

## **A STUDY OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING PROFICIENCY THROUGH DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES AT KIRAKIRA KIDS INTERNATIONAL KINDERGARTEN, BANGKOK, THAILAND**

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**Abstract:** This study compared the progressive scores of the English listening proficiency and ENGLISH-SPEAKING proficiency of students at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten. The progressive scores were based on observational notes of K3 students that they researcher took with a team-teacher. The collection of data was over a period of three months (April 27 to May 31, 2015; June 2015; and July 2015). The study had four research objectives: 1) to identify the students' demographic data (age, amount of years spent in the school previously, and background in English) at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten 2) to determine the progressive scores of the students' English listening proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten 3) to determine the progressive scores of the students' English speaking proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten, 4) to compare the difference between the students' English listening and speaking proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten.

The population and sample size for this research study was 40 students of the K3 class. The researcher used student records to obtain the data needed to address research objective one. The researcher analyzed the data obtained from the student records using numbers and percentage. For the findings of research objective two and three, the researcher used observational notes and progressive scores from April 27 to May 31, 2015; June 2015; and July 2015. The researcher analyzed the progressive scores using means and standard deviation to present and report the findings. For the findings of research objective four, the researcher used a paired-samples two-tailed *t*-test to compare the difference between the students' English listening proficiency and the ENGLISH-SPEAKING proficiency.

**Keywords:** English Listening Proficiency, English Speaking Proficiency, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten.

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## **Introduction**

Teaching young children can be a rigorous routine that requires creativity, discipline, and understanding on the part of the teacher. At the same time it is also a rewarding experience to anyone who has been positively impacted by teaching young children (Millburn, 2016). The young children are excited to learn new things. The world is fresh and new for them and any learning experience can be a joy to the young child, but to teach a child a different language from their mother tongue in a foreign land can be a tedious task for a teacher (Perry, 2001). In this study, the young students' were from Japan, while the kindergarten they attended taught them to speak, read, and write in English.

The school for this study was Kirakira Kids' International Kindergarten located in Sukumvit 61. Only Japanese students attended the school, all did not speak English at home. Furthermore, their families resided in Bangkok, Thailand where English is not the mother tongue.

The school has five levels of early childhood education, ranging from pre-nursery (called Tamago class), nursery (called Hiyoko class), kindergarten one (called Ahiru), kindergarten two (called Koala), and kindergarten three (called Panda). The focus of this research is on kindergarten three. For the purpose of this research study, kindergarten three was mentioned as K3.

In the school of this research, the Supertots 3 (Krause & Nagashima, 2002) is used in K3. The Supertots 3 curriculum uses various activities to excite interests in young students ranging from songs, chants, games, and total physical response (TPR) activities. All of the activities designed in the curriculum fall under the guidelines of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), which means that the activities address the students' developmental needs and advances at their stage (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006). Supertots 3 was used in this study as the teaching tool for the researcher.

The activities and lessons detailed in the Supertots 3 teacher guide (Krause & Nagashima, 2002) was used in the instruction of the K3 class. In the curriculum the students have an activity book and a student book. Other teaching materials include flashcards, a teacher's guide, and a CD containing songs, chants, and dialogues.

As activities in Supertots 3 follow DAP guidelines, the teachers of the school teach the students using DAP. All classes in Kirakira Kids' International Kindergarten teach the previous curriculums of Supertots 3 (Supertots 1 and 2) following DAP guidelines. By the time the students reach K3, almost all of the students have a basic understanding of dialogues and vocabulary words used in everyday English conversation.

## **Research Objectives**

There were four research objectives

1. To identify the students' demographic data (age, amount of years spent in the school previously, and background in English) at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten.
2. To determine the progressive scores of the students' English listening proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten.
3. To determine the progressive scores of the students' English speaking proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten.

4. To compare the difference between the students' proficiency in English listening and speaking at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review of this study included Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Krashen's theory of second language acquisition, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), the Supertots 3 curriculum, and the background of the school.

#### *Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development*

The researcher used Piaget's theory of cognitive development to understand what developmental stage the K3 students were in. Piaget was a biologist who categorized how children developed in their thinking into four stages: sensorimotor (from birth to two years old), pre-operational (two to seven years old), concrete operational (seven to 11 years old), and formal operational (11 years old to 15 years old) (Huit & Hummel, 2003; McLeod, 2009; Santrock, 2009). The students in this research study were in the pre-operational stage, which meant that they were able to think symbolically (Santrock, 2009).

Other developments in this cognitive stage included physical, intellectual, social, and emotional developments. In pre-operational children's physical development, they are very active and enjoy lots of physical activities as they gain more strength to do certain feats. In their intellectual development, they increase in their knowledge language structures and mathematical structures. In their social development, they have more sense of belonging to a group. In their emotional development, they are able to be taught to see things from another person's perspective although they are mostly egocentric as Piaget described them to be. These developments influenced the approach to teaching the Supertots 3 curriculum.

#### *Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition*

Krashen's theory of second language acquisition had six hypotheses, which are the acquisition-learning hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, input hypothesis, natural-order hypothesis, affective filter hypothesis, and the reading hypothesis (Krashen, 2009). Krashen's hypotheses informed the researcher of how the students were able to acquire the proficiencies taught through the Supertots 3 curriculum.

#### *Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)*

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) was a term written by Copple and Bredekamp (2006) to describe all that teachers do to teach and nurture their students with the knowledge of their development as a whole and as individuals. It came from the idea that children have different developmental stages physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Also from the idea, that not children develop the same way. There were five guidelines to teaching effectively with DAP (1) create a caring community of learners, (2) teach to enhance development and learning, (3) plan appropriate curriculum, (4) assess children's development and learning, and (5) develop reciprocal relationships with their families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006). The researcher approached the instruction of the K3 class with the Supertots 3 curriculum in the previously mentioned ways. The class environment was one that no

shaming or bullying was allowed to create a caring community of learners. The researcher used appropriate curriculum (Supertots 3) to enhance the students' development and learning. Furthermore, the researcher also assessed the students' proficiencies, which resulted in the observational notes and progressive scores. There was also communication with the parents of the students although there was no use for it in the research.

### *Supertots 3 Curriculum*

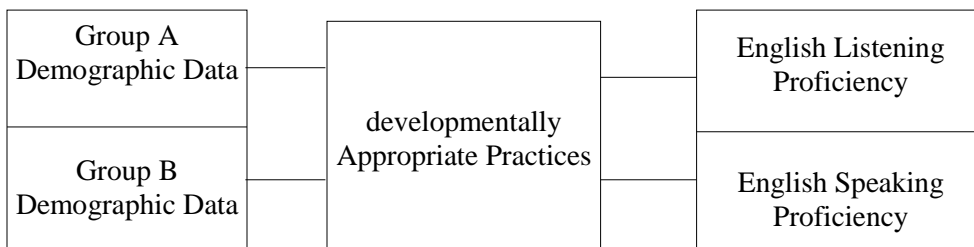
The Supertots 3 curriculum was the third book in the Supertots series that was used to teach the students English listening and speaking proficiencies. The Supertots 3 curriculum was written by Krause and Nagashima (2006). There are three types of DAP activities that were used to teach English at the school which were songs and chants, role-play activities, and total physical response (TPR) action phrases. These activities correlated to Piaget's stages of cognitive development, Krashen's six hypotheses, and DAP principals. The songs and chants got the students to engage with the lessons because of the actions and physicality. Furthermore, the role-play activities allow the students to represent a story character as they learn the dialogues. The TPR actions also give the students increased input of the English language while letting them use their actions to convey the meaning.

### *Background of the School*

The school was founded in 2009 as a bilingual Japanese and English school. The school's aim was to teach the students English while teaching the students their Japanese culture. To do this the K3 level was split into two groups (Group A and Group B) to keep one group in the Japanese class and the other in the English class. The classes would then exchange during each period of the day, in which there were three (excluding the outdoor play time, lunch time, and shower time). The researcher and team teacher observed the students throughout the entire day which culminated into five hours per day.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework is presented in the diagram in Figure 1. The first box shows the population of the research study that was split into two groups. For this study, the researcher obtained the demographic data needed from the school records. This box shows that it was done for the two groups. The middle box is labeled *Developmentally Appropriate Practices*. This represents the lessons taught from Supertots 3 that involved DAP from April 27 to May 31, 2015; June 2015; and July 2015. It also represents the developmentally appropriate method of observing the students during these periods. The researcher took observational notes of the students with his team-teacher during these periods. The last two boxes are labeled *English Listening Proficiency* and *English-Speaking Proficiency* represents the progressive scores from the progress reports that were based on the observational notes taken by the researcher. The observational notes were taken by the researcher and team-teacher who followed the DAP guidelines in observing the students. The observational scores were discussed between the researcher and team-teacher to control the bias in the research.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of This Study**

### Methods and Procedure

The researcher utilized qualitative and quantitative methods, which were observational notes and progressive scores from the progress report, in documenting the students' acquisition of the English language in regards to the student's English listening proficiency and English-speaking proficiency. The results of the progressive scores were also compared to see if there was a difference between the students' English listening proficiency and English-speaking proficiency.

The research was conducted over three observational periods. The first observational period took place from April 27 to March 31, 2015. The second observational period took place in June 2015. The third observational period took place in July 2015. During the observational period, the researcher taught the lessons from Supertots 3 unit one, unit two, and unit three. The researcher also scheduled two students to be observed with the team-teacher for five hours each day. The researcher and team-teacher would then follow the schedule and observe the students accordingly. At the end of each observational period, the researcher and the team-teacher would discuss the observational notes that were written to give the students a progressive score on their progress report. These progressive scores were the data used to analyze the total means of the progressive report from each observational period. The results and findings are discussed below.

### Findings and Results

*Research Objective 1: To Identify the Students' Demographic Data (Age, Amount of Years Spent in the School Previously, and Background in English) at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten*

For the research findings of objective 1, the researcher retrieved the data needed from the student records of the school. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of boys and girls in the K3 class of 2015. There were 17 boys and 23 girls.

**Table 1: Number and Percentage of Boys and Girls**

	Number	Percentage
Boys	17	42.50
Girls	23	57.50
Total	40	100

Table 2 shows the number of years the students have previously attended Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten. There were six students who never attended the school before and were attending the school for the first time. There were 11 students who attended the school one year previously. There were three students who attended the school two years before. There were 15 students who attended the school three years before. There were five students who previously attended the school for four years.

**Table 2: Students with Previous Years at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten**

	Number	Percentage
0 Year	6	15.00
1 Year	11	27.50
2 Years	3	7.50
3 Years	15	37.50
4 Years	5	12.50
Total	40	100

Table 3 shows the number of students who have had English activities before attending Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten. . Of the 40 students in the K3 class, only five students had English activities before attending the school while 35 of the students did not have any previous activities with English before attending the school.

**Table 3: Students with English Activities before Attending Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten**

	Number	Percentage
English Before Attending Kirakira	5	12.50
No English Before Attending Kirakira	35	87.50
Total	40	100

*Research Objective 2: To Determine the Progressive Scores of the Students' English Listening Proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten*

The findings for research objective 2 was summarized in Table 4, which shows the summary of the total means of observational period 1 (April 27 to March 31, 2015), observational period 2 (June 2015), and observational period 3 (July 2015). The table shows that from April 27 to May 31, 2015, the total means of the progressive score was 1.94 (*S.D.* = 0.57), which was interpreted as *moderately low* proficiency in listening to English. In June 2015 the total means of the progressive scores was 2.11 (*S.D.* = 0.19). In July 2015 the total means of the progressive scores was 2.48 (*S.D.* = 0.39). This was interpreted that the students had an *average* proficiency in English listening. The total means of all the progressive scores from all the months was 2.18 (*S.D.* = 0.28). According to table 5 in chapter three, the score of 2.00 to 2.99 shows that the students had an *average* proficiency in listening to English.

**Table 4: Summary of The Listening Progressive Score Means**

Month	M	S.D.	Interpretation
Apr. 27-May 31, 2015	1.94	0.57	The students performed <i>moderately low</i> .
June 2015	2.11	0.19	The students showed <i>average</i> proficiency in English.
July 2015	2.48	0.39	The students showed <i>average</i> proficiency in English.
Total	2.18	0.28	The students showed <i>average</i> proficiency in English.

*Research Objective 3: To Determine the Progressive Scores of the Students' English Speaking Proficiency at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten*

The findings of research objective 3 was summarized in Table 5, which shows the summary of the total means of observational period 1 (April 27 to March 31, 2015), observational period 2 (June 2015), and observational period 3 (July 2015). The table showed that from April 27 to May 31, 2015, the total means of the progressive score was 1.81 (*S.D.* = 0.69), which meant that the students were *average* in their proficiency to speak English. In June 2015 the total means of the progressive scores was 2.18 (*S.D.* = 0.21). Also, in July 2015 the total means of the progressive scores was 2.61 (*S.D.* = 0.39). This showed that the students were *average* in their proficiency to speak English in the months of June and July of 2015. The total means of all the progressive scores from all the months was 2.20 (*S.D.* = 0.40). According to table 5 in chapter three, the score of 2.00 to 2.99 shows that the students were *average* in their proficiency to speak in English.

**Table 5: Summary of The Speaking Progressive Score Means**

Month	M	S.D.	Interpretation
Apr. 27-May 31 2015	1.81	0.69	The students performed <i>moderately low</i> .
June 2015	2.18	0.21	The students showed <i>average</i> proficiency in English.
July 2015	2.61	0.39	The students showed <i>average</i> proficiency in English.
Total	2.20	0.40	The students showed <i>average</i> proficiency in English.

*Research Objective 4: To Compare the Difference between the Students' Proficiency in English Listening and Speaking at Kirakira Kids International Kindergarten*

To address research objective 4, the researcher analyzed the findings of the progressive scores with a paired-sample two-tailed *t*-test. The results shown in Table 6 showed a *t* statistic of 0.36 with a significant level of 0.73. The results show that there was a significant difference at the .05 level, therefore the hypothesis can be accepted that there was a significant difference between the English listening proficiency and the English-speaking proficiency.

**Table 6: The *t*-Test Results of The Progressive Scores**

	M	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
English Listening Proficiency	2.18			
English Speaking Proficiency	2.20	-0.02	0.36	0.73

## Discussion

The data collected for this research study showed that the students had lower progressive scores in the first observational period than in the second and third observational periods. Then in the second and third observational periods the progressive score means increased, showing that the students did not show high proficiency for English listening and speaking at first, but then later started to show more proficiency.

The first observational period took place at the beginning of the school year. The students were new to the new class level and were starting to adjust to the new environment. Not only were they adjusting to the new environment, but they were also taught new lessons from a new curriculum. According to Piaget's research, the child gained knowledge in their minds by assimilating and accommodating (Santrock, 2009). This means that when they are taught new things, the child's mind has to struggle to learn the new knowledge, before the child can fully understand the new knowledge. This was why the progressive scores were lower at first as the students were learning new conversations and words as well as adjusting to the new school year. As the students got more used to the new environment and the learning activities the researcher was able to use more comprehensible input (Krashen, 2009).

With that knowledge and the use of DAP guidelines, the researcher and team-teacher created a classroom environment that was age appropriate for students aged five to six years old (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006). As the researcher followed DAP guidelines, he also discouraged students from laughing at their friends during lessons also creating a caring for the new students ("5 Guidelines", 2009.). The researcher and team-teacher maintained a classroom environment that was conducive for learning, which also led to the students' affective filter being lowered (Krashen, 2009).

As the affective filter was lowered, it was easier for the researcher to include more comprehensible input in the form of role-play, action songs, and total physical response phrases and actions to the lesson, which helped the students learn more in English and enhanced their proficiency in listening and speaking. In this, the researcher's knowledge of Piaget's stages of cognitive development supported the way the Supertots 3 lessons were taught. In the Supertots 3 lessons, the students carried out role-play activities and action songs. This was appropriate for their cognitive stage as they were starting to increase in their knowledge of language with thinking symbolically (Santrock, 2009).

The research data also showed that there was a difference between the students' English listening proficiency and the students' English speaking proficiency at the significant level. According to Krashen, the second language is acquired much like the first language, through natural biological means because our aim is to communicate. This can be seen in the acquisition-learning hypothesis, where the learner first acquires the language through hearing, then learns the language by practicing how to speak it. (Krashen, 2009)

This shows that there is a separation between listening and speaking in language learning. The difference was shown by the result of the paired-samples two-tailed *t*-test. Hence, the research data showed that the students improved slightly overtime, and that there was a significant difference between the English listening proficiency and the English-speaking proficiency.



## **Recommendations and Limitations**

### *Limitations of the Study*

As the research was conducted there were some limitations that the researcher faced. The limitations were as follows:

The first limitation the researcher faced was the students' schedule. There were some days when the students that were scheduled for observation were absent. The researcher addressed this by shifting the student to another date or by adding them to the observation with other students on their scheduled day. The second limitation to the study was the students' mood and behaviors. On some of the days, the student being observed might have fallen sick or were in a bad mood. This had an effect on the students' learning hence it also had an effect on their observation. The third limitation that the researcher faced was the team-teacher. The team-teacher did not always observe the same details as the researcher although she understood what was to be observed according to the progress report. There were times when the researcher and the team-teacher disagreed about the observation of the students. In these times, the researcher and team-teacher read the observational notes and tried to recall the incidents that proved the students' high mark or low mark. When both the researcher and team-teacher agreed upon the observation and recollection, they were able to mark the students' progress report.

### *Recommendations for Early Childhood EFL Teachers*

Recommendations for teachers teaching EFL to early childhood students are as follows:

First, teachers should follow DAP for teaching young students. Include activities that interest them such as games, songs and chants, and guided-play activities. Secondly, teachers should follow the activities and teaching methodologies in a given curriculum if it is appropriate for their class level. There were some activities in the Supertots curriculum that were too easy for the K3 class of the researcher's school. For that reason, these activities were skipped. Teachers should also repeat activities to help the students retain the content taught in the lesson activities.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Recommendations for researchers in the field of early childhood education EFL teaching are as follows.

The first recommendation is do the research over a longer period of time. The length of this research was done over the span of four months. Although there was an improvement in the student's post-test and pre-test. A longer research period would probably provide more substantial data. Secondly, the research was done with a class of 40 only. A larger sample size would provide interesting knowledge on the students' progress and the effectiveness of the curriculum and dap. For the next researcher, if possible, it would be better to use a sample of several hundred students. Next it would be interesting to compare different curriculums and teaching methods between two groups. That is, having a comparison between two groups that are taught using a different curriculum. This was not possible as the curriculums are closely followed in the said school. Finally, there are several different Japanese kindergartens in

Bangkok that have some English program. It would prove a worthy study to compare the teaching methods between each school against a common research instrument like the pre-test and post-test. Comparing such a large sample of different schools with similar programs would be a worthwhile endeavor.

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