

BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR INTERNATIONAL WORKING PROFESSIONALS:
A VIRTUAL TRAINING FOCUSING ON INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

by

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DEDICATION

To my dearest sister, Young-Jae Chung,
who invited me into the world of teaching and learning,
who pushed me to listen and reflect,
who inspired me to persevere and rise no matter the circumstances,

and

To the international professionals all around the world,
for their drive,
for their voice,
for their strength,
for inspiring the world for a united future.

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ABSTRACT

Without intercultural communication skills, an unbalanced power-dynamic will continue to affect the success of individuals, organizations, and societies in the global market. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed an urgent demand for virtual learning opportunities for working professionals. This instrumental qualitative case study documented the experiences of a group of international working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training. Drawing on intercultural communicative competence and experiential e-learning models, the study documented innovative practices designing and implementing the training, the experiences of the working professionals who participated in the training, and how the training enhanced the working professionals' intercultural communication skills. Data collected included online questionnaires, artifacts, videoconference interviews, and the research journal. Data analysis for the study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process.

As a result, dissertation findings identified innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training program for working professionals centering attention on intercultural communication. The study bridged the gap between existing knowledge and instructional practices teaching English to speakers of other languages. Incorporating experiential learning was a novel insight into improving the theoretical models utilized in the study. Learner confidence as an important factor in improving language and intercultural communication was another notable finding.

I. INTRODUCTION AND STUDY DESIGN

I remember the first few weeks at work, I used all the words I learned in GRE. For example, instead of saying 'stubborn,' I would say 'mulish' or 'recalcitrant.' Everyone was like, 'why are you being pretentious?' I thought those were normal words! (Tori, University Instructor from Nigeria)

Being a foreigner, I have to be cognizant of humor most of the time. Actually, I remember I was about to say a joke, but I realized I should not say it. It was stupid from my part to even thinking about it. I must be sensitive about how humor can be translated differently here. (Hugo, Researcher from Brazil)

I sometimes find difficulties in communicating in English because I don't have enough cultural knowledge. Spending about two years in the States when I was pursuing my master's degree helped, but still, I feel like I have so much to learn! I know the language; but I realize that there is a certain barrier that I cannot really overcome. (Yeri, English Teacher from Korea)

The opening vignettes come from interviews with three international working professionals for a class assignment during summer 2020. The main goal of the assignment was to document the participants' perspectives navigating professional English communication on the job. Five working professionals from different nationalities (Brazil, Nigeria, and Korea), involved in job duties requiring the use of English, and with proficient oral English communication skills volunteered to take an online questionnaire; three of them also participated in a 45-minute videoconference interview.

As illustrated in the vignettes above, international working professionals navigate unique experiences when it comes to communicating in English for work. Even as proficient English speakers, they are constantly having to negotiate their skills and identities to interact effectively in English. For example, their life history, experience, and cultural knowledge and values are not synonymous with the English culture as well

as the expectations or values held by the organization or the field of profession (Clausen, 2007). For successful communication to take place, international working professionals must recreate or reconceptualize their affective, social, and cultural skills depending on who and in which context they are interacting.

Such challenges are well-documented in existing literature (Cheng et al., 2020; Henderson et al., 2016; Holmes, 2000; Lum et al., 2014). However, much of the discussion focuses on experiences of individuals who are integrating into a new job, new immigrants with low English proficiency, or academic students. There is little research examining experiences of international working professionals with proficient English skills. Additionally, although a large body of literature recognized the vital role intercultural communication skills play in navigating cultural challenges (Jameson, 2007; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005), intercultural communication is underexplored in business English teaching practices, especially outside of the academic settings. Therefore, this dissertation bridges the gap between existing knowledge and instructional practices teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and identifies innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training that centers on intercultural communication skills. Please see Appendix A for the definitions of relevant terms.

Statement of the Problem

In the era of globalization, English language competency is a vital asset at the individual and societal levels. For developing countries, it is a critical economic tool influencing the rise of income per capita and quality of life factors such as standards of living and life expectancy (McCormick, 2013; United Nations Development Programme,

2018). In developed economies, English skills provide a strong competitive edge (British Council, 2013). Recognizing such enormous value, many organizational systems expect a high level of English proficiency among international working professionals (Alali, 2019; Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009), and many have already successfully met this demand. For example, according to the 2019 Ethnologue Summary by Population Size, 1.7 billion people speak the English language, and 68% of them are non-native English speakers (Eberhad et al., 2019). However, when it comes to applying their knowledge and skills in the field for work-related purposes, a growing body of research reports international working professionals experiencing various challenges due to ineffective intercultural communication skills. For instance, they experience frustration and confusion, feel demotivated to continue learning, and in severe cases, lose business opportunities as well as their jobs due to cultural miscommunication, stereotyping, or accidental offensive behaviors (Badrkoochi, 2018; Gajšt, 2014; Toprak Yildiz, 2019). While numerous reasons are attributed to such a phenomenon, as explained in the following paragraphs, several key issues remain unknown.

As working professionals, participating in professional development opportunities can be challenging for multiple reasons. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020), 28% of adults claimed they do not participate in trainings due to scheduling conflicts and work commitments, 15 % due to family responsibilities, 16% due to a lack of financial resources, and 12% due to inconvenient time and location of the training. This is true for many professionals, particularly for international population. Day-to-day responsibilities, working in different time zones, different levels of responsibilities connected to their roles at work, and different degrees

of organizational support can be potential barriers for their participation in professional development opportunities.

Culture is considered a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Tomalin, 2008). Failing to foster all five skills in an English language course will have a costly impact. Because English proficiency of working professionals is closely tied with their livelihood, ineffective intercultural communication skills can lead to losing career opportunities, or in extreme cases, their jobs and income (Gajšt, 2014). Economic loss at the individual and organization levels will increase the rate of unemployment and loss of opportunities in the global market (British Council, 2013). For instance, the total U.S. international trade in 2019 accounted for \$5.6 trillion U.S. dollars (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Without intercultural communication skills, individuals, organizations, and societies will be at a cultural and economic disadvantage.

English language courses generally neglect the diversity of Englishes and the different cultures associated with the language (Oñate & Amador, 2013). Especially in business English training, the learning content tends to heavily focus on the linguistic and cultural rules of the “standard” British or American English (Nickerson, 2005; Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018). Additionally, cultural topics are often taught separately as a collection of facts without linking them to the English language or using examples that do not correspond to the real world (Tseng, 2002; Godwin-Jones, 2013). According to Sercu (2002), most culture-learning tasks are equivalent to a “cultural foot bath requiring only low levels of involvement with the cultural content offered” (p. 70). Such an approach promotes an unrealistic concept of culture being a tangible object and the idea that intercultural communication skills can be taught as a complete course instead of being

developed over time (Balboni & Caon, 2014; Bennett, 2013). Communication in general is a complex process. Learning culture and language separately will not only impede learners' process of constructing meanings in their own way but also create an unrealistic image that communication occurs in a vacuum without any influence by the context in which it takes place.

Over the past few decades, a large body of research identified experiential learning, particularly studying abroad, as the ideal approach to developing intercultural communication skills (Guo, 2015; Koyonagi, 2018; Williams, 2005). Although directly experiencing culture is a promising form of experiential learning, working professionals cannot be expected to afford the associated cost, time, and strain on their personal and professional responsibilities to physically travel abroad and participate in professional development opportunities (Boye, 2016; Harnisch, 2014; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2017). Interactive simulation and on-the-job learning are other forms of experiential learning that do not require physical traveling. However, incorporating these methods demand collaborative efforts and organizational, technological, and financial support that can become potential barriers for instructors to provide an effective and timely training program.

Addressing the various challenges, virtual learning has proved as a promising medium to incorporate experiential learning and to offer flexible professional development opportunities for working professionals. The myriad of benefits of virtual learning includes being able to deliver training at low cost, promote self-directed learning, and offer flexibility of time, place, space, and learning styles (Gu, 2016; Perry et al., 2015; Tadimeti, 2014; Wang, 2018). However, most virtual training for working

professionals tend to center around standardized assessment and one-way knowledge transmission approach where there are limited opportunities to interact and develop soft skills (Avgousti, 2018; Gu, 2016; Tadimetri, 2014; Wang, 2018). The most frequently explored experiential learning approaches in a virtual learning environment appears to be simulations (Canhoto & Murphy, 2016; Perry et al., 2015). This approach, however, can be costly in terms of time, resources, and technological capacity. Moreover, although not having real consequences for mistakes can create a safe learning environment, it does not correspond with the real-life situations, producing inaccurate results (Gray, 2002).

The field of TESOL explored virtual learning practices to develop intercultural communication skills (Baker, 2013; Liaw, 2006; Waugh, 2013). However, a vast majority of existing studies utilized a quantitative approach, reflecting a standardized assessment model. Qualitative studies predominantly documented experiences of undergraduate and graduate students in formal higher education context, discounting the additional barriers that working professionals might encounter when participating in a similar program (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Kovačić, Bubaš, & Orehovački, 2012; Teodorescu, 2015; Thorne, Black, & Skyes, 2009). Furthermore, there is a dearth of literature or resources discussing pedagogical implications for virtual instructional practices outside of academic settings and incorporating experiential learning approaches.

All in all, not bridging the gap between existing knowledge and practices related to virtual instruction was costly during the recent COVID-19 global pandemic. Constraints on physical traveling and in-contact interactions have negatively affected formal and non-formal institutions that were not equipped with the appropriate capacity or infrastructure to deliver virtual courses or support adult learners appropriately in a

virtual environment (OECD, 2020). For practitioners, limited resources and training regarding virtual instruction strategies to provide different kinds of support for learners increased their challenges navigating the modification of the face-to-face learning to virtual environments; some practitioners even experienced loss of employment (Lasby, 2020). The recent crisis revealed that socioeconomic wellbeing and social mobility of global communities can be difficult to reach without flexible, learner-centered solutions for adults (James & Thériault, 2020). Therefore, this dissertation is timely and has immediate potential to benefit various level of stakeholders. This dissertation bridges the gap between existing knowledge and instruction practices and identifies innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual business English training for working professionals that centers on intercultural communication skills.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study are:

1. What are innovative practices designing and implementing a virtual international business English training?
2. What are the experiences of working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training?
3. How can a virtual international business English training enhance the intercultural communication skills of working professionals?

Purpose and Significance

This dissertation documents the experiences of a group of international working professionals who use English for work-related tasks participating in a virtual international business English training. Through the participants' experiences and

suggestions, this study identifies innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual business English training program for international working professionals that centers attention on intercultural communication skills, which is presented in chapter 5. Study findings contribute to narrowing the gap in the literature advancing the current state of knowledge in three different areas: adult learning, virtual learning, and TESOL. This study will launch boundless achievements in knowledge and practice.

Intercultural communication is crucial in today's globalized world. The more divergent the cultural values, perspectives, customs, and behaviors, the more the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding increases (Warren & Lee, 2020). Especially in professional settings, being able to engage in intercultural communication successfully is not merely about appreciating cultural diversity of the colleagues or business partners. It plays an important role in the organizational functions and success in creating a healthy community among international professionals (Kegeyan, 2016; Kei & Yazdanifard, 2015). Without intercultural communication skills, individuals and organizations face conflicts due to miscommunication or cultural insensitivities. An unbalanced power-dynamic will continue to affect international working professionals' success in the globalized work environment. Furthermore, poor intercultural communication skills can create potential barriers to advance economically from the global market.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed an urgent demand for virtual learning opportunities for working professionals. While it is an unfortunate circumstance that pushed the modification of the face-to-face learning experience to be virtual, the crisis has revealed the potential of virtual learning expanding opportunities for working professionals to continue to learn and develop their skills without straining their personal

and professional obligations. People who were skeptical are seeing the benefits and becoming willing to continue learning virtually. More than ever, it is crucial to ensure virtual learning experiences to be of high-quality, not simply as a replacement medium. However, despite the growing body of research on virtual training of business English and intercultural communication skills, there is still much work that needs to be done. This study is essential to moving the research in the right direction in preparing for a new era of virtual learning.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research aids in achieving an understanding of “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meanings they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). Analogous to this perspective, Stake (2010, p. 15) noted that qualitative research is *interpretive*, viewing the meanings of human affairs from different perspectives; *experiential*, focusing on observations and naturalistic setting; *situational*, emphasizing the importance of context; and *personalistic*, working to understand and honor diverse perceptions. As such, qualitative research allows an examination of the topic of inquiry with a wealth of detailed information on real-life context, different from the quantitative approach that aims to evaluate and determine the effectiveness of an applied intervention (Merriam, 1998). The current study, therefore, employed a qualitative approach to gain in-depth meaning from the study participants’ experiences.

This instrumental qualitative case study documents the experiences of a group of international working professionals who use English for work-related tasks participating in a virtual international business English training. The goal of the dissertation is to

bridge the gap between existing knowledge and instructional practices teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). With the need for globalization and access to resources, communicating with other culture especially in the business setting is an urgent demand of our times. Considering the challenges that the recent COVID-19 has imposed on working professionals and travel limitations, this study is especially timely and imperative.

Theoretical Framework

The study framework serves as a lens to examine the topic of inquiry, guide the data analysis process, and expand the knowledge base (Collins & Stockton, 2018). According to Merriam (2009), the theoretical framework is the underlying structure, the scaffold or frame supporting the design of the study (p. 66). Therefore, the theoretical framework guiding this dissertation integrates (1) intercultural communicative competence and (2) experiential e-learning.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) refers to “the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language” (Byram, 1997, p. 71). That is, an individual who has developed this competence is capable of understanding diversity of cultures, including his or her own, and using this understanding, skills, and attitudes appropriately for effective communication with people from linguistically and culturally different backgrounds (Chun, 2011; López-Rocha, 2016). To help individuals develop ICC, Byram (1997) emphasized the teaching of five components:

Attitudes demonstrating curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other culture and belief about one's own

Knowledge of social groups and their practices in their own and other individual's country

Skills of interpreting and relating a document or event from another culture to their own culture

Skills of discovery and interaction to acquire new knowledge of a culture and its cultural practices and operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication

Critical cultural awareness to evaluate perspectives and practices of one's own and other cultures based on explicit criteria. (pp. 49-54)

As Byram (1997) explained, these components make up *intercultural competence* and are intertwined with three other dimensions of communicative competence (i.e., linguistic competence, discourse competence, and sociolinguistic competence). *Linguistic competence* refers to one's ability to apply the language rules correctly. *Discourse competence* focuses on the ability of using, discovering, and negotiating strategies for production and interpretation of the language. *Sociolinguistic competence* is the ability to use the language appropriately based on the context one is working in and with. Figure 1 provides a summary of the ICC dimensions.

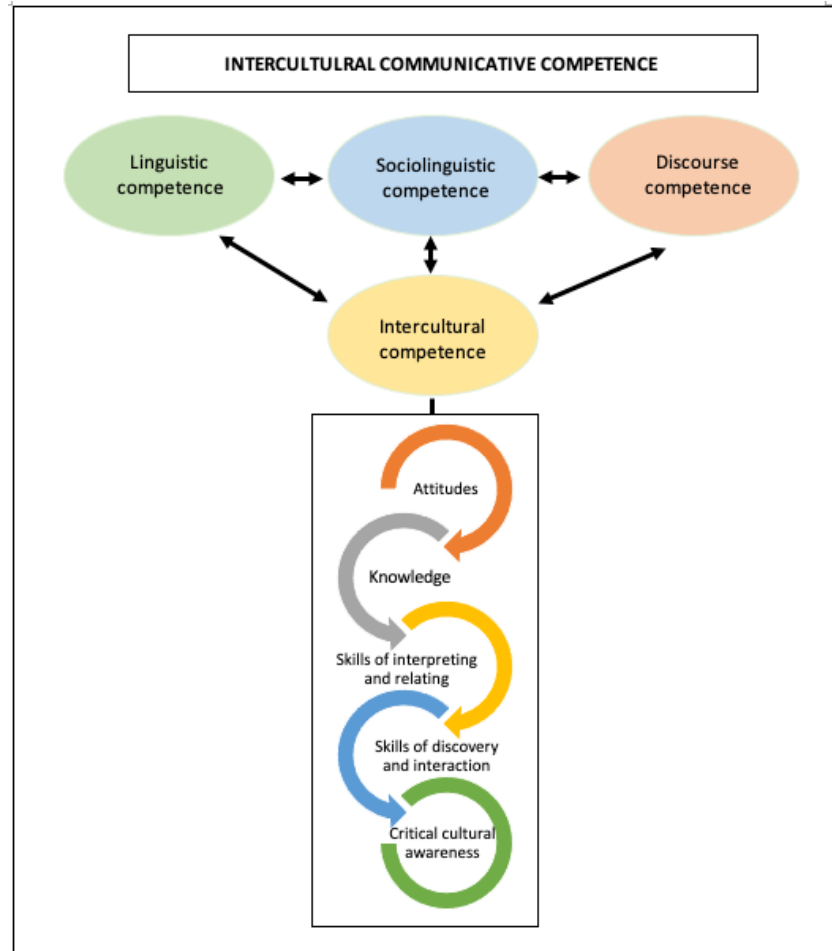


Figure 1. *Byram's ICC Dimensions Adaptation*

Overall, Bryam's (1997, p. 73) intercultural communicative competence model recognizes language and culture as inseparable. It underscores that in the process of English language learning, both linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes ought to be developed together rather than as separate contents (Coperías Aguilar, 2002). Intercultural communicative competence, thus, guides the analysis of the narratives collected.

Experiential E-Learning

Experiential learning theory, as conceptualized by Kolb (1984, 2015), refers to learning taking place through observation and reflection of experiences in a four-phase

cyclical process. According to Kolb (2015), experiential learning is different from behavioral theories of learning and offers “a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior” (p. 31). Specifically, he argued that experiential learning constitutes six characteristics (pp. 41-49):

- a) *Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes:* Knowledge is not fixed or “deposited” but is formed and re-formed through experience.

Knowledge is constructed through stimulation of inquiry and the interaction processes of assimilation and accommodation of ideas and habits.

- b) *Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience:* Knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner.

Experience of knowledge and skills in one situation informs the learner’s ability to deal with subsequent situations effectively. Thus, all learning is relearning.

- c) *Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaption to the world:* Learning is by its very nature a tension- and conflict-filled process. Effective learning requires four different kinds of abilities (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation) that are key components of the four-phase cyclical process of experiential learning. Constant shift of these abilities naturally engenders conflicts and being able to refine and integrate them leads to creativity and growth.

- d) *Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world:* Learning is the process of human adaptation to the social and physical environment. It occurs in all human settings and encompasses all life stages. Learning is, therefore, a lifelong process.

- e) *Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment:* Learning involves a transactional relationship between the subjective (the learner's feelings regarding an event) and objective (environmental or accumulated knowledge) state of the experience. Environment impacts learner's perception and behavior regarding the event, and the constantly changing perception and behavior impacts the environment.
- f) *Learning is the process of creating knowledge:* Knowledge results from the transaction between social knowledge (human cultural experience) and personal knowledge (individual subjective life experience).

Based on these characteristics, Kolb (2015) defined experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences” (p. 49). From a similar perspective, Beard and Wilson (2006) proposed a definition of experiential learning as “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer words of the environment” (p. 19). In essence, experience is the heart of all forms of learning.

Experience, however, does not automatically result in learning. It requires active engagement with the experience and reflection on the events— what happened, how it happened, and why (Beard & Wilson, 2006). For learning to be meaningful and effective, Kolb (1984, 2015) proposed progressing through a four-phase learning process consisting of the four different kinds of abilities (see Figure 2).

The learning process is initiated by *concrete experience*, where individuals involve themselves fully, openly and without bias in new experiences. This can be done by focusing on stimulations, such as senses and feelings, “so [their] mind re-sets and

switches off autopilot” (Kolb & Yeganeh, 2012, p. 10).

Reflective observation follows the concrete experience, where individuals reflect on and observe their experiences from divergent perspectives to identify any inconsistencies between experience and understanding. During this phase, individuals must practice sitting with thoughts and feelings rather than acting on them (Kolb & Yeganeh, 2012, p. 10).

Observation and reflection on experience leads to *abstract conceptualization*, creating concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories. According to Kolb and Yegenah (2012), questioning assumptions and seeking shades of gray rather than dichotomous thinking can either give rise to a new idea or new meaning to the experience.

Then, the new theories undergo an *active experimentation* to test them in future situations, specifically when making decisions and solving problems. Individuals can experiment by responding to people and events in ways that they normally do not (Kolb & Yegenah, 2012, p. 10).

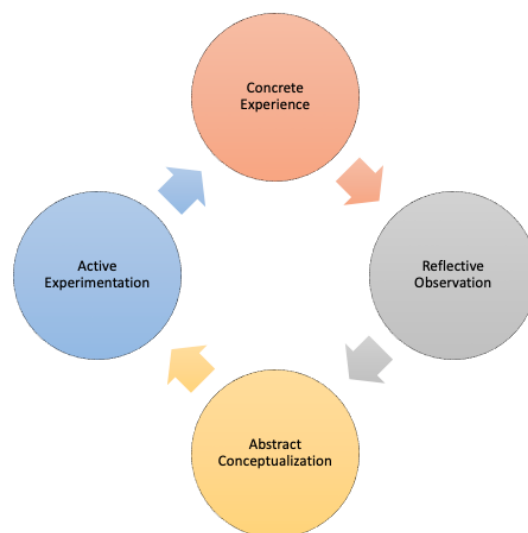


Figure 2. *Kolb's Experiential Learning Process*

Placing Kolb's (1984) experiential learning process as the underpinning, *experiential e-learning* conceptualizes on experiences situated in an online learning environment. According to Carver et al. (2007), "experiential learning process provides an already-existing framework in which to develop a new model for e-learning, one that features the individual, alone or in creative interactions" (p. 249). They argued that experiential e-learning provides opportunities of deeper, richer, and more active and meaningful experience for individuals learning in an online environment.

The core concepts serving as the basis of experiential e-learning are learner-centeredness, agency, belongingness, competence, and center of gravity (Carver et al., 2007). *Learner-centeredness* emphasizes the focus of the education to be on the individual learners. The role of the teacher should be designing and cultivating "environments in which direct instruction serves only to support student learning" (Carver et al., 2007, p. 251). *Agency* refers to the sense of a learner being the actor who takes actions and share the responsibilities of the learning process. *Belongingness* points out the importance of preventing learner isolation and establishing learners' sense of belonging as members of the online community. *Competence* refers to "acquiring knowledge, mastering skills, and learning to apply what is learned to real-life situations" (Carver et al., 2007, p. 251). It also promotes the awareness of the differences in technological skills and competence among learners. *Center of gravity* recognizes learners' knowledge, skills, and motivation as sources of force.

Figure 3 illustrates the integration of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle and Carver et al.'s (2007) five core concepts of experiential e-learning.

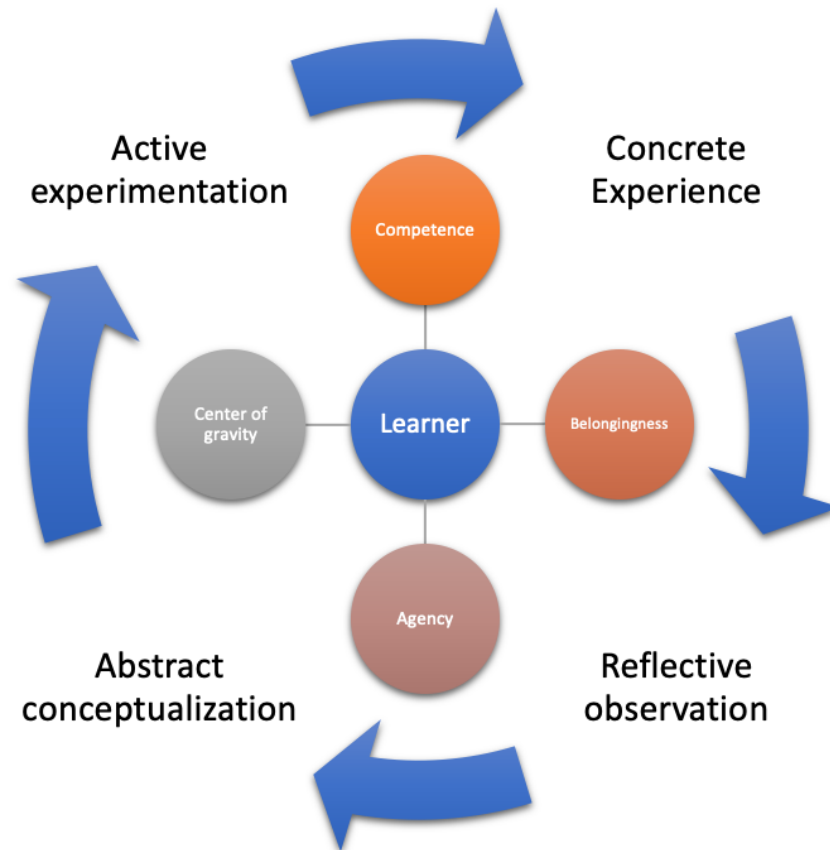


Figure 3. *Experiential E-Learning Framework*

For the present study, experiential e-learning represents the working professionals' experiences participating in a virtual business English training through context-rich, real-world activities.



Figure 4. *Illustration of Theoretical Framework*

As illustrated in Figure 4, a working professional is participating in a virtual international business English training. The lightbulb and the Wi-Fi symbol above the professional's head symbolize the experiential learning process being activated with their

participation in the virtual training. The process involves engagement in learning content and activities that enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness constituting intercultural communicative competence. The silhouettes around the professional represent other working professionals across disciplines and cultures who are involved in jobs that require the use of English, colleagues on the job, and peers within the virtual training. Overall, Figure 4 illustrates the experiential e-learning process enhancing working professional's intercultural communication skills through their participation in a virtual international business English training.

Researcher Roles

I am a South Korean Third Culture Kid; in other words, I grew up in different countries and cultures outside of Korea. I am also an international learner and an international professional with seven years of experience in English teaching. Thus, personally and professionally, I have a strong interest in this topic of inquiry. Having lived abroad my entire life, I have witnessed my family as well as peers constantly navigating cultural boundaries and experiencing challenges in interacting and building relationships despite their fluent English skills. Teaching English to adult learners for seven years, I have discovered that available resources predominantly focus on “drilling” or memorizing cultural patterns instead of reflecting on them. Despite my conscious effort incorporating intercultural learning in my teaching, it was typical of the learner's goal to focus on becoming a native-like speaker for career advancement. Upon my matriculation in my doctoral studies in the U.S., it was when I first started wondering if intercultural communication is well-promoted in existing business English teaching practices. The physical distance I had with my students also made me query the

possibility of teaching intercultural communication skills in a virtual learning environment, and if so, how.

This dissertation study is inspired by family, peers, students, and my personal and professional backgrounds. It bridges the gap between existing knowledge and instructional practices teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Furthermore, it describes an innovative virtual business English training for working professionals to help enhance their intercultural communication skills. The following chapter will present a review of the literature to provide more ample context to the study.

Since understanding a phenomenon is the key goal of qualitative studies, the researcher is considered the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Numerous authors described the roles of a qualitative researcher as observer, learner, and researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Sciarra, 1999). From this perspective, I believe my roles as the researcher include those of a learner and teacher-researcher.

Researcher as a Learner

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), qualitative researchers are expected to enter the participants' world, "not as a person who knows everything, but as a person who has come to learn" (p. 79). This study is an opportunity to learn from the participants and their experiences. Thus, it is crucial to be a good listener and engage in learning from them, whether in written or oral modes of communication throughout the study. It is important to recognize that people are individual human beings actively taking part in the research process and they have individually unique perceptions. Behaving as a learner allows for a "mutual exchange of meaning-making worlds without the imposition of the

researcher's dominant discourse" (Sciarra, 1999, p. 44). Through dialogue, study participants and I explore different viewpoints, and build on each other's knowledge about their experiences participating in the virtual international business English training.

Researcher as a Teacher-Researcher

According to Bissex (1986), a teacher-researcher is "a theory maker who stands rooted in what has gone before but who extends theory into new areas of knowledge" (p. 482). Similarly, Larrotta (2009) explained that unknowingly all teachers do research in their classroom when they assess their students' progress, and they possess expert practical knowledge making them key informants of the teaching-learning environment. In my case, as an experienced instructor, and as a course designer, this study means more than fulfilling a doctoral degree requirement. The virtual international business English training modules are designed based on the practical knowledge I gained from teaching hundreds of international adult learners over the course of my career. This dissertation reflects my professional desire to become "a more complete teacher" by writing about what I discovered and integrating knowledge and practice (Bissex, 1986, p. 484). It is my personal and professional goal for the study findings to contribute to a community of practitioners as well as scholars.

Instrumental Case Study

A case study is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40) and an approach that facilitates close exploration and investigation of the real-life phenomenon within its context (Zainal, 2007). The *bounded system* refers to what is to be studied (Stake, 2005, p. 443), and the *case* is a phenomenon occurring in the bounded context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the dissertation, the

virtual international business English training that was offered through the Google Classroom is the bounded system. In an *instrumental case study*, the case is of secondary interest to provide deeper insight into the participants' experiences (Stake, 1995). Case study for this dissertation is instrumental to go beyond assessing the virtual international business English training designed by me, the researcher, to focus on identifying innovative practices to develop intercultural communicative skills. Participating in the virtual training allows international working professionals to go beyond practicing English in a virtual environment to enhance intercultural communication skills.

Study Design

This dissertation followed a four-phase implementation process (see Figure 5). The design process of the “Virtual International Business English Training” modules began early Spring of 2020 with the completion of an E-Learning Instruction Designer certificate program to enhance my skills designing training modules. Shortly after, I started researching and exploring different platforms appropriate to deliver the training modules. Considering my experience and access to resources, two platforms available were CANVAS and Google Classroom. However, based on my experimentation with the different tools and features each offered, Google Classroom was selected to deliver the training modules because it offered free access to different digital tools that were required to complete training assignments, such as Google Doc and Google Drive. The Google classroom was also easily accessible and free to potential study participants from different geographical locations, institutions, and organizations.

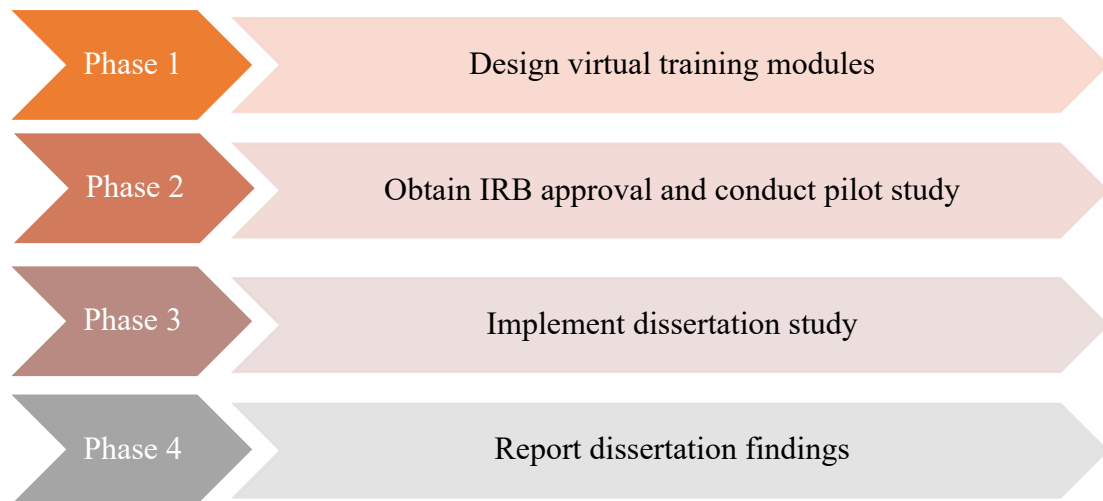


Figure 5. *Study Implementation Process*

Phase 1: Design Virtual Training Modules

The next step involved designing the initial four modules. During the spring 2020 semester, I reviewed literature and various resources to identify common practices and curriculum implemented in existing business English training courses. To gain insight from practitioner perspectives, I also attended professional development workshops related to online instructional practices. As a result, the virtual training was designed with two key sections in mind: an orientation week and four training modules. The orientation week involved completing different activities to learn to navigate the Google Classroom prior to participating in the first training module. This module contained YouTube tutorials, a training course plan, and an assignment overview. The training modules presented four different topics and each module required a few assignments to complete. The module topics were: (a) English communication; (b) tone, styles, and genre; (c) presentation skills; and (d) language of feedback. In a sequential order, participants completed one module per week. By the end of each week, participants completed a review of all the learning materials, assignments, and interactive activities as stated in the

individual modules. Weekly assignments included participation in discussion forums, completing the module quiz, and submitting the week's major application task (e.g., a case study analysis and virtual presentations). Each module followed a consistent structure with the following parts: (a) instructor-recorded video giving an overview of the objectives and tasks for the week, (b) reading materials, YouTube videos, and instructor-created videos related to the topic for the week, and (c) assignment directions. Appendix B illustrates the module structures implemented in the Google Classroom.

Phase 2: Obtain IRB Approval and Conduct a Pilot Study

Once all the training modules were uploaded on the Google Classroom, I requested and obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in summer 2020 to conduct a pilot study and a subsequent study for the dissertation. The goal of the pilot study was to test the modules and the data collections tools to make improvements for the dissertation. While the IRB protocol application was deemed as exempt from full board review, the IRB approval process took three months due to COVID-19 regulation changes and the utilization of Google Classroom as the platform for delivering the virtual training.

With the recent rise of remote working due to COVID-19 social distancing measures, both, the Texas State University IRB and Information Security Office required thorough and extra data security measures to be implemented for data collection and safeguard of the data. For example, it was recommended to configure and update the anti-virus software, host-based firewalls, and whole-disk encryption when using any personally owned computer. Similarly, the videoconference interview rooms were configured to require a password to allow authorized entry only. It was also

recommended that video interview recordings and the electronic signatures collected via Adobe Sign for the participants' informed consent to be moved to a safe, long-term repository (e.g., Shared Drive, One Drive, or any secure cloud-based platform) for data safety. After a meticulous review conducted by The Texas State University Information Security Office, the Google Classroom was authorized for this dissertation since no education records governed by FERPA were involved and since data collection was conducted outside of the Google Classroom by using Texas State University authorized tools such as Qualtrics and Zoom videoconference services.

Once IRB approval was granted, early in the fall of 2020, I completed a pilot study with five international working professionals from South America. This was a purposeful sample of university faculty from different disciplines. They all worked for a large university system which has an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with Texas State University. The goal of the pilot study was to test the delivery of the virtual training and the data collection tools for the dissertation. In addition, the project benefited a few members of the participating institution as they had the opportunity to study and improve their English and communication skills.

Data for the pilot study were collected through two online questionnaires and a videoconference interview. To collect demographic information and participants' learning goals, prior to starting the first training module, they filled out a 15-minute online questionnaire. After completing the four virtual international business English training modules, the participants completed a 30-minute exit questionnaire to document their experiences taking the virtual training. The videoconference interview lasted 60 minutes and focused on newly acquired learning regarding culture and intercultural

communication. At the end, pilot study participants received a certificate of completion as a reward for their efforts and collaboration.

Table 1. *Pilot Learning*

What Worked	Needs Refinement
Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inclusion of macro-level and micro-level concepts of communication ▪ Topics relevant to various fields of profession 	Additional Module Needed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To help participants acclimate to the training
Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Videos representing diversity of English tone and accent 	Data Collection Tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing practice and time for reflection about their learning at the end of each module to help trigger their memories during the interview ▪ Refining interview questions
Final Project: Virtual Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using technology to present an unfamiliar topic in English ▪ Providing constructive peer feedback on their virtual presentations 	

As Table 1 illustrates, the results from the pilot study presented areas proving as robust and necessitating refinements regarding the virtual training modules and data collection instruments. Based on the participants' responses in the questionnaire and the interview, three areas of the project were strong: topics presented in the modules, the videos in each module, and the final project.

First, the topics presented in the modules were the strongest point of the training. All the pilot study participants said that this was the first time they have learned about the varying cultural communication styles (i.e., low-context and high-context communication) and that this approach to learning about culture instilled curiosity and deep reflection in them. Additionally, incorporating broad topics that can be relevant to various professions allowed them to connect to each of their professions and explore the

same concepts from the perspective of other professions. The pilot study participants also shared their appreciation for the materials accompanying each module topic. Specifically, the YouTube videos representing a diversity of English tones and accents (i.e., Indian-Australian, Singaporean, Southern American, British English, Korean) offered the participants the opportunity to develop an ear for different accents and Englishes. Lastly, the pilot study participants expressed that the final project in which they recorded themselves delivering a presentation on an unfamiliar topic enabled them to recognize their current English skills and identify future learning goals. Furthermore, they found significant value in showcasing their presentation recordings with their Google Classroom colleagues and the opportunity to provide and receive constructive feedback in writing.

While the pilot study results revealed the virtual training as robust, two major refinement areas also emerged. First, there is a need to include another module to help participants acclimate to the virtual training, so they have more time to understand and familiarize themselves with how to navigate the subsequent modules. There is also the need to provide practice and time for reflection about their learning at the end of each module. The reflections and other artifacts produced through the training can be incorporated in the interview to trigger their memory and to facilitate reflection and connections to the training. Lastly, there is the need to refine the interview questions to ask questions that allow participants to provide richer responses.

Phase 3: Implement Dissertation Study

Building on what was learned from the pilot study, participants were recruited from a wider network of international working professionals. The dissertation study was

conducted within a period of seven weeks, and the virtual international business English training was delivered via Google Classroom. The virtual medium served as “a medium for communication, a venue to connect across physical borders, and a socially constructed space” (Markham, 2004, p. 119). It allowed geographic reach, providing access to participants in any parts of the world, including remote areas.

Participant Selection

Study participants were recruited through criterion-based sampling and referrals. Criterion-based sampling involves reviewing and selecting information-rich cases “that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238) and “from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). To this end, the international working professional were required to meet the following characteristics to become a study participant: (a) self-identify as having proficient English oral communication skills, (b) be currently involved in job duties requiring the use of English, (c) have at least 3 years of work experience in their professions, and (d) be willing and able to participate in the study.

To help locate individuals who meet the criteria, a form of referral and snowball sampling method was utilized (Merriam, 2009). The participant recruitment process started with “key informants who are viewed as knowledgeable about the community” and asking for recommendation of potential participants who meet the predetermined criteria (Mertens, 2015, p. 333). A recruitment flyer was distributed to key informants to identify potential participants (Appendix C). After they were identified, I contacted them by email to explain the details of the project, the time commitment, the expectations, and that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary (Appendix D).

Table 2. *Participants' Demographic Information*

Participant	Sex	Age	Nationality	Current Job Title	Professional Experience Years
Dongmei	F	31-35	China	Senior motion designer in technology industry	6-8
Saketha	F	31-35	India	Instructional assistant in business college	3-5
Mesut	M	31-35	Turkey	University math instructor	9-11
Yeji	F	26-30	Korea	Court official	3-5
Joon	M	31-35	Korea	Computer science university lecturer	6-8
Yoona	F	36-40	Korea	Administrative officer in non-profit public service	12-15
Sean	M	36-40	Korea	Engineer in automobile research and development	12-15
Jaemin	M	41-45	Korea	Business analyst manager in industrial engineering	12-15
Patricia	F	31-35	Colombia	Head of international relations in a university	6-8
David	M	36-40	Colombia	International affairs coordinator in a university	12-15
Daniela	F	41-45	Colombia	Head of international affairs office in university	16-20
Esmeralda	F	41-45	Colombia	Director of research center in a university	21-25

The participants for the study came from diverse professions and nationalities. Originally, sixteen professionals manifested their desire to participate in the study. However, due to time constraints and conflict of interests, four of them declined participation or stopped participating in the study by the second week. Therefore, twelve professionals became the focal participants for the dissertation (see Tables 2 and 3). Seven participants were female and five were male. Their ages ranged between 26 to 45 years old. They were from five different nationalities: China (1), India (1), Turkey (1), Colombia (4), and Korea (5). However, at the time of project, geographically, they were employed and living in four countries: Korea (4), Colombia (4), the United States (3), and Canada (1). This demographics illustrates the reality of the working professional of the 21st century.

The participants' experience using business English ranged from 3 to 15 years. Their current job responsibilities requiring English usage primarily involved reading and writing emails and documents, participating in meetings, delivering academic and professional presentations, as well as giving lectures.

Table 3. *Participants' Business English and Professional Experiences*

Participant	Current Location	English Usage in Current Job	Years of Business English Experience	Professional Experience
Dongmei	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in meetings • Communicating design ideas and feedback with cross-functional teams • Writing and responding to emails 	6-8	<i>I worked in Samsung for a while, and now I am a senior motion designer in a multinational tech company designing animation in a mobile app product. I am currently the only non-native English speaker in my team, and I hope to lead meetings and a team in the future.</i>
Saketha	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and guiding student work • Preparing assignments and exam guides • Grading and reporting students' progress • Writing and responding to emails • Teaching 	3-5	<i>I was a dentist in India, providing care and treatment. I have been in the U.S. for five years; I had to move to the U.S. for my husband's job. But I don't have my license to practice in the U.S., so in search of something different, I got into administrative work, which led me to pursue a master's in healthcare administration and teach as an instructional assistant for biology courses. I've never thought in my life that I would become an instructor.</i>

Mesut	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching math • Communicating with students • Grading and reporting students' progress • Writing and presenting at academic conferences • Writing and responding to emails 	6-8	<p><i>I used to be a middle school teacher in Turkey. Now, I am a third-year doctoral student in mathematics education. I am also teaching mathematics to college students. I started my English learning journey very late... During high school and college years, I didn't take any English courses. I actually come from the very southern part of Turkey, and no one cares to speak English. It was my decision to study English, and it was only when I decided to come to the U.S. to work more on my English.</i></p>
Yeji	Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching information • Translating documents • Writing reports and emails • Presenting 	3-5	<p><i>For about 3 years, I work as a marketer at a multinational company. At that time, I used English when dealing with some paperwork such as emailing, researching, writing a brief report, and translation. I recently changed my career as a court official, which has nothing to do with my background. I hope to be assigned to the international tribunal one day.</i></p>

Joon	Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading research papers • Prepare lecture slides • Writing research papers • Writing emails 	3-5	<i>These days I am working as a part-time lecturer at a university in Korea, teaching programming. I used to be a software engineer in a multinational company. I studied my master's degree in Norway, and I suffered a lot due to my poor English skills. I feel that my profession as a software engineer is undervalued when I am in an international environment because of the limitations with my English communication.</i>
Yoona	Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending meetings and taking minutes • Answering phone calls • Asking and answering questions in both verbal and written forms • Writing business emails, documents, and notices • Socializing with colleagues 	3-5	<i>I worked as a journalist for over 10 years back home, which made me an expert Korean user. Perhaps that is why I feel more tangible language barriers than others as there is a huge gap between my Korean and my English. My Korean-self is a lot more sophisticated, but my English-self gets simplified. I am currently working as a full-time administrative officer for a non-profit organization, and I have published 10 e-books and I am on the way to publish my 11th.</i>
Sean	Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating (oral and written forms) with foreign colleagues overseas • Read reports • Socializing with colleagues 	12-15	<i>I work as a research engineer for a motor company. For about 13 years, I have been part of the development of hybrid electric vehicles. I go abroad frequently to test vehicles, more than 2 times per year. This requires me to work with foreign colleagues.</i>

Jaemin	Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing emails to overseas employees and stakeholders • Attending phone and online conferences/meetings • Reading reports 	6-8	<p><i>I work as a business analyst for an industrial engineering company based in Korea. I manage more than 10 overseas subsidiaries. When using English, I need to communicate clearly with two types of English users as a second language. The first type is who has studied English in the U.S. or U.K and speaks very fluently and fast but their mother tongue pronunciation or habit gives bad effects, so I have difficulty in understanding. The other type is those who are non-English users. In order to communicate with them in English, I need to speak in a simple and direct way and rephrase what they say in another easy way.</i></p>
Patricia	Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and writing emails • Reading and writing grant applications • Reading reports • Watch videos • Review curriculum 	3-5	<p><i>I am the head of international relations office in a college in Colombia. My job is to coordinate efforts to infuse global mindedness into the ethos of the branch and all aspects of educator preparation through education abroad, international student and scholar support, curriculum development and international partnerships. English is required to undertake all these tasks, especially when writing applications for international grants.</i></p>

David	Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and writing emails • Reviewing business documents • Translating documents • Writing reports 	6-8	<i>I am currently working as an international affair coordinator for the largest university institution in Colombia. I frequently interact with people all around the world for academic purposes (student scholarships, research investigation, trips). I am also currently running some businesses related to logistics with some foreign countries.</i>
Daniela	Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating agreements • Attending meetings and conferences • Reading and writing emails • Reviewing documents 	12-15	<i>I am the head of international affairs office at the virtual and distance campus in a university in Colombia. In my role, I frequently have to be in contact with people from different countries, most of them from Latin America. The office activities relate to building university international relationships.</i>
Esmeralda	Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate international research projects • Reviewing and writing international grant applications • Reading and writing English emails • Reading research papers 	6-8	<i>I have been working as director of a research center for six years. I need to use English because the university does research projects with people in United States or Europe or look for grants in those countries.</i>

Virtual International Business English Training

Reflecting on the lessons learned from the pilot study, the virtual international business English training for the dissertation comprised an orientation week, five training modules, and participation in an exit interview and questionnaire which added one more week to their participation (see Table 4). The training module topics included: (1) Culture & English communication; (2) Tone, styles, and genre; (3) Presentation skills I; (4) Presentation skills II; and (5) Language of feedback. The virtual training was delivered via Google Classroom asynchronously. Each module required an average of three hours to complete.

Table 4. *A Summary of Modules and Activities*

Module #	Topic(s)	Required Tasks	Total Hours
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete ‘Orientation: Start Here!’ module to learn ways to navigate the platform Answer an online 15-minute questionnaire regarding demographics and learning goals 		1
Module 1	English Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English as an international language Intercultural communication Becoming an effective communicator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task 1: Quiz Task 2: Comparison Worksheet Discussion Forum Learning Reflection 	3
Module 2	Tone, Styles, and Genre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal & Formal Tone Directness & Politeness Digital Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task 1: Quiz Task 2: Case Analysis Report Discussion Forum Learning Reflection 	3
Module 3	Presentation Skills I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressions Practical Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task 1: Quiz Task 2: Research and Outlining Discussion Forum Learning Reflection 	3
Module 4	Presentation Skills II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Presentations Dos & Don’ts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task 1: Quiz Task 2: Virtual Presentation Discussion Forum Learning Reflection 	3
Module 5	Language of Feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructive Feedback Expressions Feedback and Culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task 1: Quiz Task 2: Leaving Feedback Discussion Forum Learning Reflection 	3
Exit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Qualtrics Questionnaire – 30 mins Complete Zoom Interview – 60 mins 		2

As illustrated in Figure 6 below, each module followed a consistent structure with the following parts: (a) instructor-recorded video giving an overview of the objectives and tasks for the week, (b) reading materials, YouTube videos, and instructor-recorded lecture videos related to the topic for the week, and (c) activities and assignment directions. Extra resources were provided in link and PDF formats in the sub-topic modules (see Figure 7). These resources were optional materials for participants to review if interested. The materials mainly included a sample presentation deck and lists of expressions for email communication and feedback.

Module 1: Culture & English Communication

A. Module 1 Instructor Video 1 Due Jul 11

Posted May 5 (Edited Jun 19)

Welcome to Module 1!

Before you get started, please watch the two videos in the following order:

1. Intercultural communication and understanding is important [1 min]

2. Module 1 Instructor Video [8 mins]

10 Turned in 4 Assigned

Intercultural communication and understanding is important
YouTube video 1 minute

Module 1 Instructor Video
YouTube video 8 minutes

1 class comment

[View assignment](#)

B. English as a Global Language 14 Due Jul 11

C. Influence of Culture in Communication 6 Due Jul 11

D. Effective Intercultural Communication 4 Due Jul 11

Discussion: Intercultural Communication Due Jul 11

Task 1: Module 1 Quiz Due Jul 11

Task 2: Cultural Investigation Due Jul 11

Task 3: Learning Reflection Due Jul 11

Figure 6. *Structure of Training Modules Implemented in Google Classroom*

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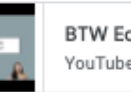
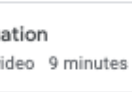

	B. Formal vs Informal Language	Due Jul 18
	C. Directness & Politeness	Due Jul 18
	A. Module 2 Instructor Video	Due Jul 18
	D. Jargon in Professional Communication	Due Jul 18
	E. Effective Email Communication	Due Jul 18
<p>effectively.</p> <p>Please review the following materials to learn how to write emails effectively and professionally:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watch "BTW Equation" by HeeJae [10 mins] 2. Watch "How to Write an Email (No, Really) TEDxAthens" [15 mins] 3. Review and refer to the "Professional Email Expression Glossary" (attached PDF) whenever writing a professional email. <p>-----</p> <p>Extra Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMAIL EXAMPLES [Video - 6 mins]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e-YPYNiLOE <p>-----</p> <div> <div>  <div> BTW Equation YouTube video 9 minutes </div> </div> <div>  <div> How to Write an Email (...) YouTube video 15 minutes </div> </div> </div> <div>  <div> Professional Email Expr... PDF </div> </div> <p>7 class comments</p> <p>View assignment</p>		
	Discussion: Email Communication	Due Jul 18
	Task 1: Module 2 Quiz	Due Jul 18
	Task 2: Case Analysis	Due Jul 18
	Task 3: Learning Reflection	Due Jul 18

Figure 7. *Extra Resources*

The first week of the training was about acclimating into the Google Classroom platform and meeting their group of training peers. On the first day of the first week, participants received a step-by-step guide via email to enter the Google Classroom training course. Then, participants were required to complete the orientation week that includes instructor welcome video, tutorial videos, training course plan, an introduction discussion activity, and an online 15-minute demographic questionnaire (see Figure 8). Once the participants completed the orientation week, they began module 1 on the second week of the training.

Orientation: Start Here!

A. Start Here: Instructor Welcome Video	10	Due Jul 4
B. Orientation Check List		Due Jul 4
C. Orientation Quiz	2	Due Jul 4
D. Demographic Questionnaire		Due Jul 4
E. Forum: Introduce Yourself!	2	Due Jul 4

Important Resources

Training Course Plan	Edited Jun 20
Rules of Engagement	Edited Jun 20
Google Classroom Tutorial	Edited Jun 19
Weekly Office Hours	Edited Jun 20
Instructor Contact Info	Edited Jun 20

Figure 8. *Orientation Week Layout*

Module 1 focused on the overarching topic of English communication. The module aimed to build participants' understanding of the concepts of English as an international language and intercultural communication and to help them become familiar with the different strategies that can be employed to become an effective English communicator.

Module 2 centered around the concept of tone, styles, and genre in business English. The module presented information on the differences between informal and formal tone, between directness and politeness depending on culture, and the genre of digital communication. The objective of the module was to examine various communication practices and investigate how cultural context and norms shape the process of English communication in a professional setting.

Modules 3 and 4 highlighted knowledge and skills related to delivering a virtual presentation. Module 3 specifically served as space and time to prepare for the final product of virtual presentation project. Module 4 was dedicated to record and show case their virtual presentations to their Google Classroom colleagues. Then, using the virtual presentations showcased in the previous week as the principal learning materials, module 5 focused on learning and practicing how to provide constructive feedback in English.

As the final step of the training, on the seventh week, participants were required to complete a 60-minute videoconference exit interview. Participants must have completed the five modules and the 30-minute Qualtrics exit questionnaire before their interview participation.

Data Collection

To gain a holistic view (Noor, 2008) of the study participants' experiences, data

for this qualitative research study came from multiple sources. They were: Two online questionnaires (demographic and exit questionnaires), artifacts created by the participants, one semi-structured videoconference interview, and the research journal.

Table 5 illustrates a summary of data collection sources.

Table 5. *Data Collection Sources*

Data	Demographic Questionnaire	Artifacts	Exit Questionnaire	Semi-Structured Exit Interview	Research Journal
Source	15-min Qualtrics questionnaire	Google Classroom discussion forums, assignment and emails	30-min open-ended Qualtrics questionnaire	One individual 60-min video conference interview	Research notes on notebook and laptop
Focus	Demographics and learning goals	Evidence of learning	Virtual training experience	IC learning experience	Descriptive and reflective field notes
Purpose	Document participant perceptions before the training	Illustrate participant experiences	Collect narratives regarding training participation	Gather narratives about IC learning experiences	Record factual and analytic notes

Demographic Questionnaire. Prior to beginning their participation in the training, a Qualtrics demographic questionnaire was conducted with the study participants (see Appendix E). A 15-minute questionnaire was included as part of the orientation activity in the first virtual module. The questionnaire aimed to document data on the (a) participants' demographics, (b) their previous experience of business English learning, and (c) their perceptions of the virtual international business training before

participating in the first module. As Baxter and Jack (2008) described, “each data source is one piece of the ‘puzzle,’ with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding on the whole phenomenon” (p. 554). Therefore, data collected from the demographic questionnaire facilitated gaining a holistic understanding of the participants’ experiences of the virtual training.

Artifacts. As Hodder (2000) noted, “what people say is often very different from what people do” (p. 705). To address such a gap, artifacts are significant in qualitative research to examine the phenomenon from various perspectives. Artifacts can refer to “residual traces of human presence or other unobtrusive evidence of past activity such as footprints left in the dirt, a teacher’s writings that remain on a classroom white board, spray-painted graffiti, or a Web browser’s history of previous sites visited” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017, p. 74). Given the nature of the current dissertation study, artifacts were produced by the study participants. For instance, artifacts included participants’ posts on discussion forums, completed assignments, and interactions with the instructor via email and/or office hours. Consequently, artifacts served as evidence illustrating participants’ learning experiences throughout their participation in the virtual international business English training.

Exit Questionnaire. An open-ended questionnaire was employed in combination with other methods to gather information about a specific topic (Wiseman, 1999). Once they completed all five modules of the training, study participants were asked to complete a 30-minute exit questionnaire that was delivered via Qualtrics (see Appendix F). The exit questionnaire included open-ended questions; it aimed to collect narratives of participants’ experiences with the virtual international business English training. The exit

questionnaire served as a great opportunity to learn about the overall participants' experience of the virtual training prior to conducting the exit interview.

Semi-Structured Interview. In qualitative research, a primary source of data collection is the interview. According to Merriam (2009), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). Interviewing can be used (a) to collect more in-depth data, (b) to gather information that cannot be directly observed such as feelings, thoughts, and intentions, (c) to document past experiences that are impossible to replicate, and (d) when it is the only method of data collection (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In particular, interviews can allow the researchers to "to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Once study participants completed the exit questionnaire, a 60-minute semi-structured interview was scheduled to be conducted via Zoom. Because each participant in a case study is "expected to have had unique experiences" (Stake, 1995, p. 65), the semi-structured interview approach provided the flexibility of asking questions in no specific order and responding to the emerging worldview of the respondent and new ideas on the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 111). The interview questions focused on the participants' narratives regarding their intercultural communicating learning experiences through the virtual international business English training (see Appendix G). The interviews were audio-recorded for transcription purposes only and to ensure accurate documentation of what was said.

Research Journal. The research journal served to record factual and analytical information. According to Borg (2001), journaling benefits the researcher both as a

process and a product. As a process, the researcher can rationalize concerns, explore solutions, examine feelings, descriptively document events, make decisions, evaluate progress, clarify concepts and implications, develop ideas, and organize thoughts. As a product, journaling can serve as a “database from which precise information could be retrieved at a later date” (Borg, 2001, p. 171). For example, a research journal can document a detailed record of events and procedures, provide an account of the researcher’s decision-making process as well as their professional growth, and spark off inspiration and further insight. In brief, a research journal provided a space to document both descriptive and reflective field notes.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), *descriptive* field notes are concerned with providing “a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed” (p. 120). Descriptive field notes can include portraits of the subjects, reconstruction of dialogue, description of physical setting, accounts of particular events, depiction of activities, and the researcher’s behavior (pp. 121-122). Whereas *reflective* field notes focus on capturing “more of the researcher’s frame of mind, ideas, and concerns” (p. 120). The notes can include reflections on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas, and researcher’s frame of mind as well as points of clarification (pp. 123-124). Being aware of my position as a teacher-researcher, keeping a research journal, thus, allowed me to monitor my assumptions and biases throughout the study, make informed decisions about the research process, obtain a holistic and comprehensive view of the study, and report findings with greater precision. The field notes were recorded in a notebook and laptop.

Data Analysis

In case study methodology, data analysis is conducted with different approaches depending on the study purpose and philosophical orientation. For example, Boblin et al. (2013) argued, a case study situated within a post-positivist paradigm involves a more structured approach of data analysis, whereas a constructivist-orientated study utilizes a more flexible approach of data analysis. Accordingly, the current instrumental case study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) *thematic analysis* process that provides flexibility as well as a well-structured and rigorous approach to handling "a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p. 78). The analysis process promotes both inductive and deductive processes (Nowell et al., 2017), and includes a total of six steps: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

Step one requires the researcher to immerse in the data to become familiar with the depth and breadth of the data collected from the multiple data collection sources—questionnaires, interview, artifacts, and research journal. This step, thus, specifically involved transcribing a verbatim account of interview data, actively reading and re-reading all data sets, and noting down ideas that helped the subsequent coding process.

Step two involves producing initial data codes by following a systematic coding process. The process begins with coding interesting features of the data that may form the basis of repeated patterns across the entire data set. For this phase, Braun and Clarke (2006) advised coding as many potential themes and patterns as possible in the permitted time. Specifically, they recommended coding large data extracts that include context in as many different themes as relevant. Therefore, during this step, I first identified as many

interesting aspects as possible in the interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, and artifacts using color-coding technique. Then, I compiled all coded items into a separate document along with extracts that include surrounding texts to not lose its context throughout the process.

Step three is about cataloging all the different codes identified in the previous step into potential themes and organizing all the data extracts within the identified themes. To catalog the codes into themes, I created a visual thematic map to “play around with organizing them into theme-piles” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). The thematic map helped look at the relationship between codes, between themes, and between overarching themes and sub-themes. Codes that do not fit into any of the initial themes were grouped as miscellaneous.

Step four focuses on identifying themes that are meaningful and those that can be discarded. I first read all data extracts for each potential theme and reviewed whether they appear to form a coherent pattern. If a potential theme did not look organized, I examined the problem either by re-sorting the data extracts with other themes, re-organizing the theme following step three procedure again, or discarding them from the analysis. Once the potential themes adequately formed coherent patterns, I then looked at whether the potential themes are accurately representing the meanings evident in the whole data set.

Step five involves identifying the essence of what each theme is about and how it fits with the overall story of the entire data set as well as the research questions. Thus, during this step, I conducted a detailed analysis of the potential themes and identified the story that each of them told and how it related to the research questions. I also identified

any sub-themes that gave more structure to a complex overarching theme. By the end of this step, each concrete theme had concise names.

Finally, *step six* focuses on writing up the analytical narrative illustrating the story that the analysis is telling. To provide sufficient evidence and capture a coherent, logical and non-repetitive account of the story, I identified vivid examples for each theme that relates best to the research questions.

In addition to following the six-step thematic analysis process by Braun and Clarke (2006), I utilized a qualitative research software (MAXQDA) to compile, sort, organize, analyze, and visualize all data collected from the study. The transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews, the questionnaire responses, artifacts, and notes in the research journal were uploaded to MAXQDA as Microsoft Word documents or Portable Document Format (PDF) files. From color-coding, categorizing the codes, creating memos, and to visualizing the codes, MAXQDA supported the current study throughout different stages of data analysis.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the degree of confidence regarding the data, interpretation, and study design is crucial in ensuring the rigor of a study. This concept is referred to as *trustworthiness*. To demonstrate trustworthiness in a study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested meeting the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2014). It is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. To support credibility, detailed

descriptions and accurate data that capture the true essence of international working professional participants' accounts are, therefore, necessary when reporting the findings. Additionally, as Shenton (2004) explained, the researcher journal plays a key role in monitoring subjectivity, assumptions, and expectations for the study.

Transferability concerns the generalizability of inquiry (Nowell et al., 2017). It refers to the study design and findings that readers can relate to or apply to other contexts. To establish transferability, the report of findings should present thick descriptions, direct quotes, and narratives, and detailed explanation of the context in which the study took place. This way future readers can follow and transfer it to their own contexts.

Dependability refers to the consistency of findings. To achieve dependability, research process should be documented in a logical, traceable, and clear manner (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Providing in-depth coverage of the research process allows the readers to develop a thorough understanding of the study methods and examine the extent to which proper research practices have been followed (Shenton, 2004). During this process, consistent checking of the research journal and raw data was conducted. Further, data triangulation, employing a variety of data sources such as artifacts, questionnaires, and individual interview, strengthened the dependability of the study.

Confirmability is concerned with whether the researchers' interpretations and findings come from the experiences and ideas of the study participants instead of the preferences and characteristics of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Key strategies to demonstrate confirmability include describing how conclusions and interpretations were established by providing a detailed methodological description and exemplifying that the

findings and the formation of implications were derived directly from the data (Cope, 2014). However, it is important that credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved to establish confirmability to begin with (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For the context of the current study, the report of findings documented verbatim quotes from the participants to truthfully portray their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the research journal assisted in monitoring my predispositions and beliefs as a researcher.

Ethical Consideration

To uphold the ethical standards throughout the process of data collection, the study followed the protocols outlined and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). First, once potential participants were identified through referrals, they were provided via email a consent form that informed them in writing the expectations of the study, the minimal risk associated with taking part in the study, the measures established to ensure confidentiality, their rights, and the voluntary nature of the study (Appendix H). Then, prior to their participation in the study, the informed consent forms were obtained. To protect their confidentiality, all data set, including interview recordings, questionnaire responses, and artifacts, were transcribed and organized using pseudonyms. They were stored in a secure password-protected location that only I have access to. Additionally, participants' names or the specific name of their affiliated organizations that result from this study will not be used in any written reports or publications.

Dissertation Road Map

Drawing on intercultural communicative competence and experiential e-learning models, this instrumental qualitative case study documents the experiences of a group of

international working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training. The goal was to identify innovative practices focusing on intercultural communication skills for this population.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provides the context for the study and presents the research design following a four-phase implementation process. Chapter II presents a review of the literature related to several topics such as business English training for working professionals, international business English, intercultural communication, intercultural communication and technology, and virtual training. Chapter III provides a detailed description of the study participants' experiences with the virtual training to identify innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training centering around intercultural communication skills. Chapter IV describes how the virtual training enhanced their intercultural communication skills. As the final chapter of the dissertation, Chapter V presents the study highlights, recommendations for innovative practices, and conclusion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is communication, and communication is culture.

– Edward Hall

With the continuously growing need for globalization and access to resources, communication with other cultures utilizing business English skills is an urgent demand of our times. The study of English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication remains an important topic around the world and improving professional practices in a virtual environment is the most discussed issue today, especially with the impact of COVID-19. This instrumental qualitative case study, therefore, is timely and bridges the gap between existing knowledge and instruction practices to help enhance the intercultural communication skills of international working professionals.

The chapter is divided into the following themes: business English training for working professionals, international business English, intercultural communication, intercultural communication and technology, virtual training, and gap in the literature. The first section explains business English training for working professional with a historical overview of the trend shift. The second section, international business English, discusses the concepts of business English as a lingua franca and international business English, its differences, and how international business English facilitates the process of becoming a global citizen. The third section of intercultural communication reviews existing instructional practices incorporated for the development of intercultural communication skills in general English as well as international business English instructions. The fourth section, intercultural communication and technology, explains the advantages and drawbacks of virtual learning for the purpose of enhancing

intercultural communication skills. The fifth section of virtual training clarifies the concept of virtual training and reviews existing studies that adopted experiential learning approaches in virtual cultural-skills trainings across disciplines. The last section illustrates the gaps found in the literature and the necessity to conduct a qualitative inquiry to explore the topic.

Business English Training for Working Professionals

The attraction of business English training began with the development of the world's economy and the demand for a language that individuals can commonly use in international communication as well as business communication (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Ramírez, 2015). While there are commonalities between business English and general English language learning, the main difference is that the aims of a business English course will always relate to learners' occupational or professional language needs (Donna, 2000), ranging from developing general business skills (giving presentations) to technical skills (how to take notes, specialized language). In fact, business English teaching aims, approaches, and focuses have shifted over the past 60 years— from writing skills to effective communication (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Procházková, 2014; Ramírez, 2015; Xie, 2016). Table 6 provides a summary of the trend shift in business English teaching by the decade over the past 60 years.

Table 6. *Business English Teaching Trends*

1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on writing (commercial correspondence)• Promoting grammatical analysis of technical texts
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attention to spoken interactions (listening-questioning, interpersonal communication, meetings, oral presentations)• Practicing all four skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking• Emphasis on discourse analysis• Incorporation of needs analysis
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fostering behavioral skills and business communication skills (socializing, telephoning, meeting, presentation, and negotiation)• Learner-centered approach using case studies and project work• Integrating management training approach and methods with language training techniques• Collaborative teaching with content/subject area specialist
1990-2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Striving to understand conventions of genre and professional practice (genre analysis)• Developing technology-based communication skills (telecommunications, computer network, email, video conferencing)• Incorporation of international rhetoric and learner genre awareness
2010s - Today	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhancing effective communication and intercultural communication• Consideration of communication contexts

Business English teaching has gradually shifted focus from promoting mastery of English mechanics to integration of knowledge, learner identity, and communication context. This phenomenon can be attributed to the advent of technology enabling the world to become more interconnected economically, socially, and culturally. Therefore, the definition of successful business English communication today is not merely about being a proficient English speaker. Being able to apply flexible strategies, preserve one's own cultural identity, and communicate effectively interculturally are also essential.

International Business English

Following the trend shift in business English teaching, different terms and definitions depending on goals, occupation, and geographical context have emerged. According to Ellis and Johnson (1994), *business English* is defined as “a language corpus with emphasis on particular kinds of communication in a specific context” (p. 3). In a broader perspective, *workplace English* focuses on the form of communication used outside the academic classroom and literacy skills necessary for reading and writing documents in context-specific environments (Boiarsky, 1997, pp. 17-18). More recently, the terms *business English as a lingua franca* and *international business English* have emerged as more relevant concepts in the modern age of sophisticated communication technology and prominent role of English in global business contexts.

Business English as a Lingua Franca

The widespread use of English, particularly in Europe, has generated interest in the status of English as a lingua franca. According to Seidlhofer (2011), the term *English as a lingua franca* refers to “any use of English among speakers of a different first language for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7). Rooting from this definition, the term *business English as a lingua franca* (BELF) specifically refers to English as a lingua franca in business contexts. It is conceptualized as a professional language and a “neutral code used by business practitioners to do their work” (Kankaanranta, 2008, p. 2). To be specific, Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) describe,

BELF is neutral in the sense that none of the speakers can claim it as her/his mother tongue; it is shared in the sense that it is used for conducting business

within the global business discourse community, whose members are BELF users and communicators in their own right – not ‘non-native speakers’ or ‘learners.’ (pp. 403-404)

For example, in their study of the use of English as a lingua franca among European employees, Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) identified several differences between Finnish and Swedish speakers’ use of English, such as communicative practices, conventions, and preferences in email messages and meetings. Despite the differences, however, their findings indicated that both the Finnish and Swedish speakers demonstrated “conversational cooperation and understanding of the discourse” (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005, p. 418), suggesting the shared goals and values within the context of their business/organizational culture. As such, business English as a lingua franca is highly context-dependent (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). The professional context serves as a compass to interact with each other effectively.

While business English as a lingua franca moves away from the native-speaker model that general business English promotes, its underlying concept of neutrality raised controversy. For example, Meierkord (2002) argued that the neutrality of code in lingua franca suggests cultural neutrality that does not consider speakers’ different cultural backgrounds. She contended that every individual using lingua franca carries their cultural background with them, at least to some degree. Likewise, Rogerson-Revell (2007) stated that lingua franca is a language with no native speakers; thus, the term business English as lingua franca “excludes substantive body of communicative events where English is used as a common language among all speakers of English including those who speak English as a mother tongue” (p. 105). Instead, she suggested using

broader terms such as international English or English as an international language.

International Business English

International business English involves a more flexible and liberal definition in which all English speakers are present. Although the relationship is not clearly defined, international business English reflects the complexity of challenges linked to the use of English in professional practices. For instance, in their study examining English communication among staff members in a Finish-based multinational corporation, Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) identified three key challenges that involved both native and non-native English speakers. First, despite that English was known as the common company language, common language was still absent since managers were typically the only staff member proficient in English. Second, both non-native and native speakers had trouble comprehending written documents in English either because they could not fully understand the meaning or because it was translated from a different language with an incorrect context. Third, communication problems frequently occurred due to difficulties in understanding different kinds of Englishes. Corresponding with these findings, “the realities of the business context are often considerably more complex than the simple label of English as a lingua franca would imply” (Nickerson, 2007, p. 354). English communication challenges exist among all English speakers, and varying skills and strategies play a more significant role than linguistic competence in an intercultural communication context.

Global Citizenship

From a global citizenship perspective, English is a means to transcend the boundaries of all nations and cultures. While there is no concrete definition for the

concept, *global citizenship* refers to shared human experience, values, and responsibilities. According to Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013), global citizenship constitutes “awareness, caring, and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility” (p. 1). From a psychological perspective, Golmohamad (2008) conceptualized global citizenship as the individual’s mindset or attitude. Whereas Rinne (2017) postulated that global citizenship is about actions and lifestyles and going beyond a mindset. However, Alfred and Guo (2012) presented a more comprehensive perspective that global citizenship includes personal, transnational, moral, philosophical, political, and epistemological views.

Global citizenship can be both learned and nurtured (Tarrant, 2010). It starts from being aware of global trends and issues, recognizing one’s role within a larger global context, and understanding and appreciating existing diversity (Cavanagh, 2020; Cesario, 2017; Jones, 2016; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). From this perspective, knowing English is crucial for facilitating the process of becoming global citizens. It allows everyone to engage in dialogue, address global issues, and participate in “cultural collaboration and socially responsible careers in a global age” (Coryell et al., 2014, p. 146). English is a means to become a global citizen and build an inclusive and sustainable future in the world of interrelationship.

Intercultural Communication

In today’s world, interacting with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is an expected event in our daily lives. Communicating respectfully and critically with one another is, thus, becoming more crucial as multiculturalism is deep-seated across numerous nations (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013). Especially for

professionals in multicultural affiliations, understanding other patterns of communication besides one's own is becoming increasingly critical. However, as Ricard (1993) stated, "successful intercultural communication and interaction does not usually occur by chance. Rather, it is the result of exchanges and behavior on the part of persons who not only desire favorable results but have the skills necessary for generating and supporting positive outcomes" (p. 3). Becoming effective in intercultural communication necessitates a balance of knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

In the field of communication, *intercultural communication* refers to having "the ability to encode and decode meanings that correspond to the meanings held in the other communicator's repository" (Beamer, 1992, p. 1). It represents the process of exchange and interpretation of culturally different ideas, values, and perspectives. In fact, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2011) suggested that "the general goal of intercultural communication is to create shared meanings competently—so that what one intended to say or imply is accurately decoded by the culturally different other and simultaneously, in a culturally appropriate manner" (p. 33). Accordingly, intercultural communication is a process where cultural symbols and contextual meanings manifest in concert with language and communicative behaviors. However, successfully engaging in intercultural communication does not simply involve effective communication skills. According to Gudykunst and Kim (1997), it requires a balance of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies. More specifically, they noted that effective intercultural communication requires the ability to reduce uncertainty (cognitive response) and anxiety (affective response) and to deal with ambiguity of the new situations (behavioral response) because interacting with people from unfamiliar cultures is a novel situation for most people.

In the discipline of foreign language education, the concept of intercultural communication takes a more socio-psychological approach, focusing on the contexts where two or more cultures co-exist and where people from different backgrounds and first languages interact using a common language (Brabant et al., 2010; Byram, 1997; Hall, 1976). This approach of intercultural communication highlights language as a crucial dimension that informs the communication process, the context, and interpretation of meanings. Therefore, intercultural communication in the field of foreign language education necessitates awareness along with knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Additionally, it emphasizes motivation of individuals (intrinsic or extrinsic) as the driving factor making progress in the development of intercultural communicative competence (Baker, 2011; Fantini, 2000). For example, according to Eken (2019), “the bond between the awareness and other dimensions is that awareness both enhances and is enhanced through the instrumentality of knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes” (p. 16). This means that understanding the similarities and differences between one’s own and other cultures can facilitate the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that yields to intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, intercultural communication between people who speak different languages involves understanding the diversity of cultures, including one’s own, and flexibly and appropriately using this understanding with their skills for building or maintaining relationships, communicating with minimal loss, and cross-cultural collaboration (Chun, 2011; Fantini, 2012; López-Rocha, 2016).

Table 7. *Important Factors Influencing Intercultural Communication*

Affective	Attitudes Values Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curiosity and readiness to suspend disbelief about other culture and belief about ones' own - Openness to learning, new experiences, or understanding - Self-esteem - Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to continue learning and understanding - Empathy - Managing anxiety
Cognitive	Awareness Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consciously acknowledging the diversity of cultures - Understanding body of knowledge related to one's own and other people's culture - Recognizing one's uncertainty and needs - Discovering similarities and differences between one's own and other people's behaviors, beliefs, practices, and preferences in real-time interactions - Interpreting and relating to artifacts, documents, or events from another culture to that of one's own
Behavioral/ Performance	Observable Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Applying knowledge to reduce uncertainty - Change of facilitating styles depending on interactions and context - Observing to learn and/or adapt to different interaction modes (verbal and non-verbal) - Listening to build understanding - Critically evaluation of different perspectives and practices based on explicit criteria - Mindful listening

As such, the wide array of approaches to intercultural communication across different disciplines include cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies as key influencing factors of intercultural interactions. Furthermore, as Table 7 illustrates, the three competencies encompass various abilities, including non-observable and observable skills that cannot be inherited but acquired (Bennett, 2009; Broome, 1993; Byram, 1997; Eken, 2019; Fantini, 2000; Guykunst & Kim, 1997; Ricard, 1993; Ting-Toomey &

Chung, 2011). Commitment, patience, and guidance are, thus, essential in the process of developing intercultural communication.

Instructional Practices

Over the few decades, scholars and practitioners have acknowledged the immanent nature of language which cannot be taught without learning the culture. In the process of English language learning, linguistic and cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes ought to be developed together rather than as separate contents (Coperías Aguilar, 2002). Drawing on this perspective, the National Standards for Language Education (2015) have outlined five goal areas, including communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities, to emphasize the inextricable link between language and cultural competence. In addition, the Council of Europe (2018) recently published the updated version of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), promoting intercultural and plurilingual competences and replacing the description of “native speaker” to “speaker of the target language” (p. 217). However, because these guiding principles only provide general instruction and no concrete strategies or examples (Eken, 2019; Reid, 2015), language instructors are still facing challenges implementing intercultural elements into their teaching.

Besides the paucity of concrete guidance, incorporating cultural components to develop learners’ intercultural communicative competence has not been easy for a variety of reasons. For example, existing literature reported issues such as (1) a lack of agreement on which aspects of culture should be taught, (2) a lack of time to include cultural elements in the lessons, (3) teachers having low confidence to teach the target culture, or (4) having no clear definition of intercultural communication skills and how to

measure or assess them (Eken, 2019; Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Fantini, 2009; Jedynack, 2011; Sercu, 2006). In some cases, learners' language proficiency levels might not be advanced enough to address complex cultural topics in a foreign language (Chavez, 2002). To address these issues, a few scholars have explored different methods and activities to incorporate culture to language instruction. For instance, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, p. 7-8) presented the following goals for instruction:

1. Gain understanding that all people exhibit culturally conditioned behaviors
2. Recognize that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave
3. Become aware of conventional behavior for daily situations in the target culture
4. Increase awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases
5. Evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture
6. Locate and organize information about the target culture
7. Stimulate intellectual curiosity about the target culture and practice empathy.

Thus, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) provided concrete suggestions and objectives for a language curriculum to incorporate culture and promote cultural awareness in the learners. Aligning with some of their goals, Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008) recommended activities such as comparing cultural elements using proverbs, discussing cultural issues observed from videos/movies, role-playing speech acts that hold cultural elements (i.e., apologizing, promising), and writing stories comprising cultural aspects. Similarly, Reid (2015) suggested comparison method, cultural assimilation, cultural capsule, role play, and treasure hunt. When utilizing the comparison method, however, Holliday (2016) recommended focusing on similarities rather than differences to move

away from cultural stereotyping or the idea of separate entity and instead, to foster particularities of individuals and co-constructing mutually understood meanings.

Despite the many activity examples suggested throughout the decades{?}, it is important to note that culture is very often taught separately as a collection of facts without interweaving with the English language or using inauthentic cultural examples that do not correspond to the real world to keep the lessons simple (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Tseng, 2002). For instance, existing curricula typically focus on surface culture topics such as food, traditions, housing, or holidays. According to Sercu (2002), most culture-learning tasks are equivalent to a “cultural foot bath, requiring only low levels of involvement with the cultural content offered” (p. 70). This author further stated:

The learning tasks tend not to invite pupils to process, apply or reflect on any previously acquired information regarding the target culture and people... Most tasks are individual learning tasks: learners acquire information alone. They do not work together to construct additional knowledge...The approach to culture teaching is non-recursive. Cultural contents are offered on one occasion only. The learner is not invited to reorganize or reconsider prior knowledge in the light of new information, nor to identify traces of prior texts and events as they appear in new contexts. (pp. 70-71)

Therefore, Sercu (2002) argued in favor of a scaffolding approach where students are gradually led to develop autonomous culture-learning skills that enables them to work through the intercultural challenges and brainstorm different solutions on their own. Supporting her perspective, Balboni and Caon (2014) proposed teaching a model for lifelong observation since intercultural communication competence changes continuously

and, thus, cannot be taught as a complete course. While developing the different forms of skills are important, lifelong autonomous learning skills such as analytical, problem-solving, observational, and reflecting skills are deemed foundational.

Approaches for International Business English Instruction

When it comes to business English communication, grammatical inaccuracies are secondary to mistakes engendering misinterpretations. Business English is more task-oriented compared to general English, and it requires more accuracy of content than linguistic (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). Due to this nature, pragmatic competence (practical use of the language) is valued more important than theoretical knowledge about the language and culture (Ellis & Johnson, 1994). In fact, Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002, pp. 24-25) recommended helping learners to use a variety of communicative strategies and metacommunicative expressions to promote understanding more than speaking it when teaching business English. Similarly, Gerritsen and Nickerson (2009) emphasized the importance of raising learners' awareness of the impact of culture and communication strategies within the business context. They stated,

It is important to raise students' awareness of the different varieties of English that are used in the business world and along with that to facilitate their understanding of their own variety of English and the impact that the variety might have on a speaker from a language background different to theirs. (p. 189)

Supporting this view, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010, p. 208) asserted that the aim of an international business English course should be training learners to be flexibly competent.

While incorporation of cultural topics is vital to raise learners' awareness

regarding differing communication patterns across cultures, the traditional approach of teaching culture in business English also heavily focuses on the surface-level culture of the nation the learners intend to work closely with (Ellis & Johnson, 1994; Gajšt, 2014). In fact, Livermore (2016) described how such an approach in a business context has the tendency of “learning about other cultures to manipulate them” (p. 18). From his perspective, promoting the idea of retaining culture simply as facts and body of knowledge can lead to costly consequences such as reinforcing stereotypes and generalizations. Similarly, Stadler (2017) described the culture-specific approach as “quick-fix” (p. 449) that centers around business efficiency, has limitations in applicability, conflicts with reality, and portrays culture as a static and context-free vacuum. However, she also raised concerns about the culture-general approach since it consists of vague, ambiguous, and complex competencies, requires long-term commitment, and relies heavily on individuals’ personal engagement. To address these issues, she instead argued for an integrated approach that fosters both culture-specific and culture-generic knowledge and skills together. Specifically, Stadler (2017) suggested that culture-specific aspects should be incorporated to help individuals “manage anxiety, provide a starting point for the encounter, and equip people with some sense of behavioral expectations...and culture-generic frameworks should be included to enable individuals to make better choices and make good judgement calls” (p. 452). Similarly, in an EU-funded, e-learning project aiming to develop intercultural business and language skills for European managers in the construction industry, Rogerson-Revell (2003) recommended implementing a cultural syllabus that integrates key aspects of national and work culture-practices in concert with professional language skills. He suggested that this

approach can help develop an understanding of similarities and differences in both communication and workplace practices across different national and organizational cultures. Based on these approaches, developing intercultural communication skills in relation to business contexts should aim to equip professionals with appropriate knowledge and skills to navigate the context-bound nature of international business English communication, to remain flexible, to manage diverse forms of communication that occur in various contexts, and to learn from real encounters.

Intercultural Communication and Technology

Following the shifting trend within English language education research and practice, the exploration of technology-based language learning has also gone through several phases (Liaw, 2006). In the early stage, computer-assisted language learning software brought revolutionary attention (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). According to Lee (2000), the implementation of technology could not only help facilitate the delivery of experiential learning and authentic materials for study but also enhance learner motivation, learner achievement, interaction, global understanding, and individualization. However, with the increase of commercial language learning software, the goal of providing learners with a culturally authentic learning experience became negating for several reasons. For instance, Kramsch and Anderson (1999) raised concerns on the possibility of presenting de-contextualized cultural input through multimedia-based learning. From the design and implementation perspective, Shaughnessy (2003) explained that commercial software captures many cultural inaccuracies and misrepresentations due to the gap between language instructors and engineers. Because commercial language learning software are designed in large teams, the objectives of

language instructors and engineers do not transfer to one another even with simple elements such as visual representations of the cultural content.

To compensate for the drawbacks of technology-based language courses, researchers and instructors have shifted their attention to the use of the internet for teaching and intercultural interactions. Instructors, especially, recognize the value of the internet, for it has enabled them to “connect learners in different parts of the world with the dual aim of improving their linguistic competence and developing their intercultural knowledge and skills” (Hockly, 2015, p. 81). Acknowledging its effects, ample literature explored various virtual learning approaches, from telecollaboration to multimedia simulation (Chun, 2011; Liaw, 2006; O’Dowd & Dooly, 2020), over the past two decades. Based on the evidence reported in the body of research, drawbacks of virtual learning for developing intercultural communication skills should also be taken into consideration along with its advantages.

Advantages of Virtual Learning for Intercultural Communication

Virtual learning has unique features that can help foster the intercultural communication skills of adult language learners. First and foremost, online networks offer a wide range of authentic culture-general and culture-specific materials that learners can access 24 hours a day (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006; Rogerson-Revell, 2003). In fact, Godwin-Jones (2013) suggested that images, videos, translations tools, YouTube channel comments, and Amazon reviews can all be helpful resources to treat culture experientially. Similarly, Barton and Lee (2013) pointed out that YouTube platform provides multimedia learning content, a suitable space for reflection and discussion, and various functions that allows autonomous and informal intercultural learning in a stress-

free environment. Second Life, an immersive virtual world that incorporates avatars from other cultures, is also identified as valuable for supporting not only visual but also voice interactions to create a near-real-life cultural experience (Barton & Lee, 2013; Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008). However, in Liou's (2012) study of Second Life with Taiwanese college students, study findings revealed the importance of having access to stable, large bandwidths to avoid breakdown and slower memory capacity of the computers.

Beyond language skills, Anderson and Corbett (2012) reported that virtual learning also provides rich potential for increasing levels of web literacy and telecollaboration skills. Likewise, Guth and Helm (2012) discussed that multiliteracies, including online literacies (e.g., netiquette) and telecollaborative task literacy (e.g., information exchange, comparison and analysis, and collaboration and product creation), can be developed along with language skills through an internet-mediated exchange. However, the most important advantage of virtual learning for developing intercultural communication is that it provides flexibility in terms of geographical location and time as well as prolonged, cost-effective access to learning materials (Avgousti, 2018; Belz, 2007). Especially as the internet and technology is not new in the contemporary society, instructors can also easily explore their practices in a virtual learning environment and adjust as needed with free of cost.

Drawbacks of Virtual Learning for Intercultural Communication

While virtual learning provides a variety of beneficial features to foster intercultural communication, its limitations cannot be overlooked. In his mixed-method study with 31 Thai university students, Baker (2013) found that students experienced low motivation to complete flexible online courses and preferred to choose face-to-face

courses if offered a choice between doing it online or face-to-face. He further discussed that a possible reason for this result might be the importance of self-discipline and confidence about studying independently and the desire for instant teacher feedback and support. A similar report was documented in Godwin-Jones's (2013) telecollaborative project, in which successful learning depended on the active engagement of the learners' telecollaboration partners. For example, learners would not benefit from the project if their partners did not show up or did not seem fully engaged. Supporting these findings, Avgousti (2018) pointed out that a lack of stability in project partners, restricted support, and technological difficulties are common issues found in the body of literature.

Of all the drawbacks, a critical aspect to pay attention to is the transmission nature of virtual education, especially when teaching it asynchronously. According to Guth and Helm (2012), the main paradigm of asynchronous mode of virtual teaching is the "one-way transmission and prescriptivist organization of knowledge" (p. 13). In other words, virtual education can easily reflect the old-fashioned transmission paradigm where learning is prescribed rather than experiential and reflective (Avgousti, 2018, p. 834). Without careful planning and practice, virtual learning can easily neglect interactive and experiential learning practices.

Virtual Training

Beyond formal educational classrooms, the popularity of virtual learning has expanded across various fields of practice (Brookshire et al., 2011). Especially, in the professional development context, virtual learning has been frequently utilized for training and equipping professionals with skills to stay current or advance.

In fact, the term is interchangeably used with *virtual learning* or *virtual training* in the

context of professional development. According to Piccoli et al. (2001), *virtual learning* is learning occurring in a computer-based environment where participants can access a wide range of resources. Whereas Huggett (2010) defined *virtual training* as the practice of teaching and learning when the student and the instructor are in separate locations and come together using a web-based classroom platform. However, the term training is used when the goal of the course emphasizes more on doing and skills attainment linked to specific vocational goals (Beebe, 2007). Additionally, training is concerned with developing specific skills in a short time frame, while education focuses on developing a broad set of skills and building knowledge that can be applied in a variety of contexts (Beebe, 2007; Workforce Insight, 2017). However, Fleming (2009) suggested to provide concepts and promote experiential learning because training and education should not be envisioned as hierarchical but rather as dialectical. Supporting this view, Workforce Insight (2017) also called for education to be more practical and trainings to be more engaging.

Virtual Training and Experiential Learning for Cultural Skills

A vast body of research reported that virtual training offers flexibility, facilitates self-directed learning, is cost-effective delivery, and can reach more learners when used for professional development purposes (McNelis, 2014; Tadimeti, 2014; Wang, 2018). With its myriad of benefits, more and more research across disciplines have adopted virtual training and explored different approaches, such as digital badging systems (Gamrat et al., 2014), mobile learning (Gu, 2016), and simulations (Perry et al., 2015), to identify the best medium and practices for meaningful well as impactful virtual training.

As an example, Crossman (2011) conducted a qualitative study with a group of

first year Australian business undergraduate students, business communications students in Netherlands, and international students largely from Asia to explore their experiences participating in an online international experiential project to learn about intercultural communication. Her findings suggested that experiential learning,

- (a) enabled students to bring new understanding to existing workplace issues with which they had struggled
- (b) helped to adopt identifiable and conciliatory strategies such as explaining, apologizing, and conceding to manage tense moments and situations rather than more assertive or defensive responses, and
- (c) facilitated reflection and interpretation to view culture not as a tangible object but as a subjective concept to grasp. (Crossman, 2011, para. 2).

Crossman also reported drawbacks where some students focused their reflection on cultural differences rather than similarities, quickly attributed communication issues to cultural differences when it was simply confusion about the task and showed behaviors of stereotyping despite the training.

Likewise, Kirst and Holtbrügge's (2019) experimental study with master's students of international business in Germany revealed that their online cultural intelligence (CQ) training incorporating an experiential learning approach did not reveal statistically significant improvements of their CQ scores compared to their pre-intervention scores. In terms of perceived usefulness of the training, study findings indicated that most of the participants felt the level of difficulty was low since they already had extensive knowledge of the concepts introduced in the modules. Some participants also claimed the absence of human touch did not enable their enhancement of

communicative skills. Therefore, as Kirst and Holtbrüge (2019, p. 162) concluded, watching videos and observing interactions can be regarded as rather passive learning; such an approach is not suitable to serve as concrete experience of experiential learning.

Besides the business discipline, the health care field also has examined the effects of experiential learning approaches for virtual cultural competence training. For instance, Perry et al. (2015) implemented an interactive eSimulation module entitled “Communicating with Patients from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds, Case Study: Ms. Shu Fen Chen” and conducted an evaluation study with 60 nurses and health professionals in Australia. Study findings reported an improvement in their confidence in communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse patients (68%), understanding of language and culture in health (78%), understanding the benefits of using a professional interpreter (73%), and being aware of the need to consider language and culture when preparing patients for discharge (75%) (Perry et al., 2015, p. 222). However, studying findings for Perry et al. (2015) also revealed that the eSimulation module restricted the participants’ ability to explore the topic; it did not offer interaction opportunities with other experienced practitioners.

Gap in the Literature

The idea of enhancing intercultural communication skills has been one of the most prominent discussion topics across various fields. Cross-cultural competence (Johnson et al., 2006), cultural intelligence (Thomas & Inkson, 2017), and intercultural competence (Hofstede, 2001) are some examples of different models explored in existing literature. While general English language teaching studies have extensively documented the potential of virtual learning in developing intercultural communication skills, there is

limited literature informing innovative practices designing and implementing a virtual international business English training that enhances intercultural communication skills. For example, while numerous studies examined context-specific discourse, the practice of increasing pragmatic competence, and business English as a lingua franca in an international business setting, enhancing intercultural communication skills are reported as merely an essential element. Concrete approaches, methods, or syllabus to implement in practice are underexplored.

Furthermore, in exploring business English training practices, a vast body of literature focused on testing the training modules or evaluating effectiveness of a virtual training using quantitative assessments (Kovačić et al., 2012; Kučirková et al., 2012; Teodorescu, 2015). There is a dearth of qualitative studies documenting individuals' experiences developing intercultural communication skills through a business English virtual training. Even so, existing qualitative studies predominantly explored learning experiences of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in formal higher education institution courses (Evans, 2012; Gregory, 2012). Studies with working professionals and in a nonformal learning setting are missing. Consequently, such gaps in the literature demonstrate the imperative need to conduct the present study.

III. PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

In schools or in other English courses, you only learn reading, listening, grammar, speaking, or writing. But in this training, you learn real life topics, and you see real examples. I felt an immersion into the English world. Everything was activated—my skills, my knowledge, my thoughts, my eyes. (Esmeralda, Interview)

Nobody taught me details about business or the concept of professionalism with regards to English. You just do your job, and nobody gives you clear guidance on how you should behave or say.... I learned a lot of professional mannerism and communication related to English in this training. It teaches how to be a professional in the English-speaking environment. That is something we cannot learn elsewhere. (Mehmet, Interview)

International English is an art. It's not just about English fluency or skills. Everyone, whether they are English speakers or not, needs to try developing different strategies to participate globally. This training was practical and relevant to me as a global member of society; it transformed me to become more confident and globally minded with English. (Shane, Interview)

The opening vignettes are dissertation study participants' statements regarding their experience with the virtual international business English training. The virtual international business English training areas of knowledge and skills that are not typically included in common business English classes (e.g., international Englishes, low-and high-context communication, giving and recording a virtual presentation, listening to diverse accents, providing constructive feedback). The current chapter, therefore, focuses on study participants' experiences to identify innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training centering around intercultural communication skills. The chapter addresses the following two research questions: What are innovative practices designing and implementing a virtual international business English training? What are the experiences of working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training?

As a result of the data analysis, four themes emerged. These are: (1) Organization of training modules, (2) Topics moving beyond grammar and into real life, (3) Importance of interaction, and (4) Flexibility and time management. Table 8 illustrates the main emergent themes and a brief explanation of the essence of each theme.

Table 8. *Themes: Study Participants' Experiences and Innovative Practices*

Themes	Explanation
1. Organization of Training Modules and Materials	Course sequence and structure as well as having varying selection of materials facilitated an enriching learning experience.
2. Topics Moving Beyond Grammar and Into Real Life	Course topics moved beyond grammatical competence and motivated participants to seek out opportunities to apply the newly acquired knowledge outside the training environment.
3. Importance of Interaction	Interaction with peers facilitated diverse perspectives and formed a learning community. Interaction with instructor resulted in increased motivation.
4. Flexibility and Time Management	Virtual participation offered flexibility as well as time management and pace issues. Some participants fell behind every week due to their English level and individual learner characteristics.

1. Organization of Training Modules and Materials

This theme presents study findings related to how the organization of the training modules and materials facilitated positive learning experiences in the virtual international business English training. Table 9 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency or number of times the categories were identified in the data.

Table 9. *Organization of Training Modules*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
1. Organization of Training Modules and Materials	A. Sequence and Structure	20
	B. Varying Selection of Materials	22

A. Sequence and Structure

The exit interview and questionnaire indicated that the participants expressed favorably about three key features: (1) the linear and progressive sequence of modules, (2) having both verbal and visual overview of the modules, and (3) the weekly quiz.

First, Yeji and David described the organization of the training modules as being similar to a *storyline* and *snowball*, all modules building up on one another in a linear and progressive manner.

I was very impressed with the organization of the training modules. I loved how it was designed like a storyline. All the modules were connected, and I appreciated that I could easily implement what I learned in the previous module into the next module activities right away. The clear organization and the connection helped me stay focused. (Yeji)

I really liked the organization of the training. In Spanish, we say El Conductor, the force that drives and orchestrates. There was an organized sequence, and it was very helpful for my learning process. Nothing stopped me or put me behind schedule. Everything built up on one another, and it felt like your knowledge and skills were snowballing throughout the training. I would feel accomplished the more I progressed with the modules. (David)

Adding to Yeji and David's statements, Mesut was particularly impressed that the training began with a focus on cultural awareness and progressed to practical strategies and techniques important to intercultural communication.

I really liked the organization of this training because, first of all, we started with the importance of English and why English became a global language. English is

a single language, but it turns out that each society has different English. Like that video we watched, there are so many other types of Englishes within Africa. We just think that English is the language of British people or American people, but that is not the case. The linguistic perspective was very interesting, and it was a very important point to learn and start the training. Having us be aware of this perspective of English was a really good starting point for us... Then, we got into simple and plain language, the importance of it. We got into the strategies and techniques to communicate in international English.... What I am trying to say is that there was a clear and logical linear progression in the training modules. Each week you build upon the previous modules. This approach helped us make sense of what's important when it comes to international English and intercultural communication. (Mesut)

It is evident from Yeji, David, and Mesut's statements that the linear and progressive sequence of the modules played an important role in their success completing the virtual training.

In addition to the sequence of the modules, Saketha and Yoona commented positively about the overall structure of the training, specifically having verbal and visual overview of the training modules. They explained how starting each module with an instructor introduction video and being able to see the overall structure of the modules made the virtual training easier to navigate.

The structure of the training was really great. Before we started each module, we got the introduction video from you. That was really helpful because it helped me know how I am supposed to proceed with the module. The steps in which I should follow was explained in the introduction video. Then, each page was in a linear sequence. It was visually obvious that I had to go to this page followed by these activities. I was also able to tell what was coming up next... It helped me manage my time. I initially allocated three hours to this training each week, but I thought it was going to take a little longer because that's how things work with online learning, right? But then, each module was actually manageable to complete within three hours. I could get things done within my schedule. It wasn't making me go to all these different pages with no clear information... I appreciated this type of organization because it made things much easier. It gave me a clear understanding of what is expected, and it made things easier for me to both learn and practice the skills all in a week. (Saketha)

The training was really well organized. I really loved the structure and sequence. It was so clear, and you made materials in each module very clear at the beginning with your introduction videos. Your video gave us the outline of what is about to be presented in the module. and then, you gave different types of materials with different level of details, one-by-one. After that, we finalized the learning with discussion, quiz, and learning reflections. It all opened and closed without anything 'hanging' unclear... I also liked how I could visually see everything in one glance. It gave me a good understanding of how I should manage my time and energy. Then, everything was broken into small parts and segments, which made it easy for me to digest each topic. When you just have ten or five minutes in your day, you can watch one video clip and then come back the next day... The way the training was organized helped me stay focused throughout the training without quitting. It encouraged me to continue learning without being bored or giving up on it. (Yoona)

Saketha and Yoona avoided any confusion or difficulty in time management due to the verbal overview of the modules presented by the instructor and the visually linear structure of the modules. In fact, Yoona described that the structure “felt like an exciting game. There was a quest of knowledge and different tasks; then, you would get a reward, which was the instructor feedback.”

Alongside the benefits of having a verbal and visual overview, Daniela, Joon, and Danyi identified having a short quiz after reviewing all the materials as an important element of the structure that enabled them to remain focused and engaged with the training content each week.

I have taken several English courses, but this training was organized, well-planned, practical, and rigorous. The training had a really good structure. For example, we had to check out all the videos because we had to do a quiz. We couldn't skip any videos because the quiz obligated you to check all the materials. It was a really good strategy to make us concentrate and keep us learning throughout the weeks. (Daniela)

Thanks to the weekly quizzes, I was able to absorb the content well. Without it, I wouldn't have been sure of what was important in each material. The structure was great, but there were a lot of materials for us to review. What helped was the

quiz; it always asked about the key points of the materials. Because of it, before you get into each module, it made you think, 'what is the point of this video or article?' It got me into this 'alert' mode. Then, whenever I was lost and confused with the content, everything cleared up when I was doing the quiz—'ah, this was the point of the video.' It was indirectly summarizing what we learned, and it made me review the content when I realized I didn't understand the concept correctly. I really appreciated how the quiz was used to help us summarize the varied topics and materials before we got into the major tasks. (Joon)

The whole structure and learning model was different from what I am used to, and that was what I really enjoyed about this training. You gave us introduction videos first to give us an overview of what we had to do each week. Then, I went to go watch the videos and read the articles assigned for each week. The quiz you gave out made us focus on what we were learning or practicing each week. It helped us find the key points. If needed for the quiz or the discussion forum, I was able to refer back to the materials... Overall, it kept my attention span longer, and I thought about what I learned more deeply than my previous experiences. Normally, to learn a new skill for my job, I would just watch a 5-minute video and just copy whatever they do to make it work. (Dongmei)

According to Daniela, Joon, and Danyi, the quiz served as a validation and accountability measure to ensure that participants had reviewed and understood all materials. Taking a quiz in each module allowed them to fully engage with the materials and activities.

As a whole, this category illustrates that presenting the module topics in a linear and progressive sequence, providing both a visual and verbal overview of the module structure, and assigning a short quiz after reviewing all the materials contribute to a more positive virtual training experience for international working professionals.

B. Varying Selection of Materials

This category illustrates how the different types of materials utilized to deliver the course (e.g., Instructor-recorded lecture videos, YouTube videos, extra resources) facilitated an enriching experience for the participants to study and reflect on each topic from multiple perspectives. Although the materials addressed the same topic for the

corresponding week, the participants perceived that they served different purposes and complemented each other, providing strong instructional support. As an example, Dongmei shared her perception about how the instructor-recorded lecture videos and YouTube videos (e.g., TED Talk, blogger insights, conference keynotes) complemented each other and how the added resources were beneficial.

All the materials were very well presented and selected. We had to watch, we had to listen, we had to read, and for the activities, we had to present and write. The materials and activities really made us study this whole concept of international business English from a full 360-perspective...The videos were great. I especially liked the videos you created because it made me feel like I was taking a class with you. To be honest, some of the YouTube videos didn't really help connect the dots, but your lecture videos made me understand why other videos were important. It felt like you were explaining things to me instead of making me go through all the materials and understand it all by myself. Some people like to study alone and just read. But for me, I like to go to class in person, have this feeling of connection, and try new things with people. Your lecture videos really created that vibe... I definitely watched more YouTube videos that I wouldn't watch if I had not taken this training. There were lots of, for example, TED Talk videos that I would normally not pay attention. I didn't even know there were that many videos on presentation skills and email writing! But because I was watching the videos on YouTube, I noticed that they started pushing more related content on my feed. I saved couple of videos I found on my feed in my 'watch list.' I am going to go back to the list and watch more videos later... As for the extra resources, because I already knew some of the concepts, it was a great way for me to quickly review and refer to it when I needed it again for the activities. But, if you had put all those things in a lecture video, it would have been much more difficult and energy-draining to practice the strategies or the expressions in my assignments. It would have been hard to correctly apply what I learned. (Dongmei)

Dongmei found that the instructor-recorded video clarified the purpose of watching YouTube videos, and the extra resources provided her with guidance in better managing her time and focusing her effort. However, Dongmei stressed that the instructor's explanation of the videos was especially critical to her experience of completing the project. She stated: "We register for these professional development courses because we

want to hear the instructor's interpretation of the topic. We often already know these concepts. Sometimes we just want to get validation or be pushed to think differently."

Similarly, Jaemin noted that the YouTube videos validated the concepts explained by the instructor. He regarded the mixture of materials as *three-dimensional* learning.

All the topics were reviewed from various perspectives because we had different types of materials. Each material had slightly different angles. At some point, it did make me feel that we are reviewing the same content repetitively, but at the end, it strengthened my learning and helped crystalize the concepts. It 'three-dimensionalized' the training... In normal online training courses, it feels like a two-dimensional learning experience with a one-way flow. It's just watching and answering questions, or sometimes just watching videos. But, in this training, each material in each module presented slightly different perspectives. It made me think about the week's topic in a three-dimensional shape. Your introduction video gave an overview of the week, your videos taught us specific concepts in a more direct and practical way, and then, the YouTube videos supported the concept by other 'outsider' voices such as industry experts. Their videos confirmed and validated what we learned, and this made your teaching credible... Then, you provided us extra resources, which were very useful. The video materials were great, but I couldn't refer to them directly if I needed the information again for my assignments. The extra resources allowed me to review and refer to the concepts easily. The mixture and balance of the materials was unique and made everything lively! (Jaemin)

Jaemin believed that each material served a different purpose, thus providing strong instructional support. It is clear from Dongmei's and Jaemin's statements that incorporating materials that promote multiple modes of learning enabled them to actively participate in the project.

While the video materials were helpful, several participants specifically emphasized the usefulness of the extra resources. Saketha, David, and Esmeralda, for instance, discussed how the extra resources served as a guide for application in practice.

I found the balance of materials very helpful. They complemented each other very well. But I would say the extra resources that you provided us were especially

helpful. Those resources really helped me put together the concepts and understand how to clearly use it in practice. They were tapping on what steps we need to take first, how different phrases should be used depending on the context, how we should use the different cues during a virtual presentation, and so on. They were very helpful in visualizing how I can use the concepts in real life. It also gave me a reference point where I can go back and practice them over and over again. (Saketha)

The feedback assignment was very difficult because each of us had different topics, tones, accents, and expressions. But the most difficult part for me was giving feedback and asking them questions. I wanted to ask important questions and make sure I was not doing it for the sake of the assignment. But the extra resource document was an excellent tool because it had lots of examples about how to write feedback email. I saw all the examples, followed the structure, and wrote in my feedback emails to my peers. I would not have been able to complete it correctly if I didn't have that extra resource to refer. (Esmeralda)

The extra resources were really helpful and useful outside of the training as well. When I was emailing my colleagues, I opened the document, and I looked for an expression that would be appropriate for the message I was trying to write. I felt more supported and confident throughout the process. I thought, 'okay, this one is useful for this message today.' I know it's not an answer sheet for all my emails, but it helps. It helps you feel like you are going in the right direction. (David)

Saketha, David, and Esmeralda were able to apply the newly acquired strategies and skills to their assignments and practice on the job due to the availability of clear examples and references. In other words, the extra resources increased the motivation of the participants to apply what they had learned in and outside of the training environment.

Likewise, Mesut spoke highly of the variety of materials offered. Mesut, however, added an additional perspective by commenting that it was crucial to his learning experience to see non-native English speakers discussing English communication strategies in the videos.

A lot of the videos we watch in an English course or on YouTube is about how to sound more native or what to do to improve our English. But these are concepts

we can pick up from casually watching tv or doing our jobs. The materials we saw in this training is something we don't normally seek and can find. For example, when we were learning about the simple and plain language, we watched this TEDTalk by this Japanese lady. When I heard her speaking in the video, I could feel that she was not comfortable speaking English, but she was great in her presentation. She was really confident, and you could see that she was an expert in using simple language. She used simple language in her presentation... These videos reminded me of my English teacher, who was from the United States. He always taught us to keep our expressions simple; no need to make it complex. The thing is, he encouraged us to use simple language, but he did not give us any example. In addition to that, he was a native speaker, and when somebody tells you to do something at a native level, that's not really helping us language learners because we know they picked it up naturally. It's their language, so they just know it. But when I see non-native speakers talking very well, I tend to respect their approach and imitate whatever they are doing. For me, seeing non-native speaker experts in the videos was new and inspiring to me. You can see this Japanese lady using all the strategies and succeeding in her professional life. Even if she has an accent and uses broken English, you can relate, and it encourages you to try. You think, 'why not me? I can do it, too...' Again, there are many YouTube videos out there. But British or American guys made those videos. Those videos are great, but they're missing one key point. You are aiming non-native English speakers, and you are expecting your audience to be good just like you. But we are non-native English speakers; native speakers can never fully understand our challenges. Even if they say so, they don't know how uncomfortable we can get when applying our skills. No matter how hard you try, there is some gap that you can never overcome. So, it's discouraging when native speakers say, 'try this' and you know you can't get to that level. (Mesut)

Having a connection to the presenter of the knowledge was what led Mesut to truly engage with the training materials. However, seeing a variety of representations of English speakers was equally important as having a variety of materials.

To summarize, the overarching theme from the participants was how the varying selection of materials offered them an opportunity to engage with the presented concepts from multiple perspectives. Their statements also revealed the importance of selecting materials that are relatable but otherwise inaccessible to them. By using varying selection

of materials in terms of modality and the presenters delivering the information, study participants were able to engage in active learning and practice, thereby contributing to a more fulfilling learning experience.

2. Topics Moving Beyond Grammar and Into Real Life

This theme presents study findings regarding how the training module topics moved beyond grammar skills and were practical to participants' professional lives. Table 10 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency or number of times the categories were identified in the data.

Table 10. *Topics Moving Beyond Grammar*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
2. Topics Moving Beyond Grammar into Real Life	A. Moving beyond grammar: Becoming internationally competitive	23
	B. Application of Learning in Real Life	12

A. Moving Beyond Grammar: Becoming Internationally Competitive

By focusing on English communication strategies and professionalism rather than grammar and language skills development (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening), the study findings revealed that the participants found the learning experience valuable and felt more integrated into the workforce as international professionals.

Daniela had previously taken English courses, but this was her first time participating in a virtual training program that focuses on international business English and intercultural communication. She noted how the topics covered in the project different from her expectations of business English training.

When I first heard this training was about business English, I thought I will learn about import or export business trade in English. But, when I started the training,

I noticed that it's about communication for professionals in different business setting. It was not about vocabulary or grammar in business. It was about topics and skills that we can apply to our jobs, any jobs! But you still had to write a lot, you had to read a lot, you had to listen a lot, and you had to speak professionally in this training. I believe everybody has to take this training. We never study these topics in school or anywhere. We are just expected to have these skills without any help! We need this training for the real world. (Daniela)

As illustrated in her statement, Daniela described the virtual training experience as positive since the topics in the modules were relevant to her job and provided her with the opportunity to practice her English skills. Supporting Daniela's experience, David and Saketha discussed the elements that made the virtual training practical.

This training taught us how to communicate, how to organize ideas, how to express ourselves, how to organize a presentation, how to express in a less or more formal way. It gave us these practical tools to communicate successfully not only for business but also for daily communication. It's telling people how to use English to be a good communicator. It's telling us why we need to be a good communicator. (David)

I enjoyed every module in the training because the details were provided very clearly, and guidelines were given on how we should use the knowledge and skills in our assignments and real life. For example, we normally learn what we need to do such as 'only use 6-10 words in a slide' or 'make sure to say this when you open and close the email.' But, what was different about your training was that it helped me understand why it needs to be done that way. Why is what important? And how do you use it? We never really learn it in this formula in any other training, workshops, or classes. (Saketha)

As David and Saketha noted, while practical topics are of importance, providing a clear outline and explanation of how and why they are valuable to them as international professionals were even more critical.

Considering their experiences of learning business English on the job, Joon and Mesut spoke about how the training modules gave them validation of their understanding of professionalism and clarity on how to communicate professionally in English.

I've never been trained or learned the concepts of how to send an email in a formal way or give constructive feedback. I just learned it naturally while working, and most classes I took focused on grammar or vocabulary. The problem was that I never knew what the right answer was whether I was doing things correctly or not. I only knew I was grammatically correct with my messages. But this training allowed me to establish a good understanding of the boundaries of business English and of intercultural communication. Now I know what is good and what is not good and that there is more than just grammar in business communication. This was a very practical and special training consisting of topics that cannot be found elsewhere. (Joon)

Nobody taught me details about the concept of professionalism with regards to English. You just do your job, and nobody gives you clear guidance on how you should behave or what you should say. There is no clear, 'Do this, do that.' Instead, people just complain about you if you make a mistake. Of course, you learn little by little from observing others, but you don't really have an orientation or formal training on this. You have to just go and figure out everything by yourself. It is a survival challenge. But in your training, I had the chance to learn those concepts and small details that I would never be able to explicitly learn on the job. This was very beneficial to me because, right now, I communicate with so many different people around the world. Usually when I send an email, I just end up saying the same thing over and over again, 'thank you, thank you, good morning, good afternoon.' I learned a lot of professional mannerism and communication related to English that I have been confused about in your training, and it was incredibly important for my career. It's not just an English course with vocabulary and grammar. It teaches you how to be a professional in the English-speaking environment. We cannot learn these elsewhere. (Mesut)

Joon and Mesut emphasized how the topics covered in the project are not easily available. Their reflections revealed that many professionals who are fluent in English already possess solid grammatical skills but need skills for navigating business and intercultural environments.

Similarly, Sean and Jaemin recalled their prior experiences with business English courses and described the current virtual training as meaningful experience because it moved away from improving their language skills.

This training is what I have been searching for many years. I took A LOT of business English courses, and I learned how to speak, how to read, how to write, and how to listen. But this was different from those types of courses. In a way, we were respected as a professional instead of being considered as someone who is not 'good' in English 'yet.' We were given opportunities to practice our skills that we already had, and it gave us information that helped us develop it more. It also totally changed my perspective on English and communication in general. For example, international English is an art. It's not just about English fluency or skills. Everyone, whether they are English speakers or not, needs to try developing different strategies to participate globally. The fact that this training was practical and relevant to me as a global member of society transformed me to become more confident and globally minded with English. (Sean)

The simple and plain language technique and the different feedback approaches were great topics. These topics were actually what I have been looking for. None of the courses I took before taught us these topics... Sometimes our issues are not about our English proficiency. It's often not knowing how to use it well in our jobs. This training covered that specific part I was missing. It emphasized the idea that global business English is not the problem of proficiency but a problem of communication, especially for people like me or like my peers who already have good experience communicating in English on our jobs. This training provided this sort of guidance on how to be a good professional communicator in an international setting, not just a good English speaker. (Jaemin)

Through their experience participating in the project, Sean and Jaemin discovered that their needs were not largely language related but rather related to professional communication skills. Practicing English language skills as a secondary objective and developing professional communication skills as the primary objective made them feel more integrated into the workforce as international professionals.

In a similar vein, Yeji discussed how the topics presented in the modules are topics that she cannot identify on her own and that are critical to becoming an internationally competitive working professional.

When I studied alone, I just studied and practiced skills that I wanted to improve and develop more. But this training not only helped me improve my English skills in general, but it also helped me look into topics that I would never have looked

into when I am studying alone. It enlarged my perspective about business English and communication in general. Intercultural communication is not a topic that we would know without the help of an expert! But it is incredibly important; it's not a random topic. It's related to our jobs, no matter what job it is, and our day-to-day communication with the world, no matter where you are from. I don't think anyone would think about these topics when they are studying alone. It's almost sad that we have been missing out on these important topics so important to our careers and for us to be internationally successful. (Yeji)

Yeji's statement illustrates that topics related to intercultural communication require facilitated learning and are difficult to be studied in a self-directed method. It is evident that explicitly addressing intercultural communication as a module topic is vital in virtual international business English training for working professionals.

At the beginning of the virtual training, Esmeralda communicated that her primary needs were developing her English skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, in her exit interview, she noted how the selection of topics corresponded to the context of her professional life as well as the current demand of online communication, making her experience in the virtual training meaningful.

In schools or in other English courses, you only learn reading, listening, grammar, speaking, or writing. But in this training, you learn real life topics, and you see real examples. I felt an immersion into the English world and the professional world. Everything was activated-- my skills with English, my knowledge with international business communication, my reflection, my eyes, and my attention... This training was important for me and my professional life, but I believe it is relevant to any international professionals who is living through this pandemic. We are using video conference and emails to communicate with other countries more than before. And this training included information on how to communicate online. If you want to communicate diplomatically during these modern times, this type of training is highly relevant. We need to learn and practice how to communicate online now. (Esmeralda)

It is important to note that the virtual training was challenging for Esmeralda as it was her first time simultaneously practicing English skills and acquiring knowledge on unfamiliar

topics. She nevertheless stated that expanding her knowledge of new topics was crucial to her advancement in her English skills as well as to her career development.

In sum, participants' statements revealed how the focus of the module topics should move beyond grammar and language skills and recognize working professionals' existing knowledge and skills as a rich reservoir to develop intercultural communication skills for business English settings. In doing so, professionals who are already fluent in English gain a more meaningful learning experience and gain the necessary knowledge and skills to become more internationally competitive.

B. Application of Learning in Real World

Participants who used English on daily basis immediately applied the acquired knowledge and skills to their jobs. For example, Dongmei discussed how she applied the presentation strategies and skills she had acquired from the virtual training to a proposal she presented to the leadership of her organization.

When we were on the presentation module [in the training], I was having to present a big proposal to our leadership in my job. I was collaborating with another colleague, and she is a native speaker. We made the deck together, and I contributed on designing a logical sequence. In our training that week, we were learning that asking questions as an opening can draw audiences' attention; they came from different countries. So, I thought it would be a great strategy to try and suggested to my colleague that we should try it. She thought it was a great idea, so we applied that technique. We opened our presentation with questions to the audience, and at the end they approved our proposal... This training helped me practice my skills in my job right away. It worked well with my work schedule, and it motivated me to apply them in real life because I didn't want to forget what I learned. It only made sense for me to practice using them right away because it was what I needed for a while. It was not hard to apply it on my own. (Dongmei)

As illustrated in her narrative, the timing of the presentation training module coincided with her job assignment. It is evident that Dongmei's job served as a site for her to

practice what she had learned from the training and to master her presentation skills for an international audience.

Similarly, Jaemin noted how he experimented with the sandwich feedback approach when writing a critical email to his Turkish colleague.

I was able to get a lot out of this training compared to other English courses I have taken. I was able to immediately use what I learned from the modules in my job!... At work, I am having to communicate with my Turkish colleagues a lot these days. I am in a situation to use business English a lot. Two days ago, I sent an email to one of my Turkish partners, and I opened with friendly sentences such as 'how are things in Turkey with COVID-19?' and added some good achievements they have made during these times. After that, I wrote my feedback to them. It was more a complain over his work, but I used the sandwich feedback approach to be more formal and constructive for this type of email to this person. It was a difficult email to write, but the sandwich feedback approach was appropriate for the situation. Normally, I am very direct, and I think that was the main reason causing the conflicts I had with them until now. But, the new approach seems to work since I didn't get a bad response from them. (Jaemin)

Jaemin emphasized how he was able to practice the knowledge and skills he acquired from the training in real life because of the nature of his job. He stated: "I definitely have extra opportunities to practice what I learned in this training. I don't think you will get this opportunity to practice unless you have a job to practice side-by-side."

As for David, he described how he applied different expressions and practiced cultural sensitivity when writing emails at work.

I applied everything we have been learning starting five weeks ago since we started the training. I mean, why not? I need to practice more, and what we learned was what I needed. I opened the glossary you gave us to explore what expressions would be good for the email I was writing that day... Also, the other day, I had to send emails to my colleagues in China, and I started thinking: 'Maybe I should not use this word because it can cause confusion. Or maybe it can sound too direct.' I noticed that I started double-checking my messages, and my opening messages are more formal now. For example, I would open with 'Dear friend, dear Kay,' or 'thank you for the quick response...' or 'thank you for

clarifying.' I am applying as much as I can in my job, and it has made my communication a lot easier. I can feel that I am starting to craft my skills. (David)

David practiced not only business English but also reflective skills, taking into account the low and high context cultures. He also used the extra resources to guide the application process. It is evident that appropriate support was extended to his job, motivating him to apply his newly acquired skills in real life.

In a similar vein, Sean and Daniela also applied the newly acquired knowledge and skills to their job but practiced them with their colleagues in their mother tongue languages, Korean and Spanish.

I have not applied all the skills with an international audience yet. But I did apply them throughout the training during my small virtual meetings with my Korean colleagues and supervisors. I noticed that our communication was a lot smoother than usual. It kept our meeting productive! I am certain that I am more prepared for future meetings with my colleagues overseas. (Sean)

I really appreciated the learning reflections. Every week, it made me think about what I learned, and it got me to reflect on how I can apply it in my job. It was an exercise to help me make connections to my life. I would have made the connections without it, but it helped me make the connection more quickly. Because of that, I was also able to apply what I learned on my job after I finished a module... Yesterday, I was in the office having to give some feedback to a colleague, and I applied the sandwich feedback approach we learned! It was in Spanish, but it still applied to my job. These are important skills for everyone and all types of jobs, not just when you use English. (Daniela)

Sean and Daniela commented that they were not able to find an opportunity to practice the concepts in English yet. However, discovering that the newly acquired knowledge and skills are applicable in any languages, they shared their plans on continue practicing in their mother tongue until they are able to use it with the English language.

This category is a true testament to the participants' interaction with their environments inside and outside of the virtual training (see Figure 4 of the framework

graphic). Because the selection of topics was relevant to their professional needs, participants were motivated to take action and further their development process in their own time and in real life. Although participants who use English for their jobs on a daily basis were presented with more practice opportunities with business English, other participants also applied their learning to real-life situations regardless of the language being used.

3. Importance of Interaction

This theme presents study findings that highlight how interaction with peers and the instructor contributed to the participants' success within the virtual international business English training. Table 11 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency or number of times the categories were identified in the data.

Table 11. *Importance of Interaction*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
3. Importance of Interaction	A. Learning through interaction with peers	19
	B. Desire for live interactions	15
	C. Interaction with instructor as motivator	12

A. Learning Through Interaction with Peers

Each module included a discussion forum that was assigned for weekly participation and comment sections in which participants could freely interact with their peers about the materials they were viewing. Study findings revealed that interacting with peers in these two interactive spaces within each module presented various opportunities of noticing, learning, and reflection. The discussion forum facilitated opportunities for the participants to notice the diverse expressions and perspectives on the assigned topics for

the week. In other words, they went through the process of noticing the cultural and linguistic features of international business English. Additionally, the comment section allowed participants to establish emotional connections and informally share their experiences with one another, establishing a sense of learning community. By having these interactions weekly, participants were motivated to remain actively involved in their learning experience throughout the training.

Yeji and Patricia noted that interacting with their peers in relation to the module topics on a weekly basis enhanced their engagement with the training.

This training was refreshing because I was sick of studying alone and not interacting with other people. It was so much fun to share my ideas with other people from all around the world and reflect on different perspectives in our discussions every week. It definitely would have been a static experience without the interaction. (Yeji)

The fact that we were able to interact with people around the world was the strength of this training. It was especially interesting to see different ideas from different cultural perspectives in the discussion forums. Every week you were seeing something different from each other. (Patricia)

Yeji and Patricia both shared that being able to interact with people outside of their neighboring countries is not a common experience for them. Therefore, they were motivated to engage in the discussion more actively and on time in order to examine the discussion topic from diverse perspectives.

For Saketha, by not having access to other participants' postings before contributing her own, she was able to present her true perspective without being influenced by others. She noted that this feature also provided her an opportunity to observe the culturally different meanings of expressions used in the interactions.

The discussion forums were great and very interesting. People were sharing their opinions from their point of views, and you get to learn how people have different

perspectives on the same exact topic. I liked the model of not being able to see other people's responses before posting your original response to the prompt first. Once you see the response of different person, you can be influenced and phrase your message accordingly to the 'crowd.' But with our discussion forum model, you were able to truly give your perspectives without being influenced by others... Another reason why I liked the discussion forum was because you also see that people use different expressions to deliver the same opinion or idea. When we learned about the low- and high-context culture, the forum helped me look at our discussions more carefully and see how same English language can have different versions in different country. There was this one person who said the presentation assignment was a 'burden' to her. But it was clear that she was just overwhelmed and nervous about the project. She didn't mean to say that it was a 'burden' to her life; I thought, 'maybe burden means something different to her.' (Saketha)

Based on Saketha's statement, the restricted access to view other participants' perspectives enhanced the weekly discussion forum activity. In fact, Sean had a transformative experience with respect to his awareness of intercultural communication skills as a result of the restriction.

I really enjoyed the discussion forum activity because that was when I was really impressed to be part of the training with professionals from different countries. I thought that most people will think like me, but that was not the case. Whenever I submitted my response first and then checked my peers' opinions, I was surprised to see how everyone had different thoughts... I clearly remember how shocked I was with the very first discussion forum. The prompt asked us to explain how important intercultural communication skills is for different professions. My response was that medical providers like doctors and nurses don't need intercultural communication skills because it's not really about communication, it's about science. I was thinking about how things worked in Korea. Most of the patients will be Korean, and they don't need to communicate in English or need 'cultural' communication skills. I believed that it was not necessary. But then, I remember that only one other person-- Korean, as well-- had the same idea as I did, while everyone else said the complete opposite. They said that doctors and nurses definitely need intercultural skills because they have to embrace patients' perspectives, considering their emotions, religions, or regional cultures. This really shocked me! It made me think that culture is not just about nationality. It makes sense, but I just didn't think of it that way. The discussion forum really helped me look at things from diverse perspectives, and it gave me this 'aha' moment of 'I really need to get out of this narrow view.' (Sean)

While enabling the restriction initially caused Sean to wonder if he was giving the "right or wrong" answers, he quickly discovered how his opinion was conflicting with the majority opinions. It allowed him to re-evaluate and reflect his own perspective. He added, "this is something you cannot experience in a live classroom because you can change your answers easily immediately."

As well as observing different perspectives, David described how he discovered different grammar structures and expressions through the discussion forum.

I enjoyed the discussion and interaction we had in the training. It made this training enriching by given the opportunity to learn from others and to learn in a different way. For example, even though everyone communicated in English, not everyone communicated in the same way. We didn't use the same expression, we didn't use the same structure, we didn't express the ideas in the same way. Whenever I was reading through the discussion forums, I learned something new - not just ideas but also vocabulary, idea organization, and sentence structure. Every week I would think, 'Interesting. I never would have expressed it this way.' So, through the discussion forum, you also improve some grammar and vocabulary as well. (David)

David further noted how he was able to fulfill his need to learn grammar and vocabulary through engaging in discussion with his peers.

In addition to the discussion forum, Yoona regarded the comment sections within each module as beneficial as it allowed her to interact with her peers in a more informal setting and establish a sense of learning community. This, in fact, increased her commitment to completing all assignments in a timely manner.

I also really appreciated how we can build some type of emotional connection in the comment section of the module. We were more honest, and there were no 'requirements' of having to write certain number of words. The comment section was another important factor making the training successful, and building that relationship made me feel that we are affiliated to this training as a group. Because of it, it made us not want to let each other down. For example, if I did not submit my presentation at all, my group would have lost a chance to give

feedback or watch a presentation. It would have taken their practice opportunity, and I would have felt guilty. I don't think there would be that sense of guilt without having interacted with them closely. This feeling gave me another strong commitment to do my assignments. Whether it was 100% satisfactory quality or not, I was happy to complete the assignments. The responsibility added up for a good experience for everyone. (Yoona)

Yoona's statement illustrates how the comment section served as a space for participants of the discussion forum to interact beyond the discussion area's topics. Following is an example of a comment section thread in the *Module 5 Instructor Welcome Video* page in which Joon, Yoona, and Yeji discuss their experiences with the virtual presentation recording assignment they had to complete in Module 4.

Joon: *The preparation for the slides took longer than I expected, so I didn't have enough time to practice the presentation and record the best version. :-(In the beginning, I wrote the script and tried to record it based on it. However, the script became an obstacle in the end. I was relying on the scrip too much!!*

Yoona: *Oh, I feel your pain, Joon! It was harder than I thought. I think the exaggerating strategy worked wonder for me! But I really had to get a better internet connection as it got frozen once in a while...I also noticed that I kind of looked sleepy in the videos, haha.*

Yeji: *I agree with both of you! Virtual presentation was a new challenge for me. I found it difficult to make eye-contact and appropriate gestures because I can't check your reactions in real time. But, overall, it was a great experience! :-)*

As such, the comment section within each module offered a space of reflection of the learning experience, thereby establishing a sense of learning community membership.

To summarize, spaces of peer interaction (discussion form and comment section) presented various opportunities for noticing, learning, and reflection. The discussion forum provided participants with the opportunity to gain new perspectives and notice different expressions, grammar structures, and interpretations of meanings. The comment

section of the training allowed participants to interact and share their reflections with one another, thus establishing a sense of learning community membership and motivating them to actively participate in the training and completing it on time.

B. Desire for Live Interaction

While the interaction with peers was beneficial to their learning, the study participants also discussed the limitations, such as the challenges of large group discussions and the disadvantages of text-based interactions. The effects of these limitations were evident in the modules 4 and 5 discussion forums where participants were the least interactive with one another. In light of these limitations, the participants of the study desired that there be opportunities for live interaction during the training.

To begin with, Jaemin describes how the discussion board was designed in a manner that discouraged him from actively participating in the discussion.

As much as I liked having the opportunity to interact with my peers, I think the way it was designed was weak. There were too many peers. We had over 10 people, right? I didn't really want to participate when I knew my opinion was not going to be 'heard' carefully. It wasn't as productive for me. (Jaemin)

Jaemin's ultimate goal in participating in the virtual training was to master the content knowledge. Such an attitude lead Jaemin to perceive the discussion forum as an "extra activity."

Dongmei shared a similar perspective with Jaemin and explained that discussions in large groups were time-consuming due to the text-heavy nature. Instead, she found the small group discussion setup encouraging her to actively interact with her peers.

I really enjoyed module three discussion dynamic. You made the discussion group smaller. That made it a lot easier, and I feel like we had a lot more active discussion. I really interacted with my group members. Whereas, other modules were big group discussion, so I didn't really care for replying to questions I was

asked by my peers...Overall, I just wish we had more non-text-based interaction because I really don't have a lot of time to read. Sometimes I did not read all the discussion there. They were bringing in perspectives based on their experiences outside of their current job. It was good to learn what other people think. But at times, we weren't able to really get more context from them. We were busy moving on to the next module, so we didn't get the time to connect deeper. (Dongmei)

The small discussion forums proved to be valuable, however, Dongmei noted that having at least one live interaction opportunity available during all five modules would have encouraged her to actively take part in the discussions all the way to the end.

Sean also expressed similar views regarding the issue of text-based interaction and desired live interactions with his peers.

In this training, most of the interaction we had were based on texts. It took me a long time to write sentences, sometimes I couldn't express what I wanted to deliver because it was going to take too much time. Also, I never really talked about those topics in English.... Writing in English takes a huge amount of time for me. To complete any writing tasks, I need several hours to complete it... I really wish we had more live-time interaction sessions to solve this issue and so that we can achieve real-time communication skills. It could also help our speaking skills. That is one thing that was missing in this training. (Sean)

Despite his passion and intent to actively engage with his peers, Sean was pressed for time since he had to write everything in English. On the other hand, this experience may have been influenced by Sean's tendency to focus on grammatical accuracy, as he demanded more correction of grammatical errors as the weeks progressed.

Adding a different perspective, Daniela, Yoona, and Saketha desired live interactions for more personal relationship-building purposes. First, Daniela described that the discussion forum structure did not offer flexibility for participants to interact more personally.

I liked the diverse group because in the discussion forum we could share different opinions, and you could see things from different points of view. Everyone was

very respectful about it. But the discussion was too punctual—just answering discussion questions. If there were more live interactions between us, we could have probably identified more commonalities between us and build a stronger connection to each other during the training. (Daniela)

Daniela was motivated to develop a more personal relationship with peers because it is rare for her to interact with people outside Latin America. However, she was concerned about connecting with someone in an entirely virtual environment; therefore, live interactions would have allowed her to establish relationships in a manner that she is familiar with.

In a similar vein, Yoona commented that the discussion forum structure prevented her from taking advantage of the unique wealth of professional knowledge each participant possessed.

I wish that we had a little more chance to get to know each other in depth, if that was even possible, because we only communicated in texts and in a 'question-and-reply' format. For example, in my case, at the beginning, when I read everyone's introduction, I was really interested in getting to know a couple of people because they worked in world renown companies. I thought it would be great if I could learn about their journeys as international people working in 'dream' companies. I know that was not the focus of the training, but it would have been nice if we could use the opportunity to connect more. Perhaps if we had an opportunity to have direct communication with each other, whether it's a Zoom meeting or email, we could have also practiced and developed our intercultural communication skills to the fullest extent. For instance, to make each other understandable, we would have had to use simple and plain English. (Yoona)

Yonna noted that the live interaction would be optimal opportunities for the participants to practice the intercultural communications they acquired from the training. Saketha also held the same opinion. She stated,

If we could have had a live Zoom meeting during the training, that would have been a really great for me. That way we can get to know each other and actually feel the cultural differences or try to apply what we learned through real-life

interactions. For example, we can observe low-context and high-context communication differences among us. However, I understand how difficult it would be to coordinate all the different time zones. (Saketha)

This category offers a detailed description of the limitations associated with text-based interaction in training. The participants discussed how the limitations can be overcome by incorporating live interaction sessions as well as why this is beneficial. The participants' statements indicate that meaningful interaction can be achieved in smaller groups, and live interaction offers more opportunities for participants to learn and practice their intercultural communication skills.

C. Interaction with Instructor as Motivator

Study participants reported that receiving timely instructor feedback and having the opportunity to interact with the instructor regarding this feedback increased their motivation. Specifically, they identified clear organization, timeliness, relevance, and opportunities to negotiate the feedback as key characteristics that provided support to their progression. In other words, the feedback was not merely for error correction but also for building reciprocal relationship and providing directions to their effort in which they saw it as relevant. The way the participants described the instructor feedback was: *well-organized, a chance to explain ourselves, celebration of progress, and a reminder to not be disappointed.*

Sean discussed how the interactive commenting capability in the assignment documents provided a medium to communicate with the instructor. By receiving weekly feedback from the instructor and having the option to respond back, Sean felt accepted as a learner, which in turn motivated him to complete the assignments on time.

The content of the training was very helpful and well-organized. But your feedback is what bonded me to this training. I was actually very impressed with

the Google doc feedback/comment feature because there was communication with you each week. You asked me questions for clarification, and I answered. I also had the opportunity to ask more questions on my assignment. If there was no feedback, I would have just been watching the videos and maybe never completing any of the assignments. I would make excuses as if I don't have time to complete the assignments. Your feedback was what made me complete the assignments and review my strengths and weakness. (Sean)

Based upon his prior experience participating in an in-person business English training course at work, Sean noted the virtual component of the current training provided him with the opportunity to interact with the instructor on an individual basis. In contrast, group training courses held in person did not offer this opportunity. He stated, “the virtual feature allowed actual communication with the instructor. It wasn’t like ‘okay, we have to move on because everyone else needs help as well.’ It felt like the instructor wanted to communicate with me.”

Yeji and Esmeralda discussed how the instructor’s feedback helped facilitate in-depth understanding of the presented topics. Furthermore, they mentioned how important it was to receive feedback in the training, as the opportunity to receive feedback on the job is rare.

Your feedback was very helpful for me. You sometimes asked me questions like, ‘what are you trying to say here? Are you saying x, y, z?’ or ‘what are the most important points here?’ These questions were a guide in a way. It helped me try to find the best way to deliver my thoughts more clearly. It also helped me ask more questions and stay curious and focused throughout the training. There were lots of ‘aha!’ moments while going through the feedback that you gave me... We never get these types of guiding questions at work. We are never really given feedback or the chance to explain ourselves; we are just criticized. (Yeji)

The concepts really solidified when I read all the feedback you gave us. Sometimes, doing the assignments are not enough even if you have lots of practice activities. At work, I don't have people giving me feedback. This training was a great opportunity for me to receive the feedback I needed as well. I would not

have finished the training without your support. It was important to know that the instructor was there every week to answer our questions. (Esmeralda)

As stated in Yeji and Esmeralda's statements, instructor feedback served to fill a void in their professional lives, supporting and facilitating their professional development.

Receiving positive feedback from the instructor served to motivate Dongmei and Daniela to progress in the training. They also shared how instructor feedback addressed grammar errors that were valuable for their growth.

Receiving feedback was important part of this experience for me. Your feedback was considerate, and it felt like a celebration of my progress. Sometimes I didn't do very well and just did okay, but you still said I did great in trying something new. Your feedback was a big kudos push for me to continue the training. If I didn't receive feedback from you, I would not have done all of this well. I would have been missing the most important part of taking the training. It would just be everything on my own; then, I definitely would have had less motivation... I also really appreciated how you gave us feedback on our grammar errors because that is not something I want to learn in a training necessarily, but something I want to still work on. I would have never known my errors otherwise! (Dongmei)

Interacting with you was very important for my success in the training. You reminded us with what we needed to do each week. You reminded us to not be disappointed if we were not doing well with the new concepts... I appreciated your feedback, especially with my grammar. If you didn't do that, I don't think this training experience would have been the same. It could be just a normal video training, but it would not have been meaningful. For this reason, I did not quit even though it was a lot for me. (Daniela)

Adding to this perspective, Saketha emphasized how the instructor feedback on grammar was more meaningful because “it came from someone who knows cultural differences, grammatical challenges, and who experienced all of them before us. It wasn’t the romanticized view; it was realistic feedback.”

In sum, the virtual medium of the current training offered more opportunities for individualized interaction and feedback negotiation with the instructor in comparison to

in-person training events. The participants' statements illustrated how the organized and timely instructor feedback provided them with strong instructional support, thereby increasing their motivation to learn and progress.

4. Flexibility and Time Management

This theme presents study findings related to how the virtual modality of the training offered study participants flexibility while also posing time management and pace issues. Table 12 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency or number of times the categories were identified in the data.

Table 12. *Flexibility and Time Management*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
4. Flexibility and Time Management	A. Benefits and drawbacks of flexibility	13
	B. Falling behind because of English	7

A. Benefits and Drawbacks of Flexibility

This category highlights the benefits and drawbacks of being able to complete the virtual international business English training on a flexible schedule. Several participants, both in their exit interview and exit questionnaire, identified time flexibility as one of the main benefits of virtual training because they were able to set a pace and time that suited their work and personal schedules. Participants also spoke about the negative effects of flexibility, especially during a busy week.

While Mesut was excited about participating in the training, he expressed concerns about the virtual format of the training prior to beginning the first module. In the end, however, he acknowledged his satisfaction with the format, as it allowed him to

control his pace and workload.

At first, I was skeptical of this 'virtual' classroom model. I still don't like virtual learning because I want to become friends with the people I share the same experience with. It's not the ideal learning environment for me. But to be honest, this project exceeded my expectation; the virtual learning made sense for the topics and everyone's level of English. I was able to take specific modules in my own pace, and if there were topics that I already knew, I schemed it. It wasn't a big problem with my progress, and it made me feel less overwhelmed with this entire experience because 7 weeks is a long time for me. But making time during the week was the biggest constraint for me. It was good to have the time flexibility, but for some reason, I had lots of things going on during this training. I had to take the IELTS exam; I had to apply for this new instructor role. Because of this, I turned some of my assignments late in the following week. I could only make time on the weekends on the busy weeks. But I don't think I would have finished the assignments at all if I didn't have the deadlines. (Mesut)

While having flexibility allowed Mesut to dictate his time and pace, it also caused him to put off all the training assignments until the weekend on busy weeks. The weekly deadlines, however, ensured that he completed his assignments on time.

On the other hand, Jaemin discussed that the Friday and Sunday deadlines were inconvenient as they imposed a feeling of time pressure by the time was able to devote to completing his assignments. Additionally, having a different main assignment every week made it difficult for him to budget the appropriate amount of time.

The good point about this virtual training is that I can manage my time. But, the bad part is that I can manage my time. There were times where I didn't focus on some topics as much because of the deadlines. For example, at the beginning of the project, I was aware of all the tasks and all the deadlines. I already briefly knew the commitments. But, I postponed everything to Sunday because that was the time I felt ready to focus—after finishing all my work and my responsibilities as a dad and a husband... The training required us to watch all the materials by Friday and post our own discussion response by Friday, and then there were quizzes, discussion post response, reflections, and other assignments all due Sunday. But my time allocation on weekends is mainly dedicated to my baby. Because of it, I couldn't spend enough time to participate in that peer interaction. And, I had discussion post response as my last task, so it felt like, 'Okay, I worked

on 1, 2, 3, 4... and ahhh I don't have time, so I'll just do the last one quickly.' If we received some information on how long each module tasks would take, it would have been great. Nowadays, I see articles saying that it's a 5-minutes long or something. If there was a sign of how much time we need to allocate for each task, it would have been helpful... Let me explain it this way. There's a task box, and I know there is something inside the box. I picked it up slowly, and I quickly opened and closed it. I thought, 'okay, let's do it Sunday.' So, I know there is something inside the box, but I didn't do it right away. So, on Sunday, I opened it, and I notice that sometimes it's smaller than I thought. But, sometimes it's bigger or more complicated than I thought. For example, I knew that recording presentation was a big task. But in week 3, you gave us time to build a skeleton of our presentation. Luckily, I had a topic in mind already, but if I didn't have the idea, it would have been really hard for me to finish the project. (Jaemin)

In order to balance his work and family obligations, Joon recognized that completing the training at a high level of quality was not his priority. It was only due to the project's flexibility that he was able to participate in the training. Even so, he was unable to manage his time as a result of the inconsistency in the length of assignments and insufficient information regarding the duration of assignments.

As a mother, Dongmei shared some of Jaemin's concerns about time management. However, she was eventually able to develop a pattern that worked well for her.

Flexibility really benefitted me. With busy work schedule and lots of house chores with my child, having flexible time to participate in this training was important to me. But at the beginning, especially the first week, I was on vacation, so it was a little bit difficult for me to catch up to everything before I started the second module. I also didn't know how much time was going to take for each module. But later on, I got used to the model, so I was able to manage and schedule my time well. It occurred to me that I didn't have to watch all the videos in one day! I watched some videos during my breaks in the weekdays. I broke it up. But it would be great if we could have smaller exercises due throughout the week, for example, we have one exercise by Wednesday, then we have another one by Friday. Not everyone has good time management skill, and not everyone has time during the week. It worked for me because I work from home and my child has day care during the week. But everything was basically due Sunday, and what if some people only have time on the weekends? If the due date can be more spread

out throughout the week, that would probably make people feel less pressured and help manage time... Also, we do need at least another two more weeks. I needed time to digest it. And I need time to think and to reflect, one week flexibility is short. We don't think about reflection time when we plan our schedule for the week. The learning reflection was too dry, and it was a 'task.' It did not allow us to reflect on it the way we wanted it to. (Dongmei)

In order to make flexible time management advantageous for working parents, Dongmei emphasized the importance of having the appropriate support and skills. Sean's experience supports this view since he was unable to secure childcare due to conflicts with his wife's schedule. According to his learning reflections and exit interview, he had difficulties completing the tasks on time because of this issue. Sean stated in his exit interview: "It was quite stressful to do everything by the due date. I did everything at night, mostly on the weekends, after my kids fell asleep. But it was just on the borderline of my limit."

Study participants' statements revealed that flexible scheduling served as a motivating factor to participate in the virtual training, but also presented challenges to successfully managing time throughout a busy week. It was especially difficult for participants who are working parents to balance the benefits and drawbacks of flexibility.

B. Falling Behind

Three participants experienced challenges with time and pace management every week. Although they all completed the training on time, Daniela, Esmeralda, and Patricia specifically discussed how they spent 6-24 hours to complete each module, consequently causing challenges to meet weekly deadlines. Based on their statements, this can be attributed to two aspects: level of English and individual learner characteristics.

First, every week Daniela submitted her assignments on the following Mondays or Tuesdays when the assignments were due the previous Sunday. In her exit interview,

Daniela explained how her level of English as well as her work schedule had caused her to be tardy in completing the modules.

There was not enough time in a week for me to complete everything on time, especially with my level of English. There were lots of words I never heard of! I had to search the meaning to even understand the general topic. I also had work commitments, and here in Colombia, sometimes you work at home after work. You have these text messaging apps as well, so people communicate with you after work. So, I couldn't find the right time to do my homework. I had to find free time during work hours, so I worked on the homework little by little... For the last module, I didn't go to work. I spent the whole week to complete the last module. I needed a lot of time to watch all the presentations. It took me a lot of time because I had to watch it over and over again. There weren't any subtitles! (Daniela)

All videos provided for the course had close captions. However, for the peer presentation recordings in the last module, closed captions were not available. Due to her level of English, Daniela spent most of her time repeatedly watching the videos to increase comprehension, especially in the last module. Nevertheless, it was evident that she was committed to complete her training and invest as much time to submit quality work.

As for Esmeralda, she was unable to submit the virtual presentation recording project. She reported that she was not feeling confident using English to provide her recording. In fact, she expressed concerns about her English skills every week although her email correspondence was free of grammatical errors. In her exit interview, she continually stated that the English level required for the course should be higher, even though she was able to communicate her perspective fluently throughout the study.

I think you should have an exam to assess our English skills before this training. This training requires you to write quickly and think quickly. It requires a good level of English to participate well. In each module, there were many activities that needed to be completed in a week, but my English was not good enough to follow the pace. For example, I needed to watch one video many times in order to fully understand the concept. Then, when I had to respond to open questions in the discussion forum, it was incredibly difficult to write complete sentences

quickly. I wanted to say a lot, but I couldn't say everything because I did not know how to say the ideas. I didn't practice writing these thoughts before. I didn't have the right vocabulary to describe my ideas in English... As for the video presentation assignment, I didn't have enough time to complete it. I didn't have the time to put together my ideas. I also didn't think my English was good enough to record my presentation. It took me a very long time to even write the email to you when I needed to tell you that I couldn't submit the assignment. (Esmeralda)

As the director of a research center, Esmeralda was detail-oriented and had a strong desire to provide an error-free product. It was evident that this characteristic gradually affected her confidence, pace, and time management to the point where she was unable to submit her project.

Adding a different perspective, while she managed to submit all her tasks on time, Patricia noted how her English level and limitation of time impacted her quality of work.

Because the purpose of this training is not to focus on grammar but on new concepts, you have to have a really good level of English before getting into the materials. This training had us write a lot. But I am not good with writing in English. I don't know a lot of words. So, my responses were short; it was more important for me to finish the assignments because I did not want to be late... The presentation project was challenging even though it was a really good practice for my job. It was difficult because of my level of English, so it was hard to get everyone to understand what I wanted to say... I spent at least 6 hours a week, and that wasn't really enough for me. I could only give short answers because I couldn't find the right words to say what I wanted to say. (Patricia)

Patricia recognized how missing a deadline could impact her progress in completing the entire training. Nevertheless, keeping up with the pace with the group was more important than spending more time on the assignments.

Despite their challenges, Daniela, Esmeralda, and Patricia completed the entire training on time. This category illustrates how English level and individual learner characteristics can create challenges to their learning, especially developing intercultural communication skills.

Chapter Discussion

This chapter offered a detailed description of study participants' experiences and identified innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training centering around intercultural communication skills.

First, study participants identified the linear and progressive sequence of modules as an important feature that facilitated positive learning experiences. They specifically described how starting with the focus of increasing awareness and working towards application of knowledge and skills enhanced their motivation to continue their learning. This finding suggests that the sequence of the modules stimulated various levels of intelligence (e.g., comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation) that enabled them to explore intercultural communication skills in an experiential way (Beard & Wilson, 2007). Furthermore, as Mesut addressed in his exit interview, the virtual training began with modules topics addressing the importance of English, how and why English became a global language, and why intercultural communication is important. By initially examining cultural knowledge and skills from the outside perspective (culture-general), followed by an exploration of the same knowledge and skills from the inside perspective (culture-specific), participants gained a clearer view of culture as context-dependent, enabling them to be mindful of stereotyping. This finding contributes to a clearer understanding of how to foster both culture-general and culture-specific knowledge and skills (Stadler, 2017).

Additionally, study findings revealed that having both verbal and visual overview of the modules allowed the participants to navigate the virtual training easier in terms of preventing confusion or time management issues. The instructor's verbal overview

included description of expectations and the importance of the module topics. This element speaks to the significance of establishing clear purposes for the participants to understand why they are undertaking the learning experience (Beard & Wilson, 2007). In terms of providing clear visual overview of the modules, it coincides with the notion of designing learning spaces for quality experiential learning (Beard & Wilson, 2007). Establishing clarity in location of resources, places for group discussion, and places for reflection produced a climate conducive to learning and effective time management on acquiring knowledge, mastering skills, and applying what they learned. This characteristic reflects the fourth core concept serving as the basis of experiential e-learning: *competence*. Competence refers to “acquiring knowledge, mastering skills, and learning to apply what is learned to real-life situations” (Carver et al., 2007, p. 251). It also promotes the awareness of technological skills and competency gap among learners. Recognizing the potential skills gap hindering engagement, the virtual training provided verbally and visually clear directions and eliminated any barriers that would become an obstacle to their learning experiences.

Based on the participants’ statements, the weekly quiz served as a validation and accountability measure of the acquired knowledge and skills. However, it is evident that the quiz also served as an activity facilitating active learning within each module. According to existing literature (Avgousti, 2018; Guth & Helm, 2012; Kirst & Holtbrügge, 2019), simply watching videos and observing interaction represents one way transmission of knowledge and is not suitable to serve as concrete experience of experiential learning. While offering flexibility with time and space for learners to review the learning materials, as Beard and Wilson (2007, p. 39) highlighted, “the concept of

self-direction may simultaneously lead to isolation, individualism, and poor learning.”

Therefore, assigning low-stake quizzes at the end of each module allowed the learners to actively engage with the acquired knowledge.

Moreover, study findings illustrated that utilizing varying selection of materials (e.g., instructor-recorded lecture videos, YouTube videos, extra resources) promoted learner-centeredness and offered strong instructional support for the participants to meaningfully engage in experiential learning. Providing varying selection of materials offered them flexibility and an opportunity to learn from sources that they personally felt stimulating based on their learning styles (Carver et al., 2007). While the virtual training required them to review all the assigned learning materials, the participants were still able to choose which material to use for deep reflection. They were also able to choose which material to refer to when applying the newly acquired knowledge and skills in practice.

The video materials representing different perspectives facilitated engagement in *concrete experiences*, *reflective observation*, and *abstract conceptualization* phases of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015). The extra resources served as a model and guidance for participants to successfully engage in *active experimentation*. In summary, study participants: (1) watched the videos to engage in new experiences, in this case, knowledge; (2) reflected on the videos and observed emergence of divergent perspectives on their own; (3) integrated their observations into logically sound knowledge; and (4) safely applied into practice their newly acquired logically sound knowledge.

The second emergent theme illustrated how the virtual international business English training offered module topics that were practical to the participants’ professional lives. One of the most common elements vital to their learning experience was how the

training moved beyond grammar and language skills. As the participants reflected on their past learning experiences with business English, they discovered their needs were not largely language related but rather related to knowledge and skills for effective, professional communication. By moving beyond language skills, the participants felt that they had become more integrated and competitive as international working professionals. It allowed them to better understand how their existing challenges were not due to a lack of English skills. This finding speaks to the significance of focusing on pragmatic competence when developing international business English skills. It supports Charles and Marschan-Piekkari's (2002) recommendation on promoting the use of variety of communicative strategies and metacognitive expressions when teaching business English.

The participants also described the topics as applicable to all of their jobs. This finding indicates that the training addressed universal aspects of work culture-practices in concert with professional language skills. Based on Rogerson-Revell's (2003) suggestion, this approach helped the participants develop some level of understanding of similarities in communication across different national, organizational, and field-specific cultures. It moved away from the traditional comparison method and fostered the idea of common entity (Holliday, 2016). Such an approach increased a sense of belongingness as members of international workforce.

As the selection of topics was practical to their professional needs, the participants were motivated to take the learning beyond the training and apply into practice in the real world. This finding suggests that the training enhanced participants' *agency* to take action and utilize their jobs as a site to engage in the *active experimentation* phase of experiential learning (Carver et al., 2007; Kolb, 2015). In this

regard, this finding provides novel insights into the current knowledge of experiential e-learning activities. For example, existing literature on virtual experiential learning heavily focuses on simulation activities held within immersive or augmented reality (Barton & Lee, 2013; Cooke-Palchwitz, 2008; Perry, 2015). However, these approaches can be costly in terms of time, resources, and technological capacity. Moreover, although it allows for safe learning, it does not correspond with the real-life situations, producing inaccurate results (Gray, 2002). To that end, current study findings prove how the virtual learning environment and the real world can interact to activate the full cycle of experiential learning. While this approach requires careful planning, it reduces costs, produces results that correspond to real life, and offers informal workplace learning that allows them to continue developing their intercultural communication skills on their own throughout their careers.

The third emergent theme highlighted how interacting with peers in discussion forums and comment section presented opportunities for noticing, learning, and reflection for the participants. Based on their statements, the discussion forum facilitated reflective observations (Kolb, 2015), where the participants noticed and reflected on their ideas from diverse perspectives. The finding also indicated the importance of interaction in highlighting culturally and linguistically rich points and how meanings are not universal but rather diverse and contextual (O'Dowd, 2003; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006). As Belz (2007) defines, "a rich point is a reflex of culture-specific ideas, beliefs, or constructs as manifested in language or other types of communicative patterns" (p. 145). From this perspective, the weekly discussion forum served as a rich source of diverse perspectives on similar ideas and linguistically diverse expressions to describe the ideas

in the same language. In Sean's case, it also offered a transformative learning experience. However, based on the participants' statements, the experience of engaging with culturally and linguistically rich points was enhanced because it occurred in a virtual environment where the interaction allowed more time to think and form authentic and meaningful responses. It contributes to a clearer understanding of how asynchronous virtual learning offers a rich and authentic context for intercultural interaction and reflection.

Regarding the comment section, it served as a space for the participants to informally share reflections and thus form a *learning community* where they actively share common goals, attitudes, and emotional experiences. Existing literature reports that participating in a learning community drives individuals' desire to continue working and actively seeking ways to meet their needs (Croft, Dalton, & Grant, 2015; Shea, 2006). Therefore, this finding suggests that the comment section in each module served as a space to foster a sense of *belonginess* (Carver et al., 2007), increasing their motivation to continue progressing with the virtual training.

In addition to peer interaction, study participants reported that interaction with the instructor through timely feedback provided participants source of motivation for continued engagement with the virtual international business English training. Specifically, the feedback was individualized, addressing varying needs and providing the participants a strong sense of instructional support. To this effect, this finding illustrates that the instructor feedback served as *coaching* that enhanced *learner-centeredness*. Ciporen (2015, p. 12) describes coaching providing "a valuable link from a specific learning event back to the learners' professional and perhaps even personal life

along with a structured approach to reflective practice.” It ensures learning transfer to the contexts participants engage in most frequently. From this standpoint, the interaction with the instructor in the form of feedback provided opportunities for participants to deepen their understanding of international business English and to enhance their intercultural communication skills.

Although the asynchronous form of interaction offered several advantages as discussed above, the nature of text-based interactions affected the participants’ potential to participate in in-depth discussion and reflection. To be precise, it led the participants to focus heavily on grammar accuracy and restricted the participants’ ability to further build personal relationships with their peers and learn from peers with wealth of knowledge relevant to their needs and interests. This finding corresponds to existing knowledge of how synchronous voice-based interaction offers linguistically less challenging communication (Angelova & Zhao, 2014; Avgousti, 2018) and Perry et al.’s (2015) study findings how the virtual module restricted the opportunities for the participants to interact with experienced colleagues and further explore the presented topics through interactions. Given these concerns, the current study findings suggest that some degree of live interaction with peers during the virtual international business English training is beneficial to enhance engagement and intercultural communicative competence.

Lastly, study findings indicated that having flexibility with time optimized participants’ autonomy, enabling them to set their own pace and schedule to develop intercultural communication skills. According to the literature, the biggest advantage of virtual learning for developing intercultural communication is that it provides flexibility in terms of time and geographical locations (Avgousti, 2018; Belz, 2007). However,

Baker (2013) suggested that learners preferred face-to-face learning more than flexible online courses because their success depended on self-discipline and confidence about studying independently. From this perspective, participants were able to successfully complete the training because the instructor offered weekly deadlines, providing learners with a means to minimize setbacks. To that end, this finding aligns with the learner-centeredness of experiential e-learning components where the instructor cultivated “an environment in which the direct instruction serves only to support student learning” (Carver et al., 2007, p. 251). Having flexibility optimized participants’ autonomy, whereas the weekly deadlines supported the participants to engage with the training.

Although flexible working hours were beneficial for some participants, a few other participants spent 6-24 hours each week due to their English level and individual learner characteristics. This finding supports Chavez's (2002) conclusion that in some cases developing learners' intercultural communicative competence can be a challenging task due to the fact that their language proficiency levels may not be advanced enough to address complex cultural topics. From the perspective of Belz (2007), this can be explained that “the *skills of discovery* are linked linguistically to the ability to post and to respond to ‘deep learning’ questions” (p. 135). While this finding builds on existing knowledge of linguistic competence being the basis for developing intercultural competence, it brings attention to the need of understanding how individual learner characteristics influence their learning experiences and the development of intercultural communicative competence. A good example of this effect can be observed in Esmeralda's confidence level and her strong desire to improve her linguistic competence to provide error-free product. Grounded within experiential e-learning, this finding

indicates that *center of gravity* was lacking for Esmeralda. The training did not align with her motivation in the sense that it did not serve as a source of force to help her engage in developing intercultural communication skills. Thus, the current study findings suggest that linguistic competence and individual learner characteristic play an important role in developing intercultural communication skills through the virtual training.

This chapter aimed to describe study findings related to two research questions: What are innovative practices designing and implementing a virtual international business English training? What are the experiences of working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training? Study participants identified the following as innovative practices: organizing modules in a linear and progressive manner, having both verbal and visual overview of the modules, assigning weekly quiz, utilizing various types of materials to deliver the course, selecting topics moving beyond grammar, providing spaces for peer interaction, and delivering timely and constructive instructor feedback. As a result of these practices, study participants illustrated a range of experiences, but most were positive.

IV. ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

English is actually plural now. We have to admit and accept that there is a variety of Englishes. We all come from different cultural backgrounds, and it affects communication. Even people who were born and raised in the same country can have completely different cultures. (Yoona, Module 1 Learning Reflection)

Your training gave me a framework of international business English. The details of my knowledge and skills can be developed overtime, but for now, it gave me a blueprint and great tools to navigate international business English. (Jaemin, Interview)

Intercultural communication skills are important for working professionals because if you make a mistake, it is impossible to work with different culture. You are financially tied with them, so it can bring you many financial issues in your personal and professional life. (Esmeralda, Interview)

These are reflections made by the professionals participating in the dissertation study. The present chapter focuses on the participants' perspectives and reflections indicating enhancement of their intercultural communication skills through the virtual international business English training. The research question guiding this chapter is: How can a virtual international business English training enhance the intercultural communication skills of working professionals?

Studying findings are presented through the following four emergent themes: (1) Concrete knowledge and awareness of cultural influences, (2) Newly acquired values for English and self, (3) Skills for intercultural interactions, and (4) New curiosities and attitude for future interactions. Table 13 illustrates the emergent themes and a brief explanation of the essence of each theme.

Table 13. *Themes: Enhancing Intercultural Communication*

Themes	Explanation
1. Concrete Knowledge and Awareness of Cultural Influences	The virtual training provided the participants with a concrete understanding of how culture influences English communication.
2. Newly Acquired Values of English	Participants gained awareness of the value of nonverbal skills required for effective intercultural communication. They re-evaluated cultural values associated with English, favoring communication strategies over fluency.
3. Skills for Intercultural Interactions	Study participants prepared a virtual presentation for an intercultural audience, developed an intercultural ear, as well as applied and reflected on cultural sensitivity.
4. New Curiosities and Attitude for Future Interactions	Study participants displayed increased curiosity to continue learning and developing intercultural ICC skills and their new confident attitude towards themselves with English.

1. Concrete Knowledge and Awareness of Cultural Influences

This theme captures the knowledge and awareness of cultural influences the study participants gained from engaging in the virtual international business English training.

Table 14 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency in which they appear in the data.

Table 14. *Concrete Knowledge and Awareness*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
1. Concrete Knowledge and Awareness of Cultural Influences	C. New Knowledge and Awareness	38
	D. From Abstract Awareness to Systematized Knowledge	19

A. New Knowledge and Awareness

This category speaks to the new knowledge and awareness that study participants gained from completing the virtual training. For several participants, international Englishes and low- and high-context communication were completely new concepts. In fact, study findings indicated that they were unaware of how culture influences English communication. The virtual international business English training was some participants' first time studying and becoming aware of the concepts. For example, Patricia and Esmeralda stated:

I remember very well in the first week when we were learning about the influence of culture in communication. It was interesting because I never thought about this relationship of culture and communication before. I knew that in some extent, culture is important, but I didn't really think there was a huge impact on us... Before your training, I never thought about culture in connection to communication-- the idea of how you were raised can influence your thoughts, or the way you think is because of culture. I also never thought that people speak English differently. I never heard these concepts before the training! (Patricia)

I learned so much in your training. I learned about topics that I didn't know, especially the topics we learned in the first module—the concept of international Englishes, low-context and high-context cultures, and intercultural communication. I never knew there were different styles of English. I also did not know the cultural aspect of communication. Now I understand why knowing the cultural background of my partners is important because my expressions are different, and they might understand it differently. For example, there are many English words that Colombians use frequently such as blue jeans, bullying, marketing, closet, cool, e-mail, bye, or expression like 'Oh my god' or 'very important people (VIP).' But there are also words we never heard use. When I heard for the first time the expression 'black Friday sales,' I believed that was something dangerous. Then, I understood that it meant discounts after thanksgiving in the USA...Before, I knew that I needed to be respectful, but I did not know all of this. This was my first time learning the concepts. (Esmeralda)

Throughout the research study, Patricia and Esmeralda consistently referred to training module 1 when reflecting on their learning throughout project, indicating the strong

impression and value the virtual training has left on them.

Similarly, despite having years of experience travelling and studying abroad, as well as working in multinational companies, Sean and Joon expressed that they were unfamiliar with the concept of international Englishes and low- and high-context communication. While they had a glimmering sense of diversity, they used to understand American and British English as the “standard” forms of English language and question communication differences. The notion of culture influencing communication and the English language was new to Sean and Joon.

At our European Research and Development, we have colleagues from Norway, Germany, Mexico, Netherlands, and many more. We have people from different nationalities. But the concept of low and high context culture was completely new to me. I thought that English is just English, and the people who use English just use it as a tool to express their thoughts, messages, or information. ... From your training, I now realize that English is a global language and has many contexts based on the nationalities or personalities. For example, German and French people speak English differently compared to American people. Word choices and form of sentences are different. The way to deliver messages would vary depending on the context that the speakers are situated in. This was completely new to me; it was something I did not know at all! I just thought that standard English is not the easiest and that everyone speaks the standard English. But now I realize that even all the English-speaking people have different ‘standards,’ so everyone has different ‘standard’ Englishes... Now, I understand why people talked differently based on their religion, their personalities, and their backgrounds. We synchronize our own context with English and speak in our own English based on our English in our own culture. I was very inspired to learn all of this in your training. I now finally feel that I know a small fraction of how to become a global leader. (Sean)

High and low context culture was a really important learning point for me. The directness and indirectness reminded me of my experience in Norway. People used to explain a lot of details, and I always thought: ‘do you really have to explain that in detail?’ I didn’t know why they had to explain so much. I thought I was lacking common sense to understand the underlying intention. But now, I sociologically understand why they communicate that way. They have a low context culture because they are a more diverse country. This was a really

important concept to learn from this training. All I knew before this training was that there are some diverse countries out there and homogeneous country like South Korea. But that's all I knew. I didn't know how our cultures affected the way we communicate, especially when we speak English...Also, I knew that we all spoke English differently somehow, but I thought it was just American English or British English spoken in a different country. I thought other English was not-so-advanced English like what we speak in Korea... Now I feel that I have gained this new idea of how to communicate with other people in English. I feel smarter, and I feel somewhat confident in avoiding making rude mistakes. (Joon)

By studying the concept of culture and international English, Sean and Joon gained a non-dichotomous understanding of the English language and new awareness of cultural context.

For Saketha and David, it was evident that the virtual international business English training was their first time studying about the relationship of culture, English language, and communication. While they had an intuitive sense of how English is used differently around the world because of their extensive experience with English, they were unaware that culture played a significant role in various aspects of communication (verbal and nonverbal).

There was one video where this person gave us an example of how there are differences with English based on culture. He explained how the traffic light signs on the street in Africa were called robots in Africa. One word or sign could mean different to other regions! I related to this concept because I am from India, and when I am in the US, people take my gestures in a different way. I also use different expressions at times. People also have different accents, and our words choices or tone are different... The concept of high and low context, understanding how same expressions would translate differently in different contexts were especially new to me. I had no idea about these concepts before your training. The idea of how English is seen through different cultural contexts, the nuance details in phrasing words, and the idea that body languages count as a significant part of communication were quite surprising. Handshaking in some culture is common, but it can be interpreted as being extra friendly that not some cultures might not appreciate... This module reminded me of my recent experience with one student who wanted me to give her permission for the ringing

bell for her father, which I was clueless about. When I asked her to explain to me what it means, she said that ringing the bell is done in the hospital, which is something they do for patients who are having their last treatment or are survivors of serious illnesses. Just like this, we have different practices, word choices, and etcetera... Watching all these videos, it helps you realize things you might not have thought about. It helps you connect the dots—what I was missing to what I already know, or what I have thought about to a valid concept.... Your training made me understand how many different people make up this world and how we function together or differently with English. (Saketha)

I really liked the videos that we watched in Module 1. It's not 'English' but 'Englishes' in plural. This is a concept that I haven't heard before, but what a great concept! 'Your English is not my English. I have my own English.' I also really liked the concept of low and high contexts. I never really heard about this concept before as well... I had the opportunity of visiting China like 10 years ago. It was really strange for me because this part of the world is a different world. I haven't traveled abroad, and my first experience was China – the other side of the ocean! By that time, I already spoke English, so when I arrived, I tried to express all my ideas in the same way that I do it in Spanish. But you must realize, English is my second language, and English is their second language, too. They were not 100% sure of what I was saying, and I also didn't understand what they wanted to say... When we tried to express our ideas, there was a crutch in cultural aspects. They were speaking English in the Chinese mind. I was speaking English using my Colombian mind. Basically, there were three languages involved in those conversations. Their Chinese, my Spanish, and our Englishes. Because I am not a native, I am obviously putting some things from Spanish to my English. Same thing with them—they put some of their Chinese patterns in their English. When we tried to communicate, there was a mix of languages, expressions, and cultures. It was really, really, really difficult for me to communicate with them at that time. ...I have been reflecting on this a lot recently through your training. I thought I was doing things in the best way, but now I am realizing that I made mistakes. These mistakes were imperceptible before. Now, it's all clear now. I was young 10 years ago, so I thought we just didn't understand each other back then. I thought it was an idea problem. But now that I have taken your training, I am thinking, 'oh my goodness, all these cultural aspects are important in communication.' Even in your native language, even if you're speaking Spanish, there are some things that comes from your own home. It doesn't matter if the person I am talking to comes from the same city. Maybe they have other expressions to use, other words to use in specific context. Your training made me realize this. (David)

Saketha and David's statements illustrate that the virtual training provided them with knowledge that enable them to reflect on and make sense of their previous experiences and gain a concrete understanding of how culture influences English communication.

To summarize, this category illustrates that the virtual international business English training provided working professionals with new understanding of the influence of culture on communication and the English language. Based on the participants' statements, the virtual training facilitated not only the understanding of new concepts but also new observations and reflections on their past experiences. As a result of this process, the participants enabled the gained concrete knowledge and awareness that will enable them to enter and navigate intercultural interactions appropriately.

B. From Abstract Awareness to Systematized Knowledge

This category illustrates how the virtual international business English training aided the study participants to build upon their existing awareness and systematize their knowledge. For three study participants that uses English on a daily basis, the concepts of international Englishes and low-and high-context communication were not new. Their professional experience already provided them an abstract awareness of the concepts. However, the findings revealed that consciously studying the concepts helped crystalize their awareness and build it into systematized knowledge.

Jaemin discussed how the studying the concept of low- and high-context communication enabled him to make observations of different communication styles at work and reflect on the issues he has been dealing with his Turkish colleagues.

The low context and the high context were one of the most precious things I learned through this training. I already had ideas of the concepts, but they were unclear images. But the training provided me a clear concept. I had lots of 'Aha, I see!' moments... When I was communicating with my Korean colleagues while

taking this training, I noticed that we are speaking in high context language. I asked my subordinates to do something, and I didn't have to describe any further. They understood what I meant. But, with business English across different cultures, this approach didn't work and won't work. I tried it multiple times, but it didn't work... For example, recently, I have been having trouble with managing one of my subsidiaries in Turkey. It's been acquired just a couple of years ago, but there have been several issues. As a manager, one of the main issues with them is having constant misunderstandings and miscommunication. My Korean colleagues and I at the Headquarters don't fully understand how they run a company in Turkey, their organizational culture, and how they receive guidance and communication... Now I have a better understanding of our issues and know what I have to do to communicate better with my Turkish team. I think they are somewhat in high context culture. We don't share any common context in our relationship, but maybe in five years, after sharing a lot of experiences, we will have a high-context relationship. But I hope we can just mutually agree to talk in low context. It will be so much easier!... I had unclear and unorganized thoughts before this training. I mean, I had small fractions of these concepts as ideas. But through this training, I was able to rearrange and crystalize these ideas. (Jaemin)

Jaemin's statement illustrates that the virtual training equipped him to understand the issues he is currently facing and gain confidence in resolving them. While Jaemin was aware of differences in English language and cultures, it is evident that the virtual training served as a tool to systematize his knowledge and augment his understanding of intercultural communication.

As for Dongmei, she expressed that international Englishes and low- and high-context communication were already familiar concepts to her. She commented that her experience working in various multinational companies and her profession as a designer, frequently communicating cross-functionally and in technical languages, contributed to her strong foundation of understanding on how culture influences English and communication. Nevertheless, she shared that the virtual international business English training helped organize her knowledge systematically and put concrete labels to them. In addition, using the systematized knowledge, she was able to reexamine the knowledge

she had about American's preferences of receiving feedback.

In the first module at the beginning, we were talking about different cultures with English language, like, how to communicate in the right context, giving more context to people, and talking logically so your audience can follow your stuff. I already knew all this stuff because I was an international student and worked in multiple international companies before. We have clients from all different cultures, and I need to work with teams in other countries in Europe and Asia... Also, in the user experience design field, there are so many different modes or phases for design, for example, are we in the first discovery mode, are we in the interaction mode, or are we in a visual mode? I need to give them the right context, so they can give me the right feedback back. I already know the importance of context in communication. But I don't feel like I wasted my time in this training. Actually, a lot of the knowledge I already had are now systematized because of this training. They were all vague and disconnected. Now I know what I can call the knowledge that I have... I also learned something new. For example, I knew Americans like to use the sandwich feedback, but what I've learned is that I didn't know that some people don't like it. I thought that is accepted by all Americans, but it looks like that might not be the case. I am going to try to use the SBI, situation, behavior, and impact model in the future. I believe that will be more accepted across different cultures. (Dongmei)

Yoona also shared similar sentiments as Dongmei. She was already aware of the cultural influences on communication because of her professional experience in Canada and Korea. However, instead of disengaging, she used the presented topics as foundation to gain a clearer understanding of advanced concepts of intercultural communication.

The training was not that basic, but more like a foundation course that a freshmen would take in college. I felt like this because I already knew all of this from my experience. Maybe it's because I have longer work experience than others. I wish there was a more advanced level of the modules. But it's not like I didn't learn or gain anything. I was able to really put a name to all the concepts I knew based on experience. I never studied it specifically. Think about it; it's always a good feeling when you find the right cabinet to put your thing that used to not belong anywhere!... I also discovered how difficult it is to have a good grasp on connotations. I really wanted to work on this through this training because, usually, when I use a word with a negative connotation by mistake, no one tells me even though I know that they know it's a mistake. I knew that words had different connotations depending on the culture, but it was not clear. But now I

am understanding I really need to understand the culture in depth to get a clear answer. This was a valuable lesson to learn in your training. (Yoona)

The concept of connotation was not included in the training modules. Based on her learning reflections and comments, it is likely that Yoona recognized the relationship of culture and connotation through her interactions with peers and the instructor.

All in all, this category illustrates that study participants who had more experience using English on a day-to-day basis participated in the project with abstract awareness of the relationship between culture, communication, and English language. Based on the participants' statements, the virtual training provided an opportunity for the working professionals to confirm their awareness utilizing their past experience and develop a concrete and systematized body of knowledge foundational to navigating intercultural interactions in the future.

2. Newly Acquired Values of English

This theme presents study findings related to the new values of English the study participants acquired from the virtual international business English training. Table 15 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency in which they appear in the data.

Table 15. *Newly Acquired Values*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
2. Newly Acquired Values of English	A. Values of nonverbal communication skills	28
	B. Re-evaluating the value of English	15
	C. Using communication strategies is more important than fluency	11

A. Values of Nonverbal Communication Skills

By participating in the project, the study participants became aware of the values of nonverbal skills required for effective intercultural communication. During week 1 and week 7, at the beginning and end of the project, I asked participants to describe what they considered the three most important aspects of intercultural communication. As a collective, they identified *open-mindedness*, *understanding other cultures*, and *considerate of the other person* as the most important aspects. Of all, they spoke more frequently about *open-mindedness* and *understanding other cultures*. For example, Mesut and Patricia explained their view emphasizing the importance of open-mindedness and understanding other cultures in terms of their willingness to learn about other cultures.

To me, the most important thing is to not assume and being open-minded to different culture. Be aware that there are cultural differences. It is not your culture, it's not your country, it's not your language. Don't expect that people will know what you're thinking or understand you. Don't assume that you know about their cultures. For example, if you're in South Korea, you are in a South Korean culture. People will know everything about the Korean culture and will act accordingly. In an international environment, don't expect that. People will bring so many different cultural backgrounds. Ask questions. Do your research. Be open to getting to know them. (Mesut)

Understanding the culture of the people that we are communicating is the most important quality in intercultural communication. It's completely different speaking with a Japanese person and with someone from Latin America. It's important to know that there are lots of elements in culture. It can be food, holiday, activity, and behaviors. But the very first thing is to know where this country is located, their language, and how we typically build relationships. And maybe you can try to look into new information when the relationship is not developing. You should research and ask your partners to get to know more about their culture... Understanding culture is important because you can have a better relationship with people, and you can better understand the meaning behind the communication. For example, Indian people don't eat pork, and it's important to know why they don't eat pork. It's a good starting point. (Patricia)

Mesut and Patricia statements exemplify their strong awareness of cultural differences manifesting in communication. This awareness has manifested itself into a strong value of a positive attitude and openness to learning and understanding, moving away from their prior values regarding linguistic skills such as grammar and vocabulary.

Likewise, Yeji and Joon valued open-mindedness and understanding of other cultures as the most important qualities in intercultural communication. Recalling their past experiences, they emphasized that these qualities took precedence over efficiency.

Having an open mind is way more important than working efficiently because based on my experience, socializing is a very important factor in an intercultural situation... When I was working at a multinational company, I once worked with a colleague from UAE. We worked together on the same project, and he helped me a lot at that time. So, when the project was over, I suggested eating lunch together because I wanted to express my gratitude to him. But he refused awkwardly. He didn't explain his reason, so I felt a little embarrassed and misunderstood it as him being uncomfortable with me. A month later, I found out that he was fasting for the Ramadan period, which when Muslims fast because of their religious belief. I think there was this misunderstanding because of my ignorance a lack of conversation. Perhaps he expected that I would know Ramadan tradition, but the thing is, I wasn't interested and didn't try to get to know his culture. If I had communicated more with my colleague, then I would have had less possibility offending him or him offending me for rejecting me... I found that understanding different culture and being open minded can help you get into the right step in building a relationship. This is really important in a multinational company even if all your colleagues you closely work with are Koreans. My boss used to tell me to just go ahead and speak a lot with people. I did that, and it worked! I understood people's intentions more, and more people came to me asking for my advice. At the end, I was able to build good relationships and a trustworthy reputation among my colleagues! (Yeji)

The most important thing is understanding the differences you have with others. There are always differences. You have to have this attitude of 'I am ready to understand the difference.' You have to also consider they might interpret the meaning differently. For example, 'interesting' can mean differently based on where you are from. Some countries take this word positively, and some countries take this word negatively. When I was studying abroad in Norway, I had a middle

eastern friend back who an idea, and a Norwegian friend said, 'that's interesting.' Then, my middle eastern friend thought it was a big compliment, so he started talking about this idea to everyone. But the Norwegian friend didn't mean it that way. Just like that, depending on your culture, one simple word can be taken differently... Also, we have to remember that when it comes to intercultural communication situations, we are communicating in zero base. It's important to remember that it's safer to be understanding and nice than trying to be efficient and direct. Otherwise, there is going to be so many misunderstandings. You can build the relationship in a wrong way first... The thing is I am able to understand all of this because I have personal experience from studying abroad. This training reminded me that I have to be careful of cultural differences. (Joon)

Yeji and Joon's past experiences illustrate communication barriers stemming from a lack of understanding of cultural practices. Grounding in their experiences, they were able to confirm the importance of open-mindedness and understanding of other cultures. The experiences undergirded Yeji and Joon's values of nonverbal qualities in intercultural communication.

Sean and David described open-mindedness as important to acknowledge diversity of cultures but also in consideration of the intentions of the other person engaged in the interaction. While others explained open-mindedness as understanding other cultures and learning about them, Sean and David defined it as accepting of different approaches, reflecting on the intentions of the other person, and not taking the differences personally.

Being open-minded is the most important thing. There are so many different contexts and perspectives based on nationalities, so the way how they say anything to me is very different from what I am familiar with. For example, if someone is directly talking about my fault, it could have been different from his or her intentions to fault me. Being open-minded means that you can accept and learn other perspectives, not to be hurt or offended by others... Also, you should be more sensitive and considerate. If someone makes a mistake or asks for something new, there is a reason. They might be going through something. (Sean)

We have to realize that we are not ‘unique’ in this world. You have to be open-minded. You have to think and consider that there are a lot of differences between you and people you’re trying to communicate with. Maybe because I say something in Spanish, you can’t say that in the same way in English. Or there might not be any translation. Even when you are hearing other people talking to you, for example, you should also have to be conscious that maybe what they are saying can seem rude, but it could be that this is the way they all talk in their jobs or culture, not because they are trying to offend you or bother you. You have to be open-minded. You don’t have to take things personally. And what is really important here is that you have to organize your idea before you communication. You have to have a structure not only to deliver you message in an effective way but also to help the listener follow what you are saying. (David)

This category illustrates that all twelve participants developed a stronger value for nonverbal communication skills over linguistic skills for effective intercultural communication. Based on their statements, it can be concluded that the virtual international business English training served as an instrument for the participants to understand that nonverbal skills are essential in the process of acquiring intercultural communicative competence.

B. Re-Evaluating the Value of English

In light of the importance set by several participants on nonverbal skills for intercultural communication, this category captures participants’ descriptions of how the virtual international business English training enabled them to re-evaluate their cultural values associated with English and envision new practices to strive for. Through reflection, and observations, they discovered how their experiences in their cultures shaped their perceptions of English, how they utilized English as a tool to establish power dynamic, and how they used English in general. Sean, for example, thought “sophisticated words or sentences make people more professionally respected.” This tendency to strive for “sophisticated” English was revealed among several participants

particularly in studying the concept of simple and plain English. The topic facilitated reflection on the value of English held by their culture. Yoona and Jaemin were especially reflective of their Korean culture to understand their tendency and the intercultural challenges they faced previously.

One of my biggest takeaways from this training is that it gave me a chance to look back on myself and the culture I grew up in. I learned about communication skills, but it also gave me the chance to reflect on myself, which contributed to my growth as a human being. First, the organizational culture I was used to in Korea, to say the least, was not a healthy culture. It had strong hierarchy and was a male dominant organization. People tried to pretend a lot. Being young and a woman made me feel insecure in front of my colleagues back then. To overcome that shortcoming, I had to pretend and exaggerate my personality in an aggressive way than I was. I mean, two decades ago the seniors kicked on the door to scare us. One boss even threw an ashtray to one of our coworkers. We are living in 21st century, but things were savage in that organizational culture. When I look back what I saw and heard in Korea, I am thinking, how could that have happened? Those ashtray attacks are not close to acceptable here in Canada. I can't believe that it happened! With that said, I wasn't aware of my bad habit and tendency to see people's performance or result connected to their personality or their competencies. It used to make me so angry when I saw bad performance. But I am aware that I am not in the position to judge someone's intentions. Maybe they did their best, and it was their best performance. I have no reason to judge the person's characteristics... I am realizing that I had this tendency my whole life. Now I am recognizing this type of reaction I had is normal in Korean society. People with poor performance or out of the usual manner, they just immediately doubt this person is not cautious enough and is bad mannered. Our level of generosity as Korean is so low in that society. I feel like I am contaminated by that, and now I am realizing I have that problem and need to work on not making assumptions about people. Also, I was kind of obsessed by elitism because that's how it is in Korea. I always thought 'I am an educated and sophisticated person, so I should use expressions or English according to my level.' That was kind of engrained in my mind since long time ago. But I am realizing that this mindset hindered communication itself. I knew this before the training, but it was hard to accept it. This training was a great chance to get to know me better. (Yoona)

I read a book regarding simple and plain English a while back. The book says you have to use 'subject verb object' pattern. You should stick to this pattern and not use other complicated patterns because it complicates your communication. The

book also says if you conquer 100 words, you can express your thoughts well. I think this was written by a Japanese writer, but it's interesting because in Korea, our goal is to become a native speaker. We have to memorize all the words Americans use. It's different. But what we learned in this training is about communication, using English as a tool to communicate as ourselves, not to be like an American or something... In my case, I still have the desire to 'show off' my English proficiency to others. In Korean perspective, people will think it's a highly educated thing. That's what we prefer, and we think that's what native speakers like. These thoughts were injected in our minds through our education. So, I have to kill those desires, and the first thing is to admit those desires, the desires that I want to show off. (Jaemin)

Through their reflections, Yoona and Jaemin recognized how English was used to establish a favorable power dynamic. As they acknowledged that their values of English were influenced by Korean culture, Yoona and Jaemin were determined to actively unlearn and develop an appropriate mindset to use English for communication rather than as a mere tool to compete.

Similarly, Mesut compared the Turkish language to English to explain the importance of simple and plain communication to manage power imbalances.

Turkish is a flexible language. It's like rubber. Depending on your personality, the message can change. For example, teachers in high schools, they have a very hard time teaching their subjects because each word has 10 other meanings. Students can easily misunderstand things. The message can be misinterpreted or lost very easily depending on how you interpret it. But since English is a global language, we don't want it to be like rubber or hard-to-understand... In Turkey, if you use complex English words, you sound like a clever person. Many people do that intentionally just to sound intelligent, which is wrong. So, I believe using simple and plain language is very important than using complex English, and that was a very important point to learn and understand in this training. I need to remind myself that in communication, our goal is to send our message as clear as possible, not to make others feel inferior. I need to remember this. (Mesut)

As an emerging international scholar, Mesut acknowledged that he developed a tendency to use complex vocabulary due to the nature of academia. It is evident that by

participating in the project, Mesut acquired reevaluated his value of English across various contexts.

Along with studying the concept of simple and plain English, Yeji and Joon observed expressions and patterns that were unique to the Korean participants' interactions in the discussion forums and in their recordings of presentations. They recognized how Korean culture has influenced their English.

The discussion forums and the presentation sessions were when I felt the most cultural differences. I thought that Korean speakers were planned. They didn't speak spontaneously, they just presented what they prepared. But with other peers from Colombia or Turkey, they spoke more naturally, added their thoughts, and they didn't sound decorated... I think some Korean speakers' problem is that we always think too much. We always try to say things in a more decorated way. Trying to look fancy. So, it was a little bit hard for me to speak in simple and plain English before this training because I thought the more complicated and advanced my vocabulary was, the higher my English proficiency would be seen... When I was studying in an advanced English level class, I was recommended to use a lot of adverbs. I subconsciously tried to use a lot of adverbs when speaking and writing in English. I thought that that was good English; I thought adding a lot of adverbs is high level English. I realized that it is a bad habit and that it could hinder delivering a clear message. Through this training and seeing other people's presentations, I realized that my problem is trying too hard to sound decorated. (Yeji)

I didn't really feel the difference or recognize that my peers were from different backgrounds because most of our interaction was text-based... But I was definitely able to notice that he or she is Korean. I could feel the tone and their intentions through the text. I could also tell that they were fully participating in the training with their maximum effort, trying to be the best in the room! This is what we do in any setting... And, when I was watching the presentation videos in my group, one of them was from a Korean. I was thinking that she must have studied a lot in high school. Some of the words she used in her presentation was from KSAT. It doesn't mean that she was bad at all—I gave her the 10 million dollars. Her word choices and sentence structures were just very KSAT style. But the other two presentations were using casual and easy English... I realize that simple and plain English is important. But the problem is at first, you can't really speak in advanced English, so you have to use simple and plain English anyways.

Then, you learn something, and you try to make your sentence more complicated. I feel that this is where I am at in terms of my English skills. Once I master this stage, I think I can go back to communicating in simple and plain English again. Basically, the reason that we Koreans make complicated sentences is because we don't know how to make it simpler. I felt this a lot during the training. (Joon)

Yeji and Joon's statements indicate that interaction with their peers facilitated observations of English practices in their own culture. As a result, they envisioned new practices to strive for.

In sum, this category illustrates that, as a result of taking part in the virtual training, the participants reevaluated their values of English that were shaped by their culture. They engaged in critical reflections on their cultural values and observations of English practices within their own culture. Following this reevaluation, the participants began to establish a new attitude and goals for ideal practices in intercultural communication.

C. Using Communication Strategies Is More Important Than Fluency

The present category captures participants new value on communication strategies. The study revealed that upon completion of the training modules, the participants started perceiving communication as a reciprocal relationship-building process rather than a mere transactional process. It became evident that participants placed a greater value on communication strategies than fluency in English, specifically attributing ideal intercultural communication outcomes to the use of simple and plain English, clarity and organization of ideas, and feedback strategies.

Saketha reflected on how she used to focus more on the delivery rather than the recipient. She recognized that this approach was not appropriate for not only communication but also building relationships.

Communication is the key to have success in any relationships— personal, professional, or familial, anything! When you speak especially in a professional setting, it's very important that the person standing in front of you, no matter how good their English is, understands what you are trying to say... Before this training, it was, 'my thoughts,' 'my approach,' 'my image,' and 'I am speaking, therefore, listen.' But now I am moving away from this thought. I am trying to understand why I need to say what I need to say, what the difficulty is in understanding what I am trying to say, why this difficulty exists, and what this person is going to take away from our conversation. That's what I am taking away from this training. I am starting to see communication more strategically. People think that using big and complicated words show that they have a good grip on that language, but that's not the fact, right? This training reminded me that English is a tool to communicate, and at the end, the purpose is to understand, move forward, and achieve our mutual goals together. So, to be an international English speaker, you must communicate in a way that is simple and easy to understand. That is what communication is about, right? (Saketha)

Saketha's statement reveals that studying simple and plain English enabled her to reflect on the purpose of communication in an international English context. Accordingly, she places a high value on communication strategies for meaningful intercultural interactions.

Reflecting on their past experiences with English language learning, Mesut and Jaemin recognized how having a lower-level English fluency is only a minor barrier and the clarity of ideas and opinions is more critical.

At the beginning, because we are non-native speakers, we just assume the problems are within us. We think it's our accent problem. But in this training, we learned that accent does not matter. It's the word choice and communication skills. So, what if you have an accent? The word choice and organization of the message are more important. In our learning path, maybe we had hard times in our pronunciation and accent. So maybe we are so used to focusing on accent or how to sound like a native speaker. That is what all my teachers or the videos I watched focused on in the past. But in this training, it makes you just think accent is a simple barrier but not a big barrier that hinders everything. What is important is how you deliver your thoughts well, not accent or grammar. (Mesut)

Having clear ideas is important. You must have a clear image of what you are thinking about and what you want to deliver to someone. Sometimes ideas are

unclear in our minds. It's not a problem with language. Even in Korean, sometimes I think about how to explain certain things because I don't have a clear idea of what I am trying to say. For example, I used to have phone English classes, and I had a very hard time doing it because the materials we had were totally different from my interests—for example, they asked me questions like how do you solve pollution problem? Can female and males be friends? These are interesting topics, but I've never thought about it in Korean as well. I had a very hard time expressing my thoughts. At that time, I thought I couldn't give a good answer because of my English skills. But now I am thinking that it was a problem of my ideas. I don't think I would be able to respond to those questions even in Korean! So, clear ideas mean that you have to organize your thoughts. If I were a genius and an instant thinker, maybe I will be good at instant responses. (Jaemin)

Based on their statements, it is evident that Mesut and Jaemin now believes varying strategies play a more significant role of effective communication regardless of the language, topic, or situation.

As for Yoona and Joon, they discussed how studying about the different feedback strategies and approaches made them realize the importance of applying varying communication strategies to build a civil and productive relationship.

I was kind of amazed by the fact that a lot of people are considering different ways to give feedback in better or effective ways. I was thinking, whether native English speaker or not, the challenge is there for everybody. Giving and receiving feedback is hard regardless of their language or cultural background. They try to bring a lot of strategy to make it effective... In Korea, even if you have a good leader, a good supervisor, they never give detailed feedback. They just say it in one simple sentence: 'I don't like it that way.' This means I have to reflect the feedback and find the answer myself. I have to reflect on what I have to be cautious with on my own. It's just not easy to get feedback. But now I realize in Canada, feedback is done in a civilized manner. They are nice to each other, and it shows that it is possible to be nice to each other. You don't have to use mean strategies to criticize someone's work. (Yoona)

When it comes to Asian men, they are often told that 'you need to be more tough in western countries, otherwise people are going to look down on you.' But that's not true! When I was going through this training, especially when we were talking about emails and feedback strategies, I thought 'ah, western people also care

about these manners. ' In Korea, we have age hierarchy, so we have the manners based on age. But your training showed me, 'no, you have to have manners no matter what. ' We have to be nice, and we should use different strategies even in our own culture because that's the universal etiquette regardless of age, gender, or race. That's how you trust each other and become productive partners. (Joon)

Based on the study participants' statements, the virtual international business English training provided them appropriate knowledge to acquire a greater value for communication strategies. By participating in the training, they now believe that communication is undertaken in a reciprocal process to build meaningful relationships. Therefore, they expressed value for communication strategies that allows for mutually beneficial communication outcomes, such as the use of simple and plain language, clarity and organization of ideas, and feedback strategies.

3. Skills for Intercultural Interactions

This theme presents study findings related to skills the study participants developed through the virtual training. Table 16 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency in which they appear in the data.

Table 16. *Skills for Intercultural Communication*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
3. Skills for Intercultural Interactions	A. Giving and recording a virtual presentation	11
	B. Developing an intercultural ear	9
	C. Cultural sensitivity	7

A. Giving and Recording a Virtual Presentation

Several study participants reported that the virtual presentation project was the most valuable activity in the training since it offered them space and time to practice their presentation skills with an intercultural audience, notice their strengths and weaknesses,

and gain confidence as non-native English speakers. For example, Mesut shared that practicing presentation skills is not available in his job often and that he was not confident as a non-native speaker. However, he described that the virtual presentation project enabled him to practice his presentation skills and increase his confidence.

Before this training, I did not like to present in English because I am not a native speaker. Even though I have good presentation skills, I was not happy to do so. This module helped me realize that I can do it. I think this is the most important thing I gained in this module. It felt real. We presented on topics that we are interested in or what we do in our jobs. It gave us a good simulation of a real situation, and because I did better than I thought, I felt more confident... We really practiced presenting in English and received feedback on it. But the thing is we don't get to 'practice' in our jobs. This training gave me that chance to practice and be more comfortable with myself in presentations. (Mesut)

Mesut expressed the same sentiment regarding all the training modules. He emphasized the importance of practical assignments, such as writing email and preparing a virtual presentation, because they provide opportunities for practice that are often absent from other training courses.

Joon took advantage of the project to practice his presentation skills using real data points. However, he shared that in doing so, he recognized the practices he should avoid in the future.

The preparation for the slides took a lot longer than I expected. I was able to make fake data for my presentation, but then, I thought that wouldn't give me a fully authentic presentation experience. I had to go through a lot of stuff to find specific data point to support my argument. There were a lot of data point that I wanted to put into my presentation, but I couldn't find all of them in time. So, I didn't have enough time to practice the presentation and record the best version. Also, in the beginning, I wrote the script and tried to record it based on it. However, the script became an obstacle in the end. I was relying too much on the script, even with the simple sentences that I use very casually! Next time, instead of writing a script, I will practice the presentation based on keywords. In reality, we don't have much time to prepare anyways. (Joon)

Joon further explained that he did not have enough time to organize his materials and deliver it in a way that is *intercultural friendly*. Considering his experience, Joon recommended providing participants with a catalog of topics and presentation slides that include all the presentation information in the future so that the participants can strictly focus on practicing the delivery aspect of the presentation.

In a similar vein, Yeji recognized areas of improvements in her skills specifically unique to a virtual environment.

The virtual presentation was a new challenge for me. I found it difficult to make an eye-contact and appropriate gestures because I couldn't check audience's reactions in real time. But I know this is something I will have to do in the future, so I have to start practicing... But overall, the project made me experiment which expression is good when you don't have an audience and when you have the world watching you. We don't have a lot of occasions where we can simply practice these skills. It was worth practicing and recording the presentation virtually. It boosted my confidence, and I feel more prepared for my future. (Yeji)

Being able to watch the recording allowed Yeji to notice and reflect on what practices worked and did not work for her, including both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies. In doing so, she was able to build confidence for future opportunities.

Yoon and Sean experienced technological difficulties that forced them to record several times. However, the challenge allowed them to notice their strengths and weaknesses and experiment new strategies every time they re-recorded. They also discovered that strengths and weaknesses can be transferred from and to presentation skills in their first language, Korean.

The virtual presentation project was very meaningful. I felt pressured at the beginning as I expected it to be time-consuming, and I thought I already had enough experience regarding public speaking. But giving a virtual presentation in English blew my assumptions. It was harder than I thought. I thought because of my previous job as a journalist, I will be able to present well. But then, I noticed

that I had different habits when presenting in English. My recording was also frozen for several seconds more than once during the first presentation, so I had to record several times. As I practiced, the results got better, so I was like, 'let's give it one more try,' which made me record over and over again... In my later recordings, I tried out the strategy exaggerating my facial expressions and hand gestures, and it worked wonder! I confirm that the strategy is effective. I also learned how much of my strengths and weaknesses in Korean would be transferred in English presentations... I also found a habit I was not aware of: I close my eye a little too long when blinking. It looked kind of funny in a virtual presentation. I thought it could look like I am falling asleep or feel sleepy or something! (Yoona)

The virtual presentation project was really interesting. I learned that presentation is an art. I thought presentation was just about delivering an information or messages. But, from this training, I learned that presentation involves empathizing with people, synchronizing with the audience, and sharing values through my speech. It's about presenting and communicating my values and ideas, not just delivering information... The presentation skills I have learned in our training module was not only beneficial to give presentation in English but also beneficial to give presentation in Korean. I realized it does not depend on what language I used. It can be beneficial to any context. Even in Korean, I need to cut unnecessary information or sentences that blur the main point. I need to focus on the main idea... The only thing I was uncomfortable with was that I had Zoom recoding audio issue. I had to find creative ways; I had to do some video editing and use my phone to capture my audio. But ironically, because of the technical problems, I was able to practice more! Each time I tried out new expressions and approaches. (Sean)

Although it was taxing to repeatedly record the content, the process of completing the project offered Yoona and Sean more opportunities of noticing, reflection, and practice.

In addition to recognizing own strengths and weaknesses through the recording, Saketha reflected on how watching other people's presentation provided an opportunity to make observations in cultural differences.

The idea that a compelling virtual presentation can be made was quite new to me. I always thought and believed that virtual presentation is dry and lacks participation from people. The idea of using silence and pausing, starting with a story to start a presentation, and using body language were new strategies I

learned from this training... Also, the presentation project was definitely a unique experience. When we went through some of the videos of the presentations, the cultural difference could be felt. The accents were different, the manners were different. I am sure my peers felt the same thing with my presentation. It does take time for the person who's hearing me to understand what I'm trying to say because of my accent and the word choices I make. While going through their presentations, I noticed that I speak very fast, and the three presentation I have seen, they pause and take their own time to explain the concepts they are presenting. Prior to the training modules, I was unable to detect those things. Now I am more conscious of how I should present to different types of people... Besides the presenting part, understanding what other presents are saying was interesting because their accents were different, and our interests were different. I also saw some people have slow speed; they were talking with lots of pauses, maybe after each word or sentence they have pauses. I also did feel that some people just assumed that people would understand their logic. I could see how people approached the project or how to explain their ideas. (Saketha)

Through the project, Saketha was able to apply the knowledge she gained in the previous training modules to understand why each presentation was delivered differently. It is evident that the virtual presentation project allowed Saketha to understand what practices would work best for a diverse group of audience. Overall, the virtual presentation project offered space and time for study participants to practice, observe, and reflect on their presentation skills in consideration of their audience and the context of the presentation.

B. Developing an Intercultural Ear

This category illustrates how the different accents presented in the videos offered the study participants an opportunity to develop an intercultural ear. Many of the participants in the study reported difficulty listening to and following videos presented in different accents. It was particularly difficult for them to watch their peer's virtual presentation recordings and provide constructive feedback. A few participants commented that they relied on the closed captions throughout the training; however, because the virtual presentation recordings did not provide closed captions, participants

had to view the recordings repeatedly in order to comprehend. In spite of the challenges, some of the study participants reported that they were able to develop an ear for different accents as a result of their experience.

Patricia and Esmerlada expressed that watching all the training videos was already challenging due to unfamiliar accents and word choices. Not having access to close captions for the virtual presentation recordings exacerbated the challenge, requiring them to listen to the videos repeatedly.

I couldn't understand everything said by the girl from Canada because of her accent and some of the words she used. I had to repeat the video many times to understand the presentation. Normally, the videos had captions to help us follow. But the captions were not there for the presentation. It was still a good experience because I really needed the practice to listen without captions. Most of the time when I watch movies, I always use captions, but I know that's not helpful in real meetings. (Patricia)

In Colombia, I don't have lots of chances to practice listening. And the presentation videos we watched did not have clear closed caption or Spanish subtitles. It was very difficult for me because they were speaking quickly, and I didn't understand a lot of the words they used. The different accents did not help. Understanding the videos without clear English subtitles was very challenging towards the end. There were many new words for me in the subtitles too. Overall, the feedback task was very difficult because each one had different topics, tones, accents, and expressions. I tried to pay attention to each slide, so I can understand the ideas. But I was not sure if I had understood everything. I had to watch each video several times. (Esmeralda)

Even though they had to spend a considerable amount of time trying to understand the presentations, the challenge presented Patricia and Esmeralda an opportunity to practice listening without closed captions, an experience that resembles real-life interactions.

Reflecting on the same challenge, David and Daniela shared that they especially had a difficult time following accent of Asian descents.

When we learned English, I only had American teachers. The different accents for me, for example, the Chinese or the Indian accents, were really difficult for me to understand. Now my listening skills have improved with those accents, at least it is getting better. But, at the beginning, the most difficult accent for me was the Indian one. If you are American or Australian, it is not hard to understand. But, if you have a markedly different accent, it is very difficult for me to follow. I had to read the closed captions to follow. But then, the virtual presentation project, wow, that was a little difficult because there were no captions. (David)

One of my biggest challenges in this training was understanding the videos. I didn't understand some words, and some people spoke very fast. I had to use the closed caption. It took me a long time to understand them. But I didn't use closed caption towards the end. I was able to understand most of the videos later in the training. But, oh, my goodness. Watching other people's presentations was very difficult. My teammate from Turkey was okay, but the Korean teammate's presentation was very difficult for me to understand. I had to repeat many times try to understand... It was so difficult to understand them at first, but with time, I got better. But I still have a difficult time understanding Asian English. So, for the last module, I didn't go to work. I needed a lot of time to watch all the presentations. I had to watch it over and over again. (Daniela)

Based on their statements, David and Daniela were not familiar with accent of Asian descents due to lack of exposure. Although it was challenging at first, David and Daniela felt more comfortable with the different accents by listening to the videos repeatedly. However, listening without the closed caption feature added more challenge.

Shane and Yoona also repeatedly watched the presentation recordings. However, it was not only due to the unfamiliar accents but as well as to their desire to provide quality feedback to their peers.

The people in my group right were me, another Korean, and two other Colombian participants. The other two participants had very strong accent, and their pronunciation of certain words were different from what we know—such as the word 'machine.' So, I had to replay and replay again to compose that feedback email. I watched it multiple times because I wanted to make sure I knew what they were presenting before giving feedback. I didn't want to hurt them or give unnecessary feedback!... The virtual feature of this training allowed me to

continue to develop my listening skills. If it was in person, I don't think I could have done that. If I did not have the replay feature, I would have given terrible feedback because I wouldn't really understand their presentation. (Shane)

It was really difficult to watch presentations over and over again to give quality feedback. I didn't really enjoy watching them because I was not interested in their topics, and it was hard to understand what they were saying. But I felt proud of myself when I finally developed an ear to some hard accent on my third try... Also, I fought the urge to be direct and say, 'it looks like you didn't put a lot of effort in this.' This project being virtual helped me keep my professional manners, and your training was a really great chance to evaluate my bad habits. (Yoona)

Having the option to replay the videos assisted Shane and Yoona to not only develop listening skills but also write accurate and meaningful feedback to their peers. It aided them to practice professionalism.

On the contrary, because of his experience studying abroad, Joon did not have trouble listening to different accents. He relied on visuals to follow the presentations.

I watched three videos in my group—one video from Korean, one from Colombia, and one from Turkey. Accents and the tone were quite easy for me to follow. It sounded familiar, the vocabulary they used sounded familiar. I am used to people from those countries when I was studying Norway. We didn't really interact with Norwegian people, we interacted more with other international students. They were mainly from South America and Turkey. Also, even with the accents, you could predict the content from their presentation slides. (Joon)

Although listening comprehension was not difficult, the virtual presentation project provided Joon the opportunity to practice his listening strategies. Based on the participants' statement, although the different accents in the training videos and the virtual presentation recordings presenting them with challenges, the study participants were able to develop an intercultural ear by the end of the virtual training.

C. Cultural Sensitivity

Beyond recognizing the importance of cultural differences, the study participants

exhibited cultural sensitivity in their reflections of the learning experience. Their statements illustrated their mindfulness of how individual differences, such as values, culture, and language, can impact interaction. It was evident that some of the participants reflected on aspects that were not addressed in the training modules, practiced cultural sensitivity when interacting with their peers, and engaged in critical reflections regarding the complexity of cultural sensitivity in a business setting.

Even though it was not explicitly addressed in the training module, David reflected on cultural sensitivity in connection to both international and local contexts. He recognized that cultural differences exist even among individuals from same nationalities and speaking the same language.

When you're working in an international community, you are always in a hurry. You are rushing. So, you are not so formal or polite to people. When I started reviewing all the expressions we learned, I started being more conscious about how things will be understood different based on cultural differences. I have to be aware of how they will think when I talk because they can feel offended depending on the words you are using in your email, for example. All the cultural differences, you have to take account of all it when you are communicating with people... Now that I have taken your training, I feel that I am conscious about cultural differences. It doesn't matter if you're speaking the same language. It doesn't matter if you're trying to speak the same language. You're always going to find something different even if you're trying to speak the same language because you have your own expressions and I have my own expressions. All of that comes from our culture and native language. I have to be very careful and conscious about the language and words that I am going to use in every single context. It doesn't matter if it's formal, informal or less formal. You must think about what you're going to say with those cultural aspects in mind. (David)

David's statement illustrates his belief that cultural sensitivity should not be restricted to those who have different nationalities. It is evident that he is mindful of how individuals' unique cultural and linguistic characteristics can impact communication.

The feedback module assignments facilitated opportunities for Sean, Yeji, Yoona,

and Mesut to practice cultural sensitivity. For Sean and Yeji, the activity requiring them to compose constructive feedback on the appearance of a hypothetical colleague provided them with an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which appearance can be interpreted differently, depending on a person's culture and personality.

Before our feedback practice exercise, I never thought about how my comments about someone's appearance could be understood differently. In Korea, we just take it very naturally if someone points out about our appearance, 'you look tired' or 'you need to put more make up on.' When I started my career, my boss told me that I should wear more formally because I looked like a student. But I didn't take it offensively at all. Now that I think about it, it could be offensive to others. I need to be more cautious about this whenever I refer to appearances! (Yeji)

When I saw the prompt, I wondered if it is possible to provide constructive feedback regarding appearance. I thought that it is best to not say anything appearance since it can be considered rude. Some people are more sensitive to those comments, especially if they are women or from a culture that has different definitions of professionalism in terms of appearances. (Sean)

The same module provided Yoona with an opportunity to practice cultural sensitivity; however, it was with the assignment that required them to provide constructive feedback to their peers regarding their virtual presentations.

When I was giving feedback to my peers for their virtual presentations, I had to fight my urge to say, 'it looks like you didn't put the time or adequate labor on your presentation.' It was almost coming out of my mouth. I tried to tell myself, 'Oh my god, no. that must not be the case. I don't know about this person to make this kind of judgement or assumption.' Your training was a great chance try to get rid of my bad habits and perspectives. (Yoona)

Yoona refrained from making assumptions based on her standards and attempted to evaluate the presentation recording in consideration of the presenter's intentions. In a similar vein, Mesut was not only culturally sensitive but also mindful of the presenter's English proficiency level when giving constructive feedback to one of his peers. Mesut

commented: “I noticed that my Colombian peer needed more practice in presenting in English. However, her presentation idea was great, and I appreciated her effort. I did not want to focus on her language skills in the feedback.”

Joon and Jaemin engaged in critical reflection, discussing caveats of understanding cultural differences based on knowledge. Specifically, Joon noted the possibility of stereotyping when only practicing sensitivity based on knowledge.

You have to be careful with understanding cultural differences if you are only basing it off on knowledge. It can be dangerous because you may generalize the country and its culture too easily. It is impossible to learn and understand all the differences. You need skills, you need to ask questions in different situations. Your training reminded me of that. (Joon)

Likewise, Jaemin reflected on the caveats of knowledge and the complexity of practicing cultural sensitivity in an international business setting. Building upon previous experience and what he studied in the virtual training, he formulated a clear view on best and bad practices of cultural sensitivity specifically in a business setting.

Business is subjected to cultural influences, but organization culture is first. Industry culture is the next important thing. The third is geographical and national culture. So, I feel that only covering national cultural differences is quite distant from the concept of business. They are related to business, but they aren't 100% related. For example, our subsidiaries are located in the northern area of India. What I learned from our experts there is that their culture is different from New Delhi culture even though it's only 1 hour away from New Delhi. Some people also moved from the South to the Northern area. If I pretend to know about their culture, then it might be dangerous. It can be beneficial at time, but there is no guarantee; I can still be rude... Let's go back to my Turkish partners as another example. I don't know how many races live in Turkey. Korea is a very homogenous country, so there is more guarantee that your guess will be right. So, digging deep into their culture and pretending to know that you know their culture can be very dangerous. We only know the general culture. 'Classifying' culture does help. For example, when I communicate with people outside of Korea, it helps if I know their public holidays, their religions, what they usually eat, and maybe a little bit about their history. But it won't be the biggest factor

driving towards success in that relationship. It just helps... Another problem to think about is that communication is more influenced by the relationship you have with the other person than the culture itself. Because I am in a unique position with more 'power,' representing a shareholder in my company, I am sending messages to my overseas colleagues in a top-down communication style. It's a bit polite, but it's still an order, right? I don't think having a full understanding of the national culture is as beneficial when you must talk top-down. You have to leverage, and you have goals to achieve. However, if I am depending on a partnership, then, I might need to spend a lot of time studying their culture in depth. I would need to know their psychology and thought process to make the relationship sustainable. But is it genuine? I don't know. It is eventually for success and profit... What I have been reflecting through your training is that if we are talking about culture for business, we need to first describe and define what culture is and how understanding that definition will help us. Making someone feel accepted is not always the goal in business. Profit gain is more important, especially when you are in a position of power... But it does help to be cordial regardless of your status. My main job is to push my Turkish partners, make complaints, and force them to drive performance. I recently wanted to write my email saying, 'Just do it, don't complain.' That's what I wanted to say, but I couldn't out of courtesy. I didn't want to hurt them. It was hard writing that email; I needed to put my energy to soften my email sentences. Like we learned, I need to be more conscious of the negativity bias. It's real, and it exists no matter what relationship or culture you are in. (Jaemin)

Joon and Jaemin reflected on the drawbacks of knowledge-based cultural sensitivity and the complexity of context in intercultural business relationships. Their critical reflections exemplify that the virtual training provided the study participants with an informed frame of reference for cultural sensitivity in intercultural interactions. For the participants, this category illustrates their development of cultural sensitivity through the virtual training.

4. New Curiosities and Attitude for Future Interactions

This theme presents study findings related to new curiosities and attitude the virtual international business English training instilled in the study participations for future intercultural interactions. Table 17 illustrates the categories that contributed to the main theme and the frequency in which they appear in the data.

Table 17. *New Curiosities and Attitude*

Theme	Categories	Frequency
4. New Curiosities and Attitude for Future Interactions	A. Increased curiosity	13
	B. New attitude towards Self with English	6

A. Increased Curiosity

This category focuses on how the virtual international business English training stimulated the study participants' curiosities to continue learning and developing intercultural communication skills. Based on their statements, the study participants developed a strong desire to gaining more knowledge on nine different topics relevant to enhancing intercultural communication in a professional setting. Figure 9 depicts the organization of the topics that the study participants were curious about in depth and breadth by the end of the virtual training.

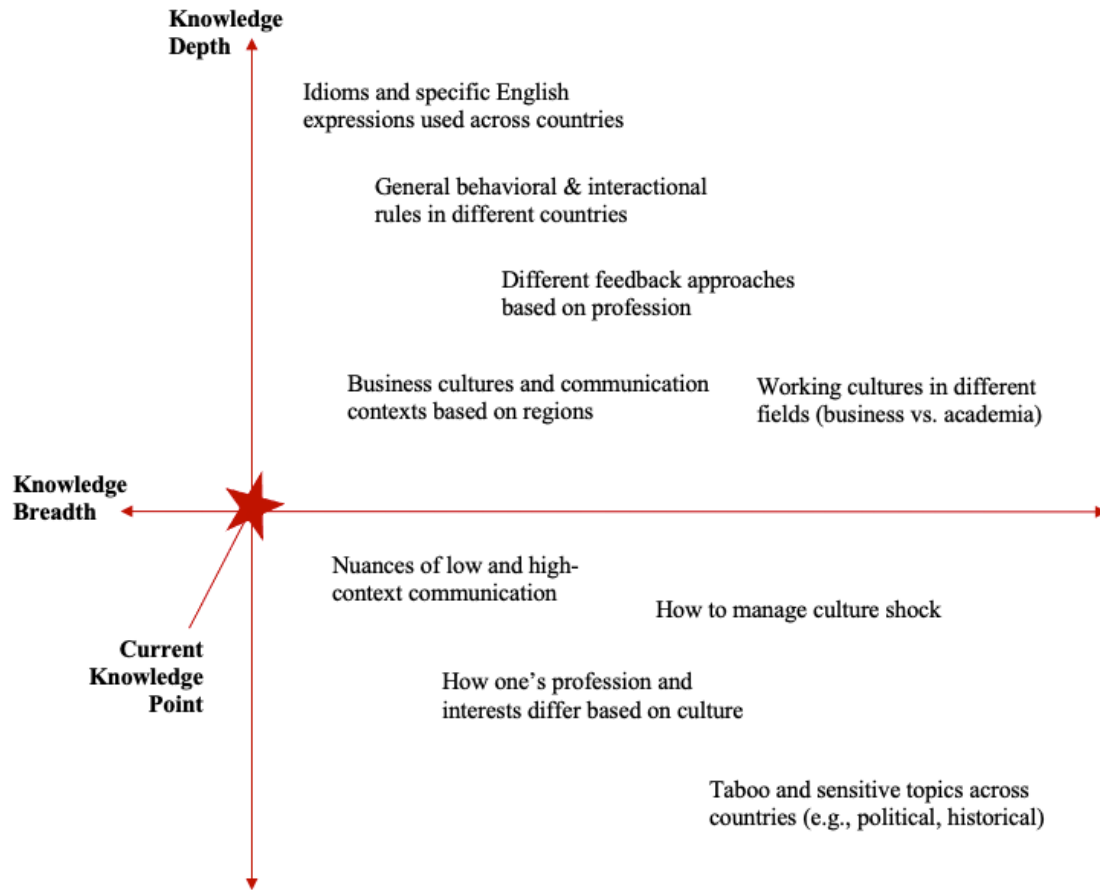


Figure 9. *Study Participants' Topics of Interest*

As displayed in the axis, study participants who expressed a desire to gain more knowledge in breadth were mainly interested in how different concepts apply in individual cultures. Some participants wanted to expand their understanding of the relevant concepts across various professions and working cultures. Danyi's statement best represents study participants' rationale for their desire to gain more knowledge in breadth:

Overall, I would like to learn more details about different cultures. I live in America but not everyone is. I have colleagues in Europe, and even in Europe, there are different countries. So, I would like to learn more about how they are and what they prefer in terms of communication. I have a lot of Korean friends because I used to work in Samsung. I have been to Korea, too. I already kind of know how Korean and Japanese work. Also, I grew up in China; we have pretty

similar cultures. But what about Australians and New Zealand people? They are people who I don't interact with as much... There is a term, we are 'global citizens,' right? We're going to have to know more people and have more interaction with different cultural backgrounds. So, I would like to learn more about what they are and how they act in terms of communication. In the future, maybe, I will meet a colleague from that country, and it would help me make a better interaction. (Danyi)

For study participants seeking more in-depth information, they wanted to examine the topic by taking into account personal, situational, historical, and political factors that impact individuals' behaviors and perspectives in intercultural interactions. For example, Joon stated:

I'm not sure if you can cover this, but it would be nice to know about sensitive topics that people often make mistakes. For example, in Europe, people don't really know the relationship between Korea and Japan. Norwegian and Swedish thinks, we are like them—friendly neighbors. But, we are not like them, we don't have a good relationship at all. I also made mistakes the way we see Chinese people, for example, with Mao Ze Dong. I saw him as a dictator who killed millions of people. One day I jokingly made a comment about Mao, and my Chinese friends were very offended. From their perspective, he was considered a hero. There are always sensitive topics that other countries don't know. (Joon)

Joon's interest stemmed from his personal experience of making insensitive comments. He further explained how this could prevent “making rude mistakes.”

However, Saketha shared a statement that addressed potential issues that could arise from delving into historically and politically sensitive topics.

Many countries have political conflicts, so learning each and everything would be difficult. So, the fact that we learned the general and rough idea of how to communicate with each other, how to present yourself to people whom you are not familiar with, and the dos and don'ts was a really good approach. Also, learning in detail of every country would be extremely difficult and can be confusing because there might not be right answers. It's so much, you would have to remember so much about each country, and that's difficult. And then, there is another issue of people only learning things that it's only useful for them. If you add so much complex, political, or cultural topics of each country in a training,

that would be vast materials. It might be more than what we need or want. We cannot discount the issue of stereotyping as well... This training covered a really good range of what we need to know to get started with our learning about other cultures. It gave us brief ideas of what will be seen with this knowledge we gained from this training whenever we interact with someone from now on. I believe it helped us feel more prepared for the future. That said, I want to learn more, but I am not sure exactly what is good for me just yet. (Saketha)

Because of the potential issues, Saketha was careful in selecting topics she wanted to continue studying. She expressed the importance of making intentional choices with her knowledge from the virtual training. Overall, it was evident that the participants' curiosities in cultural topics were stimulated through the virtual training.

B. New Attitude Towards Self with English

This category captures the new attitude the study participants developed through the virtual international business English training. Specifically, Yoona, Saketha, Esmeralda, and Yeji described that before they participated in the virtual training, they attributed communication issues to having inadequate English skills. However, after completing the virtual training, it was evident they developed self-confidence as a non-native English speaker as they became aware of the different factors influencing communication outcomes and as they discovered similarities in the challenges they experienced with English.

For example, prior to her participation in the virtual training, Yoona felt the cause of communication issue was due to her pronunciation and English skills in general. However, she recalled an observation she made in a recent board meeting she participated in and realized that it is acceptable to be herself.

I think it's important to being confident with your ways and in yourself in intercultural communication. I attended this board meeting recently, and most of the board members are first generation of newcomers/immigrant. They come from

a different diverse background. But they all kept their accent, and it was really hard for me to follow their accents. But I was amazed by their attitude. Let's say, sometimes, they could not find the right words. But, if that was me, I would have said 'sorry' or I'll just speak later. But for them, they never said sorry. For me, I always thought it was wasting other people's time. Having them for me to find the right word for the story and to be on the right track. But, I am realizing people should wait. Going back to the example, if they were asked to talk about ten things, then they would talk about ten things. Actually, they would talk about more than ten things. I was amazed by that confidence level. They can do it their way and stay confident and be at the top of the organization -- be a board member... I think a lot of Asian or non-native English speakers have that fear what others think of you, 'I should do this or don't do this.' But I felt that my board member did not have that fear at all. They have this 'I've got to do this in my way' attitude. I used to feel bad when someone could not get what I said at once instantly. I kind of thought it was my fault because of my pronunciation or something like that. But now, with the new strategies I learned in your training, I am thinking, 'okay, it's nobody's fault. I am going to say whatever I have to say where you understand it or not. If you want, I can repeat what I said without feeling guilty.' (Yoona)

Yoona's statement captures her understanding of communication being a reciprocal effort. Having this knowledge and awareness, she was able to develop confidence and strategize for a more positive image of herself with regards to English.

Saketha also attributed communication issues to her English skills. However, by completing the virtual international business English training, she described that she felt more confident in managing communication issues.

I feel that I can cry with this English language. English is so complex and having language issues can add up. I thought 'Why do I have to face all the challenges in life.' For example, whenever I presented in academic conferences, or whenever I used to communicate with my students, I always felt that they having a hard time understanding me. Or, whenever you get the option to work on a team project, I always felt somehow left out. But this training helped me feel that I can deal with these challenges I have with English because now I finally feel, 'yes, I can manage this.' I now know what I was doing wrong and how I should approach English and communication. I used to feel that that this person standing in front of me is having a hard time understanding because of my accent, but now I know

that it wasn't really my English but more about different preferences in terms of communication organization and delivery... I would say your training helped me feel more confident with my relationship with the English language. Six months ago, I was telling a friend, 'I don't speak good English, I don't have a good grip with English, I lack all these qualities.' I mean, I pursued my whole education in English until today, but I still felt that I didn't know English. I feel that I can manage any issues I encounter from now on. I feel very happy that I went through this training. (Saketha)

Based on Saketha's statement, it appears that her confidence grew as her sense of control over communication issues increased.

In Esmeralda's case, the virtual international business English training increased her confidence to the point that she was willing to assume new job tasks requiring the use of English. Before the training, she delegated English email writing tasks to other; now, she started trying to write the emails on her own.

In this moment, I am working on a project with a university in USA. The communication is very difficult for me because I am not good in English writing, so I normally use the international office to communicate with them. I wrote the email in Spanish and the International Office translated them for me. I felt that I am not able to communicate with them well. This was what I did before the training. Now, after this training, I started writing the emails in English. I feel that I have the tools to write it, and your feedback really encouraged me to try it out. Now that I am writing emails myself, it takes me all night to write. But I feel very good. I don't feel nervous. With big emails, I still get help because I am afraid that I will make mistakes. (Esmeralda)

The increased confidence aided Esmeralda in overcoming her fear of writing emails in English. She further explained that she spent less time in the last assignment, writing constructive feedback to her peers about their virtual presentation recordings. However, Esmeralda mentioned that she is still working on her confidence in speaking. She could not complete her virtual presentation project due to concerns about her speaking skills.

For Yeji, she discovered in the discussion forums that her peers were

experiencing similar struggles with English. Learning this helped her realize that she was not alone and that feelings of concern are normal. The recognition resulted in an increased sense of confidence, as well as an openness to feedback.

Now, I feel like I kind of recovered my confidence in communicating in English. Even when I was working at a multinational company, I didn't have a lot of confidence with English. To be honest, when I first started this training, I didn't have high expectations because my confidence was so low. I also thought that other people's English was much better than mine, especially non-Asian people's English in general. But, through this training I realized that regardless of the English skills, there are a lot of people like me who have similar worries and problems. Maybe their worries and problems were different than mine, but we shared similar worries. Ironically, just getting to know that gave me the confidence that I am doing okay. I now know that I am not the only who is struggling with English in a business condition... I also noticed that I became more open-minded with sharing my opinions and not being scared of receiving feedback. With the discussion forums, at first, I spent a lot of time thinking and worrying what the right answer was. But towards the end, I felt that I was more open and freer to discuss my opinions and to see what other people thought about the subject. It was not just about writing good sentences anymore. This is something I am going to continue trying. I learned about myself and others because I read the feedback carefully. (Yeji)

All in all, this category shows how the virtual training revealed the issue of confidence with regard to English among the study participants. The overarching theme from the participants was that the training enhanced their confidence and allowed them to establish a positive attitude in preparing for future intercultural interactions.

Chapter Discussion

This chapter illustrated how the virtual international business English training enhanced the intercultural communication skills of working professionals. The first emergent theme spoke to the concrete aspects and awareness of cultural influences the participants have gained from the virtual international business English training. Despite having used English for a long time, study participants asserted that this project was their

first experience explicitly studying culture and intercultural communication. In fact, seven participants did not consider English outside of the American and British traditions. They were also unaware of how people's cultural background can influence language interaction. This speaks to the learners' gaps in existing knowledge and confirms that despite the participants' extensive experiences in studying English, the diversity of Englishes and the different cultures associated with the language is generally neglected in English courses (Oñate & Amador, 2013). By participating in the virtual training, however, they were able to acknowledge diversity of cultures and culture as inseparable from language and communication (Byram, 1997, p. 73). This new acknowledgement also brought awareness to their needs to reduce uncertainty with intercultural communication challenges (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). In other words, the virtual international business English training increased cultural awareness essential to intercultural communication and provided the working professionals with new goals necessary for continuous learning and development.

For study participants that entered the project with more experience and awareness of the role culture plays in communication, the virtual international business English training enabled them to bring new understanding to existing issues with which they had struggled (Crossman, 2011), to gain increased awareness of nuanced cultural contexts (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993), and to systematize their accumulated knowledge that will assist them in forming different decisions in the future (Stadler, 2017). The virtual international business English training helped "equip individuals with some sense of behavioral expectations" (Stadler, 2017, p. 452). This finding connects with the goals Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) recommended instructors to aim for in a language

classroom. Through the virtual training, the working professionals started developing their own decision-making framework.

As such, the goals were achieved because the virtual training provided the participants with knowledge that assisted them to reflect and make sense of their past experiences. In doing so, they were able to either confirm the knowledge with their experiences and develop a concrete body of knowledge of how social variables influence the ways in which people speak and behave (Kolb, 2015). This finding illustrates that the virtual international business English training facilitated “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer worlds of the environment” (Beard & Wilson, 2006). Depending on the level of accumulated knowledge, the professionals were able to engage in the phases of *reflective observation* or *abstract conceptualization* (Kolb & Yegenah, 2012) after completing each training module.

Overall, the virtual international business English training encouraged awareness of diversity of cultures and its role in communication, developing concrete body of knowledge relevant to intercultural communication, and build their own decision-making framework. Study findings provide evidence that the virtual international business English training equipped working professionals with appropriate knowledge and awareness to navigate the context-bound nature of international business English communication in the future.

The second theme presented study findings related to the new values of English the participants acquired as a result of completing the virtual training. The majority of the participants became aware of the values of nonverbal intercultural communication skills,

English through the lens of their culture, and communication strategies than linguistic competence. These findings suggest that the virtual training enhanced all three competencies (affective, cognitive, behavioral) necessary for the development of intercultural communicative competence (Bennett, 2009; Eken, 2019). First, placing a higher value on nonverbal intercultural communication skills (understanding of other cultures, open-mindedness, and being considerate of other people) indicates that they are open to learning and understanding other people's culture (Bennett, 2009; Byram, 1997, Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2011). This finding connects to the ability to reduce anxiety towards intercultural interactions (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Stadler (2017) describes this ability as a good starting point for intercultural encounters. From these perspectives, it can therefore be determined that the working professionals developed a positive attitude towards navigating unfamiliar and ambiguous intercultural situations.

Next, re-evaluating the value of English in connection to their cultures illustrates the development of cognitive competency, specifically the *skills of discovery and interaction* and *critical awareness* (Byram, 1997). For example, the findings showed that six participants identified and evaluated differences and similarities between their own and other peoples' cultural communication practices. The participants utilized the knowledge they gained from the training to make sense of their past experiences, notice disconnections in their reflections, and observe and evaluate the differences in communication practices among their peers. This indicates that the participants were engaged in the full experiential learning process, from the phase of *concrete experience* to *abstract conceptualization* (Kolb, 1985, 2015). By participating in the full process, the participants developed cognitive skills to reduce uncertainty and to continue

developing knowledge, awareness, and attitude that yield to intercultural communicative competence (Eken, 2019; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

Furthermore, study participants acquired a greater value for communication strategies than linguistic competence. This finding suggests that the virtual training was successful in promoting the importance of understanding more than speaking (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002) and, therefore, becoming flexibly competent when speaking international business English (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Valuing strategies such as the use of simple and plain language, clarity and organization of ideas, and feedback strategies indicate that the participants are developing behavioral intercultural communication skills. For example, these strategies are crucial in supporting the change of facilitation styles, listening to increase understanding, mindful listening, and ultimately communicating with minimal loss (Byram, 1992, Chun, 2011, Eken, 2019, Fantini, 2000, Toomey & Chung, 2011). The participants expressed a greater value for communication strategies because they began to perceive communication as a reciprocal process for building meaningful relationships. This illustrates that participants became aware of the important role English plays in becoming global citizens and what is needed to engage in dialogues and participate in cultural collaboration (Coryell et al., 2014). Overall, the findings captured in this emergent theme suggest that the virtual training enhanced affective, cognitive, and behavioral competencies necessary for not only the development of intercultural communicative competence but also becoming a global citizen.

The third theme illustrated the significance of giving and recording a virtual presentation. This was an opportunity to improve the participants' linguistic competence

and practice their intercultural skills (Hockly, 2015). Based on their statements, it was evident that the participants were able to freely experiment with various expressions and gestures appropriate for a diverse group of audience and virtual medium and reflect on the choices they have made. This finding shows consideration of communication contexts, and adaptability in changing communication styles depending on interactions and contexts (Byram, 1997; Nickerson, 2007; Ricard, 1993). It also illustrates that the virtual presentation project served as an opportunity for the participants to engage in active experimentation of the newly acquired knowledge and skills (Kolb & Yegenah, 2012). Although having to record the presentation virtually posed some technological challenges, the participants seized the opportunity to experiment with a range of verbal and nonverbal expressions. While this finding aligns with the drawbacks of virtual learning documented in the literature (Avgousti, 2018), it also captures the motivation of the participants to resolve the technological issue and continue learning. As such, the findings illustrate their development of affective, cognitive, and behavioral skills of intercultural communication.

In addition, the virtual presentation project offered an authentic experience of intercultural communication. Besides the practicality of presentation skills, watching videos with different accents but without closed captions resembled real-life interaction. Participants reported experiencing difficulty in listening due to their unfamiliarity with the different accents, especially accents from the opposite side of the hemisphere to their own. This finding reflects the real communication challenges within a multinational corporation followed by understanding different kinds of Englishes documented in the study conducted by Charles and Marchan-Pekkari (2002). It shows that using videos with

different accents and no closed captions corresponded to a real-life international business English situation, leading the participants to experience challenges similar to those they might encounter in real-life intercultural situations. However, it is important to note that the virtual medium allowed for flexibility in terms of having the option to repeatedly watch the videos until they were satisfied with their comprehension (Avgousti, 2018; Belz, 2007). As a result of their experience, the participants developed an ear for different accents. Contrary to Kramsch and Anderson's (1999) concerns on multimedia-based learning de-contextualizing cultural input, the virtual presentation project rather offered a contextual experience of intercultural communication.

Literature states that lifelong autonomous culture-learning skills that enable them to work through the intercultural challenges on their own are critical to the development of intercultural communication skills (Balboni & Caon, 2014; Sercu, 2002). To this effect, the participants' statements illustrating their practice of cultural sensitivity and critical reflection on the danger of knowledge-based cultural sensitivity support their development of autonomous culture-learning skills. The participants not only practiced their *skills of interpreting and relating* (Byram, 1997) but also engaged in "reorganizing and reconsidering prior knowledge in the light of new information or identifying traces of prior texts and events as they appear in new contexts" (Sercu, 2002, pp. 71). From the perspective of Kolb and Yehenah (2012), the participants were questioning assumptions and giving new meaning to their observations and reflections. This indicates that the participants are developing conscious control of biased interpretation (Byram, 1997, p. 35). Based on these findings, it is evident that through the virtual international business English training, participants have acquired the necessary knowledge as well as

observational, analytical, and reflective skills that equip them to be sensitive to cultural factors and to further develop intercultural communication skills independently.

Lastly, as a result of participating in the virtual international business English training, study participants exhibited increased curiosities in different cultural practices to continue developing their intercultural communication skills. Loewenstein (1994) stated that curiosity arises when “an individuals’ informational reference point becomes elevated in a certain domain, drawing attention to an information gap. It is the feeling of deprivation that results from an awareness of the gap” (p. 93). From this perspective, study findings indicate that the virtual training increased awareness in the participants of an information gap and encouraged them to gain more knowledge for future success in intercultural communication. This connects to the learning objective recommended for the enhancement of the *attitude* component in Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence: “Interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one’s own and in other cultures and cultural practices” (p. 50). Meaning, the participants developed an attitude critical to further developing intercultural communication skills after the virtual training. However, Houghton (2013) noted that awareness of information gap is achieved when individuals are presented with new information close to their existing knowledge base and consciously reflect and delineate gap in their knowledge. This connects closely to Kolb’s (1984, 2015) *concrete experience* and *reflective observation* phases of experiential learning process, suggesting that engaging in reflective tasks, such as learning reflections and exit interview, after reviewing the learning materials contributed to increasing participants’ curiosities in the current study.

The confident attitude the study participants developed towards themselves with English was an important aspect of the project. Based on their statements, their confidence as non-native English speakers increased as they became aware of the different factors influencing communication outcomes and the similarities in the challenges they experienced with English. Literature found that affective variables such as self-confidence, risk-taking, anxiety, motivation, and grit, play significant roles in influencing individuals' willingness to communicate in in-class and out-of-class contexts (Lee & Lee, 2020; Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2018). It is safe to say that the study participants developed an attitude that would increase their "willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship" (Byram, 1992, p. 50). In other words, the virtual international business English training assisted in removing a potential barrier for working professionals to seek opportunities for intercultural interactions. For example, Esmeralda's motivation to write English emails on her own is a great testament to the increased willingness to engage in new opportunities as a result of increased confidence. While this interpretation is supported by Spitzberg's (1997) proposition that "as communicator confidence increases, communicator motivation [to engage in intercultural interaction] increases" (p. 383), confidence is not recognized in Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997). In this regard, this finding provides novel insights into the current knowledge that self-confidence plays a significant role in motivating international working professionals to create opportunities of their own to continue developing intercultural communication skills.

The goal of this chapter was to present study findings related to the third and final research question for the dissertation study: How can a virtual international business

English training enhance the intercultural communication skills of working professionals? Study findings indicated that the virtual international business English training enhanced working professionals' cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills of intercultural communications. As a result of the virtual training, the working professionals gained concrete knowledge and awareness of how culture influences English communication, serving as a basis to acquire new values of English, nonverbal skills, and communication strategies. These cognitive and affective skills enabled the working professionals to gain skills for effective intercultural interaction, especially giving and recording a virtual presentation to an intercultural audience, developing an intercultural ear, and practicing cultural sensitivity. Consequently, the virtual international business English training instilled curiosities to continue learning and developing intercultural communication skills and new confident attitude with English.

V. CONCLUSION

This instrumental qualitative case study examined the experiences of a group of international working professionals with proficient English skills participating in a virtual international business English training. Their narratives provided an insight into identifying innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training program for international working professionals that centers attention on intercultural communication skills.

With the participation of twelve working professionals from Turkey, China, Korea, India, and Colombia, study findings documented their experiences participating in the virtual international business English training and examined how the virtual training enhanced their intercultural communication skills. Through the participants' experiences, this research study identified innovative practices designing and implementing a virtual international business English training focusing on intercultural communication skills for international working professionals. This final chapter presents the following sections: (1) study highlights, (2) summary of findings, (3) recommendations for innovative practice, (4) tensions and challenges, (5) future research, and (6) final thoughts.

Study Highlights

Chapter III and Chapter IV provided a detailed insight into the experiences of international working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training program and innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training focusing on intercultural communication skills (see Figure 10). Thus, this section discusses study highlights organized by research question.

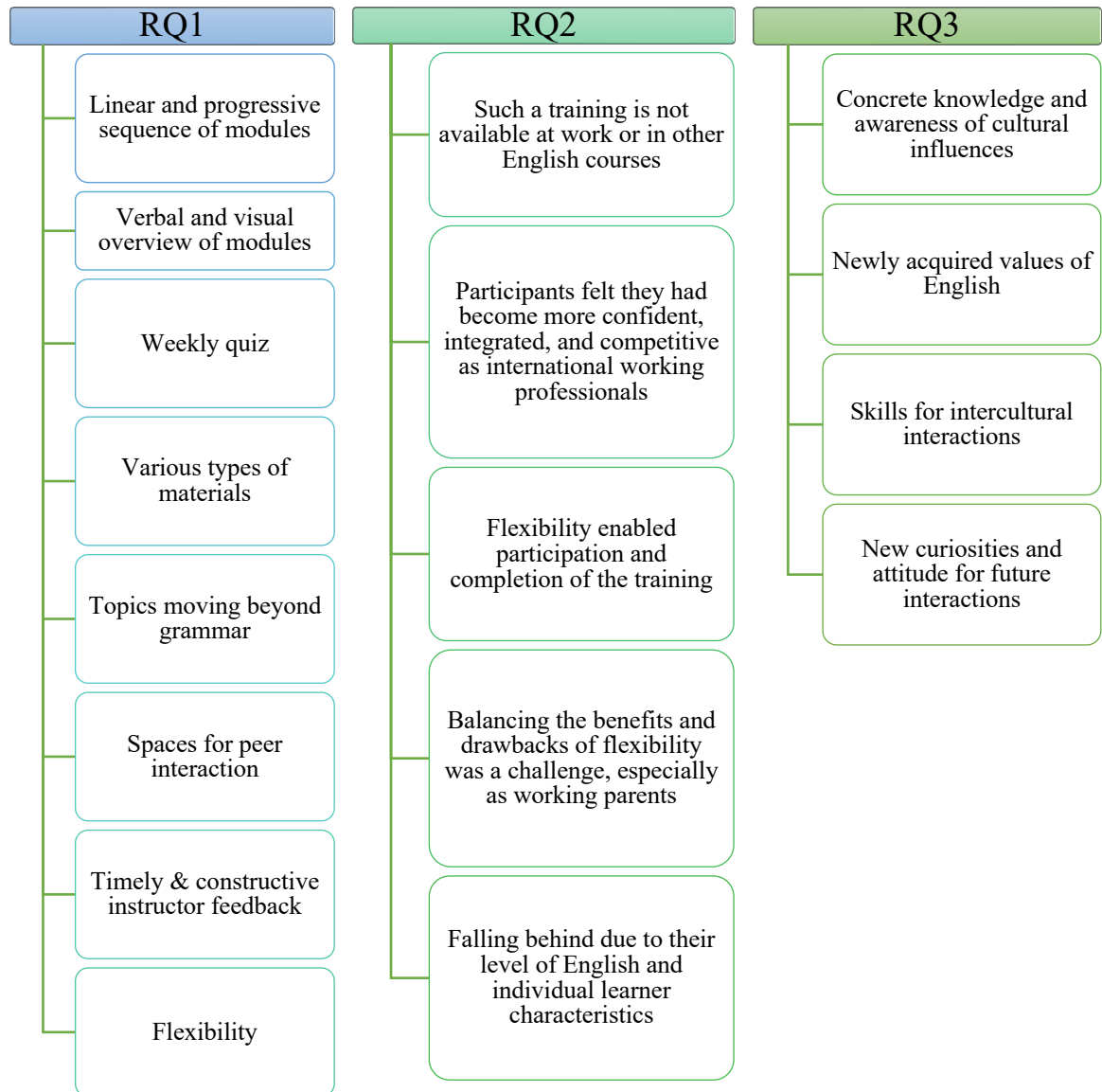


Figure 10. Study Highlights

Research Question #1

What are innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training?

The participants in the study commonly identified the following as innovative practices: organizing modules in a linear and progressive manner, having both verbal and visual overview of the modules, assigning weekly quiz, utilizing various types of

materials, selecting topics moving beyond grammar, providing spaces for peer interaction, delivering timely and constructive instructor feedback, and offering flexibility.

First, organizing modules in a linear and progressive manner facilitated positive learning experiences. Participants specifically discussed how starting with the focus of increasing awareness and working towards application knowledge and skills enhanced their motivation to continue learning. An aspect that contributed to such a sequence was examining cultural knowledge and skill from an outside perspective (culture-general), followed by an examination of the same knowledge and skill from an inside perspective (culture-specific).

Participants in the study also found that a verbal and visual overview made it easier for them to navigate through the virtual training with less confusion or time management difficulties. The instructor's verbal overview included a description of expectations and the importance of the modules. It helped the participants understand why they are undertaking the learning experience within each module. The visual overview consisted of clarity in location of resources, group discussion, and reflection produced a climate conducive to learning and effective time management. These overviews provided clear directions and eliminated any barriers that would become an obstacle to their learning.

Additionally, the weekly quiz served as validation and accountability measure of the acquired knowledge and skills. It was a tool to minimize potential setbacks as a result of flexibility and to actively engage the participants with the acquired knowledge every week.

Furthermore, utilizing varying selection of materials (e.g., instructor-record lecture videos, YouTube videos, extra resources) facilitated the participants to study and reflect on each topic from multiple perspectives. For example, the study participants found that the instructor-recorded lecture videos and YouTube videos complemented each other. It clarified and validated the concepts by watching two different videos. The extra resources provided examples and served as a guide for application in practice. It motivated the participants to apply what they had learned outside of the training environment.

One of the most commonly identified elements that was vital to the participants' learning experience was how the topics moved beyond grammar and language skills. Focusing on various communicative strategies and topics addressing universal aspects of work culture practices enabled them to appreciate similarities and to feel that they are becoming more integrated and competitive as international working professionals. Because of the topics were relevant and practical, the participants were motivated to take the learning beyond the training and apply it on the job.

In addition, participants found that interacting with peers in two different interactive spaces (discussion forms and comment sections) provided them with opportunities for noticing, learning, and reflecting. The discussion forum served as a rich source of diverse perspectives and expressions to describe the same ideas in the same language. Comment sections provided the opportunity for the participants to informally share their reflections and thus form a learning community in which they actively share common goals, attitudes, and emotional experiences.

Finally, participants reported timely and constructive instructor feedback as vital

to their motivation to continue engaging in the virtual international business English training. More specifically, they identified clear organization, timeliness, relevance, and opportunities for negotiation of feedback as key characteristics that helped them progress. Moreover, it was important that the feedback was not only provided for error correction, but also for building reciprocal relationship and providing directions to their efforts in the areas they saw as important.

Research Question #2

What are the experiences of working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training?

Participants in the study described a range of experiences resulting from the innovative practices, however most were positive. For example, the majority of the participants reflected on how the virtual international business English training addressed the gaps in their professional lives. The virtual training covered topics that they had been seeking, and it moved beyond grammar and language skills and focused more on communicative strategies. According to the participants, such a training was not available at work or in other English courses. Therefore, because of its relevance and practicality, participants who use English on a daily basis immediately applied their newly acquired knowledge and skills to their professional lives. Furthermore, they felt that they had become more confident, integrated, and competitive as international working professionals. The virtual international business English allowed them to better understand how their existing challenges were not due to a lack of English skills.

Several participants noted that their participation in the virtual international business English was made possible in the first place because of its flexibility. In

particular, working parents shared that setting their own pace and schedule enabled them to participate in such a learning experience and successfully complete the training. Nevertheless, it also presented challenges to managing time during busy weeks, as they left their assignments to the weekends, leaving little time to complete major assignments. Balancing the benefits and drawbacks of flexibility was a challenge for some participants.

In a similar vein, another challenge some of the participants experienced during their participation in the virtual training was time and pace management due to their level of English and individual learner characteristics. Three participants specifically reported spending 6-24 hours on each module, spending most of their time repeatedly watching the videos and submitting error-free, quality work. These characteristics led them to be tardy in completing the modules and feel unsatisfied with the quality of their work. For one participant, it gradually affected her confidence to the point where she was unable to submit the virtual presentation project.

Research Question #3

How can a virtual international business English training enhance the intercultural communication skills of working professionals?

The virtual international business English training enhanced working professionals' cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills of intercultural communications. As result of the virtual training, the working professionals gained the following: (1) concrete knowledge and awareness of cultural influences, (2) newly acquired values of English, (3) skills for intercultural interactions, and (4) new curiosities and attitude for future interactions.

First, the virtual training provided the participants with a concrete understanding of how culture influences English communication. Most of the participants expressed that this research project was their first experience explicitly studying culture and intercultural communication. Therefore, some of the concepts presented in the virtual training (e.g., international Englishes, low-context and high-context communication) were new knowledge to them. For participants that entered the project with more experience and awareness of the role culture plays in communication, the virtual training helped them systematized their accumulated knowledge and make sense of their past experiences. It was evident that the participants gained the body of knowledge and awareness necessary to develop their own decision-making framework and thereby appropriate cognitive skills to reduce uncertainty and navigate unfamiliar intercultural situations in the future.

The knowledge and awareness served as the basis for the participants to acquire affective and behavioral skills. For example, through the virtual training, the participants gained awareness of the value of nonverbal skills required for effective intercultural communication. They placed a higher value on understanding of other cultures, open-mindedness, being considerate of other people when it came to envisioning effective intercultural communication. These are values indicating openness to learning and suspension of belief about other cultures. Additionally, the participants utilized the newly acquired knowledge to make sense of their past experiences, notice disconnections in their reflections, and observe and evaluate the differences in communication practices among their peers. This facilitated them to re-evaluate their cultural values associated with English, favoring communication strategies over fluency. By the end of the training, they valued strategies such as the use of simple and plain language, clarity and

organization of ideas, and feedback strategies, indicating development of behavioral intercultural communication skills.

Then, the participants gained skills for effective intercultural interaction. Specifically, they prepared a virtual presentation for an intercultural audience, developed an intercultural ear, applied and reflected on cultural sensitivity. By preparing a virtual presentation, the participants were able to freely experiment with various expressions and gestures appropriate for a diverse group of audience and virtual medium as well as reflect on the choices they have made. They were given the opportunity to consider communication context and change communication styles. Further, as the virtual presentation was produced by them, it offered an authentic experience of intercultural communication. The recordings corresponded to real-life scenarios such as people speaking in different accents and listening to them without closed captions. These aspects led the participants to repeatedly watch the videos, resulting in developing an intercultural ear. The virtual presentation project offered a contextual experience of intercultural communication. As a result, the participants were equipped with necessary knowledge and skills to apply and reflect on cultural sensitivity.

The virtual international business English training also instilled curiosities to continue learning and developing intercultural communication skills and a new confident attitude towards English. The virtual training increased awareness in the participants of an information gap and encouraged them to gain more knowledge in depth and breadth for future success in intercultural communication. Also, as the participants became aware of the different factors influencing their communication outcomes and the similarities in the difficulties they encountered with English, they developed a more confident attitude

toward English. In other words, the virtual training helped to remove potential barriers to seeking opportunities for intercultural interactions and developing the attitude necessary for continuous development of their intercultural communication skills.

To conclude, this dissertation study provides novel insights into the current knowledge. The knowledge and skills the participants acquired through the virtual training are indicative of lifelong autonomous culture-learning skills. For example, practicing and reflecting on cultural sensitivity indicates critical reflection skills that will equip the learners to engage in more opportunities of learning and development of intercultural communication skills in the future. Therefore, the objective to into consideration when creating a similar training is to develop and refine foundational skills necessary to attain Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence components (attitude, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness) and effectively utilize them in future intercultural interactions. In this regard, integrating experiential learning and intercultural communicative competence models provides new directions for research and practice on developing lifelong autonomous culture-learning skills.

Study findings also revealed that the virtual training helped increase the participants' confidence, initiating the lifelong process of developing intercultural communication skills. While existing literature discusses the role of confidence in language learning, confidence is not recognized in Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence model. Given the significant role confidence plays in engaging in intercultural interactions, including confidence development in the definition of the *attitude* component of intercultural communicative competence is essential.

Summary of Findings

This dissertation identified innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training program for working professional that centers attention on intercultural communication skills. It bridges the gap between existing knowledge and instructional practices in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) by examining the experiences of twelve working professionals from five different nationalities (Turkey, China, India, Korea, Colombia).

Most of the participants' narratives and identified innovative practices were supported by existing literature related to virtual learning, experiential learning, and intercultural communicative competence. However, the findings provided new insight into how their intercultural communication skills were enhanced through the virtual international business English training and how it equipped them to continuous development of these skills after the virtual training. To bring forth understanding of these findings, intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) and experiential e-learning theory (Carver et al., 2007) served as the study frameworks. Figure 11 illustrates connections among emergent themes and findings related to innovative practices identified through the data. The process of learning and practicing intercultural communication skills was activated by participating in the virtual international business English training.

The inner cycle represents the four phases of experiential learning. In the *concrete experience* phase the working professionals engaged in videos, readings, and weekly quizzes to have new learning experiences. Next, participating in discussion forums and engaging in reflective tasks activated the *reflective observation* phase. The working

professionals reflected on the newly acquired knowledge from divergent perspectives and identified inconsistencies. Through peer interactions and various assignments, the working professionals made sense of their past experiences, connected new meanings to their experiences, and fully gained an understanding of the role culture plays in communication, which represents the *abstract conceptualization* phase. The working professionals underwent *active experimentation*, testing new meanings and understandings in their assignments, and if available, through their job. This phase illustrates how the virtual learning environment, and the real world can interact to activate the full cycle of experiential learning without incorporating costly technology and resources.

The outer cycle illustrates the components of experiential learning in a virtual environment: Learner-centeredness, competence, belongingness, center of gravity, and agency. These components enhanced the phases represented in the inner cycle.

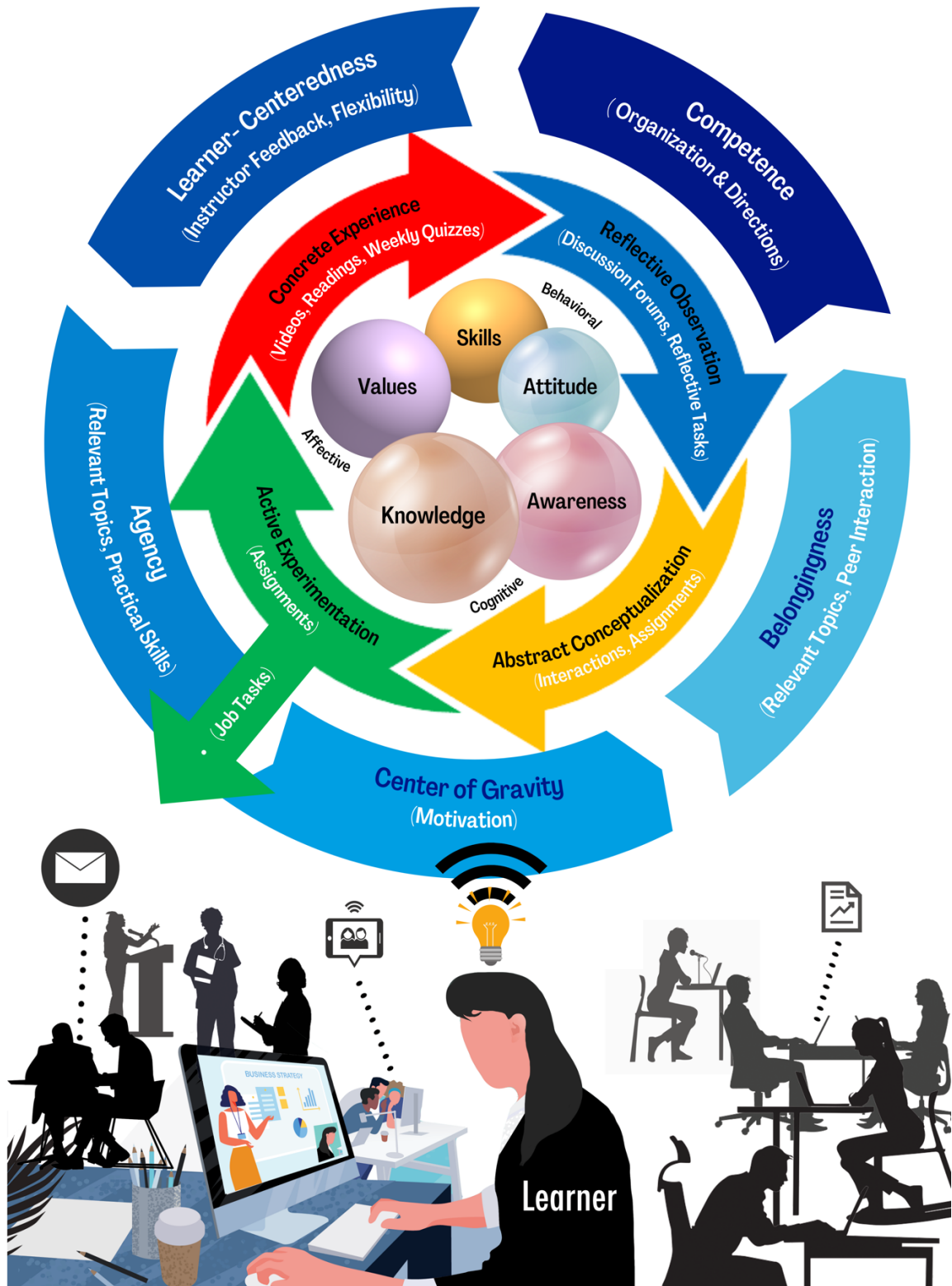


Figure 11. *Illustration of Findings*

Timely, constructive instructor feedback and flexibility were aspects that established *learner-centeredness*. They served to support the participants' experiential learning process. Clear organization and directions increased *competence*. It promoted awareness of the potential barriers the working professionals may experience. Incorporating relevant topics and peer interactions established *sense of belonging* as the participants of virtual international business English training and members of international workforce. These practices facilitated the working professionals to form a learning community and avoid learner isolation. When times were challenging, *motivation* was a source of force that guided the working professionals to actively engage in the training process. Motivation, in conjunction with, addressing relevant topics and practical skills in the virtual training increased *agency*. As a result, they took responsibility for the learning process by applying their newly acquired knowledge and skills in their job.

Overall, it was evident that these five components (outer cycle) strengthened and enriched the four-phase experiential learning process (inner cycle). The interaction of these two cycles enhanced the development of intercultural communicative competence. The study, therefore, contributes to further developing the experiential e-learning and intercultural communicative competence models.

Recommendations for Innovative Practices

After presenting the study highlights, I am able to identify recommendations for innovative practices that can be incorporated in virtual and face-to-face instructional settings of international business English training that focuses on developing intercultural communication skills. It is important for instructors, practitioners, and institutions to be

flexible, learner-centered, and provide learning of high-quality to better support international working professionals to continue learning and developing their skills as valuable members of the global society.

Recommendations for Virtual Training

Incorporate peer introduction activities. Learners should be given the opportunity to establish connections with their peers and understand the value their peers can bring to the learning experience.

Organize the modules with clear structure, titles, and in consistent patterns. Learners should easily be able to locate resources, discussion forms, and assignments.

Provide verbal overview to open each module. Verbal overview should be provided in the form of a recording of the instructors' description of expectations and the importance of the module topics, establishing clear purposes for the participants to understand why they are undertaking the learning experience.

Utilize varying selection of learning materials. YouTube videos, instructor-recorded lectures, and readings can be used to offer diverse perspectives, flexibility in learning styles, and, in particular, strong corroboration on topics that learners are not familiar with. However, instructors should refer to other assigned materials in the recorded lectures in order to aid learners in making connections between the various perspectives.

Ensure closed captions are available for instructional videos. This will provide support to learners listening comprehension.

Assign low-stake weekly quiz at the end of each module. The quiz should serve as a tool to summarize key learning points and a validation and accountability measure of

the newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Provide practical extra resources. The extra resources should include practical and concrete information to allow learners to apply the newly acquired knowledge and skills in real-life scenarios on their own.

Offer spaces for various peer interactions. Learners should be given the opportunity to interact with their peers both with structure (group discussion) and without structure (voluntary interaction). They should be given the opportunity to interact in relation to not only the module topics but also their personal and professional experiences and reflections to foster a sense of learning community, and thereby belonging.

Facilitate both text-based and oral interaction opportunities. Instructors should understand that text-based interactions demand linguistically more challenging communication, demanding more time and effort. Incorporating both modalities of interaction can help sustain learner engagement and increase learner motivation.

Incorporate different kinds of technology for further oral interaction. For live oral interactions, learners can be paired based on time zones and asked to meet via videoconference at least twice throughout the program. Instructors should provide learners with a list of guiding questions to use in their first meeting as support. In the event that live interactions are not possible because of a large geographical gap in time zones, various voice-thread applications could be implemented to enable asynchronous peer interactions.

Provide timely, constructive, and interactive feedback. Instructors should provide feedback that is timely, relevant, and organized, and that gives learners the opportunity to negotiate the feedback. The feedback should not merely focus on error correction but also

for building relationship with the learners and provide directions that they see as relevant to their effort.

Send out weekly reminders to the group at the beginning of each week. This should establish instructor presence, direct the learners towards the right path, and orient them to manage their time and resources to meet upcoming deadlines.

Give both flexibility and deadlines. Instructors should recognize that the learners are working professionals and, thus, will need autonomy to set their own pace and schedule to successfully complete the assigned modules and tasks. However, weekly deadlines are also necessary to support the learners to stay engaged with their learning experience and minimize setbacks.

Recommendations for Face-to-Face Instruction

Utilize a learning management system to facilitate learning outside of the classroom. For example, Google Classroom can be used to assign YouTube videos, give weekly quiz, provide extra resources, or facilitate peer interaction throughout the week. This can allow learners to stay engaged with the learning experience and provide learners with extra opportunities for learning and practice.

Incorporate both individual and group-level learning reflections. An individual reflection on learning should allow learners to practice reflection on their own and reflect on areas that are most relevant to them. A group reflection can provide an opportunity for an instructor to assist individuals who have difficulty reflecting and making connections.

Give assignments that allow learners to receive individualized instructor feedback in writing. Learners should be given the opportunity the space and time to process and reflect on the feedback, and then, to interact with the instructor and negotiate the

feedback. This can also help the instructor establish connections with the learners.

Assign group projects that can be accomplished in class time. Instructors should understand that learners are working professionals, and group projects outside of the structured time and space can be challenging. By having time and space to complete the group project in class, learners can have access to similar resources and the opportunity to produce high-quality products in the similar conditions.

Group learners with different professions and cultural backgrounds. This should offer learners the opportunity to notice differences and similarities among each other and to practice intercultural communication skills.

Recommendations for Developing Intercultural Communication Skills

Organize module topics from culture-general to culture-specific. Culture-general topics should focus on understanding cultural knowledge and skills from the outside perspective. These topics should increase awareness of diversity in English and culture and importance of intercultural communication skills. Culture-specific topics should portray culture as context-dependent and have learners explore the topics from the inside perspective.

Explore how culture influences verbal and nonverbal communication. Topics and assignments exploring low-context and high-context communication can be used to help learners understand the role of culture in communication and make informed decisions to successfully navigate intercultural interactions.

Utilize videos that represent diverse English accents. Demonstrating the concept of international English, instructors should promote English with a non-dichotomous view, portraying characteristics that corresponds to the real world.

Incorporate topics that are applicable to all types of jobs. Moving away from the deficit, comparison method, this approach can facilitate learners to explore and appreciate similarities in communication across different national, organizational, and field-specific cultures.

Assign weekly reflections. Learners should practice reflection skills on their own to make connections and understand how relevant it is to their learning needs. It is important not to assume that learners are already skilled in critical reflection. Therefore, weekly learning reflection can be used to offer a safe and independent space to practice it. However, this activity should not be graded merely for completion; the focus should be on the quality of the reflection. Instructors should provide concrete feedback and guidance to help learners delve deeper into their reflections.

Select topics that focus on knowledge, professional skills, and communication strategies rather than linguistic skills. Instructors should understand the needs of the learners who are in advanced English level are not largely language related but rather related to knowledge and skills for effective, professional communication. Therefore, the topics should not focus on vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, writing, or speaking.

Design assignments that promote application, synthesis, and evaluation. Learners should be given the opportunity to apply the newly acquired knowledge and skills, synthesize their ideas and opinions, and evaluate products and interactions from a critical perspective. As learners complete the various tasks, they are able to identify areas that should be improved in terms of their English skills and practice those areas alongside the training topics.

Include activities eliciting culturally and linguistically rich points. Discussion forums, giving and recording presentations, and providing constructive feedback can be incorporated for learners to notice, learn, and reflect on culturally different expressions and perspectives.

Have learners contribute their opinions without the influence of other opinions. Learners should reflect on their opinions from authentic perspectives to learn from other perspectives. This can be achieved by setting up discussion forums with restrictions to where learners cannot view other posts before posting their own or by requiring learners to provide their opinions in writing first before participating in an oral discussion.

Provide positive feedback on their efforts. Instructors should consider the role that confidence plays in learners' engagement in intercultural interactions. An objective the instructors should consider is to help learners develop their muscles of confidence. Being recognized for their efforts and celebrating their progression will enable them to focus on the achievements they have made rather than the areas they have yet to improve.

Tensions and Challenges

Conducting this dissertation study presented some tensions and challenges. While the IRB protocol application was deemed exempt from full board review, the IRB approval process took three months as it required meticulous examination by both the Information Security Office and Texas State University IRB. This was due to the COVID-19 social distancing measures, and consequently, I had to implement thorough and extra data security measures for data collection and safeguard the data. For example, the videoconference interview rooms had to be configured to require a password to allow authorized entry only. I also had to collect the informed consent form signatures via

Adobe Sign. For several participants, Adobe Sign was not a familiar tool. Consequently, they experienced challenges locating the email invitation sent by Adobe Sign in their email inboxes, requiring multiple attempts to provide their signatures. One potential participant, in fact, withdrew interest in participating in the study during this process.

During the orientation week of the virtual international business English training, I noticed that a participant had accessed all the training modules but had not completed any of the required tasks and did not respond to my emails. This participant was also a graduate student and had an English teaching background. In light of this information, I immediately consulted with my advisor and concluded that the participant had signed up for the study only to peek into the training modules and learning materials. I removed the participant from the Google Classroom site, thereby removing her access to the training.

Due to the length of the training and the demanding nature of the program, a couple of participants at some point felt overwhelmed. In fact, one participant withdrew after completing the first module; one participant disengaged after completing the first module, requiring me to remove him from the training; two participants discussed the possibility of withdrawing from the program during module 4 because the pressure and stress they felt in completing the virtual presentation recording project during a busy week at work. I provided encouragement and additional one week extension to submit their projects; this allowed them to complete the virtual training.

Additionally, due to time zone differences, the exit interview had to be scheduled on days and times that worked for both the participants and me. Although the interviews were conducive with their schedules, some participants had to join the interview during their lunch breaks or late at night when they could be away from their families and

personal responsibilities. Further, the interviews were scheduled less than a week after they completed the six-week training. Given these conditions, I often wondered whether the participants experienced fatigue and, consequently, hindered their ability to recall more experiences that were not documented in this study.

Lastly, conducting a videoconference interview with international working professionals was not an easy task. At times, internet connections interrupted the quality of participants' audio; certain words were muffled and sounded distorted. Affected by the audio quality, listening and following narratives, especially with varying accents, often posed challenges to me as a researcher. My years of experience as an ESL instructor helped me navigate these challenges, but I had to ask them to repeat their statements a couple of times. This may have been displeasing for the participants, especially those who had lower confidence level.

Future Research

A motivating factor for this dissertation study was lack of literature on international working professionals' experiences in a virtual training and developing intercultural communication skills. From this study, it is evident that more research is needed with international working professionals, especially those who are fluent in English.

A longitudinal study following the participants overtime to examine how they utilize the knowledge and skills acquired from the virtual international business English in their jobs could be beneficial. As Balboni and Caon (2014) stated, intercultural communicative competence cannot be taught as a complete course and is developed overtime. Conducting a longitudinal study could provide insight on how the working

professionals continue to develop intercultural communicative competence through what they have acquired from the virtual training.

Conducting a study with participants from the same organization would be a good unit of analysis. Such study will help examine how having similar organization knowledge and experience can hinder or enhance their learning experiences and development of intercultural communication skills.

A study focusing on international working professionals who are also balancing parental duties while participating in virtual training could also be beneficial. Understanding their experiences could provide insight into alleviating the various challenges that might be a barrier to the success of their learning. In addition, their learning needs may differ from individuals who are not parents.

Moreover, a mixed-method study examining motivational constructs that contribute to the working professionals' experiences participating in the virtual international business English training could be insightful. Given that participation in the current dissertation study was voluntary, it would offer in-depth understanding how motivation impacts their learning experience.

Research on incorporating experiential learning in a virtual environment with affordable tools should be further developed. This type of study would benefit instructors on how to best replicate and implement technology to enhance learning experiences as well as develop intercultural communication skills.

Finally, a study that focuses on instructors' perspectives on designing and implementing the virtual international business English training would be beneficial. This could offer a more holistic view of the challenges to bridging the gap between literature

and practice for the development of intercultural communication skills.

Final Thoughts

As an international working professional and as an English instructor, the dissertation journey provided me with learning experience, affirmation, and confidence. Listening to the participants express that this was a training that they have been longing for too long made me feel proud of conducting this study. As I was analyzing the data collected from the study, I could envision a future in which the innovative practices identified in this study will alleviate some of the challenges international working professionals encounter at work and support them in maximizing their potential. This study was vital to reflect upon and hone my practice to better support international working professionals to be recognized as valued members of the global society.

Through this research project, I realized that it takes a considerable amount of time and effort for an instructor to design and implement a high-quality virtual training with scattered resources and information. Due to the scarcity of business English training programs that incorporate international English and cultural topics, I had to constantly go back to my field notes and reflect on my practice and ensure that I am not subconsciously promoting the “standard” British or American English language and culture practices. As a result of this process, I have become more proficient in implementing international English and intercultural elements into my teaching. Furthermore, through this study, I was able to offer meticulous descriptions of innovative practices for virtual international business English training that centers on intercultural communication skills. It is therefore my intention that this study will serve as a motivation for instructors to deliver similar trainings and as a guide for them to design a high-quality, learner-centered virtual

training.

This research project started during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Two years later, the workforce is shifting because the pandemic has revealed the promising benefits of remote work that have never been explored before. Even though social distancing measures have been lifted, virtual learning is no longer a replacement medium since more and more people have become familiar with them. I am hopeful that this dissertation coupled with a now growing body of research on virtual learning will be valuable to a wide network of communities including international working professionals, instructors, practitioners, and scholars as they enter the new era of virtual learning.

As I close this dissertation, I have started a new job in a business environment and have been experiencing similar challenges as described by the study participants. Despite that I have lived overseas my entire life, I am continuously faced with navigating new cultural and workplace contexts despite my native-like English skills. The importance of utilizing innovative practices and continually refining them to adapt to the changing times and cultures has become imperative. While this dissertation has come to an end, the work within this scope of research has only just begun.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

DEFINITION OF RELEVANT TERMS

- Business:** An occupation, profession, partnership, or for-profit or non-profit organizations or entities engaged in commercial, industrial, or professional activities as a means of livelihood (Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d).
- Business English Training:** The process of learning and developing specific knowledge and skills in using the English language as the means of communication relevant to one's particular job (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Ellis & Johnson, 1994)
- Culture:** "A learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people" (Lustig & Koester, 2003, p. 27), within a wide array of systems such as national, professional, gender, age, religious, regional, and class.
- Intercultural Communication:** Communication between people with differing cultural and linguistic identities (Ricard, 1993; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2011).
- Intercultural Communication Skills:** The capability to interpret and relate information or event from another culture to one's own culture; use knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriately to build relationships and communicate with people from different cultures while speaking in the foreign language; and strive to continue developing one's communication skills (Byram, 1997, pp. 49-54).
- International Business English:** The use of English as a common language in business contexts where both speakers whose mother tongue is English and speakers whose mother tongue is not English are present (Rogerson-Revell, 2007, p. 105).

International Working Professional: An individual who speaks English as a dual, second, or foreign language and is engaged in a type of job that requires a degree or special training as one's main paid occupation and a means of livelihood (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam Webster, n.d.).

Virtual Training: A training done using an internet-connected computer, or when the learner and the instructor are in separate locations. Virtual training can be synchronous and asynchronous, self-paced, and interactive between the learners and a trainer (Huggett, 2010).

APPENDIX B

GOOGLE CLASSROOM MODULES

Figure B1

Overall Layout of Modules

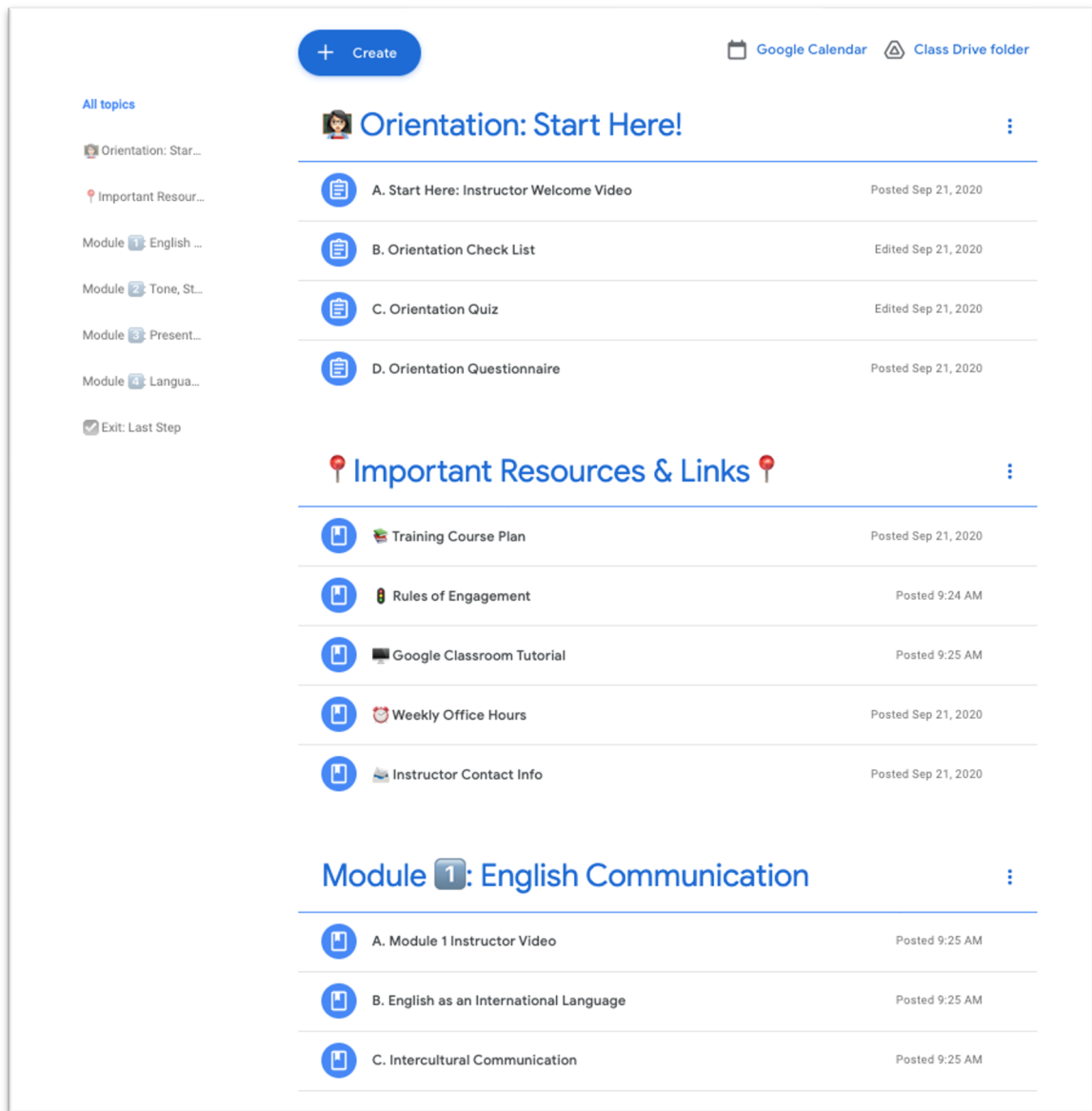



Figure B2


Individual Module Structure

Module 1: English Communication

A. Module 1 Instructor Video


Posted 9:25 AM

Welcome to Module 1!
Before you get started, please watch the instructor video. 😊




Module 1. Instructor Video
YouTube video 2 minutes


[View material](#)

B. English as an International Language


Posted 9:25 AM

C. Intercultural Communication


Posted 9:25 AM

D. Becoming an Effective Communicator


Posted 9:25 AM

Discussion: Intercultural Communication

Posted 9:25 AM

Task 1: Module 1 Quiz

Posted 9:26 AM


Task 2: Worksheet

Posted 9:26 AM


Figure B3

Sub-Topic Structure with Videos

Module 2: Tone, Styles, & Genre

 A. Module 2 Instructor Video


Posted 9:27 AM

 B. Informal & Formal Tone


Posted 9:27 AM

Please watch the following videos to learn how to make informal language sound formal:

1. Grammar: Formal English vs Informal English [4 mins]
2. How to Change Basic English into Business English [6 mins]




Grammar: Formal English...
YouTube video 4 minutes




How to change Basic Eng...
YouTube video 5 minutes


[View material](#)

 C. Directness & Politeness


Posted 9:27 AM

 D. Digital Communication


Posted 9:27 AM

 Discussion: Email Communication

Posted 9:27 AM

 Task 1: Module 2 Quiz


Posted 9:28 AM

 Task 2: Analysis Worksheet

Posted 9:28 AM

Figure B4


Assignment Instructions



Discussion: Intercultural Communication

HeeJae Chung • 9:25 AM


50 points



How is intercultural communication important for the following professionals?

1. A doctor
2. A graphic designer
3. Teachers

[Note: Please read the attached directions on how to use the discussion forum]



Discussion Forums_Updated...

PDF



Task 1: Module 2 Quiz

HeeJae Chung • 9:28 AM

50 points





Task 1 Quiz on Module 2

Google Forms



Task 2: Analysis Worksheet

HeeJae Chung • 9:28 AM

100 points





Task 2: Analysis Worksheet


Google Docs



How to Submit Tasks.pdf

PDF

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT FLYER



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

**VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS ENGLISH TRAINING**

JUNE 14 - AUGUST 1 2021

This study aims to document the experiences of a group of international working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training. The goal of the study is to bridge the gap between existing knowledge and instructional practices teaching English and propose an innovative virtual business English training for working professionals to help enhance their intercultural communication skills.

The requirements to take part in this study include participation in a “Virtual International Business English Training” for seven weeks, an average of 3-hours a week.

I am looking for international working professionals with the following characteristics:

- Self-identify as having proficient English oral communication skills
- Be currently involved in job duties requiring the use of English
- Have at least 3 years of work experience in their professions
- Have access to a computer equipped with a camera and speaker
- Be willing and able to participate in the study

For more information or if interested, contact:
HeeJae Chung at h_c173@txstate.edu

This study is IRB approved #7387

APPENDIX D
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

To: **[Potential Participant]**
Subject: **A Study of Virtual International Business English Training for Working Professionals**

This email message is a request for participation in research that has been approved or and declared exempt by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB #7387).

Dear **[Name]**,

You are receiving this email because you expressed interest in participating in this study, and you are currently involved in job duties requiring the use of English and have at least 3 years of work experience in your profession.

I am a doctoral student from Texas State University, and I am conducting a research study that aims to document the experiences of international working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training.

I am inviting you to participate in the study as the information gathered will help provide insight to identifying innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training course for working professionals around the world.

The requirements to take part in this study include participation in a “Virtual International Business English Training” for seven weeks from June 14 to August 1, 2021.

Project commitments include to:

- Have access to a computer equipped with a camera, audio, and a stable internet connection
- Be able to commit at least three hours to complete all the learning activities described for each week
- Participate in an online demographic questionnaire, an online exit questionnaire, and a 60-minute audio-recorded videoconference exit interview

While there is no incentive provided, you will receive a Certificate of Training Completion once you complete all the activities required over the course of seven weeks.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your name or the specific name of your affiliated organization will not be used in any written reports or publications, which result from this research.

If you decide to participate in the study, **please reply to this email.**

Also, I encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you have any questions about any aspects of this study, please contact the Principal Investigator, HeeJae Chung, at h_c173@txstate.edu or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Clarena Larrotta, at CL24@txstate.edu .

Thank you,

HeeJae Chung

This project #7387 was approved by the Texas State IRB. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please type in your full name.
2. What is your nationality? Where do you currently live?
3. Please describe the type of work you do.
4. How often do you use English at work?
5. What activities require you to use English at work? (e.g., teaching, lesson planning)
6. What does international business English mean for you?
7. What are the top 3 characteristics a professional need to be an effective English communicator?
8. What motivated you to participate in this course?
9. What are you looking forward to learning through this Virtual International Business English Training course?
10. List 3 goals you want to achieve through this course.
11. What would you like the instructor to know about you to help you successfully achieve your goals in this course?
12. What is your gender identity?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other
 - Choose not to identify
13. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - Caucasian
 - Hispanic
 - Black / African American
 - Asian

- Biracial / Multiracial
- Choose not to identify

14. What is your age range?

- 18-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 65+
- Choose not to identify

15. How long have you spoken English?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 25 + years
- Choose not to identify

16. Is this your first time participating in a virtual language training course?

- Yes- This is my first time.
- No – I have previous experience

17. If this is not your first time, please describe your previous experience participating in a virtual language training course.

APPENDIX F

EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. My name is...
2. Now that you have completed the course, what does international business English mean for you?
3. Now that you have completed the course, what are the top 3 characteristics a professional needs to be an effective English communicator?
4. On average how much time did you spend every week working on the modules?
5. Which topic/module interested you the most? Please explain.
6. What surprised you the most about this course? Please explain.
7. Describe 3 things you liked the most about the course. Please provide examples.
8. Describe 3 things you enjoyed the least about the course. Please provide examples.
9. If you had a chance to take part in the course again, what would you like to do differently?
10. What were the challenges you faced incorporating the course to your weekly schedule?
11. In what ways did the course benefit you?
12. What else would you like your instructor to know regarding your experience completing the course?

APPENDIX G
EXIT INTERVIEW

1. How was your overall experience participating in the training?
2. What aspects of the training did you find most useful/effective?
3. What aspects of the training did you find most enjoyable?
4. What did you like about taking part in the training online?
5. What did you dislike about taking part in the training online?
6. What are 3 new aspects you learned about intercultural communication?
7. How do you think this virtual training has helped you professionally?
8. Since there were different English accents and speakers, how easy or difficult was it for you to grasp the messages in the videos?
9. How do you think completing this course can help international working professionals in general?
10. What is a culture topic that you would like to review and discuss in a similar course and that was not explored in this training?

APPENDIX H

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: *Business English for Working Professionals: A Virtual International Training Focusing on Intercultural Communication Skills*

Principal Investigator: HeeJae Chung
Email: h_c173@txstate.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Clarena Larrotta
Email: CL24@txstate.edu

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep. Please know that participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are being invited to participate in a research study to document the experiences of international working professionals participating in a virtual international business English training. The information gathered will help provide insight to identifying innovative practices for designing and implementing a virtual international business English training course for working professionals around the world.

You are being asked to participate because you expressed interest, self-identify as having proficient English oral communication skills, are involved in job duties requiring to use English, and have at least 3 years of work experience in your profession.

PROCEDURES

The requirements to take part in this study include participation in a “Virtual International Business English Training” for seven weeks from June 14 to August 1, 2021.

Project commitments include to:

- Have access to a computer equipped with a camera, audio, and a stable internet connection
- Be able to commit at least three hours to complete all the learning activities described for each week
- Participate in a 15-minute online demographic questionnaire, a 30-minute online exit questionnaire, and a 60-minute audio-recorded videoconference exit interview

While there is no incentive provided, you will receive a Certificate of Training Completion once you complete all the activities required over the course of seven weeks.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal risk in participating in this study. All questions and activities relate to your experiences participating in the “Virtual International Business English Training.” In the event that you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions in the questionnaire or the interview, you will be offered the option to skip a question, decline to answer, or stop your participation at any time without consequences.

BENEFITS

Participation in the study will be beneficial in terms of obtaining professional development relevant to your job duties requiring the use of English. Once you complete and submit all the activities required over the course of seven weeks, you will receive a Certificate of Training Completion via email. Study findings will benefit other professionals, as they will be helpful in identifying innovative practices for designing and implementing similar virtual English training modules for working professionals.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in the questionnaire and interview responses will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

We will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. Your name or the specific name of your affiliated organization will not be used in any written reports or publications, which result from this research. All data including interview recordings, questionnaire responses, transcripts, and interview follow-up emails threads will be password-protected to provide secure storage and will be transcribed in pseudonyms. All data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspects of this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, **HeeJae Chung**: h_c173@txstate.edu, or the Faculty Advisor.

If you have questions for the IRB office, please refer to Texas State IRB protocol #7387. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT (via Secured Adobe Signatures)

Participation

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the research study described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction.

I understand I can withdraw at any time. I acknowledge that my participation in this research study is voluntary. It is also understood that the responses given will remain confidential.

Audio Recording

Your participation in this research study will be recorded using Zoom videoconference recording tool. Recordings will assist with accurately documenting your responses, and it will be used for transcription purposes only. You have the right to refuse the audio recording.

Please sign your initials next to one of the following options that you select:

I consent to audio recording:

Yes _____ No _____

Printed Name of Study
Participant

Signature of Study
Participant

Date

Printed Name of Person
Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person
Obtaining Consent

Date

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