

# Evening College Students' Views on Their Own Behavior in English Writing Classes: A Preliminary Study

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**Abstract**—This paper reports on a preliminary investigation into evening college students' views on their own behavior in English writing classes. A total of 68 English-majored students enrolled in the evening session of the Applied Foreign Languages department at a university of science and technology in northern Taiwan participated in this study. Questionnaire surveys were conducted with a primary focus on various inappropriate behaviors stated in the classroom conduct code. Initial findings showed that the majority of the participants were highly engaged in classroom activities. However, some were also involved in other activities. Chatting with classmates might be a more serious problem against the rules from students' perspective.

**Index Terms**—classroom management, college classroom, college students, discipline, student behavior, student classroom behavior

## I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom management has long been an important issue in educational publications (e.g., [1]-[10]). The issue involves not only hardware, or “physical environment of the classroom” [11], but also software, namely students as well as teachers. Nowadays, issues regarding the former have become a shared concern worldwide [12], mainly due to inappropriate behavior in the classroom, which has even led to “social anxiety” [13].

Limited research has been undertaken so far to investigate inappropriate student behavior in the college classroom though extensive work has dealt with the problem at other educational levels (e.g., [3] and [12]). However, college teaching is misperceived as easy especially when new technologies such as text messaging and new applications on mobile phones and laptops have been diffused (cf. [14]-[16]).

Various measures have been taken to deal with the problem at educational institutions in Taiwan. For example, campaigns have been conducted against late arrival, food, naps, and chats in the classroom setting in order to build a civil learning environment. In some universities and the author's affiliation as well, the classroom setting is treated as a workplace in which

ethics, or moral principles of a person's behavior, is highly valued. The first week of each semester is proclaimed to be the Week of Workplace Ethics, during which teachers are to elaborate a conduct code that states how students should behave in the classroom setting.

Previous research on student classroom behavior has been carried out from teachers' perspective (e.g., [12]). Little attention has been focused on students' views on their own behavior in classroom settings, in particular part-timers' or evening students'. Due to the diverse issues discussed above, the purpose of the study, therefore, was to investigate evening college students' views on their own behavior in classroom settings, with particular reference to English writing classes in which students are entitled to have access to computers for practice. More specific objectives are as follows:

- (1) To understand the extent that students are engaged in classroom activities from their own perspective;
- (2) To realize the extent that students are involved in other activities, especially those that are prohibited in the classroom conduct code such as using mobile phones, eating food, napping, chatting, and arriving late;
- (3) To find out students' perceptions of others' behavior in classroom settings.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Inappropriate student behavior in classroom settings is also termed classroom incivility (cf. [17]-[20]), which is defined as “any action that interferes with a harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom” [21]. On the other hand, civility is viewed as a kind of “communicative virtue” [22], which is “a disposition to respond to everyday situations in ways that both define and contribute to human excellence” [23].

Students and instructors alike are affected by classroom incivility (cf. [18]-[19]). Both are annoyed by students who converse loudly enough to distract the attention of the rest of the class, make loud sarcastic remarks or expressions of discontent, or make unpredictable or emotional outbursts. Further, instructors are annoyed by students who do not participate in the class, come to class unprepared, impose on the instructor by demanding extended deadlines or make-up exams, or disruptively arrive late or leave early.

Uncivil classroom behaviors can be grouped into four general categories: annoyances, classroom terrorism, intimidation, and threatening violence [19]. The first category is the largest one. Common examples of annoyances include late arrivals or early departures from class, answering mobile phones in class, and inattention exhibited by doing homework for another course. In fact, annoying behavior does not really constitute serious interruption to the teaching and learning process. However, these individual actions, in the aggregate, slowly chip away at the learning environment, and students are usually unaware of the effect that their incivility has on the class.

The second category is characterized by students' direct interference with instruction such as addressing other topics or opinions in class, which takes learning time away from the rest of the class. Chatting with classmates is also classified as a version of classroom terrorism on the grounds that it can interfere with instruction. The third category is characterized by students' threats to bring social or political pressure onto the instructor. Common examples of intimidation include giving undeserved negative feedback on the course evaluation and complaints to the instructor's department head or dean about the quality of his or her instruction or grading. The fourth category, which is the most serious one, includes those situations that involve or threaten violence towards individual students or instructors.

One of the reasons that student classroom behavior draws scholars' attention is probably due to its high correlations with students' academic achievement (e.g., [14]-[16] and [24]). To reflect a link among student engagement, student behavior, and academic achievement as a theoretical premise of the study, the terms "productive" and "unproductive" behaviors were adopted

in reference [12] instead of the more commonly used terms 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviors. The unproductive student behaviors fall into three categories: "disengaged", "low-level disruptive", and "aggressive and anti-social" [12]. Table I shows the details of each category. The findings in [12] show the former two major types occur more frequently than the third one. The most prevalent unproductive student behaviors are talking out of turn, avoiding doing schoolwork, and disengaging from classroom activities. This suggests that teachers frequently encounter relatively less inappropriate student behavior in classroom settings.

### III. METHODS

#### A. Participants

This research was designed as a case study [25]. A total of 68 students enrolled in the evening session of the Applied Foreign Languages department at a university of science and technology in northern Taiwan participated in this preliminary investigation. All the participants were part-time English majors, who worked during the day and attended classes in the evenings from Monday to Saturday. Their average age was about 24 years old, ranging from 18 to 50. Among the participants, there were 44 or 64.7% female students and 24 or 35.3% male students. Regarding the level of year, there were 20 or 29.4% freshmen, 23 or 33.8% sophomores, 21 or 30.9% juniors, and 4 or 5.9% seniors. Table II shows the details. They were taking required English writing courses at different levels, respectively, and taught by the same instructor in the same language laboratory in 2014. Participation in the study was voluntary and no extra credit was offered to the students.

TABLE I. UNPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS

Types	Behaviors
Disengaged	Being late for class, avoiding doing schoolwork, and disengaging from classroom activities
Low-level Disruptive	Disrupting the flow of a lesson, talking out of turn, making distracting noises intentionally, interfering with property, moving around the room unnecessarily, using a mobile phone inappropriately, using a laptop or iPad inappropriately, making impertinent remarks, mucking around and being rowdy
Aggressive and Anti-social	Spreading rumors, excluding peers, verbally abusing other students, verbally abusing teachers, sexually harassing other students, sexually harassing teachers, physically aggressive towards other students, physically aggressive towards teachers, extremely violent to students or teachers, physically destructive, and displaying uncharacteristically erratic behavior

TABLE II. PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHY (N=68)

Items	n	%	Mean	SD
Age			23.50	6.95
Gender				
Female	44	64.7		
Male	24	35.3		
Level				
Freshman	20	29.4		
Sophomore	23	33.8		
Junior	21	30.9		
Senior	4	5.9		

### *B. Instruments*

Data used for this study were collected from questionnaire surveys. The questionnaire is composed of two sections. The first section contains questions designed to elicit demographical information from the students. The second section contains multiple-choice questions with a 6-point Likert scale and open questions. The questionnaires surveyed students' views on their own and others' behavior in English writing classes, with a primary focus on behaviors prohibited in the classroom conduct code such as using computers for other purposes, using mobile phones, chatting with classmates, eating food, arriving late, napping, and so on, which mainly fall within the scope of the first and second categories in [12] and [19] discussed in Section II.

### *C. Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collected include students' views on their own behavior during the writing class and their views on others' behavior in the same class. Triangulation was achieved through the instructor's views and observations gathered [26].

Quantitative statistical analyses such as the mean and percentage, correlation reports between demographical information and question items, and factor analysis were computed by means of the statistical software Statistics Package Social Scientist (SPSS). Besides, for the survey validity, the overall Cronbach Alpha reliability was computed to be at 0.931, which is considered very highly reliable [27]. Further, question items were conceptually grouped into three constructs: appropriate classroom behaviors (Cronbach Alpha .859), inappropriate classroom behaviors (Cronbach Alpha .904), and others' classroom behaviors (Cronbach Alpha .763).

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results will be discussed in terms of the three research objectives mentioned in the introductory section, namely (1) to understand the extent that students are engaged in classroom activities from their own perspective; (2) to realize the extent that students are involved in other activities, especially those that are prohibited in the classroom conduct code such as using mobile phones, eating food, napping, chatting, and arriving late; (3) to find out students' perceptions of others' behavior in classroom settings.

### *A. Research Objective 1: To Understand the Extent That Students Are Engaged in Classroom Activities from Their Own Perspective*

In general, students were highly engaged in the classroom activities from their own perspective. Most of the participants reported that they always paid attention to lectures (86.8%), made in-class writing assignments (92.6%), took part in discussions (92.6%), and found class-related material on the Internet by computer (91.2%). Table III shows the details.

### *B. Research Objective 2: To Realize the Extent That Students are Involved in Other Activities*

Apart from appropriate classroom behaviors mentioned above, students were also involved in other activities banned in the classroom conduct code. Table IV shows the details. First of all, with respect to using computers for other purposes (items 1-5), the participants did not only English writing homework on computer in the classroom (80.9%) but also homework of other courses (47.1%); besides, they also found course-unrelated material (64.7%), watched films (26.5%), and played games (13.2%). It is noteworthy here that in most students' views, writing homework in class is an appropriate classroom behavior.

The extent of using mobile phones varied according to different purposes (items 6-12): finding class-related material (73.5%), texting (41.2%), answering phones (32.4%), taking photographs (32.4%), playing games (27.9%), making phone calls (17.6%), and watching films (17.6%). It is noteworthy here that the mobile phone use though banned in classroom settings can be viewed as an appropriate behavior when mobile phones are used for academic purposes.

The extent of other inappropriate behaviors varied considerably (items 13-21). Chatting with classmates (83.8%) outnumbered the rest, namely arriving late (57.4%), drinking (54.4%), leaving in the middle of class (48.5%), eating snacks (36.8%), having meals (35.3%), napping (27.9%), listening to music (20.6%), and leaving early (16.2%).

Chatting with classmates, classified as a version of classroom terrorism (cf. [18] and [19]), was perceived by the participants to be the most serious problem in the classroom. It can interfere with teaching and learning due to the fact that a student who chats with a classmate makes it difficult for the students around them to hear the lecture and discussion.

In conclusion, some of the participants in the study have been found to be multitaskers in the classroom. "Multitasking" can be regarded as "divided attention and non-sequential task switching for ill-defined tasks as they are performed in learning situations" [28]. The rapid task-switching that multitaskers engage in appears to result in poorer learning (cf. [14] and [16]), and this may then lead to lower academic performance [14]. However, according to Junco's study, only technologies for social purposes such as Facebook and text messaging are associated with lower academic performance [15]. Thus, developing educational models that allow for appropriate multitasking to improve learning seems necessary [29].

### *C. Research Objective 3: To Find Out Student's Perceptions of Others' Behavior in Classroom Settings*

Students had a positive evaluation of others' classroom behavior. Most participants reported that the classroom order was generally good (76.5%) and that their neighboring student always paid attention to lectures (63.2%) and made in-class writing assignments (67.6%).

On the other hand, most of them disagreed that they were sometimes disturbed by their neighboring student (73.5%). Table V shows the details. However, when these are compared with the results shown in Table III, there seems to be differences between students' views on their own behavior and their views on others' behavior. That is, participants generally reported that they behaved better than their neighboring student. In this regard, it is likely that the participants might choose to respond according to "social desirability" by "faking good" [30], and this inference was also supported by the instructor's view which agreed with students' views on others' behavior. Findings from this study might be limited to the participants here; nevertheless, generalization could also be made to other college students with similar backgrounds in Taiwan.

## V. CONCLUSION

Three research objectives mentioned in the

introductory section have been achieved. First of all, findings showed that the majority of the students were not only highly engaged in the classroom activities but also involved in other activities. Besides, students also gave positive evaluations of others' classroom behaviors.

Furthermore, the contributions of this study have made it more significant. First, this study has unveiled student behavior in the college classroom, to which little attention has been paid, and found chatting with classmates as a version of classroom terrorism to be the most serious problem. Second, this research, more importantly, has been conducted from students' perspective and has realized how students view their own classroom behavior. Last but not least, this study has attended to evening students, who are in general academically low achievers in Taiwan. It is of the hope that part-timers' learning could be enhanced through better understanding their behavior in the classroom.

TABLE III. APPROPRIATE CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

No.	Items	SA/A/SLA <sup>1</sup>	SLD/D/STD <sup>2</sup>	Mean	SD
1	I always pay attention to lectures.	59 (86.8%)	9 (13.2%)	4.7	0.9
2	I make in-class writing assignments.	63 (92.6%)	5 (7.4%)	4.9	0.9
3	I participate in discussions.	63 (92.6%)	5 (7.4%)	4.7	1.1
4	I find class-related material on the Internet by computer.	62 (91.2%)	6 (8.8%)	4.8	1.0

TABLE IV. INAPPROPRIATE CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

No.	Items	SA/A/SLA	SLD/D/STD	Mean	SD
1	I sometimes do English writing homework on computer in class.	55 (80.9%)	13 (19.1%)	4.6	1.3
2	I sometimes find course-unrelated material by computer in class.	44 (64.7%)	24 (35.3%)	3.7	1.4
3	I sometimes do homework of other courses on computer in class.	32 (47.1%)	36 (52.9%)	3.2	1.6
4	I sometimes watch films on computer.	18 (26.5%)	50 (73.5%)	2.5	1.5
5	I sometimes play games on computer.	9 (13.2%)	59 (86.8%)	2.1	1.2
6	I sometimes find class-related material by my mobile phone.	50 (73.5%)	18 (26.5%)	4.0	1.4
7	I sometimes send text messages by my mobile phone in class.	28 (41.2%)	40 (58.8%)	3.0	1.4
8	I sometimes answer mobile phones in class.	22 (32.4%)	46 (67.6%)	2.7	1.5
9	I sometimes take photographs with my mobile phone in class.	22 (32.4%)	46 (67.6%)	2.7	1.6
10	I sometimes play games on my mobile phone in class.	19 (27.9%)	49 (72.1%)	2.5	1.4
11	I sometimes make calls by my mobile phone in class.	12 (17.6%)	56 (82.4%)	2.4	1.3
12	I sometimes watch films on my mobile phone in class.	12 (17.6%)	56 (82.4%)	2.3	1.3
13	I sometimes chat with my classmates.	57 (83.8%)	11 (16.2%)	4.3	1.2
14	I sometimes drink something in class such as tea, coffee, and juice, except water.	37 (54.4%)	31 (45.6%)	3.5	1.7
15	I am sometimes late for class.	39 (57.4%)	29 (42.6%)	3.4	1.4

<sup>1</sup> SA (strongly agree) = 6; A (agree) = 5; SLA (slightly agree) = 4.

<sup>2</sup> SLD (slightly disagree) = 3; D (disagree) = 2; STD (strongly disagree) = 1.

TABLE IV. INAPPROPRIATE CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS (CONTINUED)

No.	Items	SA/A/SLA	SLD/D/STD	Mean	SD
16	I sometimes leave in the middle of class.	33 (48.5%)	35 (51.5%)	3.1	1.6
17	I sometimes eat snacks in class.	25 (36.8%)	43 (63.2%)	2.9	1.6
18	I sometimes have a meal in class (e.g., rice, noodles, and hamburgers).	24 (35.3%)	44 (64.7%)	2.9	1.6
19	I sometimes take a nap in class.	19 (27.9%)	49 (72.1%)	2.4	1.5
20	I sometimes listen to music in class.	14 (20.6%)	54 (79.4%)	2.1	1.4
21	I sometimes leave early.	11 (16.2%)	57 (83.8%)	2.1	1.3

TABLE V. OTHERS' CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

No.	Items	SA/A/SLA	SLD/D/STD	Mean	SD
1	I think that the classroom order is generally good.	52 (76.5%)	16 (23.5%)	4.4	1.2
2	My neighboring student always pays attention to lectures.	43 (63.2%)	25 (36.8%)	4.0	1.5
3	My neighboring classmate makes in-class writing assignments.	46 (67.6%)	22 (32.4%)	4.2	1.5
4	I am sometimes disturbed by my neighboring student and cannot concentrate on lectures.	18 (26.5%)	50 (73.5%)	2.7	1.4
5	I am sometimes affected by the disorder in class and cannot concentrate on lectures.	30 (44.1%)	38 (55.9%)	3.1	1.4

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