

Setting Rules for English Classes in Higher Education Institutions

- Rethinking Rules and Classroom Management Methods-

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Abstract

In recent years, English has increasingly become the globalized standard as an international language, and technical colleges need to develop comprehensive English language skills in their students in order to meet this demand. Here, we would like to go back to the starting point of English classes and, in particular, reconfirm the management method of the classes themselves. Conducting a class in a group means that it is necessary to maintain a certain level and standard of class rules, and since it is related to education, it is also considered necessary in some cases to be something akin to discipline. In this report, the authors will focus on students' and faculty members' awareness of English, their attitudes toward the implementation of classes, innovations for efficient and consistent class operation, as well as examples of how to conduct practical classes, and provide a reference example for faculty members who teach at technical colleges.

Keywords: Setting Rules on the Classes, Classroom Management, English Education

1. Introduction:

In order to cultivate comprehensive English language skills at technical colleges, it is sometimes necessary to reform and innovate, for example, by creating new training models, rather than sticking to the old ways of teaching. In order to do so, it is sometimes necessary to go back to the basics, not only in English classes, but for various subjects.

First, we would like to confirm the perceptions of students and teachers about English, and then consider what is needed to make classes more efficient. As part of this process, we would like to consider how to set clear rules, assign seating, call on students multiple times, and encourage students to prepare thoroughly for class. After considering how to deal with students who have difficulty following these rules and summarizing them, the authors

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would like to discuss how to manage classes by providing examples of practical classes in English reading comprehension, grammar, and TOEIC classes.

2. English language proficiency and perceptions of technical college students and their generation:

First, we would need to outline the English proficiency of students at the technical colleges where we teach. According to a national survey by a newspaper, about 70-80% of third-year high school students are at a junior high school English level ¹⁾. Since technical colleges also teach upper secondary school grades, it is likely that technical college students who do not take university entrance exams have about the same level of academic English ability. In other words, they are probably around the level of EIKEN Level 3 ²⁾. Next, from an educator's perspective, as those who are in contact with students on a regular basis, we believe that students are aware that English will be required in a variety of situations in the future, and as a result, English proficiency is an unavoidable requirement. In addition, it is thought that students would like to improve their English language skills, if possible, but have little time and energy to learn because of their busy schedules from the curriculum of technical colleges, which is science-related and involves many classes, experiments, and practical training ³⁾. Therefore, it is necessary to ascertain how much learning is required to master English. In fact, it is said to be about 4,000 hours for mastery, and the total hours of English classes for six years of junior high and high school combined is approximately only 600-800 hours ⁴⁾, a fraction of the required hours. Since at least 2,000 hours of study is considered necessary, unfortunately, it is impossible to ignore the fact that English classes alone are insufficient for English mastery, try as we might. Perhaps this is why one of the opinions that come from technical college students is that it is difficult to show results in external examinations such as TOEIC ⁵⁾, which is understandable to some extent.

3. Cases where we can't learn English in the classroom alone:

What should English teachers do in light of the reality that English classes alone are insufficient for developing mastery, not only at technical colleges but also at high schools? It is very important to teach seriously, but how about taking the stance that "we don't teach English, we teach how to learn English"? In other words, they do not necessarily have to like English, but it is important for them to be able to learn English on their own when they need to ⁶⁾. That is, classes should only be for learning the basics, creating motivation for independent study of English, and teaching them how to study. We also want to avoid teaching students that the means of learning English becomes an end in and of itself ⁷⁾. It will be necessary to make students recognize that they are training for such a purpose, such as using English to learn engineering. Ultimately, it is important to make the students recognize that they are training the basic skills for learning something (e.g., engineering) using English. To this end, the content of the teachers' classes will be important, and higher quality classes are desirable.

In actual educational settings, "what to teach" is often discussed, although "qualities to cultivate" are rarely raised in the content. The same applies to "how to teach" rather than "what to teach. In this paper, the authors would like to consider this point.

4. Seeking a more efficient classroom environment:

Students at technical colleges are aware of the need for English and are more motivated, but their English proficiency is not very high. Moreover, technical colleges cannot devote much time to English. Under such conditions, how should English classes be conducted? One suggestion would be to ask for more efficient classes. Here are three "class rules" that should be communicated to students at the on the first class of each semester.

(1) Thoroughly treat students as adults.

(2) Importance of thinking for oneself: calling on students numerous times according to seating order.

(3) Thorough preparation for the class.

4-1. Treating students as adults, despite not yet having reached adulthood;

Technical colleges are institutions of higher education like universities, not ordinary high schools. Therefore, we propose that they be treated thoroughly as adults. The basic premise of an adult is, above all, “do not cause trouble for others.”

First, “As a general rule, private conversation is strictly prohibited.” If a student engages in private conversation while a class is in progress in a serious manner, he/she will be expelled from the class because he/she is interfering with the rights of serious learners trying to take the class. However, the first time may just result in a warning, while the second and subsequent times may result in expulsion. In addition, there will certainly be students who fiddle with their phones, doze off, or do other things unrelated to class. In such cases, a small caution should be given (but talking or snoring should be expelled for the same reason as above). Here again we consider the reason why they are not concentrating on the class. Is the teacher actually teaching an engaging class? Is he or she teaching as efficiently as possible for the benefit of the students, so that they never get bored? In other words, it is necessary to look for reasons on the part of teachers rather than on the part of students. In other words, it is ideal to develop classes that do not allow students to use smartphones, doze off, or work inside the classroom.

4-2. The importance of thinking for oneself: Multiple designations /calls in order of seating;

One way to do this is to appoint / call on multiple students more than once. To make this easier to achieve, one way to do this in small classes is to create a seating chart with assigned seating to make it easier to call on students, preferably in the first class on each semester, and have the students sit in their assigned seats by grouping them in from the front. In addition, there are other options, such as making sure to have students present something each time they are appointed or called on, or incorporating group work. This brings up a concern about nominations. They may not be able to answer the nomination, or they may end up saying, “I don't know”. Therefore, we would like to propose the following two points.

4-2-1. Not accepting “I don't know” as an answer;

When students say “I don't know” in response to a question, they stop thinking and create a way to avoid answering the question. They are usually young, and their brains are still fresh and growing, so it is a waste of time. Also, they have done their preparation through homework (see below), so they should be able to say something in reference to the question. Therefore, we do not be too strict about what they say, and always encourage them to say something. We need to try to respect whatever they have to say. This will create an environment in which shy students are more motivated to speak up. For them, this approach is highly effective because they are more confused than they might imagine if they are suddenly and at random asked a question, could cause some students to rebel.

So, how about adding a few more innovations? The first is to introduce pair and group work as much as possible after introducing a problem / question to give everyone more opportunities to discuss, express their opinions, and make presentations. The second is to ask for a show of hands from time to time. In principle, it is preferable for the flow of the class to have students give an answer or opinion in the order in which they are seated. Sometimes, however, the teacher may present a slightly difficult topic and ask for volunteers to raise their hands after making the students think about it. In such cases, points should be awarded for their contribution to the class. In short, these various innovations are not top-down classroom lectures, but are all about encouraging students both mentally and physically, and not giving them any room to slack off. Naturally, these innovations are also very effective in preventing students from falling asleep.

4-3. Making classes more efficient thorough preparation;

There are some faculty members who assign students to do preparatory work. Especially in Europe and the U.S., students almost always do the preparatory work as a matter of course. This is because classes proceed based on the assumption that the students have done the preparation beforehand. In Japan, however, few teachers require students to do preparatory work, and even when they do, they simply say, "Please do as much preparatory work as possible," and it is up to the students to decide whether they will actually do as instructed. The authors of this paper, however, believe that preparation is essential. The significance of preparation is something we all agree on, but let us further consider the significance of preparation here.

The first is that many students are not expected to review except before final exams, which could result in students starting to only feel the need to study halfway through the course.

The second, is that preparation helps with input; without input, there is no way to do output. It is impossible to have students speak and write without sufficient input. In other words, listening is an absolute requirement for speaking, and reading is an absolute requirement for writing⁸⁾⁹⁾. The importance of the well-known input theory, which advocates providing large amounts of comprehensible input, cannot be overemphasized¹⁰⁾. Nishizawa, Yoshioka, and Sugiura¹¹⁾, who conducted self-study support for English language learning at a technical college with an emphasis on input, also found improvements in English language proficiency.

As a third point, since the learning unit includes learning outside of class (preparation, review, and practical training), it may be significant and meaningful to force students to prepare for the unit and make it subject to evaluation. (45 hours per credit, 15 hours are for classes)

4-3-1. Preparation in the English classroom;

If a student reads through an English text in class and comes across a word or phrase he or she does not understand, it is not worth the time to look it up on the spot. If this is the case, it would be more efficient to have students do what they can do at home (look up words, read, summarize, etc.). Thus, if students thoroughly prepare for the class, they can concentrate on "things that can only be done in class" (checking the contents of preparation, things that can only be explained by the teacher, pair work, group work, discussion, etc.), and also speed up the progress of the class. As a result, students can be exposed to a lot of English texts, and the quality of English learning will increase¹²⁾. This is absolutely beneficial.

4-3-2. Procedures for classes that incorporate preparation (e.g. English reading comprehension classes);

In the case of an English reading comprehension class, the preparatory work should be a paragraph-by-paragraph summary of the main text (summarizing 1/3 to 1/4 of the text in Japanese). If the English text is appropriate for the students' level, they should translate the entire text in their minds and write a short summary of the main points.

In class, the preparatory sections are checked at the beginning of the unit, and the instructor in charge puts an "approval seal (inspection stamp)" on them and makes them part of the evaluation (e.g., 15-40% of the grade distribution). When checking, the instructor does not check the details of the contents, but judge only by the amount of work and stamp an approval seal. This is done quickly, so it takes only about 3 minutes for 40 a student class.

There are 3 points for checking the preparation:

(1). A review is not required, so students can get a seal of approval if they do the preparatory work, no matter what the content. Review is also important, but most students do not do it except before exams. However, if the students are given the opportunity to prepare for the lesson and improve their understanding of the lesson, the need to review will diminish, and they may review the material on their own or study more in-depth points on their own because they understand it.

(2). Since the importance of preparation is stressed in the classroom, those who fail to do so will be dismissed

from the class. In such a case, points will be deducted from the preparation points, and the student will be considered to have abandoned the class. In the case of a technical college, this is equivalent to an unexcused absence.

(3). However, even when prerequisites are required, it is sometimes impossible to be completely thorough. For example, some students copy someone else's preparation just before class. As a countermeasure for this, by appointing / calling on students numerous times, students can try to guess and answer the items (vocabulary, grammar, prior knowledge, etc.) that they will not understand unless they have done the preparatory study.

If students are thoroughly prepared, even if they are reluctant or feel it to be troublesome at first, almost all students will come to class because they will be thoroughly checked for their achievements by the inspection and in-class appointment. As a result, it is not difficult to imagine that their level of understanding in class will be higher than if they had not done the preparation.

4-4. About Blackboard Use;

The blackboard shouldn't be used unless the instructor has a good reason. Reasons for this include;

(1). There is a high possibility that too much precious class time will be devoted to the teacher writing on the board and the student's copying the content.

(2). Students feel that they have learned only by writing. If this is the case, it would be more efficient to distribute handouts as needed from the beginning. Ideally, as Nakajima ¹³⁾ says, students should write on the board but not copy. The ideal is to develop classes in such a way that students understand the material and write it down on their own.

(3). It is less meaningful to write on the board the contents and vocabulary written in the textbook or printed materials, and it is more efficient to write the written materials at the same time as the teacher's explanation.

Of course, writing on the board may be very necessary when dealing with English compositions or in other subjects. However, in English education, with the exception of English composition and listening, it is often inefficient for teachers to write on the board during class.

5. Current status and results;

So far, we have looked at "setting clear rules in class," "assigning seats and designating students for questions," and "thorough preparation," but how well have students responded and what are the results?

First, rule-setting is communicated in the first class. This is a kind of student guidance, since a group class cannot be established without promises similar to discipline. And these are also an expression of the teachers' educational philosophy ¹⁴⁾. These promises are a set of rules with students to establish better classes and are an absolute condition for maintaining order in the class ¹⁵⁾. Leaving the discussion of the necessity of discipline in higher education institutions for another time, it is still necessary because it is education, and if there were none at all, some classes would not be able to stand on their own.

As a result of the method of instruction, many students were more focused and participated in class as a result of the "class rules" that were thoroughly communicated in the first class. At first, students may participate reluctantly, but eventually, they took the class more seriously, and as a result, dozing off and fiddling with their phones decreased. In addition, the class efficiency was unexpectedly improved because students did not object to the seating assignment and seating chart made at the first class, attendance check at the beginning of the class was completed in a short time, and the order of appointment became predictable.

As for preparation, almost all students have done their preparation, to varying degrees by this point (e.g., 2nd grade English grammar class, 4th grade English reading class, etc.).

The responses of the students to these classes can be better understood by looking at the results of the class

questionnaire. For example, the instructors have received many positive comments such as “I disliked this method, at first, because it was strict, but I got used to it”, “The environment was good in the end because I was forced to study,” and “Although I was forced to study, my understanding of the class deepened because I was forced to do preparatory work”. In fact, the authors’ previous schools gave almost the same responses.



Pictured Above : Making sure to explain the important rules for running the class on the first day.

6. Example of Classroom Practices (outline);

The following are three examples of class development that incorporate as much as possible the three points mentioned so far: 1) Thoroughly treat students as adults, 2) Importance of thinking for oneself: designate / call on students numerous times in seating order, and 3) Thorough preparation.

6-1. Example of a Reading Comprehension class;

Attendance Check → Confirmation on preparation (summary) → Appointing a student to say the summary (about 3 people per paragraph) → The teacher’s explanation (English grammar, syntax, Japanese translation, summary, background explanation; including pair and group work) → Accepting questions from students → Exercise work

In many cases, when these steps were taken in this order, things went smoothly.

Examples of future developments;

Example 1. Preparing an English text written in a position opposite to the English content of the text, having the students read it and discuss it ¹⁶⁾.

Example 2. Conducting Active-Reading: deepening understanding by deepening discussion, encouraging investigation and problem solving ¹⁷⁾.

6-2. Example of an English Grammar class;

In a class where grammar instruction is the main focus, the teacher must explain the grammar points in the text and then solve practice problems. This will lead to low motivation and boredom among the students. In addition, the class tends to become monotonous, and students cannot enjoy the content itself as they do in English reading comprehension.

Immediately after taking attendance, a preliminary review (stamping) will be conducted. The students are asked to write down the important parts of the lesson by themselves, and to write down their questions and concerns on the handout. Next, the students will be asked to guess the text, along with the preliminary printout, as the

instructor appoints / calls on the students. The teacher will then give explanations and supplementary explanations, followed by practice questions.

As an example, before the exam, students will work in groups to create grammar-based questions and then present them to the class in groups. Teams that create the best questions will receive extra points, and the actual exam will be given to them.

6-3. Example TOEIC class;

Due to the trend of the times, more and more classes focus on TOEIC. Since the classes are basically test preparation, they tend to become monotonous and require some ingenuity. Immediately after taking attendance, a preliminary confirmation (stamped with an inspection mark) is made. Preparation should be done by actually solving the exercises. In this case, it does not matter if the answers are included in the textbook. Instead, the class will hear about the process that led to the answers. Later, the contents of the textbook (explanations and exercises) will be presented to the students as they are appointed / called. Any difficult points or areas that require technique will be explained by the teacher and supplemented by the students. After the teacher's explanations and supplementary explanations, students point out areas that are difficult or hard to understand in pair or group work, and teach each other. Afterwards, supplementary exercises will be given to the students, and explanations will be given. Handouts of techniques and explanations may also be effective.

7. Conclusion:

Teaching in an educational setting is not a single methodology alone. It is a complex interplay of various conditions, including the grade level of the students at the time, their temperament, and the subject being taught. In addition, even when teaching the same subject, each teacher has his or her own method and personality. Therefore, it is not healthy to assume that this is the only way to teach. However, once a teacher has been assigned to a class, he or she have to plan and implement the course materials, the environment, and the class progression plan so that students can learn in the most efficient way possible. Of course, there are times when things do not go well, but in those cases, the teacher must have the courage to correct the course in the way that seems best at the time. The joy we feel when we develop our classes with enthusiasm, and as a result, students actually improve their English language skills, and we receive words of gratitude from them is immeasurable benefits. We, as teachers, have to keep this in mind and strive to do our best every day.

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Notes

- 1) Yomiuri Shimbun, 2015, p.37,
- 2) Saito, 2015.
- 3) Mori, 2005, p. 139.
- 4) Sakuma, 1996.
- 5) Mori and Johnston, 2013.
- 6) Erigawa, 2015, Shibata, 2015.

- 7) Shibahara, 2015.
- 8) Kasuya, 2014, pp. 5-6.
- 9) Mason, 2009.
- 10) Mason, 2009.
- 11) Nishizawa, Yoshioka, and Sugiura, 2005.
- 12) Tsukui, 2015.
- 13) Nakajima, 2015.
- 14) Tajiri, 2015.
- 15) Nakajima, 2015, p.14.
- 16) Matsumoto, 2015, p. 43.
- 17) Wada, 2015, pp. 38-39.

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