

NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR DESIGNING AND DEVELOPING AN EFL TEACHING-SPEAKING MODULE FOR THE UNIQUE LINGUISTIC TAPESTRY OF CHINESE BUSINESS ENGLISH UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

*Developing effective oral business English (OBE) curricula requires clearly understanding student needs. This study evaluated the speaking needs of Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduates majoring in business English for specific purposes (ESP), aiming to inform the design of a teaching module that bridges the gap between current speaking abilities and the escalating demand for advanced communication skills in business contexts. A needs analysis questionnaire, reflecting the first phase of the ADDIE model (analysis, design, development, implementation, evaluation), was administered to 398 randomly selected participants using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Results revealed that while students struggle with speaking errors and lack communication confidence, they favor interactive activities such as presentations, discussions, and role-plays. Concerns about current OBE pedagogy and materials highlight a need for more collaborative learning and teacher support. Statistical analysis using independent-samples *t*-test and one-way ANOVA showed no significant differences in speaking needs based on gender, age, years of English study, or English proficiency. However, a significant difference was reported between fourth-year and third-year students. This study offers some insights for developing more effective interventions to address the specific needs of Chinese business English undergraduates in Chinese ESP education.*

Keywords: ADDIE model, Chinese EFL learners, module development, needs analysis, oral business English, ESP

Introduction

Against the backdrop of deepening globalization in multinational business cooperation and cross-cultural communication, nurturing compound talents is an urge requested by China's government to consolidate the positive profile for its international presence. In fulfilling the growing needs of the existing market and employment demand, an interdisciplinary subject named business English, combining linguistic knowledge and knowledge of business has been established in Chinese higher learning over a decade. Business English prioritizes the significance of speaking competencies in business trades (Guo, 2022). Therefore, oral business English (OBE) is one of the core courses learned by Chinese EFL undergraduates in business English, which grants them with practicability and boosts their job competitiveness in the future. Unfortunately, the intended outcomes and effects of business English teaching have remained at an unsatisfactory level to some extent in recent years since most of them are not adept at performing well in speaking activities in the given business scenarios, as well as the teacher-dominated teaching method is no longer suitable for current teaching needs. Despite various pedagogical reforms bringing changes to the teaching of business English in general

and OBE in particular, universities in China's coastal region have consistently made focused efforts to enhance the quality of business English instruction (e.g., Li, 2020; Lu & Zhu, 2019; Zhu, 2020). On the other hand, universities from inland areas are commonly neglected when conducting related studies in language education (Guo, 2022). Therefore, expanding OBE reforms, and incorporating stakeholder perspectives from inland regions is crucial and an evolving evaluation of university business English programs is also needed.

Literature Review

English Proficiency Among EFL Learners

Speaking proficiency is an essential part of mastering any language to help language learners express their feelings, knowledge, and thoughts (Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021). Teaching speaking should aim at improving learners' communicative competence to raise appropriate responses to the different contexts they are involved in (Alghamdi et al., 2019, Nhi & AlSaqqaf, 2023). However, improving speaking proficiency is relatively neglected in the contexts of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Alghamdi et al., 2019). EFL language learners worldwide face challenges in acquiring productive speaking skills. Despite having foundational linguistic knowledge, many Chinese EFL students struggle with basic speaking tasks and experience communication barriers (Cui, 2013; Wang, 2002). Similarly, AlSaqqaf et al. (2023) and Guo (2022) found that Chinese EFL learners often feel dissatisfied with their pronunciation and intonation. This dissatisfaction can lead to a loss of motivation and hinder language acquisition. Studies from other countries also highlight the challenges of acquiring productive speaking skills. Hamad (2013) found that Saudi Arabian students' limited English proficiency and use of Arabic in the classroom impede their ability to communicate effectively in English. Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021) identified poor pronunciation and insufficient vocabulary as factors contributing to speaking anxiety among Thai university students. Thus, overcoming communication barriers becomes crucial in effective language acquisition.

Business English in China

Business English is an essential discipline in applied linguistics that teaches English to fulfil the specific needs of students majoring in business professions. It has been established as an independent discipline in China since 2007, and over 400 universities and colleges offer the major (Liu, 2015; Wang & Ai, 2019; Zhu, 2020). According to the Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Major issued by the Ministry of Education in 2019, business English majors should be familiar with English literature, economics, management, law, and other related theoretical knowledge. They should also possess strong intercultural skills, business communication skills, and innovative and entrepreneurial abilities. However, previous studies have found that business English teaching in China needs to be updated to accommodate the current needs of students. This includes using authentic materials for ELT, practicing skills in real scenarios, and setting business English apart from teaching English for general purposes (EGP) (Lu & Zhu, 2019; Wang & Ai, 2019; Wu, 2019; Zhu, 2020). In a nutshell, reviewing the current status of China's English language education in this part is to urge for a change in ELT, especially to evaluate the needs of students majoring in such an interdisciplinary subject from time to time, to better explore the practices of English language education, and to keep the teaching and learning up to date since everything exists in dynamic ways.

Theoretical Framework of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is a crucial step in developing effective ESP curricula as it helps identify any discrepancies between learners' current skills and their desired future outcomes. According to Richards (2001), needs analysis is widely recognized as a crucial starting point for curriculum development. This process involves identifying both target needs (what learners need to be able to do in the target situation) and learning needs (what learners need to learn) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Target needs can be further classified into necessities (required language abilities), lacks (areas where learners are lacking), and wants (learners' expectations) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Learning needs, on the other hand, explore learners' motivations and reasons for language learning. Various techniques, including questionnaires, interviews, meetings, and case studies, can be employed to gather data for needs analysis (Richards, 2001). Therefore, understanding the specific needs of Chinese EFL undergraduates in OBE is essential for designing effective speaking proficiency improvement programs. This study adapted the theoretical framework of Hutchinson and Waters (1987), focusing on both target and learning needs within the context of OBE.

The existing research on business English teaching in China highlights several outcomes. Dai and Liu (2016) found that Chinese business English learners advocated for their teachers to adopt updated pedagogical approaches that foster a positive teacher-student relationship. Guo (2022) identified student dissatisfaction with their speaking proficiency, and independent learning abilities, noting a lack of suitable materials and effective classroom instruction for developing speaking skills in business contexts. Hu and AISaqqaf (2023) validated a needs analysis scale for Chinese business English teachers, including three constructs with 17 measuring items for OBE teaching. Research from international contexts also emphasizes the importance of communicative activities and collaborative learning in ESP courses. Iswati and Hastuti (2022) reported that Indonesian business English students held a moderately positive attitude towards their teachers, materials and courses, suggesting improvements such as diversifying learning activities and incorporating appropriate language skills into teaching materials. Similarly, according to the findings of Suraprajit et al. (2024), Thai university students specializing in ESP within the logistics field also expressed a strong desire to improve their English proficiency. The study underscored that speaking posed the most significant challenge for these students, compared to other English language skills.

Research Problem

Given the context of China's global economic presence, effective business English teaching is crucial for equipping students with the communication skills needed for professional success. However, a significant gap exists in developing OBE curricula for Chinese business English undergraduates. While research highlights the significance of student-centered learning and the crucial role of speaking skills, few studies have explored how demographic factors might influence specific learner needs. This lack of empirical data hinders the development of curricula that adequately address the unique speaking demands of this student population. This study aimed to bridge this gap by examining Chinese business undergraduates' specific speaking needs (target and learning), providing insights to inform the design of more effective teaching modules and materials.

Research Aim and Questions

The oversights identified in the literature review above highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the speaking needs of business English undergraduates at Chinese universities. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the specific needs required for

designing and developing an effective EFL teaching-speaking module tailored to Chinese ESP teaching at the higher education level. Moreover, the study attempts to find out whether demographic variables affect the determination of students' needs. Therefore, the study addresses two key research questions (RQs) as follows:

RQ1: What are the needs required for designing and developing an EFL teaching-speaking module from the perspective of business English undergraduates at Chinese universities?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference in the EFL speaking needs of Chinese business English undergraduates based on their demographic variables (gender, age, levels of study, the years of studying English, and levels of English proficiency)?

Research Methodology

General Background

Quality education, a key United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN-SDG), necessitates ongoing needs analyses to adapt curricula to the evolving career market. This is particularly relevant for undergraduate business English programs, which aim to equip graduates with the language skills necessary for success in the globalized business environment. In China, where the economic landscape is rapidly changing and the demand for skilled English-speaking talents is increasing, ensuring the relevance of business English programs is crucial. Therefore, this needs analysis was conducted in early 2023.

Research Design

This study adopted a positivist paradigm, employing a quantitative research approach and a cross-sectional survey design. A needs analysis questionnaire was used to collect data on the perceptions of Chinese EFL undergraduates regarding business English, focusing on the "analysis" phase of the ADDIE model (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation). This structured approach generated data-driven insights into the specific needs of Chinese business English undergraduates concerning OBE.

Sampling Selection

This study employed a simple random sampling method to select 398 business English undergraduates from China. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table to ensure equal representation and minimize sampling error (Creswell, 2014). Before data collection, participants were fully informed of the ethical considerations for this study, adhering to established guidelines (McMillan, 2012) regarding the aim of the study, confidentiality and anonymity. The study sample is predominantly female (91.5%), with a smaller proportion of males (8.5%). The majority (36.2%) fall within the 19-20 year-old age group, with representation across all ages from 18 years old and below to 23 years old and above. Many participants (51.5%) are in their second year of study, with smaller proportions in their fourth year (28.1%), third year (19.8%), and a minimal representation in the first year (0.5%). The years of English study for the respondents range from 1-5 years (9.5%), 6-10 years (44.2%), and 11-15 years (42.7%). A small percentage (3.5%) have been studying for 16 years or longer. In terms of English proficiency, the majority fall into the intermediate level (lower) (35.4%), followed by the basic level (upper) (32.7%), and the intermediate level (lower) (12.1%). The advanced and basic (lower) levels represent 5.1% and 1.3% of the sample, respectively.

Instrument and Data Collection Procedures

To collect data for the study, a closed-ended questionnaire utilizing a 5-point Likert scale was used. The items in the questionnaire addressed the target needs analysis and learning needs of the respondents (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The questionnaire consisted of 26 items organized into five constructs based on the theoretical framework. These constructs included target needs, encompassing speaking difficulties (9 items), required speaking activities (4 items), and learning styles (6 items) (see Tables 2, 3, and 4). Additionally, the questionnaire addressed learning needs, exploring perceptions of the course (4 items) and the use of instructional materials (3 items) (see Tables 5 and 6). This framework was informed by existing research on needs analysis in language learning (Dai & Liu, 2016; Gravatt et al., 1997; Menggo et al., 2019; Yanna, 2016). To mitigate language barriers, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese by two certified translators and back-translated into English (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2023). Prior to data collection, the questionnaire underwent validation and reliability testing. Content validity was assessed by three experts with PhDs in relevant fields, while face validity was evaluated by five students. A pilot test with 52 students, similar to the target participants, was conducted using Microsoft Forms to assess reliability. Cronbach's alpha yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.812, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Taber, 2018). For actual data collection, a Microsoft Forms questionnaire was randomly distributed to business English undergraduates at Chinese universities. Data collection spanned five weeks, resulting in responses from 398 EFL undergraduates majoring in business English.

Data Analysis

The collected data were processed using SPSS 29.0 to analyze the quantitative data obtained in this study. To address the RQs posed in this study, specific data analyses were employed. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze RQ1. RQ2 was addressed using inferential analysis, including both the independent-samples t-test and one-way ANOVA for comparative analysis.

Research Results

Descriptive Results

A descriptive analysis of 26 items was conducted to address RQ1. A 5-point Likert scale was used for data collection, with responses ranging from 1 to 5. For Tables 1 and 2, the scale represented frequency, with 1 indicating *never*, 2 *hardly*, 3 *sometimes*, 4 *often*, and 5 *always*. Regarding Tables 3-5, however, the scale represented agreement, with 1 indicating *strongly disagree* and 5 *strongly agree*. The presentation of results included frequency (%), mean (*M*), and standard deviation (*SD*) values. Normality testing was performed using skewness ($-1.96 < -.125 < 1.96$) and kurtosis ($-1.96 < .640 < 1.96$) values (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). The reliability of the constructs achieved an overall Cronbach's alpha value of .864, exceeding the acceptable threshold of .70.

Table 1

Target Needs for Student Use (Speaking Difficulties)

No.	Speaking Difficulties (N = 398)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	M (SD)
1	I have difficulty working in small groups during class.	10.8	37.9	41.0	7.8	2.5	2.53 (0.88)
2	I have difficulty working with other students on out-of-class projects.	19.6	39.4	30.9	8.8	1.3	2.33 (0.93)
3	I have trouble leading class discussions.	9.3	28.4	39.7	17.1	5.5	2.81 (1.01)
4	I have difficulty participating in large group discussions.	11.1	34.2	41.0	11.8	2.0	2.60 (0.91)
5	I have difficulty giving oral presentations.	6.5	20.1	40.7	22.1	10.6	3.10 (1.05)
6	I have trouble wording what I want to say quickly enough.	2.5	14.8	37.4	31.2	14.1	3.39 (0.99)
7	I worry about saying something in case I make a mistake in my English.	3.5	14.3	36.4	27.9	17.8	3.42 (1.09)
8	I do not know how to say something in English.	1.8	11.8	44.2	29.1	13.1	3.40 (0.92)
9	I do not know the best way to say something in English.	1.8	10.3	38.7	31.2	18.1%	3.54 (0.96)

Note. Cronbach's Alpha: .897 > .70, Normality: Skewness: -.015, Kurtosis: -.174 (+/-1.96). 1= Never; 2=Hardly; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Always.

Table 1 highlights the speaking difficulties experienced by undergraduate respondents in OBE. While a majority (48.7%) felt comfortable working in small groups, a significant proportion (41%) struggled with out-of-class tasks to some extent. Over half of the respondents (59%) expressed confidence in working with others after class, suggesting a potential mismatch between in-class and out-of-class support. 22.6% faced challenges in leading discussions, while 32.7% struggled with conducting oral presentations effectively. Most participants (45.3%) experienced difficulties articulating their intended utterances, with a similar percentage (42.1%) lacking the necessary skills to express their thoughts in English. Furthermore, 45.7% reported anxiety and a lack of confidence due to inaccuracies in word usage, highlighting the importance of vocabulary development and accuracy in business communication. Notably, only a small percentage (12.1%) felt proficient in expressing themselves in English.

Table 2

Target Needs for Student Use (Required Speaking Activities)

No.	Required Speaking Activities (N = 398)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	M (SD)
1	Giving a formal speech or oral presentation.	4.8	23.6	41.5	20.4	9.8	3.07 (1.01)
2	Participating effectively in discussions.	1.0	15.8	43.5	30.4	9.3	3.31 (0.88)
3	Communicating effectively with peers in small group discussions, collaborative projects, or out-of-class study groups.	0.8	14.8	41.7	32.2	10.6	3.37 (0.89)
4	Simulating role plays in particular scenarios (e.g., talking with clients, answering clients' calls, etc.).	3.5	15.6	43.7	28.6	8.5	3.23 (0.94)

Note. Cronbach's alpha: .769 > .70, Normality: Skewness: -.189, Kurtosis: -.120 (+/-1.96). 1= Never; 2=Hardly; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Always.

The second construct of the study assessed the effectiveness of speaking activities in OBE from the undergraduate perspective (see Table 2). Data analysis revealed that 30.2% of participants agreed that engaging in speaking activities, such as formal speeches or oral presentations, was beneficial for improving speaking proficiency. 39.7% of participants believed that active participation in discussions would enhance their speaking skills. A majority of participants (42.8%) considered practicing speaking skills through small group discussions, collaborative projects, and out-of-class activities as a viable approach in OBE. Lastly, 37.1% of participants found the use of role plays in OBE to be useful.

Table 3
Learning Needs for Student Use (Learning Styles)

No.	Learning Styles (N = 398)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	M (SD)
1	I prefer to work collaboratively (in groups or pairs) when I am asked to perform a speaking task.	2.8	9.3	39.9	33.2	14.8	3.48 (0.95)
2	I prefer to work individually when I am asked to perform a speaking task.	4.5	23.1	46.7	17.8	7.8	3.01 (0.95)
3	I prefer to work with the whole class when I am asked to perform a speaking task.	5.5	25.1	40.2	20.6	8.5	3.02 (1.01)
4	I prefer to use digital literacy (e.g., information, media, ICTs) to enhance my learning of speaking skills.	2.8	7.8	33.2	42.7	13.6	3.57 (0.92)
5	I think teachers should take a traditional role in control of everything in class.	10.1	32.4	44.0	9.5	4.0	2.65 (0.93)
6	I think teachers should work as a facilitator to guide the learning of students.	1.3	3.8	19.1	44.7	31.2	4.01 (0.88)

Note. Cronbach's alpha: .704 > .70, Normality: Skewness: -.254, Kurtosis: 1.107 (+/-1.96). 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 3 reveals the undergraduates' preferences for learning styles in OBE, highlighting

a strong preference for collaborative learning, the use of digital literacy, and a facilitator role for teachers. Nearly half (48%) of the undergraduates preferred collaborative learning for speaking activities, suggesting a strong preference for group work over individual learning (25.6%). While a majority (75.9%) acknowledged the role of teachers as facilitators in the classroom, only a small proportion (13.5%) favored a traditional teacher-centered approach. Over half of the undergraduates (51.8%) indicated a strong interest in receiving support with digital literacy, highlighting the importance of technology in their language learning process.

Table 4
Learning Needs for Student Use (Perceptions Towards the Course)

No.	Perceptions towards the Course (N = 398)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	M (SD)
1	Overall, I am satisfied with the business English major.	1.8	8.0	49.7	34.2	6.3	3.35 (0.79)
2	I am satisfied with the business English course, especially speaking.	2.0	14.3	50.3	27.9	5.5	3.21 (0.83)
3	I am satisfied with the current teaching approaches to learning speaking skills.	2.5	13.1	45.0	32.7	6.8	3.28 (0.87)
4	I am satisfied with the teachers of the business English major.	1.5	3.8	32.9	44.0	17.8	3.73 (0.85)

Note. Cronbach's alpha: .866 > .70, Normality: Skewness: -.180, Kurtosis: -.607 (+/-1.96). 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 4 presents undergraduate perceptions of the business English major, revealing generally positive sentiment towards the program, OBE, and their teachers. While only 9.8% of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the course, 40.5% reported satisfaction, and 49.7% remained neutral. Similarly, 33.4% expressed satisfaction with OBE, with 16.3% reporting some dissatisfaction and 50.3% remaining neutral. Regarding speaking teaching methods, 40% of participants agreed with their effectiveness, while 15.6% disagreed, with the remaining 45% holding a neutral position. Over 60% of participants expressed satisfaction with their teachers.

Table 5
Learning Needs for Student Use (Perceptions Towards the Use of Instructional Materials)

No.	Perceptions towards the use of instructional materials (N = 398)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	M (SD)
1	I think the current instructional materials are suitable for my career development.	1.0	12.1	49.5	33.9	3.5	3.27 (0.76)
2	I think the current textbooks used in class own the appropriate level of difficulty for learning speaking skills.	0.8	10.8	48.5	34.3	5.5	3.33 (0.77)
3	To some extent, the business English textbook for speaking skills is appropriate for me to use (e.g., systematicity, practicality, and matching with students' needs).	0.8	7.8	46.5	37.2	7.8	3.43 (0.78)

Note. Cronbach's alpha: .855 > .70, Normality: Skewness: .001, Kurtosis: .052 (+/-1.96). 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree.

The fifth construct of the study assessed students' perceptions of the instructional

materials used in OBE (see Table 5). The findings revealed that 37.4% of participants reported that the materials were appropriate for their career growth, while 50% held a neutral stance on their suitability for their current learning level. On the other hand, 45% considered the textbook used for speaking skills to be appropriate, while 46.5% had a neutral attitude. Only 8.6%, however, expressed a negative attitude towards it.

Inferential Results

Following a descriptive analysis of needs analysis for OBE, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to measure potential gender differences in speaking needs. The alpha level was set at .05. Table 6 shows that the variances between the male and female groups were not homogeneous ($F(1, 396) = 11.84, p < .001$). Therefore, the assumption of equal variances was violated. Despite this violation, the results did not show a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents regarding their speaking needs for OBE, $t(36.12) = -1.91, p > .05$.

Table 6
Independent-Samples Test Results of Overall Speaking Needs Perceived Based on Gender

Gender	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	p	t	df	Significance 2-Sided p	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
EVA	11.84	<.001	-2.54	396	.011	-.198	-.350	-.045
EVNA			-1.91	36.12	.064	-.198	-.408	.012

Note. EVA = Equal variances assumed, EVNA = Equal variances not assumed

As shown in Table 7, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of participants' demographic variables (level of study, age, years of English study, and English proficiency) on their perceived speaking needs for OBE. The one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in perceived speaking needs across different levels of study, $F(3, 394) = 5.797, p < .001$. However, no significant differences were found in perceived speaking needs based on age, years of English study, or English proficiency ($p > .05$). To further examine the significant mean difference in speaking needs across the four levels of study, a post-hoc test was conducted at a 5% significance level. Identifying which specific group means differ is crucial for developing targeted interventions and addressing the unique needs of students at various academic levels (Kim, 2015).

Table 7

ANOVA Results of Overall Speaking Needs Perceived by Students

Demographic Variables		SS	df	MS	F	p
Age	Between Groups	.682	3	.227	1.198	.310
	Within Groups	74.744	394	.190		
	Total	75.426	397			
The levels of study	Between Groups	3.188	3	1.063	5.797	<.001
	Within Groups	72.237	394	.183		
	Total	75.426	397			
The years of study English	Between Groups	.637	3	.212	1.118	.342
	Within Groups	74.789	394	.190		
	Total	75.426	397			
The levels of speaking-English proficiency	Between Groups	1.073	4	.268	1.417	.227
	Within Groups	74.353	393	.189		
	Total	75.426	397			

Note. SS = Sum of Squares, MS = Mean Square.

The Scheffe Post-Hoc test was run in this stage. Table 8 above discloses that there was only a significant difference between the speaking needs in Chinese business English undergraduates majoring in Year 4 and Year 3, while other levels were not significant in terms of speaking needs.

Table 8
Results of Post-hoc Test for the Variable of the Levels of Study Enrolled

Dependent Variable	Levels of Study	MD	SE	p	Inference	
Overall Speaking Needs Perceived by Students	Year 1	Year 2	-.023	.304	1.000	Not significant
		Year 3	.103	.307	.990	Not significant
		Year 4	-.157	.306	.967	Not significant
	Year 2	Year 1	.023	.304	1.000	Not significant
		Year 3	.126	.057	.179	Not significant
		Year 4	-.134	.050	.072	Not significant
	Year 3	Year 1	-.103	.307	.990	Not significant
		Year 2	-.126	.057	.179	Not significant
		Year 4	-.259*	.063	<.001	Significant
	Year 4	Year 1	.157	.306	.967	Not significant
		Year 2	.134	.050	.072	Not significant
		Year 3	.259*	.063	<.001	Significant

Note. MD = Mean Difference, SE = Std. Error.

Discussion

Needs Analysis for Target and Learning Dominance

This study employed Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) needs analysis framework to comprehensively assess the speaking needs of business English undergraduates, aiming to align the curriculum with OBE. Above all, the findings regarding speaking difficulties among Chinese business English undergraduates highlight a considerable challenge in OBE. Respondents reported struggles with fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and accent, aligning with previous research (Guo, 2022; Lv, 2018; Xie & Chen, 2019; Wang, 2014). This suggests a persistent gap between the theoretical knowledge acquired in prior education and the practical application of speaking skills needed for professional success (Xie, 2020). The findings underscore the importance of prioritizing speaking development within business English programs. This gap may be attributed to several factors. A lack of appropriate learning contexts and systematic instruction focusing on the communicative aspects of language acquisition may contribute to learners' difficulties (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Shen & Chiu, 2019). Traditional teaching approaches often prioritize grammatical accuracy and knowledge over the development of communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Consequently, students may struggle to apply their language skills in authentic communication settings, prioritizing problem-solving over effective interaction. These findings call for a pedagogical shift towards more communicative and context-rich learning environments. Business English teaching should prioritize the development of practical speaking skills through authentic tasks, interactive activities, and real-world scenarios.

Participants clearly demonstrated a preference for communicative approaches in OBE, as evidenced by the findings related to required speaking activities. They consistently favored activities like oral presentations, discussions, role-plays, and verbal idea-sharing, suggesting a clear understanding of the importance of active engagement in developing speaking proficiency (Abulhul, 2021; AlSaqqaf et al., 2024; Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Sirisrimangkorn, 2021). This aligns with pedagogical principles that emphasize the use of language for authentic communication, opinion-sharing, and information transfer (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Xie & Chen, 2019). These findings underscore the value of incorporating interactive activities, particularly those that simulate real-world communication, into OBE contexts. Participants recognized the benefits of such activities in fostering pronunciation skills, critical thinking, and confidence (Brooks & Wilson, 2015; Girard et al., 2011). This reinforces the notion that language acquisition thrives on active participation and the opportunity to use language for meaningful purposes (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). The consistent interest in communicative activities suggests a shift away from traditional, teacher-centered approaches and towards more student-centered, interactive learning environments that promote autonomy and engagement.

Concerning the findings related to perceived learning styles, participants demonstrated a strong interest in collaborative learning, utilizing digital literacy, and a facilitative role for teachers in OBE. This understanding can shape the development of effective teaching strategies and the integration of technology to enhance student learning experiences. Prior research supports the value of collaborative learning, showing that active learners appreciate opportunities for peer interaction and problem-solving (Silitonga et al., 2020). Collaborative tasks foster communication skills, critical thinking, and a sense of ownership over learning (Huang & Hu, 2016; Johnson et al., 2014). Similarly, digital literacy has been shown to enhance student engagement, interaction, and the development of higher-order skills (Misir, 2018; Otto et al., 2024). This approach can shift the role of the teacher from a traditional lecturer to a facilitator, promoting student autonomy and self-directed learning (Misir, 2018; Reeve, 2006). The strong preference for both collaborative learning and digital literacy underscores the need for a more student-centered approach to OBE. This involves incorporating pedagogical practices

that prioritize collaborative tasks, technology integration, and student autonomy, creating a more engaging and effective learning environment for 21st-century language learners (Jose, 2021). By adopting these elements, educators can effectively cater to the specific needs and preferences of Chinese business English undergraduates.

Meanwhile, the findings related to perceptions towards OBE courses reveal a generally positive sentiment among Chinese undergraduates, with a majority expressing satisfaction or neutrality regarding the major, OBE, and their teachers. However, varying opinions on aspects like course satisfaction, speaking teaching methods, and OBE itself highlight areas for further improvement and development in the business English curriculum and teaching approaches. These results align with previous research findings. Dai and Liu (2016) observed that Chinese business English students were generally satisfied with their courses and had a positive perception of the teaching methods. Similarly, Xie and Chen (2019) confirmed that business English courses were perceived as effective in terms of content and teaching methods. One contributing factor to this satisfaction may be the perceived relevance of business English to employment opportunities (Zhang, 2007). The combination of linguistic knowledge and business-related skills makes business English more directly applicable to career development than studying English and business separately. Furthermore, the positive teacher-student relationship and teacher charisma were also found to contribute significantly to student satisfaction with business English courses (Guan, 2021). Students who feel supported and respected by their teachers are more likely to be engaged in the learning process and achieve better results. Finally, students' intrinsic motivation for English learning plays a significant role in their satisfaction (Chemir & Kitila, 2022). Students who are motivated to learn English are more likely to find the courses valuable and rewarding. These findings highlight the need for ongoing efforts to refine curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and the teacher-student relationship to address specific areas of concern and further enhance student learning experiences within the context of OBE.

In addition, the findings related to undergraduate respondents' perceptions towards using instructional materials highlight a need for updating and aligning the content of materials used in OBE. While participants generally expressed satisfaction, the results indicate a need for materials that better equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for their future career development. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of tailored materials in ESP courses (Zhang & Zhang, 2020). Students find materials that reflect their English proficiency and prior knowledge valuable for their future professional development (Jia, 2022). The choice of topics, language accuracy, and coherence of materials should align with students' needs and expectations. This emphasis on materials aligned with career development reflects a shift towards a more student-centered approach in ELT, where students are encouraged to learn using authentic materials and practice their communication skills in real-world contexts (Guan, 2018; Ye, 2018). This shift prioritizes the development of English for professional purposes over general English. However, the findings of this study contradict Dai and Liu's (2016) previous findings, suggesting that current English resources for business English teaching in China do not adequately consider students' future career development. This discrepancy may be attributed to the challenges of teaching in large classes with diverse learning levels, making it difficult to develop materials that perfectly suit all learners (Jia, 2022). This finding emphasizes the need for a careful and deliberate approach to materials selection and development within OBE. Materials should be carefully curated to reflect the specific needs and aspirations of students, equipping them with the language skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen professional fields.

Respondents' Demographic Differences for the OBE Needs Analysis

The independent-samples t-test results revealed no statistically significant gender difference in their needs for OBE learning among Chinese business English undergraduates. This finding aligns with previous studies conducted by Dinsa et al. (2022) and Ahsanah (2020) that found no considerable impact of gender on speaking skill development. However, it contradicts Xu's (2021) study, which reported significant gender differences in teaching methods preferences among English-major students, and Gholami et al.'s (2013) findings that male and female EFL students exhibit significant differences in their speaking needs. The absence of a statistically significant gender difference in this study could be attributed to several factors. First, the opportunity to learn and practice OBE may be equally available to both genders in a real-world learning environment, including equal access to educational resources, potentially leading to similar OBE requirements. Furthermore, the pedagogical approaches employed for OBE are likely gender-neutral, providing similar learning experiences for both genders. Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that both genders possess the innate ability to develop language skills when given equal opportunities (Liu, 2010). The standardized nature of textbook selection and curriculum design across institutions may contribute to the observed similarity in needs. Liu (2010) highlights that educational institutions are often directed to choose English textbooks from a specified selection, leading to a standardized approach in curriculum development. Liu and Ren (2021) further corroborate this by noting that teachers frequently base their lesson plans on the chosen textbook, the teaching outline, and the institution's prescribed schedule. Given these standardized conditions, it is reasonable to infer that male and female students may experience similar needs in OBE learning, suggesting a convergence in their requirements.

The findings regarding speaking needs demonstrate a significant difference between Year 4 and Year 3 Chinese business English undergraduates, suggesting that academic level significantly impacts language learning requirements and outcomes. This aligns with previous research highlighting the distinct speaking needs of students at different academic levels (Dinsa et al., 2022; Gholami et al., 2013). The observed difference in speaking needs between Year 4 and Year 3 students could be attributed to several factors. Year 4 students, having undergone a more advanced curriculum and prolonged exposure to English learning, may have developed more sophisticated speaking skills and proficiency (Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, the increasing need for effective communication skills in preparation for career growth and the practical experience gained through internships may further emphasize the importance of speaking proficiency for Year 4 students. Furthermore, the traditional Chinese EFL context may play a role in this observed difference. Many university freshmen enter higher education with limited experience in practicing academic English orally, as their previous learning experiences often focus on text-based learning (Wang et al., 2024). However, university teaching arrangements are designed to progressively develop speaking competencies, culminating in the final year (Anjum, 2020; Xie, 2016). This demonstrates that formal education includes not only academic knowledge but also equips students with the practical skills needed for the professional world.

Conclusions and Implications

This study shed light on the specific needs of Chinese business English undergraduates, a significant population within the global EFL context, where the demand for English proficiency is paramount for success in the globalized business landscape, particularly in terms of speaking skills. The findings underscore the importance of adopting a needs-driven approach to curriculum design, highlighting the need to incorporate student-centered, communicative, and interactive approaches into teaching methods and materials. Further evaluation was conducted to test the demographics and speaking needs for business English, revealing the academic year as a key factor in OBE instruction development. This suggests that while certain demographic

factors do not influence the necessity for business English, the academic level, specifically the transition from Year 3 to Year 4, may play a role in shaping students' requirements for language proficiency in a business context. These actions can enhance students' language proficiency and create a more engaging and effective learning environment. Crucially, the study acknowledged the unique challenges and context of Chinese EFL education, suggesting that pedagogical strategies need to be adapted to address the specific needs of this population. Moreover, the implications extend beyond the Chinese context, offering valuable insights for other EFL settings facing similar challenges in business English education. This study aligned with international trends in language teaching that emphasize communicative competence, student autonomy, and interactive learning environments. While the results of this study can be used as a reference to develop speaking teaching materials, it is important to note that the study has several limitations. This study focused on the perspectives of business English undergraduates in Chinese universities. However, it did not include input from other stakeholders, such as teachers or employers, and the self-reported data should be used with caution. Suggestions for future research include obtaining and analyzing the speaking needs of business English students from public and private institutions separately and accessing the speaking needs of master's and Ph.D. students majoring in business English. Despite the lack of significant demographic differences in this study, further research is needed to evaluate potential variations in specific aspects of OBE needs across them. This could involve examining detailed data on individual needs and preferences, as well as exploring the potential impact of broader societal factors on their learning experiences.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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