Learner Centered EFL Exams & Grading: A Classroom Study of Effectiveness
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Abstract

The purpose of this Classroom Action Research study was to: 1) refine the definition of the Learner Centered (LC) Learning Model, 2) develop LC Objectives based on this definition for exams and grading, 3) create a new form of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) examination and grading methodology which meet these LC Objectives, 4) measure the effectiveness of this LC exam and grading experience, and 5) compare the effectiveness of this LC experience with traditional exam and grading methods. 118 university undergraduate and graduate learners took a midterm exam (multiple choice or essay), were graded and then surveyed. Even though the majority of the learners in the study were teacher centered and had not experienced this new LC EFL Essay Exam, or this new LC Grading Method before: the learners reported that they were tested and graded more fairly and more accurately, than traditional exam and grading methods. In addition, learners in the study reported this LC EFL Essay Exam and LC Grading Method: supported their independent thinking, assessed knowledge they felt was important, and provided a valuable learning experience.

Introduction

From Pedagogy to Andragogy

The current educational reform in Thailand may be one of the most exiting developments in the history of education. In light of the policy mandates within the Education Act of 1999 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2542), for the first time, on a national basis, students will be empowered with classroom decision making so they can learn for their own purposes and interests.

Andragogy – Adult Learning using the Learner Centered (LC) Approach, will replace Pedagogy – the Teacher Centered Approach. "The age of the learner," which has been discussed for over 10 years may finally arrive in the classrooms across the nation (Dickinson, 1997:vii). Now teachers across Thailand must translate the policies and guidelines in the Education Reform Act into learning models, learning objectives and classroom methods.

Both the lives and learning styles of teachers and students will be enriched as andragogy supports the individual's natural passion for learning. Student apathy will decrease and may entirely disappear as they take on the responsibility for their education.

Students will acquire self-instruction, process knowledge and collaborative learning skills that they will use throughout their lives. The teacher's classroom experience will become a thrilling adventure of discovery and invention. In their new LC roles, teacher's will gain more respect and value through the process of empowering students with self determination.

From Passive Student to Active Learner

Students will become life long learners – with the skills and maturity to guide their own education and personal development. Every learner will be honored and respected for their individual differences and opinions instead of rewarded for giving correct answers. Learners will be self-motivated, involved and active: not passive and bored. **Students study** what they are told to, while **learners** know how to **learn** for themselves.

From Teacher to LC Educator

The leadership of their learners will enrich the life of the LC Educator as they explore together. Teachers will learn and change along with the learners. The role of the Teacher will change

into learning: Adventure Companion, Process Facilitator, Mirror of emotions and ideas, Learner Guardian and Learning Environment Engineer – not only the source of correct answers.

From Classroom to Learning Environment

The classroom will become a learning environment of options and **choices within limits** – a rich "Forest of Invention & Discovery." Process Knowledge, i.e. "learning how to learn," "learning how to work together and alone," will be more important than remembering facts. Collaborative task based learning will replace "present-practice and produce." "One to one" and "many to many" communication will replace "one to many" communication. Learners and teachers will co-create classroom materials and resources. Learners will teach each other and guide their own learning in a collaborative, cooperative, task based environment.

How can we make these changes?

Through a gradual, step by step process. Both the teacher and the student will need training – new Learner Centered skills. First, the teacher must research learner centered methods (see References of this study for good sources) and select those which match the teacher's style. Second, the teacher must translate the policies in the Education Reform Act into their own: Learning Model, Learning Objectives, Methods and Activities. Third, the teacher must focus on "Learner Training." Teacher centered students must have the skills to become a "learner" and make responsible decisions. Fourth, when the teacher has transformed themselves into a Learner Centered Educator, and is comfortable with their new role and the students have become Learner Centered Learners, only then can the classroom implement advanced LC methods. Applying advanced learner centered methods with teacher centered students, will lead to disaster. Advanced learner centered methods require an elegant and seamless collaboration between LC Educator and Learner, such that they can together *co-create*: curriculum, learning strategies and objectives, lesson plans, activities and materials.

All of these changes will take time to unfold in a natural manner. Classroom Action Research must be implemented by each LC Educator to guide them down their unique path to andragogy.

This study was undertaken specifically for this purpose of instructor development – to advance my skills as a learner centered educator and better lead my students to their new learner centered dynamic classroom environment.

Purpose

Create, Measure & Compare

This study was performed in the tradition of "Classroom Action Research" developed in the 1980's for the purpose of instructor development (Davis, Garside, Rinvoluceri, 1999.)

The Instructor/researcher's ongoing goal is to develop new learner centered classroom techniques, test their effectiveness and use them in class. Exams and grading are only one aspect of this endeavor.

Specifically, the purpose of this study was to: (1) refine the definition of LC Learning, 2) develop a list of LC Objectives based on this definition for exams and grading, 3) create a new form of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) examination and a grading methodology which meet these LC Objectives, 4) measure the effectiveness of this LC exam and grading experience, and 5) compare the effectiveness of this new LC experience with traditional exam and grading methods, **using the learners' perspective.**

In addition, the Instructor intended to create a new EFL exam and grading method, which from the learners' perspective, would be a *valuable learning experience in itself.*

Through the process of this study the Instructor/researcher intended to further define his own Learner Centered Learning Model (LCLM) based on his experience as a Rogerian Depth Psychologist, Music Teacher and English Teacher.

The Instructor/researcher had given a moderately learner centered, Short Answer-Multiple Choice-Essay Exam the previous semester. Some of those fourth year undergraduate English majors complained about the Learner Centered exam. This study intended to find out if the majority of learners value the a LC Exam and Grading method.

Significance

Toward Learner Centeredness

The classroom research methodology, learning model, objectives, and methods applied in this study can serve as models for instructor development and classroom research in all academic areas. The LC Grading Method used in the study can be applied across a wide age range of learner's in many academic disciplines. The "Triage" exam technique developed in this study can also be tailored and applied to many different subject areas and learner age groups.

Classroom Action Research in the area of Learner Centered Learning supports the policies set forth in the National Education Act B.E. 2542.

Scope

The scope of this study was limited to first year and third year undergraduate university students and first year university graduate students, studying English as a foreign language. While the study, very likely, has a high degree of internal validity, its data results may not generalize to other student populations.

Given that the purpose of this study was instructor development, external validity of the data findings does not fall within its scope.

LC Model Foundations

An Individual Definition

Each instructor must define a learning model for themselves, according to their own style, skills, expertise and teaching situation - such that they can apply it in a natural manner.

The Learner Centered Learning Model (LCLM) definition below can be used as your "springboard." It is based on the experience of the Instructor and specifically on the work of the: 1) classic Greek scholar - Socrates, 2) progressive educator—Bernard Dufeu (Dufue, 1995), 3) humanist psychologist - Carl Rogers (Rogers, 1983), 4) the revolutionary learner centered educator - Maria Montessori (Rambush & Stoops, 1992) and 5) the contructionist/contructivist and humanism movements which began in the 1960s in America (Honebein, 1996).

Moreover, the LCLM definition below implements the policies set forth in Thailand's National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999) which mandates a change from teacher centered learning to learner centered learning.

Socrates

Socrates was a learner centered educator in Athens Greece in the 6th century B.C. (Note: Ancient Athens was the world's first democratic society.) He is most famous for the "peripatetic" method of teaching: Socrates taught his students by **only asking questions and never giving them answers.**

Montessori

Maria Montessori worked with the pioneer of child psychology and child development – Jean Piaget. Based on Piaget's work, she developed a learner-centered model and created the Montessori

Schools, which have proliferated around the world. Studies have proven that Montessori learner centered students perform no better and no worse than teacher centered students, based upon nationwide standardized achievement tests used in the USA.

Rogers

Carl Rogers is most famous for his school of "Client-Centered" Therapy. Client-Centered Therapy is characterized by valuing the client's feelings and desires over the therapist's. In fact, advice (answers) from the therapist has no value and is never given to the client. Rogers' contribution to Learner Centered Learning is found in his book "Freedom to Learn for the '80's." Rogers encouraged a climate of trust in the classroom where, **the natural curiosity and desire to learn is nourished** and the feeling of shame is never experienced. Rogers' life work was dedicated to **valuing the individual, building their confidence and self-esteem**. He created techniques which support the internal self determination and validation of the client without imposing external judgments by the therapist (Rogers, 1983).

Dufue

Dufue felt that learning a foreign language was a "way of being" not a "way of knowing" (Dufue, 1995). He valued the horizontal sharing and expansion of knowledge over the vertical transmission of knowledge. He felt that language usage is both a conscious and unconscious activity. He felt that language should be "lived" and "experienced" (Dufue, 1995).

Jung

Dr. Jung is most well known for coining the terms: "extrovert and "introvert." He pioneered the school of "depth psychology" which focuses on universal symbols and the process of maturing from childhood to adulthood.

One of the most thrilling and important aspects of life is a change: "personal transformation" or in the word of Dr. C. G. Jung, "metanioa." Jung is the psychologist of the individual, the artist and the dreamer. He found the healing power in the imagination and in symbols. He felt that becoming an adult required metanioa.

(When I, as instructor, change because of the classroom experience, because of my interaction with learners, only then do I feel that my learners have learned something important.)

A LC Learning Model

The following learning model developed by the Instructor/researcher for this study, is based on the work of the individuals listed above along with recently published LC Educators and the Education Reform Act of B.E. 2542.

Universal Values

The LC Instructor supports the universal values of: "self-respect, acceptance of the uniqueness and dignity of each person we meet, kindness, peacefulness, compassion, empathy, honor, individual responsibility, and courage to speak from our hearts" (Rambush & Stoops, 1992).

Supporting Independence

Judgment, independent thinking, coherence of thought, supporting evidence and clear communication are valued over answers the LC Educator feels are correct. Disagreeing with the instructor is encouraged instead of suppressed.

For example: individual verbal defense of exam questions is encouraged and in this way supports the "learners interests and aptitudes, bearing in mind individual differences" (Office of the

Prime Minister, 1999: 11). There are no right and wrong opinions, however, some opinions are stronger (have more evidence) than others.

Decision Making

Class members must be empowered with classroom decision-making. A Menu of Learning Options should always be available to the learners. Learners should be able to responsibly select democratically or individually from the menu. Classroom decision making is transferred to the learner's *only* as their decision-making skills grow to accept the responsibility (Tudor, 1996).

Support Innate Creativity

The LC Instructor must provide activities, which support the learners' innate "creativity" and "thirst for knowledge" (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 5). and allow the learners to decide which activities they want to do. The LC Educator is led by the interests and desires of the individual learner - "enabling them to develop themselves" (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 11).

No Shame

Each learner is valued as a "universe of one" (Rambush & Stoops, 1992). All opinions, ideas and feelings are valued and respected. There is no room for shame in the classroom.

Guarding Individuality

The LC Educator acts as a strong **Guardian** for each learner's individuality and the climate of respect and trust in the classroom. The LC Educator must "provide experience in and appreciation for: multiple perspectives" (Honebein, 1996).

Nurturing the Passion to Learn

The LC Educator must support the learner's "passion for self chosen work," (Rambush & Stoops, 1992) such that the learner is **internally motivated,** versus externally motivated to learn.

Internal motivation means that a learner learns for their own "self development," (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 3) to become a "continuous life long learner," (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 3) and thereby improve their "quality of life." (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 3) Internal motivations include: a) the thrill of mastering a skill, b) a feeling of enrichment, c) personal transformation, d) an increased feeling of self-esteem, self-trust, and self-confidence.

External motivations are: a) the grade, b) what the teacher wants, c) what the parents want, or d) the academic degree the student is working toward.

Roles of the LC Educator

The LC Educator's role in the classroom changes along with the needs and desires of the learners, where both "the learners and teachers learn together" (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 11).

The LC Educator is "an active participant" in class activities (Campbell & Kryszewska, 2000: 6). Examples of LC Instructor roles are: **Learning Adventure Companion**, **Learning Assistant**, and **Process Facilitator**. The LC Educator acts as a "**Mirror**" reflecting the individual learner's thoughts and feelings. The LC Educator acts as a role model, always: "exceptionally calm, kind, warm, and polite" to each learner (Rambush & Stoops, 1992).

Along with the learners, the LC Educator acts as **Learning Environmental Engineer** to co-locate learning resources and co-create learning materials, which enrich the classroom environment. The materials include many modes for "discovery, offering a wide range of intellectual challenges" (Rambush & Stoops, 1992). As students become more skillful, responsible learners, then classroom materials can be created by learners themselves.

Constant Change

The classroom environment is constantly changing according to the learner's need to live in the world of tomorrow.

Authentic Experiences

The LC Educator must provide "activities for learners to draw from authentic experience," and "provide knowledge and skills in pursuing one's career and capability of leading a happy life" (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999: 11). Simulations are not enough. Real life situations and issues must be brought into the classroom experience. Things must "happen" in class.

Small Group Activities

Most of the learning takes place during small groups exercises and tasks (Cooperative Learning) as well as the learner working on their own (Autonomous Learning). The LC Classroom is "a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in their guided pursuit of learning goals and problem-solving activities" (Wilson, 1996: 5).

Not "One to Many" Interaction

Most classroom communication is not "one to many" (Teacher Centered), but "one to one" and "many to many" (Collaborative).

Cooperation Not Competition

Cooperation is valued over competition. The LC Educator does not compare learner performance, but honors each learner's performance independently from other learners'.

Process Knowledge

Process knowledge is valued over content knowledge. Process knowledge in this context includes: the processes of: learning how to learn, performing research, learning how to ask questions, integrating knowledge, refining skills, and solving problems - both individually and in a group. Process Knowledge also includes thinking processes such as: creative, analytical, critical, inductive, deductive and synthetic reasoning. Process Knowledge also includes the social skills needed to accomplish a task in a group.

Self Assessment

The Learner will regularly perform self assessment to more effectively guide their own development (Dickenson, 1987). Through self assessment the learner can become of aware of their own learning process and better guide themselves.

Supporting Cultural Identity

Teaching the culture of English speaking countries along with language may be a dangerous activity with the already pervasive and powerful movement toward globalization.. The depth and richness of traditional Thai Culture must be honored and supported, it must not be lost. Learners should be encouraged to be ambassadors of Thailand to other countries, using their English to describe their history, art, music, traditions, values, folklore, customs, worldviews, etc. EFL Learners should be supported and encouraged to use their English skills to "export" Thai culture and not "import" European or American culture. Thai learners of English should be taught to think in English, but not taught to think like people from English speaking countries.

Exam & Grading Objectives   The
Learner Centered Triage Essay Exam and the Learner Centered Grading Method used in this study, were created using the LCLM definition above, as interpreted into the following Ten Objectives for LC Examination and Grading. The effectiveness of the LC Essay exams and LC grading method were measured using the following objectives.

Objective # 1 - Provide the learners with an exam and grading experience which delivers a valuable learning experience in itself.

Objective # 2 - Reward the student for taking responsibility for their education and choosing to learn what was important for them, for their own interests and unique goals, rather than learning for the purpose of "getting a good grade."

Objective # 3 - Reward the student for simple and clear Communicative English. "Fewer words – more meaning. More meaning – more points."

Objective # 4 - Provide the student with an authentic, real life experience of having to make difficult decisions within a limited time which develops and measures the skill of "Triage."

Objective # 5 - Reward the student for independent thinking.

Objective # 6 - Cover the entire contents of the course taught over 7 weeks.

Objective # 7 - Accurately assess the knowledge learned and skills developed by the learner.

Objective # 8 - Use a method of grading which is less subjective, more quantitative and fairer than traditional essay grading.

Objective # 9 - Increase the objectivity of the exam experience by grading through using a - point for "point" system. (One point is awarded for each idea on the LC Triage Essay Exam that is clearly communicated and understood by the Instructor/grader.)

Objective # 10 - Allow the student to defend their written exam answer verbally by using their speaking, listening, and thinking skills.

The LC "Triage" Exam
There is not enough time in life to finish all that we set out to accomplish. The primary reason we start projects and don't finish them is because we simply "ran out of time." The most common reason learners don't finish their homework is because they "didn't have enough time." Time management and priority setting are important skills for academic achievement, career achievement and personal life achievement.
People with good time management and priority setting skills: will not only be more successful in academic work, but will achieve more in their profession and feel more satisfied with their personal lives.
A unique exam was created for this study – The Triage Essay Exam. "Triage" is a French word meaning – save the savable. It describes the difficult decision making process used by doctors in battlefield hospitals. They must decide which wounded soldiers they will operate on and which they must leave to die.
A "Triage" exam provides the learner with an authentic learning experience, not a simulation. A "Triage" exam both teaches and measures: judgment skills with regard to time management and priority setting, because the exam is designed such that there is not enough time to answer all the questions. Triage can be explained but the skill cannot be mastered without using it in an authentic

situation. The Triage Essay Exam created for this study was designed to satisfy the exam and grading objectives of the LCLM (see Findings By Objective).

The Triage ESL Essay Exam was comprised of 15 essay questions. Answering all of them would require more than the 3 hours allowed for the exam. LC Essay Exams must include questions such as: "The most important things I learned in this class are:" and "The most important things I learned in this class were how to:"

A LC Grading Method

The LC Triage Essay Exam and LC Grading Method created for this study, was designed such that learners can report knowledge and use skills *they felt* were important, (not only what the instructor felt was important, or correct.) The Triage Essay Exam was graded on a – point for "point" basis. Each idea that was understood by the Instructor was awarded one point. Even ideas that disagreed with the Instructor's opinion were awarded a point. There was no limit to the number of points a learner could earn on each question. There was no penalty for not answering a question. The only limitation was time.

During the grading of multiple choice exams the instructor asked for answers from the class until the class' answer matched the instructor's answer for each exam item. If an individual learner's answer did not match the instructor's, then the individual learner could verbally defend their answer and were given points if they provided coherent supporting evidence in clear and simple communicative English.

Methodology

Measuring Effectiveness

This study assumes that exam and grading effectiveness can only be measured through matching survey response data against the objectives set forward. Therefore the study proceeded through the following process: 1) Create the LCLM Definition, 2) Create the Ten LCLM Objectives for Exams and Grading, 3) Create the Triage Exam, 4) Create the survey instrument (a 7 point scale questionnaire), 5) Administer the exam and grading experience, 6) Administer the Survey instrument (English Version), 7) Analyze Survey Response Data, 8) Translate the survey questionnaire into the Thai language, 9) Administer the Thai version of the questionnaire, 10) Analyze Survey Response Data, 11) Interview sample members at random to interpret data results, 12) Interpret results by combining survey data with interviews, 13) Draft Report & Distribute to selected Faculty and Students for review and feedback, 14) Draft final paper, and 15) Draft this summary paper.

Only the results of the **Thai language survey data** and interviews were used in the findings summary below.

Study Sample Groups

There were four Sample Groups totaling 118 learners. Learners' ages ranged from approximately 19 to 35 years. Each Sample Group experienced **different course content**. Learners in each sample had **different levels of ESL proficiency**.

The Learner Centered classroom methods used increased from Sample 4 to Sample 1. Sample 1 experienced the highest level of learner centered classroom methods. The **same instructor taught all learners** in the Samples. The instructor did not write the exam used in Sample 4 but did administer the grading method for Sample 4.

Sample 1 was comprised of **12** students out of a population of 13 First Year ESL graduate students in the International MA English Program. The course title was "English for Academic Purposes." It focused on the study skills required for academic success. These learners were given the new **LC Triage Essay Exam.** They were allowed to defend their exam answers verbally. This Sample Group experienced a **learner-centered exam** with **learner-centered grading**. The exam and grading system was created and administered by the same instructor.

Sample 2 was comprised of **41** students out of a population of 43 Third Year ESL undergraduate English majors who were given a **traditional multiple choice exam.** The course title was "Children's Literature." They were allowed to defend their answers verbally. This was a **teacher-centered exam** with **learner-centered grading**. This exam and the grading system were created and administered by the same instructor.

Sample 3 was comprised of **35** students out of a population of 43 First Year ESL undergraduate English majors who answered a **multiple-choice exam** after listening to a tape-recorded conversation. The course title was "Listening and Speaking One." This was a **teacher-centered exam** with **learner-centered grading**. They were allowed to defend their answers verbally. The exam and the grading system were created and administered by the same instructor.

Sample 4 was comprised of **30** students out of a population of 37 First Year undergraduate students of mixed majors who were given a **multiple choice and cloze text exam**, which covered listening, reading and writing. The title of the course was "English for Communication." It is the first English course taken by all entering freshman. Learners were allowed to defend their answers verbally. This was a **teacher-centered exam** with **learner-centered grading**. This exam was **not** created by the instructor/researcher. However, this course was taught, and the grading of the exam (verbal defense of answers) was administered by the same instructor.

Isolating & Controlling for Extraneous Variables

In order to measure the effectiveness of the LC Triage Essay Exam and LC Grading Method itself, we needed to isolate and eliminate extraneous variables. For example, the same instructor taught and graded all Sample Groups in the study. The same instructor created all exams **except** for the Sample 4 exam. This way the study results would not be skewed by having a different instructor teach each course. The Sample 4 exam was a standard multiple choice teacher centered exam given to all first year students. In this way we can compare the effectiveness of an exam not created by the Instructor-researcher with the three exams that were created by the Instructor-researcher.

Extraneous variables controlled for included: 1) age difference, 2) EFL proficiency difference, 3) the difference of learner-centeredness in the survey respondent and 4) the level of learner-centered methods applied by the instructor in each of the four classes.

Findings Summary by Objective

Legend for All Charts

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1 = EFL Graduate Students - LC Triage Essay Exam & LC Grading Method
2 = Third Year Undergraduate EFL Majors - Teacher Centered Exam & LC Grading Method
3 = First Year Undergraduate EFL Majors - Teacher Centered Exam & LC Grading Method
4 = First Year Undergraduate Mixed Majors - Teacher Centered Exam & LC Grading Method

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Objective # 1 - Provide the learners with an exam and grading experience which delivers a valuable learning experience in itself. Survey Statement #19 "**I learned something important from the experience of taking and grading this exam.**"

100
80
60
40
20
0

1   2   3   4
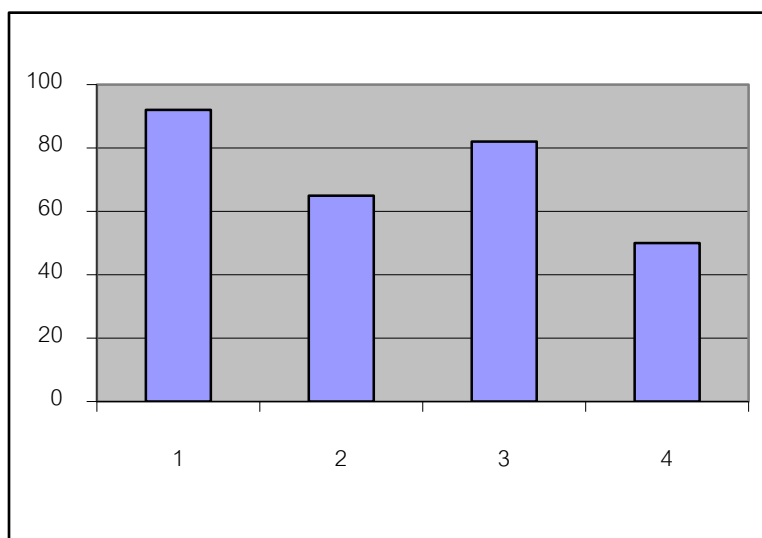
Percent Agreed

Eleven of twelve (92%) graduate students in Sample 1 who took the LC Triage Essay Exam and LC Grading Method agreed with this statement. Eighty percent of the first year English Majors in Sample 3, who took a teacher centered multiple choice exam and experienced the LC Grading Method, agreed with this statement. Only half (50%) of the learners in Sample 4 (first year mixed majors) agreed with the statement.

Objective # 2 - Reward the student for taking responsibility for their education and choosing to learn what was important for them, for their own interests and unique goals, rather than learning for the purpose of "getting a good grade." Survey Statement #9 **"This exam allowed me to answer with the knowledge I felt was important**."

100
80
60
40
20
0

1   2   3   4
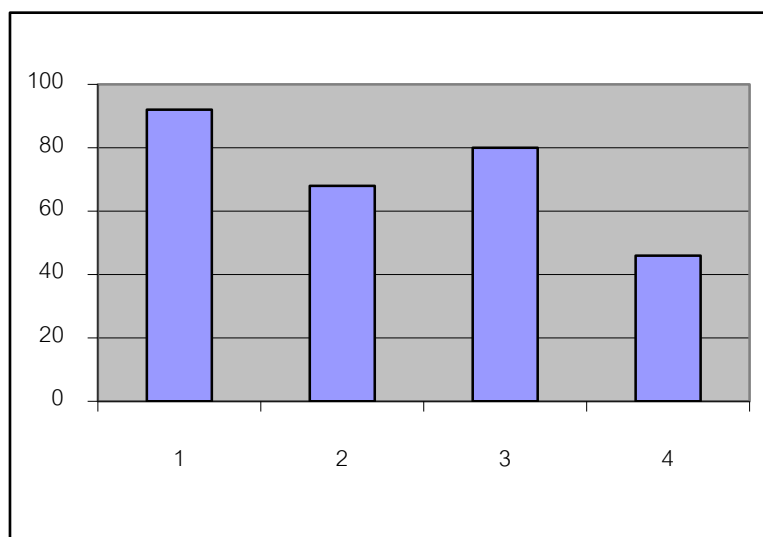
Percent Agreed

Eleven of twelve (92%) of the learners in Sample 1 agreed with the statement. While only 46% of the learners in Sample 4 (first year mixed majors), who took a teacher centered exam, agreed with the statement. This is a clear indication that the LC Triage Exam is more effective than a teacher centered exam in achieving the LCLM Objective.
Survey Statement #5 **"On the exam, I was able to report what I thought was interesting to learn during the last seven weeks of this class."**
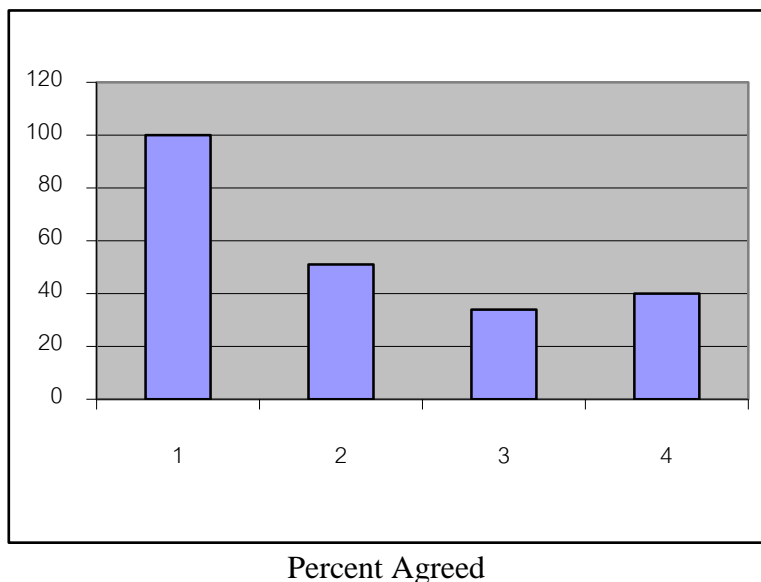
Percent Agreed

All twelve MA English students (100%) in Sample 1 agreed with the statement, while only 40% of the learners in Sample 4 and 36% in Sample 3 agreed with the statement. Clearly, the LC Triage Exam was more effective than a teacher centered exam in achieving the LCLM Objective.
Survey Statement # 6"**On the exam, I was *only* able to report what the teacher thought was important to learn during the last seven weeks of this class.**"
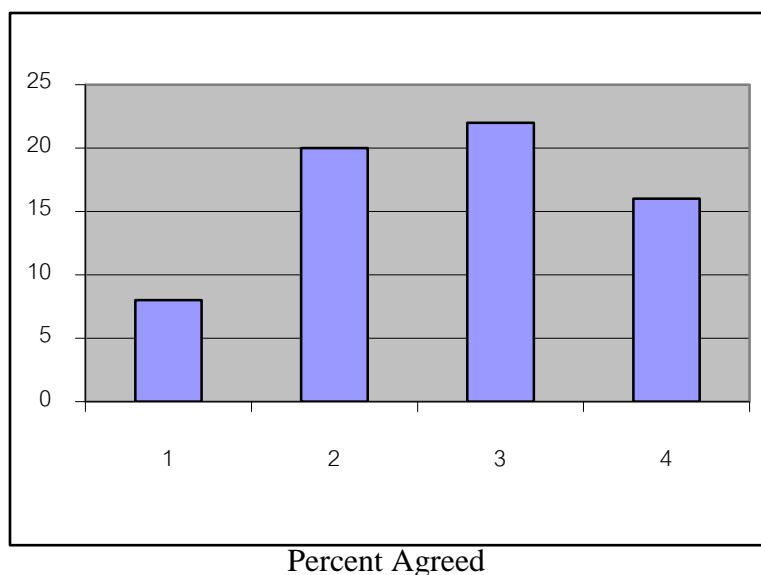
Percent Agreed

The LC Grading Method of verbal defense allowed learners to disagree with the instructor and earn points for knowledge they felt was important. The low percentages in all samples indicate that the LC Grading Method influences the learners' perception of the exam. Note that the lowest percentage – 8% of Sample 1, indicates that the combination of LC Exam and LC Grading best achieves Objective #2.

Objective # 3 - Reward the student for simple and clear communicative English. "Fewer words – more meaning. More meaning – more points." Survey Statement #18 "**Students who used simple and clear "Communicative English" got a higher grade for their answer, than those who used a lot of words in their answer**."
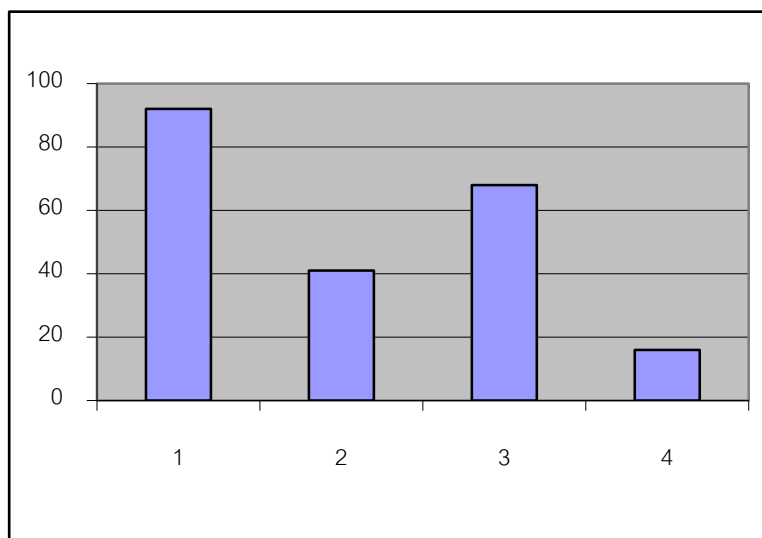
Percent Agreed

Again, eleven of twelve MA English Majors in Sample 1 agreed with this statement. While only 16% of Sample 4 agreed with the statement. The combination of teacher centered exam and LC grading method used in a class of first year mixed majors with limited English ability resulted in a low agreement with this statement. Sample 3 (a group of first year English majors in the International Program at RIU) agreed with the statement – 82%. Even though they took a teacher-centered exam, their English ability allowed them to defend their exam items. Those learners, who observed the LC Grading, could see that the use of simple and clear communicative English got more points.

Objective # 4 - Provide the student with an authentic real life experience of having to make difficult decisions within a limited time which develops and measures the skill of "Triage."
Survey Statement #10 "**This exam tested my judgment more than other exams that I have taken in the past. (Judgement in this context means – time management and priority setting.)**"
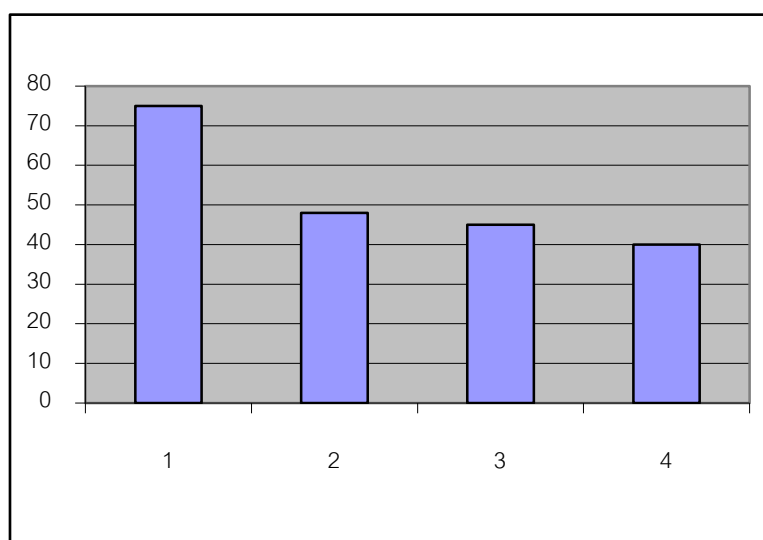
Percent Agreed

We would expect lower levels of agreement with the statement for Samples 2, 48%, 3 - 45% and 4 - 40% because these exams were not "Triage" exams – all the learners had time to complete the exam. During an interview, 100% of Sample 1 agreed with the statement. This confirms that the Triage

Essay Exam does achieve the objective it was designed for – to provide a "Triage" learning experience.

Objective # 5 - Reward the student for independent thinking. Survey Statement #16
"**The questions and the grading of this exam encourage student's independent thinking.**"
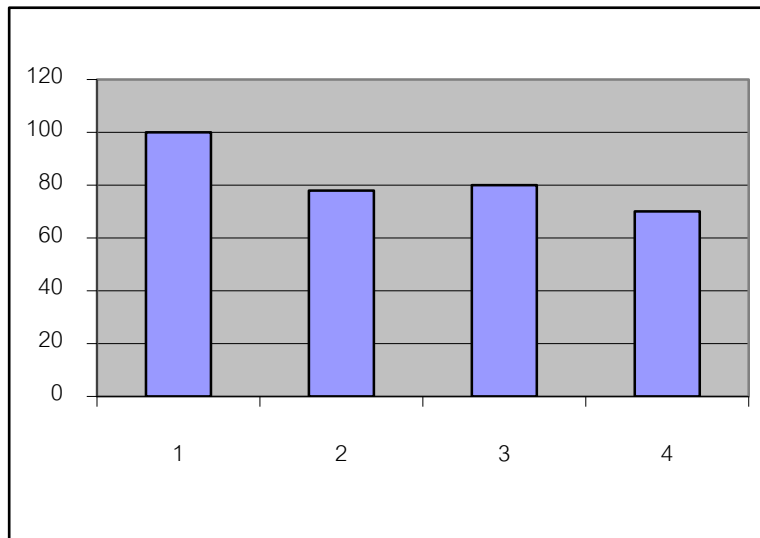
Percent Agreed

All groups had a high percentage of agreement with the statement – Sample 1 agreed 100%, Sample 2 78%, Sample 3 88%, and Sample 4 70%. In that the LC Grading Method was applied to all Samples by the Instructor/researcher, we would expect their survey responses to be somewhat homogenous.

The Sample A respondents who took the LC Triage Essay Exam - where a student's essay answer opinion, written in Communicative English was awarded points, even if it disagreed with the instructor - explains the 100% agreement with the statement. It is clear that the *combination* of the LC Triage Essay Exam and LC Grading Method applied in Sample 1, was the most effective in achieving the LCLM Objective #5, when compared to teacher centered testing.

LCLM Objective # 6 - Cover the entire contents of the course taught over 7 weeks.
Survey Statement #4 **"The questions in the exam covered almost every topic
that was taught by the teacher during the first 7 weeks of the course**."
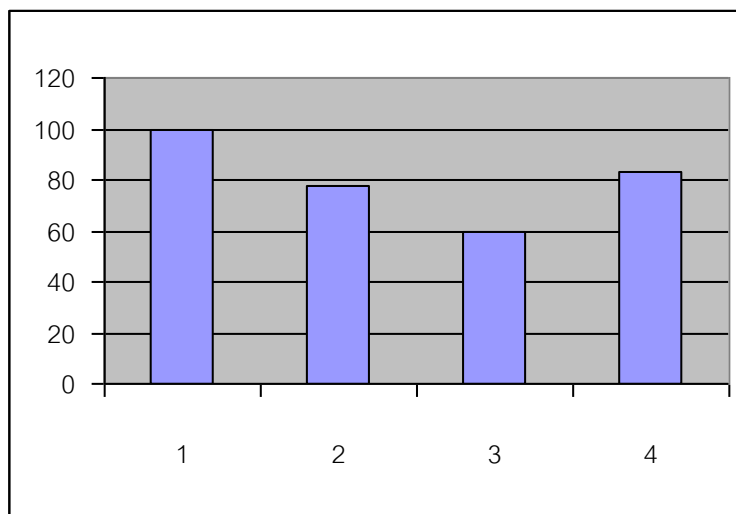

Percent Agreed

Again the majority of all samples agreed with the statement. Sample 1 agreed 100%, Sample 2 78%, Sample 3 60% and 83% of Sample 4. All of the exams were comprehensive exams covering the first half of the semester. Based on these results, it is unclear if there is a significant difference between the LC Exam and teacher- centered exams in achieving this objective. The LC Triage Exam may be somewhat more effective, based on the 100% agreement of Sample 1.

LCLM Objective # 7 - Accurately assess the knowledge learned and skills developed by the learner. Survey Statement #17 "**I felt that my grade on this exam is an accurate assessment of what I learned during the first seven weeks of this course**."

Percent Agreed
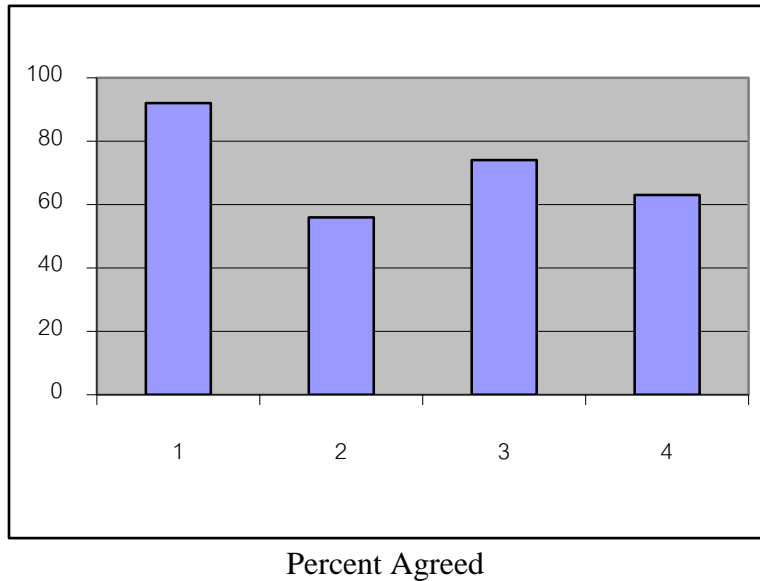
Eleven of twelve (92%) of the MA students agreed with the statement. While only 56% of Sample 2, 74% of Sample 3 and 63% of Sample 4 agreed with the statement. Clearly the combination of the LC Triage Exam and the LC Grading Method were the most effective at achieving the LCLM objective.

Survey Statement #11"**There were no questions for some topics I studied. So the teacher doesn't know from this exam, all that I learned during the first seven weeks of this course**."

Percent **Disagreed**
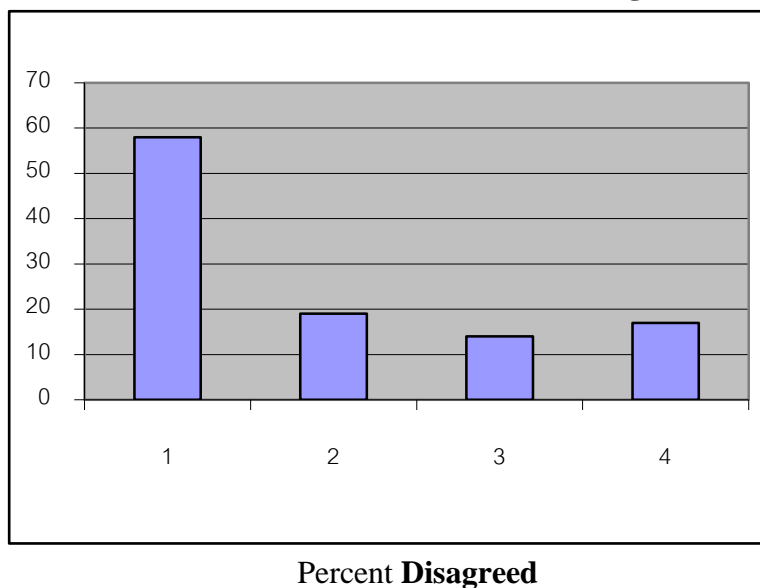
During interviews with Sample 1, 100% **disagreed** with the statement. While only 19% of Sample 2, 14% of Sample 3 and 17% of Sample 4 **disagreed** with the statement. It is clear from these results that the LC Triage Exam does a better job of assessing what the student learned than teacher centered exams.

LCLM Objective # 8 - Use a method of grading which is less subjective, more quantitative and fairer than traditional essay grading. Survey Statement # 20 "**I felt I was graded fairly**."
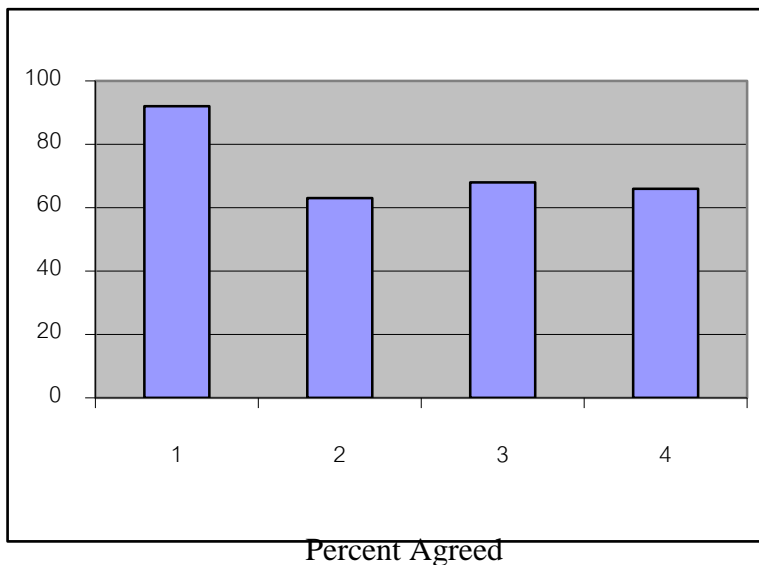
Percent Agreed

Again, 92% of Sample 1 agreed with the statement, while only 63% of Sample 2, 68% of Sample 3 and 66% of Sample 4 agreed with the statement. The teacher centered exam and LC Grading Method used in Samples 2, 3, and 4 resulted in the small majority of them feeling they were graded fairly.

Note that during interviews some learners in all Samples said it **was unfair to allow for the verbal defense of the exam in English because those with inferior English skills will get a lower score.** In addition, those learners without the confidence to disagree with the instructor would also get a lower score. Even so the majority of the learners felt they were graded fairly. The highest degree of fairness was reported by Sample 1 who took the LC Triage Essay Exam.

Survey Statement #8 **"This exam is fairer than multiple choice exams I have taken in the past."**
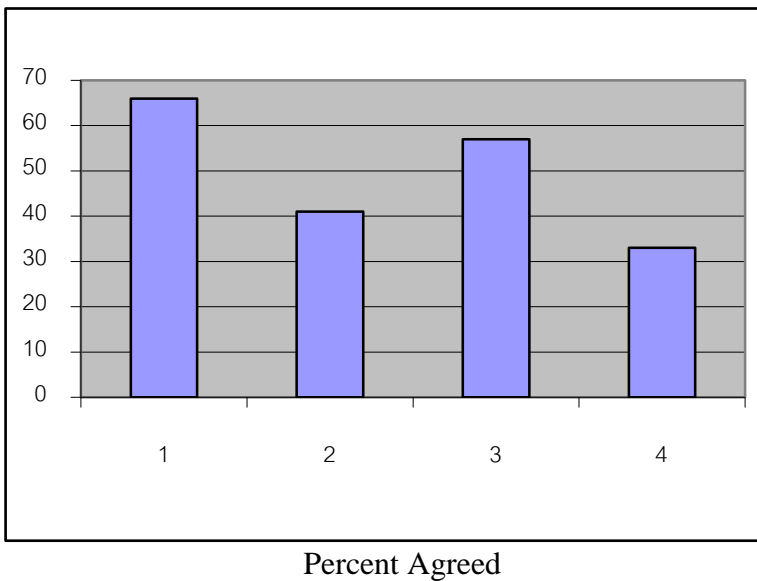
Percent Agreed

The "low" percentage for Sample 1 - 66% can be explained by their anxiety and discomfort of the new experience of taking a "Triage" Essay exam. Based on interviews with learners in Sample 1, most felt it was not fair that they didn't have time to complete the exam. The majority of Sample 1 learners reported that in the past they always had time to finish their exams in the time allowed.

The low percentage shown in Sample 2 and 3 can be explained in that the exam did not cover the entire course contents. Yet, even with this low percentage, it is clear again, that the *combination* of the LC Triage Essay Exam and LC Grading Method in Sample A was the most effective in achieving the LCLM Objective #8.

Objective # 9 - Increase the objectivity of the exam experience by grading through using a point for "point" system. (One point is awarded for each idea on the LC Triage Essay Exam that is clearly communicated and understood by the Instructor/grader.) Survey Statement #12 **"Overall, this type of exam is fairer than essay exams I have taken in the past."**


Percent Agreed
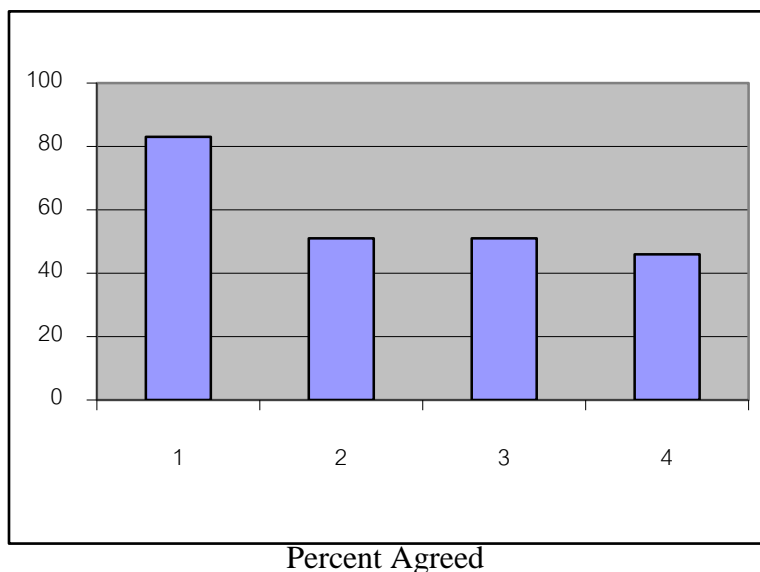
Given that the vast majority of Sample 1 81%, agreed with the statement is interesting, while only 51% of Sample 2 and 3 felt this type of exam was fairer than multiple choice exams. Perhaps the learners are trying to send a message to the instructor that they prefer multiple choice exams over essay. During interviews with Sample 1, they reported that they felt multiple choice exams were easier than essay. Half of the learners in each of the other Samples thought their multiple choice exam was fairer than other essay exams they have taken in the past. (Perhaps, all students prefer multiple choice exams, which deliver points for guessing.)

There is a significant difference between Sample 1 versus 2, 3, and 4. The majority of Sample 1 learners considered the LCLM Triage Exam to be fairer, which is surprising given that these learners did not have time to complete the exam. It is clear that the LC Triage Essay Exam applied in Sample 1 was considered fairer.

Objective # 10 - Allow the student to defend their written exam answer verbally by using their speaking, listening, and thinking skills under the pressure of a real life experience – not a simulation. Survey Statement #13 **"This exam was actually more than a writing and reading exam because those students who could *verbally* persuade the teacher that their answer was correct - got more points. It tested listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking."**

Percent Agreed
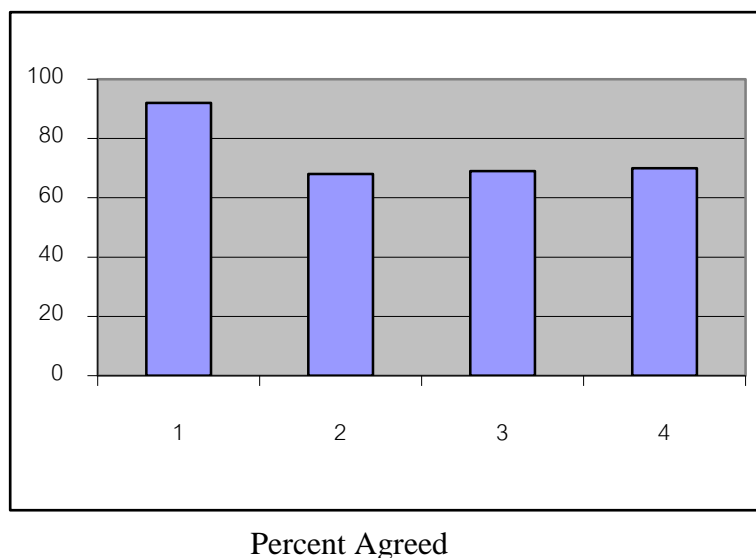
While 92% of Sample 1 agreed with the statement, about 70% of Samples 2, 3 and 4 also agreed. In that the exams taken by Samples 2, 3 and 4 **did not include speaking**. This means that the LC Grading Method, where speaking and thinking skills are important, was a significant aspect of the learner's perception of the exam and the learning experience it provided for those Samples.

The significant difference between the scores of Sample 1 compared to Samples 2, 3, and 4 can be explained by the fact that every learner in Sample 1 defended their exam, whereas not every learner in Samples 2, 3 and 4 defended their exam verbally. Some did not take advantage of this opportunity. Students were assured that their scores would not be lowered because of their verbal defense, only raised. Why would students not take this opportunity to get a higher score? Could there be Thai cultural pressure, in the younger learners, not to disagree with the teacher and defend their exam answers verbally?

Conclusion

Overall, based on the learner study sample reports: the LC EFL Triage Essay Exam and LC Grading Method as applied to their classroom experience, satisfied the Ten LCLM Objectives for Exams & Grading. Specifically, this LCLM experience: 1) supported their independent thinking, 2) assessed knowledge they felt was both interesting and important, not only what the teacher thought was important, 3) provided them with a valuable learning experience, and 4) not only graded them fairly, but they felt, graded them more fairly than other exams and grading methods.

> The homogeneity of scores for Samples 2, 3 and 4 indicated that extraneous variables had little or no influence on the study findings. In addition, the scores of Sample 2 (Third Year English Majors) was most similar to Sample 1 (First Year Mixed Majors), indicating again, that age and English proficiency did not significantly differentiate their survey responses.
>
> The difference between the Sample 1survey scores compared with the scores of Samples 2, 3 and 4 can be attributed to one variable – The LC Triage Essay Exam used only in Sample 1.
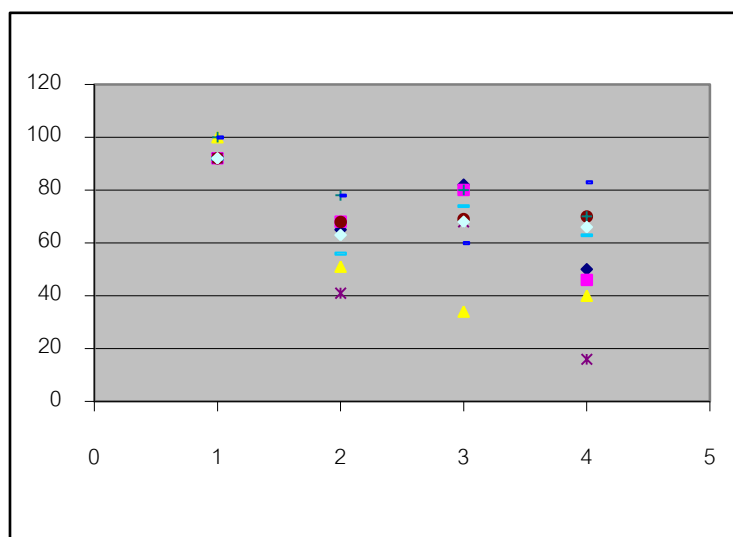
Measuring Effectiveness

The data from the survey statements, which measured **absolute effectiveness,** indicates that overall, the teacher centered or learner centered Exam and Learner Centered Grading Method applied was effective in all Samples. However, the high scores in Sample 1 indicate that the LC Triage Exam used in *only* in Sample 1 was clearly more effective than the teacher centered exams used in the other Sample Groups.

Comparing Effectiveness

The data from the survey statements which measured **relative effectiveness** indicate that the learners in Sample 1 felt that the LC Triage Essay Exam was fairer than other Essay and Multiple Choice tests they have taken in the past.

Sample 1 also reported the LC Triage Exam tested their time management and priority setting skills more than other exams they have taken in the past. The teacher-centered exam used in Sample 4 was the least effective in achieving the LCLM Objectives, when compared with other exams.

The data from the survey statements which measured **absolute effectiveness** (#5, #4, #9, #13, #16, #17, #18, #19) indicates that overall, the teacher centered or learner centered Exam and Learner Centered Grading Method applied was effective in all Samples. Note that Sample 1, scores indicate that the LC Triage Exam used in Sample 1, was clearly more effective than the Teacher Centered exams used in the other Samples.

The data from the survey statements which measured **relative effectiveness** (#8, #10 and #12) indicate that the learners in Sample 1 felt that the LC Triage Essay Exam was fairer than other Essay and Multiple Choice tests.

Sample 1 also reported the LC Triage Exam tested their time management and priority setting skills more than other exams they have taken in the past. The Teacher Centered Exam used in

Sample 4 was the least effective in achieving the LCLM Objectives, when compared with other exams.
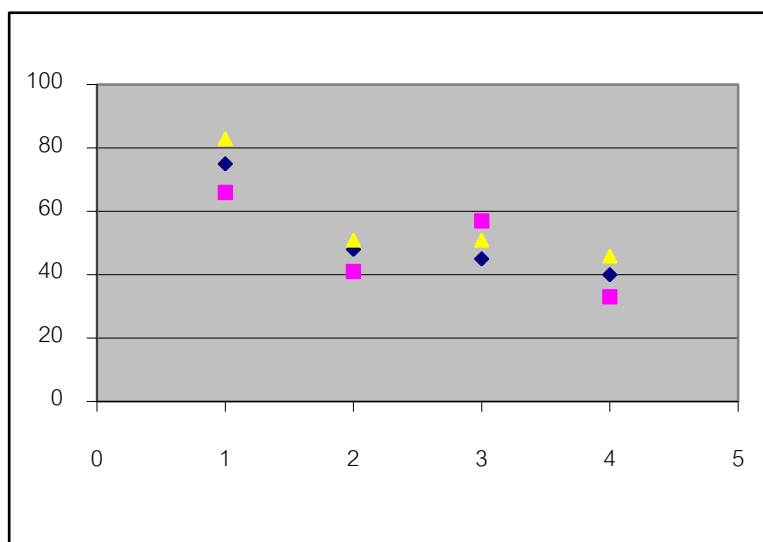
Percent Agreement

Limitations of the Study

While the internal validity and reliability of the study is strong in light of the homogeneity of scores, the tight clustering of scores in Sample 1 and corroborating interviews within each Sample, the external validity of the study is questionable. Are these Sample Groups at RIU representative of learners in other schools?

The study did not only measure Exam and Grading Methods. It measured both the effectiveness of the LCLM and the instructor because the same instructor taught all learners in the Samples. Are we studying the method or the Instructor?

Yet, if a different instructor taught each Sample, then the study results could be biased because of the influence of the instructor. Perhaps a study with 30 different instructors using the same LCLM teaching, examination and grading method would eliminate this problem.

There may be a cultural problem with the verbal defense of exams and verbally disagreeing with the teacher. This may be skewing the results of the study against the LCLM. Even so it is clear that the majority of learners in the Samples valued these new LCLM methods.

Applying an LCLM in Today's Classroom

The LC Grading Method should be explained to the learners the first week of class as this may motivate them to work on their Communicative English and persuasive thinking skills from the beginning. This may also encourage them to have a good reason for their answers during exams, knowing they will have an opportunity to verbally defend themselves during grading. This may also reduce guessing and copying someone else's answer.

Anxiety and discomfort on the part of the learners for Triage exams (multiple choice or essay) may be reduced by using non-graded classroom exercises, which cannot be completed in the time allowed. In this way learners can practice the Triage skill without the added pressure of a grade. From the Instructor's experience, the first time you introduce "Triage" to your students, there will be anxiety, all you can do is to try to reduce the amount of anxiety.

Introducing LC Methods

Students may feel disoriented, confused, shy and anxious when first introduced to learner centered techniques.

They may feel LC Menus are a trick of some kind and not want to take "the bait." Therefore, it is important that the instructor create **a climate of trust** in the classroom by demonstrating by example that all opinions are valid, correct, honored and valued. Those learning choices are taken seriously and will not be used against the learner at a later time.

Building Trust

Sometimes when a shy student offers an opinion, the Instructor/researcher will pretend to disagree with the student and at the same time honor their contribution and find valuable points in the individuals' opinion. After a few of these experiences, the participation of shy individuals will increase dramatically. All of us are afraid of public shame and are reticent to speak before we know it is safe to speak without the threat of shame.

One of the problems with the LCLM at the present time is that learners don't trust themselves, teachers don't trust the learners and everyone is afraid of the new unexplored territory of learner centeredness because we don't understand it.

How can we change externally motivated students into internally motivated life long learners? Slowly and gradually increasing their freedom in choosing learning options. A balance between firmness and flexibility is the key. We must trust our learners so that they will learn to trust themselves. Let us take a risk and extend the freedom for self-development and self-determination to our greatest national treasures, to those who carry the future of the world in their hearts and minds – our student learners. We must do this while firmly defining boundaries of behavior and clear expectations.

LCLM Benefits the Instructor

For Learner Centered Learning to work effectively, it must be a "transforming adventure experience" for the instructor. The process of applying the LCLM will change the instructor in important ways, such as: the learners will lead the instructor to explore new areas of knowledge, the learners will require process knowledge needed in tomorrow world The instructor must learn these new ways of doing things and pass them on.

Through observing the research and learning processes created by learners, the instructor will acquire new skills.

In these ways, Learner Centered Learning benefits and enriches the life of the instructor.

The transition from teacher centered to learner centered may be smoother through the use of cooperative learning techniques where the "small group (5 people)" determines the course of the learning. After practicing in a group, the individual may then proceed to determine their own course of study.

Further Research

Future research studies should be conducted through individual private interviews with anonymity guaranteed. Interviewers who are not instructors and are not connected in any way to the learner's lives would deliver the most accurate survey results.

The respondent must know that what they tell the interviewer will not in any way impact their lives or grades, or their teachers' feeling towards them, or their peers' feeling towards them.

More research is needed on how to transform teacher-centered learners into learner-centered learners. Moreover, more research is needed on how to transform teacher-centered teachers into learner-centered teachers. Through Classroom Action Research, we can prove to ourselves and to our student learners that developing and applying a LCLM is a profoundly thrilling and rewarding experience for everyone.

A New Exam is Needed

The research and development of a learner centered self-assessment test, which is as reliable and valid as TOEFL, is needed in order to change our grading methods to learner centered. *When the grading system changes, the behavior of learners and teachers will very likely change shortly thereafter*.

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Acknowledgements