their future business success. 20% feel it is moderately important, indicating that a significant portion values English but may not see it as essential. Only 12% consider English slightly important, and 8% believe it is not important at all, reflecting a smaller group for whom English is less central to their career goals.

In addition, we asked respondents whether they would benefit from additional language or mediation training tailored to their professional needs. The majority of participants (45%) indicated they would "definitely" benefit, suggesting a strong

interest in further training for improving their skills in these areas (Mdn = 2, IQR = 2) (See table 1).

A significant portion (29%) expressed that they would "very probably" benefit, indicating that a large number of students see the value in such training, although perhaps with slightly less certainty. Meanwhile, 18% responded that they would "probably" benefit, showing a moderate level of interest. A smaller group (5%) felt they "probably not" would benefit, while 3% were certain that additional training would not be necessary for their professional development.

This distribution suggests that a large proportion of respondents are open to or actively interested in further language or mediation training, highlighting the perceived importance of these skills in their careers.

Conclusions. In conclusion, the research highlights the essential role of the "English for Business Communication" discipline in developing mediation skills among engineering students. The findings demonstrate that familiarity with mediation and its principles, combined with enhanced language proficiency and cultural awareness, contribute significantly to the students' ability to manage conflicts and negotiate effectively in professional settings. The study underscores the value of integrating targeted language and mediation training into educational curricula to better prepare students for future career challenges. Furthermore, the insights gained from this research can guide ESL educators in tailoring their teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of engineering students, ultimately enhancing their mediation capabilities and professional competencies.

Appendix 1. Likert Scale Questions

Survey questions	Extremely	Moderately	Not at all			Mdn	IQR
4. Do you feel your current language knowledge is sufficient for handling mediation tasks in your field?	27	56	17			2	1

	Very significantly	Significantly	Somewhat	Had little impact	Had no impact at all		
8. To what extent has the English for Business Communication discipline contributed to the development of your mediation skills?	20	34	25	13	8	2	1
9. How important do you think English is for your future business career?	34	26	20	12	8	2	2
	Definitely	Very probably	probably	Probably not	Definitely not		
10. Would you benefit from additional language or mediation training tailored to your professional needs?	45	29	18	5	3	2	2

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