

# Current Situation and Countermeasures of Core Competencies Cultivation of Business English Majors under the Belt and Road Initiative

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**Abstract:** Based on cross-cultural communication theory, this study focuses on the core competencies of Business English majors at Panzhihua University. Using questionnaire surveys, it explores the current state and strategies for cultivating the core competencies of these students under the 'Belt and Road' initiative. The study revealed that Business English majors exhibit an uneven talent ability structure, a superficial understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative, a mismatch between course supply and demand, and inadequate practical skills. In light of these findings, it proposes cultivation strategies tailored to the economic and trade requirements of the Belt and Road Initiative, offering empirical references for Panzhihua University and similar institutions to optimize their Business English talent cultivation programs and improve the quality of talent training.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road Initiative; Business English; Core Competencies; Panzhihua University

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## I. Research Background

As the Belt and Road Initiative of China continues to advance, China's cross-border economic, trade, and cultural exchanges have grown increasingly intensive, which has given rise to an urgent market demand for interdisciplinary talents who possess not only a high level of English proficiency but also practical competence in international business and cross-cultural communication. On the other hand, as a multidisciplinary field integrating language studies and business practices, Business English plays a pivotal role in higher education, and the quality of Business English majors' core competencies development directly affects how well university talent cultivation aligns with national strategies and meets regional economic needs. Despite the steady progress of Business English education in local universities, several challenges remain, including a lack of specificity in defining core competencies and a noticeable disconnect from real-world business contexts. To address these issues, this study focuses on the core competencies of Business English majors. Taking first-to-fourth year Business English majors at Panzhihua University as the research subjects, the study employs a questionnaire survey to assess the current state of competency development. Based on the findings, it explores potential pathways for improvement, aiming to provide practical insights for similar local universities seeking to refine their talent training models and enhance the quality of core competency development.

## II. Core Concepts and Related Research

The concept of "core competence" was originally introduced by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) from the perspective of strategic management, where it was defined as the fundamental source of an organization's sustained competitive advantage. Subsequently, this concept has been widely adopted in the field of higher education, particularly in research on talent cultivation in application-oriented undergraduate programs (Yin Xueyan et al., 2015). With specific reference to the Business English major, the development of core competencies should focus on the synergistic enhancement of English language proficiency and business operation skills, guided by the actual needs of enterprises, in order to cultivate practice-oriented talents who meet corporate requirements (Yu Haibo, 2013).

At the level of educational objectives, a relative consensus has emerged in the literature. Yin Xueyan et al. (2015) propose that the Business English major should aim to cultivate well-rounded, application-oriented talents equipped with six attributes: solid English language skills, a broad international perspective, specialized knowledge and skills in international business, foundational theories in related disciplines such as economics, management, and law, cross-cultural communication competence coupled with humanistic attainment, and the practical ability to use English in international settings for activities in trade, management, finance, and other fields. This framework comprehensively captures the multidimensional requirements of language, knowledge, competence, and culture.

Further studies have attempted to delineate the internal structure of core competencies in Business English. Jiang Liping (2019) points out that the essence of Business English lies in the integration of "dual

knowledge" and "dual skills," a dual attribute that distinguishes the discipline from general English or business management programs. In a similar vein, Lu Hui (2021), through a systematic review of the literature, summarizes the core qualities of Business English into four dimensions: language proficiency, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and the ability to learn. Notably, against the backdrop of global business interactions facilitated by the Belt and Road Initiative, Jia Yongqing (2023) proposes that "strategic integration" should be recognized as a fundamental feature of the core competency system for Business English majors in the new era. This study further consolidates the required competencies into four major categories—cultural heritage, business practice, personal development, and international perspective—which encompass eight specific elements: ideological commitment, moral integrity, humanistic literacy, business acumen, a scientific mindset, physical and mental well-being, an international outlook, and cross-cultural communication skills.

Synthesizing the above, it can be observed that the academic understanding of core competencies in Business English has evolved from simple "competency listing" to "structural categorization" and, more recently, to "strategic integration." However, several research gaps remain. First, most existing studies remain at the level of theoretical deduction regarding competency composition, with little empirical investigation based on specific student populations. Second, the pathways for cultivating core competencies are often oriented toward macro-level policies or institutional positioning, with limited attention to the actual status and challenges faced by local universities under resource constraints. Third, the current literature has yet to systematically address the following practical questions: what is the current level of core competency development among Business English majors in local undergraduate institutions, what are the existing deficiencies, and how can these competencies be effectively optimized?

In response to these gaps, this study takes Panzhihua University, a typical local institution at the Sichuan-Yunnan border where a rapidly growing export-oriented economy demands versatile Business English talents, as a case study. Theoretically, this research moves beyond existing theoretical deductions by providing empirical evidence from an under-researched institutional context. Practically, by identifying specific challenges and proposing targeted pathways, this study transcends traditional single-language-skill training, informs competency cultivation in similar local universities, and supports the high-quality development of the regional open economy under the Belt and Road Initiative.

### **III. Research Design**

#### **3.1 Research Subjects**

This study conducted a questionnaire survey among Business English majors at Panzhihua University, covering all four grade levels. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, and 148 valid responses were collected, including 16 male and 132 female students. The sample comprises 29 first-year, 32 second-year, 39 third-year, and 48 fourth-year students. The sample size meets the standards for humanities and social science research, and the inclusion of all grade levels ensures strong representativeness and reliability.

#### **3.2 Research Tools**

This study employed a self-designed structured questionnaire administered to first- through fourth-year students. The instrument combines uniform and grade-specific items, covering demographics, general inquiries, and differentiated questions. Question types include single-choice, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank, focusing on the Belt and Road Initiative and core competencies of Business English majors.

#### **3.3 Research Methodology**

This study employs literature review, self-designed questionnaire survey, and cross-grade comparison. The literature review clarifies the connotation of core competencies, providing a theoretical basis for the questionnaire. The survey enables horizontal comparisons of business capabilities and core professional competencies across grade levels. Valid responses are statistically analyzed to inform research conclusions and cultivation recommendations.

#### **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

##### **3.4.1 Cross-Grade Unified Survey Item Analysis**

First-year students considered "fluent English communication skills" and "business knowledge, including international trade and cross-border e-commerce," equally important, with each receiving an importance rating of 89.66 percent. Starting from the second year, business knowledge became more prominent, reaching 90.63 percent among sophomores, 76.92 percent among juniors, and 89.58 percent among seniors. Meanwhile, cross-cultural communication, online information processing, and business problem analysis and solving maintained steady importance levels, each ranging between 60 and 70 percent across all four grade levels as shown in Figure 1.

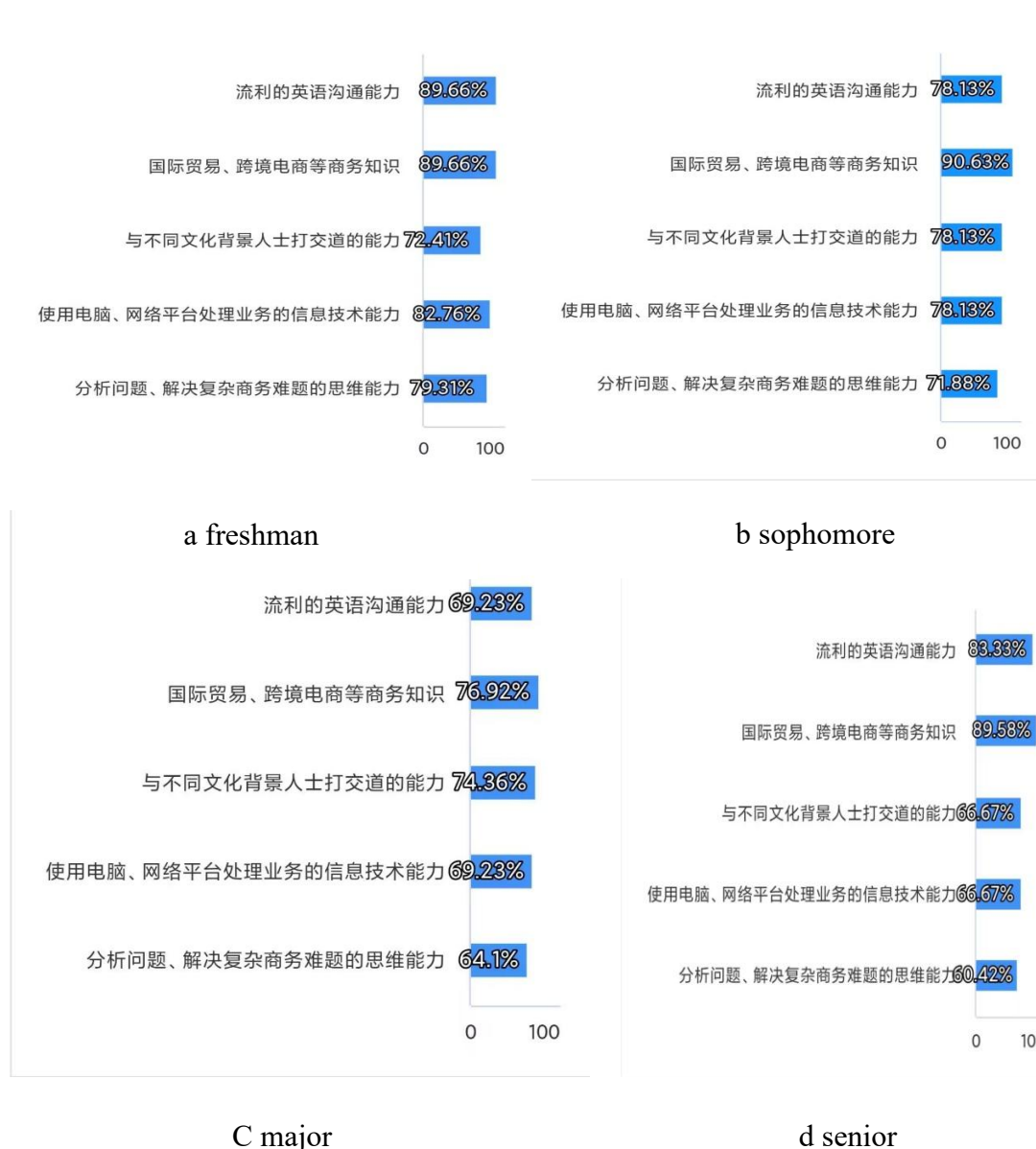


Figure1 Distribution of Core Competency Areas for Business English Majors

Across all four grade levels, a general lack of awareness of the core competency requirements under the Belt and Road Initiative persists, with 60 to 70 percent of students reporting only limited understanding. The proportion of students who are completely unaware ranges from 3.13 percent among sophomores to 10.42 percent among seniors, with freshmen at 6.90 percent and juniors at 5.13 percent. Those with limited understanding form the majority, accounting for 62.07 percent of freshmen, 68.75 percent of sophomores, 71.79 percent of juniors, and 56.25 percent of seniors. Another quarter of each grade level falls between complete unawareness and limited understanding, comprising 27.59 percent of freshmen, 25.00 percent of sophomores, 23.08 percent of juniors, and 31.25 percent of seniors. As shown in Figure 2.

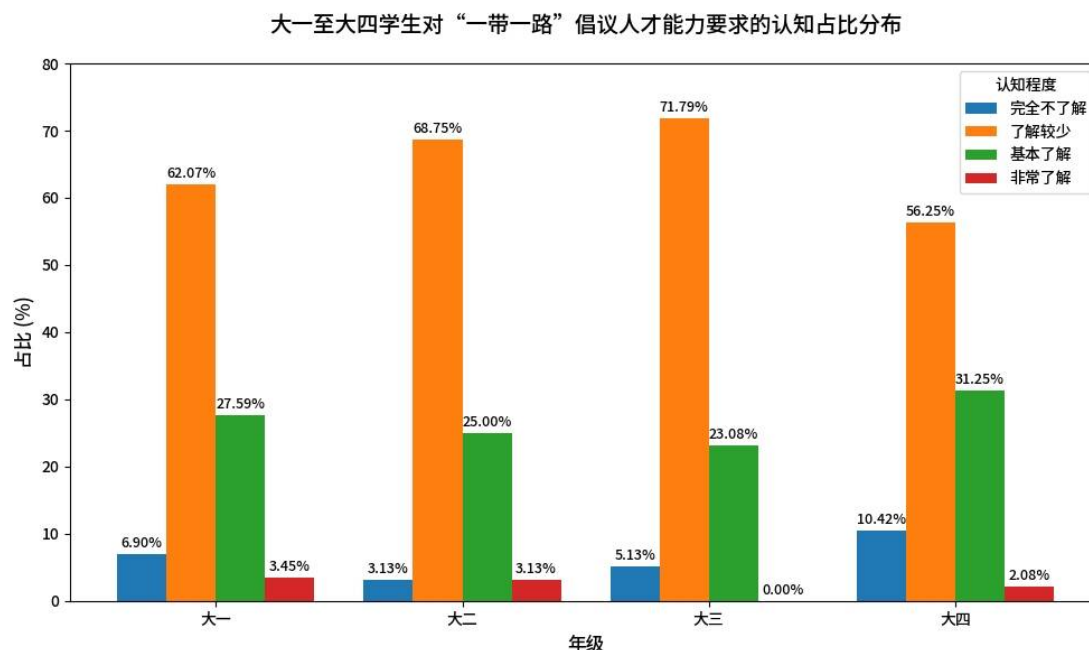


Figure2 Distribution of Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Talent Competency Requirements under the 'Belt and Road' Initiative from Freshman to Senior Year

Regarding course demand, over 60 percent of students across all four grade levels expressed a relatively optimistic or stronger hope that the school would introduce courses related to the Belt and Road Initiative. The proportion of students holding such hope is 62.07 percent among freshmen, 62.50 percent among sophomores, 66.67 percent among juniors, and 62.50 percent among seniors. Those with a strong desire for such courses account for 24.14 percent of freshmen, 28.13 percent of sophomores, 15.38 percent of juniors, and 29.17 percent of seniors as shown in Figure 3

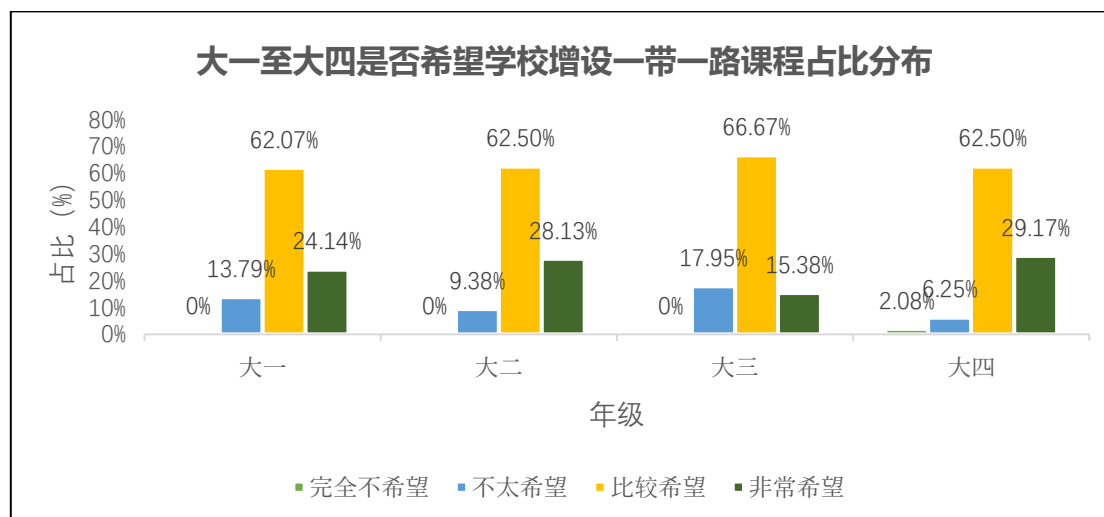


Figure 3 Distribution of the proportion of students, from freshman to senior year, who wish for the university to incorporate Belt and Road courses.

### 3.4.2 Grade-specific survey item analysis

Among first-year students, 51.72 percent considered intercultural communication competence relatively important, 31.03 percent viewed it as moderately important, and only 17.24 percent regarded it as very important. Regarding foundational skills to be consolidated, general English listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities

ranked highest at 89.66 percent, followed by business English vocabulary and terminology at 79.31 percent, cross-cultural communication knowledge at 62.07 percent, and international trade knowledge at 41.38 percent as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

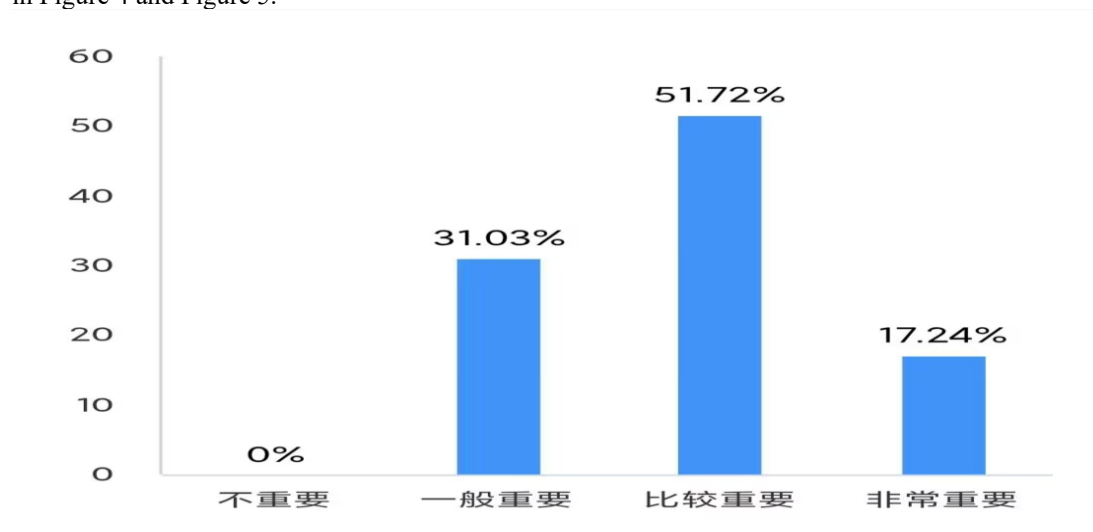


Figure 4 Distribution of the Importance of Cross-Cultural Communication Skills for Freshmen

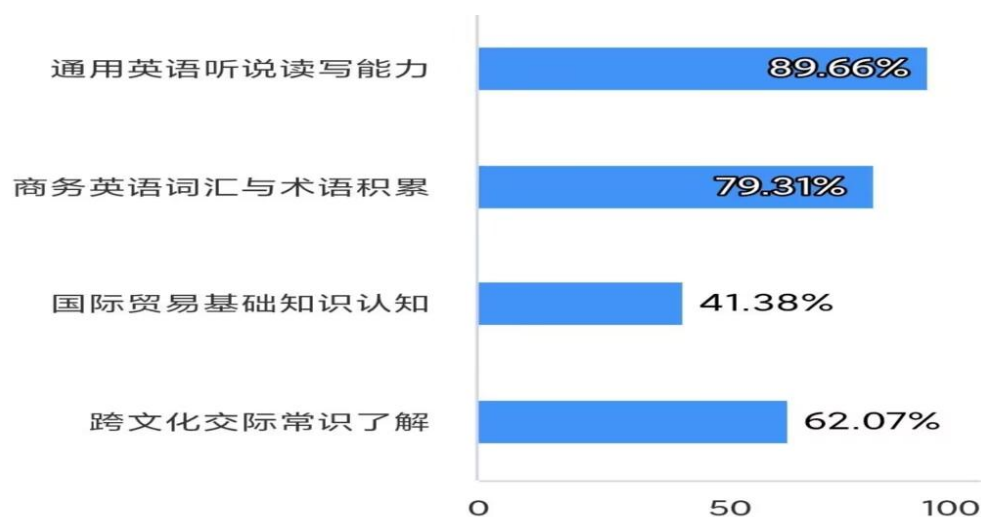


Figure 5 Distribution of the Most Essential Foundational Skills to Strengthen in the Freshman Year

Among sophomores, the most desired core competency to enhance was cross-cultural communication skills, reported by 84.38 percent of students. This was followed by practical skills in foreign trade business processes at 78.13 percent, information technology tool application skills at 53.13 percent, and business writing skills at 43.75 percent. As shown in Figure 6.

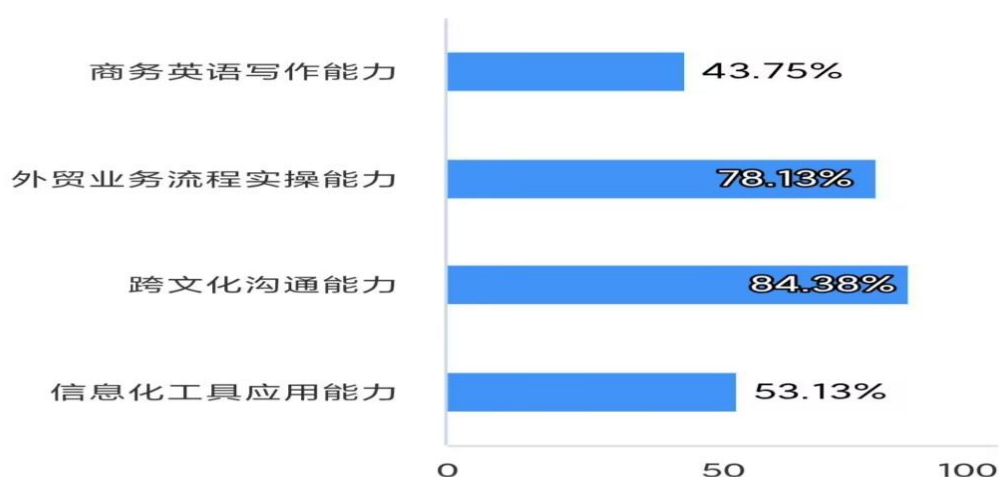


Figure 6 Distribution of the Most Critical Core Competencies Needing Strengthening in the Sophomore Year

Among third-year students, the most significant practical training deficiency is understanding and managing complex trade processes and documentation, reported by 74.36 percent. This is followed by professional business communication in English at 69.23 percent and data-driven market analysis and problem-solving at 53.85 percent. Cross-cultural interaction with customers or partners accounts for 51.28 percent, while using new software or platforms ranks lowest at 28.21 percent.

Regarding employment enhancement, 64.10 percent of students prioritize improving practical skills on cross-border e-commerce platforms. Other priorities include cross-cultural communication skills at 56.41 percent, training in etiquette and data analysis tools at 53.85 percent, and business English certificates at 41.00 percent. The weakest willingness is for second foreign languages, at 35.90 percent. As shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

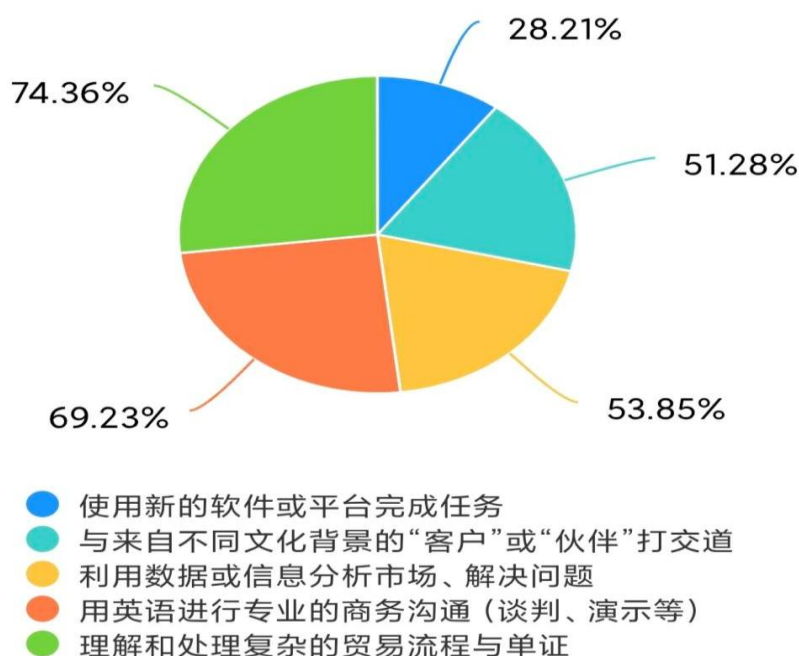


Figure 7 Distribution of the most lacking abilities among junior students in practical training

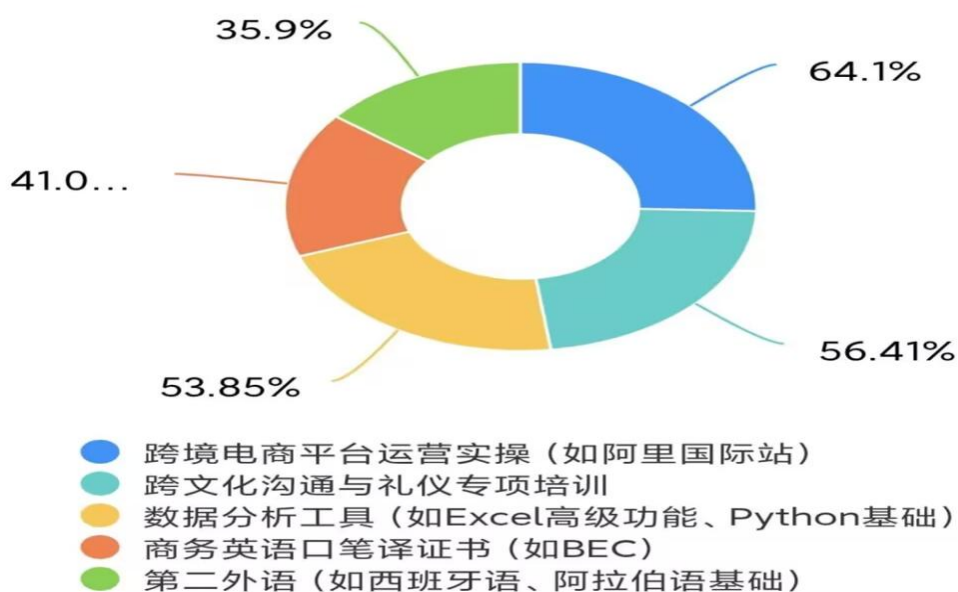


Figure 8 Distribution of key skills targeted for improvement among junior students

Among seniors, the strongest expectation for institutional improvement is expanding internship opportunities, reported by 83.33 percent of students. This is followed by adding specialized courses at 66.67 percent, enhancing practical training equipment at 62.50 percent, and strengthening teachers' practical abilities at 60.42 percent. Other directions account for only 4.17 percent as shown in Figure 9.

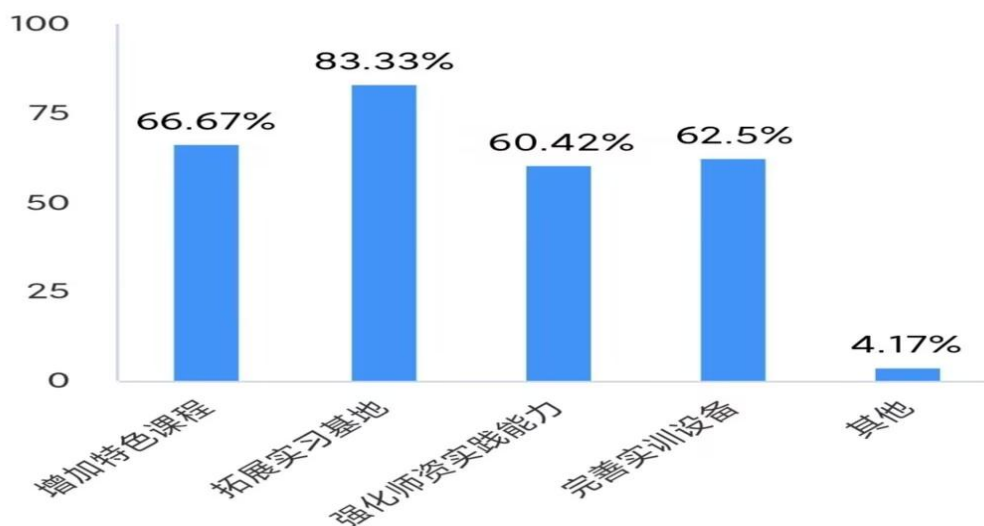


Figure 9 Proportion of senior students' perceptions regarding the improvement directions for the university's 'Belt and Road' business English talent cultivation.

#### IV. Discussion and Countermeasure Research

##### 4.1 Cultivate the cross-cultural practical abilities of business professionals

The data analysis reveals that approximately 60 percent of students regard cross-cultural communication skills as essential, yet the university's efforts in this area remain insufficient. The current cross-cultural curriculum is monotonous and lacks targeted practical training, failing to meet the growing demand for cross-cultural business communication skills under the Belt and Road Initiative. As Zhu Xu (2021) notes, the emphasis on cultivating

cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, and cross-regional communication skills poses a new challenge for Business English teaching. According to Ouyang Wenping (2017), the Belt and Road Initiative requires Business English majors not only to possess specific cross-cultural communication skills but also to inherit and promote Chinese national culture in cross-cultural interactions. To address this, Zhu Xu (2021) suggests that enhancing students' practical cross-cultural communication abilities requires guided engagement with real-world classroom instruction and authentic business activities.

#### **4.2 Conduct research on course design to optimize classroom teaching models**

In cultivating core competencies for Business English majors, key issues such as balancing practicality and sufficiency, integrating language with business, and reflecting vocational education characteristics require further exploration (Yu Haibo, 2013). Accordingly, a curriculum system should be established that prioritizes essential vocational competencies in response to Belt and Road market demands (Zhao Ying, 2017). Practical teaching should align with technological advancements and societal needs, taking basic skills training as its foundation, comprehensive quality as its core, innovative thinking as its guide, and employer needs as its orientation (Yin Yufeng et al., 2018).

The university currently offers bilingual courses in cross-border e-commerce and international direct investment to enhance students' capacity to develop markets in Belt and Road countries. Zhao Xiujuan (2021) recommends additional specialized courses tailored to local industrial economies. As Zhu Wenfeng (2024) observes, aligning course content with core job competencies has become a key trend in English curriculum instruction. To optimize the curriculum structure, Pang Zhongyan (2026) proposes using core competencies as the main framework, coordinating language skills with business knowledge development. A practice-oriented approach with an increased proportion of practical courses would help students refine their skills in real or simulated business scenarios.

#### **4.3 Build a practical training platform and promote school-enterprise collaboration**

Schools often overlook the development of students' essential professional competencies, creating a disconnection between graduate capabilities and business requirements. Practical training platforms remain inadequate, failing to provide a realistic business environment aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative, and lacking substantive integration with foreign trade enterprises and cross-border e-commerce platforms. As Ma Lingling (2013) suggests, project-based training can address this gap by designing typical workplace tasks into teaching projects that enable students to master content through completion.

Given that Business English graduates frequently join small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises, Zhao Ying (2017) advocates for university-enterprise collaboration to jointly cultivate talent. Ouyang Wenping (2017) further recommends inviting Belt and Road experts and entrepreneurs to campus for seminars and lectures to enhance students' practical skills through direct interaction.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Yin Yufeng (2018) notes that online learning, simulation software, and blended training are still insufficient, with internship bases suffering from structural deficiencies and operational lag. Zhao Xiujuan (2021) identifies a common pitfall in cooperation: prioritizing contract signing over implementation. Schools typically arrange student placements only during designated periods, failing to meet enterprises' need for stable employees and reducing student engagement. These challenges point to the need for a more systematic and sustained partnership model, one that embeds enterprise collaboration into the entire talent cultivation process rather than treating it as an occasional supplement.

### **V. Conclusion**

Against the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative, this study uses Panzhihua University as a case to systematically examine the current status, challenges, and optimization pathways for developing core competencies among Business English majors. For local undergraduate institutions, cultivating Business English talents requires leveraging regional characteristics, responding to practical needs, and achieving synergy between professional competence and cross-cultural literacy. Future research should further evaluate reform practices and explore broader university-enterprise collaboration models, contributing to a high-quality talent cultivation system that meets the demands of the new era.

#### **Limitations of This Study**

This study has three main limitations: The sample is confined to Business English majors at Panzhihua University, excluding universities of other types and levels, so the findings may not generalize nationally. In addition, the questionnaire relies mainly on closed-ended questions with few open-ended items, limiting the capture of students' authentic perspectives and deeper causes. Finally, the researcher is an undergraduate student with limited experience in research and data analysis, which constrains the study's interpretation and conclusions.

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