

Current Curriculum Guidelines Round-One Review: Insights into Successes and Issues

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First, I would like to express my respect and gratitude to English teachers and ALTs for your dedication to advancing English education in Tokushima prefecture. Furthermore, I would like to reiterate my respect for the continuous efforts of the Foreign Language Association to improve instruction, as demonstrated through initiatives such as the Research Conference in August and the English Instruction Improvement Committee. I would also like to commend you on your commitment to improving students' English proficiency through various initiatives, such as organizing the Tokushima Prefectural High School English Speech Contest, the English Composition Contest, and the Tokushima Prefectural High School English Debate Tournament.

The full implementation of the current Curriculum Guidelines in high schools was completed last year. This means last year's high school seniors became the first-year students to study under these guidelines throughout their high school education. The results of the 2024 English Education Implementation Survey, which targeted this first-year students, are as follows.

Students' English Proficiency Tokushima / (National Average)						National Target
Year	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	
A2 level or above	46.9% (43.6%)	49.4% (46.1%)	50.0% (48.7%)	55.1% (50.6%)	56.2% (51.6%)	60.0%
B1 level or above	No Data	No Data	20.7% (21.2%)	24.3% (19.8%)	26.4% (21.2%)	30.0%

In Tokushima, students' English proficiency continues to show an upward trend, which is just due to the daily efforts of English teachers and ALTs. Conversely, the survey identified some areas that necessitated enhancement to foster students' English communication skills.

2024 Tokushima (2024 National Average)	ENGLISH COMMUNICATION I ~ III		LOGIC AND EXPRESSION I ~ III	
	68.3% / (60.4%)		58.1% / (48.6%)	
Language Activities (Schools / more than half of the classes involve language activities)	General course 69.5% (64.5%)	Specialized course 66.7% (53.6%)	General course 56.4% (48.4%)	Specialized course 61.3% (49.1%)
JTEs' English Use (English teachers / more than half of their speech in English)	61.5% (46.6%)		45.3% (31.1%)	

*Language Activities: except for the English course

In particular, the survey results reveal significant differences between English communication and logic and expression. To achieve the goals of each subject, I would like to share the following two perspectives with teachers and ALTs.

The first point is the perspective of "what abilities students will cultivate in class" or "what students will be able to do through lessons." Foreign language education is a subject that cultivates "communicative competences." Its purpose is not merely "understanding textbook content," but rather "acquiring the competences to communicate using the textbook as material." To ensure that this goal remains unwavering, we must consider how to design today's lesson using the CAN-DO list as our foundation.

The second point is the perspective of "what to learn in class." While English learning involves numerous essential knowledge and information—such as vocabulary and grammar—it is necessary to further advance improvement from the viewpoint of how these should be handled both inside and outside of class, specifically what should be done during class. It is difficult to complete students' English learning only through classes. Foreign language learning in high school is expected to build the foundation for lifelong English learning. This involves connecting classroom learning to extracurricular activities, learning in other subjects, and daily life.

Based on the above premises, when reviewing the instruction of the first-year students under the current curriculum guidelines, there are likely aspects perceived as successful and others deemed in need of improvement. While circumstances vary across schools, it is essential to analyze them, share the identified challenges among English teachers, work out improvement strategies, and then incorporate them into annual teaching plans, unit lesson plans, and individual class periods to support student learning. What worked well, and what further steps should be taken to build on that success? What measures must be taken to implement improvement in the face of ongoing unsuccessful practices that are simply being followed due to precedent? I strongly encourage English teachers and ALTs to share and analyze these points in each school. This year, through my school visits and other workshops, I had the opportunity to observe classes at high schools and learn about the practices of the teachers and ALTs undertaking new challenges. I have compiled a list of key points to consider when improving instruction further. Please refer to the following.

Information: Cultivating students' communicative competences through language activities

1. Unit Teaching Plans and Lesson Design



(1) Foreign Language is a subject that cultivates "communicative competences."

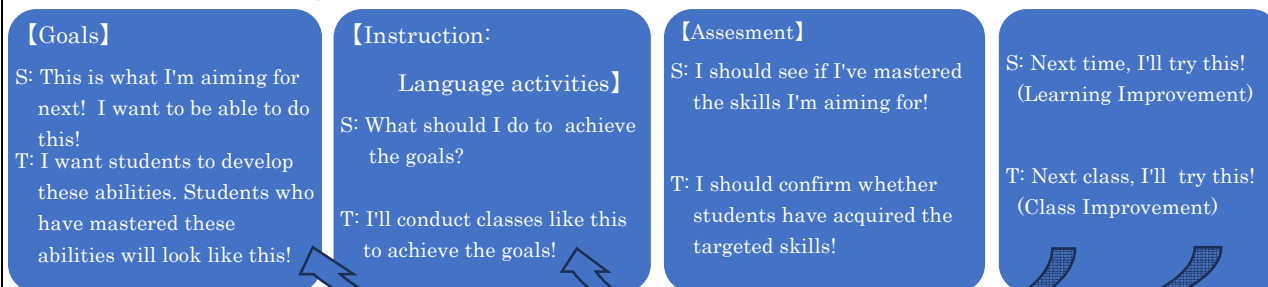
○: Develop the competences necessary for effective communication using textbooks as teaching materials.

×: Understand the content of textbooks.

(2) We should plan backward with an overview of the unit's structure to ensure balanced placement of the four skills and the five domains.

(The four skills and the five domains are not goals in themselves, but rather means to achieve communication.)

2. “Goals” of Learning



- (1) We need to organize and share with other English teachers and ALTs what students will be able to do through learning in this unit and lesson. Textbook content, vocabulary, and grammar are communication tools—how we use them is key.
- (2) Regarding “goals,” it is assumed that students understand them. To reach the goals (the purpose of learning), scaffolding is necessary throughout the unit and this lesson to enable students to learn while self-regulating.

3. “Instructions” for Goals

- (1) “Foreign languages” are subjects that cultivate “communicative competences.” Through communication with others and oneself, they enable higher-level learning activities.
- (2) We should make sure whether students are fully understanding the “purpose, context, and situation in language activities,” or whether they are engaging in them without understanding.
- (3) We should show appropriate presentation of language activity models. Without teachers’ guidance and support, students cannot progress in their learning. (Appropriate quality and quantity of scaffolding.)
- (4) We need to enhance observation and midterm guidance in language activities. This means that we are required to consider what students can and cannot do, where the problems lie, and what kind of instruction will support the deepening and broadening of both language skills and content knowledge, thereby improving our lessons.
- (5) We need to support students in repeatedly engaging in language activities by gradually varying the implementation methods (e.g., changing partners, altering situations). We should be mindful that the purpose of these activities extends beyond merely acquiring linguistic knowledge through pattern practice.

(An example of the flow of instruction)



- (6) We need to design lessons that enable students to improve their receptive and productive language skills through integrated language activities.
 - It is essential to balance the allocation of receptive and productive activities throughout the unit lesson plan and the lesson plan for this period.
 - Rich input is essential in order to develop communication skills. (Vocabulary and grammar explanations themselves do not constitute input.)
 - We need to design language activities with meaning within our lessons. Without content or information to communicate, students cannot engage in language activities.
 - We need to design lessons so that students can relate the content covered in textbooks to themselves and engage in thoughtful discussion.

4. “Assessment” for Instructions and goals

- (1) Assessment serves to confirm what was taught in class. Performance tests are essential for evaluating the “competences” cultivated through language activities. (However, performance tests are not about reproducing language activities.)
- (2) We should clearly distinguish between “evaluation for documentation” and “evaluation for instructional purposes.” Evaluation is conducted to adjust and confirm goals and instruction; we should be careful not to fall into the trap of teaching only for the sake of evaluation.

This year, Tokushima Prefectural Board of Education is implementing the following workshop and project with the aim of supporting teachers in improving their lessons.

1. Workshops for practicing teaching

The workshops focused on themes including improving logic and expression instruction, utilizing generative AI, teaching writing skills, and enhancing deep learning. Each session featured high school teachers from other prefectures engaged in advanced practices and university faculty with extensive expertise. Participants learned from practical examples while also discussing ideas and conducting microteaching sessions to share lesson development concepts.

- Part 1: Approaches to Lesson Design Aiming for the Integration of Goals, Instruction, and Assessment (Logic and Expression)
- Part 2: Guidance on Writing and the Use of Generative AI
- Part 3: On Enhancing “Deep Learning.”
- Part 4: Practical Approaches to Lesson Design Aiming for the Integration of Goals, Instruction, and Assessment (Logic and Expression)

2. English Education Leaders Project based on elementary, junior high and high school cooperation.

This program focuses on enhancing language activities at all levels of education, developing teaching and assessment methods that leverage language functions, and improving transitions between elementary, junior high, and high school. This aims to cultivate students' communication skills, particularly writing, by facilitating these transitions. Through this program, three English education leader teachers are selected from each school level. They discuss the practices and challenges of their lessons and performance tests at their respective levels, observe lessons at other levels as part of open research classes, and participate in discussions about the necessary teaching and assessment approaches at each level.

Finally, the Foreign Language Association, each teacher and ALT is playing a key role in further improving the English language skills of the students and making their foundation for lifelong learning of foreign languages. Then, Tokushima Prefectural Board of Education is committed to supporting the association by sharing the latest information of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and providing information on advanced practices and more. I hope for the further development of this association and ask for your continuous efforts for the further development of English language education in Tokushima Prefecture.