



A Survey of English Marketing Activities from Chinese Marketers

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine the current demand for English skills among marketing professionals, as well as English marketing activities and cross-cultural knowledge in practical communication. English needs analysis is the foremost element of English language learning and education. With the rapid development of science, technology and economics, the professional field of business is constantly expanding. Moreover, English for marketing purposes is changing with each passing day. The traditional approach to the study of English for business purposes is somewhat outdated and no longer suitable for the new era of business. In addition, few studies exist concerning English subskills for marketing employees, and the content is insufficiently detailed. This study classifies the English skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing into practical tasks for marketing work. The survey in this study adopts the mixed-methods survey approach, using questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The participants included 40 frontline business employees working in various international markets. The results of the study showed that there was a high demand for English skills among the participants, with speaking and listening skills being crucial. Due to the use of translation tools, reading and writing abilities are ranked lower in terms of importance. Data analysis shows that English is used for various business tasks, such as participating in international exhibitions and promoting products. The respondents in this study presented a positive attitude towards knowledge of cross-cultural communication in business fields. The authors of this study contend that practitioners' demand for English reflects the current shortcomings of English education in marketing professions. Marketing English education should be updated to include more English content related to real marketing activity tasks. In addition, knowledge of cross-cultural communication in international business personnel training programs should be increased.

Keywords: *Needs analysis, English for specific purposes, Marketing*

1. Introduction

Due to the spread of the English language globally, it has become an essential and significant medium for effective communication between people from different countries. As the process of globalization continues to evolve, English has been increasingly used in international business. In a global market environment, companies are not limited to the local market; they need to expand their business on a global scale. Since the 1980s, the global marketing activities of enterprises have increased gradually, while global marketers have grown rapidly (Gillespie & Swan, 2021). Global marketers are specializing in marketing strategies, campaigns, and activities that target global markets. Additionally, they are responsible for promoting and selling products or services to consumers, businesses, and organizations throughout different countries and regions (Kotabe & Helsen, 2022). In this context, global marketers should be able to use English in their work based on the job descriptions and international working environments.

People learn English not only to understand the charm of the English language and its literature but also for academic communication and occupational needs (Robinson, 1991). Thus, English is studied more specifically for professional purposes. For instance, global marketers need to communicate in English for work, so they learn English for marketing purposes.

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Over time, scholars have offered a variety of definitions for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Three decades ago, Halliday et al. (1964) described ESP as English for different professions, while Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explained ESP as a learning method, suggesting that it should focus on learners' specific reasons for learning English. They believed that the contents and methods of ESP should be learner-oriented. According to the opinion offered by Anthony, ESP is an approach to language teaching that aims to address contemporary and long-term requirements for academic and professional pursuits. This teaching method is designed to enable students to acquire the necessary linguistic competencies, literary format, and communication skills by using teaching materials and methods that cater to each student's field of study (Anthony, 2018).

Scholars consider needs analysis the key feature of the ESP course design approach (Li, 2014). Nunan (1988) claimed that needs analysis is a series of procedures for information collection concerning the backgrounds of students and their communication requirements. Richards and Platt (1992) added to the above view, arguing that needs analysis should also rank these needs according to priority. The definition of needs analysis has also been extended by Graves (2000), who believes that needs analysis is a process of continuous improvement, in which learners' information is collected continuously, language learning and teaching requirements are achieved through analysis, and language learning is designed based on the conclusions of the analysis. This paper agrees with Graves's definition of needs analysis. In this paper, the researcher recognizes that needs analysis should be improved constantly, including background investigation and language needs investigation of learners, as well as drawing conclusions by analyzing the information.

Target needs and learning needs are two key components in needs analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The target needs refer to the requirements of the learners in a given language setting. Target needs consist of three important components: Necessity, Lacks and Wants. Necessity means the requirements of target situations and lack of connection to the shortage of current knowledge, while wants refer to individual desires and aspirations. Learning needs refer to the subjective needs of learners, which are relevant to the factors influencing the study process, such as family and work backgrounds, learning attitudes, and learning habits.

Although needs analysis in English has attracted a considerable amount of attention, research on the segmentation of marketers in the context of economic globalization remains insufficient. Because the work of marketing employees evolves over time, their English needs must also evolve, meaning needs analysis should keep pace with the times. The results of this study will provide the latest data in this field. In this survey, the researcher wanted to study the role of English for marketers in terms of global business orientation, the needs of global marketers when using English at work, and the main work tasks that require marketers to use English, as well as intercultural communication in the field.

2. Objectives

In this paper, the researcher designed three objectives for the survey, as follows:

- 1) To analyze the necessity of English skills for marketing employees
- 2) To investigate marketing activities using English for marketing employees
- 3) To investigate intercultural communication for marketing employees

3. Materials and Methods

This survey was based on a mixed-methods approach. Two research instruments were utilized in the study, comprising questionnaires and interviews. The research method for the questionnaire results was quantitative analysis, while the analysis method for the interview conclusion was qualitative analysis.



The participants were marketers who worked at companies that use English in the workplace and were chosen for international fairs at the IMPACT Exhibition and Convention Center and Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Center. The majority of international exhibitions held at these pavilions are for enterprises from all over the world, so the researcher could find English-speaking employees more accurately. Another reason for conducting the survey at international fairs was that the employees who potentially had the chance to participate in the international exhibitions possessed English communication skills. The work communication of participants was observed first to ensure that they could communicate in English. The industries in which participants worked varied because the survey was conducted at different international exhibitions, such as the Bangkok Ad & Sign Expo and the Thailand International Dental Expo.

Due to the busy exhibition work of the marketing staff, the researcher selected 40 participants. The selection criteria for participants were related to their positions. The researcher selected different levels of marketing employees to participate in the survey. By observing their exhibition ID badges or ID cards, the researcher could determine whether the participants were in marketing-related positions. The conditions of the participants' work could then be identified to find the right time to establish communication with them and ask them to participate in the survey. All respondents were English speakers in their fields and showed a positive attitude towards the study. The first part of the survey was a questionnaire, and all 40 participants selected for the study were asked to answer the questions. The questionnaires were sent to the participants through a WeChat link. For the interview portion of the survey, ten participants were selected from the questionnaire part, and then the interview survey was scheduled with them via WeChat and voice call. The researcher ensured that the participants agreed to volunteer to take part in the study and informed them that their information would not be disclosed.

As mentioned previously, suitable participants who completed the survey were found through international trade fairs and questionnaires distributed online. The questionnaire was partially adapted from four other questionnaires, including Polsombat (2015), Luankanokrat (2011), Long (2005) and Kaewsuphan (2018). The question-type design of the questionnaire included a 4-point Likert scale and close-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of five sections. The first section aimed to collect background information about the sample, while the second section was a survey of English and work-related use. The third section was about the needs of English skills and marketing activities, and the fourth section aimed to investigate the deficiencies and aspirations for English communication. The fifth and final section investigated the needs of business personnel for intercultural communications. Data were collected from an online questionnaire in Excel form, and the results were analyzed by computer.

To improve the efficiency of the interview process, the interviews were completed online because the participants lived in different cities. A total of 10 participants were selected from the survey participants, and all participated voluntarily. The interview consisted of six open-ended questions. The first question surveyed the participants' attitudes towards the use of English in the workplace. The second question investigated the marketing activities that required English for use in international marketing work. The third question asked the participants about which marketing activities were the most difficult, while the fourth question investigated what English skills the respondents wanted to improve at work. The fifth question asked whether respondents wanted to learn English from business-related learning materials, as well as the reasons for their answers. The last question investigated the intercultural problems faced by respondents at work. The researcher contacted the participants one-on-one online and guaranteed the confidentiality of the interview information for this survey only. Additionally, the data from interviews were analyzed by a computer, and thematic analysis was used to acquire the results.



4. Results and Discussion

As presented previously, this survey had three research objectives. The results of the study were analyzed and discussed in the following five tables.

Table 1. Importance of English skills

Skill	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
English skill	40	3	4	3.413	0.361
Listening	40	2.75	4	3.506	0.414
Speaking	40	3	4	3.625	0.412
Reading	40	2.5	4	3.35	0.493
Writing	40	2	4	3.281	0.555

According to the descriptive statistics of the importance of English skills in Table 1, the average value for the overall importance of English ability was 3.413, while the average value for listening skill was 3.506, the average value for speaking skill was 3.625, the average value for reading skill was 3.35, and the average value for writing skill was 3.281. Based on the results, the participants thought it was necessary to have English skills. The four English skills, including listening, speaking, reading and writing showed no obvious differences in terms of importance, as seen in Table 1. Speaking skills were the most necessary and important, and the demand for writing was slightly less.

From this result, it could be inferred that the total demand for English ability among marketing employees was high. However, participants' needs for English subskills were somewhat different. The speaking skill was the most recognized by participants, followed by the listening skill, which may be related to the participants' work tasks. As marketing employees, they often had to deal with people in their workplaces, so oral and listening abilities for practical communication were more important. Although reading ability ranks lower, its mean value was high, indicating that reading was also a relatively important skill. Writing skill was the least in demand of the four, as participants indicated that writing was less important because it could be helped by translation tools.

The survey on the English skills of business students conducted by Bacha and Bahous (2008) also had a relevant comparison. In the 2008 paper, business students ranked the four skills as reading, listening, speaking and writing. Teachers thought the ranking should be listening, reading, writing, and speaking. In a report by Bacha and Bahous (2008), reading skill ranked high, probably because reading is an important way of learning and an important means of assessing students' knowledge in school. However, the research results of this paper found that speaking and listening were more important. The reason may be that, in practical work, communication and receiving information are very important links in business work.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of lacks and wants in English

Item	Marketing activity tasks	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English proficiency required for the job	Starter	1	2.5
	Basic user	13	32.5
	Independent user	16	40
	Proficient user	10	25
Do you need to improve your English to get promoted?	Strongly agree	4	10
	Agree	24	60
	Disagree	12	30
Which listening part should be improved?	Listen for gist	13	32.5
	Listen for details	13	32.5
	Recognize attitude and purpose	8	20



	Infer information	6	15
Which speaking part should be improved?	Accurate words & pronunciation	5	12.5
	Fluency	13	32.5
	Speaking in sentences	3	7.5
	Spontaneous speaking	19	47.5
Which reading part should be improved?	Decoding	11	27.5
	Vocabulary	14	35
	Comprehension	12	30
	Reading speed	3	7.5
Which writing part should be improved?	Grammar	5	12.5
	Cohesion and coherence	25	62.5
	Vocabulary	6	15
	Genre format	4	10
Are you willing to attend English skills training courses for the job?	Very much	7	17.5
	I want to	28	70
	Disagree	5	12.5

In terms of English proficiency required for work considering the data in Table 2, 16 people thought that independent use was required, while 10 people thought that proficiency was required, and only 1 person thought that the level of English exposure was sufficient. Therefore, it seems apparent that international work requires high English proficiency. When asked whether they needed to improve their English proficiency to help them get promoted, a total of 28 people chose "strongly agree" and "agree", accounting for 70.0%. In terms of improving listening ability, 13 people wanted to improve "listening for gist" and "listening for the details". In terms of improving their oral English ability, the number of people who chose spontaneous communication in English was the largest (19), and the number of people who chose "speak fluently" was 13. When asked about improving their writing skills, 25 people chose "writing coherence and coherence" as the top choice. In terms of whether they were willing to participate in English skills training courses for work, 35 people chose "very much" and "I want to", accounting for 87.5%, while only 5 people chose "disagree".

Table 1 shows that speaking skills are in the highest demand, while writing skills are in the lowest demand. However, all the participants put forward positive ideas when asked about what aspects they wanted to improve (see Table 2). Overall, most of the participants wanted to improve their English and had positive attitudes towards English learning.

Table 3. English marketing activity tasks using thematic analysis (Interview survey)

Category	Marketing activity tasks
Face-to-face marketing activities	Attending international exhibitions Meetings Overseas business trips Receiving foreign clients
Digital marketing activities	Emails Online product promotion and publicity E-commerce platform inquiry Online meetings Consultations from chat apps

As seen in Table 3, marketing activity tasks conducted in English were divided into two categories: face-to-face marketing activities and digital marketing activities. Face-to-face marketing activity tasks using



English included attending international exhibitions, meetings, overseas business trips, and receiving foreign clients. Digital marketing tasks using English included email communication, online product promotion and publicity, e-commerce platform inquiry, online meetings and replying to consultations from chat apps. In the study of needs analysis for college business English courses (Wu, 2012), business negotiation, product presentation and business conversation were the top three marketing activities that were used in English. Thus, it can be seen that it is very common in actual business tasks to negotiate and communicate in English about product-related matters.

Table 4. Necessary for intercultural communication

Intercultural communication	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Local politics	40	2	4	3.18	0.501
Local economic geography	40	3	4	3.3	0.464
Foreign company structure	40	2	4	3.4	0.591
Corporate culture	40	2	4	3.33	0.572
Cultural norms and customs	40	2	4	3.33	0.526
Following own cultural norms	40	2	4	2.85	0.736
Following foreign cultural norms	40	2	4	3.12	0.607
Following foreign cultural norms and showing own cultural identity	40	3	4	3.55	0.504

According to the descriptive statistical results of intercultural communication in Table 4, the demand level for local political conditions, local economic conditions, and organizational structure of foreign companies, as well as corporate culture, cultural norms and customs were above 3 points, indicating that the demand level for these five aspects was above the medium level. When it came to the culture to follow when communicating with foreign companies, the average score for the other two aspects was above 3 points, except for the average of 2.85 points for following personal cultural norms as much as possible.

It could be inferred from Table 4 that participants had a high demand for knowledge concerning intercultural communication. Due to the trend of global economic internationalization, business personnel need to deal with people from different cultural backgrounds, so they hope to acquire more knowledge of cross-cultural communication. Notably, the score standard deviation for following personal cultural norms was high, and the mean value was low, which indicated that the participants' recognition of this item varied. The cross-cultural attitudes of marketing employees tended to be moderate, meaning they believed in protecting their own culture while respecting the cultures of others.

On the question of intercultural communication, this survey found that the participants had distinct understandings of communication in different cultures. In the communication of transnational business, it is necessary to understand relevant information about the destination country. As for the way of getting along, it is better to adopt a moderate approach.

Table 5. Differences in needs for intercultural communication among different positions

Item	Group	Mean	F	p	Mean Difference (LSD)
Local politics	Entry respondents	3.36	1.082	0.349	
	Mid respondents	3.11			
	Senior respondents	3.1			



Local economic geography	Entry respondents	3.36	0.156	0.856		
	Mid respondents	3.26				
	Senior respondents	3.3				
Foreign company structure	Entry respondents	3.45	0.071	0.932		
	Mid respondents	3.37				
	Senior respondents	3.4				
Corporate culture	Entry respondents	3.36	0.867	0.429		
	Mid respondents	3.21				
	Senior respondents	3.5				
Cultural norms and customs	Entry respondents	3.36	5.132	0.011*	Mid-level	<
	Mid respondents	3.11			Senior-level	
	Senior respondents	3.7				

* $p < 0.05$

According to the results in Table 5, participants in junior, middle and senior positions all scored above 3 concerning the level of need for local political conditions, local economic conditions, organizational structure of foreign companies, corporate culture, and cultural norms and customs, demonstrating that the needs of the three positions in these aspects were above the medium level. As seen from the results of the difference test, there was no significant difference in the demand level of different positions for local political conditions, local economic conditions and the organizational structure of foreign companies. However, there was a significant difference ($p=0.011$) in the demand for cultural norms and customs, which was manifested in the demand for cultural norms and customs being lower in middle-level positions than in senior-level positions. Senior-level positions had a high demand for knowledge of cultural norms and customs, which also proved that knowledge of intercultural communication was essential for the marketing industry.

This finding was unexpected, as participants' perceptions of intercultural communication were largely unchanged between positions. This also shows that, in addition to language needs, business people also attach importance to cultural communication in cross-cultural language communication. Mastering English skills involves meeting the basic needs of communication, while understanding and respecting each other's cultures is fundamental at a deeper level.

5. Conclusion

According to the findings of this survey, marketing employees have a high demand for English skills and believe that English is an essential part of vocational skills. Speaking skills and listening skills are the two most useful and important to marketing employees. In business activities, marketing employees mainly use English to participate in international exhibitions, overseas business trips, meetings, product promotions, text message replies, etc. The results of the intercultural communication survey showed that marketing employees believed that understanding and respecting different cultures played a positive and beneficial role in corporate cooperation.

This survey revealed the importance of English in global marketing operations. In marketing work, people need to use English to communicate, so the level of English skills could affect their career development. In the context of cross-cultural communication, understanding and integrating different cultures also affected marketing work. Through the analysis of the research results, it was possible to better understand the demand by marketing personnel for English skills in their work and thus know how to help them improve their language skills and learn more about ESP in terms of global marketing.

The findings of this survey could also fill existing research gaps, presenting the newest needs analysis of English for the global marketing industry. This study not only explores the role of English skills in marketing work but also explores the influence of cross-cultural communication. The findings in the



present study might offer implications to course designers aiming to develop a customized ESP program to address the identified needs and facilitate language skills development as well as recommendations for future studies.

Because this study surveyed practitioners and did not involve relevant students or teachers in schools, the results may not address the requirements of ESP design. After the study, the researcher would seek feedback from Global Marketing major lecturers and students to ensure that more information on ESP could be obtained if follow-up in the field is needed.

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