

AN EVALUATION OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT KASETSART UNIVERSITY USING COMMUNICATIVE AND GRAMMAR-BASED INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of communicative-based instruction and grammar-based instruction in teaching English to first-year Kasetsart University students. The subjects selected for the study were two classes of Kasetsart University first-year students registered in Foundation English I during the first semester 1999. The two classes were divided into two experimental groups taught with grammar-based text and communicative-based text respectively.

Tests for students' English proficiency in the four skills were assessed before and after forty-five instructional periods. Both experimental classes were given supplementary listening exercises, but the class taught with communicative-based text was also given a grammar supplement to study outside class to prepare for the mid-term and final examinations. The computer program SPSS was used to statistically analyze the pre-test and post test scores for medians, standard deviations, and variances. Two-tailed T-tests were conducted to test the significance for each.

Conclusions drawn from the study were:

1. The grammar-based instruction class made statistically significant gains in three skills namely listening, reading and speaking at the 0.05 significant level whereas no statistically significant improvement was found in writing.

Key words: text book, communicative-based instruction, grammar-based instruction

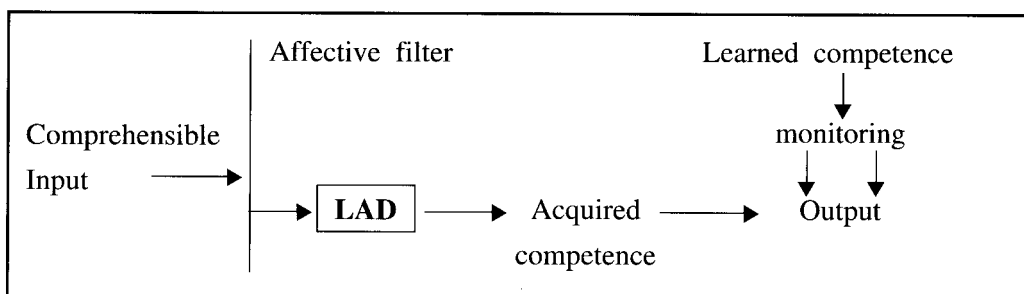
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2. The communicative-based instruction class made statistically significant gains in all four skills. A significant difference at the 0.05 level was found in listening, speaking and writing whereas the significant difference in reading was at the 0.10 level.

Research Background

Currently, one of the most interesting trends in language teaching and learning research is to find the most effective way to improve students' performance. The traditional reply concerning the basis for language teaching is to examine linguistic theory and attempt to restate existing formal grammar descriptions. So language teachers over the past decades emphasized linguistics which is about the study of language structure. Traditional grammar-translation, audio-lingual and structural methods, for example, are all applications of this principle. The content of learning was thought of in grammatical terms; therefore, most textbooks had a grammatical syllabus as their basis.

When Chomsky (cited in Krashen, 1981) stated his idea that language learning was not only a stimulus and response pattern but was also concerned with an inner ability something like a child's language learning strategy, a temporary reaction against the view of language learning and teaching occurred. He believed that there was a language acquisition device in the human brain which is called the LAD as shown in language acquisition diagram below which is based on Krashen and Terrell's (Krashen and Terrell, 1983: 30-39).



Krashen's idea led to a fundamental development in language learning and teaching. Instead of being considered as a set of structures, language teaching was considered in terms of communicative purposes. This created such learner-based syllabi as Asher's Total Physical Response (Asher, 1977), Wilkins' Notional-Functional Approach (Wilkins, 1976) and Krashen's Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell,

1983), from which the Communicative Approach was derived. This approach emphasizes class activities so that the students have to get information sometimes by learning to find their way round various documents in order to solve problems.

For the purpose of improving students' English proficiency at the beginning level, two textbooks for the Foundation English I course at Kasetsart University were developed: one is grammar-based while the other is communicative-based. The question was raised as to which method would enable the students to improve their proficiency the most by the end of the course. This research was designed to evaluate communicative-based and grammar-based instruction to find out which of these two methods would enable the students to improve their English proficiency the most.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of communicative-based instruction and grammar-based instruction in teaching English to first-year Kasetsart University students.

Hypotheses

In order to prove the effectiveness of these two methods, these hypotheses were analyzed.

1. The English proficiency of the students learning with communicative-based instruction gains positively in all skills.
2. The English proficiency of the students learning with grammar-based instruction gains positively in all skills.

Subjects

Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling were used to select the subjects for this study. They were two classes of first-year Kasetsart University students registered in the Foundation English I course during the first semester 1999. One class was taught with a grammar-based text and the other with communicative-based text.

Procedures

Two forty-five period lesson plans, one based on communicative-based instruction and the other on grammar-based instruction, were constructed.

A proficiency test was constructed to evaluate four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The tests of each skill consisted of 15 items and lasted 30 minutes. The listening skill was a fill-in and multiple choice objective test; the speaking, the reading and the writing skill tests were multiple-choice objective tests. The try-outs were arranged to find the level of difficulty and discrimination. The tests were given to both experimental groups before the instruction began and again after forty-five instructional periods. The SPSS computer program was used to statistically analyze the pre- test and the post-test scores and T-tests were conducted to test significance.

Findings

1. As shown in table 1, T-test analysis revealed that the experimental group taught with grammar-based instruction made statistically significant gains in three skills, namely, listening, speaking and reading, at the 0.05 significant level whereas there was no statistically significant difference found in the writing skill.

Table 1

Paired Samples Test for Grammar-Based Instruction Group

Difference = post test-pretest		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LISTPOS - LISTPRE	2.38	2.46	.39	1.59	3.16	6.114	39	.000 ^a
Pair 2	RDPOS - RDPRE	1.10	2.93	.46	.16	2.04	2.372	39	.023 ^a
Pair 3	SPKPOS - SPKPRE	.60	1.60	.25	8.89E-02	1.11	2.375	39	.023 ^a
Pair 4	WRPOS - WRPRE	-2.E-02	2.54	.39	-.80	.76	-.060	42	.952

^a. At the level of significance 0.05, there is statistically significant difference.

List pos = Listening post test
Listpre = Listening pre-test

2. Table 2 shows that the experimental group taught with communicative-based instruction made statistically significant gains in four skills. A significant difference at the 0.05 level was found in the listening, speaking and writing skills, and a significant difference at the 0.10 level was found in the reading skill.

Table 2
Paired Samples Test for Communicative-Based Group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	LISTPOS - LISTPRE	2.32	1.93	.36	1.57	3.07	6.379	27	.000 ^a
Pair 2	RDPOS - RDPRE	.79	2.88	0.50	-.23	1.81	1.571	32	.126 ^b
Pair 3	SPKPOS - SPKPRE	1.68	2.88	.49	.67	2.68	3.396	33	.002 ^a
Pair 4	WRPOS - WRPRE	2.10	2.29	.42	1.24	2.96	5.013	29	.000 ^a

^a. At the level of significance 0.05, there is statistically significant difference.

^b. At the level of significance 0.10, there is statistically significant difference.

List pos = Listening post test

Listpre = Listening pre-test

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study:

1. The statistical analysis of the pre- and post test scores of the grammar-based instruction group indicated the significant difference at 0.05 level only in listening, speaking and reading skills whereas there was no significance found in the writing skill. The fact that the students had supplementary exercises in the listening skill which might have assisted students' listening and speaking proficiency. This is consistent with Eugene A. Nida (cited in Robert W. Blair, ed., 1982), James J. Asher (1977), Krashen and Tracy D. Terrell (1983), Supaporn

Sukchuen's (1986) research findings that there was a transfer from listening input to the speaking skill. The fact that there was no statistically difference found in the writing skill indicated that teaching with a grammar-based method did not assist students' writing proficiency. This finding is consistent with Diana Frantzen's (1989) research finding that teaching with grammar-based method did not improve writing skill.

2. The statistical analysis of the pre- and post test scores of the communicative-based instruction group indicated significant differences at 0.05 level in listening, speaking and writing skills whereas there was a significant difference at 0.10 level existed in the reading skill. The results indicated that teaching with a communicative-based method enhanced students' proficiency. It was also observed that students showed positive attitude toward learning English in the classroom. This finding is consistent with Carmen Villegas Rogers' (1985) research findings that an increase in communicative activities in the classroom could be beneficial to students' attitudes.

Recommendations

1. To increase positive attitude, instructors should use communicative activities in the classroom.

2. Grammar-based instruction didn't assist the learners' development in writing. Thus, grammar explanation should be limited to a short time period in order to create a positive attitude toward learning.

3. Textbooks should be communicative-based, should offer a variety of activities and should have only essential grammar explanation.

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