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Capstone Design Based Business English Course to Develop Intercultural Communicative Competence*

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The purpose of this study was to implement Capstone Design to a business English course to develop intercultural communicative competence in college English learners of Korea. Data sources were from communicative needs analysis of business professionals and the pre-and post set of a questionnaire survey on intercultural communicative competence. Interviews and surveys were conducted from business professionals (N=5) and student participants (N=30) respectively. SPSS was used for data analyses. The findings from the study are summarized as 1) business professionals put stress on respect for cultural difference and the development of productive English skills to be successful in business communication, 2) the Capstone Design based business English course is regarded as effective, since it allows learners to maintain and establish a complex relationship, which is crucial to business success, 3) Among factors to measure the intercultural communicative competence, 3 factors, respect for cultural difference, interaction confidence, and interaction attentiveness had significantly increased throughout the instruction. Lastly, instructional implications for the classroom and suggestions for further research were also discussed.

[Capstone Design/business English/intercultural business communication/ intercultural communicative competence]

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the importance of being competent in intercultural

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communication is stressed and an increased number of studies on the development of intercultural communicative competence were found in the literature on English language learning (Byram, 1997; Chang, 2012; Hadley, 2001; Kramsch, 1993; Paige, Lange & Yershova, 1999; Scollon, 1999). According to Kramsch (1993), acquiring the target language culture (C2) plays a role as the fundamental competence in language acquisition. Without C2 acquisition, successful communication is not fully expected, because there is no room for doubt that language learners are exposed to the intercultural communication environment. Business communication is no longer the exception for C2 acquisition and advocates of business English learning pay more attention to studies of intercultural business communication. Wang (2009) insisted that teaching objectives of business English courses, which are designed to train business professionals, are for learners to be able to develop both business knowledge and intercultural communicative competence. Gibson (2001) also introduced several teaching methods to develop intercultural business communication on the basis of intertwined relationships between culture and language acquisition. Business English learners are requested to practice how to understand and solve communication challenges that occur within existing intercultural business relationship (Saatci, 2008). The difference between intercultural communication and intercultural business communication is not just that the latter takes place in business. Intercultural business communication requests for learners to understand the relationship between business and culture in a particular environment. Business English learners need more practice to create a new environment out of a synergy of culture, communication, and business (Lovitt, 1999).

Regarding the critical role of intercultural communication in business English learning, the present study is designed to propose an effective business reading course design, which regards the development of intercultural business communicative competence as a premier goal of the instruction. According to Kim (2011), the Capstone Design course is effective in providing learners the opportunity to work with real world situations, open-ended problems, and interdisciplinary projects. While most Capstone Design courses are found in the field of engineering studies, Kim (2011) proposed a Capstone Design courses for students of humanities and reported that Capstone Design is effective to facilitate problem solving skills and creative thinking. The benefit of conducting Capstone Design shares the outcomes of problem-based learning and task-based learning teaching since it allows language learners to create their own solution and lead the learning process. Thus the present study is designed to implement the Capstone Design procedure to a business English reading course and investigate the effect of incubated instructions on the development of intercultural communicative competence. In order to accomplish the research purpose, the following questions were used to guide the study.

Q1: What are practical communicative concerns and needs of business professionals?
Q2: How is the course design described if Capstone Design is incorporated into the business English instruction?
Q3: What's the effect of Capstone Design based on business English instruction on the development of intercultural communicative competence?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Intercultural Business Communication

Intercultural business communication is defined as the exchange of meaning in business among individuals or groups from different cultural background (Gibson, 2001; Sim & Kim, 2016; Tuleja, 2005; Varner, 2000). Since knowledge of language alone will not guarantee success in an international business environment, it is requested for business English learners to develop intercultural communicative competence. According to Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence is promoted by the development of attitudes, knowledge, language skills and cultural awareness. It is widely accepted that abundant exposure to C2 called *immersion* can be the best approach to develop intercultural communicative competence. However, in business situations, business professionals in such environments with complexities of establishing and maintaining relationships are mostly encountering ill-structured, complex and abstract challenges. Thus, intercultural business communication is not the issue to look for in terms of differences in participants' culture; rather it is suggested that participants should change their perceptions about different cultures in the workplace (Varner, 2000). People with competence in intercultural business environments are able to adjust their views in light of new evidence. They take into account the national culture, the general business culture, and the specific corporate culture along with the individual communication style to be successful in intercultural business communication. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) insisted that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is divided into English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) in accordance with the context where English is used. Donna (2000) used business English as the umbrella term of EGBP and ESBP, since business English is a mixture of specific professions and general ability to communicate in the workplace. Chan (2014) made suggestions for how a business English course could be improved as follows:

- teachers' feedback on spoken practice activities
- more spoken practices via presentations and in-class activities

- teachers' feedback on written practice activities
- authentic writing samples from the workplace

As Chan mentioned above, teachers' feedback on learners' spoken and written practices are encouraged to meet the communicative needs of business English learners. Studies to analyze the communicative needs in business English found that the use of productive skills in English such as speaking and writing have been playing a significant role in the workplace of several places in the world such as Malaysia (Chan, 2014), Hong Kong (Evans, 2012), Thailand (Pattanapichet & Chinokul, 2011) and Australia (Trinder, 2013). Therefore the refined course design of business English is requested to reflect communicative needs of the intercultural workplace in accordance with curriculum, in-class activities, and assessments.

2. Capstone Design

Capstone Design is defined as the process of devising a system, component, or process to meet the desired needs in the field of engineering. It is a decision-making process in which basic science and engineering science are applied to convert resources optimally to meet a stated object (McKenzie, Trevisan, Davis & Beyerlein, 2004). Duston, Todd, Magleby and Sorensen (1997) also claimed that Capstone Design courses act as a mechanism for students to understand practical skills. The fundamental concept of Capstone Design, which engages students in team-based learning and problem-based learning, encourages them to use their knowledge and skills through the process of learning. The following 10 steps are recommended for Capstone Design; 1) identifying needs, 2) defining the problem, 3) planning the project, 4) gathering information, 5) developing concepts, 6) evaluating alternatives, 7) selecting the best alternative, 8) detailing design, 9) documenting the design, and 10) implementing the design (Duston, Todd, Magleby & Sorensen, 1997).

Astin (1993; 1999) identified good practices of Capstone Design for undergraduate education, and they are as follows. First, it is important to have fequnt contacts between a student and an instructor through small size seminars. Second, prompt feedback with suggestions for improvement is expected for the capstone. Third, the capstone course has to be designed to facilitate the development of an active learning community through in-class exercises, which allow learners to develop independency, broader critical thinking, personal and social responsibility, and the integration of intellectual and practical skills. There are several instances to use Capstone Design as a final project of long-term program or semesters, which allows learners to accumulate their knowledge acquired from the previous instructions. Spring (2012) introduced a capstone year-long

experience in China as the final stage of the Chinese language learning program, which is comprised of direct enrollment of content courses of language learning curriculum for specific purposes. Bremner, Peirson-Smith, Johns and Bhatia (2014) also proposed the capstone course as a professional communication project and insisted on a collaborative writing course as a capstone course for students enrolled in a year-long workplace-focused group communication project. Patretti (2008) suggested teaching communication through Capstone Design and collaborated situated learning for engineering students to develop communicative competence in their workplace. According to Richards and Rogers (2014), task-based language teaching is defined as "an approach to language education in which students are given functional tasks that invite them to focus primarily on meaning exchange and to use language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes" (p.1). In sum, regarding the elements of team-based activities, process-based learning, and authentic and real-world teaching materials, a Capstone Design course shares common features with project-based language learning, task-based language learning and problem-based language learning approaches and methods.

III. METHODS

1. Overview of Business English Course

In the present study, the business English reading course, which is a- 3-credit course, is proposed as one of the E-Special Programs, which is comprised of 15-credit business English courses. An E-Special Program called 'Business English Track' which includes 5 courses; business English listening, business English speaking, business English reading, business English writing and an OPIC preparation course. Most participants of the E-Special Program, especially in the 'Business English Track', have higher motivation and concerns about business English learning since the program is proposed as an elective courses. The program is offered only for business and foreign language major students. Regarded as the capstone course, the business English reading course is designed for junior or senior students and prepares learners to use accumulated knowledge gained from the required English courses from general studies and other elective English courses.

2. Participants

First, for the communication needs analysis, 5 business professionals were invited to the interview and the invited professionals have more than 10 years of working

experience. They work for businesses that use English frequently. Table 1 shows the details of business professionals.

TABLE 1

Demographic Information of Business Professionals (N=5)

	Affiliation & Job Title	Degree (Major)	Period (Years)	Remarks
A	American Consulting Company & Manager	MBA	14	Working experience at a major domestic company for 10 years.
B	Domestic IT Company & Executive Director	BA (IT Management)	15	Overseas sales
C	Domestic Major Company & Manager	BA (Architecture)	13	A sojourning employee for two years
D	Domestic Major Company & Manager	BA (IT Management)	12	Working experience at a foreign -affiliated company for 10 years
E	Foreign-Affiliated Drug Company	BA (Business Administration)	12	Domestic Sales

For the questionnaire survey, learner participants enrolled in the business English reading course were asked to complete the pre-and post set of questionnaires, measuring learners' intercultural sensitivity. As mentioned before, as the course is designed for junior and senior students, 15 junior and 15 senior students (N=30) were recruited. The gender ratio is reported as 18 male and 12 female students. 30 students majored in foreign language and business. There are 9 out of 30 (30%) students who reported the experience of staying abroad and the average TOEIC score of participants was 652 out of 990. Participants reported no experience in the field of business.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

For the communication needs analysis in business, Interview Question(IQ) was formed to ask to five business professionals individually. IQs are as follows.

IQ1: What are some situations in which you experienced cultural differences?

IQ2: What are some skills helpful when communicating across cultures?

IQ3: What kind of education do you think universities should provide for their students to acquire these skills?

Total of 15 Professional Interview Slips (PIS), recorded from five interviewees with three questions, were collected. The content analysis was conducted with 3-round of

reviews in accordance with keyword searching, grouping and frequency analysis. For the research questions 2, the present study suggests the Capstone Design based business English course in accordance with the findings from the literature review and the recommended steps to build the Capstone Design courses by Duston, Todd, Magleby and Sorensen (1997). To confirm the effects of the Capstone Design based business English reading course on the development of intercultural communicative competence, a pre-and post set of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) (Chen & Starosa, 2000) were administrated. The ISS consists of 24 items with 5 sub-categories, which are 1) interaction engagement, 2) respect for cultural difference, 3) interaction confidence, 4) interaction enjoyment, and 5) interaction attentiveness. The collected data were analyzed by SPSS statistics ver. 17.0.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

1. Communicative Needs in Business

At first, the analysis of Professional Interview Slips about the first question (PIS-1) reported professionals having experienced situations of cultural differences due to a lack of knowledge about the working environment, the contract making manners, and the use of appropriate language at the face-to-face business meetings.

> "*The working conditions are different from Korean companies. While working conditions are impacted by the hierarchial relationship in Korean companies, there are more interactions among employees in the foreign-affiliated companies.*" (PIS-1-A)

> "*After making a contract, the terms and conditions of negotiations can change when working with foreign companies*" (PIS-1-E)

Next, the Professional Interview Slip about the second question (PIS-2) revealed that the most effective communicative skill is an attitude over the business conversation.

> "*Business English learners need to develop listening skills to fully pay attention with respect.*" (PIS-2-B)

> "*You need to lead the conversation to keep the atmosphere friendly and informal.*" (PIS-2-C)

"*Open your mind. Let yourself interact with others. Be frank with your colleague.*" (PIS-2-E)

Finally, the Professional Interview Slip about the third question (PIS-3) reported the importance of productive English skills in business English communication, which focuses on presentations and writing competence in English.

"*Learners in business English courses have set the goal to develop English presentation skills.*" (PIS-3-A)

"*We need the business English course to practice more discussion and debate.*" (PIS-3-B)

"*I think that business English writing instruction is necessary to develop accurate English competence*" (PIS-3-C)

2. Capstone Design based Business English Course

To develop research question 2, the present study proposes Capstone Design based Business English instruction in accordance with communicative needs analysis and literature reviews on business English and Capstone Design courses. As mentioned in the literature review, according to Duston, Todd, Magleby and Sorensen (1997), it is recommended that the Capstone Design course follows the following 10 steps: 1) identifying needs, 2) defining the problem, 3) planning the project, 4) gathering information, 5) developing concepts, 6) evaluating alternatives, 7) selecting best alternative, 8) detailing design, 9) documenting the design, and 10) implementing the design. In addition, regarding the suggestions by Bound and Feltti (1997) and Kim (2011), the 3-stage procedure of the Capstone Design—1) diagnosing the problem, 2) analyzing the problem and 3) solving the problem—is incorporated with business English reading instructions. The textbook, *Collins' English for Business* (Osborn, 2012) was examined and the 15-week course schedule was assigned. Then 4 Capstone Design projects were developed for this study. Each project was conducted as a team project, which includes 5 members on each team. The capstone projects are described as follows: 1) compose a business email in English, 2) apply for a job that matches your vision, 3) Promote sales by using social media and 4) Make a presentation about a competitive company website. The following Table 2 showed the details of a syllabus of a Capstone Design based business English course.

TABLE 2

Capstone Design based Business English Course

Week	Topic	Capstone Project	Task (Business Content)	Language Focus
1	Diagnosis Test	Compose the business email in English	Grouping students, test & survey	• Managing people • Negotiating the problem
2	English for Email		Managing your email inbox	
3			Dealing with group e-mails	
4	English for Doing Business	Apply for a job that matches with your vision	Understanding organization	• Applying for a job • Introduce yourself
5			Managing schedule and budgets	
6			Reading agendas and minutes	
7			Reading CVs & Cover letters	
8			Review units (Midterm Exam)	
9	Marketing & Advertising	Promote sales by using social media	Browsing advertisements	• Summarizing information • Marketing & advertising products
10			Exploring product and service brochures	
11			Exploring the company website	
12			Exploring social media	
13	English for business media and books	Make the presentation about the competitive company website	Exploring the business media website	• Summarizing information • Giving presentations
14			Reading business blogs	
15			Review Units (Final Exam)	

Table 3 provides detailed instructional procedures of Week 2. On that day, students were asked to complete the first capstone project, "Compose a business email in English." During the instruction, students followed the 3-stage capstone procedure; diagnosing the problem , analyzing the problem, and solving the problem by participating in activities guided by the instructor. All activities were conducted through team-based learning and the main task was to manage your email inbox.

TABLE 3

Example of Instructional Procedure for Week 2

Stages	In-class Capstone Design activities	Examples of Student Responses Task: Manage your email inbox
Input (Conditioning)	Diagnosing the problem	1. The instructor introduces his/her email and explains the terms and use of the email inbox 2. Students read the information about the email inbox from the textbook. 3. Students are asked to check their email and compare the differences and similarities with others

Process	Analyzing the problem	1. Students read the titles of emails in their inbox. 2. Students try to put emails in order, regarding their priority 3. Students rearrange emails in their inbox
Outcomes	Solving the problem	1. Check and compare the order of items in the inbox with the information in the book. 2. Share the ideas with partners or group members. 3. Present the findings in the classroom.

3. Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence

The 15-week business English course is conducted on the basis of Capstone Design projects and the effects of the instruction were confirmed by measuring the change of intercultural sensitivity. As shown in Table 4, the respect for cultural difference (t=2.475, p=.016), the interaction confidence (t=-4.424, p=.000) and the interaction attentiveness (t=-3.250, p=.002) showed significant increase throughout the semester.

TABLE 4

A Paired Comparison of Intercultural Sensitivity

	Items		*M*	*N*	*Std. D*	*t*	*p*
1	Interaction engagement	Pre	3.5493	30	.67164	-1.381	.172
		Post	3.6761	30	.67135		
2	Respect for cultural difference	Pre	4.1268	30	.67463	2.475	.016*
		Post	3.8451	30	.87256		
3	Interaction confidence	Pre	2.6338	30	.76044	-4.424	.000**
		Post	3.0845	30	.75112		
4	Interaction enjoyment	Pre	3.1408	30	.66108	-1.040	.302
		Post	3.2676	30	.90960		
5	Interaction attentiveness	Pre	3.0423	30	.61960	-3.250	.002**
		Post	3.3521	30	.73870		

*p<.05 , **p<.01

4. Discussions

Firstly, in the communicative needs analysis of business professionals on practical English use in business, they agreed on the importance of changing attitude and perspective toward the individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds to be successful in business. According to Varner (2000), to make an intercultural business successful, professionals need to develop an intercultural business communication

strategy along with business strategy, intercultural strategy, and communication strategy. Instead of practicing business English expressions, learners need to build self-reference criterion so that business English learners are able to build strong competence as business conditions change. As Byram (1997) mentioned, intercultural communicative competence consists of attitudes, knowledge, language skills and cultural awareness and business professionals in this study agreed on the importance of having a respectful attitude toward different cultures and the development of productive business English competence. Thus, the study aligns with the goal of business English reading instruction is "*Be able for learners to develop business English reading competence to communicate in intercultural business situations.*"

Secondly, most capstone courses were widely conducted for engineering students as a final project course, but the present study proposed the model to implement Capstone Design for language learning courses. The major benefit of incorporating Capstone Design in the business English reading course is to facilitate learners to develop independency, broader critical thinking, personal and social responsibility and the integration of intellectual and practical skills (Astin, 1993; 1999). It shares the benefits of conducting communicative language teaching's notional-functional syllabus and task-based language teaching, which focuses on the notional and functional words and expression learning and task embedded instructional procedure (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). According to Table 2, Capstone Design based instruction reflects communicative language learning and task based learning and students were encouraged to complete four capstone projects which required for them to use accumulated English competence, business competence, and intercultural communicative competence.

Thirdly, the paired comparison of degrees of intercultural sensitivity reported the significant increase throughout the semester and it implies the intercultural mind-set was recognized by business English learners. The intercultural mind-set plays a crucial role because intercultural communicative competence is conceptualized as the ability to develop a positive attitude toward different cultures (Friz, MÖllenberg, & Chen, 2002). By conducting capstone projects, participants were encouraged to focus on the process of learning, which is the benefit occurring from "the learning-by-doing approach of group projects" (Hansen, 2006). Instead of stressing the knowledge gain, participants in this study acquired intercultural communicative competence, which is the precondition for successful intercultural business communication (Lovitt, 1999).

Lastly, the importance of business reading was confirmed from the study. Through result of communication needs analysis, productive language skills such as presentation and writing skills were encouraged for business English learners to acquire throughout

the business English courses. However, by incorporating Capstone Design to the business English reading course, learners conducted capstone projects, which encourage that learners integrate their reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. Thus, capstone projects made business English reading course more interactive and collaborative business English reading instructions.

V. CONCLUSION

In the present study, a business English course was redesigned on the basis of Capstone Design. In order to accomplish the research purpose, the communicative needs analysis, literature review on intercultural business communication, and capstone design courses were conducted. Then, the study proposed the Capstone Design based business English course/ reading on the basis of capstone projects, which expects learners to develop intercultural communicative competence. The present study has some implications for further studies. First, the study provides the model to include the business professional's view of learning. In the curriculum design, needs analysis of learners is widely accepted and no one denies that business English courses include practical use of English in business. Although a limited number of professionals were invited to the interview for the study, it is still worth listening to the concerns and ideas of these business professionals during the curriculum design stage. Next, the present study suggests using a Capstone Design based business English course to gain benefits for English learners. The present study tried to incorporate Capstone Design with business English courses and it implies the conceptual model that allows more capstone projects for English learners. Lastly, the study reveals the blended teaching method that allows the development of intercultural communicative competence for language learners. Among several direct method of providing C2 information and resources as a form of textbook or multimedia resources, the present study proposes the Capstone Design itself a resource that is capable for learners to discover and experience C2 in the classroom. For the future studies, the study has a limitation to confirm the effect of Capstone Design on the Business English instruction. The present study only concerns the change of intercultural sensitivity of learners, thus the study suggests further investigation on affective and academic factors of learners that strengthen the effect of business English courses.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Language: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary

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