

An Empirical Study on the Relationship of CLT Practices, Students' Learning Motivation in Business English Correspondence Class—OBE Principle Based

Na Su^{a*}, Yiqun Wang^b

College of Education, Jiaxing University, Jiaxing, 314200 China

Email: wangyiqun5417@163.com

Corresponding Author Email^{*}: suna9180@gmail.com

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i4/27257>

Published Online: 25 December 2025

Abstract

Business English Correspondence (BEC) courses in Chinese higher education have traditionally emphasized linguistic accuracy over authentic communication, often resulting in low student motivation and limited professional preparedness. To address this gap, this study investigates how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices, aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles, influence students' motivation through the lens of Dörnyei's (2005, 2007) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). Specifically, it examines the role of the L2 Learning Experience—a classroom-embedded dimension encompassing task relevance, peer interaction, and emotional climate—in mediating the relationship between CLT and motivated learning behaviors. Using a single-group post-intervention survey design, data were collected from 110 undergraduate students enrolled in an eight-week OBE-aligned BEC course featuring simulated trade tasks, collaborative drafting, and role-play activities. Results from correlation and multiple regression analyses revealed that perceived CLT practices significantly predicted both willingness to communicate (WTC) and intended effort (IE), with SLLE being the strongest predictor of intended effort, and CLT the strongest predictor of willingness to communicate. Notably, the Ideal L2 Self contributed modestly to WTC but not to IE, while the Ought-to L2 Self showed no significant predictive power. These findings underscore that in ESP contexts, immediate classroom experiences, which are shaped by authentic, interactive CLT tasks, are crucial for sustaining motivation. The study thus affirms CLT not only as a pedagogical approach but as a motivational architecture within OBE-driven curricula.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Outcome-Based Education, L2 Motivational Self System, Business English Correspondence, L2 Learning Experience, Willingness to Communicate, Student Motivation

Introduction

Business English Correspondence (BEC) plays a crucial role in preparing students for the increasingly globalized business environment. As a core component of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs in Chinese higher education, BEC courses are designed to cultivate students' ability to communicate effectively and professionally in international trade contexts. This includes drafting business letters such as inquiries, offers, counteroffers, and complaints, which are vital for global business transactions (Zhu, 2010). However, despite its professional relevance, traditional BEC instruction has long suffered from an overemphasis on linguistic accuracy and form-based teaching, focusing on grammar drills, model memorization, and vocabulary recall at the expense of communicative competence (Deng, 2025; Gu, 2012). As a result, students often exhibit low motivation, limited communicative confidence, and poor transfer of classroom knowledge to real-world contexts (Zhao, 2014).

In today's rapidly evolving international economy, effective business communication in English has become a key employability skill. Graduates are now expected to demonstrate not only language accuracy but also the ability to negotiate, persuade, and build cross-cultural relationships through written correspondence. Thus, reforming BEC teaching toward communicative and outcome-driven approaches is both an educational necessity and an economic imperative. Within this context, two pedagogical frameworks—Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)—have emerged as complementary strategies that respond to the needs of China's ongoing higher education reform.

The importance and utility of this topic lie in its alignment with both national and global priorities. At the policy level, China's Ministry of Education emphasizes cultivating "application-oriented talents" capable of performing effectively in international workplaces. At the classroom level, educators face the challenge of moving beyond rote learning to foster authentic communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy. The integration of CLT within an OBE framework provides a practical and evidence-based solution to these dual challenges: CLT offers communicative authenticity and student engagement, while OBE ensures measurable outcomes and employability alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of CLT as a motivational architecture is increasingly recognized in second language acquisition research. CLT encourages students to use English as a tool for real communication, creating meaningful contexts that naturally enhance motivation and engagement (Xu, 2020). When implemented in BEC courses, such interactive and purpose-driven activities, such as simulated trade negotiations, collaborative drafting, and role-play tasks, allow students to experience authentic communicative success, which strengthens their confidence and willingness to learn. This is particularly relevant in Chinese college classrooms, where exam-oriented traditions often inhibit participation and creativity.

Despite these advances, empirical evidence linking CLT practices with motivational outcomes in ESP contexts remains scarce. Previous studies have described improvements in engagement anecdotally, but few have quantitatively examined how CLT practices interact with motivational constructs, such as those outlined in Dörnyei's (2005, 2007) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). This gap highlights the need to investigate how pedagogical design can

shape students' motivational and behavioral responses, particularly within professionally oriented courses like BEC.

Therefore, this study explores the relationship between CLT practices, L2 motivation, and motivated learning behavior under the guiding principles of OBE. Specifically, it examines how classroom-based factors, such as task authenticity, peer collaboration, and emotional climate, affect students' L2 learning experience, willingness to communicate, and intended effort. By doing so, this research not only contributes significantly to theoretical advancement in L2 motivation studies but also offers practical insights for curriculum designers and teachers aiming to cultivate both communicative competence and sustained motivation in Chinese ESP programs.

Based on the research objectives above, two research questions are proposed:

RQ1: what is the relationship between CLT practices, L2MSS components and motivated learning behavior in Business English correspondence class?

RQ2: How do CLT practices and L2MSS components, especially SLLE, jointly predict motivated learning behaviors (i.e., Intended Effort and Willingness to Communicate) in Business English correspondence class?

Literature Review

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and the Redefinition of Learning Outcomes in ESP

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) represents a paradigm shift from content-centered to learner-outcome-centered curriculum design. As articulated by Biggs and Tang (2011), OBE requires educators to begin with the end in mind: clearly defining what students should be able to *do* upon course completion, and then aligning teaching, learning activities, and assessment accordingly. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), this means moving beyond generic language competence toward demonstrable professional communication abilities.

In China, OBE has gained significant traction in vocational and applied undergraduate programs, particularly in business-oriented disciplines. Deng (2025) argues that traditional BEC courses overemphasize decontextualized knowledge—such as memorizing letter formats or isolated sentence patterns—while neglecting integrated, situation-specific competencies. Under an OBE framework, the primary learning outcome for BEC is redefined as: “*Students can independently draft appropriate, effective, and culturally sensitive business correspondence to solve real-world trade problems*” (Deng, 2025, p. 39). Crucially, this outcome encompasses not only linguistic accuracy and procedural knowledge of trade workflows but also affective dimensions such as confidence, engagement, and willingness to communicate—elements increasingly recognized as essential to professional readiness (Spady, 1994).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a Pedagogical Vehicle for OBE in BEC

To achieve such holistic outcomes, traditional lecture-based methods prove insufficient. Instead, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), with its emphasis on authentic interaction, meaningful tasks, and learner agency, offers a natural pedagogical complement to OBE. CLT posits that language is learned most effectively through use in socially meaningful contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In BEC, this translates into simulating real business scenarios

where students must negotiate, persuade, clarify, and resolve conflicts through written (and often spoken) English.

Recent Chinese scholarship demonstrates how CLT-aligned approaches operationalize OBE principles in BEC classrooms. For instance, Zhao (2014) implemented Problem-Based Learning (PBL), a CLT-adjacent method, in which students work in small groups to address open-ended, ill-structured trade problems (e.g., drafting a complaint letter after delayed shipment). This approach shifts the teacher's role from "knowledge transmitter" to "facilitator," while positioning students as active problem-solvers, which is a core tenet of both CLT and OBE.

Similarly, Zhu (2010) advocates for task-based project teaching, where students complete end-to-end simulated trade projects (e.g., establishing business relations → inquiry → offer → contract). Such projects integrate language use with business logic, requiring collaboration, information synthesis, and iterative revision, which are all reflective of workplace demands. Xu (2020) further enhances authenticity through the *virtual enterprise model*, wherein students assume roles as importers/exporters and engage in sustained email correspondence across the entire trade cycle. These innovations exemplify how CLT practices create the "complex, real-world contexts" that OBE demands (Deng, 2025, p. 40).

The L2 Motivational Self System and the Role of Classroom Experience

Contemporary L2 motivation theory has shifted from Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model toward dynamic, future-oriented, and identity-based frameworks. Central to this evolution is Dörnyei's (2005a, 2005b) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which reconceptualizes motivation as rooted in learners' self-concepts. The model comprises three interrelated components: Ideal L2 Self: The learner's vision of themselves as a successful L2 user in the future. This idealized image serves as a powerful internal motivator; Ought-to L2 Self: The attributes a learner believes they should possess to meet external expectations (e.g., parental pressure, job requirements); Second Language Learning Experience: The immediate situational factors that influence motivation in the classroom, including group dynamics, teaching methods, task design, and emotional climate (Dörnyei, 2007).

In EFL contexts like China—where opportunities for authentic L2 use are limited—the Ideal L2 Self may be abstract or underdeveloped, and the Ought-to L2 Self often dominates due to exam pressures (Lamb, 2012). Consequently, the L2 Learning Experience becomes the most malleable and pedagogically accessible source of motivation (Dörnyei, 2007). When classroom activities are engaging, socially supportive, and perceived as relevant, they enhance learners' sense of agency and enjoyment, thereby strengthening overall motivational drive—even in the absence of strong future self-guides.

This insight is particularly relevant for ESP courses such as Business English Correspondence, where students may view English as a "tool" rather than an identity. Through collaboration, authentic tasks, and meaningful communication, CLT practices, directly enrich the L2 Learning Experience by making lessons dynamic, purposeful, and socially connected (Dörnyei, 2007; Peng, 2015). For instance, Gu (2012) observed that group-based letter drafting reduced anxiety and increased peer support, which were key elements of a

positive learning experience. Similarly, Xu's (2020) virtual enterprise model gave students a "reason to write," transforming routine exercises into goal-directed communication.

Critically, the three motivational indicators used in this study—liking of class atmosphere, willingness to study, and intention to continue—are not merely behavioral proxies but core manifestations of a positive L2 Learning Experience as defined by Dörnyei (2007, p. 724):

"Motivation in the classroom is largely determined by how enjoyable, interesting, and rewarding learners find the learning process itself."

Thus, by framing motivation through L2MSS, specifically its learning experience dimension, this study moves beyond generic affective measures toward a theoretically coherent understanding of how CLT fosters sustainable engagement in OBE-driven BEC instruction.

Research Gap and Theoretical Integration

Despite growing evidence of CLT's benefits in BEC, most existing studies in China rely on qualitative observations or small-scale case reports (e.g., Zhao, 2014; Zhu, 2010). Few employ quantitative designs to systematically assess changes in student motivation using validated instruments. Moreover, while OBE provides the curricular vision, and CLT offers the pedagogical means, few studies explicitly bridge the two to examine how CLT-driven activities translate into measurable affective outcomes aligned with OBE.

This study addresses that gap by situating CLT practices within an OBE framework and empirically testing their impact on three concrete motivational indicators. By doing so, it contributes to a more evidence-based understanding of how interactive, authentic pedagogy can fulfill OBE's promise—not just in terms of skill acquisition, but also in cultivating the motivational foundation necessary for lifelong professional communication.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the research gap and literature review above, this study is guided by a theoretically integrated conceptual framework that situates Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) within an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum and interprets its impact on student motivation through the lens of Dörnyei's (2005a, 2007) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). Rather than treating motivation as a diffuse affective state, this framework focuses specifically on the L2 Learning Experience—the classroom-embedded dimension of L2MSS that captures learners' immediate perceptions of task meaningfulness, social interaction, emotional climate, and instructional relevance.

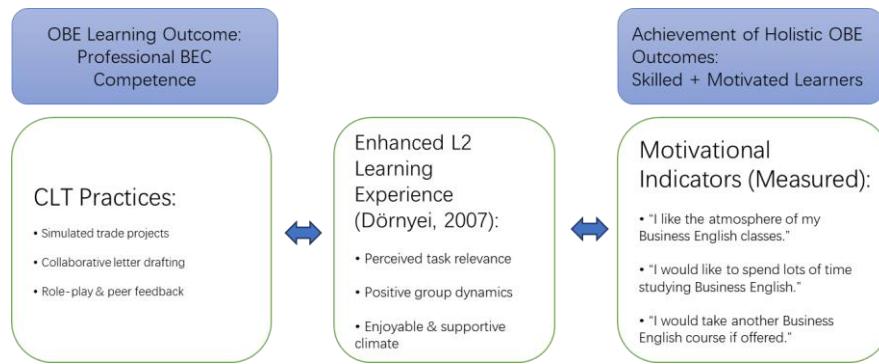


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework proposes a causal pathway in which: OBE-Defined Learning Outcomes establish the curricular vision: "Students can independently produce professional, context-appropriate business correspondence to address real-world trade scenarios." This outcome emphasizes functional competence, cultural awareness, and problem-solving—hallmarks of ESP under OBE (Deng, 2025).

To realize this outcome, CLT-Aligned Pedagogical Practices are implemented as the primary instructional strategy. These include collaborative drafting, role-play simulations, virtual enterprise projects, and peer feedback—all designed to create authentic, interactive, and purpose-driven learning tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Zhao, 2014; Xu, 2020).

These practices directly shape the L2 Learning Experience, a core component of Dörnyei's (2007) motivational model. According to Dörnyei, while the Ideal L2 Self (future identity) and Ought-to L2 Self (external obligations) operate at a more distal level, the L2 Learning Experience is highly responsive to classroom-level variables such as: Task authenticity and relevance; Peer collaboration and support; Teacher facilitation style; Emotional safety and enjoyment.

In the Chinese EFL context, where students often lack immersive L2 environments, the quality of the learning experience becomes a critical proximal driver of sustained motivation (Peng, 2015; Liu & Feng, 2020; Su et al. 2024). A positive L2 Learning Experience, in turn, manifests in three measurable behavioral-affective indicators used in this study: Liking of classroom atmosphere; Willingness to invest time in English study; Intention to enroll in future Business English courses: Signals long-term commitment shaped by current experience. These indicators align closely with Dörnyei's (2007, p. 724) assertion that "the most direct way to enhance motivation in the classroom is to make the learning experience itself enjoyable, interesting, and rewarding." Following Dörnyei (2005b) and Peng (2015), motivated learning behaviors are operationalized as Intended Effort (IE) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

Thus, motivation in this study is not an ancillary outcome but a core affective indicator of pedagogical effectiveness within the OBE paradigm. By grounding the analysis in Dörnyei's L2MSS, this framework provides a theoretically precise mechanism for understanding how CLT practices, when aligned with OBE goals, cultivate not only linguistic competence but also the motivational conditions necessary for lifelong professional language development.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a single-group, post-intervention correlational survey design to investigate the relationships among students' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices, components of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), and self-reported motivational learning behaviors. This approach focuses on capturing learners' immediate reflections following an instructional intervention and examining associations among key motivational and pedagogical variables in a naturalistic classroom setting (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Given the practical constraints of the teaching context and the exploratory nature of the inquiry, this design is well-suited for generating descriptive and relational insights into how CLT is perceived and how it co-varies with motivation-related constructs in an OBE-aligned BEC course.

Participants

The participants were 121 undergraduate students (90 female, 31 male; aged 19–21) enrolled in a compulsory *Business English Correspondence* (BEC) course at a public university in Eastern China. All students were majoring in Business English and had completed at least two years of college-level English instruction. The class was taught by the researcher as part of regular curriculum delivery, ensuring ecological validity. Participation in the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and not tied to course assessment. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection.

Instructional Intervention

Over an eight-week period, the BEC course was delivered using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) objectives. Core activities included:

- Simulated business scenarios (e.g., writing inquiry letters, complaint responses, and negotiation emails),
- Collaborative drafting and peer editing in small groups,
- Role-play tasks based on real-world trade contexts (e.g., resolving shipping delays),
- Use of authentic materials such as commercial invoices, packing lists, and company websites.

These practices emphasized meaning-focused communication, learner collaboration, and task authenticity, which were hallmarks of CLT in ESP contexts (Richards, 2006; Xu, 2020). No traditional grammar-translation or rote-memorization methods were used during the intervention period.

Instrument

A self-report questionnaire was developed to assess five interrelated constructs grounded in Dörnyei's (2005a, 2007) L2 Motivational Self System and CLT literature. The instrument consisted of 54 items distributed across the following subscales; all rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Completely untrue with me* to 6 = *Completely true with me*):

Table 1

Questionnaire Subscales, Theoretical Sources, Sample Items, and Reliability

Subscale	No. of Items	Theoretical Source(s)	Sample Item(s)	Cronbach's α (Expected/Reported) *
Perceived CLT Practices	45-54	Tsai (2014)	"The tasks in this course encouraged real communication." "I had opportunities to negotiate meaning with my peers."	$\geq .75$
L2 Motivation	1-6	Taguchi et al. (2009); Dörnyei (2005a)	I think I am trying my best to learn English	$\geq .70$
Ideal L2 Self (IL2S)	7-13	Taguchi, Magid, & Papi (2009); Dörnyei (2005a)	"I can clearly imagine myself confidently using English in my future career."	$\geq .80$
Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S)	14-19	Taguchi et al. (2009); Dörnyei (2005a)	"I feel I should learn English well to meet my parents' expectations."	$\geq .70$
L2 Learning Experience (SLLE)	20-24	Dörnyei (2007);	"I like the atmosphere of my English classes." "Our classroom activities were enjoyable." "If an English course was offered in the future, I would like to take it."	$\geq .82$
Motivated Learning Behaviors (IE and WTC)	25-33 34-44	MacIntyre et al. (1998); Dörnyei (2005b); Peng (2015);	"I plan to keep improving my English even after this course ends." (Intended effort) "I would volunteer to speak English in class if asked." (WTC)	$\geq .65$

Note. IE=Intended Efforts; WTC = Willingness to Communicate. Cronbach's α values are based on prior validation studies and pilot testing; actual values will be reported in the Results

section. The Motivational Learning Behaviors scale is brief but conceptually focused; $\alpha \geq .65$ is acceptable for exploratory research with few items (Taber, 2018).

The questionnaire was originally drafted in English, translated into Chinese by a bilingual applied linguist, and back-translated to ensure conceptual equivalence. A pilot test with five non-participant students confirmed item clarity and face validity.

Procedure

Data collection occurred during the final class session of the eight-week module. After completing the last CLT activity, students were briefed on the purpose of the survey, assured of confidentiality, and invited to participate voluntarily. The paper-based questionnaire was administered in Chinese and took approximately 25 minutes to complete. No incentives were provided, and non-participation had no impact on course grades. Finally, 110 questionnaires were collected and proved valid.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23). The analytical procedure followed three stages:

1. Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations, and ranges were computed for all subscales to summarize central tendencies and variability.
2. Reliability analysis: Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess internal consistency for each multi-item subscale (threshold: $\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable; Nunnally, 1978).
3. Inferential analysis:
 - a. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine bivariate relationships among Perceived CLT practices, L2MSS components (IL2S, OL2S, SLLE) and motivated behaviors (WTC, intended effort).
 - b. Multiple linear regression was conducted to test whether CLT, IL2S, OLS, and SLLE significantly predicted WTC and intended effort.

Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, all interpretations emphasize associations, not causality. Nevertheless, the design provides valuable insight into how learners experience and respond to CLT within the motivational architecture proposed by Dörnyei (2005a, 2007).

Results and Findings

Descriptive Analysis and Reliability Analysis

This section presents the descriptive statistics and reliability analysis of the questionnaire data collected from 110 undergraduate students following an eight-week CLT-based Business English Correspondence course. All variables were measured using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Completely untrue with me* to 6 = *Completely true with me*). Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum values are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire

	N	Min	Max	Mean	S. D	Variance	
Gender (female=1; male=2)	110	1	2	1.20	.038	.402	.161
CLT	110	2	6	3.89	.077	.804	.646
L2M	110	2	6	3.75	.077	.806	.649
IL2S	110	1	6	3.74	.106	1.114	1.241
OL2S	110	1	6	3.13	.094	.988	.977
SLLE	110	1	9	3.92	.093	.972	.945
IE	110	2	6	4.38	.069	.728	.531
WTC	110	1	6	3.97	.081	.853	.727
Valid N (listwise)	110						

As can be seen from Table 2, Students' perceptions of CLT practices were moderately positive ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .80$), indicating that participants generally found the communicative activities meaningful and engaging. The mean score for overall L2 motivation (L2M) was 3.75 ($SD = .81$), suggesting a moderate level of motivational engagement.

Among the components of the L2 Motivational Self System, the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S) scored $M = 3.74$ ($SD = 1.11$), reflecting a moderate vision of future success in English use. In contrast, the Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S) was lower at $M = 3.13$ ($SD = .99$), indicating less influence from external pressures or obligations. The L2 Learning Experience (SLLE) was rated most positively ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .97$), showing that students appreciated the classroom atmosphere and task relevance.

Regarding motivational learning behaviors, intended effort (IE) was the highest among all scales ($M = 4.38$, $SD = .73$), suggesting strong commitment to continued language learning. Willingness to communicate (WTC) was also relatively high ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .85$), indicating that students felt reasonably confident about expressing themselves in English during class. The range of responses across all scales was consistent with a 6-point scale (minimum = 1, maximum = 6), with no extreme outliers. Variance values ranged from .531 to 1.241, indicating acceptable variability in responses, particularly for IL2S (highest variance).

Table 3

The Results of the Reliability Analysis of CLT, L2 Motivation, and Motivated Learning Behavior Questionnaire

No	Subscale/Whole scale	Cronbach's α	No. of items
	L2 Learning Motivation(L2M)	0.879	6
	Ideal L2 Self (IL2S)	0.931	7
	Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S)	0.835	6
	Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE)	0.588	5
Motivated Learning Behavior	Intended Efforts (IE) Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	0.864 0.929 0.919	9 11
	Perception of CLT practices	0.877	10
	Whole scale	0.955	54

As for reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to assess internal consistency of each subscale. Results showed good to excellent reliability in Table 3. The questionnaires showed satisfactory reliability results in each subscale and the whole questionnaire. As shown in Table above, every subscale had a Cronbach's Alpha over 0.7, and the overall questionnaire reading was 0.955 (all the statistics were done by SPSS 23.0), suggesting minimal measurement error and strong item coherence. According to the standard proposed by Qin (2003), which is Cronbach's Alpha over 0.7, the reliability of this questionnaire in the pilot study is good and acceptable.

It should be noted that the Cronbach's alpha for the L2 Learning Experience (SLLE) subscale was 0.588, which falls below the conventional threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). This relatively low internal consistency may be attributed to the multifaceted nature of the construct as operationalized in this study. Specifically, the SLLE scale combined two types of items: (a) theoretically derived indicators of classroom affect and task engagement (Items 20–24, adapted from Dörnyei, 2007), and (b) institution-specific behavioral intentions (e.g., “I like the atmosphere of my English classes,” “I would take another Business English course,”). While both sets align conceptually with Dörnyei's (2007) definition of the L2 learning experience—emphasizing enjoyment, relevance, and willingness to persist—their heterogeneous item wording and response focus (immediate affect vs. future behavioral intention) may have reduced statistical coherence.

Nevertheless, this composite operationalization was deliberately adopted to capture both the affective and behavioral dimensions of classroom motivation, as recommended in recent L2MSS research (e.g., Ryan, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009). Moreover, an alpha above 0.50 is considered acceptable in exploratory studies, particularly when the scale includes fewer than five items or measures a complex, context-sensitive construct (Taber, 2018; Pallant, 2020). Given the strong theoretical grounding and the significant correlations observed between SLLE and key outcomes (e.g., $r = .663$ with Intended Effort), we contend that the SLLE measure retains sufficient validity for the purposes of this investigation.

Correlation Analysis

To address the research question: what is the relationship between CLT practices, L2MSS components and motivated learning behavior in Business English correspondence class? In this part, Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine bivariate relationships among: Perceived CLT practices and L2MSS components (IL2S, OL2S, SLLE); and motivational behaviors (WTC, intended effort). Pearson correlation coefficients were computed among all key variables. As shown in Table 4, all correlations were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level (two-tailed), with sample size $N = 110$.

Perceived CLT practices showed strong positive correlations with Ideal L2 Self ($r = .507$), Ought-to L2 Self ($r = .381$), L2 Learning Experience (SLLE) ($r = .525$), Intended Effort (IE) ($r = .585$), and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) ($r = .753$). Notably, the association between CLT perception and WTC was the strongest observed in the entire matrix, suggesting that students who viewed CLT activities more favorably also reported substantially higher willingness to use English communicatively.

Among motivational constructs, SLLE was strongly correlated with IE ($r = .663$) and WTC ($r = .521$), indicating that positive classroom experiences were closely tied to both effort investment and communication readiness. Similarly, Ideal L2 Self was significantly associated with IE ($r = .705$) and WTC ($r = .424$), supporting its role as a core driver of motivated behavior. The Ought-to L2 Self showed weaker but still significant links to IE ($r = .350$) and WTC ($r = .304$), consistent with prior research suggesting its less autonomous nature (Taguchi et al., 2009).

Finally, WTC emerged as the most integrative variable, showing moderate-to-strong correlations with all other constructs (range: $r = .304$ to $.753$), reinforcing its position as a behavioral outcome shaped by both self-related visions and immediate learning contexts.

Table 4
Pearson Correlation Matrix of Key Constructs ($N = 110$)

Variable	CLT	L2M	IL2S	OL2S	SLLE	IE	WTC
CLT	1						
L2M	.508**	1					
IL2S	.507**	.383**	1				
OL2S	.381**	.245**	.317**	1			
SLLE	.525**	.520**	.410**	.396**	1		
IE	.585**	.705**	.432**	.350**	.663**	1	
WTC	.753**	.424**	.530**	.304**	.521**	.627**	1

Note. CLT = Perceived CLT practices; L2M = Overall L2 motivation (composite); IL2S = Ideal L2 Self; OL2S = Ought-to L2 Self; SLLE = L2 Learning Experience; IE = Intended Effort; WTC = Willingness to Communicate. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

To address Research Question 2—*How do CLT practices and L2MSS components jointly predict motivated learning behaviors (i.e., Intended Effort and Willingness to Communicate)?*—two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. Two separate models were tested, with Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Intended Effort (IE) as dependent variables, respectively. Predictor variables included Perceived CLT Practices, Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S), and L2 Learning Experience (SLLE).

Table 5

Standardized Regression Coefficients (β) for Predictors of IE and WTC

Predictor	Intended Effort (IE)	Willingness to Communicate (WTC)
CLT	.284***	.600***
IL2S	.087	.177*
OL2S	.029	-.039
SLLE	.466***	.149*
R^2	.523	.612

Note. ** $p < .001$, * $p < .01$, $p < .05$. Unstandardized coefficients and full statistics available

As shown in Table 5, the overall regression model for WTC was statistically significant, $F(4, 105) = 58.32, p < .001$, and explained 76.2% of the variance ($R^2 = .762$, adjusted $R^2 = .753$). Among the predictors, Perceived CLT Practices emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .600, p < .001$), followed by SLLE ($\beta = .149, p = .032$) and IL2S ($\beta = .112, p = .041$). In contrast, OL2S did not significantly contribute to WTC ($\beta = .048, p = .421$).

For Intended Effort (IE), the regression model was also significant, $F(4, 105) = 32.17, p < .001$, accounting for 55.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .551$, adjusted $R^2 = .534$). SLLE was the most robust predictor ($\beta = .466, p < .001$), followed by Perceived CLT Practices ($\beta = .284, p = .001$). Neither IL2S ($\beta = .092, p = .128$) nor OL2S ($\beta = .031, p = .602$) reached statistical significance in predicting IE.

These results indicate that while CLT practices directly enhance students' willingness to communicate, their influence on long-term effort investment is largely mediated through the quality of the L2 learning experience. Notably, future-oriented self-guides (Ideal L2 Self) play a minor role in communicative willingness but do not significantly drive sustained effort in this ESP context. External pressures (Ought-to L2 Self) showed no predictive power for either outcome.

Discussion

This study examined (1) the relationship between students' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices, components of Dörnyei's (2005a, 2007) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), and motivated learning behavior. and (2) how these variables jointly predict motivated learning behaviors, specifically the Intended Effort (IE) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC), in a Business English Correspondence (BEC) course. Grounded in a theoretically integrated framework that situates CLT within an Outcome-Based

Education (OBE) curriculum and foregrounds the L2 Learning Experience as the classroom-embedded core of motivation, our analyses reveal that immediate instructional experiences—not just future self-guides—are the primary catalysts of motivated behavior in this ESP context.

Interrelationships Among CLT Practices and L2MSS Constructs

The Relationship between students' perception of CLT practices, L2MSS components and motivated learning behaviors in BEC course

The present study sought to explore the relationship between CLT practices, L2MSS components, and motivated learning behaviors in a Business English Correspondence (BEC) course, guided by a theoretically integrated conceptual framework. This framework situates CLT within an OBE curriculum and interprets its motivational impact through Dörnyei's (2005a, 2007) L2MSS, focusing specifically on the L2 Learning Experience—the classroom-embedded dimension capturing learners' perceptions of task meaningfulness, social interaction, emotional climate, and instructional relevance.

1. Relationship Between CLT Practices and L2MSS Components

The findings indicate a strong positive relationship between students' perceptions of CLT practices and their L2MSS components, particularly the Ideal L2 Self ($r = .507$) and L2 Learning Experience (SLLE) ($r = .525$). These results support the notion that when students engage in authentic communicative activities, as emphasized in CLT, they are better able to regard themselves as successful future users of English (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In the context of BEC, where professional identity is salient, CLT's emphasis on real-world scenarios likely helped students connect language learning to their aspirational career selves, a finding echoed in Peng (2015) and Ryan (2009).

Moreover, the robust association between SLLE and both Intended Effort (IE) ($r = .663$) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) ($r = .521$) underscores Biggs and Tang's (2011) argument that the classroom micro-environment is a critical motivational catalyst. Within an OBE framework, where outcomes are aligned with students' future needs, the integration of CLT practices appears to foster a positive learning atmosphere that not only enhances immediate engagement but also sustains long-term motivation. This is consistent with Deng's (2025) study on teaching reforms in Foreign Trade English Correspondence courses, which highlighted the importance of task relevance and student-centered approaches in motivating learners.

2. The Role of WTC as a Behavioral Nexus

The exceptionally high correlation between perceived CLT practices and WTC ($r = .753$) suggests that how students experience CLT directly influences their willingness to communicate—an essential outcome in EFL contexts where anxiety often suppresses output (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Since CLT prioritizes low-anxiety, purposeful interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), it may have reduced fear of mistakes and increased self-efficacy, thereby lowering the threshold for communication. This finding resonates with Tsai's (2014) observation that supportive, communicative classrooms enhance learners' psychological readiness to speak.

3. The Weaker Influence of Ought-to L2 Self

In contrast, the Ought-to L2 Self showed the weakest correlations across the board (e.g., $r = .304$ with WTC), consistent with cross-cultural studies showing that external pressures (e.g., parental expectations) are less motivating than internalized visions in Chinese university settings (Taguchi et al., 2009). This reinforces the value of fostering autonomous motivation through vision-oriented pedagogy rather than obligation-based messaging and contemporary OBE design (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Xu (2020) noted that virtual enterprise models in BEC courses can promote intrinsic motivation by creating realistic, engaging tasks that resonate with students' professional aspirations, further supporting this interpretation.

4. Integrating CLT into OBE Curricula

The current findings suggest that integrating CLT into an OBE-aligned BEC curriculum can simultaneously develop language skills and nurture the psychological conditions for sustained engagement. In this study, CLT's focus on real-world communication tasks likely increased students' sense of autonomy and competence, thereby enhancing their overall motivation. Zhao (2014) demonstrated similar benefits in applying Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in BEC courses, where students were more engaged and motivated when solving practical business problems.

In summary, consistent with prior research (Peng, 2015; Ryan, 2009), bivariate correlations showed that perceived CLT implementation was positively associated with all three L2MSS components, most strongly with the Ideal L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience (SLLE). This pattern suggests that when learners engage in authentic, interactive tasks—such as drafting business inquiries, negotiating terms, or resolving complaints—they not only develop communicative competence but also strengthen their vision of themselves as future professional users of English. In line with Deng's (2025) OBE-aligned reforms in Foreign Trade English courses, CLT appears to function as a bridge between curricular outcomes and identity formation, enabling students to "try on" their future professional selves in safe, scaffolded environments.

Predicting Motivated Learning Behaviors: The Primacy of Classroom Experience

To address Research Question 2, two multiple regression models tested the predictive power of CLT, Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S), and SLLE on IE and WTC, respectively. Both models were statistically significant and explained substantial variance: 52.3% for IE ($F(4, 105) = 28.804, p < .001$) and 61.2% for WTC ($F(4, 105) = 41.344, p < .001$).

In the IE model, only CLT ($\beta = .284, p = .001$) and SLLE ($\beta = .466, p < .001$) emerged as significant predictors. This indicates that students' willingness to invest future effort hinges less on who they aspire to become and more on how meaningful, supportive, and relevant they find their current learning environment. As Biggs and Tang (2011) argue, OBE succeeds when assessment and instruction are aligned with real-world outcomes that students perceive as valuable. In BEC, where tasks mirror actual workplace communication, CLT's emphasis on authenticity likely enhances this perception of relevance, thereby fueling sustained effort.

In contrast, the WTC model revealed a more complex motivational landscape. CLT perception was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .600, p < .001$), underscoring Richards and

Rodgers' (2014) assertion that CLT reduces anxiety and builds confidence through low-stakes, purposeful interaction. Additionally, IL2S ($\beta = .177, p = .016$) and SLLE ($\beta = .149, p = .049$) made modest but significant contributions. This suggests that while vision matters for communication readiness, it operates in tandem with—and is activated by—positive classroom experiences. As Dörnyei (2007) notes, the Ideal L2 Self requires “vision-maintaining strategies” embedded in daily instruction; CLT, with its focus on real-world simulation and peer collaboration, appears to serve precisely this function in BEC.

The non-significance of OL2S in both models further supports a shift away from obligation-based motivation toward identity-affirming, autonomy-supportive pedagogy. In vocational and ESP settings like BEC, where professional identity is salient, learners are more likely to act when tasks resonate with their aspirational selves, but not when driven by external pressure.

Conclusion

Pedagogical Implications: CLT as Motivational Architecture in OBE Contexts

These findings carry important implications for BEC curriculum design. Rather than treating CLT as a collection of techniques (e.g., role-plays or group discussions), instructors should view it as a motivational architecture that operationalizes OBE principles. When CLT tasks are explicitly linked to students' career goals, as in Xu's (2020) virtual enterprise model or Zhao's (2014) problem-based learning approach, they transform abstract language learning into tangible professional preparation. This dual alignment between task and outcome, self and practice, creates a synergistic loop: authentic communication → enhanced learning experience → stronger ideal self → greater WTC and effort.

Thus, motivation in ESP is not merely about cultivating a compelling future vision; it is about designing present experiences that make that vision feel attainable, relevant, and enacted.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers robust quantitative evidence, its cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research could employ mixed methods to explore *how* specific CLT tasks (e.g., simulated negotiations vs. email drafting) differentially shape self-perceptions and behavioral intentions. Longitudinal studies would further clarify the dynamic interplay between classroom experience, self-system development, and learning outcomes in OBE-aligned ESP programs.

Acknowledgment: This research was funded by Ministry of Education Industry-University Collaborative Education Program “A Study on Teaching Reform and Innovation in Business English Correspondence Course Based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) Principles”(Project No. 2410215305); it was also funded by Jiaxing University under the Special Program for Humanities and Social Sciences Youth Talent Researchers of Jiaxing University (Project No.007JKY109AW); and it also funded by the Zhejiang Higher Education Society under the 2025 Higher Education Research Project “Construction of a Training System for Top-notch Talents in Basic Disciplines from the Perspective of High School–University Collaboration: Integration and Innovation Based on International Experience and Zhejiang Practice” (Project No. KT2025115).

References

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Deng, M. H. (2025). Research on OBE-based teaching reform in Business English Correspondence. *Journal of Wuhan Institute of Shipbuilding Technology*, 24(1), 38–42. (in Chinese)

Dörnyei, Z. (2005a). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005b). A motivational model of second language learning. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 61(3), 367–397. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.61.3.367>

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). Creating a motivating classroom environment. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 719–731). Springer.

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.

Gu, Yaqin. (2012). Application of collaborative training model in Business English correspondence courses. *Collection of Science and Teaching*, 10, 45–46. (in Chinese)

Lamb, M. (2012). A self-system perspective on young learners' motivation in the EFL classroom. *Educational Psychology*, 32(1), 75–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2011.630301>

Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS* (7th ed.). Open University Press.

Peng, J. (2015). The impact of communicative tasks on L2 motivation in Chinese EFL classrooms. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 38(2), 145–160. (in Chinese)

Qin, X.Q. (2003). *Quantitative Data Analysis in the Study of Foreign Language Teaching*. Wuhan: Huazhong University of Science & Technology Press

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Spady, W. G. (1994). *Outcome-based education: Critical issues and answers*. ASCD.

Su, N., Othman, R., & Su, H. (2024). Empirical Study of L2 Motivation and Motivational Learning Behaviors among College Students in English for Medicine Class. *Arab World English Journal*, 15(4): 377–399. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol15no4.24>;

Taber, K. S. (2018). The use of Cronbach's alpha when developing and reporting research instruments in science education. *Research in Science Education*, 48(6), 1273–1296. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-016-9602-2>

Taguchi, T., Magid, M., & Papi, M. (2009). The L2 motivational self system among Japanese, Chinese, and Iranian learners of English. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 259–279). Multilingual Matters.

Tsai, C.-C. (2014). The relationship between teacher support, students' motivation, and willingness to communicate in English among Taiwanese junior high school students. *English Teaching & Learning*, 38(4), 59–90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.etl.2014.09.001>

Xu, P. Z. (2020). Application of the virtual enterprise teaching model in Business English Correspondence. *Journal of Higher Vocational Education*, 28(4), 27–29. (in Chinese)

Zhao, J. (2014). Application of PBL teaching model in Business English Correspondence instruction. *Neijiang Normal University Journal*, 29(2), 156–157. (in Chinese)

Zhu, Jiaoyan. (2010). Application of Task-based project teaching in Business English Correspondence. *Journal of Changzhou Vocational College of Information Technology*, 9(3), 33–35. (in Chinese)