It is generally accepted that communication constitutes a major part of corporate culture irrespective of the type of a business entity or an organizational structure, the facets of communication relating to how information is circulated inside and outside the organization. Multicultural dimensions of business communication have also been crucial in the times of the globalized business world, and will remain so despite the fact that there has recently emerged a tendency to slowbalize.

A study has been carried out by means of spreading a questionnaire and interviewing employers and employees of a few small privately owned companies working in service industries. The objective has been to find out what writing skills are vital in small and medium sized enterprises where there is no special department to oversee the outward and inward communication flow and whether, or how, business writing has changed in the recent years.

The results revealed that, firstly, written communication is still of primary importance and, secondly, writing competences of low-level managers and low-status employees leave much to be desired.

The communication flow has greatly increased in recent years, half of the respondents saying it has doubled or tripled, especially in terms of the number of e-mail messages received and replied, as well as social media messages. Competition opens up a wider choice of producers and service providers and gives access to a wider customer base. Most communications focus around basic inquiries and quotation requests. Some employees do not have formal qualifications and writing is a struggle.

It has been noted that, for example, Russian companies’ employees are better business correspondents, verbalize their messages in detail and observe norms. Our employees sometimes ignore writing back if they see no potential in
communication, which is obviously a wrong strategy as a today’s failed contact may never write back and ask for a quotation in the future.

Belarusian employees have shown no knowledge of the difference between writing to an American, German, Japanese or French potential partner, customer, or supplier. The writing strategy, though, will differ. For example, writing e-mail requesting information in the United States will contain (a) an opening with a direct request, (b) providing logical justification for the request, (c) closing with appreciation. A German supplier will expect a message to be (a) opened with a statement underlining previous communication or relationship, followed by (b) a request justified by a straightforward rationale, and (c) closing with appreciation and end dating [1].

Writing to a Japanese supplier, the e-mail will be tailored and will contain (a) an opening with a comment on the season and compliments to the receiver, followed by (b) the humble explanation why the information is required, and (c) closing with respect and appreciation. Writing to a French company will be modified, too, and will include (a) a goodwill statement with the focus on the title of receiver, (b) explaining respectfully why the information is requested, and (c) closing with appreciation and respect [1]. Cultural idiosyncrasies are ignored by Belarusian managers, and it often makes them wonder why relations suffer.

It is essential to point out that writing courses could be useful for small companies’ staff as they would turn into an investment returned in the long run. Such courses could be incorporated in a longer CRM training as distant learning provided through a learning portal.

The major task of an educational institution is to collaborate with businesses in order to outline the areas where we can foresee the problem future graduates will face when they start a career and to prevent the incompetence in business communication.

Observations of how the Business School students struggle with writing e-mails within their Business English course and communicating with peers from abroad (for example, when working on a joint international project – COIL – collaborative online international learning) prove the necessity to reconsider the content of the writing syllabus. The problem areas encompass the form, the logic, and the accuracy of the students’ writing.

Intercultural aspects of business writing should also be taken into consideration as in some cultures writing is more important than in others. Reflecting on intercultural communication with the Dutch counterparts, about half the students admitted to having communication problems. They can be summed up as follows:

1) being afraid to write;
2) being nervous of the first interaction;
3) being unassertive (having no confidence);
4) losing motivation after a few unsuccessful attempts to get in touch;
5) misinterpreting slang;
6) failing to understand abbreviations;
7) neglecting time zone differences when texting.

The project with the Dutch university disclosed how difficult it was for our students to work with people from another country; nevertheless, almost all the students enjoyed it immensely and found it highly beneficial and informative.

The reasons for ineffectiveness of their writing can be described as follows:
1) some students do not consider writing in a second language, English, essential for their future careers;
2) most students do not have any serious experience of writing in business contexts, even in their first language;
3) students do not feel the difference between formal and informal styles, neutral and colloquial register, professional vocabulary or jargon, British or American variants;
4) major writing tasks in English are given in the third year, which is late, and within the foreign language course, far from enough time is allocated to all types of writing/business writing;
5) most manuals cannot meet the needs of a fast-changing business world in the time of increasing amount of communication via electronic and social media.

Thus, it is understandable why students face challenges with business correspondence. Moreover, there is one more factor to take into account. The School of Business of BSU has English as a foreign language in its curricular for all specialties. The problem arises, primarily, to those students who learned other languages at school. The analysis of communication competences in English, which most school-leavers can demonstrate at an entry stage to university, reveals a gap between the knowledge possessed and the knowledge desired due to the diversity of backgrounds. Even at an upper-intermediate language level of study, writing lags behind speaking-listening-reading skills.

Despite this gap, a four-year bachelor program seeks to provide the quality assurance needed and the preparation of would-be business managers to comply with the current and future global market demands. However, to meet the challenge and safeguard the achievement of the end-result, it is imperative to develop in students up-to-date and true to real life competences of both formal and informal writing.

Information technologies provide a wide array of necessary tools and can be employed to close the gap between the incompetence and efficiency. A lot has been said about ICT tools recently, but there is still some room for further development.
Student-teacher interactions can result in drawing up students' individual trajectories with clear learning objectives and outcomes. It is a popular and widely-spread practice among university students and teachers abroad.

Stimulating interuniversity collaboration in the field of joint student' projects in business communication can result in real-life interaction situations. Projects can be implemented as self-study assignments, controlled independent work, through COIL, which the chair of international business has had experience of.

A special online writing lab can be launched on the School of Business web-site which will look into model writing, the rules, common errors analysis, cultural issues of business correspondence, etc. The lab can be modeled according to similar ones effectively implemented by well-established universities, for instance, at Purdue University where it is named “OWL” and covers broad areas from general to workplace writing, job search writing, business writing for administrative and clerical staff, and other [2].

To sum up, it should be noted that the capability of business writing takes time to master; thus, any business school should see it as its mission to develop writing competences in would-be managers from their first year as well as providing them with a multicultural perspective to avoid blunders in the future.

References


2. Purdue Online Writing Lab [Electronic resource] // Purdue University. – Mode of access: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html. – Date of access: 17.02.2019.