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## **FROM ENGLISH PLUS TO ENGLISH 1 AND 2: ASSESSING TRANSFER OF GRAMMAR SKILLS**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the effectiveness of grammar skills transfer from English Plus to English 1 & 2. English Plus is meant to address the English Language deficiency of incoming freshmen by providing them enabling skills to cope with college. It aimed to address the lack of readiness of entrants, through the improvement of crucial language skills, particularly grammar and usage. The research used the descriptive-evaluative method. It was anchored on the Constructivist's Paradigm: "individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences, either by accommodation or assimilation (Microsoft Encarta, 2007") It was found out that nowhere in the evaluation did it appear that the English Plus takers even approximated the competencies of the non-takers. This means that English Plus has in fact no carry-over effect on students taking English 1 and 2. This means further that English Plus takers were NOT able to integrate or apply learning of English grammar in this college course as evidenced by the disparity in the scores of the two sets of respondents. It is therefore recommended that specific measures be*

*undertaken to improve the implementation of the English Plus – to provide coping skills and to ensure that there is indeed assimilation of learning.*

### **Keywords**

English Plus, Grammar, Skills Transfer

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## **1. Introduction**

English Plus is a non-credit course meant to address the English Language deficiency of incoming freshmen by providing them enabling skills to cope with the rigors of college. The English Plus Program was put in place in response to Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No. 59 s. 1996, which provides that all higher education institutions implement a new General Education Curriculum non-credit course called English Plus, to be taken by incoming college freshmen who fail the Placement Examination in the English Language. It aimed to address the lack of readiness of college entrants, through the improvement of crucial English language skills, particularly grammar rules and proper usage.

This study aimed to answer the following: (1) Is there a significant difference in the results of the pre- and post-tests of the English Plus takers; and (2) What is the level of performance of English Plus takers and non-English plus takers in terms of grammar use in line with skills and knowledge learned in English General Education Courses (GECs)?

## **2. Methodology**

The 3-phased research employed the descriptive-evaluative method of research, which is quantitative in nature. This method was specifically applied through the administering of the English Plus pre-test and post-test, as well as the post-tests given at the end of English 1 and English 2.

An existing pre test and post test enhanced on a yearly basis was utilized in the first phase of the assessment. A test of knowledge and skills were likewise prepared and used by the researchers in order to evaluate the program's effectiveness through a comparison of performance in English 1 and English 2 among English-plus and non-English-plus takers as evaluated by said test. These researcher-made tests underwent proper validation, specifically through pilot-testing in AMA Computer College for the English 1 test and Divine Word College

of Legazpi for English 2. Subsequent item analysis led to enhancements of the researcher-made tests, which, incidentally, was used by a number of teachers as their final examinations.

The respondents of the study were chosen on two levels. The English Plus takers of Summer 2011, identified by random sampling, were the respondents utilized to evaluate the program's effectiveness in terms of immediate effects. This is the first level of the assessment.

In order to make comparisons in performance in English 1 and English 2, a set each of respondents was computed for and identified at random for the administering of the respective tests. The performance of the English Plus takers and non-English Plus takers were compared for both GEC subjects. This formed the second level of the assessment.

To cover all colleges of the university for this second level assessment, a sample was drawn to represent each course, using the stratified random sampling procedure.

Averaging was used in finding the general performance level of the respondents. Frequency counts and percentages were also used to determine similarities and differences among responses of the two types of respondents.

In interpreting the proficiency level of the respondents, percentage was used to translate the mean scores into more meaningful figures, that is, to show how much of the test the respondents were able to answer correctly. These percentages were then assigned equivalent interpretations, namely:

Percentage (%)	Interpretation
96-100	Proficient
86-95	Closely Approximating Proficiency
66-85	Moving Towards Proficiency
35-65	Average Proficiency
15-34	Low Proficiency
5-14	Very Low Proficiency
0-4	Absolutely No Proficiency

The above is an adoption with slight modification ("proficiency" was substituted for "mastery") of that used in the Department of Education-National Testing and Research Center.

(Ocfemia, 2009). It was consulted in this study specifically to interpret the test results of the respondents, and get their overall proficiency level.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

The first stage of the research was carried out upon the completion of the English Plus classes. A total of 2,990 high school graduates enrolled for English Plus this summer 2011, spread across three batches and offered in the main campus, specifically at the College of Arts and Letters (BUCAL), and the satellite campuses of Bicol University, namely Tabaco Campus (BUTC), Gubat Campus (BUGC), Polangui Campus (BUPC), and the College of Agriculture and Forestry (BUCAF).

Pre-test scores were computed to have a mean of 43, while the Post-test scores had a mean of 55, arriving at a 12-point difference. Using the t-test, computation arrived at the result  $3.23186E-82$ , interpreted to mean that there is significant difference between the two means. This result shows that the English Plus Program currently offered by Bicol University through the College of Arts and Letters is effective, at least in the attainment of its immediate learning outcome.

The first and most immediate effect of English Plus to students, shown by the significant difference in the pre test and post test, proved to be positive, but the question on whether there is a carry-over or assimilation of this learning to the GEC's, remains to be seen.

Thus, the second phase tested the grammar skills of students in English 1 (Study and Thinking Skills), comparing the performance of English Plus vs Non-English Plus takers. The average score of all respondents who had taken English Plus was 45.84 out of the total highest attainable score of 100 points. This is interpreted as *average proficiency (AP)*. Similarly, the average score of all respondents who had not taken English Plus was computed, with a result of 68.48. This is a notch higher interpreted as *moving towards proficiency (MTP)*. These findings showed that the non-English Plus takers performed better than the English Plus takers in the subject English1, Study and Thinking Skills.

Going back to the research framework of the study, it was pointed out that performance of English Plus takers parallel to or exceeding that of non-English Plus takers will be interpreted as a positive effect of the program. In this case, the significant difference leans on the negative side, which means that, English Plus has in fact no carry-over effect on students taking English

1. This means further that the English Plus takers were NOT able to integrate or apply learning of English grammar in this college course as evidenced by the disparity in the scores of the two sets of respondents.

The third phase tested the grammar skills of students in English 2 (Writing in the Discipline). The intention is to likewise evaluate the carry-over effect of English Plus, if any, in the attainment of specific course objectives dealt with in English 2. Again, it is noted that performance wise, the non-EP takers scored higher than the EP takers in all the colleges surveyed.

Nowhere in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phases of the assessment did it appear that the English Plus takers exceeded or even approximated the grammar skills of non-English Plus takers. Referring back to the research framework, this could only mean that for the given scope there was no transfer of grammar skills from English Plus to English 1 and 2.

Any evaluation is meant to improve what exists; in this case the English Plus Program of Bicol University implemented by the English Department lodged at the College of Arts and Letters.

The initial findings on its effectiveness as revealed in study 1 suggests a positive note. There is a significant difference in the pre test and post test scores, implying that after 54 hours, the students relearned the basics of grammar. Going further on a second and third level evaluation though, eroded the what-seemed-to-be an affirmative indicator of effectiveness. Studies 2 and 3 proved that there is no carry-over of this learning in both English 1 and 2. Simply put, the students failed to apply what they have learned in isolation to actual learning outcomes for the GEC's. While it may be true that the students learned the knowledge, skills and attitudes laid out by these subjects (no data however from this study supports this claim), errors along the use of language, specifically grammar persist, which hampers their performance all the more.

Such could only connote that the teaching of grammar must not only be structural, but functional and communicative. "Functional theories of language propose that since language is fundamentally a tool, it is reasonable to assume that its structures are best analyzed and understood with reference to the functions they carry out (Functional Grammar, 2012)." "Functional grammar looks at the way in which grammar is used to construct texts in their context of use - it is concerned in other words with real language not just with the made up

examples of language (Functional Theories of Grammar,2012).” Communicative Language Approach on the other hand, makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life (What is Communicative Language Teaching, 2012). Therefore, the move must be from separation of language and content instruction to more integrated approaches. The area on methodology is a big concern.

Consequently, this calls for rehash in the materials used so that utility of language is better emphasized. Instructional materials and the corresponding techniques of teaching have to be so chosen so that they “present grammar to teachers and students as a set of tools they can use rather than a set of rules about what not to do (Masangya and Lozada, 2012).” Tools and techniques beyond classroom teachings perhaps are a possibility. Educators may have an option of tapping viable outputs such as language exposure on good linguistic models at home, media and other forms of literature.

Another area is English Plus teachers. To teach grammar, they must be close to impeccable. All teachers need not be experts in their fields, but possessing more knowledge than the students is important. Teachers must show their students how the information they are learning might be used or might lead to the development of some other useful skill. They ought to show that the application of the knowledge and skills gained is not restricted to the analysis of isolated sentences.

#### **4. Conclusions**

It is therefore concluded that: (1) There is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores, implying that after 54 hours, the students relearned the basics of grammar. (2) The what-seemed-to-be an affirmative indicator of grammar skills transfer is discounted showing further that there is no carry-over of this learning in both English 1 and 2. (3) The non-English Plus takers evidently and conclusively performed better in both GEC’s, thus the English Plus Program failed to provide the enabling competencies that would have allowed the English Plus takers to approximate the level of performance of the non-English Plus takers. (4) Improvement is always a choice, not simply an option, thus the areas for improvement are many but are substantially anchored on policy implementation. And, (5) Specific measures can be undertaken to improve the implementation of the program before the full impact of K12 to higher education.

## 5. Recommendations

It appears that English Plus is only effective in as much as its immediate learning output is measured, but ineffective where its assimilation to a new experience is concerned. The following are, therefore, recommended that: (1) The English program be continued taking into consideration the suggested improvement outlined in this research. (2) Specific measures be undertaken to improve the implementation of the English Plus program before the full impact of K12 to higher education. (3) It becomes imperative to go back to the heart of the program –to provide coping skills and to ensure that there is indeed assimilation of learning so that students feel more prepared to handle the learning outcomes of higher English subjects. (4) Basic policies be revisited and previous research results be taken into account. (5) Revamp in the different areas of implementation be done, and that after the program is phased-out, English Plus is offered as a special program to be lodged at the BU Language Center.

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