

Learning Needs Analysis of Business English Major Students: Taking a Western Foreign Language University as an Example

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the learning needs of 54 Business English major students in a western foreign language university in China through a questionnaire survey. The main research purposes are as follows: (1) This paper aims to understand and master the English learning needs of Business English major students; (2) This paper tries to understand students' views and satisfaction of Business English courses, so as to adjust the course contents to meet students' learning needs; (3) This paper hopes to understand the students' expectations in this major and develop a Business English course that not only can meet the requirements of students, but also provide help in students' English learning. Based on this study, we can figure out students' English learning motivation and interest at present, current English ability, satisfaction with current courses, as well as the expectations for future study, thus providing more targeted suggestions and countermeasures for English teaching of Business English majors.

1. Needs Analysis

Hutchinson & Waters proposed two concepts: target needs and learning needs. Target needs refers to the knowledge and skills that learners must master in order to use them smoothly in the target situation, while learning needs refers to everything that learners need to do in order to learn.^[1]

Needs analysis refers to the techniques and methods of researching needs through interviews, observations and questionnaires, etc. Needs analysis includes learning needs analysis and target needs analysis.^[2] Among them, learning needs refers to the needs of learners in order to achieve objective goals, which clarify what level of knowledge and competence they need to master in the learning process, including learning conditions, learners' knowledge, skills and strategies, learning motivation, etc.^[3]

Under the different situations, the learners' needs are different, and the key of the needs analysis is to find out the distance between learners' existing language competence and the degree they expect to achieve, so that teachers can devote their energy to the most important aspects. A complete needs analysis should contain these two aspects and find out the gap between them.

Therefore, the needs analysis in this study is to analyze the gap between the current language competence of Business English learners and the English proficiency they expect to achieve, and understand what the learners' wants in course design, and what will be made to help them narrow this

gap and ultimately meet their learning needs?

2. Research Object and Method

The object of this research is the first-year Business English major students. 54 students participated in this research, including 10 boys and 44 girls.

As for the research method, based on previous related literature research, the author designed a questionnaire which contains 22 questions. The questionnaire combines the question items from previous related theses^[4], the new items have been deleted, revised, and supplemented.^[5]

3. Research Result

3.1 English Learning Motivation and Interest

The discussion of English learning motivation in this questionnaire is based on Question 5, and the results are as follows. According to the research data, 74.07% of the students learn English for their future work needs, 12.96% of students' motivation is to obtain the ability to communicate with others in English, 5.56% of students learn English in order to pass various English level tests and gain all kinds of certificates, and the remaining 7.41% of students learn English in order to study abroad in the future.

It can be seen that when asked about the English study motivation, most students choose "future job needs" (74.07%), which is in line with the employment orientation of education in China and also shows that students use English as an important means of job hunting. Therefore, when schools set up courses for their majors, they need to give priority to whether the course content is helpful for students to find jobs. The second choice is "communication with people" (12.96%), it can be seen that its proportion is greatly reduced compared with "job needs." This result is in line with the view of some scholars that students' English learning motivation is weaker now and also stays in a utilitarian state.

Questions 6-8 are designed to understand students' interest and consciousness in learning English, so as to understand students' English learning attitude. In the question that asks students whether they like the English or not, 49 students choose "like" (33), "like it very much" (16), accounting for 90.74%, which means that most of the students like to learn English and have a strong interest in English.

In the "Students' Self-learning of English after Class" question, the answer is in line with the students' interest in English learning. Among them, 85.19% of students use their spare time to learn English on their own, only 14.81% of the students do not study by themselves. This data further illustrates that the Business English major students of our school have high learning interest, strong self-consciousness, and a good attitude in learning English.

3.2 Current English Competency and Learning Difficulties

Questions 9-14 are designed to understand students' current English level and difficulties in English learning. Question 9 is based on students' current self-assessment of English proficiency. Questions 10-14 are designed to understand the difficulties and learning weaknesses encountered in English learning. These questions are divided into single-choice and multiple-choice questions, including listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. Understanding these weaknesses of students is of great help for schools to set up different types of English courses and also good for English teachers' teaching. The survey results are as follows:

Based on the data of this question survey, we found that the overall evaluation of English proficiency by students is not high. Only 10 people felt satisfied with their English, accounting for

18.52%; 44 students evaluated their English proficiency as “general,” “dissatisfied,” and “very dissatisfied,” accounting for 81.48%. This shows that students generally have a low evaluation of their own English proficiency. This result is not optimistic, which needs to arouse English teachers’ attention.

Table 1: Students’ Difficulties in English Learning.

Difficulties	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
People	20	22	3	9
Percentage	37.04%	40.74%	5.56%	16.67%

Based on Table 1, “Students’ Difficulties in English Learning” question, we found that the most difficult skill students find in English learning are listening (40.74%), then speaking (37.04%), writing (16.67%), and reading (5.56%). This result can also be seen from the IELTS analysis report on the level of Chinese students over the years. Chinese students have very high reading scores in tests, but their oral and writing scores are relatively low. This result also gives some enlightenment for the future curriculum design of the school, that is, attaching importance to the setting of listening, speaking, and writing courses, aiming to improve these three skills.

According to the specific difficulties that students encounter in learning the four skills of business English, we can find according to the survey results that, in Business English listening, “There are too many new words in others’ speech, which affects understanding” (81.48%), “Little knowledge of professional Business English leads to misunderstandings” (77.78%), and “I often feel that the others’ speaking speed is too fast to keep up” (62.96%) constitute the main obstacle.

In terms of Business English speaking, “Little knowledge of professional Business English makes it impossible to express” (81.48%), “I have a small vocabulary, so ideas can only be expressed by phrases and simple words” (79.63%), “I feel the other person speaks too fast for me to understand, so I can’t answer” (53.7%) as the main three reasons.

In terms of Business English reading, the two main difficulties encountered by students are: “Little knowledge of professional Business English affects reading efficiency” (74.07%); “Too many new words in the article affect reading” (72.22%).

In terms of Business English writing, students encounter two main difficulties: “Small range of vocabulary, lack of rhetoric and literary skills” (88.89%) and “Do not understand the format and expressions in Business English writing” (77.78%).

Through the results of above questions, we can conclude that the most serious learning problems faced by Business English students are as follows: professional Business English knowledge, vocabulary, and listening competence. This result has important implications for the school’s future Business English curriculum design and teachers’ teaching content. That is, we should pay attention to teaching the professional Business English knowledge, including professional terminology, vocabulary, and so on, and also the English listening competence improvement.

3.3 Satisfaction and Perception of Curriculum

Questions 15-17 are designed based on students’ satisfaction and views on the Business English curriculum, involving whether they are satisfied with the current curriculum, the types of professional courses, and the rationality of the curriculum. The research results are as follows:

Based on the survey data, we found that students are generally satisfied with the current Business English major curriculum, 77.78% of them are “very satisfied” and “satisfied,” and 22.22% feel “general” or “not very satisfied,” and it is believed that the current professional courses have been moderately set, accounting for 90.74%; what’s more, students generally believe that the Basic English Courses and Business English Professional Courses should be offered at the same time, accounting

for 68.52%.

These results indicate that the overall satisfaction and recognition of the curriculum of Business English major in our school is high, and the students' specific views on the curriculum are consistent with the current course setting, which shows that the current Business English curriculum in our school is relatively successful. However, 22.22% of the students are still not satisfied with the curriculum, which shows that the school still has a lot of room to improve the course setting.

3.4 Learning Expectations

Questions 18-22 are designed to understand students' learning expectations so as to give school and teachers enlightenment in terms of resource supply, course design, teaching content and method design, etc. The survey results are as follows:

Table 2: Business English Students' Learning Expectations.

Questions	Options	People	Percentage
Expected Improvement of Business English Skills	A. Listening	17	31.48%
	B. Speaking	30	55.56%
	C. Reading	2	3.7%
	D. Writing	5	9.26%
Expected Resource Support from School	A. Provide foreign teachers to increase communication opportunities	44	81.48%
	B. Applied multimedia teaching	36	66.67%
	C. Regular English salon activities	35	64.81%
	D. Hold lectures on Business English knowledge	30	55.56%
Expected Classroom Protagonist	A. Teacher	7	12.96%
	B. Student	4	7.41%
	C. Study group	2	3.7%
	D. Different protagonists in different situations	41	75.93%
Expected Classroom Teaching Model	A. Traditional teaching	30	55.56%
	B. Situational teaching	36	66.67%
	C. Task-based teaching	18	33.33%
	D. Flipped classroom teaching	28	51.85%
Expected Classroom Activities	A. Perform dialogues, sketches, skits, etc.	26	48.15%
	B. Watch the original English videos	50	92.59%
	C. Discuss with classmates	34	62.96%
	D. On stage to give presentations	14	25.93%
	E. Learn to sing English songs	32	59.26%
	F. Various game activities	26	48.15%

Based on Table 2, we can find that, consistent with the top two English learning difficulties — listening and speaking—the two English skills they most want to improve are speaking (55.56%) and listening (31.48%), far exceeding the third-ranked writing (9.26%) and the fourth-ranked reading (3.7%).

In terms of the learning resources expected by students, 81.48% of students hope the school can

“provide foreign teachers to increase communication opportunities,” 66.67% of students hope to use “multimedia teaching,” and 64.81% of students hope to learn English through “regular English salon activities,” which shows that students prefer target-context teaching and immersive learning methods.

In the question of who should be the protagonist in the English classroom, only 12.96%, 7.41% and 3.7% of students think that teachers, students, and study groups should be the protagonists, respectively, 75.93% think that there are different protagonists in different situations. It can be said that the mode of teachers’ mastery and authorization in class is out of date. In this regard, teachers must change their teaching models according to different situations.

In terms of the teaching model that students hope, although the traditional model accounted for a certain proportion (55.56%), more students like “Situational Teaching” (66.67%). In addition, flipped classroom teaching model is also loved by students (51.85%); specific to classroom teaching activities, students mostly hope to “watch the original English short videos” (92.59%), “discuss with classmates” (62.96%), and “learn to sing English songs” (59.26%) to learn English. It can be seen that students prefer immersive and experiential language learning methods. Therefore, taking students as the center, creating real-language situations and increasing the opportunities for each student to speak English can effectively mobilize their enthusiasm for learning English.^[6]

4. Conclusion

The function of needs analysis in this paper is to provide a basis for the opening and implementation of business English courses, and at the same time provide a basis for the selection of teaching contents and teaching methods, and provide a reference for the inspection and evaluation of existing courses. Based on needs analysis, we can find out students' English learning motivation and interest, current English ability, satisfaction with current courses, as well as the expectations for future study, thus providing more targeted suggestions and countermeasures for English teaching of Business English majors.

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