

***Teaching “Cross-Cultural Communication” through Content Based Instruction:  
Curriculum Design and Learner Perspectives in an EFL Context***

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**Abstract**

This study intends to introduce a content based curriculum design for the course “Cross cultural communication” in an EFL context. It also explores on student perspectives regarding their perceived learning outcome with both content knowledge and language skills. Sixty non-English major EFL students from a university in Northern Taiwan participated in this study. A variety of tasks such as readings of a variety of authentic texts, viewing movie and video clips, discussing in groups, and accomplishing a group project were employed to have students actively explore the subject content and concurrently work on their language skills. Students were also required to evaluate their peers’ final group project with provided evaluation criteria. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore what students were able to learn from this course and the challenges they’ve encountered. The results from students’ feedback revealed their positive gains in the areas of content knowledge as well as the enhanced language skills. Some perceived difficulties among students such as inability to fully comprehend the input or to produce effective output were reported and the pedagogical solutions were suggested. Other benefits such as constructive cooperative learning, enhanced critical thinking, and boosted confidence in the target language use were also reported by the learners.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Communication, Content Based Instruction, Curriculum Design, Learner Perspectives, Cooperative Learning, Critical Thinking

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## **Introduction**

Content Based Instruction (CBI) is a curricular approach which focuses on the “concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 2003, p.2). It is claimed that with CBI, the content knowledge is constructed through the meaningful and purposeful use of language. In CBI, language is not only the object of learning but the means for negotiating meaning, organizing information and acquiring content knowledge (Butler, 2005).

In Taiwan, the adoption of CBI programs takes place mainly within the framework of EFL classes where some authentic materials with selected topics of student interest are chosen for the main topics for exploration. The main goals of these courses are targeting at the development of language skills with less focus on the content knowledge development. The other extreme of the spectrum which is increasingly adopted in Taiwanese tertiary level is the English Medium Instruction (EMI). For these EMI courses, the learning of content is the focus of the curricular with little attention paid to the specific development of language skills. As for university students’ perspectives with CBI instruction in Taiwan , some studies reported positively in terms of enhancing students’ reading skills and some area of content knowledge (e.g., Lo & Sheu, 2008; Tsai & Shang, 2010); while other studies received some negative feedback from students, such as inability of comprehending well in class (e.g., Lee, 2007; Cheng, Chang, Chen, & Liao, 2010).With the limited curriculum which place equal attention on the development of both content and language, and with the mixed results of student perspectives with the existed CBI curriculum, this study thus aims to add to the existing knowledge by reporting on the design and implementation of a CBI based subject course “Cross-Cultural Communication”, with dual focus on content and linguistic development. It also aims to explore student perspectives on their perceived effectiveness of content and language learning, their perceived difficulties and coping strategies while taking this course.

“Cross-Cultural Communication” course has been promoted as a compulsory course in the tertiary level curriculum in many universities in Taiwan. To meet the demand of rapid globalization, many Taiwanese universities are promoting cultural exchange programs in various forms, such as senior year abroad or other short-term exchange student programs with their partner institutions abroad. In addition, many universities are also recruiting students overseas, and consequently cross cultural communication is taking place on campus and in the classrooms. Cultural and language exchanges are inevitable and the ability to communicate effectively in different cross cultural context is becoming more and more important Taiwanese students. Thus, this subject course “Cross-Cultural Communication” with CBI framework aims to help students not only learn distinctive culture(s) and different cross-cultural communicative patterns and skills, but use the target language meaningfully, and thus accelerate acquisition.

Specifically, this study will:

- 1) outline the design and implementation of this CBI based “Cross Cultural Communication” course,
- 2) explore how students perceive the effectiveness of their learning outcome in terms of the content knowledge and language learning,
- 3) and investigate students’ perceived difficulties and coping strategies in taking this CBI course.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Content Based Instruction (CBI)**

Briton, Snow, & Wesche (2003, p.2) defined CBI as “the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills”. The goal of CBI is to develop students’ content knowledge and language skills through providing authentic and meaningful academic text. The integrated nature of content and language in CBI views “language as a medium for learning content and content as a resource for learning and improving language” (Stoller, 2002, p.109). As for what the “content” should be in CBI approach, Met (1999) introduced that content should be materials which are cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, that extend beyond the target culture. Stoller (2008, p.59) regards CBI as an ‘umbrella term’ for approaches that combine language and content learning, although different degree of emphases may be placed on the two areas.

Second language acquisition theories support CBI. For example, CBI aims to provide students with meaningful and comprehensible input in context, which, according to Krashen (1985), is the essential condition for language acquisition to take place. In the similar vein, Met (1998) pointed out that natural language acquisition occurs in context, and CBI provides a meaningful context for natural communication to take place. Since students are provided with opportunities to negotiate meaning and exercise productive skills in natural communication, they work out to produce “comprehensible output” which can facilitate their target language learning (Swain, 1985, 1993). CBI also allows students to engage in cognitively challenging content materials and tasks which would promote their higher-order thinking skills and develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1992). Since the input in CBI is mostly authentic and meaningful, it enhances motivation (Butler, 2005). In a nutshell, CBI which has its dual focus on both content and language learning receives support from different SLA theories.

### **Models of CBI: Adjunct Model**

Met (1998) proposed a continuum of content and language integration that ranges from the most content-driven end, with more emphasis on the mastering of content over language, to the most language-driven end, with more importance placed on the mastery of language skills. Briton, Snow and Wesche (1989) proposed three models of CBI program, theme-based model, sheltered model, and adjunct model, which can be applied in second/foreign language classes. Theme-based model falls on the continuum of the more language-driven position, sheltered model falls in the continuum of the content-driven end, and the adjunct model serves both content and

language goals and lies in the middle of the continuum. Adjunct model can be adopted in EFL context where EFL teachers are knowledgeable with the subject content and are capable of designing various teaching activities to foster students' language skills. This type of program is relatively less researched in the EFL context, thus this paper will adopt this CBI model and illustrate the design and tasks implemented for this course.

### **Empirical Studies on CBI at the Tertiary Level in Taiwan**

Among the studies which adopted CBI at tertiary level in Taiwan, different focus in terms of content and language has been reported. In addition, students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of CBI also yielded differences from study to study. With more emphasis on the side of language development, Tsai and Shang (2010) examined the impact of content based literature curriculum on EFL students' reading performance. 101 English major sophomores participated in this study and the result indicated that students' reading comprehension and critical thinking ability were improved. Emphasizing on both content and language development, Lo and Sheu (2008) reported on the development and evaluation of an ESP project. 16 English major EFL learners participated in this project. Both content knowledge such as urban culture and scenic spots, and hospitality language training were introduced throughout the project. The result of the study indicated positive gains among participants both on the content knowledge and hospitality language skills.

In the content driven end of the CBI subject courses in Taiwanese tertiary level, Lee (2007) reported on the result of a CBI program in the course "Molecular Biology" for junior students in a medical school in Taiwan. From the questionnaire, 37 students who enrolled in the course reported that the CBI instruction affected their learning of content knowledge in a negative way. Enrolled students reported that their English skills were not particularly improved, and their learning of content knowledge suffered because all English medium instruction procrastinated the progress of the course.

With the mixed results in the existed CBI programs, which placed unequal emphasis on content and language development, students in general expressed their needs for language development alongside the content learning. Thus a more balanced working CBI model should be established for subject courses in tertiary level which allows students to develop their content knowledge and at the same time to help enhance students' linguistic ability.

### **Teaching "Cross-Cultural Communication" with CBI**

The course "Cross-Cultural Communication" is offered as a compulsory course in many Taiwan university curriculums. As the title of the course suggested, it aims to develop students' ability to communicate effectively in cross cultural context when they encounter interlocutors whose languages, beliefs, backgrounds, and communication styles may vastly differ from their own. "Culture", according to Kramash (1996, p2) is defined as "the attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of that community." This concept is also differed in two types (Moran, 2001). Bic "C" refers to the surface structure of culture, and the focus if which is on the visible forms of culture, such as food, art,

clothing, gesture, architecture, etc.,. Small “c” studies the deep structure of culture, and it targets at the invisible forms of culture associated with perceptions, beliefs, communication styles, cultural norms, kinship system, and social organizations. To enhance successful cross-cultural communication, this course intends to familiarize students with not only Big “C” but taps into small “c” within distinctive cultures in the world. With different linguistic tasks designed, it intends to have students explore the differences and similarities between these cultures and the culture of their own. Students will also be acquainted with effective linguistic skills in making successful cross-cultural communication at work and in interpersonal exchanges.

### **Curriculum Design**

The design of the curriculum will be specified as follows: subjects, course objectives, content knowledge objectives, language learning objectives, syllabus design, course implementation, evaluation and assessment.

### **Subjects:**

Totally, sixty students (15 male, and 45 female students) enrolled in this class. These are non-English major sophomores from a university in Northern Taiwan. The class meets two hours a week for 18 weeks. The subjects have been studying English for more than 10 years. As for their English proficiency levels, most students fall in the range of intermediate level as students’ TOEIC scores (or other equivalent measures) indicate they varied from 480 to 780, with the average of 575.

### **Course Objectives:**

This course aims to develop students’ content knowledge of cross cultural communication both in theory and in actual practice. It also intends to enhance students’ linguistic abilities through different tasks designed. Thus the course objectives fall in two aspects.

### **Content Knowledge Objectives:**

- a) To understand the basic cross-cultural terms, principles, and theories
- b) To explore the fundamental types of cultures and corresponding behavior types, and to raise awareness of the possible cultural diversity within these cultures
- c) To increase students’ knowledge of cultural conflict and adjustment
- d) To explain different patterns of communication that can lead to misunderstandings
- e) To describe and explore different beliefs, attitudes, values and perceptions regarding relationships, family, work, education, gender roles within some distinctive cultures, and to contrast those with students’ own culture
- f) To gain cross-cultural competence through interpersonal experiences and simulated exercises

### **Language Learning Objectives:**

In terms of language learning objectives, students are expected to enhance their four skills through a variety of activities such as watching video clips then engaging in group discussion, reading authentic material of different genre (i.e., newspaper article,

short story, textbook, journal article, etc.), and then complete tasks such as answering specific questions, writing a summary and/or orally report in class. Specifically, this course aims to:

- a) Enhance students' reading ability (via text reading, journal reading, authentic reading material from internet, posters, newspapers, etc.,)
- b) Improve students' writing ability (via written report, summary writing)
- c) Develop students' aural/ oral fluency, and presentation skills (via watching video clips, movies, role-plays, oral report, and oral presentations)
- d) Provide students with opportunities for cooperative learning (via group work tasks and a final group project)
- e) Develop students' critical thinking skills (through evaluating their peers' and their own group project and through sharing different views of cultural phenomenon)

### **Course Implementation**

The reading text used for this course combined both textbook "Beyond Language Cross-cultural Communication" (Levine & Adelman, 1993), "Fifty ways to improve your intercultural skills" (Dignen & Chamberlain, 2009), selected supplemental on-line journal articles, and other authentic reading materials such as posters, magazine, and newspaper articles. The class usually proceeded with pre-reading discussion questions, followed by pre-reading vocabularies. Students would then be instructed to scan for specific information for the completion of reading tasks. After instructor's lecture with power point presentation (PPT) on the topic, students would be presented with comprehension and discussion question tasks. In groups, students should discuss for the answers, and had representative member(s) to lead discussion and orally report on their responsible questions.

In addition to visual input, audio input such as movies, movie-clips, video-clips were also regularly incorporated in class. For instance, the topic such as interracial marriage, "My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding" was used for students to watch, to reflect upon issues such as diversity within a society, high and low context culture, different communication styles across culture, and etc.,. In groups, students were supposed to complete tasks such as to discuss and come up with well-elaborated answers to questions raised on the task sheet, to summarize and provide their reflection and feedback for the film. The video-clips such as "Ted talk" and "Voice Tubes" were used in class to discuss issues such as marriage, stereotypes, cultural differences in doing business, communication styles, and etc.,. Students were instructed to take notes while watching the video, and in groups, discuss and verbally report on the key points covered and provide their reflective feedback. The effort in combing different types of input in class aims to provide students with different means for comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), encourages students to actively interact with the lecture, and to engage in meaningful communication with other peers (Met, 1991).

To integrate all learning skills into a meaningful output, students in groups would also have to do research for selected countries regarding their respective Big "C", the visible part of culture and small "c" elements, the invisible type of culture (Moran, 2001). Students had to provide their feedback and reflection regarding how the respective culture they've researched was similar to or different from their own culture. In order to have language and cultural exchanges take place meaningfully for

students, they had to interview the international student(s) from the culture they currently researched on. Finally, an oral presentation was performed for teacher and peer evaluation. This task aimed to provide students with opportunity to integrate content knowledge learned via different channels (i.e., lecture, video, research, etc.) and to make best use of their linguistic abilities for comprehensible output (Swain, 1993). Figure 1 shows how different language tasks are integrated for students to acquire the content knowledge and at the same time to enhance their linguistic abilities.

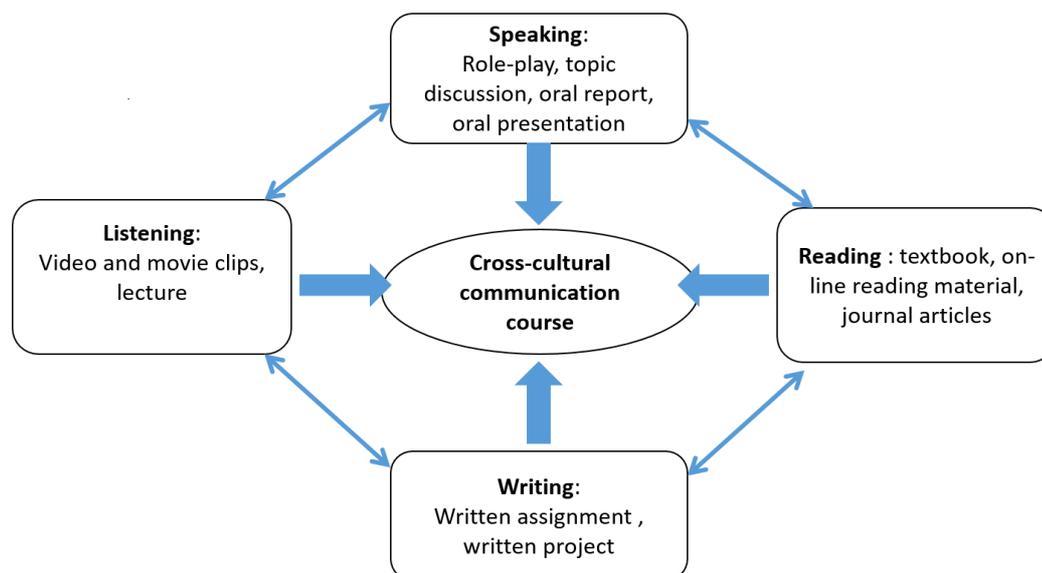


Figure 1. Integration of task implementation in CBI course “Cross-cultural communication” course

### Evaluation and Assessment

For this course, students were evaluated by means of their in-class group participation (20%), completion of group assignments (20%), midterm written exam (30%) and final research project (30%). The rationale behind the extensive group work derives from Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory (1978). According to Vygotsky, through interaction with a teacher or more experienced peers, learners are provided with “scaffolding” which would support them in understanding the knowledge and also in development of complex skills (1978). Thus, by employing various opportunities for group work, collaborative learning was taking place where less linguistically proficient learners would get help from the more proficient counterparts. Also, since attention is not fixated on individual but on a whole group, learners’ anxiety is reduced via group work (Crandall, 1999) and thus enhances the learners’ development in content and language.

Along with the above mentioned methods for assessing students’ learning outcome, evaluation sheets which specified different criterion in both content and language were provided for each group to evaluate their peer groups’ final oral presentations. Lastly, questionnaires and open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how students have perceived the effectiveness of this CBI course and the difficulties they’ve encountered while taking the course.

## Results of Student Evaluation

In terms of students' perceived effectiveness for this CBI adjunct course, the results of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were revealed as follows: 1) learner perspectives regarding content learning; 2) learner perspectives regarding linguistic enhancement; 3) learners' perceived difficulties and coping strategies, and 4) learners' gains in critical thinking and from cooperative learning.

### Learner Perspectives regarding Content Learning

For student perspectives on the effectiveness of content learning, the results of a five point Likert-style questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were revealed. The frequency statistics on mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire were illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Distribution on Students' Perspectives regarding the effectiveness of Content Learning

Item	Mean	S.D.
1. I have learned what big "C" and small "c" represent in description of culture.	4.37	.610
2. I have learned the basic elements and differences between high-context culture and low-context culture and can give examples of each.	4.35	.577
3. I have learned Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and are aware of the six dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity and long term vs short term orientation.	4.30	.671
4. I have learned Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and understand that language we speak can affect or even shape our world view.	4.23	.621
5. I have learned that ethnocentrism is the belief that one's race nation, group, etc., are better and superior than others.	4.32	.676
6. I have learned different stages of cross-cultural conflict and adjustment. The adjustment process in a new culture is like a W-shape diagram: ranging from honeymoon period to finally acceptance and integration.	4.35	.633
7. I have learned the differences regarding "high involvement" VS. "high considerateness" conversation patterns.	4.30	.671
8. I have learned the possible different communication styles existed between high context culture and low context culture.	4.38	.715
9. I have learned different types of nonverbal communications, such as posture & gestures, face and eyes, voices, touch, clothing, distance and etc.,.	4.38	.613
10. I have learned the same nonverbal communication may have different indications across cultures.	4.20	.632
11. I have learned there can be different expectations across cultures for a variety of types of personal relationships, such as marriage and friendship.	4.38	.715
12. I am aware of different expectations can exist on teacher-student relationships, class participations, diversity in higher education across cultures.	4.35	.633

13. I am aware of the different expectations which might exist in work ethics, employer-employee relationship, on-the-job communication skills across cultures.	4.21	.635
14. I have learned the basics in communication for international business, such as international emailing, international telephoning, international negotiating.	4.36	.615
15. I think learning about culture is enriching. The more I learn about others, the more I see my own culture more clearly.	4.23	.621

As displayed on Table 1, positive responses can be found on nearly all items. The high mean score can even be found on the introduction of some theoretical context, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, etc., (M=4.30, M=4.23), reflecting that students were not overwhelmed by the relatively more difficult conceptual framework. From the semi-structured interviews, students pointed out that they learned different beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and communication styles associated with different cultures introduced in class via lectures, their own research projects, and their peer report. Students also revealed that through the video-clips, movies, and group work, the abstract concept of the text became vivid examples, and thus helped them comprehend different theories associated with the subject.

From the semi-structured interviews, most students pointed out they gained knowledge in big "C" and small "c" of various cultures introduced in class. Other gains regarding content knowledge development were their enhanced ability in cross-cultural communication, academic topic research, and cooperative and interactive skills.

### **Learner Perspectives regarding Linguistic Enhancement**

For student perspectives on the effectiveness of language learning, the results of a five-point Likert-style questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were revealed. The frequency statistics on mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire were illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Distribution on Students' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of language learning

Item	Mean	S.D.
16. I think my English reading ability has improved with the reading of textbooks and the related research material.	4.37	.637
17. I think my English writing ability has improved because of what is required in the course, such as writing assignment and writing up materials for midterm and final report.	4.13	.791
18. I think my English listening ability has improved because I have to understand the teacher's lecture in class.	4.22	.600
19. I think my English speaking ability has improved because of the in-class role-play exercises, preparing for oral presentations.	4.35	.709
20. I think I have more acquired more vocabularies and phrases and learn how to use them in the proper context.	4.20	.684
21. Overall I think all my English skills have improved because of this course.	4.28	.555

As revealed from Table 2, most students perceived that they improved different aspects of their language skills (M=4.28). Particularly, students believed their reading and speaking abilities have improved greatly (M=4.37, M=4.35). Students pointed out that reading from a variety of sources such as textbook, on-line reading, journal articles, and magazines, etc., have helped greatly with their reading. Students indicated that reading skills learned in class such as reading for the gist and for specific information helped them comprehend better and faster with the different reading resources needed for their final project. In addition, when encountered unknown vocabularies or phrases, they've learned to comprehend the meanings in context which help enhance their vocabulary acquisition and overall comprehension. With the difficult journal articles, students would also seek help in their group from more capable peer(s) and also verified their understanding with their instructor.

In addition, for majority of the enrolled students, all English medium instruction was reported as being very helpful in improving their listening ability. Some less proficient students did encounter difficulty in comprehending the lecture due to the fast speed in the beginning. However, they were able to pick up the missing information from their peers and from the reading resources. Viewing video clips and movies were also reported to be interesting and helpful in advancing their listening skills.

### **Leaner Gains in Critical Thinking and from Cooperative Learning**

For student perspectives on group learning and the development of critical thinking, the results of the questionnaire and interviews were also revealed in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Distribution on Students' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of cooperative learning and development of critical thinking

Item	Mean	S.D.
22. Doing group project helps me learn language skills from the more capable peers in my group.	4.20	.684
23. Doing group project helps me understand better about the content which I would not be able to understand it on my own.	4.35	.685
24. Doing group project allows me to be less anxious in preparing and doing the oral presentation.	4.03	.863
25. Evaluating other students' performance makes me aware of their language problems (i.e., grammatical mistakes, pronunciation errors, etc.) which helps me to reflect upon my own problems.	4.17	.642
26. Evaluating other students' performance allows me to learn some important issues which can help me understand the content better.	4.25	.704
27. From the peers' and teacher's feedback, I know better about how to improve my own presentation skills.	4.48	.595

As revealed from table 3, engaging in group work did help most of the students be less anxious, particularly, when they were dealing with writing or speaking tasks which seemed beyond their current proficiency level. It could also be observed that students' critical thinking abilities were enhanced via peer group report. Specifically, students pointed out that with the specific guidelines and criterion provided in evaluating their peers' presentation, they were able to listen attentively for the main issues reported in selected cultures as well as to pay attention to their fluency and

grammatical errors in speech. They would feedback the evaluation to their peers and also used it as reminders for their own speech improvement.

In fact, from the interview, most students expressed their preferences in group work. In completion of a group final research project, students revealed they learned how to work effectively with others, how to get help from the more proficient member, and how to help the less linguistically capable peers. Some students mentioned that they've gained deeper understanding of the content while solving problems for their members. Other students even elaborated in the interview that differences did not only exist between different cultures. The individual differences within their own groups were apparent and they were able to solve their disputes by exercising some of the communication skills learned in class.

### **Learner Perceived Difficulties and Coping Strategies**

For the perceived difficulties with this course, some students pointed out that engaging in group work was not always an easy task. Students indicated that working with others was not easy considering all group members may contribute unequally to the group work, which might result in disputes, or even resentment among group members. Students would seek help from the instructor sometimes, but would also try to find different ways to resolve the problems caused by less cooperative members on their own. In short, students were usually able to come up with effective communication strategies to deal with their problems and to make the best out of their group work in the final project.

Speaking publicly in the final oral presentation was also reported by many as the hardest part in this course. Many students revealed their anxiety and lack of confidence in speaking publicly using the target language. However, students also described their coping strategies such as practicing, rehearsing their oral script before the presentation repeatedly in groups, getting feedback from their peers and teacher, making adjustment with their presentations, and visualizing their success on stage (strategies learned from a lecture on public presentation skills).

### **Discussion**

From the student evaluation elaborated above, it validates this CBI "Cross-cultural communication course" in its benefits on students' content and language learning. Actually, in addition to students perceived effectiveness, they did demonstrate their understanding of the content knowledge as it was evident from the result of midterm exam ( $M=75.33$ ,  $SD=8.678$ ) and their improved work on written and oral final projects. This result is congruent with some of the CBI research conducted in tertiary level in Taiwan from which students were able to improve in their reading skills, critical thinking abilities, and operational content knowledge (Liw, 2007; Lo & Sheu, 2008; Tsai & Shang, 2010; Tseng, 2015). The findings also confirmed the effectiveness of the curriculum design for this CBI course, which integrated consistent and meaningful input, and created a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) for comprehensible output.

From the result of students' feedback on content learning, students elaborated on their knowledge not only in the theoretical aspects of culture and cross-cultural

communications, but on their openness and respect for cultural differences, their expanded knowledge in doing research paper, and capability in collaboratively working with other group members. In terms of linguistic gains, students reported their improvement in different language skills, although in different strength respectively. Thus, the effectiveness of this CBI course is in line with previous studies in which CBI fosters academic growth while also develops language proficiency (Crandall, 1993; Short, 1997; Stoller, 2004).

The incorporation of different meaningful mediums as the comprehensible input such as textbook, on-line authentic reading material, lecture PPT, teacher hand-outs, movies, and video clips was reported as beneficial (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992), interesting, and motivating for students to have deeper understanding and interaction with the content knowledge. That is, when the emphasis is on meaningful and relevant content other than the language form itself, language acquisition increases rapidly (Curtain, 1995; Met, 1991).

In addition to comprehensible input, the productive tasks such as written reports and final oral presentations in this course have created the proximal zone for language learners to produce comprehensible output (Swain, 1985, 1993). Students were pushed to get their messages across not only from the simultaneous role-plays but from the formal report as in the written research paper and oral presentations. Being able to practice, edit, rehearse, and present their languages formally allows students to be pushed to use precise, coherent, and appropriate language thus enhance their overall linguistic ability.

Finally, with the extensive use of group work in this course, participating students were supported by their peers from which “scaffolding” was taking place when less linguistically capable students were helped while interacting with more capable members in their group (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, the support extended from getting help with problematic language structure to clarifying meaning of the puzzled content knowledge since students reported that they had deeper understanding of the content with the help of their peers, a result in line with previous findings (Hattie, 2009; Mangelsdorf, 1992; Wilkinson, 2015). Group work also helped alleviate anxiety in making errors (Slavin & Kaweit, 1981), as students reported that they were less nervous when they worked in groups. In addition to cooperative learning, students’ gains on critical thinking ability from evaluating peer groups’ oral report were also revealed from their ability to correct and edit their own written report and their own oral presentations. When students were provided with the opportunity to observe, attend to, and reflect upon the content and linguistic elements via provided criterion (i.e., evaluation sheets) for their peers’ report, they were able to activate their critical thinking skills and accordingly, they could improve the effectiveness of their own learning, both in content and language.

## **Conclusion**

This paper intends to report on the curriculum design of a CBI based course “Cross-cultural communication”, and to explore the learning outcome on both content and language improvement from students’ perspectives. From the findings, the perceived success of this course highlighted a few essential elements for a CBI course to be effectively implemented in the tertiary level in EFL context: (1) the integrated tasks which interweave all language skills, (2) meaningful, relevant, and multiple sources of information as comprehensible input, (3) meaningful and organized context for comprehensible output; and (4) clear guidelines and criterion for group work and group evaluation. It is clear that CBI, when adopted sensibly with well-planned curriculum syllabus and tasks, can provide students with comprehensible input which stirs up students’ genuine interest and motivates them to actively seek to understand the content knowledge. It also creates the best arena for students to acquire their linguistic skills by pushing them to perform the concise, coherent and more accurate productive target language. Through the guidelines provided by the instructor, students are more focused in obtaining the informative knowledge, in learning to be more linguistically fluent and accurate, and in climbing the scaffolds to maximize learning effectiveness through the cooperative learning in groups.

This study had its limitations in that the course was conducted with a group of students who have had cross cultural encounters on campus because of the big international student population in this university. Other students with limited encounters of the similar context might not have the motivation or chances to actualize cross cultural communication. In addition, this study is mainly examined from the learners’ perspective. It is suggested that future studies which include pre and post assessment on measuring students’ actual language enhancement can be included. Furthermore, the nature of this course is closely related to language learning since language, culture, and communication are intrinsically interconnected with one another. Thus, it is suggested that the methods and procedures implemented in this study be further tested in other CBI courses with subjects in different disciplines to further validate the findings of this study and to allow this model to be evaluated from different perspectives.

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