*25th International Conference of English Teaching and Learning*
*2008 International Conference on English Instruction and Assessment*

# An Investigation of the Effectiveness of an Interactive Immersion English Program in Taiwan

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Abstract

The rapid development of the Internet since the 1990s has had a wide impact on the teaching and learning of English. In general, previous research results on CALL showed that computer assisted language learning and interactive programs have resulted in positive results on student achievements and attitudes. However, not much research has been done in the area of online interactive programs. Few online interactive programs have been designed from beginning through advanced levels with emphasis on all four language skills --mainly listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the same time, few online programs are combined with live classes. The US Wind online program is a fully integrated language course that combines weekly live classes with daily online interactive learning activities. The purpose of this proposed study is to investigate the effectiveness of an Interactive Immersion English Program (the US Wind program) in the area of listening, reading and writing abilities on beginning (elementary) students. It is hypothesized that after one year of interactive learning; at least 80% of students who have completed the first two levels of the online program will be able to pass the Starters level of YLE --Cambridge Young Learners English Tests. The elementary school chosen for this study is located in remote central Taiwan. Results show that more than 80% of students successfully passed the listening section of the test but only 45% of students passed the reading and writing section. Further research is suggested.

**Keywords: online, interactive, CALL, language learning, Internet**

## Introduction

Personal computers have greatly changed our lives since its appearance in the 1980's. Today, in the 21st century the personal computer has become so prevalent that people all over the world, including language learners and teachers, now have the potential to communicate freely and instantaneously with one another (Hanson-Smith,1997). Nowadays, as more and more people are using and surfing the Internet, information on the Internet has become easily accessible by the individual with a computer. The personal computers have become faster, more

convenient to use and much cheaper than before. All these recent developments have given rise to more attention on the use of technology on pedagogical practices. In the International Conference of English Teachers in 1996 it was pointed out that since the early 1990s, English-language teaching professionals have tried a variety of ways to make use of the Internet to promote language learning and practice. (Hegelheimer, Mills, Salzmann & Shetzer, 1996).

In theory technology-enhanced learning has the potential to support innovation in instruction. For example, computer technology can provide text, sound, color, graphics, animation, video etc. and multimedia software can enhance language learning in all the four skills –listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the same time, the Internet is also full of color, sound and video. From experience we have learned that using multimedia can get the students' attention and keep them interested – but there are design principles that should be used in order to be pedagogically sound (Hanson-Smith, 1997).

What are the advantages of using computers in language learning? The computer has the potential to allow individuals to use the learning styles they prefer, and to proceed through the learning materials at their own pace, and individually without outside pressure along with instant correction, explanation, and reinforcement.

At present there are numerous websites on the Internet that are useful to ESL teachers. However, when teachers want to integrate the Internet into the ESL curriculum, there are many considerations to be made. While searching for materials on the Internet, teachers have to consider whether the material meet the teaching goals or not, including the content, vocabulary, grammar and other issues. They also have to consider issues like: whether they can provide opportunities for speaking, listening, reading and writing; whether the Internet activity is motivating and interesting, and whether the reading level is suitable for the class (Crane, 2000).

Lee, Jor, & Lai, (2005) points out that using the Internet to teach English necessitates a change in the conventional paradigm of classroom roles, methodologies, and processes. English language teaching has undergone several paradigm shifts and each shift brings in a new teaching approach. Warschauer & Kern (2000) also agree that the paradigms of CALL have changed, so has research on the role of computers in the language classroom. Chun and Plass (2000) also point out that many language instructors believe that the use of the Web represents a paradigm shift in how languages are taught and learned.

The rapid development of the Internet in the 1990s has had a wide impact on the teaching and learning of English. The Internet or the Web is a powerful teaching tool but unfortunately, up till now, not much research have been found on the effects of

teaching and learning. (Lee, Jor, & Lai, 2005) The WWW has tremendous potential for creating and providing access to multi-user, interactive multimedia environments; although so far there have been few developments projects in this area. (Warschauer, & Kern, 2000)

With this paradigm shift in mind if we look closely at the language learning programs available on the Internet we can see that online technologies can be used for instructional purposes by either non-interactive or interactive means ( Lafford & Lafford, 1997). Non –interactive technologies basically serve as reference tools that provide target language input – online newspapers, Web sites, and data bases –where the users search for information by selecting an option or clicking on a link. While interactive technologies provide the student the opportunity to receive input and produce output in the target language; for example, the users can interact with the material that requires oral or written production in the target language. Lafford and Lafford (1997) discuss activities using online technologies and give examples of existing online non-interactive and interactive applications. Bush (1996) describes several modes of interaction based on the Internet and Web technologies.

**State-of-the-art Computer Assisted Language Learning research**

The principles for the design and evaluation of online interactive language learning programs should be based on past and present CALL research. It is necessary to mention CALL and discuss past and present CALL research in order to determine the effectiveness of online programs as compared with other ways of learning.

Levy (1997) points out that the nature of CALL at any particular time is, to a large degree, a reflection of the level of development of the technology. For educators, the rapid and continuing introduction of new technology into education has outpaced the ability of teachers and developers to evaluate it properly.

Likewise, Beatty (2003) points out that research interests in CALL have tended to follow trends; for example, the focus of many early studies was quantitative rather than qualitative, with their main emphasis on classroom teaching. Recently, some language labs integrate CALL and some teachers use CALL activities based on email and the Web (WWW) to supplement student learning. Language labs with computer functions incorporated can provide online instruction through the WWW and distance and networked learning through the use of email.

In the last four decades, CALL materials have changed from an emphasis on basic textual gap-filling tasks and drills to interactive multimedia presentations with sound, animation and full-motion video. However, a major challenge to many studies in CALL remains a lack of empirical research. Therefore, results have not provided strong empirical evidence for the superiority of CALL over classroom

instruction. Despite the wide spread applications of computers and much discussion of the benefits and effects of computer activities on language learning, more empirical data are needed to support the hypothesis that it is effective (Lee, Jor & Lai, 2005).

A summary of the search results do show that the area of Internet studies have increased to about 16% of the total studies on CALL (Beatty, 2003). For example, Cahill and Larrade (1997) outline a method for teaching a college-level introductory second-language course entirely online, using a distance-learning approach that incorporated electronic messaging, multimedia, WWW, and Internet assignments.

**The need for Adequate CALL software**

In this age of rapid technological development, there is an indisputable need for adequate CALL software to teach foreign-language skills. As language teachers we are always searching for more suitable language-instructions courseware. There are a variety of language instruction programs on the market. However, as Wang (2006) pointed out to us it seems there are little commercially available interactive multimedia courseware packages for language instruction which are pedagogically sound, curriculum-based, and easy-to-adapt. Foreign language programs in schools, institutions and language centers would benefit greatly from such courseware, which would, ideally, integrate cultural information and the language skill areas of grammar, speaking, listening, reading and writing.

However, the new technology should be able to blend with traditional teaching methods in order to create an exciting, versatile language learning environment. Most existing programs nowadays, are limited in scope and structure, and simple cannot supplement the language curricula. CALL programs that cannot be readily integrated into the syllabi of language courses are of very little use (Wang, 2006)

However, the demand for technology in the classroom has certainly generated a wide variety of CALL programs. For example, many universities have web-based programs, the University of Hawaii Foreign Language Multimedia website (www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/aboutus/ithompson/flmedia lists over 700 CD-ROM-based foreign language programs in 45 languages as well as 453 commercial and freeware web-based programs on the Internet. Yet a quick survey reveals that most of these programs are limited in scope, with only a few hours of instruction. In addition, these programs mostly target the beginning language learners and in most cases cannot supplement a language curriculum. Many of the existing programs also deal with only a narrow spectrum of skills; for example, they tend to focus on isolated elements of language learning, rather than a wider range or even full scope language learning skills necessary to become proficient in a language. As a result, it is often difficult to

incorporate such programs into a complete language-learning experience (Wang, 2006).

**Some online language learning courses**

Cahill & Larralde (1997) mentions a framework and outline for teaching a foreign language course entirely on-line to college undergraduates. The course uses a distance learning approach that incorporates an electronic messaging system, multimedia, World Wide Web, and Internet assignments. Because no model exists for this specific language application, on–line language pedagogy is still in a transitional period in which trial and error predominate.

The online course is a multimedia software program called *Exito,* which is incorporated into Spanish on-line instruction. The Exito program engages students visually and intellectually in an individualized interactive training experience. In a comparison with 43 students who were enrolled in two traditional classes, 20 students enrolled in the on-line class. Their writing performance was compared but other skills were not. The classes were taught by the same instructor and used the same textbook. Both the in-class and on-line students received the same final exam and two identical essay questions. It was found that students in the on-line group significantly outperformed those in the in-class group on both measures of writing quality. However, the reasons for the superior performance of the on-line students are unclear. Further research in this area is suggested.

Lee, Jor, & Lai (2005) describes a Web-based English learning programme called MELW (Multimedia English Learning Website) developed for Science and Social Science tertiary students in Hong Kong. The programme is indeed an on-line theme based course. Materials were developed consisting of science and social science related themes, focusing on listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. Five main types of pedagogic tasks (i.e., listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary) were thematic based and divided into three talk levels, from Level 1 (easy) to Level 3 (difficult). The learning contents are repeatedly practised in each level in a spiral manner.

A follow-up pilot study was conducted and the impact of this web-based language learning was investigated. The study concentrated on the four areas of MELW: reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar. The results of student performance showed significant improvement in vocabulary and grammar for the experimental group; but no significant difference for the control group between the pre- and post- tests. It appeared that the experimental group outperformed the control group at least in the areas of vocabulary and grammar.

Gomez & Iborra (2006) describes the design of an online English language course as an alternative to the traditional attendance language course and distance learning courses offered by the Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas (EIO) in Spain. The course has designed and developed reading, speaking, reading and writing skills. After completion of the program students have to sit for a final evaluation test that certifies their learning. The tests follow the guidelines of the *Common Framework for Languages*, cover the four skills in a balanced way and are exactly the same tests regular attendance students take. Out of 106 registered students in the online program 77 of them attended the final examination (72.64%). 57 students passed the written exam (53.77%). And 50 students performed positively in the oral part (47.17%). A brief comparison between online students' performance and offline students' performance resulted in very similar figures regarding exam attendance and success/fail rates.

Marriot& Torres (2006) discusses the development of LAPLI, the language lab that implements an integrative CALL methodology, providing language courses in a virtual environment with a focus on reading and writing but also speaking skills in a hybrid mode. The hybrid mode consists of 50% distance learning and 50% face-to-face in order to encompass the best of both worlds. Results showed that the alternation between face-to-face and distance-learning classes was said to be "beneficial" or "very beneficial" (87%).

Wang (2006) describes an innovative approach of a curriculum-based courseware developed by the Johns Hopkins University (JHU). It consists of a series of easily adaptable, integrated multimedia templates with an effective and powerful media courseware package for use in language programs nationwide. The courseware package entitled *Gateway to China* is a comprehensive courseware package for beginner, intermediate, and advanced intermediate levels of Chinese language learning. *Gateway to China* currently is comprised of 62 lessons and covers three years worth of instruction, from beginning to intermediate to upper intermediate/advanced levels, and contains sophisticated multimedia exercises in grammar and the four basic language skills –listening, speaking, reading, and writing—plus an additional grammar component. Many recommendations are suggested for multimedia project developments; however, nothing was mentioned about its effectiveness.

Language Online (LOL) is a project of the Department of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University (Chenoweth, Jones & Tucker, 2006). Elementary and Intermediate French and Spanish courses have been produced for students and eight courses are now complete and part of the regular offerings of the Department. All

materials are Web-based with extensive use of Internet technologies for research, writing and communication.

To compare learning in the LOL courses and offline courses, student performance on common sections of the final exams and oral interviews were used. Evaluation results show that in the areas of oral production and written production comparisons of student performance do not reveal any statistically significant differences. When scores on listening comprehension, grammar knowledge, and reading comprehension are compared there also were no statistically significant differences. This suggests that the online courses were as effective as the offline courses.

## Evaluation of CALL

Burston (2006) suggests establishing criteria for the effective assessment of CALL. Therefore, pedagogical goals and objectives should be defined in terms of measurable outcomes. Otherwise it was pointed out that there is no way to determine whether or not teaching practices, including technologically based, are having the desired effect. Clearly, the assessment of CALL necessarily entails the systematic evaluation of the entire language curriculum/whole course. As a consequence, the time frame of such investigations must expand to encompass results that extend over semesters and years, not just weeks or months. Wang (2006) says that a curriculum-based courseware should certainly allow for more than a few hours worth of instruction. In fact, a program should at least cover one or two years' worth of material, and ideally would allow for more.

## Introduction to the US Wind interactive program

The US Wind English Interactive Immersion program offers a comprehensive, complete, online interactive learning system including integrated texts to inspire students during their English language learning journey (US Wind English Interactive Immersion Approach, 2006). It provides a unique approach for English learning by integrating the best English curriculum, internet technology and multimedia technology to form a powerful, effective English learning system that can be accessed by students from any location, at any time. It is a fully integrated online language course with emphasis on listening, reading and writing, grammar and vocabulary. The program also combines with weekly live class sessions to practice student speaking skills. The program is a complete course as it consists of several different levels from beginners, intermediate to advanced. For example, level 1 consists of 247 online interactive learning programs. Level 2 consists of 189 online interactive learning programs and is divided into 2 parts: level 2A and level 2B. Level 3

consists of more than 1,300 online interactive learning programs and is divided into 4 parts: level 3A, level 3B, level 3C and level 3D. The main features of the US Wind approach include:

- Employing the voices of native speakers and thousands of vivid pictures and animations in using a natural approach to English learning.
- Teaching English language the way we learn our native language, without memorization, translation, or grammar drills.
- Providing thousands of interactive programs that cover all essential competencies and skills taught to children in schools in the United States.
- Providing a powerful and flexible management system that manages all aspects of English learning activities.

With this program students are required to go online everyday for 30 minutes and progress at their own pace. The study time spent online for level 1 is approximately 50 – 100 hours. If a beginning learner (for those who have no prior experience of English learning) were to spend about 30 minutes each day on the computer learning US Wind, it would take about 100 -200 days to complete level 1.

The study time spent online for level 2 is approximately 30 - 60 hours. If a learner (for those who have completed the previous level curriculum or equivalent program content) were to spend about 30 minutes each day on the computer learning US Wind, it would take about 60 – 90 days to complete level 2 including level 2A and level 2B.

The study time spent online for level 3 is approximately 200 – 350 hours. If a learner (for those who have completed the previous level curriculum or equivalent program content) were to spend about 30 minutes each day on the computer learning US Wind, it would take about 300 -600 days to complete level 3A and 3B, and another 300- 600 days to complete level 3C and level 3D.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this proposed study is to investigate the effectiveness of the US Wind Interactive Immersion English Program in the area of students listening abilities, and students reading and writing abilities and the impact of factors such as geographic regions, parents' education, age, sex, availability of internet at home, amount of study time (on-task time) on beginning (elementary) students. To assess the effectiveness of the US Wind interactive program, the learners are tested on a sample test of the Cambridge YLE (Young Learners English Tests) as a form of certification. The Cambridge YLE test is chosen because the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests are designed to offer a comprehensive approach to testing the English of primary learners between the ages of 7 and 12. The learners are elementary school students

from a rural elementary school in Taiwan. It is hypothesized that after one year of interactive learning; at least 80% of students who have completed the first two levels will be able to pass the Starters level of YLE --Cambridge Young Learners English Tests by University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES).

In the YLE candidates' average performance report for 2005 we can see that the average award over the whole year in Listening was 3.73 shields. And the average award over the whole year in Reading and Writing was 3.57 shields. These means if the elementary students can pass the Starters Test and were to have a mean score close to this average, then it strongly suggests that the US Wind program is considered effective for students of Taiwan when learned under the circumstances required of learners.

**The Cambridge Young Learners English Tests (YLE)**

The Cambridge Young Learners English Tests consist of three key levels of assessment: Starters, Movers and Flyers. (YLE Handbook, 2007)
The three tests together form a bridge to take children learning English as a second language from beginner to Waystage level (A2). The examinations cover all four language skills-reading, writing, listening and speaking. They include a range of tasks which assess candidates' ability to use English in a variety of contexts. Above all, the examinations assess the ability to communicate effectively in English.

The tests reflect the main content areas which frequently occur in these materials (topic, vocabulary, etc.) as does the presentation of the test material. Both text and pictures are presented in a clear and attractive way, taking into account the age and background of the intended candidates.
The Cambridge Young Learners English Tests are designed to offer a comprehensive approach to testing the English of primary learners between the ages of 7 and 12.
For example, the Cambridge ***Starters*** consists of: Listening: overall length 20 minutes, number of tasks 4, number of items 20; Reading and Writing: overall length 20 minutes, number of tasks 5, number of items 25; Speaking: overall length 5 minutes, number of tasks 5.

Cambridge ESOL is committed to providing examinations of the highest possible quality. This commitment is underpinned by an extensive programme of research and evaluation, and by continuous monitoring of the marking and grading of all Cambridge ESOL examinations. Of particular importance is the rigorous set of procedures which are used in the production and pre-testing of question papers. For example, in the Reading & Writing paper correct spelling is required. In Part 2 of the Listening paper some misspellings are allowed. Candidates must follow the rubrics carefully and keep within the word limits

**Candidate performance for the year 2005**

The average award over the whole year in Listening was 3.73 shields.
The average award over the whole year in Reading and Writing was 3.57 shields.
For Taiwan in the year 2005 the average number of shields in Listening was 4.17 which is higher than the whole year average.
For Taiwan in the year 2005 the average number of shields in Reading and Writing was 3.37 which is lower than the whole year average.

**The target population**

The target population that were tested consist of 21 students from a remote elementary school in Nantou (南投). The elementary school is called Guang Ying Elementary School (廣英國小). The school is located near a town called Chung-liao (中寮) in the county of Nantou, in central Taiwan. Actually, this elementary school has only 60 students from grade 1 to grade 6. Since March, 2007, all the 60 students have participated in this interactive immersion English program. The program requires learners to go online everyday for 30 minutes for maximum results. According to student records more than 80% of students have consistently gone online for 30 minutes at least 3-4 times a week for 10 months already. Out of the 60 students, 20 students have completed the level 2B of the US Wind program and have, under the hypothesis of our study, achieved the ability and level to pass the YLE starters test for young learners.

**Description of target population**

Most elementary students living in the big cities, for example Taipei, have started learning English at a very young age, even before they attend kindergarten. If that is the case, then before graduating from elementary school, they would have already learned about 6 – 8 years of English. On the contrary, the students from Guang Ying elementary school do not have the resources that big cities provide. This elementary school is considered to be located in a very far and distant place. There are few cram schools in that locality, and the opportunities to practice/read English or meet native speakers are rare if any. Therefore, most of this group of students from Guang Ying have come in touch with English through the US Wind English program only. Some students may also come from poor, underprivileged and low socio-economic status families.

**Results of the study**

Table 1. Summary of survey and test results

| No. | Sex | Grade | Father's Education | Availability of Internet at home | Months Spent on US Wind | Already Completed US Wind Level | I like US Wind | Listening | Reading & Writing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | M | 4 | Jun. high | no | 10 | 2B | no | 40 / 2 | 36 / 2 |
| 2 | F | 4 | Sen. High | Yes | 10 | 2B | Yes | 60 / 3 | 80 / 4 |
| 3 | M | 6 | College | Yes | 10 | 2B | Yes | 100 / 5 | 100/5 |
| 4 | M | 6 | Sen. high | Yes | 10 | 2B | yes | 30 / 2 | 28 / 1 |
| 5 | M | 3 | college | Yes | 10 | 2B | yes | 50 / 3 | 24 / 1 |
| 6 | F | 3 | Sen. High | Yes | 10 | 2B | yes | 55 / 3 | 36 / 2 |
| 7 | F | 5 | college | Yes | 6 | 2B | yes | 100 / 5 | 96 / 5 |
| 8 | F | 5 | Jun. high | no | 10 | 2B | yes | 75 / 4 | 52 / 3 |
| 9 | M | 3 | Sen. high | no | 10 | 2B | yes | 60 / 3 | 32 / 2 |
| 10 | M | 6 | College | Yes | 10 | 2B | no | 60 / 3 | 68 / 3 |
| 11 | M | 6 | college | no | 10 | 2B | yes | 60 / 3 | 24 / 1 |
| 12 | M | 5 | Jun. high | No | 10 | 2B | yes | 60 / 3 | 44 / 2 |
| 13 | F | 6 | Sen. High | yes | 10 | 2B | no | 80 / 4 | 92 / 5 |
| 14 | F | 6 | Sen. High | Yes | 10 | 2B | no | 60 / 3 | 36 / 2 |
| 15 | F | 6 | Sen. High | no | 10 | 2B | Yes | 40 / 2 | 20 / 1 |
| 16 | F | 6 | Sen. High | Yes | 10 | 2B | Yes | 70 / 4 | 76 / 4 |
| 17 | F | 6 | Jun. high | no | 10 | 2B | no | 60 / 3 | 32 / 2 |
| 18 | F | 6 | Sen. High | no | 10 | 2B | Yes | 70 / 4 | 88 / 4 |
| 19 | M | 6 | Sen. high | Yes | 10 | 2B | Yes | 85 / 4 | 44 / 2 |
| 20 | M | 6 | college | Yes | 10 | 2B | no | 80 / 4 | 88 / 4 |

20 students from grade 3 - grade 6 participated in this study. Before the test, the students were asked to fill out a survey. After that they proceeded with the test. The Listening part was taken first, and then 20 minutes were allowed the students to complete the Reading and Writing section. A summary of the survey and test results are given in Table 1. All students used US Wind (online) everyday for 30 minutes about 4-5 days a week at school during the weekdays, very few used US Wind (online) during the weekends. All the 20 students had completed the first two levels of the US Wind program.

Table 2. Sex of participants

| Sex | # of students | Listening | Reading & Writing |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 10 | 63 | 49 |
| Female | 10 | 67 | 61 |

20 students participated in the study. Out of the 20 ten were male and ten were female. Their score on Listening and Reading are included in Table 2. There is little difference in their listening score but it seems that the female students did better on the Reading and Writing section.

Table 3. Grade level of participants

| Grade | # of students | Listening | Reading & Writing |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | 55 | 31 |
| 4 | 2 | 50 | 58 |
| 5 | 3 | 78 | 64 |
| 6 | 12 | 66 | 58 |

The 20 students were from grade 3 – grade 6. Their listening and reading scores are given in Table 3. Due to the limited number of students in each grade, comparing scores are of little significance.

Table 4. Father's education of participants

| Father's Education | # of students |
|---|---|
| Primary | 0 |
| Junior high | 4 |
| Senior high | 10 |
| College | 6 |

The parents' education of the participants is given in Table 4. As we can see, most of the students' parents are high school graduates.

Table 5. Students' attitude toward US Wind

| I like US Wind | # of students | Listening | Reading & Writing |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 14 | 62 | 53 |
| No | 6 | 63 | 59 |

The students' attitude toward using the US Wind program is given in Table 5. Out of the 20 students, 14 students expressed a positive attitude towards the program. Six students or 30% said that they did not like the program.

Table 6. Average achievement in Listening and Reading

| Total average | Listening | Reading and Writing |
|---|---|---|
| Total points average | 65 | 55 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Total shields average | 3.35 | 2.75 |

The average achievement in Listening and Reading & Writing are given in Table 6. Their average score in Listening is 65 points or 3.35 shields. Their average score in Reading and Writing is 55 points or 2.75 shields.

Table 7. Pass/Fail percentage of participants

| Pass / Fail | Listening | Reading & Writing |
|---|---|---|
| Pass | 17 (85%) | 9 (45%) |
| Fail | 3 (15%) | 11 (55%) |

In Table 7 the students who passed or failed the test is given along with their percentage. To pass one has to get 3 shields or more. Those who acquire 2 shields or less fail the test. As we can see, 17 students or 85% passed the Listening section of the test, while 9 students or 45% passed the Reading and Writing section.

**Discussion and suggestions for further research**

This very far away, remote elementary school and its students were chosen to test the effectiveness of the US Wind interactive immersion English program. On the one hand, the majority of students were true beginners of English when starting to use the program and had very little contact with English other than being "immersed" in the US Wind program for nearly one year. On the other hand, the program itself and its contents should be comprehensive and integrated with emphasis on all four skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking in order to build the foundation of a good English ability. The content was learned through mastery learning in which students were not actually tested on each learning unit directly, but were allowed to move on to the next unit when they reached mastery of that particular unit. The Cambridge YLE Starter test was chosen because Cambridge ESOL is committed to providing examinations of the highest possible quality. And this commitment is underpinned by an extensive programme of research and evaluation, and by continuous monitoring of the marking and grading of all Cambridge ESOL examinations. Of particular importance is the rigorous set of procedures which are used in the production and pre-testing of question papers. In other words, the Cambridge Young Learners English Tests are designed to offer a comprehensive approach to testing the English of primary learners between the ages of 7 and 12. The examinations are designed around four essential qualities: validity, reliability, impact and practicality. Validity is normally taken to be the extent to which a test can by shown to produce scores which are an accurate reflection of language skills (Cambridge YLE, 2006). Needless to say, the Cambridge YLE tests are well-balanced,

well-rounded and accepted world-wide by experts in assessment as the assessment instrument that tests the true ability of young English learners.

The result shows that the average mean score was 3.35 shields for the Listening section and 2.75 shields for the Reading and Writing section. The hypothesis was that after completing the first two levels in one year's time 80% of students would be able to pass both the Listening and the Reading & Writing test of the Starters YLE test. The results show that 80% passed the Listening section of the test but not on the Reading and Writing. This result also shows that the listening abilities of students were much better than their reading and writing abilities. This may suggest that the US Wind program can successfully train students listening abilities within a short period of time, while reading and writing skills may require more time.

The reason that students did not do well on the reading and writing sections may be due to students' lack of test-taking skills. Because students in remote elementary schools are not that often tested on exams, perhaps they need some test taking experience. For these remote elementary students, they have experienced very few English written examinations. Therefore, some practice on test-taking may be needed for them to get accustomed to the pressure and anxiety that may arise while taking a test.

Perhaps the students need some more on task time, because the actual time spent on the program turned out to be about 10 months because it was discovered that the students discontinued their online learning during the summer and winter vacations.

Further research is needed with larger samples because the sample was too small but the remote elementary school was also a small school as it had only a total of 60 students.

## Conclusion

We have seen that online programs are either interactive or non-interactive. Among the interactive online programs usually we can find few programs that are comprehensive, systematic and integrated. We often find programs designed for a particular target population, at a particular level and for a certain skill. From the literature we have found few programs with all four skills integrated and with various levels included, like from beginners, to intermediate and advanced. If one lives in the big cities, then foreign language learning resources are abundant. However, if one lives in a remote part of Taiwan, if one single courseware could be proven to be effective in improving all four skills, then this single course could be the solution to narrowing the achievement gap between the city and remote/rural students. Even in the cities and rural areas, a single integrated and systematic course could save time and money for thousands of average ability students and for those who have difficulty

catching up with the group paced progress of a whole class. Many students who prefer individual learning styles may benefit from an adequate online program as one can proceed at one's own pace.

From the results of this study, we have found that the program in this study is effective in building students listening abilities within a given time frame, while the effectiveness of building reading and writing abilities may require further studies. Further research is also suggested to see if the elementary students who continue using the US Wind program can pass the next stage of the YLE tests – the Movers test of not. However, the students did not take the speaking section of the Starters test. This section requires trained oral testers to test the learners. It is highly recommended that students take the actual YLE Starters test which includes the speaking section. As we know a comprehensive English test cannot be complete without a speaking skills exam.

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