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EDUCATION RENAISSANCE / Reading of English papers help exam preparation

Shoko Okuda / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

The following article is a translation from The Yomiuri Shimbun's Educational Renaissance series. This installment--the third in a five-part set in the series, which looks into unique ways to use English newspapers as a study resource--focuses on a private integrated middle and high school in Shizuoka that encourages students to do a great deal of English-language reading.

"Where can the first paragraph of this article be punctuated according to the context?"

This was a question posed by Yasumi Shiga to her students as she started an English class at Shizuoka Futaba High and Middle School in mid-September.

They were third-year students in the high school division. The 56-year-old teacher went over an article run by an English-language newspaper this summer on biomass energy. She had distributed copies of the article to the students during a previous lesson, requiring them to prepare for the next class.

"In my classes, each student gets about 100 English articles a year as study material, including ones for self-learning," Shiga said.

Managed under a system integrating middle and high schools, Shizuoka Futaba offers a unique English education program aimed at cultivating globally-minded human resources.

Using English newspaper articles--as well as novels and magazines--has been part of the school's practical curriculum for about 20 years to enhance students' reading comprehension skills.

In its middle school division, students start by reading short English sentences--for example, only those found in the first paragraph of articles. When they reach high school, they gradually begin reading longer sections until eventually, they can read the whole text. English newspapers are also used to nurture the students' English writing skills and in oral communication classes.

Third-year classes, which focus on preparing students for university entrance

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exams, use English newspapers as the main study material to learn reading.

Shiga--who has been in charge of third-year classes for three years --selects articles with themes similar to those featured in past tests used by the National Center for University Entrance Examination, as well as other university exams.

"I teach students how to find key words or sentences to help them understand the points of each paragraph and the structural links between them," Shiga said. "[Thus, reading English newspapers] improves students' logical reasoning, while enhancing their speaking ability and English composition skills in the language."

Third-year student Michiko Matsunaga, 18, says, "Through reading English newspapers, I've become able to see what the point of the story is, while skipping words I don't understand."

Another third-year student, Yuki Sato, 18, says reading English newspapers has helped her "gain the ability to think in a logical manner. With it, I've become good at writing my thoughts [on various themes] in English--as a way to prepare for entrance examinations."

Explaining the benefits of reading English newspapers in class, Toshiko Okada, 62--chief of the school's English teaching section--said that media "is important [for students] to understand topical subjects in Japan and around the world.

"Reading newspapers is vital for students as an increasing number of universities and colleges have used articles from the media in their entrance exams."

(Dec. 3, 2011)

Chuo University

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