Efficacy of Student Guided Instruction versus Teacher Guided Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study measured the effectiveness of beginning level Spanish students guiding themselves through the acquisition and learning of the required course material for one academic semester. Lessons were randomly selected throughout the semester and the students were provided with the same instruction material and information as they would have received had a professor been present to lead the lesson. This study included four classes that were assigned to two groups: experimental and control. Both groups were responsible for covering the same course material, however, the experimental group was given both pre and post surveys on their attitudes towards self-guided learning in addition to being required to study and learn ten percent of the course material on their own. Results from the post study guided lesson graded events revealed that students in the control group performed better than the students in the experimental group when measuring average grades on post student guided learning lessons. The post survey also showed that the students’ attitudes towards student guided learning sessions were overwhelmingly positive.

INTRODUCTION

The value of student guided learning at the undergraduate level cannot be overstated, as it is an integral part of continuous education and, many times, a prerequisite to successful post graduate studies. There are a variety of views regarding the best practices to ensuring that students are exposed to different methods that promote student guided learning. From self directed or deep learning to case based learning, all of these methods lead to putting the responsibility of the student’s learning squarely on the shoulders of the student. Measuring the effectiveness of doing this by way of combining student guided lessons (lessons in which the student teaches himself or herself the material) with instructor guided
lesson (lessons in which the instructor teaches the students the material) within one course and then measuring the student achievement levels and attitudes was the goal of this study.

Student’s affective responses played just as large of a role as student scores on graded events. How students felt about student guided learning was measured both before and after the study in order to determine if attitudes towards teaching oneself was positive, negative or neutral. The surveys that were used to measure these affective responses were important as it allowed the instructor to understand the preconceptions that students had towards being required to teach themselves the material as well as to be able to tailor the study to mitigate the effect that student attitude had on student performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study was comprised of 2 groups of beginning level Spanish undergraduate students. One group of 35 students, the control group, had 80 lessons which were taught solely by the instructor. The second group, also consisting of 35 students, served as the experimental group. This second group also had instructor guided lessons. However, the experimental group had 8 of the 80 lessons dedicated as strictly student guided learning lessons. These students were provided with the exact same activities, lesson plans, and lesson materials as they would have received from their teacher during an instructor guided lesson. The students were not grouped based on merit, class rank, gender, or any other demographic information. They were grouped based on the section to which they were randomly assigned by the school’s registrar. Of the students participating in the study, 89% of them were in their second year of undergraduate studies.

In a preliminary survey, it was observed that student attitudes towards self-guided study days were very positive. In response to such questions as, “I think incorporation student guided learning days is a great way to supplement traditional classroom learning” and “I have successfully taught myself more than one classroom lesson since I’ve been here at West Point”, the majority of the students responded as either “agree” or “strongly agree”. This information was used to determine student attitudes prior to entering the study.

RESULTS
Students that were a part of the control group received scores that were just over 4% higher than the students who were in the experimental group on the graded events that were administered just after a student guided lesson. On graded events that were not preceded by student guided lessons, however, the control group still out performed the experimental group – only in this case, the control group scored just over 2% higher than the experimental group. But when looking at lessons in which graded events were given when there were no prior student guided lesson days, the experimental group actually performed better than the control group by 0.2%.

Despite being out-performed by their peers in the control group, student attitudes in the experimental group towards student guided learning was very positive. In response to such post study survey questions as, “I truly believe that student guided lessons should be incorporated into every beginning level Spanish course” and “This semester, I really enjoyed student guided learning days”, the percentage of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with these two statements was 46.9% and 51.6% respectively. This same group, however, either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement, “I prefer to figure problems out on my own without the help of my instructors or my peers”; 64.5% of the students in the experimental group disagreed with this statement.

**DISCUSSION**

The incorporation of student guided learning lessons into the curriculum of undergraduate beginning level Spanish at West Point provided some valuable insight into the efficacy of this particular learning method. This study showed that, although students in the experimental group did not perform as well as the students in the control group, the experimental group truly enjoyed the student guided study lessons and they believe that these days should be incorporated into every beginning level Spanish course at their school. And although the study originally set out to prove that students can perform equally or even better in their Spanish course whether they are guided by themselves or by an instructor, it is important to note that the vast majority of the students preferred to have help figuring out problems as they did not like to do this on their own. Perhaps this played an important role in the outcomes of each graded event that was preceded by a student guided lesson.

The fact that there were two different instructors also could have played an important part in the outcome of the study. Perhaps the control group had an instructor who was more seasoned and skilled at delivering the lessons to his students, thereby playing a part in the higher grades received by the control group. The next study may need to be conducted with the same instructor for both the control group as well as the experimental group.
There are many factors that went in to determining the outcome of the study; the most important factors, however, may be measurable not necessarily by test scores but perhaps by the degree to which each student felt as though he or she had truly gained valuable knowledge while they were enrolled in a beginning level Spanish course.

Appendix

These graphs show the 7 minor graded events that were administered directly after the student guided learning sessions. The 8th graded event was excluded from the graph due to the fact that it was a major graded event and carried a maximum of 200 instead of 13.

Figure 1
Graded Event Scores (Experimental)

Figure 2