

ประสิทธิผลของแนวการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติที่มีต่อการส่งเสริมระดับ ภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาครูตามกรอบอ้างอิงความสามารถทางภาษาของ สหภาพยุโรป (CEFR)

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้ศึกษาประสิทธิผลของแนวการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติระดับภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาครูตามกรอบอ้างอิงความสามารถทางภาษาของสหภาพยุโรป (CEFR) และกระบวนการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติต่อการส่งเสริมความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษ ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยได้แก่ นักศึกษาครูสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 70 คน ซึ่งลงทะเบียนเรียนรายวิชาการจัดการชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ เป็นระยะเวลา 17 สัปดาห์ เครื่องมือวิจัยเชิงปริมาณด้วยคือแบบทดสอบวัดระดับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษ 50 Min EF SET ที่สอดคล้องกับ CEFR การวิจัยนี้เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณด้วยการเปรียบเทียบผลสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียนด้วยแนวการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติ และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณนา ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพมาจากเรียงความสะท้อนความคิดและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการวิจัยพบว่าผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยทุกคนมีคะแนนสูงขึ้น และคะแนนของผู้วิจัยจำนวน 60 คน อยู่ในระดับที่สูงขึ้นตามกรอบอ้างอิงความสามารถทางภาษาของสหภาพยุโรป (CEFR) นอกจากนี้ห้องเรียนตามแนวการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติที่ช่วยเร่งความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยประกอบด้วยปัจจัย 5 ด้าน ได้แก่ เนื้อหาการเรียนรู้ ภาษาที่ใช้เป็นสื่อการสอน สื่อและช่องทางการเรียนรู้ งานมอบหมาย และปฏิสัมพันธ์ในห้องเรียน การวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าแนวการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติมีประสิทธิผลโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งต่อผู้เรียนระดับ A1 และ A2 ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อการสอนมีบทบาทสำคัญในการส่งเสริมให้ผู้เรียนได้มีประสบการณ์สื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ ปฏิสัมพันธ์ในห้องเรียนระบบสองภาษาส่งเสริมให้ผู้เรียนใช้ภาษาภาษาอังกฤษในการสื่อสาร

Keywords: กรอบอ้างอิงความสามารถทางภาษาของสหภาพยุโรป, แนวการสอนภาษาแบบธรรมชาติ, การศึกษาครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ, ทฤษฎีการสร้างความรู้ด้วยตนเอง

The Effectiveness of the Whole Language Approach On Fostering Student Teachers' CEFR Levels Of English

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Abstract

This research explored the effectiveness of the whole language approach on student teachers' CEFR levels and enhancing their English language proficiency. The participants were 70 student teachers majoring in English and enrolled in a 17-week course in English Classroom Management. The research instrument for collecting quantitative data was the 50 Min EF SET test of English aligning with the CEFR levels. The quantitative data was collected by comparing the pre-and post-test results after the implementation of the whole language approach and analysed by descriptive statistics. The qualitative data were from reflective essays and analysed by using content analysis. The findings showed that all participants scored higher and 60 of them gained a higher level of CEFR. Furthermore, the whole-language-based classroom enhanced the participants' English proficiency with five elements: the learning contents, languages of instruction, learning materials and platforms, assignments, and classroom interactions. The research implied that the whole language approach could work effectively, especially with beginner learners at the A1 and A2 levels of CEFR. English as a medium of instruction played a major role in learners' exposure to English. Bilingual classroom interactions encouraged them to communicate in English.

Keywords: CEFR, Whole Language Approach, EFL Teacher Education, Constructivism

Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was enacted as a reference tool for Thai teachers' English competence. All graduates from the four-year teacher development programmes are required to demonstrate a solid knowledge of English by achieving at least the B2 category and those who are to teach English must achieve in the C1 category (Mala, 2018). Thailand was in the category of very low proficiency in English and ranked 89th among 100 countries across the world and 20th among 24 countries in Asia (Post Reporter, 2020). This rank has been dropped to 100th out of 112 countries and 22nd among 24 Asian countries (Herald Reporters, 2021). Because of these declining ranks, CEFR has gained a strong influence on education and teacher education.

The theoretical framework underlying this present study is constructivism. Constructivists claim that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Constructivism is applied to education (Simonova, 2019, p. 253) and is composed of three assumptions (Laney, 2011). Firstly, "learning cannot be separated from its context" (Laney, 2011, p.1565). Secondly, "the individual learner's learning purpose is integral to what is learned and finally, knowledge gained by the individual learner is socially constructed through negotiation, evaluation, or transformation" (Laney, 2011, p.1565). Constructivism has also appeared in the field of second (English) language education in the form of the whole language approach (Huang, 2014). According to Moghadam and Adel (2011), the whole language approach brought linguistic skills and communicative abilities into close association with each other. According to Aydoğ̃an and Akbarov (2014, p.674), the whole language approach gave students opportunities to simultaneously use four macro skills of language including listening, speaking, reading, and writing in "meaningful, functional, and cooperative activities." Most participants (N=149) in their study (Aydoğ̃an and Akbarov, 2014) perceived that the integrated-skill approach had a positive impact on learning the four skills of English and improving their level of English. Similarly, in Aydoğ̃an and Akbarov's (2014) study, 149 students of a Turkish university perceived learning English through the whole language and integrated skill approach as helpful. The majority of the participants in Aydoğ̃an and Akbarov's (2014) study believed that the approach enhanced their vocabulary learning and grammar studying (the micro-skills) and improved their English reading, writing, and speaking skills (the macro skills). Interestingly, Aydoğ̃an and Akbarov's (2014) study indicated that both content-based and task-based instruction could motivate students' learning regardless of age groups and backgrounds.

Several studies have shown the effectiveness of the whole language approach on learners' learning, especially at the kindergarten level. For example, Huang (2014) discovered that most of the teacher participants from nursery, preschool, and kindergarten in Taiwan (N=169) perceived the whole language approach as valuable and relevant to improving early-year literacy teaching. Over half of the teachers knew the ideas of the whole language approach and nearly 50% of them used a blend of methods and techniques, drawing from the whole language approach and the skill-based approach (Huang, 2014, p.74). However, just over 30% of them believed that the approach could work or be successfully implemented and claimed that early-year children need to have a "more basic awareness of print before any concepts associated with the fine-grained decoding of text" (Huang, 2014, p.73).

The whole-language approach impacted language learning for students in higher education when technology came into play. Wang (2011) evaluated computer-assisted whole-language instruction and found significant improvement in reading skills for non-English major freshmen (N=212), especially among basic-level students, at a university in Taiwan. Similarly, Simonova (2019, p.256) discovered that the blended approach enhanced the process of language acquisition and made progress in students' level of English (N=123) from the Faculty of Informatics Management (FIM, n = 61) at the University of Hradec Kralove and Faculty of Education (FE, n = 62) at the University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně, Usti nad Labem in the Czech Republic. Through the blended approach, the students from both faculties scored higher in English grammar equivalent to the A2 and B1 levels of the CEFR (Simonova, 2019). Simonova (2019) claimed that the blended learning approach could have the potential for facilitating the students acquire English grammar for B2 and C1 levels of CEFR.

The previous studies explored perspectives of the approach's effectiveness on language teaching and learning held by teachers and learners. As a result, this study investigated its participants' English proficiency aligned with CEFR by comparing their test results before and after the implementation of WLA. The CEFR-based manuals were directed at Thai teachers in primary and secondary education (Savski, 2019). Likewise, upper secondary school graduates in the Czech Republic were required to reach the B1 level (Simonova, 2019). In addition, the first-year students of the undergraduate programme of English language and literature at the Faculty of Education, University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně, Usti nad Labem were required to reach the C1 level at the end of the second semester and the C2 for their bachelor examination (Simonova, 2019). Furthermore, first-year university students with low proficiency in English at the Faculty

of Informatics and Management (FIM), University of Hradec Kralove (UHK) were required to take special courses to reach the required CEFR levels, according to Simonova (2019).

However, the careful implementation of CEFR should be taken into consideration. For example, Kanchai (2018) investigated the understanding of CEFR and viewpoints on implementing it held by 33 Thai university lecturers of English. The lecturers in Kanchai's (2018, p.33) study appeared to have similar conceptualisations of the overall purpose of the CEFR but none of them elaborated on their understanding and in-depth knowledge of the CEFR for assessment. The lecturers seemed unaware of the action-oriented approach, underlined by the CEFR. Instead, most of them implemented the content-oriented approach (Kanchai, 2018). Similarly, Kir and Sülü (2014) investigated the views on the use of the CEFR held by 46 language teachers from different cities across Turkey. Almost half of the participants (42.2%) did not read the CEFR and the majority of them (82.2%) needed in-service training on CEFR (Kir and Sülü, 2014). The participants (66.7%) perceived that the CEFR did not play a role in their teaching (Kir and Sülü, 2014). CEFR provided educators with a theoretical and practical basis for developing foreign language teaching curricula, materials, and methods of assessment to enable students to have communicative, plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Arikan, 2015). However, it was not widely brought into consideration in language teachers' teaching.

Communicative competence was defined as the competencies needed for effective communication including learning language knowledge and skills in situations and contexts where communication takes place (Council of Europe, 2001). Nakatani (2012) argued that the CEFR introduced the use of communication strategy (CS) in daily learning contexts. Nakatani (2012) regarded the CS as a communicative approach with strategic training through a five-phase-instructional sequence including review, presentation, rehearsal, performance, and evaluation. Nakatani (2012) implemented the CS in a 12-week course of English lessons to investigate the improvement in 60 Japanese students' English speaking skills. The study showed that the CS-based instruction facilitated the participants to overcome their target language deficiencies and cooperate with interlocutors during communicative lessons (Nakatani, 2012). The participants increased their total use of communicative strategies after their training which helped them develop their target language interaction and they were aware of using communicative strategies for controlling affective factors and keeping the conversation flow (Nakatani, 2012).

Similarly, Arikan (2015) claimed that the CEFR has encouraged the use of the communicative method, more mechanical techniques and strategies, and authentic written texts for students to have direct exposure to the authentic use of language.

Arikan (2015) examined the overall nature of the CEFR, its attribution to reading skills and its practical application. Based on Arikan's (2015) document analysis, the CEFR concerning reading skills highlighted the communicative competence and involved communication-oriented language teaching method with productive, receptive, and interactive activities and strategies such as reading and commenting on a text, giving a lecture or presentation, and cooking after reading a recipe. Moreover, developing reading skills by using communicative activities or interactive activities was considered significant and reading could be integrated with speaking through activities such as speeches at public meetings, sportive commentaries and reading written texts aloud (Arikan, 2015).

Overall, the previous studies showed that the CEFR was used as a guide in language teaching and aligned with communicative language teaching (CLT). The CLT has had a positive impact on developing learners' English and improving their level of CEFR (Nakatani, 2012). However, Savski's (2019) analysis of research on CLT in Thailand revealed that the implementation of CLT in Thailand has been largely unsuccessful yet with the conclusion that CLT might not exclusively offer appropriate solutions, particularly to the educational system in Thailand.

Instead, Savski (2019) proposed the concept of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism (PP) as a pedagogical practice to reform language education aligning with the CEFR. The PP involved developing content and activities by having learners reflect on how the linguistic concepts are relevant to themselves as individuals and to their society (Savski, 2019, p.617). This is in line with the whole language approach in which content and all language skills were integrated. Phongploenpis (2020) argued that the integration of content and language facilitated students to actively participate in learning activities and practice new ways of using the target language for constructing knowledge. The content and language-integrated learning made Thai primary students less anxious about asking questions and sharing their thoughts in class (Phongploenpis, 2020).

It might be argued that WLA is an alternative teaching methodology with the integration of content, language and technology for enhancing Thai student teachers' English proficiency and improving their CEFR level. To evaluate the effectiveness of WLA on English proficiency, this research study attempted to answer two research questions as follows:

1. Is the student teachers' CEFR level of English proficiency higher after the implementation of the whole language approach?
2. How does the whole language approach accelerate the student teachers' English proficiency?

Methodology

The mixed-method research examined whether the whole language approach could make a positive impact on the participants' CEFR levels and further investigated any possible factors in accelerating their English proficiency. The whole language approach implemented in the process of instruction combined face-to-face lessons, synchronous learning via Google Meet and asynchronous learning via Google Classroom and Loom Application. The following subsections presented information on participants, research methods, procedures of data collection, and data analysis.

The Participants

70 student teachers participated in this research. There were 45 females (64.28%) and 25 males (35.72%). They were freshmen of the English major from the Faculty of Education faculty of a Rajabhat University in Bangkok. The sampling was voluntary because the research participants realised the benefits of participating in the research study. The participants' names were pseudonyms.

Methods

The 50 Min EF SET is a free English test in which the results are fully aligned with CEFR levels. The test has two sections: Reading and Listening. The total testing time is 50 minutes. It begins with a 25-minute reading section and ends with a 25-minute listening section. The participants took the test twice before and after learning through the whole language approach. The differences in their test scores would inform the impact of the whole language approach on their CEFR level of English proficiency (Research Question 1). The participants wrote a reflective essay either in English or Thai to describe what was learnt and how they perceived their English proficiency after experiencing the whole language approach. The reflective essays would reveal the participants' perspectives on learning through the whole language approach (Research question 2).

The Procedure of Data Collection

The whole language-based lessons were delivered via in-person, synchronous and asynchronous learning for a 17-week course entitled English classroom management. The topic of the lectures included classroom management, 21st-century classroom practice, and the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) model. The participants were required to complete three tasks, namely mock teaching, review of educational technology, and participating in a professional learning community. All

teaching mediums were written in English which was also mainly used as a language of instruction. Thai as the participants' mother language was employed to clarify certain learning contents and negotiate meaning during classroom discussions.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, the researcher conducted descriptive statistics to provide numerical explanations for the participants' test results. Descriptive statistics included measurements of percentages, mean, and standard deviations to answer the first research question. To answer the final research question, the content analysis method was used for analysing textual content from the reflective essays. The process started with sorting text into groups of related categories to identify similarities and differences, patterns, and associations, both on the surface and implied within.

Findings

This section began with the accumulation and comparative analysis of the pre- and post-test results to answer Research Question 1 which investigated the effectiveness of the whole language approach on the participants' CEFR level. The data from the reflective essay were analyzed to explore the participants' perspectives of the learning activities based on the whole language approach (Research Question 2) and to triangulate and therefore establish the validity and reliability of the data from the test results.

As seen in Table 1, the highest and lowest score on the pre-test was 68 and 23, respectively (Mean = 46.13 and SD = 11.33). After experiencing the whole language-based learning activities, the participants scored higher. The highest and lowest score on the post-test is 76 and 30, respectively (Mean = 59.29 and SD = 9.44).

Table 1 The Average Scores of Pre- and Post-test

Descriptive Statistics	Pre-test	Post-test
The total amount of participants (N)	70	70
Max	68 (C1)	76 (C2)
Min	23 (A1)	30 (A1)
Mean	46.13	59.29
SD	11.33	9.44

Table 2 showed that the whole language approach has enabled the participants to achieve a higher level. None of the participants achieved the C2 level before the WLA experience but there were seven participants (10%) with the C2 level after experiencing

the WLA. The number of participants with the C1 level increased from 7 (10%) to 27 (38.57%) and those with the B2 level rose from 17 (24.29%) to 26 (37.14%). As a result, there was an immense drop in the number of participants with the B1 level from 24 (34.29%) to 7 (10%), the A2 level from 15 (21.43%) to 2 (2.86) and the A1 level from 7 (10%) to 1 (1.43%) level.

Table 2 The number and percentage of the participants with their CEFR level

CEFR Level	Pre-test		Post-test	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
C2 (Proficient)	0	0	7	10
C1 (Advanced)	7	10	27	38.57
B2 (Upper Intermediate)	17	24.29	26	37.14
B1 (Intermediate)	24	34.29	7	10
A2 (Elementary)	15	21.43	2	2.86
A1 (Beginner)	7	10	1	1.43

As shown in Table 3, the difference between the pre-test and the post-test score ranged from 0 to 31. It found that the highest difference in the pre-test and post-test scores were all made by the participants with A1 and A2 of the CEFR level.

Table 3 The Participants with the Highest Improvement after the WLA Experience

The participants (n = 13, 18.57%)	Difference	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Score	CEFR Level	Score	CEFR Level
1. Ashley	21	27	A1	48	B1
2. Sharon	21	38	A2	59	B2
3. Penny	21	38	A2	59	B2
4. Tracy	21	40	A2	61	C1
5. Lily	25	23	A1	48	B1
6. Phil	25	33	A2	58	B2
7. Gandy	26	25	A1	51	B2
8. Kate	27	30	A1	57	B2
9. Sonya	27	35	A2	62	C1
10. Taylor	29	39	A2	68	C1
11. Natalie	30	36	A2	66	C1
12. Amy	31	25	A1	56	B2
13. Ken	31	38	A2	69	C1

This subsection showed that the whole language approach enabled the participants to score higher on the EF CEFR test. Most of the participants (N = 70) achieved the B2 level (n = 26, 37.14%) and higher i.e. C1 (n = 27, 38.57%) and C2 (n = 7, 10%), as shown in Table 2. The WLA made a huge impact on the participants with the A1 and A2 levels whose difference in pre-and post-test scores ranged between 21-31 points (Table 3). The next subsection reported how the participants perceived the WLA experience and how the WLA supported their English learning.

The whole-language-based classroom that enhanced the participants' English proficiency was composed of five elements including the learning contents, languages of instruction, learning materials and platforms, assignments, and classroom interactions.

The participants perceived all contents as meaningful and helpful to their teaching and learning of English. Below are some examples of the participants' quotes translated by the researcher:

"I learnt classroom management as well as English." (Ava)

"In this course, my professor also focussed on classroom language which enabled me to communicate in English." (Wayne)

English and Thai were the languages of instruction. English was used most of the class time and Thai was used to clarify certain complicated contents. The participants reported that English as an instructional language enhanced their English and communication skills. For example:

"English was used in the class for approximately 85% and I could learn and apply the experience of learning in English to my English speaking, reading, writing, and even interpretation ability." (Theo)

English as a medium of instruction enabled the participants to learn new words and sentences and was more effective than memorizing. The participants explained that learning in both English and Thai enhanced their English and communication skill because it accommodated them with a consistent English learning space which motivated them to communicate in English both inside and outside the class.

"The professor mainly communicated in English and sometimes in Thai to ensure that we understood. This inspired me to study as hard as I could. I practised listening to her lecture and video clips and I was finally used to learning in English." (Tracy)

In terms of learning materials and platforms, the participants stated that learning materials in English enhanced their English vocabulary and four skills of English. For example:

“I learnt English vocabulary and grammar from learning materials and contents. I feel more comfortable with listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English.” (Chantel)

Online learning experiences enhanced the participants’ language learning and teaching as well as technological knowledge. For example:

“I learned in class and then online during the spread of COVID-19. I learn English and teaching methodology in both on-site and online contexts.” (Wayne)

The assignments included mocked teaching, reviewing and applying educational technology, and establishing professional learning communities and each of them facilitated their English learning and suggested ideas for future teaching. Mocked teaching particularly enhanced the participants’ speaking, communication skill, and English pronunciation. For example:

“Mocked teaching facilitated the students to practice English speaking and encouraged them to communicate more in English.” (Tara)

Reviewing and applying educational technology enabled the participants to expose to English and experience instructional design. For example:

“I improved my English when I designed my instructional media for online learning.” (Diane)

The participants learnt English from peers when establishing professional learning communities which also prepared them for their future teaching. For example:

“English was used to share my ideas, assess peers’ teaching, and work in groups helped me practice my thinking and planning skills.” (Poppy)

In terms of classroom interactions, the participants learned new words and sentence structures when they participated in classroom interactions and activities. For example:

“Sometimes, I found familiar words, but I didn’t know the meaning. The professor taught me an unknown vocabulary and sentence structures. She gave us an explanation.” (Jonathan)

Moreover, the participants gained the confidence to communicate in English because of the professor’s encouragement and feedback. For example:

“The professor encouraged the students to ask and discuss any doubtful topics. I felt that my English was getting better. I liked and loved learning English more.” (Kelsie)

This bilingual class made the participants feel comfortable with communicating in English and discussing in class. For example:

“This class was a safe place where the students communicated in English whenever they were ready. They could also speak Thai. I considered this useful because the students would not be shy and they were comfortable with speaking English instead.” (William)

In general, the data from the reflective essays supported the findings relating to the participants’ test results which were higher after the whole language classroom experience. The five elements of the whole language-based classroom in the present study enabled the participants to expose to English and become fluent in the target language. Importantly, the findings showed that providing a space for L1 (Thai) in the classroom encouraged them to communicate in English with confidence and ease.

Discussion and Implications

The whole language approach gave them the opportunities to use four skills of English: listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a meaningful way through a variety of communicative learning activities, such as mocked teaching, review of educational technology, classroom interactions, etc. This present study has confirmed Nakatani (2012), Arikan (2015), and Savski (2019) who stated that communicative skill was the core of CEFR. The research results supported Arikan (2015) and indicated that the whole language approach was effective in terms of encouraging the participants to have direct exposure to the authentic use of English. Furthermore, the data from the reflective essays in the present study were in line with Nakatani (2012) that the participants could control affective factors and keep the conversation flow.

The participants with A1 and A2 level made the highest difference in the pre-test and post-test scores. This finding implied that the whole language approach could work effectively with beginner learners. This implication supported Wang (2011) who found that computer-assisted whole-language instruction enhanced the reading skills of basic-level students. Nevertheless, the present study discovered that online learning enabled them to be exposed to English while experiencing educational technology and asynchronous lessons facilitated their vocabulary learning.

The whole-language-based classroom in this study was composed of five elements: the learning contents, languages of instruction, learning materials and platforms, assignments, and classroom interactions which accelerated the participants’ English proficiency. The five elements have contributed to Kir and Sülü (2014) and Kanchai (2018) by guiding teachers and teacher educators on how to implement the

whole-language approach highlighting the action-oriented approach rather than the content-oriented approach to achieve the preferable CEFR levels. These elements were rooted in constructivism (Laney, 2011; Simonova, 2019; Huang, 2014; Moghadam and Adel, 2011) which gave the participants the opportunities to simultaneously practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing in meaningful, functional, and cooperative activities. In line with Moghadam and Adel (2011), the present study found that the association between linguistics skills and communicative abilities by the whole language approach enhanced the participants' English proficiency and communication skill. They perceived all learning contents as meaningful and helpful to English teaching and learning i.e. vocabulary and grammar reading or the micro-skills (Aydoğın and Akbarov, 2014) and English speaking, listening, reading, and writing or the macro-skills (Aydoğın and Akbarov, 2014).

Similar to Aydoğın and Akbarov's (2014) study, the present study found that the whole language approach motivated the students' learning. Further, the present study discovered that translanguaging, the participants accessing L1 and L2, and the professor as a facilitator enabled them to become comfortable, confident, and secure in exposing themselves to English. This discovery confirmed Phongploenpis (2020) who claimed that language and content-integrated learning relieved stress and anxiety in learning.

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