

Achievement Grouping and Students' Progress in Freshman English Classes at Feng Chia University

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Abstract

Achievement grouping has been introduced in Freshman English classes in order to better cope with the wide disparities of students' proficiency in English and, thereby, improve English instruction in higher education. This study evaluated the actual progress students in grouped classes showed after one year of English instruction at Feng Chia University, Taiwan. At the beginning of the first semester, all first year students had to take a pre-test and were assigned to a class according to their scores. The classes were grouped into three levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced. At the end of the second semester the students had to take a post-test. The results of both tests were evaluated in this study and revealed significant differences in the proficiency of students. The study further showed that students in the basic level improved most, while students of the advanced level didn't make any substantial progress or scored even lower than in the pre-test. The differences in the progress of students of different colleges were not significant. Implications of these results for further improvement of the Freshman English program are discussed.

Keywords: achievement grouping, Freshman English, progress

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I. Introduction

In the past years, all students at Feng Chia University in Taichung, Taiwan, were assigned to freshman English classes according to their major fields. Each class thus consisted of about 60 students with a broad range of proficiency in the English language. While teaching a foreign language to such a big class will never be very effective, it is also difficult to instruct a class with a wide disparity of proficiency. Teaching at whatever level results in a large part of the students feeling the class either too easy and boring, or they are frustrated as they feel the course is too difficult for them. It is almost impossible to satisfy everybody's needs in such a classroom.

Furthermore, pressure from classmates with higher English ability is one reason for the occurrence of foreign language anxiety, which has a negative impact on students' achievements (Wu and Chan 2002). Consequently, assigning students according to their English proficiency in their college Freshman Year has been proposed already in the 1970s (Yen 1975, Tsai 1978). Tsai (1978) pointed out that teaching all students of one class together irrespective of their English proficiency has led to a situation where competency of college sophomores does not differ from competency of high school students.

Achievement grouping in this paper refers to the assignment of students to different classes according to their level of proficiency, as defined by Grossen (1996). It brings advantages not only for the teacher but for the students as well. The teacher can adjust the content of the course according to the students' level of proficiency, which simplifies the determination of curricula goals and the choice of a textbook. The students can thus receive a language instruction appropriate to their fluency in English.

However, achievement grouping has been described as one way of social comparison and has thus been considered as detrimental to motivation (Ames 1992). Consequently, when placed in the basic level, students may feel stigmatized and be frustrated as has been documented for elementary (Chou and Luo 2003) and junior high school students (Wang 1998) in Taiwan who were found to very much reject the idea of achievement grouping. In the highly competitive setting as schooling is regularly found in Taiwan, the better students didn't like the idea as achievement grouping meant that they wouldn't be the best students in their respective class any more. The low achieving students rejected it because of the stigmatization connected with being in the "low level" (Wang 1998). Chan (2004) also suggested that authorities should administer English proficiency tests carefully and schools should

avoid a “tag” effect when applying ability grouping in their English instruction at primary schools. In addition, if students attribute their failure to lack of ability, they may decrease their expectation of further success in learning English, as has been described for motivation in general in the attribution theory (Weiner 1985, 1992). Due to their perceived “low ability” the students may consequently develop a state of “learned helplessness” (e.g. Maier and Seligman, 1976, Peterson *et al.* 1993), i.e. students may feel that success is impossible for them, however hard they try, and thus give up learning at all.

However, Yang (1995) suggested that university students with a low proficiency in English very often feel neglected and cannot catch up with the rest of their class if no achievement grouping is adopted in the freshman English program and if materials and teaching methods are all the same. Baker (1998) reasoned that providing learning environments and supporting infrastructures that are conducive to successful learning activities can encourage students' motivation. Language anxiety, boredom, and frustration do not promote favorable learning conditions. Therefore, some universities and colleges in Taiwan introduced achievement grouping.

At Fu-Jen University achievement grouping and reduction of class size to no more than 40 students has been introduced since 1977 and has been evaluated as being effective and having more advantages than disadvantages (Chang 1992). This study didn't elaborate on students' progress. At National Pingtung University of Science and Technology achievement grouping has been implemented and is showing positive results, but the content of the course was limited to listening and speaking (Tsai *et al.* 2000). Tunghai University has also been practicing achievement grouping for quite a long time in their freshman English course, which emphasizes speaking and listening (Haakenson *et al.* 1995). However, they just reported that the majority of the students liked the program, without giving any further details. Chien (1987) and Chien *et al.* (2002) found inconsistent results in their two surveys at Chung Yuan Christian College, the first one suggesting that achievement grouping was not effective while the second one showed positive findings. However, no explanations were given which could explain the differences in these two studies. Luo and Tsai (2002) showed that especially students in the basic level benefited from achievement grouping by better attitudes towards learning English, higher self-confidence, and increased motivation to take further English courses compared to students in the intermediate and unlevelled classes. However, this study did not evaluate the progress in students' English ability at the end of the academic year. Thus, it was assumed that leveling at college level would have no negative effect on students' self-esteem but

that particularly students of the basic level would be able to significantly improve their English proficiency. Therefore, this study was conducted to compare students' English proficiency at the beginning of the first and the end of the second semester to evaluate their progress in learning English. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a reference for freshmen English programs in other colleges and universities as well.

II. Methodology

In Taiwan, freshman English refers to the study of English in the first year of universities and colleges. At Feng Chia University, the program is a 3-hour/3-credit required course, with focus on reading and writing, and a 1-hour/0-credit course of listening and speaking practice in the language lab.

At the beginning of the first semester, all first year students had to take a proficiency test (pretest) and were assigned to a course according to their scores in this test. The test consists of four parts: listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading. The format of the test is comparable to the format of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), except for a small part of the listening section where true/false questions are used. Students were told that the test was a placement test and that the scores would only be used to determine the level of English they would be assigned to during their freshman year. Students marked answers on a computer answer card. The total number of scores was 30, 20, 20, and 30 for the listening, vocabulary, grammar, and reading sections, respectively, so that the highest score reachable was 100 points.

The courses were classified into three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. Due to the high number of students in the college of business and the limited number of classrooms available, classes of this college were divided into two sections – business a and business b – that were taught at different periods. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences took part with only one class from the Department of Chinese. Thus, students from this college were assigned to the English courses of the College of Sciences. The English major students of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature were excluded from this study as these students received a substantial higher amount of English instruction compared to the non-English-major students.

The dividing lines for each level differed a little between colleges due to administrative reasons. The number of classes per level had to be decided upon before

the semester started. This was necessary in order to give teachers time to prepare their classes and to order textbooks so that those were available to the students when classes started. Deciding on how many students would be assigned to which level after evaluating the results of the pretest, i.e. on the first day of class would have been too late. For example, in the College of Business, five classes were assigned to the basic level, six to the intermediate, and four to the advanced level of each section (a and b). The dividing line between the basic and the intermediate level was 63 in the B section of the College of Business. For a dividing line of 63 points in the "a" section of the College of Business, one more class should have been assigned to the basic level instead of the intermediate level for those students that scored between 60 and 63 points. The dividing lines thus ranged between 52 and 63 for separation between basic and intermediate level and between 66 and 73 for intermediate and advanced level (see app. a-f).

At the end of the second semester, i.e. after 9 month of English instruction, the students had to take another proficiency test (posttest). This test has the same format as the pretest. As there was no make-up test for students who did not attend the posttest, these students were excluded from the study. Furthermore, during the pretest it was observed that some students did not really go through the test but checked answers by chance. They might have done this in order to be assigned to a lower level and thus pass a "comfortable" year of English instruction. Therefore, students who scored very low in the pretest but high in the posttest were excluded as well. The most obvious case was that of a student who scored 6 points in the pretest and 78 points in the posttest. Another critical problem discovered in the results was that almost one percent of the students were placed in incorrect levels (see app. a-f). These students were taken out of the analysis as well. Therefore, the total number of students in this study was 3296 (tab. 2).

As an improvement in their English proficiency was anticipated, the difference between pre- and posttest scores was defined as progress in this paper. The underlying hypotheses were that students in all levels would show significant progress and that students of the basic level would show the highest improvements. The data were analyzed with the SPSS software program. One-way analyses of variance were used to test the hypotheses. The Levene test was applied to test for homogeneity of variances, and the post-hoc procedures LSD and Tamhane were used for homogenous and inhomogeneous variances, respectively, to separate means. In addition, crosstabulations were done to identify misplaced students.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Grouping

The grouping of students revealed three problems. The first one was, as explained above, that some students intentionally tested low in order to be assigned to a lower level class and thus pass a “comfortable” year of English instruction. This problem has already been taken care of in this academic year. The scores of the pretest were taken into the calculation of the final scores of the first semester, accounting for 10 % of the total score. The results of the posttest of this academic year will show if this was enough to encourage all students to give their best in the test. But the posttest results should equally be credited to the final scores of the second semester, so that students will take that test serious as well and try their best. Although some obvious cases were excluded from this study, it cannot be guaranteed that there are no more such cases in the evaluation. The resulting differences between pre- and posttest, i.e. the progress students showed at the end of their freshman year, may thus have been higher than they would have been without this problem, especially in the basic level.

The second problem was that students assigned to the basic level still differed greatly in their English proficiency. In this level, scores ranged between 15 points for the lowest and 63 points for the highest achieving student in this level. In regard to the different colleges, differences were – with 32 points - lowest in the College of Construction and Development (referred to as College of Construction) and with 46 points highest in the College of Business. In the intermediate level the differences were least with a range of 11-16 points and in the advanced level the highest difference was found in the College of Information and Electrical Engineering (in this study referred to as the College of Information) but with 23 points still far lower than in the basic level (tab. 4). Therefore, the basic level should be divided into two levels as especially the very low achieving students need much more support.

The last problem was that almost 1 % of the students were assigned to an inappropriate level, either too high or too low (app. a-f). While in the College of Business this was a minor problem with only two out of 1160 students (app. a-b), there were 13 out of 702 students in the College of Information (app. e) and even 9 out of 370 students in the College of Sciences (app. f). The assigning of students was carried out by the Computer Center of Feng Chia University. Thus the questions how this misplacing could happen and how to avoid this problem in the future should be forwarded to the responsible person.

B. Students' English proficiency after high school: the pretest

Fig. 1 shows the cumulative percentage of students' scores in the pretest. If a benchmark of 60 points - marking the passing or failing in exams - is used to describe the results of the pretest, it can be seen that 46.1 % of all students "failed" this test, 23.9 % scored less than 50 points, and still 10.2 % even scored below 40 points. On the other hand, although a majority of 53.9 % "passed" this test, the majority of these students only scored between 60 and 69 points. Just 3 % of all students scored 80 points and above and none scored higher than 89. These results cast an immense shadow on English instruction at high school. The best results could be seen in the College of Business with 72.1 % of students "passing" the pretest, while an almost equal percentage of students of the College of Sciences (69.0 %) "failed" this test (tab. 1). Therefore, of the 361 students in the College of Sciences, 200 had been assigned to the basic level. This was the highest percentage of students in this level (55.4 %) for all colleges. Only 39 of the students of this college were assigned to the advanced level – the lowest percentage (10.8 %) compared to the other colleges. This reveals that students in this college (including the students from the Department of Chinese) had the lowest English proficiency. In the other colleges the distribution of students into the three levels was much more even and averaged 40 % in the basic and 22 % in the advanced level, regardless of the college (tab. 2 and fig. 2).

The results in tab. 3 reveal that students in the College of Business scored significantly better compared to the students of other colleges and the average was 64 in this college. The averages of all other colleges were below 60 with the significantly lowest being 52 for the College of Science. When observing the average scores of students from each college and each level (tab. 4 and fig. 3), it was found that they ranged between 41 and 52 in the basic level, with a school-wide average of 46 for this level, between 59 and 67 in the intermediate level with an average of 63, and between 72 and 77 in the advanced level with an average of 74. Again the College of Business showed the significantly best results while the College of Sciences and the College of Information showed equally low results except for the intermediate level, where the average score in the College of Information was significantly lower than that in the College of Science. Although there has not been done any research on this, it has long been observed by the English teachers of Feng Chia University that English proficiency of the students of the College of Business is higher than that of students from other colleges. It might be reasoned that students with a lower proficiency in English tend to choose majors apart from business as they know that English proficiency is very important when working in the field of business.

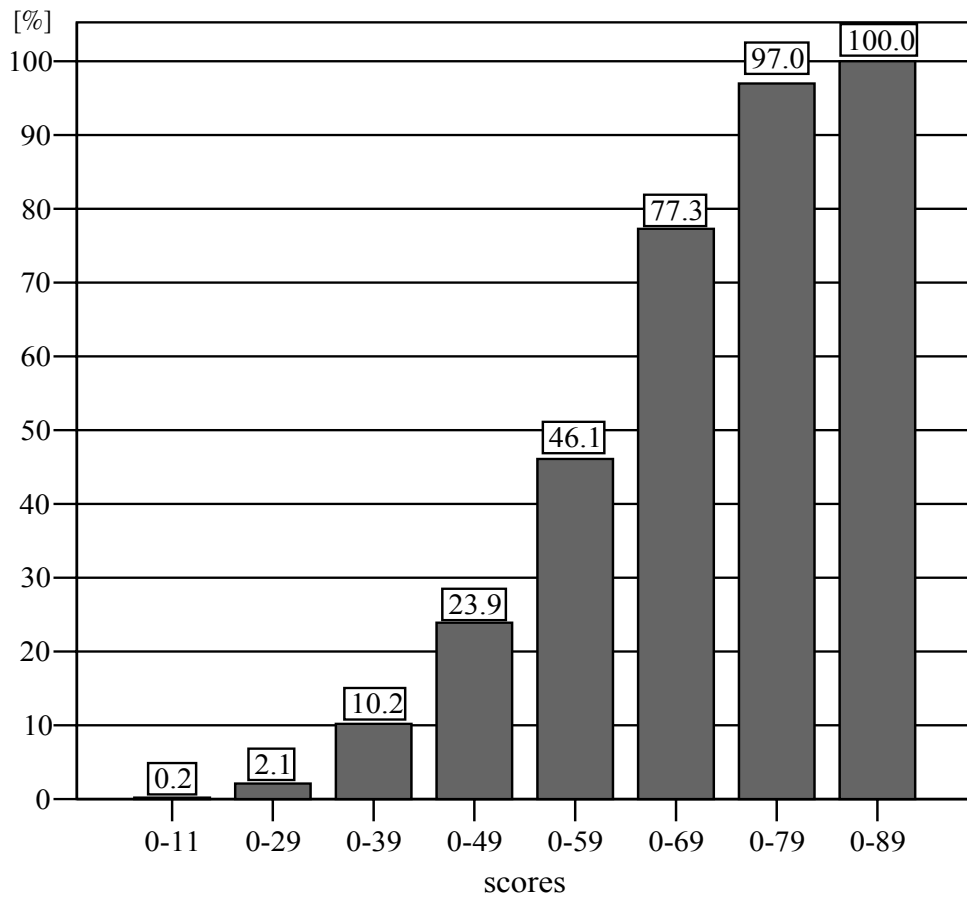


Fig. 1: Cumulative percentage of students' scores in the pretest

Tab. 1: Proportion of students with passing or failing grades in the pretest

college	passed [no.]	failed [no.]	passed [%]	failed [%]
all colleges	1777	1519	53.9	46.1
business	835	323	72.1	27.9
engineering	315	281	52.9	47.1
construction	223	269	45.3	54.7
information	292	397	42.4	57.6
sciences	112	249	31.0	69.0

passed = 60 points and above

failed = below 60 points

Tab. 2: Number of students in each level and college

level college	basic	intermediate	advanced	total
business	392	473	293	1158
engineering	249	232	115	596
construction	225	172	95	492
information	258	256	175	689
sciences	200	122	39	361
all colleges	1324	1255	717	3296

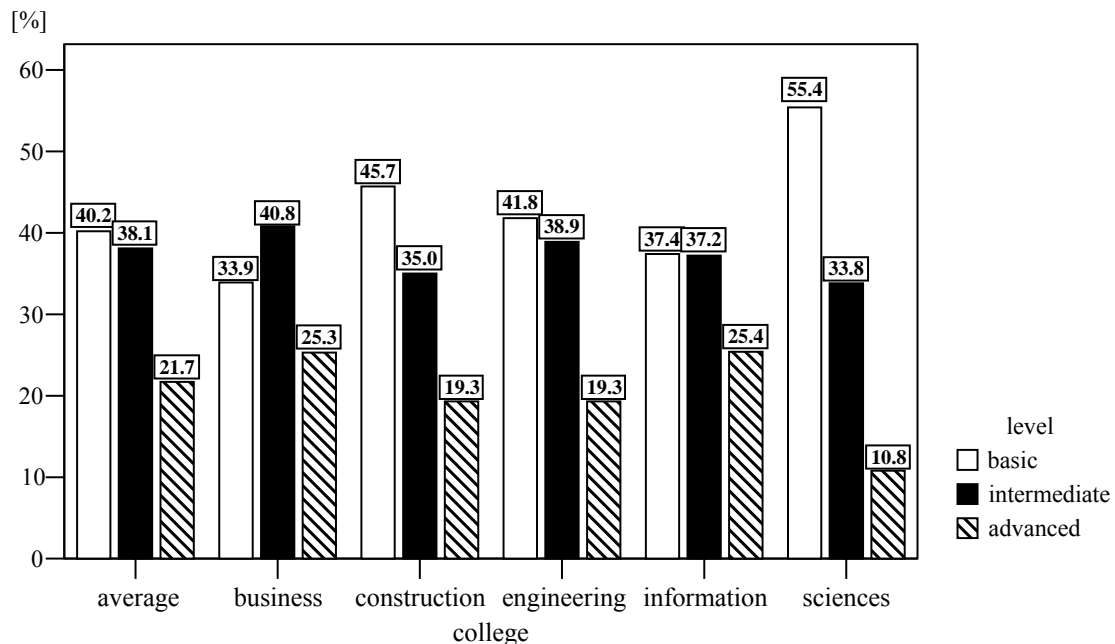


Fig 2: Percentage of students assigned to each level by college

Tab. 4 further reveals that the differences in achievement varied most in the basic level. While in the intermediate and advanced level differences between the lowest and the highest achieving students were within a range of 11 to 16 points and 13 to 23 points, respectively, differences in the basic level ranged between 32 and 46 points. Thus, classes in the basic level were still quite inhomogeneous and this level should have been separated in two different levels instead of one.

Tab. 3: Average results of the pretest by college

all levels		mean	sig* p≤0.01	minimum	maximum
test	college				
placement	business	64.20	a	17	86
	engineering	58.19	b	20	85
	construction	56.41	bc	24	88
	information	55.81	c	18	89
	sciences	51.96	d	15	82
post hoc: Tamhane	all colleges	58.75		15	89

*: Values with different letters within a group of rows are significantly different at $p \leq 0.01$

Tab. 4: Results of the pretest for each level and college

level	college	mean	sig* p≤0.01	minimum	maximum	maximal difference
basic	business	51.64	a	17	63	46
	engineering	46.60	b	20	58	38
	construction	44.76	b	24	56	32
	information	41.84	c	18	52	34
	sciences	40.77	c	15	53	38
post hoc: LSD	all colleges	45.97		15	63	
inter- mediate	business	66.89	a	60	73	13
	engineering	63.28	b	58	69	11
	construction	62.38	b	56	68	12
	information	58.90	d	52	66	14
	sciences	60.54	c	53	69	16
post hoc: Tamhane	all colleges	63.36		52	73	
advanced	business	76.65	a	71	86	15
	engineering	73.00	b	69	85	16
	construction	73.22	b	68	88	20
	information	71.89	b	66	89	23
	sciences	73.23	b	69	82	13
post hoc: Tamhane	all colleges	74.26		66	89	

*: Values with different letters within a group of rows are significantly different at $p \leq 0.01$

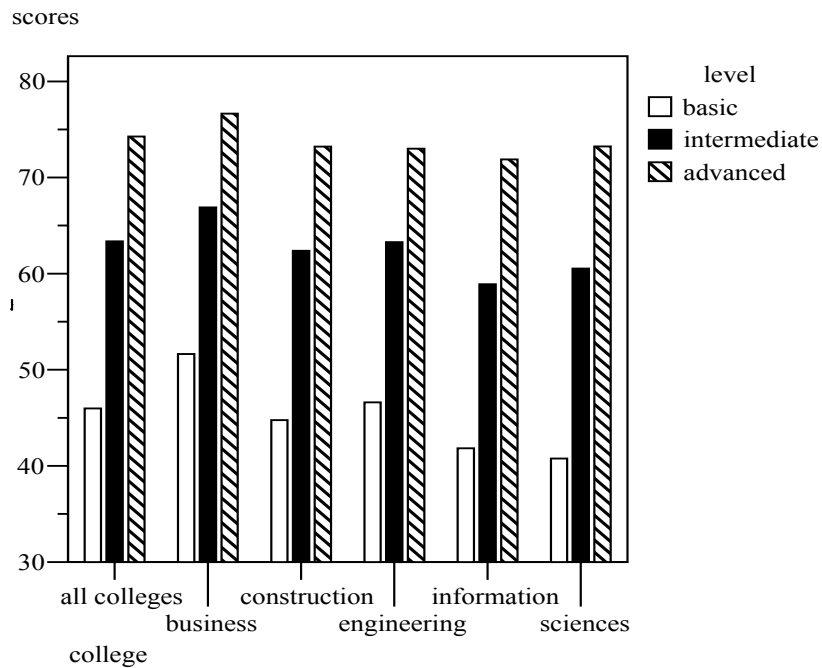


Fig. 3: Results of the pretest for each level and college

Tab. 5: Average results of the posttest and students' progress by college

all levels		mean	sig* p≤0.01	minimum	maximum
test	college				
posttest	business	68.10	a	21	91
	engineering	62.39	b	27	85
	construction	61.60	b	24	87
	information	59.30	c	23	88
	sciences	55.35	d	11	85
post hoc: Tamhane	all colleges	62.86		11	91
progress	business	3.90	ab	-29	56
	engineering	4.21	ab	-32	48
	construction	5.19	a	-26	39
	information	3.49	b	-23	35
	sciences	4.40	ab	-31	52
post hoc: Tamhane	all colleges	4.12		-32	56

*: Values with different letters within a group of rows are significantly different at p≤0.01

C. Students' English proficiency after two semesters of Freshman English instruction

The posttest (tab. 5) revealed the fact that in each college the average score of students was higher than in the pretest (tab. 3) but that the differences between the departments were almost the same as before so that students in the College of Business still scored significantly higher than students from the other colleges and that students in the College of Sciences still scored lowest. The highest increase in proficiency (progress) was found in the College of Construction with 5.19 points but being significantly different only compared to the progress of students from the College of Information. The range of scores between students was still very high with the lowest score being 11 compared to the highest score of 91 points. However, the overall increase in scores of just 4.12 points was unexpectedly low.

Tab. 6: Results of the posttest for each level and college

level	college	N. of students	mean	sig.* p≤0.01	minimum	maximum
basic post hoc: LSD	business	392	58.99	a	21	89
	engineering	249	53.25	b	27	76
	construction	225	52.48	b	24	74
	information	258	47.35	c	23	77
	sciences	200	46.61	c	11	77
	all colleges	1324	52.67		11	89
intermediate post hoc: Tamhane	business	473	70.56	a	36	86
	engineering	232	66.65	b	29	85
	construction	172	67.47	b	32	82
	information	256	62.00	c	34	82
	sciences	122	63.81	c	41	82
	all colleges	1255	67.01		29	86
advanced post hoc: LSD	business	293	76.33	a	54	91
	engineering	115	73.61	b	55	85
	construction	95	72.58	b	55	87
	information	175	72.98	b	53	88
	sciences	39	73.74	ab	55	85
	all colleges	717	74.44		53	91

*: Values with different letters within a group of rows are significantly different at p≤0.01

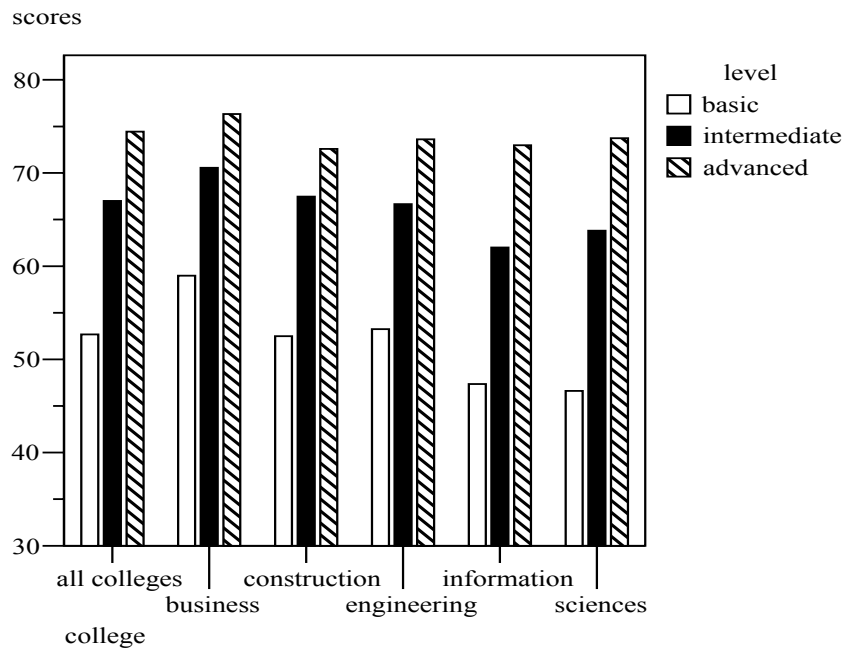


Fig. 4: Results of the posttest for each level and college

The results of the posttest are given for each college and each level in tab. 6 and fig. 4. While the minima in the basic level were comparable to the minima of those of the basic level of the pretest, they dropped by around 13 points in the advanced and by around 23 points in the intermediate level. The maxima raised by around 2 points in the advanced level, by around 13 points in the intermediate level and by around 26 points in the basic level (compare tab. 4 and 6). This means that after two semesters of Freshman English instruction the classes were much more inhomogeneous than at the beginning of the first semester. This is in accordance with what teachers regularly observe in Freshman English classes: some students are interested in learning English and study hard, others are indifferent and just do what they have to, while the remainders are not interested and unwilling to do anything to improve their English, but skip classes, prepare other classes during English instruction, or do other things unrelated to English.

The results in tab. 7 and fig. 5 show that students in the basic level improved most with an average increase of scores of 6.7, while students in the intermediate level increased by 3.65 points. However, students of the advanced level almost did not improve at all with an increase in their scores of only 0.18 points, with students in the College of Business and the College of Construction even scoring lower than in the pretest. But the differences between the colleges were not significant, regardless to the level. It may be argued that students in the advanced level had less room to improve

as it is far more difficult to improve when scores are already high.

Tab. 7: Students' progress in each level and college

level	college	N. of students	mean	sig.* p≤0.01	minimum	maximum
basic	business	392	7.35	a	-24	56
	engineering	249	6.65	a	-26	48
	construction	225	7.72	a	-19	39
	information	258	5.51	a	-19	35
	sciences	200	5.84	a	-31	52
post hoc: LSD	all colleges	1324	6.70		-31	56
intermediate	business	473	3.67	a	-29	24
	engineering	232	3.36	a	-32	22
	construction	172	5.09	a	-26	20
	information	256	3.10	a	-21	19
	sciences	122	3.27	a	-14	22
post hoc: LSD	all colleges	1255	3.65		-32	24
advanced	business	293	-0.32	a	-21	16
	engineering	115	0.61	a	-20	16
	construction	95	-0.64	a	-20	15
	information	175	1.10	a	-23	15
	sciences	39	0.51	a	-27	12
post hoc: LSD	all colleges	717	0.18		-27	16

*: Values with different letters within a group of rows are significantly different at p≤0.01

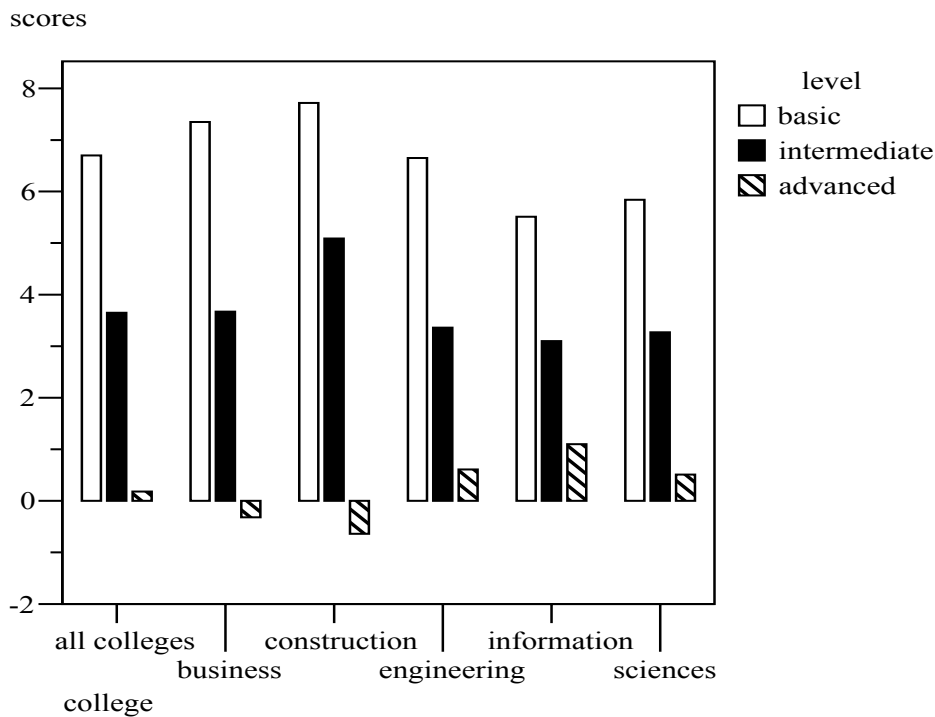


Fig. 5: Students' progress in each level and college

From tab. 8 it can be seen that the scores of 317 students of the advanced level increased by 1 to 10 points, which amounts to 44.2% of the students of this level and corresponds to 90.8% of those students who improved in that level. In the intermediate level the scores of 702 students (55.9 %) increased by up to 10 points, which translates to 79.2 % of the students who improved in that level. In the basic level scores of 41.6 % of the students increased by up to 10 points. But this corresponds to only 56.1 % of the students who improved in this level. Only 6.5 % of students in the advanced level scored 11 - 20 points higher, while in the intermediate level this amounted to 14.3 % of the students and in the basic level 25.3 % of the students improved up to 20 points. These differences may well be attributed to the fact that students in the basic level had more room to improve than students in the advanced level. An improvement of more than 10 points is especially hard to achieve for students who scored above 80 in the pretest while an increment of 10 points is far easier to achieve if the score in the pretest was about 40 points or even lower.

However, this does not explain why less than 50 % of the students of the advanced level improved, 7.5 % scored the same as in the pretest and 43.8 % scored even lower. This is in sharp contrast to students of the intermediate and the basic level, where 70.5 % and 74.2 % of the students improved, respectively, and only between 20 and 25 % scored lower than in the pretest. But these results are in accordance with those of Luo and Tsai (2002) who investigated students' responses to leveling in two classes of each level and two unlevleed classes. They showed that especially students in the basic level profited from leveling, showing a higher interest in learning English, a higher comfortableness and slightly higher diligence compared to learning English at high school. In addition, they showed the highest self-confidence in regard to learning English compared to students from the other levels or the unlevleed classes and a higher motivation to take further elective classes compared to students from the unlevleed classes and partly from the intermediate level.

In contrary, students of the advanced level had indicated in that study that their interest in learning English was just the same as in high school. They as well indicated a lower degree of diligence compared to high school and a lower self-confidence to learning English compared to students of the basic level and the ungrouped classes. But students of this level were still highly motivated to take elective English classes in their further years at university. It thus seems that the Freshman English course is not a challenge for students of the advanced level – the teaching materials used in class are just what they have had before at high school in only a bit modified way. The influence of teaching material on students' attitude and motivation to learn has been

Tab. 8: Differences in scores between the pre- and the posttest for each level

subgroup	students per level			subtotal	% per level			subtotal	Cumulative % per level and subgroup			subtotal
	basic	inter.	adv.		basic	inter.	adv.		basic	inter.	adv.	
-32 to -21	4	7	3	14	0.30	0.56	0.42	0.42	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
-20 to -16	14	7	10	31	1.06	0.56	1.39	0.94	98.61	97.74	99.04	98.46
-15 to -11	26	26	23	75	1.96	2.07	3.21	2.28	93.75	95.48	95.86	95.07
-10 to -6	88	75	80	243	6.65	5.98	11.16	7.37	84.72	87.10	88.54	86.84
-5 to -1	156	195	198	549	11.78	15.54	27.62	16.66	54.17	62.90	63.06	60.20
subtotal	288	310	314	912	21.75	24.70	43.79	27.67				
0	53	60	54	167	4.00	4.78	7.53	5.07	100.00	100.00	100.00	32.74
1 to 5	290	358	205	853	21.90	28.53	28.59	25.88	29.50	40.45	58.74	38.48
6 to 10	261	343	112	716	19.71	27.33	15.62	21.72	56.05	79.21	90.83	70.77
11 to 15	212	145	30	387	16.01	11.55	4.18	11.74	77.62	95.59	99.43	88.23
16 to 20	123	34	2	159	9.29	2.71	0.28	4.82	90.13	99.44	100.00	95.40
21 to 30	71	5	0	76	5.36	0.40	0.00	2.31	97.36	100.00	100.00	98.83
31 to 56	26	0	0	26	1.96	0.00	0.00	0.79	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
subtotal	983	885	349	2217	74.24	70.52	48.68	67.26				

investigated in several studies (e.g. Yang 1985, Luo and Tsai 2002, Chan 2004), and should not be underestimated. Chou (2004) found that students at technological and vocational colleges were highly motivated to learn English but showed a negative attitude towards learning activities. It might be that English courses more related to students' own fields of study will find a higher acceptance and thus motivate students more, to really study English in their freshman year instead of killing their time in the classroom.

The problem mentioned above that some students might have intentionally scored low to be assigned to the basic level is as well reflected in the results of tab. 8. While the cumulative percentage of students who scored lower than in the pretest is comparable in all levels with 94 to 96 % of the students scoring not more than 15 points lower, there was a far higher than expected percentage of students in the basic level who improved by more than 20 points, i.e. almost 10 % of the students who improved in this level, scored between 21 and 56 points higher. Although some obvious cases had already been taken out of the evaluation, the problem is where to draw the line. It seems that there still had been a few more cases of intentionally low scoring. Thus, the average improvement found in the basic level in this study might have actually been lower if the scores of the pretest would have had an impact on students' semester scores. This will be seen when the results of the pre- and post test of the actual school year will be evaluated, as the tests count for 10 % of the final score of the fall and the spring semester, respectively.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

The hypothesis that leveling would result in a significant improvement in the English proficiency of all students had to be rejected. However, students of the basic level showed the highest improvement so that the second hypothesis was verified. The overall improvement of students was, nevertheless, unsatisfactory in all levels with the highest improvement of 6.7 points in the basic level, 3.9 points in the intermediate level and 0.2 in the advanced level. Differences between the colleges were not significant. While an equal amount of students in the basic and the intermediate level scored lower than in the pretest (22 and 25 %, respectively), this amount was with 44 % almost double as high in the advanced level and reflects as well the poor performance of students in this level. On the other hand, while none of the students of the advanced level scored more than 20 points higher in the posttest compared to the pretest, and only 0.4% of students of the intermediate level scored between 21 and 30 % higher, 7.2 % of the students of the basic level showed an increase of more than 20

points with the highest scoring 56 points higher than in the pretest. Although it is unrealistic to expect an increase of more than 20 points in a level that scored 74 points in average at the pretest, the high increase in the scores of some students in the basic level may have been the result of intentionally scoring low in the pretest in order to pass an “easy” year of English instruction. This problem has already been taken care of so that now the results of the pretest count for 10 % on the final scores of the first semester. Future evaluation of the English program will show if this will reduce the number of cases with such incredible “improvements”. At present, the freshman English program is redesigned with two hours of in-class study and two hours of self-study in the language lab. As this study has shown that the range of proficiency was far too high in the basic level, this level has been subdivided into two levels in the current academic year.

However, there is one more point that should be observed but is not yet reflected in the new program: Due to the actually non-existing improvement of students of the advanced level and to results of an earlier study of Luo and Tsai (2002), the author recommends to skip the advanced level and to require students of this level to choose elective courses instead so that they will still have 4 hours of English instruction in their freshman year. A general English course seems to be an unnecessary waste of resources. If students were free to choose their courses, their motivation to study English and their achievements might improve considerably.

Additional studies could further look at the influence of teaching methodology on students’ progress in order to provide teachers with more information to further improve freshman English courses. The use of textbooks of a four-level series might as well be considered to better control for the influence of teaching material on students’ progress.

V. Acknowledgment

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VII. Appendix: Cross-tabulations between level and students' scores for each college

App. a: College of Business (a)

pretest score	level			total	pretest score	level			total
	1	2	3			1	2	2	
17	1	0	0	1	57	10	0	0	10
20	1	0	0	1	58	16	0	0	16
22	2	0	0	2	59	11	0	0	11
24	1	0	0	1	60	5	9	0	14
29	1	0	0	1	61	0	18	0	18
31	3	0	0	3	62	0	28	0	28
33	1	0	0	1	63	0	16	0	16
34	1	0	0	1	64	0	19	0	19
35	3	0	0	3	65	0	16	0	16
36	4	0	0	4	66	0	24	0	24
37	2	0	0	2	67	1	21	0	22
38	3	0	0	3	68	0	15	0	15
39	2	0	0	2	69	0	19	0	19
40	5	0	0	5	70	0	22	0	22
41	4	0	0	4	71	0	6	17	23
42	4	0	0	4	72	0	0	26	26
43	5	0	0	5	73	0	0	11	11
44	5	0	0	5	74	0	0	18	18
45	3	0	0	3	75	0	0	10	10
46	4	0	0	4	76	0	0	8	8
47	6	0	0	6	77	0	0	10	10
48	6	0	0	6	78	0	0	6	6
49	7	0	0	7	79	0	0	6	6
50	6	0	0	6	80	0	0	9	9
51	11	0	0	11	81	0	0	2	2
52	9	0	0	9	82	0	0	4	4
53	12	0	0	12	83	0	0	5	5
54	7	0	0	7	84	0	0	1	1
55	12	0	0	12	85	0	0	3	3
56	9	0	0	9	86	0	0	1	1
total						183	213	137	533

Misplaced students are marked

Number of misplaced students: 1

Dividing lines: 60 (basic/intermediate) and 71 (intermediate/advanced)

App. b: College of Business (b)

pretest score	level			total	pretest score	level			total
	1	2	3			1	2	3	
19	1	0	0	1	59	17	1	0	18
21	1	0	0	1	60	20	0	0	20
22	1	0	0	1	61	21	0	0	21
26	1	0	0	1	62	16	0	0	16
29	1	0	0	1	63	7	16	0	23
30	1	0	0	1	64	0	22	0	22
31	1	0	0	1	65	0	29	0	29
34	1	0	0	1	66	0	23	0	23
35	3	0	0	3	67	0	21	0	21
36	1	0	0	1	68	0	25	0	25
39	3	0	0	3	69	0	19	0	19
40	3	0	0	3	70	0	32	0	32
41	3	0	0	3	71	0	35	0	35
42	2	0	0	2	72	0	21	0	21
44	4	0	0	4	73	0	17	16	33
45	4	0	0	4	74	0	0	21	21
46	3	0	0	3	75	0	0	10	10
47	8	0	0	8	76	0	0	20	20
48	3	0	0	3	77	0	0	19	19
49	6	0	0	6	78	0	0	15	15
50	3	0	0	3	79	0	0	8	8
51	9	0	0	9	80	0	0	12	12
52	11	0	0	11	81	0	0	7	7
53	3	0	0	3	82	0	0	8	8
54	13	0	0	13	83	0	0	7	7
55	6	0	0	6	84	0	0	6	6
56	7	0	0	7	85	0	0	4	4
57	13	0	0	13	86	0	0	3	3
58	13	0	0	13	total	210	261	156	627

Misplaced students are marked ■

Number of misplaced students: 1

Dividing lines: 63 (basic/intermediate) and 73 (intermediate/advanced)

App. c: College of Engineering

pretest score	level			total	pretest score	level			total
	1	2	3			1	2	3	
6	1	0	0	1	53	17	0	0	17
20	1	0	0	1	54	9	0	0	9
22	1	0	0	1	55	14	0	0	14
23	2	0	0	2	56	10	0	0	10
24	2	0	0	2	57	14	0	0	14
26	1	0	0	1	58	7	15	0	22
27	1	0	0	1	59	0	17	0	17
28	1	0	0	1	60	0	23	0	23
29	1	0	0	1	61	0	27	0	27
30	2	0	0	2	62	0	19	0	19
31	4	0	0	4	63	0	18	0	18
32	4	0	0	4	64	0	24	0	24
33	2	0	0	2	64	1	0	0	1
34	6	0	0	6	65	0	19	0	19
35	2	0	0	2	66	1	26	0	27
36	5	0	0	5	67	0	18	0	18
37	5	0	0	5	68	0	17	0	17
38	4	0	0	4	69	0	9	6	15
39	10	0	0	10	70	0	0	20	20
40	4	0	0	4	71	0	0	24	24
41	6	0	0	6	72	0	1	14	15
42	5	0	0	5	73	0	0	9	9
43	3	0	0	3	74	0	0	7	7
44	9	0	0	9	75	0	0	11	11
45	10	0	0	10	76	0	0	7	7
46	10	0	0	10	77	0	0	7	7
47	8	0	0	8	78	0	0	4	4
48	14	0	0	14	79	0	0	2	2
49	12	0	0	12	80	0	0	1	1
50	17	0	0	17	81	0	0	1	1
51	12	0	0	12	82	0	0	1	1
52	14	0	0	14	85	0	0	1	1
total					252	233	115	600	

Misplaced students are marked ■

Number of misplaced students: 3

Dividing lines: 58 (basic/intermediate) and 69 (intermediate/advanced)

App. d: College of Construction

pretest score	level			Total	pretest score	level			Total
	1	2	3			1	2	3	
0	1	0	0	1	56	6	9	0	15
24	2	0	0	2	57	0	14	0	14
25	3	0	0	3	58	0	6	0	6
26	2	0	0	2	58	1	0	0	1
27	1	0	0	1	59	0	15	0	15
28	1	0	0	1	60	0	8	0	8
30	4	0	0	4	61	0	17	0	17
31	1	0	0	1	62	1	13	0	14
32	4	0	0	4	63	0	14	0	14
33	5	0	0	5	64	0	18	0	18
34	4	0	0	4	65	0	15	0	15
35	4	0	0	4	66	0	24	0	24
36	8	0	0	8	67	0	13	0	13
37	7	0	0	7	68	0	6	11	17
38	9	0	0	9	69	0	0	13	13
39	2	0	0	2	70	0	0	10	10
40	5	0	0	5	71	0	0	9	9
41	5	0	0	5	72	0	0	6	6
42	9	0	0	9	73	0	0	10	10
43	9	0	0	9	74	0	0	6	6
44	6	0	0	6	75	0	0	5	5
45	8	0	0	8	76	0	0	1	1
46	15	0	0	15	77	0	0	7	7
47	12	0	0	12	78	0	0	5	5
48	11	0	0	11	79	0	0	2	2
49	17	0	0	17	80	0	0	1	1
50	10	0	0	10	81	0	0	1	1
51	14	0	0	14	82	0	0	4	4
52	12	0	0	12	83	0	0	2	2
53	7	0	0	7	85	0	0	1	1
54	11	0	0	11	88	0	0	1	1
55	11	0	0	11	total	228	172	95	495

Misplaced students are marked

Number of misplaced students: 2

Dividing lines: 56 (basic/intermediate) and 68 (intermediate/advanced)

App. e: College of Information

pretest score	level			total	pretest score	level			total
	1	2	3			1	2	3	
18	1	0	0	1	56	1	25	0	26
21	1	0	0	1	57	1	13	0	14
22	3	0	0	3	58	1	20	0	21
27	4	0	0	4	59	1	21	0	22
28	6	0	0	6	60	0	17	0	17
29	1	0	0	1	61	1	29	0	30
30	3	0	0	3	62	2	17	0	19
31	5	0	0	5	63	0	17	0	17
32	5	0	0	5	64	0	20	0	20
33	6	0	0	6	65	1	13	0	14
34	4	0	0	4	66	0	4	17	21
35	9	0	0	9	67	0	1	11	12
36	11	0	0	11	68	0	0	23	23
37	14	0	0	14	69	0	0	18	18
38	18	0	0	18	70	0	0	14	14
39	9	0	0	9	71	0	1	10	11
40	11	0	0	11	72	0	0	10	10
41	8	0	0	8	73	0	0	16	16
42	8	0	0	8	74	0	0	6	6
43	14	0	0	14	75	0	0	13	13
44	10	0	0	10	76	0	0	9	9
45	14	0	0	14	77	0	0	7	7
46	8	0	0	8	78	0	0	3	3
47	11	0	0	11	79	0	0	7	7
48	8	0	0	8	80	0	0	3	3
49	16	0	0	16	81	0	0	2	2
50	11	0	0	11	82	0	0	2	2
51	25	0	0	25	83	0	0	1	1
52	14	5	0	19	84	0	0	1	1
53	0	15	0	15	86	0	0	1	1
54	2	20	0	22	89	0	0	1	1
55	1	20	0	21	Total	269	258	175	702

Misplaced students are marked

Number of misplaced students: 13

Dividing lines: 52 (basic/intermediate) and 66 (intermediate/advanced)

App. f: College of Sciences

pretest score	level			total	pretest score	level			total
	1	2	3			1	2	3	
15	2	0	0	2	51	3	0	0	3
16	1	0	0	1	52	10	0	0	10
20	2	0	0	2	53	11	2	0	13
21	3	0	0	3	54	0	14	0	14
22	1	0	0	1	55	0	9	0	9
23	2	0	0	2	56	0	6	0	6
24	4	0	0	4	57	0	4	0	4
25	2	0	0	2	58	1	4	0	5
26	3	0	0	3	59	0	10	0	10
29	2	0	0	2	60	2	13	0	15
30	7	0	0	7	61	1	6	0	7
31	3	0	0	3	62	0	11	0	11
32	5	0	0	5	63	1	9	0	10
33	5	0	0	5	64	0	7	0	7
34	2	0	0	2	65	1	6	0	7
35	5	0	0	5	66	0	7	0	7
36	6	0	0	6	67	0	6	1	7
37	11	1	0	12	68	0	6	0	6
38	10	0	0	10	69	0	2	4	6
39	8	0	0	8	70	0	0	1	1
40	5	0	0	5	71	0	0	8	8
41	4	0	0	4	72	0	1	6	7
42	9	0	0	9	73	0	0	5	5
43	10	0	0	10	74	0	0	4	4
44	1	0	0	1	75	0	0	3	3
45	10	0	0	10	76	0	0	3	3
46	10	0	0	10	77	0	0	1	1
47	10	0	0	10	78	0	0	1	1
48	11	0	0	11	79	0	0	1	1
49	11	0	0	11	80	0	0	1	1
50	11	0	0	11	82	0	0	1	1
					total	206	124	40	370

Misplaced students are marked ■

Number of misplaced students: 9

Dividing lines: 53 (basic/intermediate) and 69 (intermediate/advanced)

Total number of misplaced students (tab.1a-f): 29

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能力分班對於提升 逢甲大學大一新生英文能力之影響

羅珮瑄*

摘 要

在台灣，大一英文在大部分大專院校屬於必修課程。近年來，有愈來愈多的大專院校，對大一英文課程實施能力分班，俾妥適處理學生間因英文程度落差所產生之問題，進而提升該校之英文教育。本論文乃探討逢甲大學學生，在參加分班教育一年後，其英文程度實際進步之情形。第一學期開始時，所有一年級新生均須接受英文能力測驗，並就其成績分班。所有班級分為三種等級，即初級、中級與高級班。第二學期結束時，全部學生則須接受另一次英文能力測驗。前述兩種測驗之結果，在本研究分析中，顯示出不同學院之學生，其英文程度彼此間有極大之差異。其次，本研究證實，初級班之學生，其英文程度進步最多。反之，高級班學生之英文程度並無重大改善，甚至部分學生之成績，較其第一次英文能力測驗之成績還要低。此外，不同學院之學生，其英文進步之程度並無顯著之差異。最後，上述研究成果對於進一步改善大一英文課程之意涵，在文中亦有所論述。

關鍵詞：能力分班、大一英文、進步

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