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Best Practices in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract

This action research project attempted to determine the best practices in teaching a foreign language to high school students. In order to determine these best practices, the researcher read literature and studies that had been previously conducted with foreign language students. This study attempted to determine if students would learn better in the context of real-life communication rather than overt grammatical lectures. Students were given a pre- and post-test to determine whether or not their levels of language acquisition and grammatical understanding improved over the course of the study. The results of the study revealed that more time is needed to show evidence of true improvement in language acquisition or grammatical understanding. The study results did indicate that the more time spent in the study of a foreign language, the more true language acquisition will take place.

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Best Practices in the Foreign Language Classroom

by

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B.A. Calvin College, 2006

Action Research Report
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank God for His provision and faithfulness to me each and every day. I am forever grateful for my relationship with Him.

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Abstract

This action research project attempted to determine the best practices in teaching a foreign language to high school students. In order to determine these best practices, the researcher read literature and studies that had been previously conducted with foreign language students. This study attempted to determine if students would learn better in the context of real-life communication rather than overt grammatical lectures. Students were given a pre- and post-test to determine whether or not their levels of language acquisition and grammatical understanding improved over the course of the study. The results of the study revealed that more time is needed to show evidence of true improvement in language acquisition or grammatical understanding. The study results did indicate that the more time spent in the study of a foreign language, the more true language acquisition will take place.

Teaching is a profession in which life-long learning and self-improvement are important in order to be of great influence to students (Hendricks, 1997). Effective teachers are constantly seeking ways to make improvements on their instructional practices, their assessment techniques, and their engagement of students in the subject matter. Knowledge of best practices encourages teachers to implement teaching methods that are more authentic, holistic, experiential, challenging, and expressive. (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2012). A study on the best practices in foreign language instruction is an important step towards remaining relevant in the classroom and reaching every student on a daily basis.

"The need for individuals who can speak and understand languages other than English is acute in many sectors of the United States," (Malone, Rifkin, Christian, & Johnson, 2005, para. 1). When looking at the ever-changing diversity in the United States, one can attest to the fact that knowing how to communicate in another language will continue to be of value. The United States Census Bureau reported that, "the vast majority of the growth in the total population came from increases in those who reported their race(s) as something other than White alone…" (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011, p. 3). The benefits of learning a foreign language will allow society to flourish in its diversity, with those who are multilingual leading the way toward breaking down language barriers that have once created division.

There is a distinct need for instructors in the Foreign Language classroom who demonstrate proficiency in foreign language pedagogical methods. There are differing views on effective foreign language instruction, including: Total Physical Response (TPR), Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), content-based teaching, a grammatical approach, and the contextual approach. While the aforementioned methods are important, this

study attempted to determine if the communicative approach is the best practice in foreign language instruction.

Problem Statement

The need for best practices in the classroom is evidenced by previous research studies and the current trends in education. Best practices in instruction vary from one classroom discipline to the next, including that of the foreign language classroom. This study attempted to determine whether the communicative approach, with a more holistic view of language learning, is the best practice in foreign language instruction.

Research Question

Will students' achievement scores improve as a result of the instructional practices of the communicative approach?

Definitions

The following definitions will provide guidance to readers as they explore this research topic. Unless otherwise noted, the definitions provided are those of the author.

Communicative Approach: An instructional method that focuses on real-life situations that necessitate communication in the foreign language (Galloway, 1993).

Comprehensible Input: Language input that can be understood by listeners despite them not understanding all the words and structures in it ("The British Council," n.d.).

Grammatical Approach: An instructional method that focuses on analyzing and studying the grammatical rules of a language (Snow, 1992).

Input: The language that goes into the students' brain as they learn a foreign language.

Output: The language that a student produces after experiencing hours of foreign language input.

Target Language: A foreign language that a person intends to learn.

Total Physical Response (TPR): Physical actions done in association with a vocabulary word learned in the foreign language.

Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS): A teaching methodology used in the foreign language classroom that focuses on student comprehension through the use of personalized stories told in the target language.

Literature Review

Instructional methods in the foreign language classroom such as grammar-translation, the natural approach, and TPR, are all popular today (Krashen, 1981). However, the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (*ACTFL*) suggests that perhaps more can be done to improve language learning. Malone, Rifkin, Christian, and Johnson (2005) noted that, "It can take up to 720 hours of instruction for a student to achieve proficiency at the ACTFL Advanced level…however, typical undergraduate programs at U.S. colleges and universities offer only three contact hours per week, which, after two years, yields at most 180 hours of instruction," (Malone, et. al, 2005, para. 5) Therefore, it is imperative that foreign language teachers utilize the best instructional methods in their limited time frame.

The first best practice method known as *Total Physical Response,* or *TPR* was developed during the 1960s and 1970s. James Asher, Professor of Psychology at San Jose State University in San Jose, California, introduced the idea of teaching a foreign language through the use of bodily physical responses to vocabulary words. This active approach to learning a language was engaging and exciting to the educational world, resulting in much student success. (Ray & Seely,

2005). TPR became a best practice in the foreign language classroom; however, TPR could not meet every need in the foreign language classroom. As noted language acquisition expert Steven Krashen stated, "TPR is not a complete method. It cannot do the entire job of language teaching, nor was it designed to do this," (Ray & Seely, 2005, p. 3) Krashen explained that students needed to experience that of *comprehensible input* in order to truly acquire the language.

Ray attempted to improve the best practice known as TPR by creating comprehensible stories for use in the classroom. Ray noted that acquisition of the language will occur within the context of interesting and meaningful stories (Ray & Seely, 2005). Furthermore, Ray suggested that teachers need to make class so interesting that students in the foreign language classroom will *want* to listen and understand just to know what is going on. He said that making the class interesting is where the art of teaching enters in (Ray & Seely, 2005). Ray's adaptation, Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) has become a second best practice approach in the teaching of foreign languages.

Another best practice method to teaching the foreign language is that of teaching classroom content in the foreign language. With this content-based approach, "…students develop the ability to express ideas about concepts in content areas, and develop proficiency in understanding and producing the types of texts specific to that area," (Sherris, 2008, para. 4) Were all content learned in school taught in the foreign language, perhaps students would be exposed to an adequate number of hours in order for acquisition to be a possibility. De Bot (2007) noted that "Learning word lists and grammar rules is not attractive; young learners steer away from rote learning…" (p. 275). Although De Bot (2007) discovered that rote learning is not the best method for students to acquire a second language, still many current teachers instruct in this way.

A fourth best practice in foreign language pedagogy is that of contextual instruction. Language learning must include the study of the communities and cultures in which native speakers reside (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). A knowledge of the grammatical rules without the practice of their usage will not serve the student well in the context of building relationships with those who are native speakers in that language (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). Peterson and Coltrane (2003) noted that, "Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. Language learners need to be aware, for example, of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone," (para. 5) Learning a foreign language within the context of culture will be of much value to the students, because they will be able to interact with native speakers. Foreign language educators in a Christian school may add to this best practice by addressing the purposes behind acquiring a second language.

Smith (2004) proposed that the purpose of learning a foreign language has everything to do with the biblical commands given by Christ himself. Smith referenced Bible verses from both the book of Leviticus 19:18 and Mark 12:20-31 which say, respectively, "The alien living among you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt…" "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself," (New International Version). Smith (2004) stated, "Perhaps the most basic reason for learning the languages and cultures of others is neither purely intellectual nor predominantly pragmatic. Perhaps language learning should not *at its heart* be about enhancing career or study prospects, polishing our brains, strengthening national security or economic competitiveness…perhaps the central reason…is an *ethical* reason," (p. 3). Adding to the best practice of teaching within the

context of culture and communities is Smith's approach of a more global perspective on language learning.

For the Christian educator, teaching a foreign language to students should not only seek to help students fulfill a requirement for graduation, but also encourage those students to see language as a way to love others. (Smith & Carvill, 2000) Christian teachers of foreign languages should take seriously their call as educators, but also as humble servants who seek to break down barriers both linguistically and culturally through their teaching of the language.

A fifth best practice used by those in the foreign language classroom includes grammar drills and a mixture of input and output, the grammatical approach. One benefit for learners who are taught with a grammatical approach is that by learning the 'rules' of grammar, it "…enables learners to construct their own sentences to express their own ideas," (Ellis, 2008, para. 3) Ellis (2008) suggested that students ought to learn the second language in sequences, rather than one rule at a time (para. 4) Although language teachers across the globe do not agree on one best method, Ellis noted that a blending of grammatical formulas within context will be beneficial to students (para 4).

Ellis (2008) noted that second language teaching might include a grammatical approach, and that this grammar should be taught in a sequence that honors a natural process of the acquisition of language (para. 2). In addition to the grammatical approach, students must receive ample opportunities for input; meaning they receive the language from their teacher through modes of communication such as reading texts and listening to dialogue or instruction. Once students have been given input in the language, they are ready and able to practice output;

through communicative activities in which students practice their own production of the language (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003).

Historically, learning a foreign language in the academic context has been seen as "…mastery of grammatical competence. Language learning was viewed as a process of mechanical habit formation," (Richards, 2006, p. 4). In recent years, however, many language teachers have come to identify with the instructional method called the communicative approach. The communicative approach to teaching a foreign language is the opposite of the grammatical approach, with its focus on rules and the correct formation of sentences. In the communicative approach, the focus has shifted towards "…the knowledge for different communicative purposes such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, describing wishes and needs, and so on," (Richards, 2006, p. 9). Furthermore, the communicative approach offers more opportunities for students to interact with one another, while using the foreign language to communicate. The communication between students has the potential to be more meaningful and therefore more memorable for the learner (Richards, 2006, p. 4).

Teachers who use the communicative approach encourage their students to try out what they know rather than making grammatical corrections to student conversation in the foreign language. When using the communicative approach, teachers "Make real communication the focus of language learning," and "Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency," (Richards, 2006, p 13). The communicative approach is considered a best practice in foreign language teaching because it shifts the classroom atmosphere from teacher-centered to student-centered. It is holistic in that it asks the students to use a variety of communication skills during just one conversation.

The communicative approach does take into consideration the need to understand a language's grammar. The goal of a communicative foreign language classroom is that of the acquisition of the language being taught, and therefore, grammar is not taught in large pieces out of context. Richards (2006) noted that through the use of communicative activities, students will begin to "induce or discover grammar rules" (p. 13). Rather than focusing primarily on grammatical concepts completely out of the context of real-world conversations and situations, the communicative approach seeks to "…develop students' communicative competence through linking grammatical development to the ability to communicate" (Richards, 2006, p.13). In this manner, students are able to learn the various grammatical nuances of the language within the context of real-life communication.

Summary

As foreign language educators seek to instruct using the best practice, the research suggests that the communicative approach is a best practice because it incorporates positive aspects from various other methodologies. The communicative approach gives the individual student the opportunity to acquire the language naturally and holistically. In order to interact with and learn with a global perspective, the use of the communicative approach may be the best practice to implement for the teacher of foreign languages.

<center>**Methods**</center>

Participants

The participants of this study came from a mid-sized Christian school in a suburb of Los Angeles. Five sections of Spanish 1 students participated in this study. Students came from ethnic backgrounds including: Caucasian, Latino, and Asian. The control group consisted of four

different classes of Spanish 1, totaling 80 students. The experimental group consisted of 27

students in a Spanish 1 class.

Design

   The research was conducted using a non-randomized control group pre- and post-test

group design. The timeline for this study was 2 weeks, or 8 instructional days. Students in the

control group received instruction using a grammatical approach. In these classes, the researcher

used both Spanish and English during instructional time, amounting to approximately 50% in

each language. For the experimental group, the researcher used only the communicative

approach to foreign language instruction, using primarily Spanish to instruct and communicate

with students.

Materials

   Students in both the control group and the experimental group took the same pre- and

post-test to determine whether if there was a difference in student achievement and foreign

language acquisition based on the instructional methods utilized. At the end of the experimental

time period, both groups of students took the same summative assessment of the unit. The pre-

test and post-tests are attached in Appendix A.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Pre- and Post-Test Question Two

   Students were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten regarding their

understanding of the Spanish language, with a score of 1 meaning "Not at all," to a 10 meaning

"The entire (book)." Table 1 shows the mean scores of the students' response. The mean score of

the control group increased by .2; demonstrating that students in this group rated themselves

higher after the experiment. The mean score of the experimental group increased by .48,

demonstrating that students in this group also rated themselves higher after the experiment.

Table 1

Mean Scores for Question 2: "Using the Following Scale, Rate Yourself on Your Understanding of the Spanish Language"

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Pre-test	6.7	6.7
Post-test	6.9	7.18

Pre- and Post-Test Question 3

Students were asked to respond with either "yes" or "no" to the question, "Using the

novel as a backdrop, could you give an example of a direct object pronoun?" Table 2 shows the

total number of student responses in each category. The sum total of the scores for each group

varies due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each

question on the survey. The results of the control group show an eight point increase in their

post-test scores with a "yes" response, and a one point decrease in their post-test "no" response.

The results of the experimental group show a 20 point increase on their post-test scores with a

"yes" response, and a 20 point decrease in their "no" response.

Table 2

Mean Scores For Question 3: "Using The Novel As Your Backdrop, Could You Give An Example Of A Direct Object Pronoun?"

	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pre-test	3	59	2	21
Post-test	11	58	22	1

Pre- and Post-Test Question 4

Students were asked to respond with either "yes" or "no" to the question, "Using the novel as your backdrop, could you give an example of a conjugated verb plus an infinitive verb?" Table 3 shows the total number of student responses in each category. The sum total of the scores for each group varies due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each question on the survey. The results of the control group show three point decrease in their post-test scores for a "yes" response, and an 11 point increase in their "no" response. The results of the experimental group do not show any difference in their "yes" response, and show a three point decrease in their "no" response.

Table 3

Mean Scores For Question 4: "Using The Novel As Your Backdrop, Could You Give An Example Of A Conjugated Verb Plus An Infinitive Verb?"

	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pre-test	18	43	2	23
Post-test	15	54	2	20

Pre- and Post-Test Question 5

Students were asked to respond with either "yes" or "no" to the question, "Using the novel as your backdrop, could you give an example of a reflexive verb?" Table 4 shows the total number of student responses in each category. The sum total of the scores for each group varies due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each question on the survey. The results of the control group show an 8 point increase in their post-test scores for a "yes" response, and no difference in their "no" response. The results of the experimental group show a one point decrease in their "yes" response, and show a two point decrease in their "no" response.

Table 4

Mean Scores For Question 5: "Using The Novel As A Backdrop, Could You Give An Example Of A Reflexive Verb?"

	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pre-test	4	58	1	24
Post-test	12	58	0	22

Pre- and Post-Test Question 6

Students were asked to respond with either "yes" or "no" to the question, "Using the novel as your backdrop, could you give an example of an indirect object pronoun?" Table 5 shows the total number of student responses in each category. The sum total of the scores for each group varies due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each question on the survey. The results of the control group show three point increase in their post-test scores for a "yes" response, and an three point increase in their "no" response. The

results of the experimental group do not show any difference in their "yes" response, and show a

three point decrease in their "no" response.

Table 5

Mean Scores For Question 6: "Using The Novel As A Backdrop, Could You Give An Example Of An Indirect Object Pronoun?"

	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pre-test	2	60	1	24
Post-test	5	63	1	21

Pre- and Post-Test Question 7

Students were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten regarding their

pronunciation of the Spanish language, with a score of 1 meaning "Poor," a score of 3 meaning

"Fair," a score of 5 meaning "Good," a score of 7 meaning "Excellent," and a score of 10

meaning "Like a native speaker." Table 6 shows the mean scores of the students' response. The

mean score of the control group shows a .65 point increase, demonstrating that students in this

group rated themselves higher after the experiment. The mean score of the experimental group

increased by 1.14, demonstrating that students in this group also rated themselves higher after the

experiment.

Table 6

Mean Scores for Question 7: "Using the Following Scale, Rate Yourself on Your Understanding of the Spanish Language"

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Pre-test	5.85	6.08
Post-test	6.5	7.22

Pre- and Post-Test Question 8

Students were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten regarding how much of the vocabulary in the book they could comprehend, with a score of 1 meaning "None," a score of 3 meaning "Very few words," a score of 6 meaning "Some words," a score of 8 meaning "Most words," a score of 9 meaning "Majority of words," and a score of 10 meaning "All words." Table 7 shows the mean scores of the students' response. The mean scores for each group vary due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each question on the survey. The mean score of the control group shows a .69 point increase, demonstrating that students in this group rated themselves higher after the experiment. The mean score of the experimental group increased by .85, demonstrating that students in this group also rated themselves higher after the experiment.

Table 7

Mean Scores For Question 8: "Using The Following Scale, Indicate How Much Of The Vocabulary Of The Book You Can Comprehend."

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Pre-test	6.5	6.28
Post-test	7.19	7.13

Pre- and Post-Test Question 9

Students were asked to respond with one of three options to the question, "As a whole, do you feel you would have a better comprehension of the novel if we learned grammatical concepts with accompanying learning activities BEFORE reading?" Their options included, "Yes, I wish we could spend time learning grammar BEFORE reading the novel," "I would have a slightly better understanding with grammar exercises before reading," or "No, I understand the book just fine without grammar exercises." Table 8 shows the total number of student responses in each category. The sum total of the scores for each group varies due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each question on the survey. The results of the control group show an 8 point increase in the "yes" column, a 7 point increase in the "slightly" column, and a 7 point decrease in the "no" column. The results of the experimental group do not show a difference in the "yes" column, a one point increase in the "slightly" category, and a 4 point decrease in the "no" column.

Table 8

Mean Scores For Question 9: "As A Whole, Do You Feel You Would Have A Better Overall Comprehension Of The Novel If We Learned Grammatical Concepts With Accompanying Learning Activities BEFORE Reading?"

	Control Group			Experimental Group		
	Yes	Slightly	No	Yes	Slightly	No
Pre-test	15	33	15	4	13	8
Post-test	23	40	8	4	14	4

Pre- and Post-Test Question 10

Students were asked to respond with one of three options to the question, "As a whole, do you feel your understanding of grammatical concepts has HINDERED your comprehension of the novel?" Their options included, "Yes, I would understand the novel completely if we studied the grammatical concepts first," "I would have a slightly better understanding of the novel if we studied the grammatical concepts first," or "No, I understand the novel just fine and pick up grammatical knowledge along the way." Table 9 shows the total number of student responses in each category. The sum total of the scores for each group varies due to student absenteeism as well as students' choice on whether to respond to each question on the survey. The results of the control group show an 2 point increase in the "yes" column, a 9 point increase in the "slightly" column, and a 2 point decrease in the "no" column. The results of the experimental group show a 2 point decrease in the "yes" column, a one point increase in the "slightly" category, and a 2 point decrease in the "no" column.

Table 9

Mean Scores For Question 10: "As A Whole, Do You Feel That Your Understanding Of Grammatical Concepts Has HINDERED Your Comprehension Of The Book?"

	Control Group			Experimental Group		
	Yes	Slightly	No	Yes	Slightly	No
Pre-test	26	25	12	8	13	4
Post-test	28	34	10	6	14	2

Summary of Findings

This study found that for the first question on pre- and post-test that addressed overall student comprehension of the novel, students in the control group felt the same about their abilities before and after the research. The experimental group felt that their overall comprehension of the novel increased after the two-week period of time.

When students were asked whether or not they could identify specific grammatical concepts, they were only given two choices, rather than a scale of ability. Given those parameters, the results for questions 3, 4, and 5 show that students in both the control group and the experimental group did not feel confident in their overall abilities with specific grammatical concepts. The findings from the question on the pre- and post-test that asked if students could identify a direct object pronoun showed that students in the control group felt more capable of their abilities for this grammatical concept after the two-week study. Those students in the experimental group felt less confident in their abilities in identifying a direct object pronoun after the study. When asked if they could identify or give an example of a conjugated verb plus an infinitive, students in both the control group and the experimental group rated themselves low on

the scale provided. When asked if they could identify a reflexive verb, students in the control group rated themselves slightly higher after the study, while those in the experimental group felt less confident after the study.

When asked to report on their pronunciation abilities, students in both the control group and the experimental group gave themselves a higher score after the experiment. Students in both the control group and the experimental group reported an improved level of vocabulary comprehension after the two week period of time. Lastly, students gave themselves higher scores for vocabulary comprehension of the entire book after the two-week study.

Discussion

While gathering resources and reading the previous literature on best practices for the foreign language classroom, the researcher hypothesized that the best method for students to learn a foreign language was to avoid grammar drills and in-depth explanations as to why the language works in a certain manner. Further, the researcher hypothesized that the communicative approach, with its energetic and authentic feel, would be the best way for students to acquire a foreign language. After conducting this action research project, the researcher affirms that students should have the opportunity for authentic communication opportunities in the classroom, but that students also desire knowledge of some of the grammatical rules that dictate that communication.

From this action research study, it is clear that adequate time must be dedicated to a new instructional approach in order to fairly measure its success. The researcher learned that two instructional weeks, or eight school days was not enough time to see much growth in student ability in the foreign language. Based on the research results, the researcher presumes that if

students had been given a longer period of time between taking the pre- and post-tests along with further instruction in the communicative approach, the data results would have shown more growth in overall student ability in the foreign language.

Students in the control group were much more attentive and easier to manage because of the structure of the grammatical lessons. After a few days of this type of structure, students were able to make more sense of the grammar lessons the researcher was teaching them, and their comprehension of the novel is deeper because of their grammatical knowledge.

The researcher found that implementation of the communicative approach was difficult. Despite research on the best ways to use the communicative approach to teaching a foreign language, putting it into practice and watching students flourish in it was a much different experience. The researcher found the experimental group to be lacking in focus due to the less structured learning environment. In order for a communicative approach to language teaching and learning to take place, expectations of students must be made clear, and boundaries must be set from the very beginning. Furthermore, trying to implement a new instructional strategy mid-year caused disruptions in student learning because students were used to the patterns of instruction already in place from the previous weeks of school. This, too, impacted the overall results of the pre- and post-test data.

As a result of this action research, this researcher concluded that students in a level one foreign language class need both grammatical instruction and authentic opportunities for communication. Using one method or the other on a daily basis for the entire year may not allow for the most student success, but rather a combination of grammatical explanation and

communicative activities that help students practice those concepts might be the most effective teaching practice.

Recommendations

One recommendation that this researcher suggests for future study is that the allotted time for experimentation be increased by at least a month or two. In order to evaluate if true acquisition and comprehension has occurred using the different teaching methods, students must experience the instruction over a longer period of time. Another recommendation for this action research project concerns the pre- and post-test. If similar questions were to be asked again, it is recommended that the teacher give a list of definitions for all the grammatical terminology. Moreover, it is recommended that the pre- and post-tests are limited to three to five questions rather than ten. The researcher in this study asked students to remain anonymous when they took the pre- and post-tests in an effort to lower their anxiety level while taking the tests. However, a more significant structure for administering the pre- and post-test is needed so that students provide complete and honest answers.

Limitations of the Study

Although some conclusions about the best practices in the foreign language classroom can be seen from the results of this study, there were also some limitations. Some of the students in the study had taken a previous foreign language course in their middle schools, so they had higher levels of language comprehension and acquisition even before the action research began. Therefore, when the data from those students is mixed in with the data of students who had never before taken a foreign language course, it is possible that results were skewed.

Another limitation of the study was the population size and demographics. Many of the students in both the control group and the experimental group were Latino, and used Spanish in their homes on a regular basis, which may have skewed their pre- and post-test scores. Another limitation was the skill level of the instructor in administering the communicative approach. Adopting a new pedagogy and methodology proved more challenging than anticipated. The limited experience and expertise of the instructor may have been a limitation to the success of the study. Finally, the allotted time frame chosen for the study was a limitation of the study. The limited number of class periods that students received instruction may have had an effect on their language acquisition and comprehension of grammatical concepts.

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Appendix A

Pre and Post Test

1) **Using the following scale, rate yourself on how well you could you summarize the novel,** *Pobre Ana* **to a friend in Spanish:**

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

   Not at all   A few words   A few sentences   A paragraph   The entire book

2) **Using the following scale, rate yourself on your understanding of the Spanish language (vocabulary, sentence structure, comprehension of storyline):**

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

   None   A few words   A few sentences   A paragraph   The entire book

3) **Using the novel as your backdrop, could you give an example of a Direct Object Pronoun?**

   Yes, and the example is: _____   No

4) **Using the novel as a backdrop, could you give an example of a Conjugated Verb + Infinitive Verb?**

   Yes, and the example is: _____   No

5) **Using the novel as a backdrop, could you give an example of a Reflexive Verb?**

   Yes, and the example is: _____   No

6) **Using the novel as a backdrop, could you give an example of an Indirect Object Pronoun?**

   Yes, and the example is: _____   No

7) **Using the following scale, please rate your Spanish pronunciation skills based on the reading we have done in class.**

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

   Poor   Fair   Good   Excellent   Like a native speaker

8) Using the following scale, indicate how much of the vocabulary in the book you can comprehend.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

None   Very few words   Some words   Most words   Majority   All words

9) As a whole, do you feel you would have a better overall comprehension of the novel if we learned grammatical concepts *(see questions 3-6)* **with accompanying learning activities BEFORE reading?**

No, I understand the book just fine without grammar exercises

I would have a slightly better understanding with grammar exercises before reading

Yes, I wish we could spend time learning grammar BEFORE reading the novel

10) As a whole, do you feel that your understanding of grammatical concepts *(see questions 3-6)* **has HINDERED your comprehension of the novel?**

No, I understand the novel just fine, and pick up grammatical knowledge along the way

I would have a slightly better understanding of the novel if we studied the grammatical concepts first

Yes, I would understand the novel completely if we studied the grammatical concepts first

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Education

M.A. Teacher Leadership, Dordt College (2014)

B.A. Spanish K-12 Education, Calvin College (2006)

Academic Employment

Teacher (9-12), Whittier Christian High School, La Habra, CA (2010-present)

- Plan and implement daily lessons for Spanish levels 1 and 2
- Use Edline to post grades, communicate with students and parents, and coordinate class calendar
- Chaperone student life events on and off campus
- Serve as a member on an accreditation team for the Association of Christian Schools International
- Initiated the use of *Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling* curriculum for Spanish level 1

Teacher (9-12), Ontario Christian High School, Ontario, CA (2008-2010)

- Planned and implemented Spanish lessons for levels 1 and 2
- Coached Cross Country Running and Track and Field
- Initiated and led girls Bible study and fellowship once a week
- Served as a mentor teacher for student leaders for Jackson, MS Justice Journey

Teacher (K-8), Ontario Christian Elementary School, Ontario, CA (2006-2008)

- Initiated K-8 Spanish classes
- Planned and implemented Spanish curriculum for grades K-8
- Coached high school Cross Country Running and Track