Promoting Intercultural Competence for Technical Writing Students: A Case Study of an Intercultural Business Memo Research Project

Yingqin Liu
Cameron University,
Lawton, Oklahoma, USA
Corresponding author's email: yliu [AT] cameron.edu

_____

ABSTRACT----*In the age of globalization, acquiring intercultural communication skills and developing intercultural competence are essential for technical and business communication students and practitioners. Using a case study from a technical writing course assignment, which explores the effectiveness of incorporating an intercultural business memo research project to improve students' intercultural competence, the paper has come to some valuable conclusions. The findings show that it is useful and effective for teachers to use technical writing course research projects to help teach intercultural communication in the workplace for these ends.The findings indicate that the technical and business writing teachers need to find more effective ways of motivatingstudents in this intercultural communication learning process. The teachers also need to create more real-life tasks such as internship opportunities or service learning projects in some intercultural workplace settings to help students acquire intercultural competence.*

Keywords---technical writing, intercultural communication course project, intercultural competence
_____

1. INTRODUCTION

Asthe age of globalization further expands its influences in the 21st century economy, culture, education, and communication, technical and business writing teachers are preparing their students to workwith clients and colleagues across the world and to write effectively for readers from diverse cultural backgrounds. As DeVoss(2002) points out,"in today's global marketplace, if not all, students in our classes will have diverse experiences with different cultures within and outside the organizations in which they work" (p.69). Furthermore, statistics show that more than half of US business people on long overseas assignments return home early because of their inability to adapt to other cultures (Pfeiffer, 1994, p.119). This number also demonstrates the importance of addressing, in our technical and business writing classrooms,the communication challenges specific to intercultural environments(DeVoss, 2002, p.70). Thus, acquiring skills of intercultural communication and intercultural competence has become essential, rather than merely desirable, for technical and business communication students and practitioners (Yu, 2012).We can saythat helping technical and business writing students acquire intercultural communication abilities or skillsthrough classroom teaching is a challenging taskbecause of lacking a real- life intercultural communication environment in which a classroom can't adequately offer.

However, this paper positsthat writing teachers can meet this challenge byusing some innovative course assignments or research projects that examinethe complexity of intercultural technical and business communication in real-life-like intercultural communication contexts to enhance intercultural competence of the students.To test this assumption, with a case study that explores the effectiveness of usingan intercultural business memo research project to improve students'intercultural competence, the paper asks two research questions:

    1).Can we help raise students' cultural awareness and obtain intercultural communication knowledgeby providinga series of lectureson intercultural communication topics and by engaging students in doing critical readings and reflections on intercultural communication articles?

    2).Can we help promote students' intercultural competence or intercultural communication skill byengaging them in creating a practical real-life-like workplace document such as an intercultural research businessmemo?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. 1. *The definitionsof intercultural competence*

Deardorff (2006) broadly defines intercultural competence as three types of abilities: a). the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based onone's intercultural knowledge, silks, and attitudes; b).the ability to shift frame of reference appropriately and adapt behavior to cultural context; and c).theability to identify behaviors guided by culture and engage in new behaviors in other cultures even when behaviors are unfamiliar given a person's own socialization (as cited in Yu, pp. 169-70).

Chen andStarosta (2000), however, examine intercultural competence from the aspects of sensitivity, awareness, and skills. They suggest thatsensitivity reflects affective ability and refers to people's desire to understand, appreciate,and accept cultural differences; they refer to awareness as the cognitive ability concerned with the understanding of culturenormsthat can influence the ways we think and behave (Chen &Starosta, 2000, p. 4). As for the skills, Chen and Starosta (1998) describe it asbehavioral ability focusing on communication skills ''such as behavioralflexibility, interactional management, and verbal and nonverbal skills'' in interculturalinteractions (p. 49). According to Yu (2012),Chen's and Starosta'stheory makes it possible for us to understandintercultural competence from three domains ofaffective,cognitive, and behavioral capabilities, andit also provides us with a more complete clarification on some confusing conceptsabout intercultural competence (p.171).

This study uses a working definition of intercultural competence that draws insights from all the above scholarly definitions: the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in cross-cultural technical and business communication contexts based on one's awareness of, knowledge of, and skills of intercultural communication.

2.2. *The ways wecan help our students acquire intercultural competence*

Much research on the effective means of helping students acquire intercultural competence actually focuses on using classroom teaching and classroom assignments. Wang (2013) assessed students' level of intercultural competence to understand whether they may change in response to herteaching. She applied a two-part framework for teaching and learning intercultural business and technical communication: one part is the DMIS model- Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity; the other is related instrument to assess intercultural sensitivity- the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Wang (2013) concludes that, while the DMIS and IDI framework canhelpinstructors toassess the wholeteaching and learning process, it can alsopromote students to start to examine the complex issues of culture in depth (p.215). Her study certainly provides us a new pedagogical approach thatteachesintercultural communication based on initially assessing student needs in terms of their level of intercultural competence.

Yu (2012) proposes several methods to teach and assess students' intercultural competence. One method is to engage students in doing different writing tasks such as expressive and self-exploratory writing to help them "look inward and reflect on their intercultural sensitivity, how they develop it, or why they lack it" (Yu, 2012, p.172). Thus, Yu (2012) believes that writing practice can help students understand the very concept of intercultural sensitivity or can raise their intercultural awareness, and how they might develop it in class. Coincidently, Kratzke and Bertolo (2013) conducted a cross-cultural experiential learning study to explore undergraduate community health students' perceptions of their cultural competence (cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills).Their method was to ask students to do reflective writing "to elicit students' attitudes of the other culture and their coping skills" (Kratzke&Bertolo, 2013, p.107). They suggest that the results of their study highlightthat using cross-cultural teaching approaches to improve student cultural competence is crucialfor student academic preparation and success (P. 107).

Another method recommended by Yu (2012) is called "critical incident/case study assessment" (p. 173). Yu(2012) states thatthe criticalincidents portraying certain misunderstandings inintercultural communication are like what technicalcommunication teachers may regard as case studies based on scenarios, in which students will engage in situational cultural analysis (p.173). Yu (2012) further explains that instead of examining cultural issues broadly, students need to solve specific problems based on specific contexts in a case (p.173).
This method of using scenarios or cases for critically analyzing and discussing intercultural issues in specific contexts actually has been used in many technical and business writing classrooms to help improve students' intercultural competence. For example, Wang (2013) used one case study from research to challenge her students to learn how to solve cross-cultural issues arising from international business practice. This case required her students to deal with the conflicts between two cross-cultural project teams, one from the USA and the other from Japan, based on what they learned on how to provide cross-cultural consultation service to different cultural groups (Wang, 2013).

Finally, another useful method for teaching intercultural communication is through creating innovative course assignments or research projects. Planken and Hooft (2004)reported on how to use learning projects and tasks that were incorporated into their 1st-year intercultural business communication program to achieve "an awareness of cultural diverse and an understanding of different modes of living and behavior" (p. 308), in their tertiary foreign language (FL) courses at Nijmegen University in the Netherlands. They used two types of activities, awareness-raising task and production task. In the first task, students were required to observe and analyze some authentic instances of business communication conducted in the FL by native and nonnative speakers and to describe and interpret specific aspects of that communication (Planken&Hooft,2004, p.312). By contrast, their production task involved doing assignments in which students practiced FL and business pragmatic skillsby participating in business communication activities, including intercultural communication activities (p.313). They also described that the teacher, who worked as both an examiner and a guider and who provided necessary help to students during the performance of the tasks, played a crucial role inthis 'deep-end' approach (p.313). Some of Planken'sand Hooft's(2004) conclusions on their studyhighlightthat in addition to helping students develop their FL competence, these course projects enabled students to acquire some perspectives on intercultural business communication and competence.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants and settings

The present paper presents a case study that lasted for three weeks. Fifteen*Introduction to Technical Writing* (English 2333) students from the Spring 2015 semester and nine *Introduction to Technical Writing*(English 2333) students from the Fall 2014 semester at a small university in Oklahoma, USA, participated in the study. All weregiven three weeks' time to write an intercultural communication research business memo project. The class is offered every academic semester and is required for English creative writing major and multimedia major at the university and it is a general education elective for all other majors.The students in this sample represented English creative writing majors, multimedia majors, and others such as business, psychology, and science majors.

3.2. Thecourse research project/assignment

During March 2015 and October 2014, the InterculturalBusiness Research Memowas assigned to the student participants. The following is the assignment descriptions (created by the researcher /the instructor):

Instructions:*The scenario*: You are an assistant marketing director of a US company that sells (please choose one of the following):

- Dried spices to Saudi Arabia
- Pepsi to Mexico
- Dairy products to Japan
- Ford automobiles to South Korea

Now, your company plans to open a joint-venture company in that country to sell your product in 2015. Tim Barker, the Marketing Director, asks you to do some research on the country and to compose a memo that informs Mr. Barker of the following information about that country:

1) its economy (is it a developing or a developed country?)
2) its society and its major values
3) its preferred communication style or pattern (such as a high-context culture orientation or a low-context culture orientation?)

In your memo, Mr. Barkeralso requests that you

1) discuss the implications of what you have learned from your research,
2) discuss how the findings from you research may affect your company's plan of opening a joint-venture company in another country, and
3) make some recommendations on this joint-venture company plan.

Your task: Write a memo (about two pages single spaced) responding to the scenario and follow the required steps below:

The following is the Important STEPS for you to write the Intercultural Business Research Memo.The careful and critical reading here will help you understand your chosen country's value orientation and preferred communication style or pattern.

1).   You need to select one of the countries given above by visitinghttp://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles.html , and then, click on the selected country and read and make notes about its economy, society, values and so forth. 2). You also need to go to Course Documents section on our course Blackboard to read and reviewthe readingarticles on intercultural communication:

- "Dimensions of Culture" by Hofstede (2005)
- " Communication Styles" by Sangeeta Gupta (2010)
- "Key Concepts: Underlying structures of culture" by Hall and Hall (2001)
- " Chapter 2 Social Organization" from *Intercultural Communication for Managers"* by Goodman (2013)
- "Chapter 3 Contexting and Face-Saving" from *Intercultural Communication for Managers"* by Goodman (2013).

3.3. Procedures

To engage students in learning and practicing interculturalcommunication and help them acquire intercultural competence, "a three-step process: awareness, knowledge, and skills" **(**Goodman, 2013, p. 4) was applied in the study.

Stage 1: During the first week of the project assignment,the instructor provided the studentswith a series of lectures for class discussion. These lectures included the topicssuch as"What is culture?" "What is intercultural competence?" and "What isintercultural communication and its relationship with theintercultural workplace?"These lectures helped the students understandsome basic conceptsof culture and thesignificance of intercultural communication in their daily lives. Additionally, the students were requested to critically analyze their assigned readings through writing reading reflections and responding to each other's reflections on the course Blackboard. The readings focused on the following topics: Dimensions of Culture byHofstede (2005), "Key concepts: Underlying structures of culture" by Hall and Hall (2001),and chapterson "Social Organization" and "Contexting and Face- Saving" by Goodman (2013).

Stage 2: During the second week of the project assignment, students did the following activities:First, the students compared two business letters chosen from the course textbook (Markel, 2012), which were written by the same author for two different international audiences, one audience from the USA, the other from Japan. The students were asked to explain how the writer of the letters adapts the message to the cultural needs of a specific audience. To be able to answer the questions well, the students needed to use their understanding of the cultural variables "beneath the surface" learned from the class lectures and their intercultural readings.Those variables include whether the culture focuses on individuals or on groups, whether the culture emphasizes the distance between business life and private life and the social hierarchy, and whether the culture is a high-context or a low-context culture.

Then, the instructorconducteda workshopon the research intercultural business memo. The purpose here is to help students identify possible problem areas. The challenging part of the assignment was that students needed to read the researched country thoroughly and summarize the key information properly to include the required aspects of the assignment- the country's economy, society and values, and its preferred communication patterns. Meanwhile, the students also needed to interpret the summary and draw cultural implications from it for the company's joint-venture business. Usually, many students could write a good summary but would fail to synthesize what they readand, thus, had difficulty drawing related cultural implications for the company's business.The workshop directed students' attention to these problem areas.

*Stage 3:*At the end of the third week when the research memo project was due, to assess how students thought about their own improvement on their intercultural knowledge and competence, the instructor requested students to write an overallresearch memo assignment reflections. The instructor also used students' final grades on the research memo assignment to evaluate as a whole how well the students had improved their intercultural competence based on the grading criteria (see TABLE 1).

3.4. Data collection and instruments

Three types of research data were collected and analyzed by the researcher.

The first type was from 24 student reading reflections on the assigned intercultural communication reading articles. The writing prompt (the instrument) for their reading reflection goes as:

> "Write a reflection of 350-400 words on the readings about the intercultural communication concepts. You need to cover at least three aspects of your reading: a). Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture and the implications,b).similarities and differences of the communication styles between the low-context culture and high-context culture and the implications, and c). the things you learned that will help you write your intercultural research business memo. (created by the research/the instructor)

The second type was from 24 students'overall researchbusiness memo assignment reflections. Here is the writing prompt (the instrument) for the assignment reflection:

> Write a 300-350 word reflection on this research business memo. Your reflection should include: a).describe how you chose to approach the scenario; provide specific examples of how you altered your tone to better appeal to the communication and rhetorical situation, and b). reflect briefly on how you think about your intercultural communication skills now through doing this assignment. (created by the research/the instructor)

The third type of datawas from the final grades of 24 students' "Intercultural Communication Research Business Memo." The TABLE 1 shows the grading criteria used by the instructor for this memo assignment:

TABLE 1:The Evaluation of the Students' Performance on the Intercultural Business Research Memo

Grades	Criteria for GradingStudents' Intercultural Communication Business Memos
A	Students do an excellent job in both accurately synthesize the required research information and critically analyze and interpreting the information so that it can lead to some specific effective and practical recommendations for the company's joint venture in another country.
B	Students do a good job in both synthesize the required research information and analyze and interpreting the information so that it can lead to one specific usable recommendation for the company's joint venture in another country.
C	Students do acceptable job in both synthesize the required research information and analyze and interpreting the information so that it can lead to a somewhat usable recommendation for the company's joint venture in another country.
D	Students do very little research on the required information and demonstrate a very limited understanding on the chosen country in its economy, society, values and communication style to such an extent that they cannot draw any useful implications for the company's joint venture in another country.
F	Students didn't do research on the required information and demonstrate very little understanding on the chosen country in its economy, society, values and communication style, and they could not draw any implications for the company's joint venture in another country.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will present the results and discussion on the study in the form of respondingto the two research questions presented in the beginning.

4.1. Findings for and discussion on the first research question

1). Can we help raise students' cultural awareness and obtain intercultural communication knowledgeby providinga series of lectures on intercultural communication topics and by engaging students in doing critical readings and reflections on intercultural communication articles?

The findings from students' reading reflections provide a positive answer-"Yes" to the first research question because they demonstrate that both the lectures and the assigned reading articleson the concepts and theories ofintercultural communication helped improve the students' intercultural cultural awareness and intercultural communication knowledge. Through analyzing the data, the researcher summarized the themes arising from students' reading reflections that answeredthe first research question positively (see TABLE 2):

TABLE 2: The Emerging Themes from the Student Reading Reflections

The Emerging Themes	Selected Student Reading Reflections (N=24) Supporting the Emerging Themes
Theme 1 Many students learned the specific cultural differences through comparing their own native culturewith those of other countries and reflected on what these differences mean to them.	"All five of the readings contained information about how culture differs in the workplace and how it affects the very voices of workers and their conversations. Every country has its own unique system to get work done and its own special form of communication in day to day life, and even though these methods are different to some, they should be respected just the same, especially in the work place. People all around the world are going to be different and they are going to have different ways to do things, but no one way is wrong and no other way is right. A respect for other cultures and people is just one of the many ways that people can connect, and not just in conversation, but as a part of ethical acceptance for one another as well." (Student 6) "The intercultural documents we read in class, along with my own research on my country of choice, have opened my eyes to the extreme importance of being culturally aware. In the global business world that we live in today, it is essential that people are aware of how their communication is being interpreted by those around them. Simply knowing the difference between a high-context and low-context culture or not knowing them can cause you to win or lose an important business relationship. I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to be made aware of these communication differences, and I look forward to getting a chance to apply what I have learned." (Student 12) "I think it was very helpful how chapter 2 gave categories based on the differences in global cultures and how they tie into business dealings with other countries. It was interesting how they stated that the self-made man in America is revered and something to aspire to since we happen to be a socially mobile culture with less emphasis on family ties in business, yet other countries may see that same person as a social climber who is trying to become more than he can through making more money and being more successful in business" (Student 3) "I really enjoyed the assignment we did comparing and contrasting the two letters sent, one to a Japanese company and one to an American one. It was fascinating how there were very different expectations. 'The code of diversity in literary texts' we touched upon, and it's easier to pick out nuances from other cultures and determine how to alter our tone." (Student 16)
Theme 2 Many students started to understand high-context culture and low-context culture and how these different cultural contexts influence the ways people communicate.They also learned to appreciate different cultural values and respect others' communication styles.	"Chapter Three goes into more detail about how to interact with others in business environments. The US is a low-context culture. We are very abrupt and to-the-point. We do not put time into personal relationships when doing business with others. Our relationships are focused on the business itself. High-context countries, like Japan, put importance on building a relationship with a business partner beforehand. This includes playing golf or getting lunch. Communication isn't as direct; Silence means they are focusing and listening to what you say, and "yes" may just mean they hear you, rather than actually meaning they agree. High-context culture countries see low-context culture countries as brash, rude, impersonal and aggressive, while low-context culture countries see high-context countries as vague, slow, confusing, and inconsiderate. You have to take this into account when interacting with someone, so you do not offend them and ruin your chance at business with them. Overall, this is very informative and important information I am glad I read. I will certainly take this into account when interacting with someone from a different culture." (Student 4) "I learned a great deal about working and communicating with other countries during this exercise. I had never considered working internationally; my career goals have thus far been on a smaller scale. However, should I ever be asked to do this in the future, I feel that this practice would greatly benefit me both on the experience end of it as well as having the confidence to tackle it in the first place." (Student 1)

The findings for answering the first research question apparently show that one aspect of intercultural competence of the student participants, namely"sensitivity" (affective ability)defined by Chen and Starosta (2000),seems to have improved because the studentswerewilling toaccept and appreciate cultural differences.As one student stated, "[a] respect for other cultures and people is just one of the many ways that people can connect, and not just in conversation, but as a part of ethical acceptance for one another as well" (Student 6, 2014, "Reading Reflection"). Other traits of intercultural competence of the student participants, such as "awareness" (Chen &Starosta, 1997) and intercultural knowledge (Goodman,2013), also were developed. As a result, the students became more confident in their future intercultural interactions in workplaces. Here, a student wrote, "[s]imply knowing the differences between a high-context and low-context culture or not knowing them can cause you to win or lose an important business relationship. I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to be made aware of these communication differences, and I look forward to getting a chance to apply what I have learned" (Student 12, 2015, "Reading Reflection"). Finally, the findings here also supportPlanken'sand Hooft's (2004) study that shows that the interculturalcommunication course projects enable their students to acquire some perspectives on intercultural business communication and competence (p.314).

4.2. Findings for and discussion on the second research question

2). Can we help promote students' intercultural competence or intercultural communication skill byengaging them in creating a practical real-life-like workplace document such as an intercultural research businessmemo?

The findings for answering the secondresearch question from students' assignment reflectionsare also affirmative- "Yes" since they demonstrate that the intercultural communication research memo assignment has helped improve the students' intercultural communication skills and has enhanced their intercultural competence. Having analyzed the data, the researcher summarizes the themes emerging from students' research memo assignment reflections thatprovided positive answers to the research question two (see TABLE 3).

TABLE 3:The Emerging Themes from the Student Participants' Memo Assignment Reflections

The Emerging Themes	Selected Student Assignment Reflections (N=24) Supporting the Emerging Themes
Theme 1 Students learned to apply their intercultural understanding and knowledgeto guide the memo writing such as giving appropriate recommendations for the American business to avoid offendingthe business partner in theother culture and respect the partner's cultural values and customs.	"The intercultural business memo was a challenge. The communication style was the difficult part. The two readings posted on Blackboard helped me understand the differences between high and low context cultures. South Korea is a high-context culture, so direct communication is frowned upon. I had to keep this information in mind when I made my recommendations." (Student 19) "The business memo about the intercultural situation was tough. Finding the right information that I need was difficult, but most I was able to find on the site provided. The information regarding Mexico's economy, society, and values was pretty straight forward. The most difficult part was pinning down how Mexico's economy and where and how people work would benefit our Pepsi Cola. In moving into this country, Mexico's economy is always in flux. And while they are a highly industrialized nation, much of the population still lived in rural areas. I had to keep all this in mind when I made my recommendations." (Student 11) "Additionally, learning about another culture made me think more closely about how we communicate here in the United States. I was able to analyze the differences between behaviors that are acceptable and expected here, and what behaviors one should learn to portray before engaging in business communications with partners in Mexico." (Student 23)

Theme 2 The students critiquedtheir own cultural business practice and began to appreciate other cultures' different business practices.	"For this assignment, the concept of high versus low context culture in intercultural communication was new to me. I chose Korea because I have been there, and I know some Korean people. I did not limit my research to the links provided on Blackboard. I also did some internet searches to get more information from reliable sources. I also learned about the concept of face-saving which is almost totally missing from American culture, especially in the military. In an organization that has "never leave a fallen comrade" as part of its ethos, apparently this only applies to the battlefield. Obviously the military benefits from having the most direct communication, but it could use some face-saving as well." (Student 7)
	Through this assignment I learned that I was obviously born into 'the wrong culture,' but also that it is imperative that we take the time to research whatever culture it is that we will be communicating with as to ensure that we do not offend someone by accident and to also show them we are someone they could do business with as we care enough about them to conduct our own research about their culture and their business. (Student 15)
	"I learned a lot about intercultural communication in this assignment. Prior to this, I did not realize how different communication styles in each country really were and how much that can affect relations with people of different cultures. It also helped me realize that when people from different cultures are being "rude" they may just be reflecting their different cultural preferences. For example, South Koreans can seem very short, rude, and emotionless but that is because they have very high uncertainty avoidance and they are embarrassed by showing too many emotions. They aren't really being rude at all; they are just different. This new knowledge will help me in my future career because I want to be a teacher and this will help me communicate more effectively with international students" (Student 10)
	"For the Intercultural research, I learned a lot about South Korean culture, and find it fascinating to discover new ways to communicate with people from other countries. Foreign affairs have always been a slight interest of mine, so learning about another culture is always fun to do" (student 9)

The findings here are very encouraging. They reveal that the students' intercultural communication skills have increased. For instance, when the students encountered different cultural behaviors during their research project, theydid not just look at them on the surface level, but they instead sought a deeper meaning. In other words, they avoidedmaking judgments about the people from other cultures. Instead, they tried to apply what they learned from the intercultural communication theories to interpret and analyze those different cultural behaviors through the lens of diverse cultural values and communication styles.Particularly, one student made a very good point when she wrote that "South Koreans can seem very short, rude, and emotionless, but that is because they have very high uncertainty avoidance and they are embarrassed by showing too many emotions. They aren't really being rude at all; they are just different" (Student 10, 2015, "Assignment Reflection").

Thus, based on findings in this part, we can say that certain features of intercultural competence from Deardorff's perspective (2006), which includes the ability to shift frame of reference appropriately and adapt behavior to cultural context and the ability to identify behaviors guided by culture and engage in new behaviors in other cultures … (p. 249), have improved.

4.3. Discussion of the students' final grades of the assignment

Finally, thestudents' final gradeson the "Intercultural Communication Business Research Memo"assignmentalso provide affirmative ananswer for both of the research questions(see TABLE4):

TABLE 4:TheStudents'Final Grades on the Intercultural Communication Business Research Memo

Grades	The Number of Students Attaining Each Grade(N= 24 students)
A	5 (20.8%)
B	13 (54.1%)
C	4 (16.6%)
D	2 (8.3%)
F	0 (0%)

TABLE 4shows that majority of participants did well in this assignment.First, among the 24 students, 5 of them(20.8% of 24) earned"As." The grades meant that they did an excellent job in both accurately synthesizingthe required research information and critically analyzing the information so that it led to some specific effective and practical recommendations for the company's joint -venture in another country. Second, 13 students (54.1% of 24) received "Bs." Those grades represented that the students did a good job to synthesize the required research information and analyze and interpret the information so that it could lead to one specific usable recommendation for the company's joint -venture in another country. Then, 4 students (16.6% of 24) got "Cs," which meant that they did an acceptable job in both synthesizing the required research information and analyzing and interpreting the information for somewhat usable recommendations for the company's joint- venture in another country. Finally, 2 students (8.3% of 24) received "Ds."These students seemed to do no research on the required information and demonstrated very little understanding on the chosen country in its economy, society, values and communication style, and they could not draw any implications for the company's joint -venture in another country. But no students failed in the assignment.

The final gradesdemonstrate that the students had to work hard and use their own initiatives and their learned knowledge of intercultural communication to produce the effective and appropriate intercultural communication memos. This is due to the fact that for many students "[t]he intercultural business memo was a challenge" (Student 19, 2014, "Assignment Reflection"). Thus, students needed to have proper critical, analytical, and writing ability to not only summarize but also synthesize their research information and intercultural communication situations. Then, they needed to put them in a well-organized memo which offered solutions to resolve an intercultural real-life-like workplace problem. Supporting Kratzke's and Bertolo's(2013) study,the present study alsoshows that using cross-cultural teaching approaches to promotestudents'intercultural competence is important and necessary(Kratzke&Bertolo, 2013, P.107). The shared understanding on both of our studies seems to bethat weall advocate that there is an important connection between students' general academic ability and their intercultural competence.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We can concludethat it is effective and helpful for us to use a technical writing course research project to help teach intercultural communication in workplace so as to promote students' intercultural competence.The study also indicates that we need to find more effective means to motivate all students fully engaging in this learning process. For example, several factors resulted in students' receiving "Cs" and "Ds" in their memos. These factors included a) lack of analytical ability to interpret what they found from their research, b) lack of motivation to study intercultural communication readings, andc) lack of good writing ability to help express themselves clearly in a correct memo format.These findings seem to supportwhat Byram and Morgan (1994) have concluded. They point out that students need more than intercultural competence in successfully completing the course project or assignment, butthey also need the ability to understand assignment requirements and to organize information and the analytical skills to represent ideas (Byram and Morgan, 1994).The students' final grades of the Intercultural Business Research Memo also indicate that technical and business writing educatorsshould try to provide American college students moreopportunitiesto learn and understand the values ofother cultures and some basic intercultural communication concepts and theories. We should also create more specific authentic learning contexts in which to practice them.As Freedman, Adam, and Smart (1994) suggest,case studies are ultimately a classroom genre and do not reflect the contingency and complexity of real-world communication contexts. Additionally, Corbett (1996) also points out that the intercultural case studies might not move students from case discussions to real-life performance becausethe cases may not connect directly with real-life successalthough the case discussions did help students improve their intercultural competence (Yu, 2012, p.174).

Thus, the researcher recommends that future study on using technical and business classroom assignments or research projects should make endeavor to create real-life tasks in some intercultural communication working place settings such as internship opportunities or service learning projects.As Deardorff(2009) argues, "[i]n the end, intercultural competence is aboutour relationships with each other and, ultimately, our very survival as thehuman race, as we work together to address the global challenges that confrontus" (p. 269). In short, the significance of intercultural communication requeststhat our business and technical writing classrooms provide moreopportunitiesfor our students to engage each other and engage in this diverse world, even when it is challenging to do so.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

7. REFFERENCES

[1] Byram, M., & Morgan, C. (1994). Teaching-and-learning language-and-culture. Bristol, PA: Multilingual Matters.

[2] Chen, G. M. &Starosta, W. J. (1997). A review of the concept of intercultural sensitivity. *Human Communication,1*(1),1-16.

[3] Chen, G. M., &Starosta, W. J. (1998). A review of the concept of intercultural awareness. *Human Communication, 2(1),*27–54.

[4] Chen, G. M., &Starosta, W. J. (2000). The development and validation of the intercultural sensitivity scale. Paper presented at *the Annual Meeting of National Communication Association,* Seattle, WA. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED447525

[5] Corbett, J. (1996). From dialog to praxis: Crossing cultural borders in the business and technical communication classroom. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 5,* 411–424. doi: 10.1207/s15427625tcq0504 3

[6] Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*(3), 241–266. doi: 10.1177/1028315306287002

[7] Deardorff, D. K. (2009). Synthesize conceptualizations of intercultural competence: A summery and emerging themes.In D. K. Deaedorff (Ed), *The SAGEhandbook of intercultural competence* (pp.264-270). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

[8] DeVoss, D., Jasken, J.,& Hayden, D. (2002). Teaching intracultural and intercultural Communication: A critique and suggested method. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *16*(1), 69-94.

[9] Freedman, A., Adam, C., & Smart, G. (1994). Wearing suits to class: Simulating genres andsimulations as genre. *Written Communication*, 11, 193–226.doi: 0.1177/0741088394011002002

[10] Goodman, M. B. (2013). *Intercultural communication for managers.*New York, NY: Business Expert Press.

[11] Gupta, S. (2010). A quick guide to cultural competency: Communication style.Retrieved fromhttp://hawaiidistrictumc.org/clientimages/53021/high%20context%20low%20context.pdf

[12] Hall, E. T., & Hall, M. R. (2001). Key concepts:Underlying structures of culture. *International HRM: Managing Diversity in the Workplace*, 24-40.

[13] Hofstede, G., &Hofstede, G.J. (2005). *Culture and organizations: Software of the mind,* 2nded. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

[14] Kratzke, C., &Bertolo, M. (2013). Enhancing students' cultural competence using cross-cultural experiential learning. *Journal of Cultural Diversity,20*(3), 107-111.

[15] Markel, Mike. (2012).*Technical communication*. 10th ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's. Pfeiffer, W. S. (1994). Technical writing: A practical approach. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

[16] Planken, B., Van Hooft, A., &Korzilius, H. (2004). Promoting intercultural communicative competence through foreign language courses. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *67*(3), 308-315.

[17] Wang, J. (2013). Moving towards ethnorelativism: A framework for measuring and meeting students' needs in cross-cultural business and technical communication. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *43*(2), 201-218.

[18] Yu, H. (2012). Intercultural competence in technical communication: A working definition and review of assessment methods. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *21*(2), 168-186.