

## ***A Non-structured, Empowered and Activity-oriented English Immersion Program in an EFL Setting***

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This research presents a non-structured, empowered, and activity-oriented English immersion program developed and implemented at a college in an EFL setting. Since its inception in 1995, this program has gone through several changes in its curriculum and format. The participants in this program acquire the target language through being involved in several activities led by native speaking group leaders whose age are about the same as that of the program participants. The pre- and post-program interviews and the program evaluation made by the students and group leaders show that the program has significantly contributed to an increase in the speaking skills of the program participants, irrespective of the short program period. The program deserves the attention of English teaching professionals and researchers working in an EFL environment.

### **COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AT COLLEGES IN KOREA**

Communicative teaching approach, which had been a teaching trend since the 1980s in ESL/EFL settings around the world, started to impact English teaching at colleges in Korea in the mid 1990s. Before that period of time, English teaching at Korean colleges, with some exceptions, had mainly focused on translation and literature-based reading comprehension, along with the teaching of grammar. This orientation of English teaching was

unavoidable probably because English teaching faculty at colleges consisted of Koreans who had limited competence in spoken and written English. Also, a need for communicative competence in English did not strongly arise in Korean society before the 1990s. In a similar context, teaching practical English for communication purposes at college levels was regarded as an inferior profession due to the misguided perception that it should and could be taught at private institutes, rather than at colleges. It was in the mid-1990s that practical English geared for communicative purposes drew attention at colleges in Korea. In tune with this change in academia, Korean society started to realize the significance of English for international business and its function in globalization. In fact, in a 1995 press conference, President Kim Young Sam, announced that globalization was a shortcut to boosting the country's economic development, claiming that English could fulfill that mission and would help the country to cope with changes in a rapidly changing world. These social conditions have virtually stirred a boom in English learning and teaching in Korea, especially teaching practical English at colleges based on communicative language teaching methods and curriculum.

Park's research (1994) on English teaching at colleges in Korea, which is one of the earliest studies on that issue, pointed out some concerns of college English education in Korea. He mentioned that English education before the mid-1990s could be characterized by teacher-centered classroom teaching, the curriculum not reflecting the practical needs of the students, the focus on accuracy, and much weight on reading skills. Irrespective of holding a critical view of the teaching trends prevalent in that era, his prospect for college-level English language teaching in Korea was not negative, since English language teaching (ELT) in Korea in the early 1990s had been experiencing a transition from traditional competence-dominant ELT to performance-dominant ELT.

Witnessing the communicative approach to ELT in Korea, which started to attract the attention of practitioners and researchers of English teaching in Korea in the mid-1990s, Kong (1996) claimed that many English instructors

teaching at Korean colleges felt uncomfortable with the new teaching paradigm since the nature of their classrooms does not fit it and the concept of communicative language teaching is not clear in presenting the teaching trend. He also mentioned that the communicative language teaching curriculum adapted in Korea does not provide the opportunity to learn an intensive and deep study of spoken English. As to the effectiveness of college English teaching, he also had a very negative perspective, since learning and teaching English for a few hours a week in a classroom setting would not lead language learners to reach a competent level of communicative competency. Though his view of communicative language teaching appears to be biased, the comment on the insufficient learning hours deserves to be carefully appreciated.

Cho, Moon, and Lee (1997) reported some issues concerning the English education of colleges in Korea and made suggestions on the betterment of it. They claimed that the curriculum and educational surroundings of English teaching at colleges lagged behind the demands of time and expectation of the college students. The respondents of their research, college students, pointed to the fact that the English classes they took or are taking are carried out one-sidedly by instructors without much exchange of ideas and discussion, which, in turn, caused them to feel bored of English class. With these findings, they argued strongly that Korean colleges, in order to deal with the complaints, should devise and implement programs for boosting speaking and writing competency in English, discarding long-favored grammar, reading comprehension and translation teaching.

Kwon (2000), in his article on English education policies in the 1990s in Korea and on the prospect of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expressed an opinion that the 1990s had experienced significant developments in English education in terms of importing native speaking teachers, seeing revolutionary changes in the 6<sup>th</sup> National English Education Curricula for elementary school, intensifying conversational English classes and setting up English proficiency standards at colleges. All of the aforementioned changes arose from the reflection of the English education in Korea dominant before the 1990s,

which was characterized by the unbalanced weight on the teaching of grammar, translation and reading comprehension. Viewed in this perspective, it is not surprising to see that listening comprehension began to appear on the Korea Scholastic Aptitude Test from 1993. Still, however, speaking abilities, which constitute the core of communicative language teaching, are not measured on the test as well as on tests in secondary schools.

In her study on college English programs in Korea, Joh (2002) pointed to the fact that in spite of the influence of communicative language teaching, English education at the college level up to the turn of the century had not reflected the trend of the new teaching approach. Investigating into college English programs since the mid-1980s made her argue that there had not been much discussion on college English teaching and the curriculum had mainly focused on grammar and literature-based reading comprehension. Her own research with 111 college professors teaching at sixty-seven colleges and 825 college students at fifteen 4-year colleges, however, found that many new programs which purport to develop communicative competence had been devised and implemented in Korea, which is expected to bring about desirable outcomes of the college level English teaching in Korea.

Influenced and motivated by the communicative teaching trends, some colleges in Korea have run programs devised to foster communicative competency in English. Cho (1998) reported an English immersion program in which the program participants had to use English in and out of the classroom, virtually 24 hours a day for five weeks. All the program participants and group leaders lived in the same dorm, which, in turn, led the students to communicate with their group leaders and with other members of the program in English. The program consisted of two major components: regular classes teaching pronunciation, conversation, video-based class, topic discussion taught by native speaker teachers and extracurricular activities such as movie night, language games, field trips, etc., led by native speaker group leaders whose age was about the same as that of the program participants. The program was found to meet the goal of increasing communicative competence in English of the program participants. About

94% of the students who participated in the program in the summer of 1996 and in the summer and winter of 1997 responded that their English proficiency had improved and gained confidence in speaking and listening. In a similar context, about 80% of the program participants expressed satisfaction with the program. On the other hand, the complaints they had were mostly concerned with minor things such as “The program was tougher than expected,” “There were many students in a group,” “The group leaders got together themselves and didn’t have much time with the students,” etc. Irrespective of the contribution of the program to the students’ English, it must be noted that about 10 % of the program participants dropped out of the program, probably because there was no way to force the students to stay in the program and no credit was given.

Song and Park (2004) presented a college English program designed to elevate communication skills in English. Their school ran experimentally a communicative language teaching oriented English curriculum in 1999 under the name of “Practical English,” and a year later a revised program entitled “College English” was implemented. One of the characteristics standing out in the program was the choice of the textbooks used in class. Even though the class was claimed to increase mainly communication skills in English such as speaking and listening skills, the textbooks were the ones for reading comprehension. This was because the reading materials in the textbooks contain topics which would instigate discussions and help satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the students. They reported that the new curriculum with a direction for communicative language teaching proved to be effective in helping increase the students’ speaking, listening and writing skills.

In sum, with the recognition of the significance and use of English in the world-wide context, English teaching at colleges in Korea has started to adopt communicative language teaching and in fact several programs with that purpose are now being implemented. In this trend, it would be worthwhile to look into a program developed to increase communicative competency in English. The results and findings from running the program will shed light on directions for the teaching of English to the English

instructors and administrators of colleges in an EFL context.

## **MAJOR CHANGES OF THE PROGRAM**

As of 2005, many colleges in Korea are running English programs based on the communicative language teaching approach but as Kong (1996) critically pointed out, teaching and learning English a few hours a week for two or three semesters at most in a classroom setting would not help the students acquire competent English proficiency. With the awareness of this limit, some colleges in Korea such as the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology and Seoul Women's College run English immersion programs, English Language Program and Seoul Women's University English Language License, respectively, during the summer and winter breaks in which the program participants are required to speak English in and out of class. The program introduced here, unlike other English immersion programs operated in Korea, features non-structured, empowered and activity-oriented characteristics. Initiated in 1995, this program has gone through major changes in its curriculum. When it was first run, classroom instructions given by native speakers of English constituted the main portion of the program. Group work guided by native speaking group leaders was also carried out. The program evaluation made by the students revealed that extracurricular activities led by the group leaders were more helpful and rewarding than the formal instructions given in class, as far as the development of their communication abilities was concerned. This was probably because they had more chances to use the target language in a natural, less stressful environment, where the students talked to their group leaders without the burden of learning English as in a classroom setting. These findings made group activities such as topic discussions, a skit contest, a project presentation and field trips the core of the program in the second stage of the program. The program in the second stage run from 1999 to 2003 operated on an activity-oriented structure and non-credit curriculum. In that

program, the students and group leaders were given a daily schedule and group activities they had to do in advance from the instructor. This period, however, did not escape from the high drop-out rate of the students, even though a lot of effort was made to reduce it. During this period, it was found that a low group leader-student ratio played a key role in increasing the students' communication skills. The current program reflecting the aforementioned findings and evaluations has been run since 2004. Table 1 below displays the major changes of the program.

**TABLE 1**  
**Changes of the Program**

<i>Period</i>	<i>Program content</i>	<i>Features</i>	<i>Drop-out rate</i>	<i>Group leader-student ratio</i>	<i>Credit</i>
1995-1998	Classroom teaching Extracurricular activities	Structured immersion	10%	around 1:10	No
1999-2003	No classroom teaching Group activities	Structured immersion	10%	around 1:7	No
2004-Present	No classroom teaching Group activities	Non-structured immersion	0%	around 1:3-4	2 Credits

## **CHARACTERISTICS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM**

### **Learner-centered Approach in ELT**

Basically, this program is in line with a learner-centered approach in ELT, influenced by Richards (1984) and Nunan (1985). As a reaction to centralized curricular and product-oriented ends-means models which had been dominant in the field of language teaching before the 1980s, they proposed a learner-centered curriculum which puts the learner into the center of the curriculum

development. The representative classroom activities recommended in this approach are working in pairs and small groups, role-play, language games, oral presentations, etc., which lead the learner to learn a language by being involved in activities. Nunan (1992) summarizes the changes in ESL curriculum development and dominant ideologies of them. According to him, progressivism, which emerged from the objection to ends-means model, is more concerned with learning activities in which learners should engage. Thus in this approach, problem-solving tasks and group activities, which are supposed to induce the learners' active participation and involvement, are recommended.

In terms of the spectrum of learner-oriented curriculum of language teaching and learning, Auerbach and Burgess (1985) take a rather extreme position: ESL curriculum and teaching materials developed and implemented by ESL teachers are bound to represent teacher-centered and dominant ideology of a society where the language is taught, and to impose a misguided perception of the reality of the world on ESL learners. However, they don't insist on radical, total changes of ESL curriculum and teaching materials. Rather, their suggestions, based on the reality of ESL teaching environments, concern making incremental changes for securing better ESL teaching circumstances and shifting power relations. In a way to make changes, they call for more autonomy in curriculum development reflecting the needs of ESL learners and the reality of the world, and the learners' involvement in developing curriculum and teaching materials.

### **Non-structured**

More specifically, the current program is characterized by non-structured, empowered and activity-oriented features. To begin with, the rationale behind making the program non-structured originates from a simple belief that a language is learned by using it. To put this idea into practice, a language program should provide as many opportunities to practice target skills as possible for the language learners. Since the uttermost goal of this program is

to increase communicative competency of the program participants, mainly speaking skills in English, situations where the language has to be used should be devised. One of them was to have the students in the program build up their own program in cooperation with group leaders. In the environment where no detailed daily activities and their content were provided in advance, the students and group leaders had to decide on daily and weekly plans. This circumstance was expected to induce active communication between the students and group leaders and between the students, thereby contributing to increasing speaking skills of the program participants. When adopting this idea, we first considered the level of the program participants' English competency: Unless the program participants had minimal language abilities to express their opinions and understand others, it was hard for them to lead the program with the group leaders. Experience from running this program for several years has convinced the program developer that English language proficiency of the program participants was enough for them to be involved in several types of communication such as having everyday conversation, discussing general, argumentative topics and expressing opinions.

The general principles of adult learning (Brundage & MacKeracher, 1980) also support the rationale behind this program in that adults learn best when they are involved in developing learning objectives for themselves and when they can change their own learning phase. Both of these characteristics highlight the autonomy of learning by which adult learners are more motivated and expected to bring about better learning outcomes. In fact, Garcia and Pintrich (1996) reported that the autonomy in a college classroom seemed to trigger learning motivation, more specifically, intrinsic goal orientation, task value and self-efficacy, although it may not directly facilitate high course grades. In line with these findings, the non-structured feature of this program would lead the students to more voluntarily participate in group work. Even though there have been some complaints of the program not having a detailed schedule at the beginning of the program, the students and the group leaders soon became used to it and could take advantage of it. This program, however, presents several recommended activities such as topic

discussions, a skit contest, field trips and a final project presentation. In particular, the date for the skit contest and final project presentation, which were mandatory tasks assigned to the students, were set up and announced at the orientation. Other than these two group-based tasks, each group was free to do whatever they wanted, if they agreed on it.

### **Empowered**

In a way to facilitate communication between the students and group leaders, the program does not offer any formal language instruction carried out in class, where power relations between teachers and students exist (Imel, 1995; Shore, Black, Simpson & Coombe, 1993; Tisdell, 1993). In class, each part is perceived as the provider and the receiver of knowledge, respectively. Though this dichotomy reflects a somewhat radical view of teachers and students, it succinctly describes the roles of teachers and students in classrooms. Where power relations prevail, it would impede natural communication between them. In particular, when it comes to foreign language learning, the learners with limited language competency are unlikely to be involved in discussions and communication, which play a major role in fostering communicative competence. With this concern in mind, this program tried to eliminate the circumstance where power relations between teachers and students may exert a negative influence on language learning.

A couple of ways were considered and implemented to make the program empowered. First of all, there were no teachers who teach students. Instead of teachers, group leaders serve as the source of learning English for the students by mainly talking to and communicating with their students. The group leaders' roles were explicitly announced at the orientation to them as well as to the students. The group leaders were told that their roles were not to teach the students but to help them speak, while the students were instructed to think of their group leaders as friends, rather than teachers and tutors. Several episodes showing their relationships, in fact, occurred during

the program. One noticeable one was that a student and one of his group leaders had some trouble when planning a field trip and had a severe argument over the issue. Such a case would not happen if the student regarded the group leader as his teacher. In other words, if the student had thought of him as his teacher, he would not have showed a strong disagreement to the suggestions and plans of his group leader.

Secondly, the age of group leaders was considered as a way to lessen the negative effect of the power relations on the learning of English of the program participants. In a society where Confucian ideology still prevails, the age would affect, to a great extent, the building of human relationships, especially the power relations of people involved. In Korean society, it is taken for granted that the old deserve to have more power than the young, even when there exists a small age gap. Given this fact, group leaders whose age was about the same or just above that of the program participants were invited to the program and it was found through the post-interview with the students and weekly meetings that the students seemed to consider the leaders as peers or just friends.

### **Activity-Oriented**

Lastly, the activity-oriented feature which would require cooperation between group leaders and students also accounts for the program. If the group leaders had taught the students with teaching materials provided, it would have been likely to create a teacher-student relationship. On the contrary, activities were expected to foster a friendship between the students and group leaders since they worked together for a goal such as winning the skit contest and they had fun by having field trips together.

### **Ways to Check Students' Progress and Encourage Their Motivation**

Taken all together, this program mirrors the current paradigm of English language teaching in an ESL/EFL context in that it is basically a learner-

centered, autonomous program designed to induce learners' involvement and participation. Just having the program participants attend activities led by their group leaders, however, would not assure them of increasing their speaking skills. Even though the program was designed for the teaching and learning of English in a stress-free, empowered environment, some systems were needed to encourage the program participants to practice their speaking skills. In order to accomplish this goal, the group leaders were given several responsibilities: monitoring the students' participation, progress and motivation, reporting them in a written form and having weekly conferences with the instructor of the program. These tasks made the group leaders be aware of what they had to do and in turn led the students to show their motivation. In a way to help the group leaders accomplish their tasks, two forms were prepared and presented to them. Appendix 1 displays the two forms, the Group Activities Report and the Attendance, Participation and Performance Report filled in by one of the group leaders, who was in the program in the winter of 2004. The Group Activities Report consists of several sub-categories such as the number of hours spent together, activities, attendance and special remarks. As seen in the report, the form succinctly shows how long the students and group leaders worked together, what activities each group did every week and students who missed gatherings. The number of hours that students and group leaders spent together was placed first in the form, since it has been observed that the longer the time they were together, the more chances the students were exposed to English and spoke in the target language. As shown in the first week report of a group, the students and group leaders were together for 31.5 hours, which far exceeds the required time for working together, 20 hours a week. In the second week, the group worked together for 27.5 hours. During five weeks, the students and group leaders worked together for about 150 hours, doing a variety of group-based activities. The second item of the form indicates the group activities that the students and group leaders did together. In fact, a lot of activities, ranging from topic discussions and discussions for forthcoming activities such as the skit contest and field trips to sports activities, were

carried out. In particular, the topics for topic discussions encompassed a variety of issues such as money, free trade, relationships, embarrassing moments, independence from parents, fuel shortage, superstition, etc. The third column of the form is concerned with attendance, which is believed to play a significant role in increasing language proficiency as well as in motivating others in a group. During five weeks, only two students were found not to attend gatherings only one time, which implies a near perfect attendance rate. This was possible in part because the students were informed that attendance will affect their grade and the friendly atmosphere formed in a group would not let them skip group activities.

Another form, the Attendance, Participation and Performance Report, was prepared to obtain information about the attendance, participation and performance of an individual student, serving as sources for evaluating and checking the progress of each student. The group leaders brought this form to the weekly meetings with the instructor of the program and reported the details of their students.

In summary, a couple of forms were devised and used to lessen the drawbacks from the special features of the program, based on empowered and autonomous learning, and they seemed to successfully satisfy the intended purposes.

## **PRE- AND POST-ORAL INTERVIEW RESULTS, PROGRAM EVALUATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PROGRAM**

### **Pre- and Post-Oral Interview Results**

In order to verify the program participants' increase in speaking skills in English, two interviews were given, at the beginning and end of the program, and the results are shown in Table 2. Two English faculty members teaching at the university where this program had been run served as the interviewers.

Both of them have taught in the same language program for several years and were familiar with the students' general English proficiency. The questions of the pre-program oral interview were mostly concerned with the students' interests, motivation to participate in the program, daily life, etc. The post-program oral interview was also about their interests, daily life, learning in the program, etc. The interview results were rated in terms of Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, and Excellent and a '+' and '-' could be added. Even though no specific rater training was given, the raters calibrated their rating results of the first two interviewees and discussed the differences of their ratings. The inter-rater reliability of the raters showed an acceptable value of .69. Table 2 reports the statistical analyses based on seventeen students who were enrolled in the program in the winter of 2004 and nineteen students who took part in the summer of 2005. Since the raw data of this research are non-parametric data based on ranks, Wilcoxon's Signed ranks test, which is assumed to be equivalent to a paired t-test with parametric data, was conducted. This test is appropriate for matched pair's data, that is, for testing the significance of the relationship between a dichotomous variable and a continuous variable with related samples. For the analysis, rating results were converted into numeric values: A value of 1 was given to Poor, 2 to Fair, 3 to Good, 4 to Very Good and 5 to Excellent.

**TABLE 2**  
**Wilcoxon's Singed Ranks Test for Pre- and Post-Interview Results**

<i>Rater</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Pre-interview mean</i>	<i>Post-interview mean</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
1	37	2.83	3.83	1.00	-4.976	.0001
2	37	2.78	3.64	0.86	-4.767	.0001

As reported in Table 2, the means of the pre-interview based on a five-point scale are 2.83 and 2.79 for Raters 1 and 2, respectively. In the post-interview, the means are 3.83 and 3.6 for Raters 1 and 2. Wilcoxon's signed ranks test shows statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-interviews at the level of .0001. These results imply that the speaking

abilities of the program participants improved, to a great extent, in five weeks.

The results of the statistical analyses, however, do not mean that every participant in the program benefited from the program. Four out of thirty-six students assessed by Rater 1 did not show any improvement and nine students rated by Rater 2 remained at the same level as to their speaking abilities after the five week's program. In contrast, the rating results of seven students rated by Rater 1 showed substantial increase in their speaking skills with a difference of two rating scales, for example, from Fair in the pre-interview to Very Good in the post-interview, while five students assessed by Rater 2 showed a similar trend. Considering the short period of the program, five weeks, it can be said to have a great contribution to the increase in the speaking abilities of the program participants. Taken all together, the program, except for the case of some students, proved to be effective, satisfying the goal of the program of increasing communication skills in English. Appendix 2 shows the interview results of all the program participants.

### **Program Evaluation Made by the Program Participants**

The program evaluation made by forty-seven students, including two auditors, who participated in the summer and winter of 2004, and in the summer of 2005 supported the oral interview results in that the overall evaluation of the program was 4.5 on a 5 point scale as seen in Table 3. This is a very high score, considering that the average course evaluation of the other English classes offered in the college is usually around 3.8. As to the question whether the program has contributed to the development of speaking skills, which is the most important goal of the program, they responded to it with an average of 4.2. Even though this question is concerned with the participants' subjective evaluation of the progress they have made in five weeks, the self-evaluation of language learning has been known to be reliable. In this view, their response endorses the general observation that the program was effective and useful for boosting the communication skills of the

program participants. The next question “to what extent the program helped you to gain confidence in speaking in English” reports a high degree of agreement to the previous two questions, showing 4.5. In the post-interview, many students responded that though they were not sure of how much their English had improved, they have gained much confidence in speaking. Some of them commented that the time taken to react to the group leaders’ questions and utterances became much shorter as the program went by, which implies that they started to speak English without going through complicated translation and thinking processes. This was possible in part because they could relieve the stress and tension from communicating in a foreign language, by acquiring confidence in speaking in English. The question of whether the students participating in the program are willing to recommend this program to others showed a very high score of 4.6, indicating that they enjoyed this program a lot. In fact, in the last writing assignment for the students which had them write some suggestions to make the program better, some of them pointed to the fact that the program could be highly recommended for its actual contribution to their speaking and listening skills as well as for its function to have them realize cultural differences and foster friendships with group leaders. In other words, some factors beyond the supposed goal of the program seem to have induced the highest degree of response to the questionnaire item. The only issue which got a low evaluation of 3.6 is whether the assignments properly reflect the course objective. As

**TABLE 3**  
**Program Evaluation Made by the Students**

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Mean on a five-point scale</i>
1. Overall evaluation of the program	4.5/5.0
2. Contribution of the program to the development of speaking skills	4.2/5.0
3. Contribution of the program to having the confidence in speaking in English	4.5/5.0
4. Relevance of the assignment to the course objective	3.6/5.0
5. Willingness to recommend this program to others	4.6/5.0

mentioned above, the participating students had to write four essays during the program period whose topics were from the discussions carried out as part of group activities. Out of the four writing assignments, two were given with assigned topics, such as cultural differences between Koreans and North Americans and suggestions to make the program better. The topics of the other two writing assignments were not assigned to the students; they were free to choose topics from those of their discussion. After writing the draft of the essays, the students had to have a conference with their group leaders for the correction and proofreading of their essays. Viewed in this way, the writing assignments seem to have some relationship with the program objective. However, the students' response illustrated that the writing assignments were not concerned with the goals of the program. Taken all together, the program turned out to be successful and met the goals which were targeted.

Some suggestions stated in the last writing assignment and the post-program interview are worthwhile to discuss here. They are listed in Table 4 below:

**TABLE 4**  
**Suggestions Made by the Program Participants**

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Want the program to be more structured
Need reading materials containing topics for discussion
Want the group leaders to teach pronunciation and idiomatic expressions
Expect more preparation from the group leaders
Making the period of the program longer
Linking the writing assignment to group activities
Providing more ways to encourage the students' motivation
Placing more weight to the interviews
Having the group leaders meet the students individually

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Out of the suggestions above, the one concerning "want the program to be more structured," which seems to contradict one of the rationales behind this

program, derives from the fact that the participating students as well as group leaders had some difficulty coming up with every day schedule. Some of them commented that they wasted their valuable time, especially when making a decision on a place for field trips, because where the students preferred to go varied among them. However, the disagreement between the members of a group can be interpreted in a different way: It might have triggered an exchange of ideas and opinions. The second suggestion in the list is that the program needs to provide them with reading materials containing possible topics for discussion. It also reflects difficulty the students felt from the lack of the program's content and schedule. The third suggestion, "want the group leaders to teach pronunciation and idiomatic expressions," demonstrates the program participants' expectation of the roles of the group leaders. In other words, the students want their group leaders to play a role of language teachers as well as that of group leaders. Some students seemed to prefer learning from their group leaders to acquiring the language through real-life communication. This may be due to the general language learning behaviors of Korean students, who are accustomed to one-sided lecture style teaching of English. A couple of other suggestions are also concerned with the roles of group leaders who are virtually in charge of running the program. To summarize the suggestions made by the program participants, they needed a more-structured program provided with detailed daily and weekly plans.

### **Comments and Suggestions Made by the Group Leaders**

Along with the program evaluation made by the program participants, the group leaders' suggestions and comments on the program were recorded onto a tape recorder in the last conference with the instructor of this program. Their comments and suggestions are grouped into the overall evaluation, structure, and management of the program. As to the overall evaluation of the program, most group leaders working in the winter of 2004 and summer of 2005 mentioned that this program made a great contribution to the increase in

the students' speaking. Group Leader A, who majored in French language and literature in England and had foreign language learning experience for a long period of time, described this program as follows:

As a French and Spanish major, I found it very frustrating and difficult to learn a foreign language. Based on my experience, I can say to learn a foreign language in class has some limits and drawbacks, because usually few chances are given for practicing it and also several class hours a week is definitely short to study it. This kind of program offers a lot of chances to practice English to the students, because they had to use it in this kind of immersion environment. Of course, at the beginning of the program, my students were reluctant to speak but in several days they seemed to acquire kind of confidence. So they didn't hesitate to speak and I found that the time to utter a sentence got shorter. Just before I came here, I met a couple of my students in the bathroom. I suddenly felt they looked like different people because their English had improved a lot. Even though there are some students who didn't show development, generally this program was pretty effective in increasing their confidence as well as their communication skills. This program was wonderful.

In a similar vein, Group Leader B from Australia with a Japanese major, who worked as a group leader twice in the winter of 2004 and in the summer of 2005, mentioned that the close relationship fostered between the group leaders and the students helped break the silence period at the beginning of the program and lead to natural interaction, thereby substantially contributing to the development of the students' language proficiency:

I'm not sure of the other groups but I think the members of our group made a big improvement in speaking. You know, our group was sort of special, because we were together several hours a day. I mean, sometimes we met at 7:00 for dinner and departed at one or two in the morning. After the discussion meeting, we usually went to a bar to have a drink. The field trips we had were also kind of special, since our group usually had overnight trips. This made us build up a close relationship and in fact helped expedite conversation. Because the students and group leaders were about the same age, we felt like we were friends, not leaders and students.

In terms of the non-structured feature of the program, the group leaders' opinions varied. Some of them favored and supported the idea because it led the students to speak up and communicate with them and other group members.

When I first heard that my students and I had to make our own program, I was worried about it. I mean, I had no teaching experience of English, or whatever. But it was not that hard to plan what to do. In the first week we had topic discussions almost every night during the weekdays. In the second week we were busy preparing the skit contest. I found the students were actively involved in talking and expressing their opinions of the plans. Hmm, I thought that a non-structured program has more merits, like inventing our own program, because it helped draw the students' participation in the program.

On the other hand, others mentioned that the non-structure trait caused the group leaders and students to just waste time;

I agree to the underlying assumption of the no structure program. It sometimes worked but because of that we seemed to have lost our time. Let me tell you one example. When we were talking about the second or maybe third week field trip, we had really hard time. We could not choose any place for the field trip until the last minute. The students all were different from each other. If the program had fixed the field trip, we would not have spent time talking about it.

Lastly, some comments made by the group leaders are concerned with essays containing possible discussion topics, additional assignment for self-study and the age of group leaders. Contrary to the original intention to have the students pick discussion topics, they were faced with difficulty finding appropriate topics for discussion. Discovering this problem, the group leaders suggested that essays, newspaper articles and editorials with argumentative discussion topics be provided. They argued that the reading materials, if provided, would lead the students to read them in advance and facilitate

discussion. The second suggestion is from the group leaders' observation that some students were unmotivated. In order for them to become more interested in the program and to practice English, students with less motivation need to have special care and attention. One way of doing that was to give the students additional assignments such as having them memorize some useful expressions in a conversation book and to check whether they have finished it. The other suggestion was made on the age of the group leaders. As stated above, the age of the group leaders played an important role in expediting communication with the students since the students and group leaders were about the same age, and it would help them build up a friendship, rather than the relationship of students and teachers. But this fact was sometimes found not to work as expected, since the group leaders whose age was similar to that of the students failed to accomplish assigned roles as leaders. In fact, some young group leaders had difficulty managing and running the program. On the other hand, group leaders who were a little older than the students successfully did their tasks. It was probably because the experience they had seemed to provide them with the ability and confidence to deal with unexpected problems and conflicts between the students.

## **CONCLUSION**

The success of the program is indebted to, firstly, the fact that it provides the students with as many chances to speak in the target language by having them participate in diverse activities such as group discussions, a skit contest, field trips, a final project presentation, going out with their group leaders, etc. Through these activities, the students were exposed to a language use environment where they had to speak English. In fact, earlier studies (Carroll, 1967; d'Anglejan, 1978; MacNamara, 1973) have reported the advantages of learning a foreign language in a natural setting with less burden of learning. The findings of the current research supported them in that the interviews

given at the beginning and the end of the program showed statistically significant difference in the students' speaking abilities and the overall program evaluation showed a very high value of 4.5 on a 5-point rating scale. Secondly, the special features of this program, which are non-structured and empowered, also contributed to an increase in the language proficiency of the program participants. Even though the students and group leaders experienced some difficulty coming up with daily plans, the students had to use English in order to be involved in deciding on them. In a similar context, the age of the group leaders and the relationship between the students and group leaders fostered during the program facilitated comfortable communication and exchange of ideas and opinions without feeling the pressure of learning English. In other words, the students could learn English by using the language. Lastly, it should be noted that credits given to this program influenced positively the performance of the students. When the previous programs similar to the current one were offered on a non-credit basis, the drop-out rate amounted to about 10%. Since the program ran on a credit-basis, no student has withdrawn or dropped out.

The program introduced here presents a possibility of running a non-structured, empowered English immersion program in an EFL setting. In light of the tangible effect of this program on the development of speaking skills in English, hands-on experience of interacting with native-speakers of English, and a cheap program fee, this program is entitled to the attention of English teaching professionals and researchers in EFL contexts.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**Group Activities Report: Week 1**

	<b>Time</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Monday</b>	6 PM-12 AM	*Watched last semesters skit *discussion for the essay *ate at cafeteria	*everyone attended except Byun Ikjoo	*went drinking after class *played cards
<b>Tuesday</b>	7 PM-1 AM	*introduction *discussion (money) *talked about skit and field trip *talked about essay	*everyone was present	*went drinking after class
<b>Wednesday</b>	7PM-2:30 AM	*went bowling *talked about skit (characters, story, costumes) *talked about essay	*everyone was present	*went drinking and watched movie after class
<b>Thursday</b>	7 PM-4 AM	*went to have dinner *went to karaoke *discussion about sports	*everyone was present	*went drinking and eating after class *watched movie
<b>Friday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*field trip discussion (Kyung Ju, Kojedo) *discussion topic (relationship)	*everyone was present	*played Gostop *went to D.O.G. party after class
<b>Field Trip</b>				

**Group Activities Report: Week 2**

	<b>Time</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Monday</b>	7 PM-12 AM	*writing script *had discussion *free trade *motorcycle	*everyone was present	
<b>Tuesday</b>	6:30 PM-12 AM	*discussed education system *doing script	*everyone was present	
<b>Wednesday</b>	7 PM-12 AM	*rehearsed for skit *rewrote skit *starting making props	*everyone was present	
<b>Thursday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*talked about field trip *rehearsed *made props *made charges	*everyone was present	
<b>Friday</b>	4 PM-1 AM	*practiced *rehearsed *did skit	*everyone was present	

**Field Trip****Group Activities Report: Week 3**

	<b>Time</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Monday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*discussions (embarrassing moments / why we live) *field trip discussion *discussion on what we would do the next week	*perfect	*tried to show skit tape but didn't work
<b>Tuesday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*show and tell IKJoo-Korean Drum Jaemin-Joystick Juwook-Gostop *Charades (movies) *field trip	*perfect	*Students enjoyed the game. *Students talked for more than 15 min. for show and tell

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<b>Wednesday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*discussion -Magazines -Independence from parents -Fuel shortage	*Everyone attended except Ki Jeong and Jeonggon	
<b>Thursday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*discussion -essays -dependency on the net *Script on 'Friends' -read and watched one episode *field trip	*perfect	
<b>Friday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*field trip discussion *discussion on superstition *played Korean Pool	*perfect	*changed their minds on where they wanted to go on the field trip
<b>Field Trip</b>	11:30AM-7 PM	*Went to Wolpo beach *Ate at market.	*perfect	

**Group Activities Report: Week 4**

	<b>Time</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Monday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*discussion -How to improve Campus English *split into separate groups for ice breaker		
<b>Tuesday</b>	6 PM-9 PM	*discussion (field trip) *sports competition with other groups *talked about essay		
<b>Wednesday</b>	7 PM-10 PM	*discussion (field trip) *watched 'Friends' and read the script		
<b>Thursday</b>	5:30 PM-10:30 PM	*discussion (field trip and game) *played 'Couch game' with other groups		*Our group won the game.

<b>Friday</b>	4 PM-Sat 3 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*went shopping</li> <li>*went to Guryongpo to stay overnight</li> <li>*watched the video tape of our skit</li> <li>*played on the beach and cards</li> <li>*went to Yang-Dong mal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Our group members argued too much about where to go for the field trip.</li> </ul>
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**Field Trip**

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**Attendance, Participation and Performance Report: Week 4**

Student' Name: Sung Hae

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<b>Attendance</b>	Perfect
<b>Participation</b>	Actively participated during class discussions and the couch game. One of the two students who asked most of the questions during the couch game.
<b>Performance</b>	Has become more comfortable speaking English. Conversation flows when talking to Sung Hae.

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Group Leader:

**Attendance, Participation and Performance Report Form: Week 2**

Student's Name:

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<b>Attendance</b>	100% full attendance
<b>Participation</b>	In group discussion, Nick always listens carefully to other members points of view. He is keen to participate + always gives his considered + logical opinions. He expresses himself well in English and is usually extremely grammatically accurate.
<b>Performance</b>	There has been an improvement in Nick's ability to contribute to group discussion. Nick worked very hard on his pronunciation + acting skills, for the skit performance.

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Group Leader:

**APPENDIX 2**  
**Pre- and Post-Program Interview Results**

Student	Rater 1		Rater2	
	Pre-Interview	Post-Interview	Pre-Interview	Post-Interview
Student 1	G+	V G-	G-	G+
Student 2	G+	V G-	G	V G
Student 3	G	G+	F-	G-
Student 4	G+	V G-	G	G +
Student 5	G+	V G-	G+	V G-
Student 6	F	G+	G-	G
Student 7	G+	V G-	G-	G
Student 8	G+	V G-	G	G-
Student 9	G+	G+	G	V G
Student 10	G	V G-	G-	G+
Student 11	F	G+	G-	G-
Student 12	F	V G-	G-	V G+
Student 13	G	V G-	G	G+
Student 14	G	V G-	G-	G
Student 15	G	G+	F+	V G-
Student 16	V G-	V G-	G	V G
Student 17	V G-	V G-	V G-	V G-
Student 18	G	V G-	G	V G
Student 19	F+	V G	G+	V G-
Student 20	F+	V G	G	V G-
Student 21	F-	G+	F	G+
Student 22	G-	G	F	G+
Student 23	G-	E	F	V G-
Student 24	F+	V G	F+	V G-
Student 25	V G	E	G+	V G-

Student 26	G+	V G-	G+	V G
Student 27	V G	E	V G+	E
Student 28	F	G+	F	G+
Student 29	G-	V G	G	V G-
Student 30	F+	V G	F	V G-
Student 31	G+	V G+	G+ -	V G
Student 32	G	G+	G+	V G
Student 33	G-	V G-	F	V G-
Student 34	F+	V G-	F+	G+
Student 35	G	V G+	G+	V G
Student 36	G-	V G-	G	V G

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