

APPLIED FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS AT NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: The article aims to overview the bachelor's program in Applied Foreign Languages for Administration and Management (in English and a second foreign language) (AFLAM) and the master's program in Business Communications taught at New Bulgarian University (NBU). It also features the annual conference in Cross-Cultural Communication held at NBU, with a focus on mastering communication skills and equipping students with practical experience in multilingual business environments. The article highlights the potential of such interdisciplinary and applied programs to serve as models for future language and communication education.

Keywords: Applied Foreign Languages, Business Communications, Cross-Cultural Communication, higher education, New Bulgarian University

1. APPLIED FOREIGN LANGUAGES PROGRAM

Research on programs taught in English shows that they have become a significant tool for internationalisation, with universities across Europe developing such programmes in an effort to attract international students and increase global academic competitiveness (Hultgren et al. 2015). The authors highlight linguistic and cultural implications, ensuring equitable access to higher education and fostering the development of professional and academic language skills. It is claimed that such programs have not only been a tool for internationalisation but also as part of a broader effort to enhance the quality of higher education across Europe. Perceptions and experiences of students, lecturers and decision-makers in business schools at a Chinese university and a Dutch university were examined by Shao & Wilkinson (2023), while Gölle (2024) examines their spread in both European and worldwide contexts. The importance of English proficiency in attracting international students and business is crucial and such programs have proven their potential.

The bachelor's degree program in Applied Foreign Languages for Administration and Management (in English and a second foreign language) (AFLAM) at NBU is a multidisciplinary academic pathway designed to equip students with strong linguistic competence and practical professional skills relevant to contemporary administrative and managerial environments. The program combines advanced foreign-language training with essential knowledge of management, economics, law and organisational communication, enabling graduates to operate effectively in multilingual and multicultural professional contexts.

A central characteristic of the program is its focus on applied language training in English and a second foreign language (French, German, Spanish or Russian). The curriculum places special emphasis on developing high-level proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing for academic purposes, as well as specialised language skills required for business communication, administrative correspondence, public speaking and professional presentations. Students work with authentic materials such as reports, case studies, contracts, policy documents and digital communication tools, ensuring that language skills mastered are directly relevant to real work environments.

Another defining feature is the program's strong orientation toward practical skills and experiential learning. Courses integrate simulations, role-plays, project-based tasks and teamwork activities, reflecting real-life administrative and managerial scenarios. Students learn how to write official documents, prepare presentations, analyse organisational structures, participate in meetings, negotiate in multilingual settings and communicate effectively with international partners. This hands-on approach helps students acquire not only language proficiency but also the professional confidence needed for administrative roles in both private and public institutions.

The program's interdisciplinary structure further strengthens its applicability. In addition to foreign-language modules, students take courses in management theory, project management, human resources, business law, marketing, economics, public administration and information management. This broad academic foundation enables them to understand how organisations function and to apply analytical thinking when dealing with administrative processes, policy implementation, or business operations. The interdisciplinary blend also fosters adaptability, an essential quality in dynamic and globalised professional environments.

An important dimension of the program is its commitment to developing intercultural competence. Students explore cultural norms, communication styles and intergroup dynamics, which prepares them to work with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This aspect is particularly valuable for careers in international organisations, multinational companies, NGOs, tourism, diplomacy and cross-border communication. The program also encourages independent learning, research skills, and critical thinking. Students engage in academic writing, conduct small-scale research projects, and participate in discussions and debates that challenge them to evaluate information critically and express ideas clearly. These competencies are central to the university's philosophy of education and reflect NBU's emphasis on learner autonomy and continuous professional development.

Practical experience is another significant component. Students may complete internships in administrative offices, companies, cultural institutions, or international organisations, where they apply their linguistic and managerial skills in authentic work settings. Many students also participate in international mobility programs, especially through Erasmus+, gaining valuable exposure to different educational and professional cultures. Erasmus+ agreements form an essential component of the bachelor's program in AFLAM at NBU, providing students with valuable opportunities for international academic mobility, professional development, and intercultural experience. There are agreements with Universite Toulouse II-Jean Jaures, Universite Clermont Auvergne, France, Hochschule Zittau/Goerlitz, Germany, Kadir Has Universitesi, Turkey, Universita Degli Studi Di Cagliari, Italy, University of Malaga, Spain, as well as a double-degree-diploma agreement with Aix-Marselles University, France. Through partnerships with universities across Europe, the program enables students to study abroad, improve their language proficiency, and gain first-hand insight into administrative and managerial practices in different cultural and institutional contexts. A key feature of these Erasmus+ agreements is their alignment with the program's multilingual and interdisciplinary orientation. Partner institutions typically offer courses in English and in a range of other European languages, allowing students to continue developing both English and their second language during their mobility period. Academic exchange is carefully coordinated to ensure that students can transfer credits, participate in relevant courses, and integrate their international studies into their overall academic trajectory at NBU. The Erasmus+ partnerships also expand students' exposure to diverse approaches to administration, management, communication and cultural studies thanks to Erasmus lecturers who teach at NBU, enriching their understanding of European professional standards and practices. During their mobility, students attend lectures, seminars, and project-based courses that complement the curriculum at NBU and allow them to engage with new ideas, teaching methods, and learning environments.

In addition to academic benefits, Erasmus+ mobility plays a crucial role in developing intercultural competence, an essential skill for graduates who will work in multilingual and multicultural organizational settings. By living and studying abroad, students experience different cultural norms, communication styles, and administrative systems, which strengthens their adaptability, empathy, and ability to function effectively in international teams. Many Erasmus+ agreements within the program also support internship placements, enabling students to gain practical experience in companies, public institutions, NGOs, and cultural organizations throughout Europe.

These internships allow students to apply their linguistic, administrative and managerial skills in real-life work environments and to build professional networks that may benefit their future careers. The program's active participation in Erasmus+ initiatives reflects NBU's commitment to fostering internationalisation, academic excellence and student mobility. The variety of partner universities and institutions ensures that students in AFLAM have access to a wide range of academic and professional opportunities that enhance their qualifications and broaden their global perspectives. Erasmus+ agreements significantly strengthen the program's mission by integrating international experience into students' education, preparing them for careers that require advanced language skills, intercultural awareness, and a solid understanding of global administrative and managerial practices.

Overall, the bachelor's program in AFLAM aims to develop versatile, globally minded professionals who can bridge linguistic, cultural, and administrative domains. Graduates are prepared for a wide range of careers in international administration, business communication, project coordination, public institutions, tourism, customer relations, and other fields where strong language skills and managerial competencies are essential. The program's combination of linguistic excellence, practical training, and interdisciplinary education ensures that students are ready to thrive in a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world.

1.1. Cross-Cultural Communication Conference and Yearbook

The bachelor's program in Applied Foreign Languages for Administration and Management (in English and a second foreign language) (AFLAM) and the master's program in Business Communications taught at New Bulgarian University (NBU) are two examples of programs, encouraging diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism. They started organising the NBU annual Cross-Cultural Communication Conference and publishing Cross-Cultural Communication Yearbook. The focus is on equipping lecturers and students with practical experience in multilingual business environments, highlighting the potential of such interdisciplinary and applied programs to serve as models for future language and communication education.

2. BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

About ten years ago, enthusiasts from diverse professional backgrounds and departments at NBU, namely the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Department of Economics and Department of Mass Communications, designed a unique, interdisciplinary program aimed at training students to develop a successful business while mastering two foreign languages, Russian and English. Thus, in the autumn semester of the 2011–2012 academic year, the Master's program in Business Communications launched in regular and distance study modes within the 3.7 Administration and Management Academic Field with proficiency in two foreign languages, Russian and English. The 21st century ushered in new requirements and possibilities, a new era of intensive communication. In this century, foreign language proficiency and the ability to communicate at a professional level are essential for running a successful business.

The program's competitive edge lies in its interdisciplinary nature, combining courses in economics, business, finance, management, organizational psychology, project management, as well as culture and linguistics, tailored to the specifics of Bulgaria's relations with foreign partners. It also includes courses such as event management, advertising and digital business management, client relationship management, corporate culture, online communication, and more. The knowledge from these courses is necessary for successful partnerships in the business sphere and for work in public institutions and NGOs. The program emphasizes communicative skills that enable successful negotiations, consultations, and collaborative activities, based on knowledge of the cultural, social, and economic characteristics of Russia and of the English-speaking world. Special attention is given to specialized terminology. Students are offered opportunities to strengthen their Russian and English language skills both within the respective disciplines and in the countries where the languages are spoken: Russia (via a bilateral agreement between NBU and the Moscow State Linguistic University) and the United Kingdom (Oxford House College, London, with the kind assistance of the Prestige Language School). A special focus is placed on developing practical skills and habits, for which

internships and placements in real firms with mixed participation are provided, such as Overgas, Lukoil, etc.

The Master's program in Business Communications contemplates conducting research and practical work through the development of course projects and Master's theses based on real foreign-invested companies and corporations. Interest in the program stems from the offered courses, which strike an optimal balance between theory and practice in the field of management and language-based managerial skills, drawing on prominent business and practice professionals as consultants for the developed independent projects and theses, and as instructors for the program. For example, courses such as "Psychology and Ethics of Business Communication" and "Conflict Resolution and Negotiation" are taught by Dr. Nikolay Chirpanliyev, a long-time official in the Protocol Department of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria and former Chairman of the Refugee Agency in Bulgaria. The Diplomatic Correspondence course was taught for several years by Dr. Mariana Konova, who served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria and worked as a diplomat and translator at the Bulgarian Embassy in Russia.

For more than ten years, about 250 applicants have been admitted to the Master's program in Business Communications at NBU. Applicants have been extremely diverse: only 30% of students have been NBU graduates, while 70% of applicants hold bachelor's degrees from state universities like the University of National and World Economy, Sofia University, Technical University, the Sports Academy, the University of Economics in Varna, Veliko Tarnovo University, Plovdiv University and the American University in Blagoevgrad. A large number of applicants also hold bachelor's degrees earned abroad. A group of five students from the Technical University transferred to NBU with a strong desire to study at a modern university and earned two degrees, namely a bachelor's in telecommunications and a Master's degree in Business Communications.

In the regular-mode of the program, each year there are international students from Poland (via the Erasmus+ program) and from the Moscow State Linguistic University (Russia). Since 2004, the Bulgarian Studies Project has operated at MDLU (led by Assoc. Prof. Tatiana Fed, PhD, on behalf of NBU), where Bulgarian language was introduced as a second foreign language first in the Regional Studies Specialisation (2004–2008), then in International Relations (2008–2012), Public Relations (2012–2016), and most recently in the Translation Studies Specialisation (2017–2020). Foreign students arrive for a language internship at NBU and enrol in courses in the Bulgarian Studies and Business Communications programs. In the distance mode of the program in Business Communications, there are Bulgarian students living and working abroad: in Austria, Germany, Greece, the USA, Italy, and Turkey. Most of the students either run successful family or private businesses or hold managerial positions in large banks and corporations. It is particularly gratifying that they came to New Bulgarian University to further develop their practical knowledge and skills, gain theoretical knowledge in an academic environment, and obtain the prestigious Master's diploma in Business Communications with its European add-on. The atmosphere in the program is extremely positive; the teaching team is cohesive, which is reflected not only in the learning process but also in the students. Each lecturer contributes to shaping graduates with interdisciplinary preparation.

The primary objective of both AFLAM and Business Communications programs is to bridge the gap between theoretical language studies and real-world business applications, thereby enhancing students' employability and intercultural competence. The programs have been designed through a combination of curriculum innovation and experiential learning. Key components include the development of specialised courses in areas such as business writing and presenting, face-to-face and digital communication, as well as translation and interpretation. These are complemented by integration of digital tools, partnerships with companies offering internships and international cooperation. The conference component further supports the programs by fostering dialogue between students, faculty and companies, encouraging knowledge exchange and academic projects. The outcomes include a comprehensive curriculum, measurable improvements in students' communication skills across languages, and enhanced readiness for careers in international business contexts. An academic outcome is the joint initiative Cross-Cultural Communication Project.

2.1. The Cross-Cultural Communication Project at NBU

The Cross-Cultural Communication Project at NBU encompasses an international conference and a yearbook issued at the NBU Publishing House. It represents a long-standing academic initiative dedicated to the exploration of intercultural dialogue, communication practices and global cultural dynamics. Established within the university's broader commitment to promoting interdisciplinary research, programs and international collaboration, the conference provides a platform where scholars, practitioners and students engage in meaningful discussions on issues related to culture, language, identity, economics, tourism, mobility and communication in an increasingly interconnected world. A defining feature of the conference is its interdisciplinary orientation, bringing together experts from linguistics, anthropology, sociology, media studies, international relations, education, economics, tourism and business communication. This diversity of perspectives allows participants to examine cross-cultural communication from multiple angles, such as intercultural competence, migration and social integration, multilingualism, global media, organizational communication, and cultural heritage. The conference encourages dialogue between theory and practice, promoting research that has both academic value and real-world relevance.

The academic event is characterised by its inclusive and collaborative atmosphere, where established scholars and early-career researchers exchange ideas, present findings, and engage in constructive debate. It often features keynote lectures, thematic panels, workshops and student sessions that highlight emerging trends and contemporary challenges in cross-cultural communication. The conference also supports multilingual participation, reflecting the university's belief in the importance of linguistic diversity in fostering intercultural understanding. An integral part of the initiative is the Cross-Cultural Communication Yearbook, a peer-reviewed publication that compiles selected papers presented at the conference. The Yearbook serves as a scholarly archive of innovative research, documenting ongoing developments in the field and contributing to international academic discourse. Articles in the Yearbook typically address topics such as cultural identity construction, communication strategies in multicultural environments, intercultural pedagogy, media representations of cultural difference and the impact of globalisation on modern economy, tourism and communication practices. By maintaining high academic standards, the Yearbook strengthens NBU's reputation as a centre for intercultural research in the country.

In conclusion, the bachelor's program in Applied Foreign Languages for Administration and Management and the master's program in Business Communications at New Bulgarian University demonstrate the value of educational models that integrate language proficiency, professional communication and practical training. Both programs illustrate how multilingual competence, when combined with applied knowledge in administration, management, and business communication, can effectively prepare students for the complex demands of contemporary professional environments. The Cross-Cultural Communication Project further underscores the university's commitment to fostering intercultural awareness and experiential learning. By offering a forum where students engage with experts, present their work, and encounter diverse perspectives, the conference contributes to the development of essential communicative and analytical skills within an international context. Taken together, these initiatives reflect NBU's broader vision for innovative language and communication education. They highlight the potential of interdisciplinary, practice-oriented programs to inform future curriculum development and to support the cultivation of professionals capable of navigating multilingual and multicultural settings with confidence and competence.

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Abstract: Цель статьи представить обзор бакалаврской программы «Прикладные иностранные языки для управления и администрации» (на английском и втором иностранном языке) и магистерской программы «Бизнес коммуникация», преподаваемых в Новом болгарском университете (НБУ). Также рассматривается ежегодная конференция по кросс-культурной коммуникации, проводимая в НБУ, с акцентом на освоение коммуникативных навыков и предоставление студентам практического опыта в многоязычной деловой среде. В статье подчеркивается потенциал таких междисциплинарных и прикладных программ в качестве моделей для будущего языкового и коммуникационного образования.

Keywords: Applied Foreign Languages, Business Communications, Cross-Cultural Communication, higher education, New Bulgarian University

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