Effects of a Customized Instruction on Korean EFL College Students’ Learning Achievement and Attitudes

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I. Introduction

One of the notable phenomena since 2000 in pursuit of improving Korean English learners’ communicative competence has been going abroad to study in countries where English is spoken as an official or de facto language. This phenomenon has been constantly growing and is evolving due to the increasing number of college students aspiring to improve their oral English communicative competence. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2011), more than 98,644 students have left Korea to take part in short-term study abroad programs in 2009, which represented double the number of learners who left Korea to study abroad since 2001.

However, the cost of English education in English speaking countries is expensive and Korean colleges have attempted to find various ways to offset the heavy economic burden for students by providing intensive English conversation programs in the country.

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(Rha, 2010). For instance, intensive English conversation camps designed for summer and winter breaks and after-school or extra-curricular programs have emerged as an alternative option for students who cannot afford to join study abroad language programs. For example, domestically-run, small-sized customized classes (1:1 or 1:5 instructor to student ratio) have been adapted to provide inexpensive yet effective ways of providing English conversation instruction to college students in Korea.

Although there are several studies on the effects of study abroad English programs on college students’ language learning experience in recent years, no in-depth research has been specifically conducted to find out the effects of small-sized, customized English conversation instructions on Korean EFL college students’ learning achievement and attitudes toward English learning. Since communicative competence is deemed as one of key specifications for college students in terms of successful job placement in Korea, mandatory speaking proficiency assessments such as English interview exams and the TOEIC Speaking scores are sometimes considered as a requirement for college graduation (Lee & Park, 2012). Thus, college students are faced with external motivation to improve their communicative competence (Jang 2012; Rha, 2011), specifically in speaking skills in English.

The purpose of this study is to examine how small-sized, customized English classes provided by a university language program in Korea affected the EFL learners’ communicative competence and their attitudes towards oral performances and their English learning. The research questions are as follows: 1) How has the customized English conversation classes affected the EFL learners’ learning achievement and communicative competence? 2) How has the customized English conversation classes affected the EFL learners’ attitudes towards English learning, and their satisfaction about their participation in the program? Based on the result of the second research question, a correlational relationship between the learners’ level of participation in classes and program satisfaction will be also