

# 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 means and standard deviations. 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.

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, reading and writing.

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

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

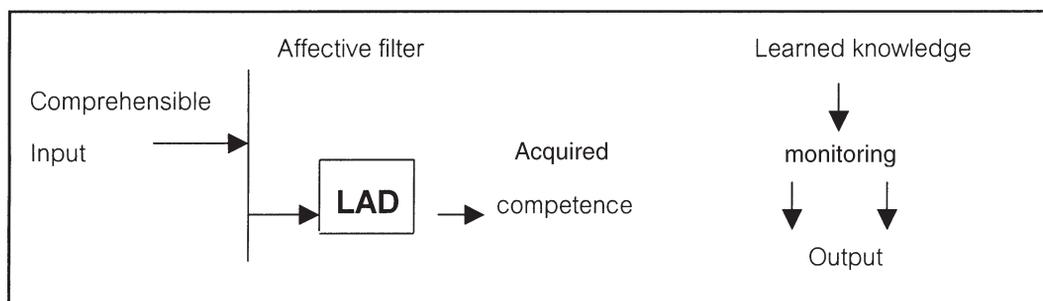
Currently one of the most interesting trends in language teaching and learning research is to find the most effective way to improve students' performance. The traditional reply concerning the basis for language teaching is to examine linguistic theory and attempt to restate existing formal grammar descriptions. 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 Terrells. (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 situations 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



**Figure 1** Language acquisition diagram.

Source: The Natural Approach 1983

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 four skills.

2. The English proficiency of the students learning with grammar-based instruction gains positively in four 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. It was found out after the pre-test that these two classes were not equivalent. Therefore their pre and post-test scores were statistically analyzed separately.

## 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 test items which were at 0.20 - 0.80 difficulty level and over 0.20 discrimination level were selected for the tests. 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.

## RESULTS

1. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group taught with grammar-based instruction. Obvious gains were made in the means of three skills namely, listening, speaking and reading

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for grammar-based instruction group.

	Pre-test			Post-test		
	N	$\bar{X}$	SD.	N	$\bar{X}$	SD.
Listening	39	8.51	3.06	39	11.13	2.67
Reading	39	7.33	2.34	40	8.50	2.28
Speaking	41	9.39	2.32	41	10.12	2.05
Writing	40	7.05	2.42	41	7.00	2.49

**Table 2** Paired samples test for grammar-based instruction group.

	Paired differences		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation			
Pair 1 LISTPOST - LISTPRE	2.55	2.34	6.711	37	.000 *
Pair 2 RDPOST - RDPRE	1.13	2.95	2.363	37	.023 *
Pair 3 SPKPOST - SPKPRE	0.73	1.79	2.619	40	.012 *
Pair 4 WRPOST - WRPRE	2.50E-02	2.37	.067	39	.947

\* At the level of significance 0.05, there is statistically significant difference.

Listpre = Listening pre-test      Listpos = Listening post-test

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics for communicative-based group.

	Pre-test			Post-test		
	N	$\bar{X}$	SD.	N	$\bar{X}$	SD.
Listening	27	8.04	2.54	28	10.50	3.16
Reading	27	6.07	2.29	28	7.07	2.65
Speaking	28	5.79	2.81	28	7.79	2.44
Writing	26	4.19	2.08	28	6.07	3.15

**Table 4** Paired samples test for communicative-based group.

	Paired differences		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation			
Pair 1 LISTPOST LISTPRE	2.56	2.67	4.983	26	.000 *
Pair 2 RDPOST - RDPRE	1.19	2.75	2.243	26	.034 *
Pair 3 SPKPOST - SPKPRE	2.00	2.76	3.831	27	.001 *
Pair 4 WRPOST - WRPRE	2.12	2.45	4.394	25	.000 *

\* At the level of significance 0.05, there is statistically significant difference.

Listpre = Listening pre-test      Listpos = Listening post-test

while there was an imperceptible difference in writing skill.

2. Table 2 shows the t-test analysis of the experimental group taught with grammar-based instruction which made statistically significant gains in listening, reading and speaking skills at the 0.05 significant level whereas there was no statistically significant difference found in the writing skill.

3. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group taught with communicative-based instruction. Obvious gains were made in all four skills.

4. Table 4 shows the t-test analysis of the experimental group taught with communicative-based instruction which made statistically significant gains in four skills. A significant difference at the 0.05 level was found in the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

## 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 Nida (cited in Robert W. Blair, ed. 1982), Asher (1977), Krashen

and Terrell (1983), Sukchuen's (1986) research findings that there was a transfer from listening input to the speaking skill. The fact that there was no statistically significant 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 Frantzen's (1989) research finding that teaching with a grammar-based method did not improve the writing skill.

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

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

2. Grammar-based instruction did not 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 explanations.

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