

Linguistic Intelligence: a Case Study of Thai Children Studying English with an American Teacher

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ABSTRACT

As stated by a leading authority “All tiny children are linguistic geniuses”. This paper explores the relevance of cultural background and context, in terms of the issues related to developmental theory over time; and seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges faced by young students studying the English language, from a n Thai perspective. The ability to learn languages in a child's first three years is a miracle beyond comprehension. The intention of this study is to investigate the outcomes of Thai children, two to three years of age, who study English with a native-American speaker; and to identify the techniques applied in which to maximize the development potential of these very young students. This study, which was conducted at the Native Speaking Kids School in Thailand’s Ubon Ratchathani province; was based upon the observations of student groups, consisting of five students from four separate classes, over a six-month period. The in-class activities employed by the American teachers aimed at gaining and maintaining the students' attention, were observed and documented. Research has indicated that early intervention is important, and should be maintained over a course of several years; in order to produce the linguistic goals desired of each student. Additionally, methods of motivation, positive acknowledgement and reward, as well as the factors necessary to establish a child’s ability to speak to English (with an American accent) were studied; in order to structure a more positive and affirmative learning environment in Thailand. The Denver Developmental Screening Test (DDST) was utilized within our focus groups of students, before and after attending the experimental classes.

Keywords: linguistic geniuses, studying the English language, DDST, native-American speakers.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a flexible social tool for the emblematic marking of social allegiances. We use variation in language to construct ourselves as social beings, to signal who we are, as well as who we are not and cannot be. Speakers choose among the sociolinguistic variants available. Their choices are grouped together in ways which are obvious and interpretable to other speakers within the community. This process is a functional and necessary part of the way we communicate. It is not an optional feature of the spoken language (Lippi-Green, 1997). As they say, “The soul of the three year-year-old lasts till a hundred”, and child specialists are fond of reminding parents that 80 percent of a child's brain cells are formed at that time. “The newborn baby is like a white sheet, and adults should take care to make the right impressions upon it” (Ibuka, 1976).

LITERARY REVIEW

I. Developmental Theories

1. Biological Theories

1.1 Charles Darwin

Darwin maintains the widely held notion that all life is related, and has descended from a common ancestor; birds, bananas, fish, and

flowers: all related. Darwin's general theory presumes the development of life from non-life and stresses a purely naturalistic (undirected) "descent with modification". That is to say, complex creatures evolve from more simplistic ancestors naturally, over time. In a nutshell, as random genetic mutation occurs within an organism's genetic code, the beneficial mutations are preserved; because they aid in the survival process known as "natural selection." These beneficial mutations are passed on to the next generation. Over time, beneficial mutations accumulate and the result is an entirely different organism (not just a variation of the original, but an entirely different creature).

Darwin's Theory of Evolution - Natural Selection

While Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a relatively young archetype, the evolutionary worldview itself is as old as antiquity. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Anaximander postulated the development of life from non-life, and the evolutionary descent of man from animal. Charles Darwin simply brought something new to the old philosophy -- a plausible mechanism called ‘*natural selection*.’ Natural selection acts to preserve and accumulate minor advantageous genetic mutations. Suppose a member of a species developed a functional advantage (such as developing wings and learning to fly). Its offspring would inherit that

advantage and pass it on to their offspring. The inferior (disadvantaged) members of the same species would gradually die out, leaving only the superior (advantaged) members of the species. Natural selection is the preservation of a functional advantage that enables a species to compete better in the wild. Natural selection is the naturalistic equivalent to domestic breeding. Over the centuries, human breeders have produced dramatic changes in domestic animal populations by selecting individuals in which to breed. Breeders eliminate undesirable traits gradually over time. Similarly, natural selection eliminates inferior species gradually over time.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution - Slowly But Surely.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a slow gradual process. Darwin wrote, "...Natural selection acts only by taking advantage of slight successive variations; she can never take a great and sudden leap, but must advance through short and sure, slow steps." Thus, Darwin conceded that, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down." Such a complex organ would be known as an '*irreducibly complex system*'. An irreducibly complex system is one composed of multiple parts, all of which are

necessary for the system to function. If even one part is missing, the entire system will fail to function. Every individual part is integral. Thus, such a system could not have evolved slowly, piece by piece. The common mousetrap is an everyday non-biological example of irreducible complexity. It is composed of five basic parts: a catch (to hold the bait), a powerful spring, a thin rod called 'the hammer', a holding bar to secure the hammer in place, and a platform to mount the trap. If any one of these parts is missing, the mechanism will not work. Each individual part is integral. The mousetrap is irreducibly complex.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution - A Theory in Crisis

Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a theory in crisis in light of the tremendous advances we've made in molecular biology, biochemistry, and genetics over the past fifty years. We now know that there are in fact tens of thousands of irreducibly complex systems on the cellular level. Specified complexity pervades the microscopic biological world. Molecular biologist Michael Denton wrote, "Although the tiniest bacterial cells are incredibly small, weighing less than 10^{-12} grams; each is in effect a veritable micro-miniaturized factory containing thousands of exquisitely designed pieces of intricate molecular machinery, made up altogether of one hundred thousand million atoms, far more complicated than any machinery built by man

and absolutely without parallel in the non-living world."

1.2 Mendel's Theory

Mendel developed three principles of inheritance based on his experiments with pea plants. Our understanding of how inherited traits are passed between generations comes from principles first proposed by Gregor Mendel in 1866. Mendel worked on pea plants, but his principles further apply to traits in plants and animals – they can explain how we inherit our eye color, hair color, and even tongue-rolling ability.

Mendel began with pure-breeding pea plants, as they always produced progenies with the same characteristics as the parent plant. Mendel cross-bred these plants and recorded the traits of their progeny over several generations.

There are some exceptions to Mendel's principles, which have been discovered as our knowledge of genes and inheritance has increased. The principle of independent assortment doesn't apply if the genes are close together (or linked) on a chromosome. Also, alleles do not always interact in a standard dominant/recessive way, particularly if they are codominant or have differences in expressivity or penetrance.

1.3 Gesell

The maturational theory of Arnold Gesell continues to affect what goes on in schools, particularly in early childhood classrooms in some parts of the United States. Gesell based his theory on three major assumptions: (a) development has a biological basis, (b) good and bad years alternate, and (c) body types (endomorph, ectomorph, and mesomorph). Maturational theory strongly influenced the teaching of reading in the mid 1900's. Children were not thought to be ripe for reading until they reached a mental age of six and a half years. Consequently, readiness activities were developed for children who were not yet ready to read. Some of this nonsense still occurs in preschool, kindergarten, and even primary-level classrooms.

Practitioners subscribing to maturational theory consider any difficulties a child experiences as being found *within* the child. This over simplistic explanation for anything from reading problems to Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADHD) is extremely limiting to children and to those who work with them. If a problem lies within a child, then what value does a supportive (or, for that matter, a non-supportive) environment have?

2. Personality and Social Theories

2.1 Psychosexual developmental Stages

Freud (1905) proposed that psychological development in childhood takes place in a series of fixed stages. These are called psychosexual stages, as each stage represents the fixation of the libido (roughly translated as sexual drives or instincts) on a different area of the body. As a person grows physically, certain areas of their body become important as sources of potential pleasure (erogenous zones), frustration, or both.

Freud believed that life was built around tensions and pleasure. Freud also believed that all tension was due to the build-up of the *libido* (sexual energy), and that all pleasure came from its discharge.

In describing human personality development as psychosexual, Freud theorized that what develops (biologically) is the way in which sexual energy accumulates and discharges, as we mature. Freud used the term 'sexual' in a very general way, to mean all pleasurable thoughts and actions. Freud stressed that the first five years of life are crucial to the formation of the adult personality. The *id* must be controlled in order to satisfy social demands; thus setting up conflicts between frustrating wishes and social norms.

The *ego* and *superego* develop in order to exercise this control and direct the need for gratification into socially acceptable channels. Gratification centers within

different areas of the body, at different stages of growth; make the conflict at each stage *psychosexual*.

THE ROLE OF CONFLICT

Each of the psychosexual stages is associated with a particular conflict that must be resolved before the individual can successfully advance to the next stage. The resolution of each of these conflicts requires the expenditure of sexual energy. The more energy that is expended in a particular stage, the more significant characteristics of that stage remains with the individual, as he/she matures psychologically.

To explain this Freud suggested the analogy of military troops on the march. As the troops advance they are met by opposition or conflict. If they are highly successful in winning the battle (resolving the conflict) then more of the troops (libido) will be able to move on to the next battle (stage).

But the greater the difficulty encountered at any particular point, the greater the need for troops to remain behind to fight and thus the fewer that will be able to go on to the next confrontation.

FRUSTRATION, OVERINDULGENCE AND FIXATION

Some people do not seem to be able to leave one stage and proceed on to the next. One reason for this may be that the needs of the developing individual at any particular stage may not have been adequately met, resulting in frustration. Or, possibly the person's needs may have been so well satisfied, that he/she is reluctant to leave the psychological benefits of a particular stage in which there is overindulgent satisfaction.

Both frustration and overindulgence (or any combination of the two) may lead to what psychoanalysts call *fixation* at a particular psychosexual stage. Fixation refers to the theoretical notion that a portion of the individual's libido has been permanently 'invested' in a particular stage of his development. It is assumed that some portion of the libido is permanently invested in each psychosexual stage, and thus each person will behave in some ways that are characteristic of infancy, or early childhood.

PSYCHOSEXUAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

You can remember the order of these stages by using the mnemonic: “old (oral) age (anal) pensioners (phallic) love (latent) grapes (genital) in Fig 1.

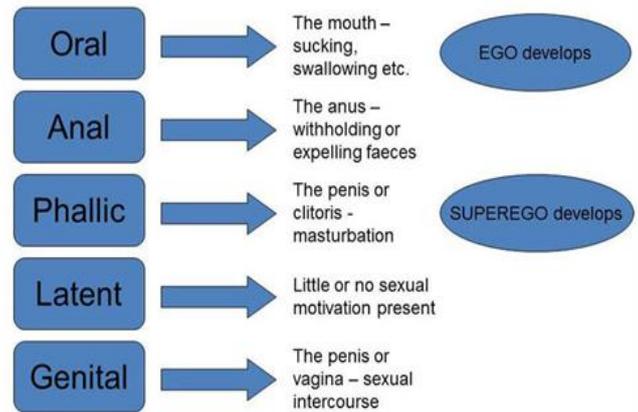


Fig. 1 Psychosexual Stages of Development.

2.2 Psychosocial Developmental Stage

Erik Erikson does not *talk* about psychosexual stages, he *discusses* psychosocial stages. Freud's influence over Erickson included Freud's (1923) theory regarding the structure and topography of personality.

Erikson was an ego psychologist. He emphasized the role of culture and society, and the conflicts that can take place within the ego itself; whereas Freud emphasized the conflict between the id and the superego. According to Erikson, the ego develops as it successfully resolves crises that are distinctly social in nature. These involve establishing a sense of trust in others, developing a sense of identity in society, and helping the next generation prepare for the future.

Erikson extends on Freudian thoughts by focusing on the adaptive and creative characteristics of the ego, and expanding the notion of the stages of personality

development to include one's entire lifespan. Erikson proposed a lifespan model of development, taking in five stages up to the age of 18 years, and three further stages beyond, well into adulthood. Erikson suggests that there is still plenty of room for continued growth and development throughout one's life. He put a great deal of emphasis on the adolescent period, feeling it was a crucial stage for developing a person's identity.

Like Freud and many others, Erik Erikson maintained that personality develops in a predetermined order, and builds upon each previous stage. This is called the epigenic principle.

The outcome of this 'maturation timetable' is a wide and integrated set of life skills and abilities that function together within the autonomous individual. However, instead of focusing on sexual development (like Freud), Erickson was interested in how children socialize, and how this affects their sense of self.

3. Emotional Theories

The major theories of motivation can be grouped into three main categories: physiological, neurological, and cognitive. Physiological theories suggest that responses within the body are responsible for emotions. Neurological theories propose that activity within the brain leads to emotional responses. Finally, cognitive theories argue that thoughts

and other mental activity play an essential role in the formation of emotions.

David Ausubel was a proponent of cognitive learning, who focused on the learning of school subjects, and who placed considerable interest on what the student *already knows* as being the primary determiner of whether or not he continues to learn, and what he/she learns next. Ausubel viewed learning as an active process, not simply responding to your environment. Learners seek to make sense of their surroundings by integrating new knowledge with that which they have already learned.

Ausubel was leery of the research conducted in laboratories, which often used stimuli that were not typical of school subjects. For example, Ausubel's research in learning involved having students memorize nonsensical terms such as 'sdrgp'; or paired associates, such as 'table-banana' as these were likely new and unfamiliar to learners. For Ausubel, this was simply rote learning that remained isolated from other knowledge the learner had already acquired. It was not potentially meaningful, where as schools subjects were. Ausubel sought to study how we learn content, like school subjects. He often wrote of 'meaningful learning', rejecting the mechanical and habitual formats as inappropriate, if we are to improve learning in schools.

- ❖ Social/personal: aspects of socialization inside and outside the home (e.g., smiling).
- ❖ Fine motor functions: eye/hand co-ordination, and manipulation of small objects (e.g., grasping and drawing).

The key concept for Ausubel is the *cognitive structure*. He sees this as the sum of all acquired knowledge; as well as the relationships among the facts, concepts, and principles that make up that knowledge. He felt that learning requires bringing something new into our cognitive structure, attaching it to our existing knowledge (located there), and giving it meaning

4. Cognitive Theories

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget was a biologist who originally studied mollusks, yet moved into the study of the development of children's understanding through observation, as they worked given exercises.

His view of how children's minds work and develop has been enormously influential, particularly in educational theory. His particular insight was the role of maturation (simply growing up) in children's increasing capacity to understand their world; citing that children cannot undertake certain tasks until they are psychologically mature enough to do

so. His research has spawned a great deal more, much of which has undermined the detail of his own, but like many other original investigators, his importance comes from his overall vision.

He proposed that children's thinking does not develop entirely smoothly: instead, there are certain points at which it "takes off" and moves into completely new areas and capabilities. He saw these transitions as taking place at about 18 months, 7 years, and 11 to 12 years. This has been taken to mean that before these ages children are not capable (no matter how bright) of understanding things in certain ways, and has been used as the basis for scheduling a school curriculum. Whether or not this *should* be the case is a different matter.

The accumulating evidence is that this scheme is too rigid; in that many children manage concrete operations earlier than he thought, and some people never attain formal operations (or at least are not called upon to use them) in Table 1,2.

TABLE 1: Piaget's Key Ideas

Adaptation	What it says: adapting to the world through <u>assimilation and accommodation</u> .
Assimilation	The process by which a person takes material into their mind from the environment, which may mean changing the evidence of their senses to make it fit.
Accommodation	The difference made to one's mind or concepts by the process of assimilation. [Note that assimilation and accommodation go together; as you can't have one without the other.]
Classification	The ability to group objects together on the basis of common features.

Class Inclusion	The understanding (more advanced than simple classification) that some classes or sets of objects are also sub-sets of a larger class. (E.g. there is a class of objects called dogs. There is also a class called animals. But all dogs are also animals, so the class of animals includes that of dogs)
Conservation	The realization that objects or sets of objects stay the same even when they are changed about, or made to look different.
Decentration	The ability to move away from one system of classification to another one, as appropriate.
Egocentrism	The belief that you are the centre of the universe and everything revolves around you; and the corresponding inability to see the world as someone else does, and adapt to it. Not moral 'selfishness', but an early stage of psychological development.
Operation	The process of working something out in your head. Young children (in the sensorimotor and pre-operational stages) have to act, and try things out in the real world, to work things out (like counting on fingers); whereas older children and adults can accomplish such in their heads.
Schema (or scheme)	The representation in the mind of a set of perceptions, ideas, and/or actions; which go together.
Stage	A period in a child's development in which he or she is capable of understanding some things, but not others.

TABLE 2: Stages of Cognitive Development

Stage	Characterized by
Sensory-motor (Birth - 2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate self from objects. • Recognize self as an agent of action and begins to act intentionally (e.g. pulls a string to set a mobile in motion or shakes a rattle to make a noise. • Achieve object permanence: realize that things continue to exist even

Stage	Characterized by
	when no longer present to the sense (pace Bishop Berkeley)
Pre-operational (2 - 7 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to use language and to represent objects by images and words. • Thinking is still egocentric: have difficulty taking the viewpoint of others. • Classifies objects by a single feature (e.g. group together all the red blocks regardless of shape, or all the square blocks regardless of color).
Concrete operational (7 - 11 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think logically about objects and events. • Achieve conservation of number (age 6), mass (age 7), and weight (age 9). • Classify objects according to several features, and order them in a series along a single dimension, such as size.
Formal operational (11 years and up)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think logically about abstract propositions and test hypotheses systematically. • Become concerned with the hypothetical, the future, and ideological problems.

II. Denver Development Screening Test II (DDST II)

The Denver Developmental Screening Test II (DDST II) is a widely used assessment for examining the developmental progress of children, from birth until the age of 6, devised in 1969. The DDST II was originally designed at the University of Colorado Medical Center, Denver, Colorado, USA.

There were concerns raised at that time about

specific items in the test and, coupled with changing normal values, it was decided that a major revision of the test was necessary in 1992 (the DENVER II).

Test design

The test consists of up to 125 items, divided into four parts:

METHODOLOGY

This study is an experimental research aiming to investigate the development of Thai children studying English language with an American teacher, and to determine the results of the lesson plans based on development theories used in the classrooms (experiments)

Population of the study is Thai children, aged 1–2 years old, and studying English language with an American teacher for 50 minutes daily; four days per week. The length of the study is three months. There are four groups, each having five children. Total population is 20 students. All classes occurred at the Native Speaking Kids school, Ubon Ratchathani province.

Sample of the study are 10 Thai children, aged 1–2 years old, and studying

English language with an American teacher for 50 minutes on each day; 4 days per week. Again, the length of the study is three months. The sample is randomly selected from the population.

The experiment began with the researcher testing all samples, using DDST; to ensure that all children within the samples fall within the normal developmental progress of children. They were then selected based on various development theories. Figures 2 – 5 represent the chosen lesson plans, in which the researcher recorded each student's score in Fig 2,3,4,5.



Class	Month	Week	Day	Lesson	Duration	Activities	Instruction	Teaching materials
1	1st	1st	Day 1	Warm up songs	Less than 10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action: 1. If you are happy, and you know it...	- CD - CD Player
				Spatial concept	15 minutes	Tops and Bottoms	Sit on the floor with your toddler. Take three or four blocks and build a tower. Take a toy and put it on top of the blocks and say, "The toy is on the top" Knock the toy off the top of the tower and say "The toy is on the bottom. Repeat the game, letting your toddler move the toy from top to bottom	- Wooden Blocks
				Brain development	15 minutes	Can you find me?	Pick a favourite stuffed animal. Hide the animal while your child is watching. Says, "Where is bunny rabbit (or another stuffed animal)? Where could he be? Let's find him as quick as "one, two, three". Go to the place that the bunny has been hidden and pull it out. Say, "Here is rabbit. Hooray!" Continue the game by hiding other toys. Always say the rhyme (Changing the name of the stuffed animal) before you find the toy. Ask your toddler to hide a toy. Repeat the rhyme and let him find it.	- Stuffed animals. Ex. Rabbit, Pig, Dog, Duck, Cow, Cat, Owl, etc.

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Fig. 2 Lesson plan / Lesson 1



				Closing activity	10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action: 1. Ring a Ring o' Roses	- CD - CD Player
2	1st	1st	Day 2	Warm up songs	Less than 10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action: 1. If you are happy, and you know it...	- CD - CD Player
				Language development	15 minutes	Different voices	Sing a song: 1. Mary had a little lamb. 2. Jingle Bell First sing it in a normal singing voice. Now change your voice and try to get your toddler to do the same. Try different voices, including: High voice, Low voice, Soft voice, Nasal voice (hold your nose as you sing) This kind of game will help your young child learn about patterns of special	- CD - CD Player
				Develop large motor muscles	15 minutes	Cat and mouse	Show the students the animal flash cards of Cat, Mouse, and Dog. Use the animal puppet along with the Animal Sound book to show them how each animal sound like. Tell your child that you are a tiny little mouse and that she is a cat that is going to chase you. Tell her that the mouse says, "Squeak, squeak", and the cat says, "Meow, meow" Get down on the floor and say, "You can't catch me!" Start	-Animal sound book - Puppet animal: Cat, Mouse, Dog - Animal Flash cards: Cat, Mouse, Dog

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Fig. 3 Lesson plan / Lesson 2

							crawling quickly and encourage your child to chase you. Crawl behind furniture, under tables and into other rooms. When your child understands the game, swap roles.	
				Closing activity	10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action: 1. Ring a Ring o' Roses	- CD - CD Player
3	1st	1st	Day 3	Warm up songs	Less than 10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action: 1. If you are happy, and you know it...	- CD - CD Player
				Classical dance	15 minutes	Introducing ABC	Let students help to finish the ABC wooden floor puzzle. Say each alphabet to them out loud. Talk about items that each alphabet stands for. Ex. A for Apple, B for Ball, etc. Then, Sing ABC song	- ABC - Wooden floor puzzle - CD - CD Player - Apple - Ball
				Action rhymes	15 minutes	Little craft work	Give a dice template to each child. Tell them how to use a scissor and glue stick. Show them that you cutting the paper carefully, apply the glue, and fold the paper. Make a proper dice. Let the child choose colour magic pen. Tell them to draw a picture on each side. Let them count how many side the dice have.	- Dice template - Scissor - Glue - Colour - Magic Pens
				Closing activity	10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action:	- CD

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Fig. 4 Lesson plan / Lesson 3

							1. Ring a Ring o' Roses	- CD Player - CD
4	1st	1st	Day 4	Warm up songs	Less than 10 minutes	Sing and do action:	Sing and do action: 1. If you are happy, and you know it...	- CD Player
				Develop listening skills	15 minutes	Someone special	Develop your toddler's listening skills by saying the following poem to him: "I know someone very special. Do you know who? I'll turn around and turn around (turn around) And then I'll point to you" (point to your child!) Ask him to turn around as you say the poem. Repeat the poem and change the action. Instead of turning around, jump up and down, clap your hands, fly like a bird and so on.	- CD Player
				Spatal concept	15 minutes	On and under	Sit on the floor with your toddler. Take three or four blocks and build a tower. Take a toy and put it on the table and say, "The toy is on the table" Knock the toy off the top of the table and say "The toy is on the bottom. Repeat the game, letting your toddler move the toy from top to bottom. Put the toy on the chair, under the chair and do the same thing. Put the toy on the big storage box, under the storage box and do the same	- Plastic or Wooden blocks - Any toy - Table - Chair - Storage box

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Fig. 5 Lesson plan / Lesson 4

Each lesson plan is used repeatedly within the experiment each week. The duration of the experiment is three months. The objective vocabularies learned in each lesson (and included in both the pre-test and post-test exams) are listed. After three months, the sample groups completed the post-test exam. One-Group Pre-test Post-test

Design (Luan, 1995) was employed, and is illustrated in table 3.

TABLE 3 : One-Group Pre-test Post-test Design
Meaning of symbols:

O1 Administers the pre-test examination to each sample before entering the experiment (Pre-test).

O2 Administers the post-test examination to each sample after completion of the experiment (Post-test).

X The experiment involving Thai children, aged 1 – 2 years, which are normal developmental progress of children tested using DDST, and studying English language with an American teacher for 50 minutes each day; four days per week. The length of the study is three months.

Each student's scores from the pre-test exam and post-test exam were analyzed in Table 3.

Pre-test	Experiment	Post-test
O1	X	O2

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were derived from the samples, having normal developmental progress of children (estimated through the Denver Developmental Screening Test II – DDST II), after three months of experimentation. The sample has post-test examination scores higher than the pre-test

examination scores, with a statistical significance level of .01

The class of children studying English language with the selected lesson plans (based on theories of developmental learning by an American teacher) demonstrated improvements in their listening, speaking and reading skills. The theories of developmental learning were well related to the age group of students, ensuring that the lessons were both useful and interesting to the children.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to support the study of English language for early childhood, using the selected lesson plans based on theories of developmental learning, by an American teacher. The result of this study shows that one to two year old students learned English effectively through the use of the selected lesson plans. Further studies are recommended in investigating older students (two to three years old, or other age ranges) to consider the best time to a Thai student to start studying English.

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