

On English Teaching by the Division of Freshman Classes According to Ability in English (II)

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The students who took the ability test were approximately 600, excepting a few absentees; four year college freshmen majoring in physical education numbered 311 and two year junior college freshmen majoring in health education numbered 334. One and the same test was given to all freshmen.

Degree of difficulty of the test:

The test had to be a good criterion for the aimed classification as well as a measurement of the ability in English. The English tests of such levels as those given in most liberal arts colleges for their entrance examinations are not suitable for our purpose in the point that the results obtained would not necessarily enable the classification of the examinees according to their ability. For, if the test is difficult, as is often the case with the entrance exams, and a greater part of the students get a low score of around 30~40 points, or if the test is easy and most students get a high score of around 80 points, then either case would require another test to further divide the students into certain numbers of groups. We assumed from the past experience in the entrance examinations and also in the class work that the level of the ability test would suitably be around 10th grade, that is, a level of freshman in junior high school. We presumed that the test of this level would come up with the performance scattered in a way of the normal distribution curve which would prove the validity of the test as well as appropriateness for classifying the tested based on the ability shown in the test. The test should cover as wide a range of skills as possible to measure with accuracy the ability in the language. The test content should take into consideration the limit of time which is one hour for the test during the course of orientation between the registration and first classes and also the time limit of one day which can be spared for marking the results of the test of 600 students, since the first class of English course should begin with the students newly classified.

The test comprises five major questions: the first requiring grammatical knowledge by the selection of proper words to be filled in the blanks of ten sentences chosen out of a group of words; the second consists of four sentences, each using four different ways of expression, of which one way of expression should be selected, the third is to measure the ability in English composition by arranging the given words in right order to form four sentences, the fourth

is a question on accent and the fifth is to measure the comprehension of a short story of about 100 words in the replies to the question of selecting four right ones out of 12 statements relating to the contents of the story. All the questions were so designed as to be objectively scored.

The results of the test:

The results of the test were tabulated and the statistics of the results are shown in the following Table 1 and Figs. 1 and 2. Table 1 is the frequency distributions of the scores made by the college and junior college freshmen on the present English ability test. Figs. 1 and 2 are the frequency polygons and

Table 1. Frequency distributions of the scores made by 311 College freshmen and 334 Junior College freshmen on English ability test.

Scores	Frequency	
	College	Junior College
95-100	6	5
90- 94	10	6
85- 89	18	14
80- 84	18	16
75- 79	38	27
70- 74	19	29
65- 69	27	29
60- 64	34	18
55- 59	22	39
50- 54	32	30
45- 49	28	34
40- 44	20	18
35- 39	9	24
30- 34	14	17
25- 29	13	20
20- 24	1	7
15- 19	2	1
10- 14	0	0
5- 9	0	0
0- 4	0	0
Actual Mean	60.96	56.94
Median	61.63	58.85
Highest score	98 points	100 points
Lowest score	17 points	19 points

histograms of the test scores shown in Table 1 for the college students and junior college students respectively. In view of the so-called bell-shaped normal distribution curve, the above graphs are close to the standard, particularly so is the junior college curve. The mean scores are 60.96 and 56.94 for college and

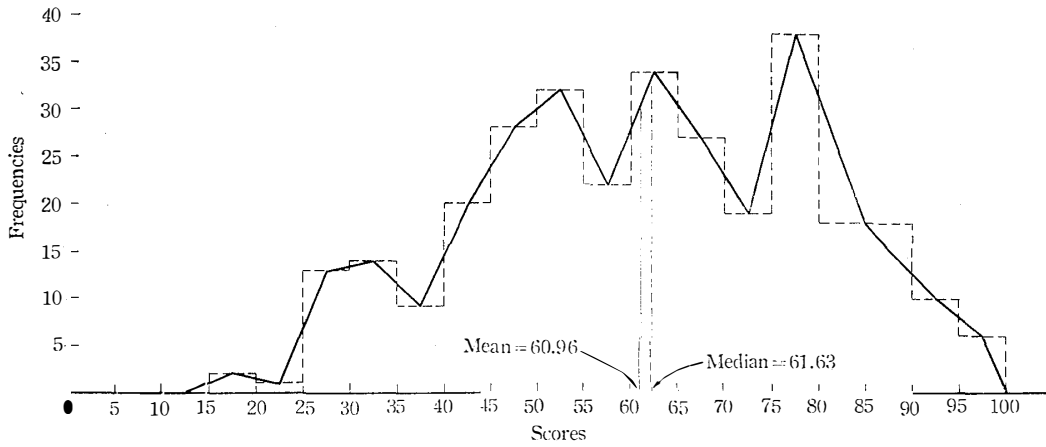


Fig. 1. Frequency polygon and histogram of test scores made by college freshmen shown in Table 1.

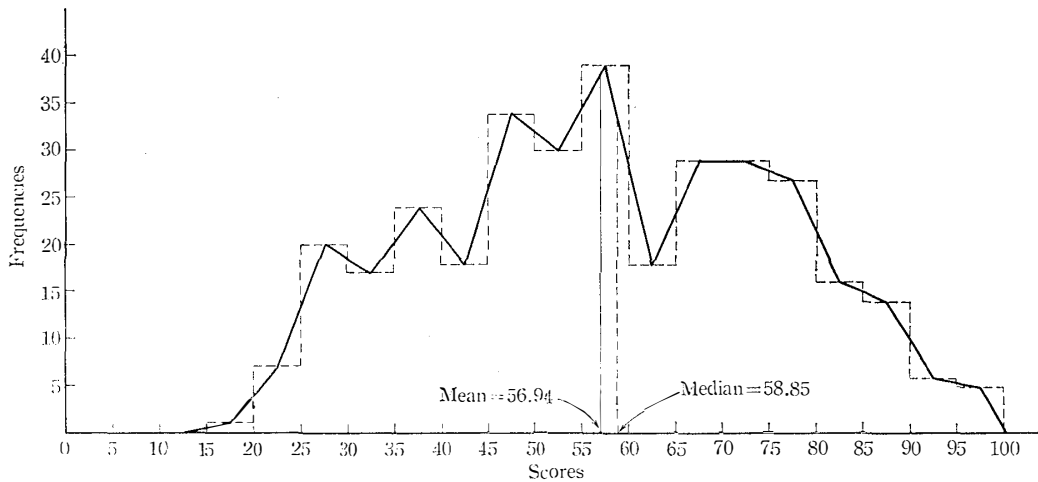


Fig. 2. Frequency polygon and histogram of test scores made by junior college freshmen shown in Table 1.

junior college respectively; college has a higher average score than junior college by 4.02 points, the medians are 61.63 and 58.85 and the crude modes fall on class intervals 75~79 and 55~59 respectively showing that the distribution curve of the former is skewed to the left.

Classification based on the test results:

It is needless to mention that a homogeneous group in terms of ability is desirable from an educational viewpoint, therefore, the number of classes showed ideally be the number of homogeneous groups as found in the test results. In reality, however, the number of classes is to be determined by the number of English class hours available in the entire curriculum and the available number of English teachers. From these two determinants, the number of classes could not be but six for college and junior college respectively, that is about 50 students each class. The students are originally classified into four classes in an alpha-

betical order of about 80 students each.

New six subdivisions were made by taking upper graded 100 students whose scores in the test range from 70 to 95 for two better classes and the rest lower graded 200 students whose scores are below 70 for four poor classes, these latter four classes, however, not grouped in the order of ability but in the alphabetical order just mechanically to have the equal number of students to go along with the original class divisions, solely due to the curricular conditions. In the entire curriculum the subdivisions should coordinate with other subdivisions such as in piano, vocal music and physical training courses.

The classification according to ability, if carried out strictly as is meant, should be made in the order of ability. For that purpose, the frequency distribution of scores and the cumulative frequencies (Table 2) are helpful in the

Table 2.

Scores	Frequency	
95-100	6	
90- 94	10	
85- 89	18	↓
80- 84	18	<u>52</u>
75- 79	38	
70- 74	19	
65- 69	27	
60- 64	34	
55- 59	22	
50- 54	32	
45- 49	28	<u>59</u>
40- 44	20	↑
35- 39	9	
30- 34	14	
25- 29	13	
20- 24	1	
15- 19	2	
10- 14	0	
5- 9	0	
0 - 4	0	
	<u>N 311</u>	

practical operation of dividing a great number of students into a desired number of classes in relation to the possible number of teachers and the total outlook of the performance, or in finding out the dividing lines among achievement scores to form subdivisions into desired numbers of levels in case more number of teachers are available.

Selection of text books and ability classes:

In the use of text books for the classes formed according to ability, there may be two ways of thinking; one is a case wherein the same text book is used in higher and lower classes and different norms of teaching are used,

and the other is a case wherein different text books are used according to the levels of the classes. The former may be said advantageous from a point of psychological effect on the students particularly of lower class who are feared to have inferiority complex by being put into lower classes. This also has a practical convenience that the same term examination problems can be given to all the students of different levels and the marking will naturally be made all through the students based on the results of the same problem, which may help to eliminate the students' anxiety for the fairness of the evaluation basis. The latter case wherein different text books are used to suit the levels of classes may also have advantages, in that higher class students may find the text books interesting and challenging and the lower class students will enjoy the mastery of the material; if the same text book is used for both higher and lower classes, it is certain that the level of the book is unsatisfactory to either one of the classes, too difficult or too easy. Besides, in the former case wherein the same text book is used, it would not be so feasible to introduce and practice the different norms of teaching in every day class, thus, the selection of text books is not easy as it appears. In the present attempt, the selection of text books was eventually left to the instructors. The writer herself employed the former method of using the same text book in her one higher class and the corresponding two lower classes.

Comparison of achievements among classes:

The results of teaching by the division of freshman classes based on the ability in English as found in the ability test was studied after a year. Among six classes of totally about 300 college freshmen, three classes; two lower classes and one higher class were chosen for follow-up analytical study. These classes will arbitrarily be named herein A, B and C, meaning two lower classes and one higher class respectively. Classes A and B are the ones wherein students got a mark below 70 in the said ability test while class C is the one for those who got a mark above 70 in the same test. The average scores of the three classes in the ability test and in the performance in English class during a year are given in the following Table 3.

The score in achievements in English course in the above table implies the score made by the students on their regular class work, quizzes, term tests and even attendance in their English course during the school year. The achievement score is, therefore, a sort of adjusted performance score and should not be interpreted as a variance to compare with the ability test score to see any correlated factor between them. It may also be noted here that no control groups were made for the purpose of the present study, since it is the belief of the writer that the experimental work should be introduced into the regular teaching only when no previously contemplated disadvantages are existed, that is, no class should be

conducted simply for the sake of experiment. The present case, in the writer's opinion, would suffer some degree of psychological disagreeableness on the part of students if any factors are controlled, such as some classes are not formed according to ability but remain to be in the form of regular classes or the like.

For comparison between higher and lower classes, the value $C - \frac{A+B}{2}$ is given here. Class C has 27.4 points higher than the other classes in the ability test on entry, and 17.4 points higher in the achievement score at the end of a school year, showing that the students in Class C did better performance than the students in A or B Class. According to $(y-x)$ value which shows the difference between the score of each class in the ability test and the score in achievements in English course after a year since the entry, Class A shows much progress by 11.1 average points, and Class B by 1.6, whereas Class C declined in the score by 2.4 points. Nevertheless, the ranking order that Class C comes first among the three has not been changed.

Table 3.

Class	Number of Students	Average score in ability test (x)	Average score in achievements in English course	$(y-x)$
A (lower)	51	51.9	63.0	11.1
B (lower)	50	52.9	54.5	1.6
C (higher)	58	79.8	76.4	-3.4
Total	159	61.5	64.6	3.1
$C - \frac{A+B}{2}$		27.4	17.4	

Further studies into the achievements of the freshmen disclosed that 11 students of Class A failed to get the minimum passing grade of 60 point in the term examination and has to take a re-examination, 9 students of Class B and even 4 students of Class C were required to take a re-exam of the same kind. Those four students of Class C were the ones who had points of 78, 83, 73 and 85 in the ability test. Since there are many other factors to be considered in the achievement of the college courses, particularly in the present college of physical education major, the failure in English course may simply be resulted from irregular attendance. On the other hand, eight (8) students of Class A on 55~60 point level in the ability test and four (4) of Class B on 50~60 point level received above 80 points in the achievement score in English course.

Reactions of students on the classification according to ability in English.

After a year since the introduction of the ability classification, a research

was made by means of questionnaire on attitudes towards the grouping of freshman Eng. courses according to ability in English. Fig. 3 shows the form of the questionnaire used. Anonymous returns were permitted to encourage their free expression of opinions.

Fig. 3 Questionnaire

Name_____
1. Have you recognized that your English classes were formed based on the results of the ability test?
Yes_____ No
2. What do you think of the ability classification of English course? Check the following a. or b.
a. Satisfied
b. Not satisfied
3. Those who checked b. in the above 2, please give the reasons.
a.
b.
c.
4. Do you agree that this classification should be continued hereafter?
a. Yes.
b. No.
c. Don't know.
5. Comment on anything concerning English courses.

The percentage of the returns was 100% in the number of 308 college freshmen. The results are shown in the following Table 4.

The outcome of the questionnaire was somewhat against the writer's expectation in that the higher classes are not satisfied and less agreeable to the proposal of future employment of the classification according to ability, while lower classes are more satisfied with the classification and support the continuance of the program. We may be able to find the reasons for the opinions as expressed in the replies to the questions No. 3 and No. 5. Following are the reasons as found in the replies to the question No. 3, and the number in paren-

Table 4. Reaction of students towards ability classification as appeared in a questionnaire in Fig. 3.

Class	Level of class	Satisfied	Not satisfied	Total
A	Lower	48	5	53
B	Lower	49	1	50
C	Higher	44	7	51
A'	Lower	49	3	52
B'	Lower	47	4	51
C'	Higher	42	9	51
		279 (90.6%)	29 (9.4%)	308

Table 5. Reactions of students towards future continuance of the classification according to ability.

Class	Level of Class	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
A	Lower	31	4	18	53
B	Lower	34	2	14	50
C	Higher	17	7	27	51
A'	Lower	29	3	20	52
B'	Lower	34	5	12	51
C'	Higher	27	4	20	51
		172 (56%)	25 (8%)	111 (36%)	308

Unsatisfied, because

Lower class

We feel discriminated.
 Sometimes I have inferiority complex.
 No stimulus felt in the class.
 There are still found differences in ability.
 We want to be treated equally. (2)

Higher class

I sympathyze with the friends who are put into lower classes.

The same text books are used and I don't see why classes should be divided according to ability.

I wish I could be in a lower class, then I could have had a better grade.

Only one test cannot measure real ability. (9)

I don't see any merit in the classified teaching.

I wonder if there is any difference in the contents of teaching in our higher class from lower classes.

Class is too difficult for me. (3)

Higher class is handicapped, because we have more pages to study at examination (3).

If classification is based on ability, special consideration should be taken in the marking of the higher class students.

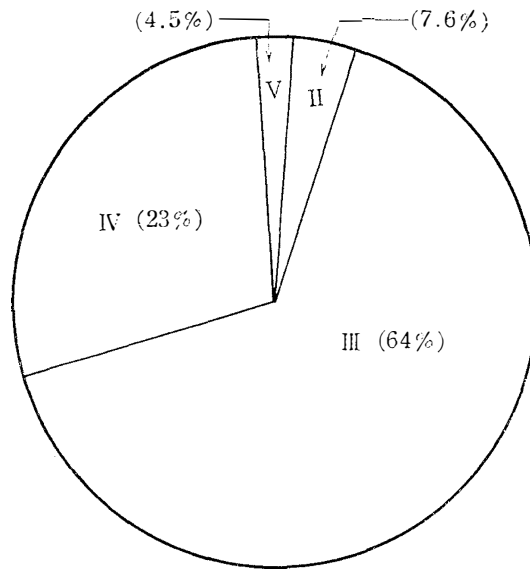
Some students went to lower classes, because they didn't do their best in the ability test on purpose, since they knew the results of the test will be used as the criterion for classification. (3)

theses shows the frequency of the similar opinion.

From the above replies and reasons for approval and disapproval of the classification, we see that inferiority complex which have been considered as one of major hindrances to the execution of classification according to ability in various school levels, and which also in our opinion might have existed in the lower classes was not found to be the primary reason of those who disapprove the scheme. As far as the findings from the above questionnaire are concerned, the disapproval is by the students of higher classes with an almost unanimous reason that higher classes are disadvantageous. Their most concern seems to be placed on how to get better grade in an easier way. They are unhappy about having to study more for the class and for exam and about not being provided with any privileges by being in higher classes. Several students have an opinion that only one test can not rightly judge true ability. This reason may be related with the reason that some of the students intentionally gave poor results in the ability test. Although opposition seems to be strong, it should also be noted that the number of opposition was 9.4% and the rest over 90% stand for the approval. In the question No. 5 for the free comment on English, about 50% of the students wanted more practical English such as conversation.

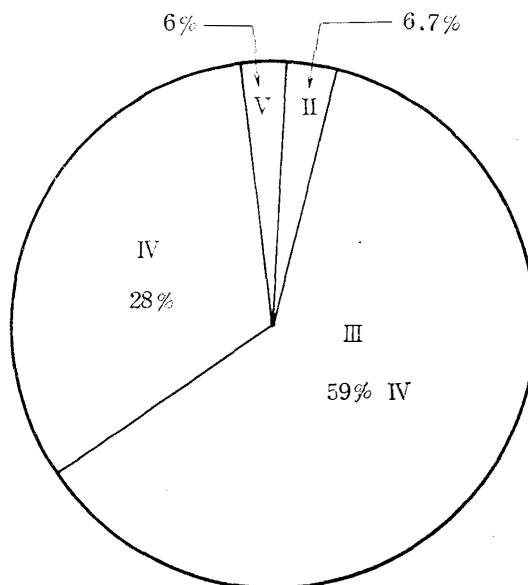
In view of the fact that some of the students intentionally didn't do their best in the ability test, we need to find other methods of measuring their ability to rely on for the intended classification. We attempted to find the performance in English subject at their senior high school and the correlation, if any, with the ability test or the performance in the college English course. The findings from the studies into their achievement at high school are shown in the following; their grades are represented by five grades of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 in the order of good quality. The average grades during three years are shown in the following table.

Grades during three years				Score averaged	Number of Students
II	2	2	2	2	}24 (7.6%)
	2	2	3	2.3	
III	2	3	3	2.7	}201 (6.4%)
	3	3	3	3	
	3	3	4	3.4	
IV	3	4	4	3.7	}74 (2.3%)
	4	4	4	4	
	4	4	5	4.3	
V	4	5	5	4.7	}14 (4.5%)
	5	5	5	5	
				313	



When the achievements are limited to the senior year of high school, the findings are as follows:

Grade	Number of Students
II	21 (6.7%)
III	186 (59%)
IV	87 (28%)
V	19 (6%)
	313



From the above findings, more than half of the students who come into this college have a grade of III for English language achievements, indicating that

they were on the average in the performance of English at high schools.

Concerning those 19 students whose grade in English in the senior year of high school was V, the average score of ability test and the performance average score in the freshman year were studied and found to be 69 points and 78 points respectively, which are not so good as is expected from the high school performance. On the other hand, for those 21 students whose high school grade in English was II, the said scores in the college were respectively 63 points and 69 points which are not too bad as would be expected. This may be caused by various factors, but the difference in the school level and in the criterion of evaluation may be affecting the phenomenon. In a word, as far as the experience we have had with our students is concerned, there is seen little correlation between the mark in the subject of English at high school and the achievement in the same at college.

In conclusion, we have seen the educational effects and psychological effects of teaching English by the division of freshman classes according to the ability in English. In the former educational effects, there are several problems involved; the integration of the English course into the entire curriculum, the available number of teachers, the objective methods of using text books, and so on. In the latter psychological effects, a questionnaire was conducted to find out the reaction by the students on the subject classification. Among several findings are the unexpected facts that the higher class students are against the method rather than lower class students, that the students intentionally did not do their best in ability test, and that the grade in English at high school does not always correlate with the performance in English language at college. In order to cope with the present general resistive attitude of the students toward learning of English language but with much mark-consciousness, the teaching of English by the division of classes according to the results of ability test should be comprehensive of varieties of needs on the part of the learners.

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