

Cultivating linguacultural competence in business English communication:**A mixed-methods intervention study**

Internationally operating business professionals use English as a business lingua franca (BELF) for their transnational communication, which requires linguacultural competencies (LCCs). This study explores classroom interventions designed to improve professionals' LCCs for business communication. Drawing on a novel conceptualization (i.e., the LCC framework) and adopting a mixed-methods design, this experimental study investigated the effects of an intervention on two groups of job-experienced Chinese professionals who use English for work: a control group receiving instruction on an existing business English textbook unit and an experimental group exposed to an adapted version of the unit specifically targeting two LCCs. Quantitative results revealed that both groups showed statistically significant but similar improvements in pre- to post-intervention assessments. Qualitative data provided evidence of LCC development and particular characteristics of the job-experienced participants as moderating factors. These results illustrate the utility of LCCs to curricular development and Business English pedagogy. However, they also exemplify challenges with the design and practicalities of experimental research. Overall, this investigation provides insight into how to develop Business English curricula to prepare learners for transnational communication in the workplace, ideally contributing to more efficient professional communication.

Keywords: English as a business lingua franca, BELF, teaching intervention, mixed methods, pedagogy, curriculum

1. Introduction

Contemporary communication in English is characterized by transnational and transcultural interactions. English as a business lingua franca (BELF) refers to the shared language used in the business domain by speakers with different L1s (Authors, 2025b). BELF communication is transnational, crossing political and linguistic borders, so it is inherently transcultural (Baker, 2024). BELF is used by people of an enormous variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, all interacting according to their unique styles, highlighting the importance of linguacultural competence (LCC) and the need for pedagogical efforts to foster such competence.

In the Chinese context, learning business English is a means of professional and economic advancement (Patel et al., 2023). As China's global economic interests grow, the increasing presence of multinationals, foreign direct investment, and ventures such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are considered central to China's socioeconomic development (Patel et al., 2023; Authors, 2024). These endeavors require vast resources of English-speaking professionals (He & Li, 2021). However, how business English has been taught in greater China does not necessarily match workplace needs (Du, 2021). While cultural awareness and understanding are the second most difficult issue for Chinese BELF users (after accent) (Du, 2021), culture-related Business English (BE) courses offered by universities are reportedly incongruous with "the reality of business communication in China" (Du, 2021, p. 156). The presence of intercultural communication in Chinese BE curricula notwithstanding, learners "are unable to meet threshold demand for workplace English" (He & Li, 2021). The need for improved communication entailing LCC has spurred organizations and job-experienced individuals to undertake BE training programs (He, 2020), prompting this study's research problem: *How can instruction foster the linguacultural*

competence of BELF learners and users? To address this problem, we first turn to the literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 BELF and Pedagogy

BELF is real-time, negotiated, and context-specific usage of English. How to structure and teach such usage is challenging because it is a “moving target.” Even so, there have been investigations into BELF pedagogy. Studies have examined awareness-raising (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005), using case study tasks to impart BELF principles (Beckisheva et al., 2015), and implementing task-based language teaching (TBLT), focusing on meetings and interviews (Pullin, 2010). Other investigations examined exposure to professional discourse, combining language development with corporate jargon and business know-how (Kankaanranta et al., 2015). More recently, Komori-Glatz (2017) examined how postgraduate business students communicate in multicultural team meetings, highlighting how casual talk supported their transactional communication. In the Chinese context, Du-Babcock (2016) examined the impact of internships on university students’ BELF communication. While the above investigations covered aspects of BELF competence, they did not specifically focus on BELF transcultural competence or the concept of linguaculture. Developing LCC is essential because BELF communicators interact with interlocutors from all over the world (Kankaanranta et al., 2015), individual linguacultural competencies (LCCs) can bridge gaps of understanding between different linguacultures (Agar, 2002), and BELF communication is negotiated and transient, requiring flexibility to adjust to those hailing from different linguacultural contexts (Baker, 2024). Further, the aforementioned studies involved pre-experienced learners rather than job-experienced professionals, a population that remains under-researched in the wider Global Englishes literature, within which BELF can be theoretically situated (Rose et al., 2021). It is clear from previous research that BE learners

need to improve specific LCCs, and this is especially true of Chinese L1 learners. For example, they have both self-reported and been observed to display difficulty with communicating their home culture, in English, during professional communication (Cong, 2000; Authors, 2024, 2025b). Additionally, Chinese professionals stationed overseas have reported challenges with adjusting to the religious practices of less secular societies (Authors, 2024, 2025b). The target population of Chinese professionals informed the identification of the particular LCCs to be developed, driving the overall design of this study and positioning it to produce pedagogical implications for what is likely the largest BE language learning population in the world (He & Li, 2021).

2.2 Linguacultural Competence and Pedagogy

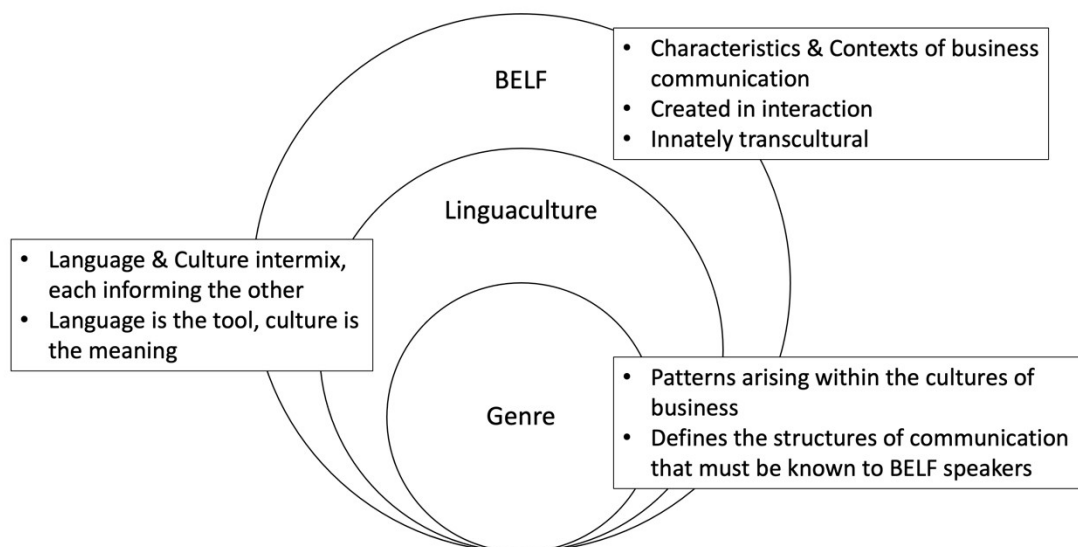
Linguaculture is the intersection of language and culture (Agar, 2002), and LCC is the ability to communicate successfully with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Risager, 2006). Linguaculture has been adopted as the conceptualization of the different backgrounds of interlocutors in contemporary lingua franca communication. There has been limited exploration of pedagogical approaches to LCC. Risager (2005) addressed linguacultural pedagogy in which various linguacultures mixed in a classroom discussion of the media coverage of the *Tour de France* event. Shaules (2016) created the Developmental Model of Linguacultural Learning (DMLL) to integrate language learning with linguacultural development. However, the DMLL remains theoretical, not yet implemented pedagogically. Finally, Blyth (2019) enacted a curriculum that combined the notion of linguaculture with multiliteracies studies. Though the notion of linguaculture is prevalent in GE literature, often cited as an essential component of contemporary communication, none of the aforementioned investigations incorporated the concept of BELF, nor did they include empirical studies beyond observations. LCC for BELF users must be operationalized, taught, and assessed to understand its pedagogical value and affordances.

2.3 The Linguacultural Competence Framework

The LCC framework is a novel construction targeting the development of professionals' LCCs (Authors, 2024). Comprising three theoretical lenses, it is organized from broad to specific: At the macro level, BELF defines the competencies required of business communicators (e.g., transcultural competence) as well as the context and characteristics of contemporary professional communication: who is interacting (internationally operating business professionals), how they interact (using flexible and content-focused communication), when they interact (during transactional and interpersonal interactions), and why they interact (to achieve business goals) (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011). At the meso level, linguaculture illuminates how language and culture intersect, addressing BELF's need for transcultural understanding and communication (Agar, 2002; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Risager, 2006). At the micro level, the ability to understand and use genres enables the identification, analysis, and conduct of business communication. The construct of genre complements linguaculture by structuring patterns of communication within a culture (Bhatia, 1993) and serving as communicative bridges (referred to as "frames" in the literature) between different linguacultures (Agar, 2002). See Figure 1 for a visual of the LCC framework.

Figure 1

The LCC Framework



The LCC framework is distinct from the other frameworks reviewed above in that it incorporates contemporary conceptualizations of culture as being manifested in fluid, negotiated, and liminal communication rather than being static entities (Baker, 2024); it regards language and culture as integrated rather than separate paradigms (Camerer & Mader, 2012; Risager, 2006); and it leverages genres as linguacultural bridges essential to BELF communication (Agar, 2002). In the LCC framework, the three lenses interact simultaneously and complementarily to provide a multifaceted perspective of BE linguacultural competence to offer insight into how to develop BELF communicators' LCCs.

2.4 Gaps in previous research

A review of previous research into classroom interventions to improve students' global competencies in English has revealed that there is both a lack of research using experimental research designs, as well as a dearth of research outside of university settings. (Rose, et al., 2021). The current study's focus on job-experienced professionals, as their performance in the intervention will 1) demonstrate the efficacy of an LCC-based curriculum to those whose workplace experience will inform and be informed by their participation, 2) reveal whether this study's content and pedagogical approach foster this population's learning motivation, and 3) serve as a template in advancing pedagogy for job-experienced

learners in different contexts as well as for pre-experienced learners, who do not yet have workplace perspectives but need to be well-prepared for workplace success (Authors, 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

Given the contextual background and extant literature, this study's research problem is how to develop the linguacultural competence of BELF learners and users through pedagogy. Within that general problem are this study's specific research questions:

1. *How effective is a pedagogical intervention informed by the LCC framework in enhancing BE learners' linguacultural competence and meeting their transcultural communicative needs?*
2. *What factors contributed to the (in)efficiency (i.e., relative effectiveness) of the intervention?*

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods experimental design that embedded three interconnected designs, as indicated in Figure 2. In the *exploratory sequential design comprising an initial qualitative phase and an intervention phase*, the LCC framework was conceptualized, as described above. Next, individual LCCs were gleaned from the relevant literature. They were expressed as "can do" descriptors and double-checked in domain analysis interviews and questionnaires with job-experienced business professionals in mainland China, as reported in Authors (2025b). The finalized list of 20 LCCs was used to evaluate *Market Leader 3rd Edition Extra* (Cotton et al., 2010) to determine how the LCCs were addressed in the textbook, as reported in Authors (2024). *Market Leader* was selected as the foundation of the teaching intervention's curriculum because it was designed in large part for job-experienced professionals (Pearson, 2022), is used widely in China (Si, 2020), and the instructor (the first author) had extensive experience using it in the classroom. It also scored

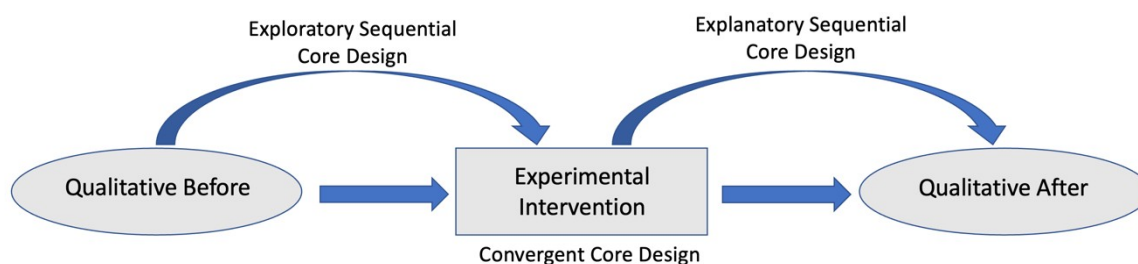
the highest in its global orientation according to Global Englishes parameters (Rose & Galloway, 2019). The textbook analysis informed which LCCs were selected as the targets for the materials adaptations and assessment instruments. Once the assessment instruments were developed and validated, and the materials had been adapted, a pilot study was undertaken, as reported in Authors (2025a).

In the convergent design constituted by the quantitative and qualitative strands of the *intervention phase*, the students were exposed to the control and experimental instructional conditions and assessed pre- and post-intervention. Qualitative data in the form of presentations, exercise responses, and self-reflections were collected.

In the *explanatory sequential design* made up of the intervention phase and a following qualitative phase, post-course interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the intervention results, moderating factors, and the participants' firsthand experiences with the intervention.

Figure 2

The Mixed Methods Experimental Design



3.3 Participants

A total of 68 participants completed the course between April and September 2024, totaling 36 in the control group and 32 in the experimental group. Twelve other participants began the course but did not complete it (6 control, 6 experimental), indicating a slight difference in randomization. Participants were drawn from the pool of available and

interested professionals using volunteer/convenience sampling as well as snowball sampling. Participants reported a range of working experience, job descriptions, and industries, and were located in 15 mainland Chinese cities, the Hong Kong S.A.R., and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Based on recruitment interviews, participants displayed English levels ranging from A2 to C1 according to the CEFR's *Qualitative features of spoken language scale* (Council of Europe, 2001). For more detail about their demographic makeup, see Appendix A. They were randomly assigned to the control or experimental conditions using random numbers generated by www.randomizer.org (Urbaniak & Plous, 2023). Participants #1-36 were in the control group and will be labeled C#1-36 (e.g., C#36). Participants 37-68 were in the experimental group and will be labeled E#37-68 (e.g., E#37). All participants signed informed consent before beginning the course.

3.4 The Intervention

In the intervention phase, a classroom experiment was conducted. Two LCCs that were absent from *Market Leader* were selected to be developed and assessed in the teaching intervention (Authors, 2025a). The first LCC was home cultural competency: *Professionals recognize and can express the enormous cultural diversity within their home culture.*

Research has shown that Chinese learners struggle to express their home culture in English (Cong, 2000; Authors, 2025c). Being able to articulate the cultural diversity of China is a crucial competency for self-understanding, building bridges culturally, and communicating in the workplace (Hu & McKay, 2014; Pullin, 2010). The second LCC was religion competency: *Professionals understand religion in terms of holiday schedules, food, and beliefs and interact accordingly.* This LCC surfaced repeatedly in the domain analysis interviews with participants, especially Chinese professionals working in the Middle East (Authors, 2024, 2025b). Though it can be a sensitive topic, generally considered taboo in ELT (Authors, 2024; Brown & Nanguy, 2021; Cogo, 2022), a nuanced understanding of

religion, the parameters of what aspects can be discussed, and how it affects business communication is crucial (Camerer & Mader, 2012).

Unit 3 of *Market Leader* on the theme of “change” was selected as the foundational curriculum because the unit “had a relatively high percentage of linguacultural-building opportunities overall but was not specifically focused on culture, hence a good illustration of how opportunities manifest” in different contexts (Authors, 2024, p. 8). Theoretical and practical support for the adaptations to this unit came from an extensive literature review, which informed the creation of a “decision-making tree,” shown in Appendix B. Every adaptation followed the tree’s structure, progressing from general to specific. Adaptations were made to three of the seven sections of the unit: The *Reading* section was changed from an article about Mercedes to one about a fictional Chinese multinational that revolutionized its cultural training to improve the communication of staff (targeting both the home culture and religion LCCs). The *Managing Meetings* section was changed from a dialogue about a company’s smoking policy to one about adjusting the holiday policy to meet the needs of people of different religious backgrounds (targeting the religion LCC). The *Culture* section was adapted from an expert explaining how different cultures conceptualize meetings to the importance of being able to express one’s home culture in international business communication (targeting the home culture LCC).

The teaching intervention was one-on-one, online, self-paced, and asynchronous to accommodate busy professionals with demanding schedules and to obtain a wide regional sample. The course was divided into three modules. Students were sent links to the materials via *OneDrive* and had to complete them in a specified order, only proceeding to a new module after completing the previous module. Originally, the estimated time commitment of the course was intended to be 10 hours, though participants self-reported spending a range of 8-30 hours on it, with a mean of 17.5 hours. Module 1 was the pre-course assessments (a

questionnaire used to collect the participants' self-reported knowledge/skills/attitudes concerning the two target LCCs and an email task based on a case study intended to assess the participants' actualization of the two LCCs in authentic oral and written tasks). These instruments are discussed in further detail in the next section. Module 2 was the main course. It consisted of six sections; *Starting Up*, *Vocabulary: Describing Change*, *Reading*, *Language Review: Past simple and present perfect*, *Skills: Managing Meetings*, and the *Expert Talk about Culture*. It included a variety of exercises and required a presentation about one's home city and two self-reflections for students to consider their learning progress and perspectives. Knowledge was presented, such as in the *Expert Talk*, in which aspects of cultural tendencies and principles were discussed. It was also elicited, such as in questions about learners' extant home cultural or religious knowledge. Each section was treated as a mini-lesson, contributing language, knowledge, and skills that could later be used in the email of complaint in the assessment. Further, to bolster participants' understanding of email writing, the supplemental learning materials (e.g., video and *PowerPoint*) included the structure of a *response to complaints* email from a genre perspective. Short videos accompanied the materials, adding context and explanations. The video mini-lessons followed the approaches and best practices outlined in the Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2018), which is one of the most popular ELT certificates in the world (Dewey & Patsko, 2018). CELTA's best practices were referenced because they are highly structured, research-based, and widespread. Module 3 consisted of post-course assessments (i.e., re-administration of the questionnaire as well as the presentation and email task upon completion of the intervention).

3.5 Instruments

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, it was necessary to develop a battery of assessments to gauge the participants' mastery of the two target LCCs. To this end, a self-

report questionnaire and an email task were developed for administration before and after the main course. These instruments were designed and validated according to an adapted version of the argument-based validation (ABV) framework for English for professional purposes (Knoch & Macqueen, 2020). The questionnaire consisted of 26 Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree), with 15 items forming the home culture subscale and 11 items constituting the religion subscale (see Appendix C). These items assessed knowledge, skills/strategies, and attitudes concerning the two LCCs.

The email task had two parallel forms based on two versions of the same case study. Each form of the email task required an email of 200-500 words responding to employees' complaints about a merger. Email was selected as the means of communication for this assessment because it remains one of the most-used communicative means in the workplace (Chan, 2023; Du, 2021, Evans, 2012), thus enabling participants to apply their LCCs in authentic business communication (Kuo, 2007). The rubric for scoring the emails also focused on knowledge, skills/strategies, and attitudes related to the two focal LCCs, with a 5-point scale for each of the three facets and a maximum total score of 15 (see Appendix D). The collected emails were scored by three raters. Many-facet Rasch measurement (MFRM) was conducted to determine *fair scores*, adjusted for rater severity and leniency and the influence of other factors such as scoring bias toward groups (e.g., control and experimental) or products (e.g., pre-course emails and post-course emails). Overall, the raters, items, and scores were highly reliable and well within the MFRM's required parameters (Eckes, 2019), indicating that: 1) the rubric was valid, 2) it was highly reliable, 3) the raters were consistent, and 4) the fair scores derived from this analysis were accurate and objective.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed via *SurveyMonkey* before and after the main course. The two forms of the email task were administered before and after the main course in a

counterbalanced manner to avoid possible practice effects (Rogers & Revesz, 2020). A series of 2-way mixed ANOVAs were run on the questionnaire (sub)scale scores and email performance fair scores. The between-groups independent variable was instructional conditions (i.e., experimental and control treatments), and the within-subjects independent variable was time of measurement (i.e., before and after the main course). Before the ANOVAs were performed, the data were checked for the requisite assumptions. One participant's data were excluded from further analyses because they were outliers in all the normality tests.

The post-course interviews aimed to determine participants' reasons for joining and completing the course, evidence of developing the two target LCCs, and their perspectives on the course. The interviews ($n = 18$) were conducted on *Tencent Meeting* between November 5 and 20, 2024. They lasted between 21 and 54 minutes and were recorded and transcribed using *TurboScribe* for later analysis. Participants were selected according to purposeful sampling's *criterion-i strategy*, to "identify and select all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 535). Inclusion criteria were: 1) they were willing to be interviewed, 2) there was a mix of men ($n = 4$) and women ($n = 14$), 3) several geographies were represented (7 mainland Chinese cities and the Hong Kong SAR), and 4) both instructional conditions were represented (8 participants were from the control group, while 10 participants were from the experimental group). One participant (C#25) responded to the interview questions in writing due to scheduling constraints. Interviews followed the guide in Appendix E.

A thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts, following the 6-phase procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). With the aid of *MAXQDA*, the thematic analysis aimed to determine 1) why the participants were motivated to join and complete the course, 2) whether they demonstrated an expanded understanding of the two target LCCs, 3)

what their perspectives on and perceptions of the course were, and 4) how each of the above may have impacted the effectiveness of the intervention. In the *data integration* phase, the qualitative data were connected to the quantitative findings to help explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4. Findings

The following sections report the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Overall, both treatment conditions improved from pre- to post-course, and there were between-group differences on most measures. However, there was no interaction effect of time of measurement and treatment condition for any measure. The qualitative results provided nuance to these findings, with both groups expressing similar evidence of intrinsic motivation and LCC development. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all the quantitative measures. The measures included the overall questionnaire scores, the subscales (home culture and religion), the components (knowledge, skills/strategies, and attitudes), and the email scores.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Measures

Instructional Condition	Control Group				Experimental Group			
	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
Time of Measurement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall Questionnaire	4.86	.40	4.98	.40	5.12	.41	5.24	.36
Home Culture Subscale	4.93	.39	4.94	.43	5.14	.47	5.22	.39
Religion Subscale	4.78	.53	5.03	.45	5.09	.43	5.27	.39
Knowledge Component	5.25	.42	5.39	.38	5.43	.39	5.58	.33
Skills/Strategies Component	4.45	.64	4.54	.61	4.76	.61	4.87	.52
Attitudes Component	5.04	.51	5.19	.51	5.33	.45	5.39	.47

Email Scores	3.80	.97	4.43	1.28	3.95	.90	4.49	.90
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4.1 Improvement Measured by the Combined Home Culture and Religion Subscales

The two-way ANOVA run on the combined questionnaire subscale scores found a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention), $F(1, 65) = 8.828, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .120$. The effect size, as measured by the eta squared value, approached the criterial .14 for a large effect, explaining 12% of the variance in the dependent variable. The participants as a whole improved significantly from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 4.98, SD = .43$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 5.10, SD = .40$). There was also a main effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = 8.34, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .114$. The effect size fell between medium and large. The experimental group ($M = 5.18, SD = .35$) outperformed the control group ($M = 4.92, SD = .38$). However, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .000, p = .998, \eta_p^2 = .000$, indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

The interviews shed light on the significant improvement of both groups. Participants showed high levels of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated individuals engage in activities “for their own sake – for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from their performance” (Deci et al., p. 328). A determinant of intrinsic motivation is whether the participants expected any external reward (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this study, the participants were given no external mandate, nor were they offered any reward to ensure that intrinsically motivated individuals were recruited. The reasons they gave for joining the course included: “I was curious” (E#43), “I saw the topic I’m very interested in” (E#64), and “[I want to] improve myself” (E#65). Another factor in their intrinsic motivation was their expectations of

the future: There was a strong sentiment that English would continue to be essential to these participants' professional lives. Experimental group Participant E#64's statement was representative: "I think in the future I will use more English in my work and in my life." This participant was being relocated to her company's car factory in Mexico, facing the imminent prospect of daily transcultural BELF communication. As a result, she was highly motivated to improve her proficiency. Finally, all participants were explicitly informed that they were free to leave the course at any time, which 12 did. Therefore, participants who completed the course were likely highly intrinsically motivated.

Despite their intrinsic motivation, some participants did struggle with thoughts of quitting the course. Participant E#52 explained: "I mean, it's inner frustration, because on one side, I want to do one thing well. The other side, I want to rest, or do nothing. And the two, they are fighting." Most interviewees, however, did not consider quitting (e.g., C#6, C#26, C#36, E#41, E#43, E#60), though they were free to withdraw from the course, further evidence that those who completed the course were highly intrinsically motivated.

4.2 Improvement Measured by the Home Culture Subscale

The two-way ANOVA run on the questionnaire's home culture subscale scores revealed there was not a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention), $F(1, 65) = 0.93, p = .338, \eta_p^2 = .014$. The participants as a whole improved slightly from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 5.03, SD = .44$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 5.07, SD = .43$). There was a main effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = 7.21, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .100$. The effect size was medium. The experimental group ($M = 5.18, SD = .37$) outperformed the control group ($M = 4.93, SD = .37$). However, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .37, p = .546, \eta_p^2 = .006$,

indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

Both groups' home culture subscale raw scores improved from pre- to post-course, but not to a statistically significant degree. One assumption of this study was that the participants' home cultural expression would be a challenge, aligning with assertions originally made by Cong (2000), who labeled the phenomenon *Chinese culture aphasia*, and supported by more recent findings (Authors, 2025c). However, the participants self-reported a high level of competence in the home culture LCC. Perhaps job-experienced professionals perceive that they have already developed this LCC to some extent, thus limiting their improvement in the questionnaire. This finding highlights the fact that extant studies on home cultural expression have exclusively focused on pre-experienced learners (Guan et al., 2018; Huo, 2015; Luo, 2011; Authors, 2025c; Song & Bai, 2018; Wang, 2013), whereas this study focused on job-experienced learners. Even so, there was qualitative evidence of their progress in this LCC, which they found useful and relevant. For example, Participant E#46 said:

I think the best part for me, my idea is we need to make presentations to show our hometown's history and like pretend we have a customer to come to China. We need to show them our history and know about our hometown. I think this is very great.

As an independent international trader, this participant often had to host overseas customers. She appreciated the presentation assignment in Module 2, which allowed her to practice such home cultural expression and served her workplace needs well. Participant C#34 concurred, highlighting how understanding "my cultures" helped her to understand "another people's cultures," a key rationale for the home culture LCC. Her sentiments were shared by other participants (e.g., E#41, E#52, E#64, and E#65), offering further evidence that the

instructional activity was impactful and successful in prompting consideration and development of the home culture LCC despite the lack of quantifiable improvement.

4.3 Improvement Measured by the Religion Subscale

The two-way ANOVA run on the questionnaire's religion subscale scores found a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention), $F(1, 65) = 19.118, p = <.001, \eta_p^2 = .227$. The effect size was very large, far exceeding the criterial .14 for a large effect. The participants as a whole improved significantly from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 4.93, SD = .51$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 5.14, SD = .44$). There was also a main effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = 7.37, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .102$. The effect size was medium. The experimental group ($M = 5.18, SD = .37$) outperformed the control group ($M = 4.91, SD = .44$). However, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .67, p = .417, \eta_p^2 = .010$, indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

Both groups' statistically significant improvement on the religion subscale was corroborated by the post-course interviews, in which participants demonstrated their improvement. For example, Participant E#59 said:

I was asked to choose some gifts for our customer. They are from there. Actually, they are living in the Middle East now, Riyadh, but they are Indian. So, when I was searching for gifts for them, I was like thinking about those like cultural difference. Yeah, yeah. Thinking about cultural difference, like those festivals.

She applied her learning from the course to the choice of gifts for her business contacts and selected gifts in a culturally informed way. Similarly, Participant E#41 relayed how, after beginning the course, she began asking her Malaysian customers (of several linguacultural backgrounds) about their holiday schedules so that she could accommodate them. Such

anecdotes provided evidence of participants' greater awareness and ability to practice what they learned regarding the religion LCC in the workplace, one of the primary goals of this study.

4.4 Improvement in the Knowledge Component

The two-way ANOVA run on the questionnaire's knowledge component scores found a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention), $F(1, 65) = 11.31, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .148$. The effect size was large, exceeding the criterial .14 for a large effect. The participants as a whole improved significantly from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 5.33, SD = .41$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 5.48, SD = .37$). There was also a main effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = 4.99, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .071$. The effect size was medium. The experimental group ($M = 5.51, SD = .30$) outperformed the control group ($M = 5.32, SD = .37$). However, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .05, p = .832, \eta_p^2 = .001$, indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

The statistically significant improvement in the knowledge component was consistent with what the post-course interviews revealed. For example, Participant C#33 said:

I really learn a lot about different culture. Generally, I know some culture is different. But not really so specific about, especially Indians. But I know a lot.

Actually, I'm improved in this part.

She cited cultural knowledge specifically regarding Indian culture. Other participants cited knowledge about working habits and schedules in Egypt (E#60), solving conflicts between cultures (E#58), gift-giving (E#59), Chinese home culture (C#34), and religion (E#41). Each of them offered concrete evidence of their improved knowledge in the domains of the two target LCCs.

4.5 Improvement in the Skills/Strategies Component

The two-way ANOVA run on the skills/strategies component scores found there was not a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention), $F(1, 65) = 2.41, p = .125, \eta_p^2 = .036$. The participants as a whole improved somewhat from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 4.59, SD = .64$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 4.69, SD = .59$). There was a main effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = 5.79, p = .019, \eta_p^2 = .082$. The effect size was medium. The experimental group ($M = 4.81, SD = .51$) outperformed the control group ($M = 4.49, SD = .57$). However, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .06, p = .808, \eta_p^2 = .001$, indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

The post-course interviews offered mixed evidence of improvement in the LCC skills and strategies. On the one hand, some interviewees such as Participant C#25 were very clear about their skill improvement: “I’ve noticed a significant improvement in my business communication skills, particularly in writing professional emails....” However, others, such as Participant C#26, did not report LCC skill or strategy improvement when saying, “I don’t think after the course, I have learned a lot of the foreign culture.” Her statement does not reflect the fact that she improved according to both assessments. Similarly, Participants C#6 and E#52 cited their improvement in language. The participants’ inconsistent views of this component should be taken into account when interpreting the non-significant quantitative results.

4.6 Improvement in the Attitudes Component

The two-way ANOVA run on the questionnaire attitudes component scores found a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention),

$F(1, 65) = .34, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .072$. The effect size was medium. The participants as a whole improved significantly from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 5.18, SD = .50$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 5.28, SD = .50$). There was also a main effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = 2.97, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .072$. The effect size was medium. The experimental group ($M = 5.36, SD = .41$) outperformed the control group ($M = 5.11, SD = .49$). However, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .87, p = .353, \eta_p^2 = .013$, indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

Both groups' statistically significant improvement in the attitudes component was supported by views expressed in the post-course interviews. For example, Participant E#46 said:

When we are dealing with different countries' customer and we need to [realize] sometimes that there is a different culture, you need to feel [like] them and understand them. And then when you talk about something [...], I think that will be easiest to talk together.

This participant highlighted the importance of empathy and mutual understanding as underpinning rapport-building and successful business communication. Similarly, Participant C#36 described how confidence derived from the course would hopefully help him communicate with overseas partners as he moved forward in his career as an entrepreneur. Both participants exemplified improvement in attitude and the importance of the affective component of the LCCs and BELF communication.

4.7 Improvement Measured by the Email Tasks

The two-way ANOVA run on the email performance scores found a statistically significant main effect for time of measurement (i.e., pre- and post-intervention), $F(1, 65) =$

16.799, $p = <.001$, $\eta_p^2 = .205$. The effect size was very large, far exceeding the criterial .14 for a large effect. The participants as a whole improved significantly from the pre-intervention assessment ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .93$) to the post-intervention one ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.11$). There was no effect of instructional conditions (i.e., the control group vs. the experimental group), $F(1, 65) = .238$, $p = .627$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$. The experimental group ($M = 4.22$, $SD = .73$) outperformed the control group ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .95$). Similarly, the interaction between time of measurement and instructional conditions was not significant, $F(1, 65) = .063$, $p = .759$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$, indicating the differences between the pre- and post-intervention assessments were consistent for the two instructional conditions.

Notably, the effect size of the post-course improvement on the email task (i.e., .205) was markedly greater than that on the combined questionnaire subscales (i.e., .120). Further, neither group's questionnaire skills/strategies scores improved, contradicting their statistically significant improvement on the email performance tasks, which directly assessed their use of skills and strategies. These findings show that the self-report instruments were less sensitive to LCC progress, underscoring the importance of using multiple measures of LCC development in a study like this one.

Participants were aware of their LCC improvement on the email task, as illustrated by Participant C#25, exposed to the control version of the course.

The best part of the course, in my opinion, was the practical exercise where I was given a specific business scenario and tasked with writing a business reply. This activity was not only challenging but also immensely helpful in applying the theoretical knowledge we had learned. The feedback provided was particularly insightful, and it greatly improved my ability to craft effective business correspondence.

Participants C#34 and E#59 also highlighted the efficacy of the case study and its requisite email assignment in prodding them to solve cultural problems caused by the merger, providing further evidence of the development of the target LCCs in actual performance.

5. Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative findings reported in the preceding section are discussed below in relation to our two research questions.

5.1 Effectiveness of the LCC Intervention

Based on the findings summarized, the answer to RQ1 is clear: Both the experimental and control conditions were effective in improving knowledge, skills/strategies, and attitudes according to the two LCCs, though the control condition was equally efficient as the experimental condition.

Both groups showed statistically significant improvement with large effect sizes for both the questionnaire ($\eta_p^2 = .114$) and the email assessment ($\eta_p^2 = .205$). Further, both groups showed statistically significant improvement according to the religion subscale, the knowledge component, and the attitudes component, with large effect sizes of $\eta_p^2 = .227$ and $\eta_p^2 = .148$, and a medium effect size of $\eta_p^2 = .072$ respectively. While the questionnaire's home culture subscale and the skills/strategies component showed raw score improvement for both groups, it was not statistically significant. However, the email assignment directly assessed learners' skill/strategy performance providing convincing evidence of development. Qualitative data provided further evidence of LCC improvement for both groups.

These findings are particularly encouraging given that the scope of the intervention was limited to accommodate participants' heavy schedules and time constraints. As mentioned in the methodology section, a pilot study was conducted before this study (Authors, 2025a). One learning from the pilot was that the originally planned curriculum was too expansive for busy professionals volunteering to complete the course, so it was

condensed. This decision was necessary but potentially risky, as research literature suggests that learning improvements often require extended periods of time to manifest (Rogers & Revesz, 2020). Viewed that way, the fact that both groups improved significantly according to both assessments during this relatively limited intervention illustrates the LCCs' high level of utility to curricular design and efficacy in cultivating LCC development. Next, we consider the improvement according to the two subscales: religion and home culture.

Both groups improved according to the religion subscale. For perspective, in this study religion operated contrary to established treatments of religion in ELT. As discussed, religion is considered taboo in ELT materials from a Western publishing perspective (Authors, 2024; Brown & Nanguy, 2021; Cogo, 2022). Religion has been assumed to be a *rich point* that would cause miscommunications, misunderstandings, and disagreements between those of different linguacultural backgrounds that should be avoided. This sentiment is quite different than in certain Muslim contexts, where ELT materials explicitly address religion (e.g., Hamid, 2024; Sharifian, 2010). However, this study showed that religion can be addressed in a sensitive, nuanced, and empathetic way, perhaps even serving as a *frame* between linguacultural groups rather than a *rich point*. The religion LCC can be developed, facilitate communication, and serve as a vital link between job-experienced professionals from different linguacultural groups using BELF. These findings support the sentiment that basing materials decisions on customers' "perceived sensitivities" can strip important cultural content from textbooks (Gray, 2002, pp. 143-144). Treating religion as taboo is a disservice to learners, especially in the Chinese context, who may lack religious understanding but need it in the internationally functioning workplace (Authors, 2024).

Regarding the home cultural subscale, on the surface, it was surprising that the scores did not improve for either group. An assumption of this study was that the participants' home cultural expression was a deficiency, as has been propounded by researchers since Cong

(2000) labeled it Chinese *culture aphasia*. Additionally, Chinese users of English themselves have reported home cultural self-expression to be a challenge (Authors, 2025b). However, the participants' pre-course questionnaire results showed the opposite: Their scores averaged 4.93/6 for the control group and 5.11/6 for the experimental group, indicating that the participants felt they had a high ability to express their home culture in business situations. The most likely explanation for this finding is that this study focused on job-experienced learners working transnationally, unlike the majority of extant studies on the topic, which have mostly focused on pre-experienced learners (e.g., Guan et al., 2018; Huo, 2015; Luo, 2011; Authors, 2025b; Song & Bai, 2018; Wang, 2013). It is possible that these job-experienced learners had the opportunity (or necessity) to develop the ability to express their home culture for their workplace communication and therefore scored highly from the beginning. This unexpected finding illustrates the importance of conducting research with job-experienced professionals (Authors, 2025c; Frendo, 2005).

5.2 Factors Influencing the Efficiency of the Intervention?

The second research question asks what factors contributed to the relative effectiveness of the intervention. There are several possible explanations for why the experimental condition was not more efficient than the control condition.

The most likely explanation for the improvement of both groups is that the target LCCs are readily developable. Put another way, they do not require extensive work to produce improvement, and the control treatment was sufficient to raise them. This intervention was based on just a single unit from a textbook, structured such that learners completed required tasks independently over the course of several hours, yet they showed significant improvements, evidence that the LCCs can be developed with great efficiency in curricula. Additionally, the improvement of this study's experimental group, exposed to novel adaptations, further illustrates the efficacy of the LCCs underpinning those materials, a

conclusion that aligns with adaptation-based experimental teaching interventions such as Hadley and Hadley (2023), who argue that a novel adapted curriculum performing similarly to an established, globally-distributed, and professionally-designed one is evidence of its pedagogical value. Finally, the fact that two different treatment conditions supported the development of the LCCs was unexpected but encouraging: It indicates that they can be cultivated in multiple versions of curricula, and therefore have a wide range of pedagogical utility. These results show that the LCC framework's individual competencies are operationalizable, pedagogically addressable through adaptations, and assessable (Authors, 2025c). In other words, they are highly practical and efficient in contributing to improvement via different versions of curricula, thus illustrating a wide range of pedagogical utility.

Characteristics of this study's job-experienced population impacted the results, as will be discussed below.

The first, and arguably most, consequential characteristic of these learners is that they are job-experienced. Job-experienced learners have real-world stakes and perspectives, which offer key insights into the results of this study. Competencies "cannot be detached from their contexts of practice and use" (Resnick & Resnick, 1991, p. 43). Context underpins, permeates, and influences every aspect of competence, behavior, and performance (Camerer & Mader, 2012). The reciprocal relationship between the participants' experiences and the course was illustrated by C#26, who left her previous position because of her "poor" English skills, thus completely changing the complexion of her professional life. Another example of the importance of context arose when E#64 explained that she was preparing to transfer to Mexico, facing imminent exposure to daily BELF transcultural communication. Her need for LCC was tangible and immediate. Notably, C#26 and E#64, hailing from both the control and experimental groups, improved according to both assessments, and their improvements were higher than the average improvements across all participants. For these job-experienced

learners, the stakes were high: Communication and LCC were essential to their careers, and lack thereof brought profound consequences (Authors, 2024, 2025a, 2025b; Du, 2021; Frenedo, 2005), which likely prompted high levels of engagement and performance in this course. It is possible that the influence of their contexts was powerful enough to attenuate the influence of the different treatment conditions. In other words, perhaps the real-world stakes and necessities were more influential than the treatment conditions, thus contributing to the result of both groups improving to a similar degree.

Research has shown intrinsic motivation correlates with greater enjoyment, and, therefore, engagement with training content, resulting in higher levels of performance (Bauer et al., 2016). As established in the findings, participants were intrinsically motivated. In the post-course interviews, when asked about their successful performance, participants expressed high levels of enjoyment and engagement. Reflecting on the course, participants E#65, C#6, C#22, C#25, C#33, and E#46 all highlighted that the course was a good experience. Referencing engagement, participants such as C#34 explicitly linked their improvement to their heavy involvement in the course. These findings align with extant literature examining the motivation of adult, job-experienced corporate trainees, stating that “if trainees enjoy the content of a course, they should be more engaged in the course and learn the material” (Bauer et al, 2016, p. 36). Further, almost all of the participants anticipated the continued importance of English to their professional lives. A key motivational consideration is their “beliefs about whether successful course completion will lead to valued outcomes” (Bauer et al., 2016, p. 36). In this case, the “valued outcomes” were improved communicative proficiency applicable to their daily work, so participants deemed that expending effort toward this goal was warranted, resulting in successful LCC improvement exemplified by the statistically significant improvement for both groups according to both assessments.

Another explanation for this study's findings relates to learning autonomy, which must be considered contextually: Researchers have suggested that learners from collectivist cultural backgrounds, such as China, might have lower autonomy (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). According to such assertions, Chinese learners are dependent, passive, and display "learned helplessness" (Yu et al., 2018, p. 190). To complicate matters, scholars have argued that Western pedagogies (such as those used in this study) are sometimes unsuccessful in the Chinese context because "traditional Chinese education has more structure" (Yu et al., 2018, p. 194). Participant C#25 alluded to this issue when talking about transitioning from Chinese-style learning to the autonomous nature of this course. However, studies of Chinese learners have found that they display equal levels of autonomy as learners from Western cultures (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985) and that for Chinese learners "an autonomous motivation to study positively predicted adaptive learning attitudes, academic success, and personal well-being" (Yu et al., 2018, p. 184). This study's active, job-experienced professionals have to use English at work, so their high levels of autonomy might be expected (Yu et al., 2018). Further, we argue that their learning autonomy was not simply based on comfort with the online and asynchronous nature of the course. Rather, their autonomy was driven by *transfer*, which is "using the trained knowledge and skills in a new context" (Bauer et al., 2016, p. 35). It could be argued that transfer is more important to job-experienced learners than any other learning group because their training and development are immediately applicable and with high stakes. Their intrinsic motivation and resultant autonomous efforts to improve likely superseded possible hesitations about independent online learning or culturally influenced education expectations for teacher-centered approaches (Yu et al., 2018). According to BELF epistemology, they simply needed to *get the job done* (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). As autonomy was evident amongst members of both groups, it is understandable that both groups improved to a similar degree.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to foster the development of the LCCs of job-experienced professionals who communicate using BELF. Accordingly, the LCC framework was designed, informing this study's experimental teaching intervention. The LCC framework showed great utility in underpinning the curriculum and teaching intervention, as both groups showed statistically significant improvement according to both assessments. These results illustrate that the LCCs are readily developable and assessable. Further, finding that the curricula underpinning both instructional conditions led to improvements indicates that there are multiple curricular approaches to developing LCCs, further illustrating their utility. The similar performances of the control and experimental groups were likely due to factors relating to the population of job-experienced participants, namely their experience and motivation.

This study has several important implications. First, LCCs can be fostered without extensive demands on curricular time. BE instruction can incorporate LCC development without major curricular adjustments. Second, the course's tasks (i.e., the presentation and email) were found very useful by the participants because they aligned closely with participant's workplace needs (Chan, 2023), underlining the importance of domain and/or needs analyses in determining curricular design for relevant learning and teaching. In terms of methodology, the questionnaire and email assessments combined self-reports with performance. Successful implementation of the assessments provided evidence not only of participant improvement but also the utility of the LCC construct underpinning assessments of contemporary global English usage called for by researchers (Hu, 2018; Rose & Galloway, 2019). These implications can be leveraged in other business English curricula to develop the LCCs of users across contexts, accounting for the variability inherent in classroom practice. Finally, the LCC's descriptors offer a promising avenue toward understanding BELF's

transcultural communicative requirements for the ultimate purpose of addressing them pedagogically, as they are contextually bound, operationalizable, and serve to bridge the theory-practice gap problematized by researchers (e.g., Rose & Galloway, 2019).

The findings of this study can inform pedagogical practices that contribute to developing the transcultural communicative abilities of professionals who can create a more engaged and understanding international business environment in the future. After all, the primary motivation of most English language learners worldwide, and especially in China, is to develop skills that can be leveraged in the workplace (Cambridge English and Quacquarelli Symonds, 2016; He & Li, 2023; Patel et al., 2023). Even with calls to deemphasize English in Chinese curricula and a purported waning interest in learning English overall (Patel et al., 2023; *The Economist*, 2024), the participants of this study pursued language development vigorously. Indeed, workplace requirements are key drivers of English learning and motivation in Chinese society (He & Li, 2023). From that perspective BELF-informed pedagogy should be at the forefront of pedagogically-focused research globally, as it defines the communication to which learners aspire. Relatedly, as illustrated in this study, job-experienced professionals have a direct and tangible relationship with learning, as they are communicating in English with people from different backgrounds on a daily basis. Their authentic communicative needs provide a litmus test of the relevance and adequacy of the learning, and they have the experience to evaluate which competencies are important to them, as illustrated in the domain analysis and qualitative data arising from the intervention. Their input can inform the effective development of pedagogy not only for job-experienced learners but also pre-experienced learners who do not yet have experience-informed frames of reference (Authors, 2024, 2025c). Further, the LCCs support empathy, plurality, and home cultural expression. BELF learners are encouraged to communicate as themselves, from their own perspectives rather than trying to attain the cultural knowledge and skills of Anglo-

Americans. Amidst shifting geopolitical landscapes, discussions about globalization versus protectionism, and changes in economic conditions, industries, and sectors in the post-COVID era – combined with the use of English to communicate with all of the above – the competencies required for successful transcultural communication are more important than ever. Communication needs to remain open, empathetic, and clear. Such improvements will support business communication and connections between individuals and organizations globally.

Several limitations to this study should be acknowledged. The curriculum was of limited scope, including a single unit of a single Business English textbook to accommodate the heavy schedules of job-experienced participants with multiple responsibilities. In the future, researchers could design and enact an adapted curriculum that is greater in scale to parse out the competencies more definitively. Next, the sample population recruited for this study was broad, offering limited insight into specific populations of learners, such as those in different industries, job functions, or hierarchical levels. Future studies could target particular populations, providing insight into the LCC needs and development of diverse populations, how curricula within specific contexts could be enacted, and how different populations compare to each other. More empirical research is required to develop a greater understanding of how LCCs can be cultivated effectively in different groups of BE learners in various contexts.

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