

On the English Facilitators' Activities as Voluntary Professional Development

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Abstract

In this highly globalized world, it is necessary for Japanese to be able to communicate with people all over the world in English. In order to help students at Tokuyama College of Technology meet this need, the authors formed a group named "English Facilitators' Group (henceforth referred to as EFG)." The primary goals of the EFG are to train the group members to improve not only their English proficiency level but also the way of teaching their classes in English and to increase opportunities for the students to use English in their daily life. This article aims to describe what the EFG members have been doing both as a whole and respectively to achieve the goals.

Key Words: globalized world, facilitators, English proficiency, professional development

1. Introduction

We are now living in a globalized international community. It means that we face an ever-increasing need to communicate with overseas people fluently and properly in English.

Generally speaking, however, students at colleges of technology have a bad reputation of being poor at using English.

On the other hand, English classes have been taught in English at senior high schools since the beginning of the school year 2013. Also, more and more special subjects as well as English classes are taught in English at universities. We have to say that colleges of technology are far behind in this respect.

In order to get rid of the bad reputation of the students at colleges of technology regarding English proficiency, we formed a group in April 2013. We named the group "English Facilitators' Group (henceforth referred to as EFG)."

We EFG members have been conducting professional development training voluntarily on a regular basis so as to brush up both our English and the way we teach our classes in English. Also, we have been trying to augment students' opportunities for using English in and out of class. One of the ultimate goals of the EFG activity is to raise the rate of classes taught in English.

The following sections will explicate what the

EFG as a whole has been carrying out, what each of the EFG members has been doing, and what we plan to do to attain the purposes.

2. Activities as a whole group

Mr. Ogawa and Mr. Kunishige decided to improve the English-speaking environment for students at Tokuyama College of Technology in April 2013. They wanted to provide the students with more opportunities to use English at school. In order to achieve this, they thought it would be necessary for teachers to polish their English ability first and to use English more both in and out of class.

As a first step, they asked one teacher at each department to be an English facilitator with them. That way the EFG was formed. Our primary missions are to make our English better and to make an all-out effort to talk to and communicate with students in English.

So as to improve our English and the way we teach our classes in English, we get together regularly once in two weeks. The meeting is called "Powwow" and naturally we conduct it all in English so that we can boost our communications skills in English. In a powwow, for example, Mr. Kunishige taught the other members how to use classroom English, using a handout that will be shown in Mr. Kunishige's

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part below.

In each powwow, we have also decided what to do for students as a next step. According to a decision, for example, we made a presentation to students on our research or on what we are working on in English, the details of which will be shown in the next section.

3. What each member has been doing

3. 1. Mr. Ogawa: my practice---a small but great step to globalize the whole campus

In my class: I teach all of my subjects in English. Ethics is taught for 2nd-year students. Law is taught for 3rd-year students. Philosophy is taught for 4th-year students. Engineering Ethics is taught for 2nd-year students of the advanced course. Of course, I change the way to use English depending on subjects and the student's level. For example, I basically give a lecture when I teach Ethics. However, I discuss with students when I teach Philosophy.



Fig. 1: Mr. Ogawa's Philosophy class

At EZ (English Zone): If we want to speak English, we have to use it every day. But it is very difficult to find the chance to speak English in our daily life. If we set up any extra time just for English conversation, we will get frustrated soon. In order to solve this problem, we decided to use English in our daily life. We talk to students in English and communicate in English even if we need to tell them something important. More importantly, we established the space to communicate only in English. This space is called "EZ" (English Zone), which has the same sound of "easy". We stay at EZ during the lunch break every day, so that students can have a chance to speak English regularly. We also ask native teachers to join in.



Fig. 2: EZ activity

TED-like event---a presentation event: As a part of EZ activities, we held a presentation event, TED-like event. By referring to TED conference (<http://www.ted.com/>), one teacher gave a short presentation a day. Many students could experience an academic presentation in English and ask a question in English. I gave a presentation on "Creative philosophy," which was my latest idea.



Fig. 3: Mr. Ogawa's presentation at TED-like event

Future plan: We plan to hold a symposium to discuss the significance of English in English, so that students can experience English symposium. Regarding a presentation event, we plan to involve students more. Concretely speaking, I plan to let students give a presentation in English. Our ultimate goal is to globalize the whole campus.

3. 2. Mr. Kitamura: about my presentation at TED-like event---introduction to space weather study

As a fourth speaker of TED-like event, I introduced the Space Weather study that can be

understood as a subsequence of the electromagnetic relationships between the sun and the earth. I am usually in charge of the electromagnetism class as my principal subject, because the fundamental subject of the space weather is strongly related with the electromagnetism (Fig. 4).

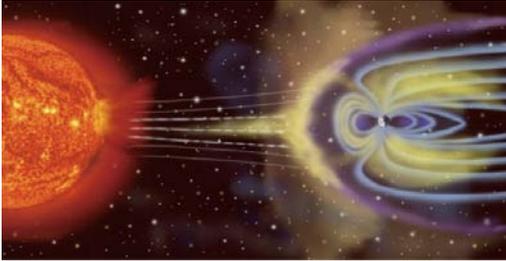


Fig. 4: Schematic illustration of the Space Weather study

On the other hand the academic research subject of each teacher is much segmentalized and does not always one-to-one correspond to the subject of the class. The space weather study is representative of such case. Each specific subject that composes the space weather research well corresponds to the subject in the class of electromagnetism, whereas the space weather study itself has not established yet as one of the major subject in the school. Due to the above stated reason, the present TED-like event is the first time for me to make a presentation about my academic research subject to unspecified students.

The presentation started with a simple self-introduction, especially the fact that my major in the university was not engineering but science, was emphasized in the presentation. This is important to get it through the audience that the academic research subjects do not always have to consist of typical subject and/or majors in the university.

The power-point slides were revised after the rehearsal conducted a week before the TED-like event.

We evaluated our presentations each other and had various comments to improve the slides and the speech. The original slides of my presentation included a lot of texts, so that they could not impress the audience significantly at the rehearsal. After the rehearsal, however, I deleted most of the words on the slides and

simplified the presentation.

The presentation seemed to be accepted by the audience. Also, especially for some students, this was the first time to listen to a presentation on an academic research in English. The presentation focused on the space disasters caused by the space weather, so that, at the time for the questions and comments, it was impressive that one student asked me about the good effect of the space weather to our daily life. Such a viewpoint is very unique and it is almost impossible for professional researchers working on the specific subjects to see things from such a perspective. In this regard, TED-like event was highly useful and valuable for me.

Our approach showed the effectiveness to encourage and motivate students to use English without hesitation, even though we still need to improve it to make it work more effectively.

3. 3. Mr. Koga: Stimulation to students' spontaneous motivation---from general academic subjects to specialized technical subjects

In my laboratory: In my Lab., an English seminar class (2 hrs/week) and weekly meetings on graduation theses for 5th-year students (1 hr/week for a student) are conducted in English. I started these activities in 2012 in order to increase students' opportunities for using English in actual situations.

The whole program of the seminar consists of three phases. At each phase of the program, I aim to cultivate students' spontaneous motivation to study technical issues in English, to train students' actual skills in presentation and discussion, and to improve their ability to read technical papers, respectively.

In the first phase, IEEE Spectrum is used for an educational material (see Fig. 5). That is a monthly magazine published by IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), which is the world's largest professional association for the advancement of technology. This publication introduces not only state-of-the-art technologies but also social issues associated with the novel technologies. Each student selects an article according to their interests such as gaming, sports, art, music, culture, DIY, cooking, automobiles, computers, etc.

At the first and second phase, by using the material, I let students explain the summary, discuss the contents, and make presentations in English. At the beginnings of the phases, I give them a complete example to breakdown their psychological barriers. After their one-by-one presentation, I provide comprehensive yet concise commentaries on the contents by using easy English.

At the third phase, I have the students read and summarize some technical papers regarding their theses published by IEEE, ACM, Springer, or Elsevier etc. These papers contain primal and state-of-the-art contents, and the students can improve their ways of thinking and can have broad viewpoint on their studies.

TED-like event---a presentation event: I also shared with my colleagues and students about “A concept of soft computing” in the presentation event named TED-like event mentioned above. I explained about ways of thinking in the field of soft computing for 15 min. So many students came to my presentation and I discussed with them in English after my presentation (see Fig. 6).

I think that it is very important to show our activities to students, and to reinforce interactive cooperation on the education with English teachers and other teachers of specialized departments through this kind of activities.



Fig. 5: IEEE Spectrum



Fig. 6: Mr. Koga's presentation at TED-like event

3. 4. Mr. Furuta: the skills that the students have to acquire are not only design but presentation

What is the most important skill of future architects or civil engineers (that means the students of civil engineering and architecture)? Of course, it is the design skill, but presentation skill is necessary for them these days.

The business markets of construction have been spreading all over the world and Japanese contractors have to win the international competition in English. Otherwise they can't get the projects and monetary reward.

I think there is a tendency that the students with presentation skill in English have an advantage over getting jobs or passing the entrance examination for universities.

In my class: In Architectural Design and Planning taught for 2nd-year students of the advanced course, I began to show the students the TED presentations of some famous architects like Bjarke Ingels, Joshua Prince-Ramus and Daniel Libeskind (see Fig. 7) etc.



Fig. 7: Architects on TED^{*7}

They have designed excellent buildings and they have performed excellent presentations. In the comments after the class, the students said they were inspired of the presentations. This year, I am going to use English in the handouts and lectures of the class.

*7 The upper left is from http://www.ted.com/talks/bjarke_ingels3_warp_speed_architecture_tales.html.

The lower left is from http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_libeskind_s_17_words_of_architectual_inspiration.html.

The right is from http://www.ted.com/talks/joshua_prince_ramus_on_seattle_s_library.html.

TED-like event---a presentation event: I gave a presentation about what I can do to make your life better as an architect and civil engineer. I'm trying to solve the problems on four categories using my skills. For example 1) Local bus lines deficit problem; I am going to restructure a public transportation system in the local city. 2) Revitalization of central district of a city; I analyze the city life to supply public housing. 3) Reforming houses as a first-class registered architect; I reformed the house of my mother-in-law turning a two-story home into three-story one built of original brick tile baked in a kiln in Tokoname City. 4) Civil procedures about buildings; As a technical expert of the Supreme Court, I explain to lawyers the civil procedures about buildings (see Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 : Mr. Furuta's presentation at TED-like event

3. 5. Mr. Kunishige: "Talk more, make more mistakes, and you can learn more!" is the name of the game.

How can you speak English more fluently? There is only one and very simple answer to this

question: Speak it as much as possible. It is the same as playing baseball or golf. Even if you have read a lot of textbooks on baseball or golf, you will never be a good player unless you play it a lot.

Therefore, I believe that my missions as an English teacher are to improve my own English fluency, get the message across to students that it is significant and useful for them to be able to speak English well, and show them that it is fun communicating with others in English. How can you achieve these missions? The answer to this question is also very easy: Speak English as much as possible.

Following this answer, I've been doing the following.

I first started talking with Mr. Ogawa only in English about a year ago. At the beginning, it was very strange and awkward to talk with a Japanese colleague only in English. English words didn't come out smoothly and we often got frustrated and irritated. After about half a year, however, it was perfectly natural for us to communicate in English. We became much more fluent in English, too.

Secondly, in order to offer more opportunities for students and teachers at my college to use English aurally and orally, I started teaching all of my classes all in English from April, 2013: extensive reading classes for 2nd-year students, extensive reading classes for 3rd-year students, and English conversation class for the 2nd-year advanced course students.

Thirdly, as part of voluntary professional development for the EFG, I taught the other members how to use classroom English in a powwow, using the following handout:

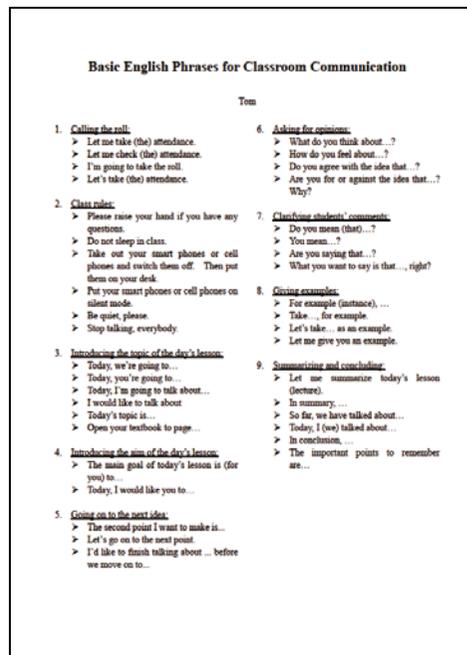


Fig. 9: A handout on classroom English given at a powwow

Also, I've participated in EZ that is explained in Mr. Ogawa's part almost every day since it was established. I try not to dominate the conversation

there so that I can let students talk more voluntarily.

In addition, as mentioned in Mr. Ogawa's part above, I gave a presentation on a new creative idea for enriching your English vocabulary at TED-like event, an EFG brown-bag English presentation event.



Fig. 10: Mr. Kunishige's presentation at TED-like event

4. As a conclusion

In this article, we have talked about what the EFG as a whole has been carrying out, what each of the EFG members has been doing, and what we are going to do from now in order to train our students to be future world-class engineers with a good command of English. In this sense, what we have been doing and we are going to do can be classified as part of our education activity.

At the same time, however, the EFG activities should be regarded as part of voluntary professional development. The biggest reason for that is that our continuous activities are fully voluntary and through them we are trying to enhance our competitive edge as professional teachers and scholars.

We sincerely hope that our activities will contribute to the globalization of Tokuyama College of Technology in some way or other.

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