

Bridging the Gap: Measuring the Alignment Between Academic Mandarin Learning and Real-World Business Communication Needs

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Abstract

This study investigates the alignment between academic Mandarin programs and real-world business communication needs in Indonesia. Through a mixed-methods approach involving surveys of 85 students, 60 alumni, and 10 industry professionals, significant competence gaps were identified. While stakeholders unanimously recognized the critical importance of Business Mandarin, the findings reveal substantial deficiencies in graduates' practical skills, particularly in negotiation, professional presentation, and understanding Chinese business culture. The current curriculum was found to overemphasize theoretical knowledge and receptive skills, lacking sufficient authentic, task-based learning activities. To bridge this gap, this research proposes an integrated educational model that synergizes Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with industry-recognized micro-credentials. This framework is designed to create a competency-based learning ecosystem that directly addresses identified industry needs, enhances graduate employability, and provides verifiable certification of job-ready skills. The study underscores the necessity for curriculum reform and sustained industry-academia collaboration to effectively prepare graduates for the communicative demands of the global business environment.

Keywords : Business Mandarin, Curriculum Alignment, Competence Gap, TBLT/PBL Integration

1. INTRODUCTION

TBLT, PBL, and micro-credentials—have established theoretical support, their synergistic integration within Mandarin for Specific Purposes (MSP) remains under-explored (Zhang & Li, 2024). Crucially, there exists a lack of empirical research systematically measuring the specific misalignments between academic preparation and business communication needs, particularly in emerging economies with significant China-related business interactions (Morgan, 2024). This gap prevents the development of evidence-based curriculum reforms and perpetuates the disconnect between educational outcomes and workplace requirements.

This research addresses a critical gap in language education by systematically investigating the alignment between academic Mandarin programs and the practical communication demands of the business world within the Indonesian context (Cha, 2022). This study employs a multi-stakeholder, mixed-methods approach—gathering perspectives from students, alumni, and industry professionals—to move beyond general language acquisition studies and pinpoint the specific challenges faced by non-Chinese speakers in business contexts (Pan et al., 2023). The primary aim is to conduct a rigorous needs analysis to identify precise competence gaps and inform subsequent curriculum development.

Building on this investigation, the study will critically examine whether current pedagogical approaches effectively equip students for the sociolinguistic and cultural complexities of real-world Chinese business interactions (Azmi et al., 2025). This involves a detailed analysis of how core language proficiencies—such as listening, speaking, and reading—developed in various instructional contexts, ultimately translate into effective performance in professional scenarios (Yang, 2024). The research will identify which critical communicative competencies, from negotiation to formal presentation, are most essential yet

underdeveloped, thereby assessing the practical application of academic language skills in meeting the demands of the global business environment (Chan, 2014; Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2024).

The ultimate objective of this research is to develop an integrated framework that connects pedagogical innovation with credentialing reform. The findings are intended to generate both theoretical insights for Mandarin for Specific Purposes (MSP) curriculum design and practical, actionable strategies for enhancing graduate employability (Yang, 2022). By aligning academic training more closely with industry needs, this study seeks to bridge the identified gap, ensuring that graduates are not only linguistically proficient but also possess the validated, job-ready communication skills required for success in China-related business sectors (Liu et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to identify the key components of professional communicative competence relevant to Mandarin learners entering business contexts, extending beyond basic comprehension and fluency to encompass areas like strategic interaction and cultural pragmatics (Khasanova, 2024; Aparece & Bacasmot, 2023).

2. METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively address the research questions. The sequential explanatory design is adopted, where quantitative data collection and analysis are followed by qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach allows for a thorough understanding of both the statistical trends and the underlying reasons behind the alignment—or lack thereof—between academic Mandarin learning and real-world business communication needs. The cross-sectional survey design enables the capture of a snapshot of current conditions across multiple stakeholders simultaneously, providing a comprehensive basis for needs analysis and model development.

2. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises three distinct stakeholder groups directly involved with Business Mandarin in the Indonesian context: (1) current university students enrolled in Mandarin or business-related programs (n=85), (2) alumni who have graduated and entered the workforce (n=60), and (3) industry professionals from companies with Chinese business relations (n=10). A purposive sampling technique is employed to ensure that participants possess relevant experience and knowledge regarding Business Mandarin application (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample size is determined based on accessibility and the principle of data saturation for qualitative components, with approximately 85 students, 60 alumni, and 10 industry professionals participating in the study.

3. Research Instruments and Data Collection

Multiple research instruments are developed to collect comprehensive data:

Quantitative Instruments:

- Three structured questionnaires are designed for each stakeholder group, incorporating Likert-scale items to measure perceptions, competencies, and alignment levels. The questionnaires are developed based on previous studies on Business Mandarin assessment (Wu, 2020; Rahman et al., 2025).

Qualitative Instruments:

- Semi-structured interview protocols are created for in-depth exploration with selected participants from each group. The protocols focus on uncovering nuanced challenges, specific competency gaps, and suggestions for curriculum improvement.

- Document analysis frameworks are developed to examine existing Mandarin curriculum documents, syllabi, and learning materials against industry requirements.

Data collection occurs in two phases: first, the distribution of questionnaires to obtain quantitative data, followed by interviews and document analysis to gather qualitative insights that explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings.

3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process follows the mixed-methods approach:

Quantitative Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) are computed to summarize demographic characteristics and response patterns

Qualitative Analysis:

- Thematic analysis is applied to interview transcripts and document analysis results, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach.

Integration of Methods:

- Data triangulation is performed by comparing and contrasting findings from different data sources and methods. The qualitative data help explain and contextualize the quantitative results, particularly in understanding why specific gaps exist and how they might be addressed (Flick, 2018).

4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure research quality, several measures are implemented. Content validity of questionnaires is established through expert review by two language education specialists and one industry professional. A pilot study with 15 participants from each group is conducted to refine instruments and establish internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha calculated to ensure reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$). For qualitative components, credibility is enhanced through member checking and peer debriefing, while transferability is supported by thick description of contexts and participants (Nowell et al., 2017).

3. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The subsequent sections will present the empirical findings derived from the data analysis, offering an in-depth statistical and qualitative exposition of the collected information. The research data is presented in the form of tables and the following explanations:

The demographic profile of the 85 student respondents, revealing a strategically relevant sample for investigating Business Mandarin needs. The predominantly male cohort (72.9%) primarily comprises students from Digital Business (30.6%) and International Business Administration (29.4%) - programs where Mandarin proficiency holds particular career relevance (Rahman et al., 2025). The balanced distribution across academic semesters, with concentrations in semesters 1-2 (34.1%) and 3-4 (29.4%), enables capturing evolving perspectives throughout students' academic journeys.

Table 1. Self-Assessed Proficiency in Business Mandarin Tasks (Scale 1-5)

No.	Business Communication Task	Mean Score	Proficiency Level
B1	Understanding simple business conversations	3.2	Moderately Proficient
B2	Reading and understanding short business emails	3.4	Moderately Proficient
B3	Writing simple and professional business emails	2.8	Between Slightly-Moderately
B4	Understanding technical business terminology	3.1	Moderately Proficient
B5	Delivering short product/service presentations	2.9	Between Slightly-Moderately
B6	Participating in business negotiations	2.3	Slightly Proficient
B7	Understanding Chinese business culture	2.7	Between Slightly-Moderately
Overall Average		2.9	Moderately Proficient

Table illustrates students' self-assessed proficiency in Business Mandarin tasks, indicating moderate overall competence (Mean=2.9) with notable skill disparities. Receptive skills like reading emails (3.4) and understanding conversations (3.2) scored higher than productive competencies, revealing an instructional emphasis skewed toward passive comprehension rather than active communication. The most critical deficiencies emerge in complex professional interactions. Business negotiations scored lowest (2.3), alongside weaknesses in presentations (2.9) and cultural understanding (2.7), highlighting a concerning gap between classroom learning and workplace demands (Wu, 2020; Tian & Lowe, 2018). This pattern underscores the urgent need for curriculum reform through increased authentic, task-based learning scenarios to develop the strategic communication skills essential for global business contexts (Ellis, 2017).

Table 2: Perception of Curriculum Relevance (Scale 1-5)

No.	Learning Activity	Mean Score	Interpretation
C1	Role-play simulating professional situations	2.9	Rarely - Occasionally
C2	Learning specific business vocabulary and terms	3.3	Occasionally - Frequently
C3	Writing business document tasks	2.7	Rarely - Occasionally
C4	Analyzing business case studies	2.4	Rarely
C5	Using authentic audio/video materials	3.1	Occasionally - Frequently
Overall Average		2.9	Occasionally

Table 2 reveals a concerning infrequency of experiential learning activities in the Mandarin curriculum, with an overall average score of 2.9 indicating only occasional implementation. The data shows particularly limited engagement with crucial practice-based methodologies, as analyzing business case studies (2.4), role-playing professional situations (2.9), and writing business documents (2.7) all fall within the rare-to-occasional range, suggesting a curriculum prioritizing discrete language components over integrated communicative tasks. This pedagogical approach contrasts sharply with the more frequent use of receptive activities like vocabulary learning (3.3) and audio/video materials (3.1), creating a significant skills application gap. The over-reliance on knowledge transmission at the expense of practical skill development fails to bridge the classroom-boardroom divide, underscoring the urgent need for curriculum redesign that systematically incorporates authentic, problem-based tasks to transform passive learners into proficient professional communicators.

Table 3. Career Importance & Learning Readiness

Category	Option	Freq (n)	Percent (%)
Importance for Future Career	Very Important	38	44.7%
	Important	35	41.2%
	Neutral	10	11.8%
	Unimportant	2	2.4%
Readiness for Professional Use	Very Prepared	8	9.4%
	Prepared	22	25.9%
	Moderately Prepared	35	41.2%
	Unprepared	15	17.6%
	Very Unprepared	5	5.9%

Table 3 reveals a significant paradox between students' recognition of Mandarin's professional value and their perceived readiness for workplace application. An overwhelming 85.9% of respondents consider Mandarin skills important or very important for their future careers, highlighting a clear awareness of its strategic value in the global job market (Tian & Lowe, 2018). However, this stands in stark contrast to their readiness, with only 35.3% feeling prepared or very prepared for professional use. The largest group (41.2%) identifies as only moderately prepared, indicating a widespread lack of confidence in applying their skills

in real-world business contexts. The findings suggest that while the academic program successfully instils an understanding of Mandarin's importance, it inadequately develops the applied communicative skills and confidence necessary for professional settings (Wu, 2020). This misalignment points to an urgent need for pedagogical reform, emphasizing that curriculum redesign must bridge this divide by incorporating more authentic, task-based learning experiences to enhance students' professional readiness.

Table 4. Most Important Skills & Learning Challenges (Multiple Response)

Category	Option	Freq (n)	Percent (%)
Most Important Skills to Master	Negotiation & Presentation Skills	58	68.2%
	Business Email & Report Writing	49	57.6%
	Understanding Chinese Business Culture	42	49.4%
	Daily Oral Communication Skills	35	41.2%
	Reading Contracts/Legal Documents	28	32.9%
Biggest Learning Challenges	Lack of real-world practice opportunities	65	76.5%
	Overly theoretical teaching materials	58	68.2%
	Limited business vocabulary	49	57.6%
	Lack of confidence in speaking	45	52.9%
	Lack of cultural context understanding	38	44.7%

Table 4 clearly demonstrates a significant alignment between students' perceived needs and their learning challenges. The skills deemed most crucial for mastery—negotiation and presentation (68.2%), business writing (57.6%), and understanding Chinese business culture (49.4%)—are precisely those that require extensive practical application. However, these complex, interactive competencies are hindered by the most frequently cited challenge: a stark lack of real-world practice opportunities (76.5%). This disconnect is further exacerbated by overly theoretical teaching materials (68.2%) and limited business vocabulary (57.6%), which collectively prevent students from developing the confidence and practical ability required for professional communication. The data compellingly indicates that the current curriculum fails to provide the authentic, application-based learning environment necessary to bridge this gap. Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental pedagogical shift towards Task-Based Language Teaching and simulated business scenarios that directly target these high-priority skills.

Table 5. Thematic Summary of Open-Ended Suggestions

Theme	Example Suggestions from Respondents
Practical Application	"More real practice with companies that have relations with China." "Internship programs in Mandarin-using companies." "Use real business cases from Chinese-Indonesian companies as assignments."
Teaching Methodology	"Invite industry practitioners to share real experiences." "More serious role-playing for negotiations with detailed feedback." "Interactive sessions with native speakers."
Curriculum Content	"Update learning materials with current business trends." "Deeper material on Chinese business etiquette and relationship building." "Short courses with native speakers experienced in business."
Facilities & Certification	"A language lab that simulates a real office environment, not just a regular classroom." "Digital certification (micro-credentials) that are recognized by industry to prove our specific skills."

Table 5 synthesizes qualitative responses that collectively advocate for a transformative approach to Business Mandarin education. Student suggestions consistently emphasize the need for authentic, industry-aligned learning experiences, specifically requesting real-world practice through internships, actual business cases from Chinese-Indonesian companies, and interaction with industry practitioners. These recommendations strongly align with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014) and

underscore the demand for curriculum that bridges the classroom-workplace divide through meaningful engagement with professional contexts.

• **Data Result for Alumni Respondents**

The outlines the professional background of the 60 alumni respondents, revealing a strategically relevant sample with substantial experience in Mandarin-utilizing environments. The distribution across graduation years (2018-2020) provides perspectives from professionals at different career stages, while the predominance of Digital Business (33.3%) and International Business Administration (30.0%) graduates confirms their direct relevance to Business Mandarin applications. Notably, 66.7% of alumni work in multinational corporations (41.7%) or companies with Chinese partnerships (25.0%), indicating their direct exposure to professional Mandarin requirements.

The current position distribution further validates the sample's appropriateness, with 61.7% employed in client-facing and business development roles (Marketing/Sales 36.7%, Business Development 25.0%) where communication skills are paramount.

Table 6. Perceived Relevance of Academic Learning to Workplace (Scale 1-5)

No.	Aspect of Learning	Mean Score	Interpretation
B1	Business Vocabulary and Terminology	3.1	Moderately Relevant
B2	Role-play for Professional Situations	2.6	Slightly Relevant
B3	Business Document Writing Practice	2.9	Slightly-Moderately Relevant
B4	Understanding Chinese Business Culture	2.3	Slightly Relevant
B5	Presentation Techniques in Mandarin	2.7	Slightly Relevant
Overall Average		2.7	Slightly Relevant

Table 6 presents alumni perceptions regarding the relevance of their academic Mandarin training to workplace requirements, revealing an overall assessment of "slightly relevant" (mean = 2.7). This moderate evaluation suggests a significant disconnect between classroom instruction and professional application. While business vocabulary and terminology received the highest rating (3.1), other crucial aspects like role-playing professional situations (2.6) and understanding Chinese business culture (2.3) were deemed particularly inadequate. The notably low scores for practical application components highlight a critical gap in the curriculum's effectiveness. The deficiency in cultural understanding (2.3) is especially concerning, as cross-cultural competence is fundamental to successful business interactions in Chinese contexts (Tian & Lowe, 2018). Similarly, the inadequate preparation in professional simulations and presentation techniques indicates that the curriculum emphasizes theoretical knowledge over the development of practical communicative competence essential for workplace success (Wu, 2020). These findings strongly suggest the need for pedagogical reforms that incorporate more authentic, task-based learning approaches to bridge this relevance gap.

Table 7. Use of Mandarin in the Workplace

Category	Option	Freq (n)	Percent (%)				
Frequency of Use	Daily	10	16.7%	Career Impact	Very Influential	25	41.7%
	Several Times a Week	25	41.7%		Quite Influential	20	33.3%
	Several Times a Month	15	25.0%		Neutral	10	16.7%
	Rarely	8	13.3%		Slightly Influential	5	8.3%
	Never	2	3.3%				

Tasks Requiring Mandarin						
Email Communication	45	75.0%	Business Negotiations	28	46.7%	
Attending Meetings/Conferences	38	63.3%	Writing Business Reports	25	41.7%	
Business Presentations	35	58.3%	Reading Technical Documents	20	33.3%	

Table 7 demonstrates the significant role Mandarin plays in the professional lives of alumni respondents, with 58.4% using the language daily (16.7%) or several times a week (41.7%). The data reveals email communication (75.0%) as the most common professional application, followed by participation in meetings and conferences (63.3%) and business presentations (58.3%). These findings confirm that Mandarin serves as a functional tool for essential workplace communication rather than merely a supplementary skill.

The substantial reporting of Mandarin's career impact is particularly noteworthy, with 75.0% of alumni acknowledging its influential role in their professional advancement. This strong correlation between Mandarin proficiency and career development underscores the language's strategic value in the Indonesian business landscape. However, the relatively lower percentage of alumni engaging in business negotiations (46.7%) suggests this complex communicative competence remains challenging despite its professional importance. This pattern indicates that while basic professional communication needs are being met, advanced strategic communication skills require further development through targeted curriculum enhancements.

Table 8. Gap Analysis and Perceived Value of Micro-credentials

Category	Option	Freq (n)	Percent (%)
Most Critical Missing Skills	Business Negotiation Skills	45	75.0%
	Understanding Chinese Business Culture	38	63.3%
	Presentation & Public Speaking Skills	35	58.3%
	Professional Writing Skills	30	50.0%
	Industry-Specific Technical Vocabulary	25	41.7%
Value of Micro-credentials	Very Important	35	58.3%
	Important	15	25.0%
	Moderately Important	8	13.3%
	Not Important	2	3.3%

Table 8 reveals critical competency gaps identified by alumni, with business negotiation skills (75.0%) and understanding Chinese business culture (63.3%) emerging as the most significant deficiencies. These findings align directly with workplace demands, where these complex communicative competencies prove essential yet underdeveloped in academic preparation. The substantial percentage identifying presentation skills (58.3%) and professional writing (50.0%) as missing further confirms the need for curriculum enhancement in high-stakes business communication areas. The strong endorsement of micro-credentials by 83.3% of alumni underscores their potential value in addressing these gaps. This overwhelming support suggests that industry-recognized certifications could effectively validate specific competencies that traditional degrees may not adequately demonstrate..

Table 9. Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Improvement Suggestions

Theme	Example Suggestions from Alumni
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Content/Material	"Include more real case studies from successful Indonesian-Chinese business partnerships." "Continuously update business vocabulary with current industry terms, not just textbook language." "Add more material on business ethics and cultural differences in Sino-Indonesian business contexts."
Teaching Methodology	"More practical sessions with native speakers focused on business communication." "Invite business practitioners as guest lecturers to share real-world experiences." "Implement mandatory internship programs in companies that use Mandarin extensively."
Facilities/Resources	"Create a language lab with business simulation technology, not just basic audio equipment." "Provide access to a digital library with up-to-date learning resources and authentic business materials." "Develop an online platform for self-paced practice with immediate feedback."
Industry Collaboration	"Establish stronger partnerships with companies for curriculum development." "Create a mentorship program connecting students with alumni working in Mandarin-intensive roles." "Organize regular industry networking events with Chinese-speaking business professionals."

Table 9 synthesizes alumni recommendations for enhancing Business Mandarin education, revealing a consistent demand for greater authenticity and industry integration. The suggestions for content/material emphasize the need for contemporary, context-specific resources, including real business cases and updated industry terminology that reflects current Sino-Indonesian business practices. This aligns with established principles of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) pedagogy, which stress the importance of authentic materials in developing profession-specific communicative competence (Wu, 2020). The recommendations regarding teaching methodology and industry collaboration particularly highlight the crucial gap between academic instruction and workplace requirements. Alumni strongly advocate for increased practitioner involvement through guest lectures, mentorship programs, and structured internship opportunities - all mechanisms that facilitate the transfer of learning from classroom to professional settings.

- **Data Result for Companies Respondents**

Table 10. Company Profile of Industry Respondents

No.	Industry Sector	Company Size (Employees)	Operations in Mandarin-Speaking Countries
1	Electronics Manufacturing	> 500	Yes
2	International Trade	51 - 200	Yes
3	Information Technology	201 - 500	No
4	Agribusiness	< 50	Yes
5	Consulting Services	51 - 200	Yes
6	Automotive Manufacturing	> 500	Yes
7	Retail	201 - 500	No
8	Financial Technology (Fintech)	51 - 200	Yes
9	Construction	> 500	Yes
10	Pharmaceutical	201 - 500	Yes

Data above provides a comprehensive profile of the 10 participating companies, revealing a strategically diverse sample with strong relevance to Business Mandarin needs. The data shows that 80% of respondent companies maintain operations in Mandarin-speaking countries, spanning crucial sectors including manufacturing (electronics, automotive), trade, and professional services. This high percentage confirms the strategic importance of Mandarin capabilities in Indonesia's key economic sectors and validates the research focus on industry-academia alignment.

Table 11. Importance and Need for Business Mandarin Skills

Category	Response	Freq (n)	Percent (%)
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Overall Importance of Mandarin Skills	Very Important	6	60%
	Important	3	30%
	Moderately Important	1	10%
Positions Requiring Mandarin Skills	International Marketing/Sales Staff/Manager	9	90%
	Procurement/Purchasing Staff/Manager	7	70%
	All Positions Interacting with Foreign Partners	6	60%
	Translator & Interpreter	4	40%
	Client Relations Staff/Manager	3	30%
Frequency of Mandarin Use in Business	Daily	3	30%
	Several Times a Week	4	40%
	Several Times a Month	2	20%
	Rarely	1	10%

Table 11 demonstrates the critical importance industry places on Mandarin proficiency, with 90% of companies rating these skills as important or very important. This overwhelming consensus underscores Mandarin's strategic value in the contemporary Indonesian business landscape. The data reveals that international marketing and sales positions (90%) show the strongest demand for Mandarin skills, followed by procurement roles (70%), indicating that customer-facing and supply chain positions drive the primary need for Mandarin capabilities in business operations. The frequency of Mandarin usage further validates its operational significance, with 70% of companies reporting daily (30%) or weekly (40%) application in business contexts. This regular usage pattern confirms that Mandarin serves as an active working language rather than a supplemental skill in these organizations. The convergence between high importance ratings and frequent practical application presents a compelling case for educational institutions to prioritize the development of industry-relevant Mandarin programs that address these specific professional needs through targeted curriculum design and practical skill development (Wu, 2020). The findings particularly support the implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching approaches that focus on the communicative tasks most prevalent in these business contexts (Ellis, 2017).

Table 12. Gap Analysis of Graduate Competence in Business Mandarin

Business Mandarin Skill	Average Importance Rating (1-5)	Average Graduate Readiness Rating (1-5)	Competence Gap
Speaking Skills (Meetings, Calls, Presentations)	4.8	2.9	1.9
Writing Skills (Emails, Reports)	4.5	2.7	1.8
Reading Skills (Contracts, Technical Docs)	4.2	3.1	1.1
Listening Skills (Conversations, Instructions)	4.6	2.8	1.8
Business Vocabulary Knowledge	4.7	2.8	1.9
Negotiation & Persuasion Skills	4.9	2.5	2.4
Understanding of Chinese Business Culture	4.3	2.3	2.0
Overall Average	4.6	2.7	1.9

Table 12 reveals a substantial misalignment between industry expectations and graduate preparedness across all Business Mandarin competencies. The data demonstrates significant competence gaps, particularly in negotiation and persuasion skills (gap: 2.4) and understanding of Chinese business culture (gap: 2.0), which represent the most critical deficiencies. These findings indicate that while industry places paramount importance on these strategic communication and cultural competencies, current educational outcomes are

failing to meet workplace requirements. The consistency of substantial gaps across all skill categories, with an overall average disparity of 1.9 points, underscores a systemic rather than isolated challenge in Business Mandarin education. The particularly pronounced deficits in active communication skills (speaking: 1.9, writing: 1.8) compared to receptive skills (reading: 1.1) suggest an instructional emphasis skewed toward passive comprehension rather than productive language use. This pattern strongly indicates the need for pedagogical transformation through increased implementation of Task-Based Language Teaching and Project-Based Learning approaches that specifically target these high-gap areas through authentic business scenarios and cultural immersion experiences.

Table 13. Challenges and Willingness to Collaborate

Category	Response	Freq (n)	Percent (%)
Biggest Challenges in Graduates	Lack of understanding of Chinese business culture	9	90%
	Limited mastery of business vocabulary	8	80%
	Lack of confidence in oral communication	7	70%
	Inadequate professional writing skills	6	60%
	Technical knowledge mismatch with industry needs	4	40%
Willingness for Collaboration	Internship Programs	9	90%
	Providing real case studies for assignments	8	80%
	Guest Lecturer / Practitioner Teaching	7	70%
	Curriculum Development Input	6	60%
	Recognizing Micro-credentials in hiring	5	50%

Table 13 identifies critical challenges in graduate preparedness, with cultural understanding (90%) and business vocabulary (80%) emerging as the most significant deficiencies. These findings align precisely with the competence gaps identified in previous analyses, confirming that cultural intelligence and domain-specific language present the greatest barriers to workplace readiness. The high percentage citing oral communication confidence (70%) and writing skills (60%) further validates the need for pedagogical approaches that develop practical communication abilities. The remarkably high willingness to collaborate across all categories—particularly internships (90%) and case study provision (80%)—provides a clear pathway for addressing these challenges. This strong industry engagement, coupled with the 50% openness to recognizing micro-credentials, presents a strategic opportunity for educational institutions to develop structured partnership programs. The convergence of identified needs and industry willingness creates a compelling foundation for implementing an integrated academia-industry model that combines practical immersion, curriculum co-development, and industry-recognized certification to effectively bridge the competence gap.

Table 14. Thematic Analysis of Industry Suggestions for Improvement

Theme	Representative Statements from Industry Respondents
Curriculum & Practical Skills	"Graduates need more practice with real case studies. Invite practitioners from companies to teach specific modules." (HR Director, Electronics Manufacturing)
	"Focus on negotiation skills and cultural understanding. Graduates must understand how to build relationships with Chinese partners." (CEO, International Trade)
	"Technical vocabulary is crucial. Graduates must understand terms in contracts and technical documents." (Procurement Manager, Construction)
Teaching Methodology	"Curriculum must be updated with industry developments. Micro-credentials would greatly assist our recruitment process." (Business Manager, Fintech)
	"Presentation and public speaking skills in Mandarin are still very weak. More practice with detailed feedback is needed." (Head of Marketing, Pharmaceutical)
Industry-Academia Partnership	"We are open to accepting interns and providing real business problems for student projects." (Director, Consulting Services)

"We can participate in curriculum reviews to ensure alignment with current industry needs." (Production Manager, Automotive Manufacturing)

Table 14 synthesizes industry experts' recommendations for enhancing Business Mandarin education, revealing three critical improvement areas. The consistent emphasis on practical application and cultural competence emerges as the foremost priority, with multiple respondents stressing the need for real case studies, negotiation practice, and relationship-building skills that reflect actual business dynamics with Chinese partners.

The strong advocacy for pedagogical innovation and credentialing reform demonstrates industry's recognition of evolving educational needs. The explicit mention of micro-credentials as a recruitment tool and the call for updated curriculum content indicate a growing preference for verifiable, industry-relevant competencies over traditional certification methods. Furthermore, the willingness to engage in structured partnerships through internships, curriculum review, and real-project provision presents a valuable opportunity for creating a sustainable ecosystem of industry-academia collaboration that can continuously align educational outcomes with workplace requirements.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has systematically identified and measured a significant misalignment between academic Mandarin programs and the practical communication needs of the business world in Indonesia. The empirical data gathered from students, alumni, and industry professionals consistently reveals critical gaps in graduates' competencies, most notably in the high-stakes areas of business negotiation, professional presentation, and cross-cultural understanding. The findings underscore that current pedagogical approaches, while potentially effective for building general linguistic foundations, are insufficient in developing the specific, applied communicative skills demanded by employers in multinational and China-related business environments.

To bridge this gap, this research proposes an integrated educational model that synergizes Project-Based Learning (PBL), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and micro-credentialing. The PBL framework provides an authentic context for sustained inquiry into complex, real-world business problems, while TBLT serves as the pedagogical engine for developing discrete, practical language tasks within that framework. The incorporation of micro-credentials offers a verifiable and industry-recognized mechanism to certify the specific competencies developed through this process, thereby enhancing graduate employability and providing employers with clear evidence of job-ready skills.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of this model necessitates a paradigm shift from a knowledge-transmission approach to a competency-based, industry-engaged learning ecosystem. This transformation requires strong and sustained collaboration between academia and industry, as evidenced by the high willingness of both alumni and companies to participate in curriculum development, guest lecturing, and internship programs. By adopting this integrated framework, educational institutions can not only enhance the relevance and impact of their Mandarin for Specific Purposes (MSP) programs but also empower graduates to thrive in the competitive landscape of international business, thereby fulfilling the critical mandate of higher education to prepare work-ready, globally competent professionals.

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