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ABSTRACT

A language skills program was developed at Lake City Community College to increase remedial students' chances of academic success in college courses. The program concentrates first on developing students' speaking and listening skills and then proceeds to more complex reading and writing skills. The program provides 16 weeks of developmental study for academically underprepared students, during which skills in oral communication, listening comprehension, grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, paragraph writing, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and study skills are approached in an integrated manner. An evaluation of the program involved two groups of students: an experimental group (N=26) of students who completed the language skills program and subsequently the college's basic English course, and a control group (N=25) of students who completed only the basic English course. The groups were compared on the basis of pre- and post-test measures of vocabulary and reading comprehension, and final grades in the English course. The results indicated that the experimental group performed better on both the vocabulary and comprehension tests and averaged a full letter grade higher than the control group in the English course. (HB)

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INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS: AN APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

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## INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS: AN APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

The problem of the underprepared student has plagued postsecondary educators for decades. In increasing numbers, students who are not prepared academically to meet the demands of higher education are attracted to the liberal admissions policy of the public community college. These educationally deficient students have a history of academic struggle, frustration, and failure, yet they look to the community college with unexplainable expectations of finding a miracle cure for their scholastic ailments. Before these students can progress in collegiate courses, mastery of skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and logical thinking must be achieved.

Even though educating the underprepared student has been an issue of concern in postsecondary education for decades, limited progress has been made since the early efforts at remediation (Roueche and Clark, 1981). The time, money, and effort devoted to redeeming the underprepared student frequently have been wasted on poorly designed curricular models, short-sighted goals, and inappropriate materials and methods. Traditional developmental courses are mainly attenuated versions of the regular college-level courses. Diagnostic testing and accurate screening often are overlooked as students are placed in programs based on vague objectives and unsubstantiated philosophies (Roueche and Armes, 1980). A deficiency in verbal skills has plagued the underprepared student, yet few remedial programs have focused on the development of these skills.

Lake City Community College, a small rural institution located in north Florida, was determined to find an approach to remediation which would increase its students' chances for academic success. After extensive research and planning, the Language Skills Program was developed. Based on

a philosophy which views the skills of reading, writing, and speaking in an interdisciplinary manner, this nontraditional approach is an attempt to ameliorate the weakness of earlier programs by proceeding from sound theory and conclusive research. Developmental instruction based on an integrated skills approach provides the learner with the opportunity to concentrate first on oracy--listening and speaking--and then on the more complex skills of literacy--reading and writing. This approach, which takes the learner "back to the beginning," is based on the knowledge that oral language is at the base of reading and writing (Shaughnessy, 1977). The Language Skills Program provides the student with an opportunity to develop a broad range of communication competencies. This growth provides a broad base for future learning and helps the underprepared student become more competent in the communication skills. Thus, the potential for being more successful in regular college-level courses may be increased.

#### Description of the Language Skills Program

The Language Skills Program provides sixteen weeks of developmental study for the academically underprepared student. Students are involved in language related activities for twelve hours each week. Daily lab sessions of two hours each day, five days a week, provide time for individual tutoring and group work. The program yields twelve hours of institutional (non college-level) credit. Language Skills participants are encouraged to enroll simultaneously in a one-hour course such as physical education or choir so they would feel that they are a part of the regular student body.

Although the lab work is based on individual needs, the program provides instruction in the following areas: oral communication, listening comprehension, grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, paragraph writing, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. The content of this program also focuses on the development of study skills in areas such as notetaking, outlining, dictionary usage, test preparation and test taking,

and research skills and library usage. The Language Skills Program is designed to increase student persistence in college and thus lower the attrition rate by preparing students for a college-level curriculum through improved reading and writing skills.

The Language Skills Program differs from the traditional programs in that the communication skills are approached in a unified manner. Classroom activities and learning modules used in this program are designed to incorporate more than just one communication skill. For example, writing assignments are not limited to writing, but rather include prewriting activities which interrelate listening, viewing, reading, and speaking. Once a written assignment has been prepared, proof-reading practice incorporates the oral mode as the student tape records his written communication. Thus, the growth of skill in proofreading is approached through oral reading of the composition. The learner, under the direction of the instructor or tutor, is encouraged to note the pattern of his sentences by hearing and reading his language and thus becomes more aware of grammatical constructions.

The integrated skills approach is also applied to spelling instruction. A sample spelling unit which is part of the Language Skills Program includes work on correct pronunciation through the use of a tape recorder. In this unit the student studies the letter configurations in an attempt to develop his visual memory. Using the words in sentences and recording the sentences on tape require that the words be used in context, thus expanding the student's speaking and reading vocabularies.

Reading instruction is also based on an integrated skills approach. A student may listen to a tape as he reads a selection, or he may read the selection and prepare his own recording. Skills in oral language, sentence structure, and vocabulary are being developed as a part of reading instruction. The discussion of comprehension questions may be a small group activity or an individual or group written activity.

The integrated skills approach is also used for grammar instruction. Units in subject/verb agreement are presented to the student in both the aural and written modes, thus allowing him to see and hear the correct constructions. Oral and written practice complement this activity as the student is given the opportunity to apply the rules of grammar.

Evaluation of the Language Skills Program

The director of the Language Skills Program conducted an experimental study to aid in evaluation of the program. To assess the effectiveness of the program, student progress in subsequent courses was considered. That is, a student may be successful in remedial, non-college classes, but also must be successful in college level courses. Since developmental programs fail to be effective if communication deficiencies are not eradicated beyond the term of remediation, student performance in a regular college-level course after completion of a remedial program was an area of concern. Therefore, student performance was assessed after completion of Basic English, a regular college-level grammar and writing skills course which was a required course for all of the students who participated in the study.

The study involved an analysis of the performance of two groups of students. The first group, known as the experimental group (n=26), completed the elective Language Skills Program and then completed the required Basic English course. The second group, known as the control group, (n=25), completed only the Basic English course. Assessment included the following:

- 1) Pretest and posttest measures of reading comprehension for both the control group and the experimental group.
- 2) Posttest measures in vocabulary for both the control group and the experimental group.
- 3) Basic English final examination scores for both the control group and the experimental group.

A pretest-posttest-control group experimental design was employed to determine if participation in the Language Skills Program (independent variable) had a significant effect on the dependent measures of reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and Basic English final exam scores. Prior to the random assignment to their respective groups, all subjects completed the Reading Comprehension subtest of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, Form B (1973). To establish group equivalence, a t statistic was computed to compare placement score means for the experimental and control samples. The obtained t value was .8725 (Table 1).

Since all students did not receive their Basic English instruction from the same instructor, "instructor variables" such as personality and teaching style may have produced direct or interactive effects on the dependent measures. Therefore, testing for the effect of this variable was necessary. In order to assess the extent of the influence of the "instructor variable," the experimental and control groups were further divided into four subgroups with each subgroup corresponding to one of the four instructors. In all four of the two-way ANOVAs, the results indicate that the choice of instructor for Basic English had no significant effect on the dependent measures (Tables 2,3,4).

The results of this experimental study demonstrate that students receiving instruction in the Language Skills Program (experimental group) performed significantly better on the Reading Comprehension subtest of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The control group mean raw score was 10.60, while the Language Skills group mean raw score was 14.08, which represents a 33% difference. This difference was significant ( $F(1,43) = 7.47$ ;  $F_{crit.}(1,42,.05) = 4.07$ ) (Table 2). Student scores on the Vocabulary subtest of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test also indicate that completion of the Language Skills Program produced a significant effect. The mean raw score for the Language Skills students was 19.73, while the mean raw score for the control group was 14.00. This represents a 41% difference which was significant ( $F(1,43) = 5.24$ ;  $F_{crit.}(1,42,.05) = 4.07$ ) (Table 3).

The researcher also determined that Language Skills instruction improved performance in those skills emphasized in the Basic English course at Lake City Community College. The dependent measure was the student's score on the Basic English comprehensive final exam. On this measure, the two groups differed markedly. The mean percent correct for the Language Skills group was 77.15%, and the mean percent correct for the control group was 67.04%. The difference was significant ( $F(1,40) = 6.98$ ;  $F_{crit}(1,42, .05) = 4.07$ ) (Table 4). This difference represents an improvement of two letter grades for those students who participated in the Language Skills Program. For the Basic English final course grade, the Language Skills group averaged more than a full letter grade higher than the non Language Skills group. These findings suggest that the Language Skills Program may help prepare students for the regular college curriculum.

In addition to improved student performance, the Language Skills Program has been effective in maintaining a high retention rate of 90 - 95%. This is significant when compared to an estimated college-wide retention rate of 70%.

Students' evaluations of the program have been quite favorable; almost 90% of the students noted that they would recommend the program to other students. Given the results noted above, it is evident that the Language Skills Program is an innovative program of developmental studies which is effectively meeting the needs of the academically unprepared students. Data and information on the Language Skills Program have been disseminated to other institutions within Florida's community college system, and the response has been positive.



Table 1  
Group Equivalence as Measured by  
Raw Scores on Placement Test

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Language Skills Group (n=26)	X=9.15	SD=3.23
Control Group (n=25)	X=8.28	SD=4.85

$H_0$ : Language Skills - control = 0

$t_{observed} = .8725$

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Table 2  
 Reading Comprehension as Measured by  
 Raw Scores on Nelson-Denny Reading Test

Language Skills Group ( <u>n</u> =26)	$\bar{X}$ =14.08	SD=2.86
Control Group ( <u>n</u> =25)	$\bar{X}$ =10.10	SD=4.82

ANOVA					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	
Language Skills	123.23	1	123.23	7.47	p<.01
"Instructor"	17.99	3	6.00	.36	NS
Interaction	36.66	3	12.22	.74	NS
Error	709.60	43	16.50		
Total	887.48	50			

Table 3  
 Vocabulary Development as Measured by  
 Raw Scores on Nelson-Denny Reading Test

Language Skills Group ( <u>n</u> =26)	$\bar{X}$ =19.73	SD = 8.44
Control Group ( <u>n</u> =25)	$\bar{X}$ =14.00	SD = 8.19

ANOVA					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	
Language Skills	350.58	1	350.24	5.24	p<.05
"Instructor"	322.38	3	107.46	1.60	NS
Interaction	150.14	3	50.05	.75	NS
Error	289.10	43	66.76		
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,702.20</b>	<b>50</b>			

Table 4

Final Examination Scores as Measured by  
Percent Correct on Basic English Comprehensive Final Examination

Language Skills Group ( <u>n</u> =26)	$\bar{X}$ =77.15	SD=10.64
Control Group ( <u>n</u> =25)	$\bar{X}$ =67.04	SD=12.25

ANOVA					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	
Language Skills	958.35	1	958.35	6.98	
"Instruccor"	136.88	3	45.63	33	NS
Interaction	493.16	3	164.39	1.20	NS
Error	5906.95	43	137.37		
Total	7495.34	50			

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ABSTRACT

INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS: AN APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

This study investigated the effectiveness of a remedial program for the adult student based on an integrated language skills approach. The researcher designed and implemented a program based on this philosophy at the community college level. In this remedial program, the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking were approached in an interrelated manner.

A pretest/posttest control group experimental design was employed to assess the skills of the Language Skills students and those of a comparable group of non Language Skills students. An assessemnt of student performance in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and written syntactic complexity was conducted after the experimental and control groups completed a regular college-level basic English course. A significant difference was noted in measures of written syntactic complexity. Participation in the Language Skills Program was found to have improved students' skills in the skills emphasized in the regular college-level English courses.

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