

Enhancing Correctness in English Class through “Right is Right”

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Abstract—This study investigated the application of the “Right is Right” teaching strategy in English classes, with a focus on its implementation, the verbal and non-verbal signals used, challenges encountered, and suggested techniques for improvement. The strategy, which emphasizes holding students to a high standard of correctness before accepting responses, was examined to understand its potential to improve accuracy, critical thinking, and learning outcomes in an ESL context. A qualitative design was employed, involving 10 purposely selected English teachers from a foreign school. Data were gathered through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Thematic analysis revealed three primary modes of application: eliciting extended responses through dialogue, rejecting partially correct answers, and integrating the strategy into instructional goals and assessment criteria. Teachers used verbal cues such as praise, prompts, and guiding questions, alongside non-verbal cues like hand gestures and references to text. Challenges included student reluctance to participate, varied ability levels, occasional teacher misjudgment, and lesson content that did not always have a single correct answer. Findings highlight the role of “Right is Right” in elevating classroom standards, reinforcing precision in language use, and preparing learners for real-world demands. The study concludes that systematic teacher training and sustained practice are essential for maximizing the benefits of this strategy.

Keywords— Correctness; English class; high standard; right is right; teaching strategy.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of language education, the demand for instructional strategies that uphold high academic standards and promote critical thinking has never been greater. As classrooms become increasingly diverse—particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts—teachers face the dual challenge of supporting learner engagement while ensuring precision in language use. One technique that addresses this challenge is the “Right is Right” strategy, popularized by Lemov (2010) in *Teach Like a Champion*. This strategy requires teachers to hold students to a high standard of correctness before accepting an answer, thereby reinforcing accuracy, rigor, and a culture of excellence.

At its core, “Right is Right” is built on the principle that partially correct answers, if left unaddressed, can foster misconceptions and lower expectations. Rather than rewarding incomplete or imprecise responses, the teacher prompts the student to refine or extend their answer until it meets the required standard. This method positions correctness not

merely as an endpoint but as an integral part of the learning process. In the context of English language teaching, where precision in vocabulary, grammar, and syntax is essential, such an approach can be particularly beneficial.

A. Rationale for High Standards in ESL Classrooms

Language acquisition research emphasizes that consistent exposure to accurate language models and corrective feedback significantly improves learner proficiency (Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In many ESL classrooms, however, teachers face the temptation to accept “close enough” answers in order to maintain classroom momentum, boost student confidence, or avoid potential discomfort. While such acceptance may appear supportive, it risks solidifying errors and perpetuating incomplete understanding. “Right is Right” directly counters this by positioning accuracy as a non-negotiable component of participation.

In multicultural ESL contexts, such as international schools in Vietnam, additional factors influence the teaching-learning dynamic. Students bring varied linguistic backgrounds, levels of English proficiency, and cultural attitudes toward correction and authority. In some cultures, for instance, being corrected publicly may be perceived as a loss of face, potentially leading to reduced participation. For this reason, understanding not just the theory but also the practical application, signals, and challenges of “Right is Right” is essential for its successful integration into diverse classrooms.

B. Previous Research and Gaps

Although the benefits of high-expectation teaching are well documented (Brophy, 2010; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), specific research on “Right is Right” remains limited, particularly in ESL contexts. Existing literature primarily addresses broader questioning techniques and corrective feedback strategies without delving into the unique demands and nuances of sustaining complete correctness. Studies by Cotton (1988) and Black and Wiliam (1998) have shown that high-quality questioning improves retention and understanding, but few have examined how holding out for “all the way right” answers affects learner motivation, classroom dynamics, and long-term proficiency.

Moreover, practical classroom application often involves more than simply asking for correct answers. Teachers must employ a range of verbal and non-verbal signals, balance

encouragement with challenge, and navigate student affective factors. Without clear documentation of these practices, the strategy risks being misapplied or abandoned altogether. This study addresses this gap by systematically examining how teachers in a foreign school ESL setting apply “Right is Right,” the signals they use, the challenges they face, and the techniques they propose for improvement.

C. Research Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to contribute to the evidence base for high-expectation teaching strategies in ESL contexts. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Describe how English teachers apply the “Right is Right” strategy in their classrooms.
Identify the verbal and non-verbal signals used to implement the strategy.
2. Determine the challenges encountered in its application.
3. Propose techniques to enhance the effective use of “Right is Right” in ESL instruction.

D. Significance of the Study

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it adds to the limited literature on targeted, high-standard questioning techniques in ESL classrooms. Practically, it provides actionable insights for teachers, school administrators, and teacher trainers on how to apply “Right is Right” in a way that maintains rigor while supporting learner engagement. In doing so, it addresses a critical need in language education: the balance between fostering student confidence and ensuring linguistic accuracy.

By documenting real-world experiences of teachers who actively use “Right is Right,” the study aims to present a nuanced understanding of the strategy’s impact on classroom culture, student participation, and language learning outcomes. The findings will not only inform pedagogical practice in ESL contexts but may also hold relevance for broader educational settings where accuracy, depth of understanding, and high expectations are valued.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the application of the “Right is Right” teaching strategy in ESL classrooms, focusing on how it was implemented, the signals used, the challenges encountered, and the techniques suggested by teachers. Conducted in a foreign school in Vietnam that follows an international curriculum, the research context was particularly suitable for studying high-expectation teaching practices, as English instruction is central to the institution’s mission. Ten English teachers were purposively selected to participate, each meeting the criteria of actively teaching English at the school and having prior experience in applying the “Right is Right” strategy. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The FGDs encouraged collaborative reflection, the interviews provided more in-depth individual insights, and the classroom observations allowed direct examination of how the strategy

was used in practice. All sessions were conducted in English, audio-recorded with consent, and supplemented by field notes. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which involved familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and reporting. Triangulation of FGDs, interviews, and observation data strengthened the credibility of the findings, while member checking allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, with informed consent obtained from all participants, pseudonyms assigned to ensure confidentiality, and secure storage of all data.

III. DISCUSSION

This study sought to investigate the application of the “Right is Right” strategy in English language classrooms, focusing on how it is implemented, the verbal and non-verbal signals used, the challenges encountered, and the techniques suggested by teachers to improve its effectiveness. By analyzing qualitative data from focus group discussions, interviews, and classroom observations, the study provides a detailed understanding of how the strategy works in practice and the contextual factors that influence its success. The discussion below addresses each of the four research questions in turn, integrating the study’s findings with relevant literature.

1. Application of the “Right is Right” Strategy

The first research question explored how teachers apply “Right is Right” in ESL classrooms. Findings indicated that teachers used the strategy through three interconnected practices: (a) eliciting extended responses from students, (b) rejecting partially correct answers, and (c) embedding the expectation of full correctness into lesson objectives and assessment criteria.

Teachers reported that they rarely accepted a student’s first answer if it was incomplete or contained inaccuracies. Instead, they followed up with prompts such as “Can you tell me more?” or “Check your answer again” to push students toward refinement. This approach encouraged learners to engage in deeper thinking and reflect on their language use, consistent with Lemov’s (2010) recommendation that teachers hold out for “all the way right” answers.

Classroom observations showed that in some lessons, “Right is Right” was integrated into the teaching cycle itself—teachers would introduce a topic, solicit answers, and then guide students step-by-step toward precision. For example, when a student misused a verb tense, the teacher did not correct the error immediately but instead prompted the class to collaboratively identify and fix it. This aligns with Black and Wiliam’s (1998) assertion that formative assessment works best when it actively involves learners in the process of correction.

However, teachers noted that applying the strategy required patience and careful pacing. One participant explained, “Sometimes it feels like the easiest thing to do is just accept an answer that’s close enough, but I’ve learned that those extra 30 seconds to push for correctness make a big difference in the long term.” This sentiment echoes Brophy’s (2010) emphasis on persistence as a hallmark of effective high-expectation teaching.

2. Verbal and Non-Verbal Signals Used

The second research question examined the cues teachers employed to signal to students that further refinement was needed. Verbal signals included praise for correct elements (“Yes, that’s a good start”), guiding prompts (“What about the ending of the sentence?”), and rephrased questions that narrowed the focus to the missing or incorrect component. These verbal cues provided scaffolding and encouraged students to persist rather than abandon their response.

Non-verbal signals played an equally important role. Teachers frequently used hand gestures—such as circling a finger to indicate “go on” or pointing to a relevant section in the text—to draw attention to gaps in the response. Facial expressions, such as a raised eyebrow or a slight head tilt, were also used as subtle indicators that more was expected. Eye contact was maintained to keep students engaged and aware that the floor was still theirs. These findings are consistent with Walsh’s (2011) discussion of teacher immediacy behaviors, which enhance clarity and keep learners actively involved in classroom discourse.

Importantly, the combination of verbal and non-verbal cues allowed teachers to adapt their approach based on the student’s response and affective state. For instance, if a student appeared nervous, a teacher might soften the verbal prompt and rely more heavily on supportive gestures to maintain a safe learning environment. This reflects Nguyen’s (2016) observation that in some cultural contexts, the manner of correction can significantly affect student willingness to participate.

3. Challenges Encountered

The third research question addressed the challenges teachers faced when applying “Right is Right.” Four main difficulties emerged:

Learner reluctance: Some students hesitated to answer or withdrew from participation after being prompted for more precise responses. This fear of “being wrong” was especially pronounced among lower-proficiency students and those from cultural backgrounds where public correction is seen as face-threatening.

Variation in proficiency levels: Teachers struggled to apply the same high standards across a class with widely varying abilities. While the strategy pushed advanced learners to refine their answers, it sometimes discouraged those still grappling with foundational language skills.

Teacher misjudgment: On occasion, teachers misinterpreted a student’s partially correct answer as incorrect, potentially undermining student confidence.

Content without a single correct answer: In tasks involving interpretation, opinion, or creative expression, the strategy’s rigid requirement for correctness was harder to apply.

These challenges highlight the need for flexibility in applying “Right is Right.” While high expectations are important, they must be tempered with sensitivity to learner differences and the specific demands of each task. This finding reinforces Richards and Rodgers’ (2014) view that effective teaching methods must be adapted to context rather than applied mechanically.

4. Proposed Techniques for Improvement

The fourth research question sought to identify strategies for

enhancing the effectiveness of “Right is Right.” Teachers suggested several practical techniques:

Using motivational cues to sustain confidence while prompting for correction, e.g., “You’re almost there” or “That’s a strong answer—can you make it even better?”

Providing clear, specific instructions before starting an activity so students know the standard of correctness expected.

Incorporating peer support by allowing students to confer briefly or build on each other’s answers before the teacher finalizes the correction.

Integrating the strategy with formative assessment, so that correctness is reinforced through multiple feedback channels.

Gradually scaffolding the strategy for lower-level learners by breaking the question into smaller parts or giving hints toward the missing component.

These recommendations align with Brophy’s (2010) assertion that high expectations should be paired with supportive scaffolding and with Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) emphasis on feedback that is both corrective and encouraging.

Overall Synthesis

By systematically addressing each research question, the findings demonstrate that “Right is Right” is a powerful yet nuanced strategy. Its strength lies in its ability to hold students accountable for precision in their responses, thus fostering accuracy and deeper engagement. However, its success is contingent on the teacher’s skill in signaling, pacing, and adapting the approach to suit varied learner needs. When applied with flexibility and cultural sensitivity, “Right is Right” can help cultivate a classroom culture where correctness is valued, persistence is rewarded, and students develop the confidence to meet high expectations—an outcome that resonates with the goals of both language education and broader academic achievement.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the application of the “Right is Right” teaching strategy in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms within a foreign school context in Vietnam, focusing on its modes of implementation, the verbal and non-verbal signals used, the challenges encountered, and the techniques recommended by teachers. The findings demonstrate that the strategy, when applied effectively, can raise the standards of correctness in classroom discourse, promote accuracy in student responses, and encourage deeper cognitive engagement. By eliciting extended responses, rejecting partially correct answers, and embedding the principle of full correctness into instructional objectives and assessment practices, teachers were able to establish a classroom culture that values precision and persistence.

Verbal and non-verbal signaling emerged as key elements in guiding students toward more accurate answers. These cues served not only to maintain the flow of classroom interaction but also to provide scaffolding that encouraged learners to refine their ideas. Such practices align with the broader literature on formative assessment and feedback, which underscores the importance of timely and targeted teacher intervention in improving learning outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

However, the study also revealed that the application of “Right is Right” is not without its challenges. Learner reluctance due to fear of making mistakes, differences in proficiency levels, occasional teacher misjudgment, and the presence of tasks without a single correct answer all affected the consistency and effectiveness of the strategy. These findings reflect a wider reality in language education, where pedagogical ideals must often be adapted to suit the diverse needs and contexts of learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Despite these challenges, the evidence from this study suggests that “Right is Right” has significant potential to enhance ESL learning environments when implemented with cultural sensitivity, pedagogical flexibility, and a focus on sustaining student motivation. The strategy encourages students to persist in refining their responses, thereby reinforcing a growth mindset and fostering habits of precision that extend beyond language learning into other academic and real-world contexts (Dweck, 2006).

In conclusion, “Right is Right” should not be viewed as a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach, but rather as a flexible framework that can be adapted to different teaching contexts and student needs. When combined with supportive feedback, culturally aware correction techniques, and complementary teaching strategies, it can contribute to building a high-expectation classroom culture where correctness is not only expected but also attainable. This study reinforces the importance of teacher competence, adaptability, and reflective practice in ensuring that high academic standards are upheld without sacrificing learner engagement and confidence.

V. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry important implications for teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and education policymakers seeking to promote high academic standards and precision in English language classrooms. First and foremost, the successful application of the “Right is Right” strategy depends heavily on teacher competence, not only in subject matter knowledge but also in the ability to provide targeted corrective feedback and manage classroom discourse effectively. Professional development programs should therefore include training on questioning techniques, scaffolding strategies, and culturally responsive correction practices to ensure that teachers can uphold high standards without diminishing learner confidence. Such training could incorporate demonstration lessons, peer observations, and reflective practice sessions to help teachers internalize and adapt the strategy to their specific contexts.

For classroom teachers, the results suggest that “Right is Right” should be integrated into everyday instruction as part of a broader repertoire of formative assessment practices. Verbal and non-verbal signaling should be used deliberately and consistently to guide students toward more precise responses. Teachers should also anticipate potential challenges—such as reluctance to participate, varied proficiency levels, and tasks with multiple possible answers—and plan alternative approaches, such as scaffolding questions, providing sentence starters, or using peer support to help learners reach the required standard. By embedding the strategy into both planned lessons

and spontaneous classroom interactions, teachers can gradually normalize high standards of correctness as part of the learning culture.

School administrators have a role in creating an environment that supports the sustained use of high-expectation strategies like “Right is Right.” This can be achieved by fostering a culture of collaborative learning among staff, where teachers regularly share best practices, observe each other’s lessons, and provide constructive feedback. Additionally, school leaders can encourage the alignment of assessment policies with the principles of full correctness, ensuring that students understand and value precision in their work.

For curriculum developers, the study’s findings underscore the value of designing learning objectives and activities that encourage depth of thinking and precision in responses. Including clear success criteria, structured questioning sequences, and opportunities for self- and peer-assessment can complement the “Right is Right” approach and help students internalize high standards over time.

Finally, at the policy level, education authorities and teacher training institutions could incorporate high-expectation questioning strategies into teacher certification and professional development frameworks. In contexts like ESL education—where accuracy in language use is essential for academic progression and communication competence—policies that promote rigorous but supportive correction practices can contribute to improved language proficiency outcomes at scale.

In summary, the implications of this study point to the need for intentional, sustained, and context-sensitive implementation of “Right is Right.” When supported by ongoing teacher training, institutional encouragement, and curriculum alignment, the strategy can serve as a powerful tool for fostering a culture of precision, resilience, and critical thinking among learners. By integrating this approach into the broader instructional ecosystem, educational stakeholders can help ensure that students not only meet but exceed the standards expected of them in both academic and real-world communication contexts.

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