

Action Research

March – Final Report

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Title: Creating a Positive Learning Environment

Context: Level: 5th Grade, elementary

Class size: 40 students

Time: 45 minutes, 1 class per week

Textbook: Hi, Friends 1

Problems:

There were some problems in the first term that were resolved in the second and third term. Some of them were how to introduce vocabulary, group students and match activities with students' interests. Gradually, with the help of the professors' and MA students' comments I discovered how to puzzle out those challenges.

At the beginning of the second term, students' relationship with one another was slowly deteriorating and it was very difficult for us teachers to engage them to work with their partners or group mates.

By the middle of the school year I was expecting that students' speaking ability will improve considering that I introduced a lot of communicative activities to provide more opportunities for them to have meaningful encounter with vocabularies and target languages and included few conversation strategies. However, I didn't see any significant changes.

Teachers' collaboration was hard to carry out due to the difficulty to set a meeting with homeroom teachers and English Activity Supporter. I need to bring the homeroom teachers more into the class to motivate them in that way they can also influence their students.

Goals:

- a. To create a positive learning environment that promotes interaction among students and improves their communicative competence.
- b. To create a well organize lesson plan which includes a main goal which is an information-exchange task and carefully decide on the sub goals that will help students accomplish the main goal.
- c. To modify textbook's drills and activities to communicative exercises in order to enhance speaking abilities and increase motivation.
- d. To maximize homeroom teachers' involvement in English lessons this means improving team teaching, collaboration in lesson planning, evaluating each lesson and students'

involvement.

What I did:

I reflected about my teaching principles and invested time to know my students

One lesson per week makes it difficult for me to familiarize students and cultivate a relationship with them. It is during English class, lunch time or in their free time that I get the chance to talk to some of them. Because of this I decided to keep a journal about my class reflection, anything about students' and a lot more. I also invested time to talk with teachers and even the school nurse because one of the students in my research class goes there to escape during classes. At first it was difficult for me to grab my journal and write on it but it became a habit. It was a great source of data for lesson planning too!

I modified teaching style and organize my goals well to match it with students' abilities and learning styles.

I included several steps in order to prepare students for the final activity. I organized the lesson from a teacher-centered practice into a student-centered activity and from a controlled practice into a communicative activity. I realize that I tend to set a very high goal that is unachievable and affects students' motivation. I presented target languages in small amounts per class. Likewise, I followed a step by step procedure in order to help students reach the goal. I also tried to simplify activities and included miming and total physical response. In addition, I introduced new song per lesson and composed my own chants to enhance speech rhythms, intonation and pronunciation.

I modified almost all the exercises and drills in the required textbook.

The pages in the textbook are very colourful and attractive so students like to use them. But I need to add more communicative exercises because most of the exercises in the textbook are either mechanical or meaningful drills. Therefore it was an exceptionally challenging for me to modify them to complement in my lessons. To utilize the textbook I asked students to answer it as an additional task so they can receive a sticker or a stamp the next English lesson. In this way learning extends until they reach home.

I introduced conversation strategies.

In order to improve speaking ability I introduced some conversation strategies such as shadowing, rejoinders for showing interest and confirmation checks. Although I didn't have a systematic way of evaluating CSs during students' interaction I can say that most of them were aware of why they have to use it and above all they enjoy using it in their conversations.

I shared survey results with my students and the homeroom teachers.

Due to lack of class time I neglected sharing survey results to the students not until I realized how that they didn't answer them seriously. For this reason, I started to share to them the results and made them aware that everything they wrote in their star cards are valuable to me and their learning. I was hesitant to share survey results to homeroom teacher because of some presumptions which I regretted later. When they saw the survey results they were enlightened and were willing to support me to improve our English lessons. They offered ideas that match with my teaching approach. During our meetings they provided me with information such as students' ability to cooperate, learning styles and interests which will help me choose activities suitable for each class. We also considered a lot of possibilities, loop holes and disagreements between students when we decide the activities in each lesson.

I conducted a Speaking Test.

No test is given to elementary school students in English class therefore it was not easy for me to do this. I asked the EAS (English Activity Supporter) to explain very carefully to students so they will not feel being evaluated and cause them not to try speaking English during the activity. It was the first time for me to do this so I was so eager to know how students will respond.

Results: What Happened?

Students

- They were able to approach me confidently during the lesson. Most of them usually say "Once more, please" during flashcard drills.
- They also understood that it's ok to make mistakes in English Class and if they are in trouble during the activity they know what to do. I say this in Japanese, "Komattara..." and they would respond with hands raised, "Help me, Super Teacher!"
- They could follow simple rules as long as it is clear and well organize.
- They were able to learn more English words. Some of them could identify the objects in the flashcards through reading the first syllables or identifying the first letter.

- They were able to participate in the activities especially role plays, shopping games, songs, chants and more.
- They were able to use conversation strategies and improved the quality of their conversation.
- They were interested in answering survey results and increased their open-ended replies.
- They were eager to participate in the Speaking Test. Since it was done randomly during the activity some of them appeal to the teachers to listen to their conversation so they can receive the evaluation.

Teachers

- We were able to improve team teaching during the lessons.
- There was a great effort in collaborating with ideas and activities that will fit the distinct characteristic of each class.
- We became more motivated to improve the class because of the survey results.
- The lesson planning was well organized with a clear goal and sub goals which leads to the accomplishment of the final goal.
- We were more reflective, observant and sensitive to factors that will contribute to the success of the lesson.
- I was able to communicate well with the participants of my AR through investing time with students, sharing the survey results to both students and teachers and providing feedback.

What I learned:

- The greatest lesson I learned in my Action Research Class is that there is no such thing as bad class. It maybe challenging but it shouldn't be labelled as a bad class.
- If you only take time to communicate and know the real story about each challenging student teaching them will be much easier.
- Every little thing counts especially to students who just need our attention. I tried so many things to get my students attention but I realized that in the first place do I give them the attention that they deserve?
- The success of the lesson does not depend on how it is done and accomplished in the classroom but on how eager students want to use them in their free time and even take them home. How satisfying it is to hear students singing English songs at the lobby. And even if I get embarrassed I still can't help but smile because they loudly sing English songs in the library which makes the librarian angry. It is my joy to do extra work before "Gekko Time" because they want to ask for copies of worksheets and board games used in our class.

- As a language teacher I can say that I am truly thankful that everything I learned in the courses I took in NUFS MA Program helped me a lot in my teaching. My lesson planning skill improved a lot and I learned how to identify main goals and organize sub goals as well. The first semester of the MA Program was not easy for me because theories were difficult to understand and apply in my own teaching context but as time passed I started to see light at the end of the tunnel. I grasped the principles and little by little incorporated them in my lesson planning and teaching approach.
- I also learned that it is significant to determine students' learning styles. For young learners, it is our responsibility to provide them with many opportunities to learn through listening, speaking, reading and even writing. Although not all of the skills were integrated equally during class time, I believe that we should give emphasis to all skills.
- Conversation Strategies are very important tools to improve the quality of conversation. Although I introduced some, I am not confident that students will continue to use them without any guidance. I wasn't able to highlight the importance of Conversation Strategies because I was preoccupied with other issues in my AR class. I learned that it is better to introduce one or two CS especially for young learners and give students recursive practice for familiarity until it becomes a habit.
- In doing an action research we become unfocused to the things that matters most. I was busy collecting data and neglected sharing it with students and the homeroom teachers. If I shared it to them regularly at the very start of the research I am sure that result will be more excellent and satisfying to both teachers and students.
- It was the first time for me to conduct a Speaking Test but my only guiding light is the washback effect. I didn't want to make students feel that they have to do extra ordinary things in order to have perfect hanamaru. So I conducted it like the usual final activity. My main goal is that they will enjoy the activity at the same time trigger their conscious mind on how far they improved in terms of English speaking ability. They were able to enjoy the Speaking Test but not all of them received an evaluation. There were some students who were dismayed because of that. Hence, I learned that I need to allocate a generous amount of time to conduct speaking test in order to evaluate all students.

Future Issues:

- I would like to introduce CSs in an effective and efficient way.
- I would like to conduct more Speaking Tests and learn to analyze the results.
- I would like to improve in developing not only structured output activities but also communicative exercises.
- I would like to know more on how to conduct test using different skills.

Lesson Plan : Lesson 9: What would you like?

Goals and Objectives:

- To be able to familiarize 26 food vocabularies.
- To know the difference between “What do you want?” and “What would you like?”
- To use simple conversation strategies like rejoinders for showing interest and confirmation check
- To conduct a Speaking Test at the end of the lesson

Procedures:

Day one: Learn food vocabulary part 1 and the target language, “What would you like?”

- Greeting
- Song: It’s Lunch Time
- Preview of the Lesson: Difference between “What do you want?” and “What would you like?” Skit by teachers
- Vocabulary Activity: Missing Game
- Activity: Fruit Basket
- Comments
- Goodbyes

Day Two: Learn food vocabulary part 2 and the target language, “I’d like ~ and ~.”

- Greeting
- Song: It’s Lunch Time
- Review of Vocabulary and Target Language
- Vocabulary Activity: Tornado
- Activity: Perfect Four
- Comments
- Goodbyes

Day Three: Today’s Lesson

Greeting: Good afternoon. How are you? I’m great. How’s the weather?
What day is it? What’s the date today?

Song: It’s Lunch Time

Review of all food vocabularies and target languages

Introduction of new expressions: Please sit here. Oh! Yummy!

Demonstration for Restaurant Game

Activity: Restaurant Game

- Divide the students into 8 groups. The first 4 groups will play the role of the waiter/waitress and the rest will be customers. After ten minutes they will switch roles.
- The goal of the customer is to eat to different restaurants namely, Italian, American, Indian and Japanese. All the restaurants have different sets of menu. They can order as much food as they can. After eating, they will receive a sticker from each restaurant. They have to complete the point card in order to receive a special prize which is the “Hazelynn Money”. To complete the point card a customer should receive 5 stickers from any restaurant they like.
- To add a little excitement, the restaurants are given a certain number of stickers for their customers. If they have given all of these stickers they have to close their restaurants. Therefore the customers need to plan a strategy on which restaurant to go first because they have only 10 minutes to complete the task.
- The restaurant who can give out all their stickers first is also considered the winner.

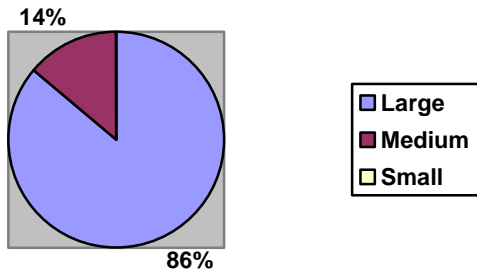
Comments: Teachers and Students’ Self-evaluation (Star Card)

Goodbyes

Self-Evaluation Data (Star Card) March 19, 2014

Lesson 8 - 3 (Restaurant Game)

Chart 1: Smile

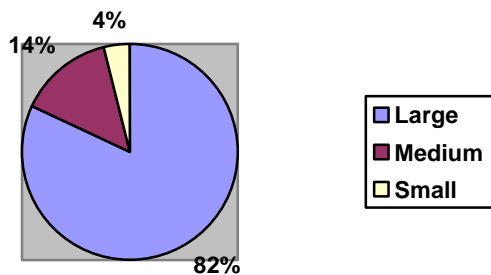


No. of students: 28
Average: 2.86

For Smile, 86% for Large stars, 14 % (4 students) for medium stars and none shaded the small star.

Sure enough, the students enjoyed the final activity which is the restaurant game. All of the students were involved in the activity and were busy going to different restaurants.

Chart 2: Loud Voice

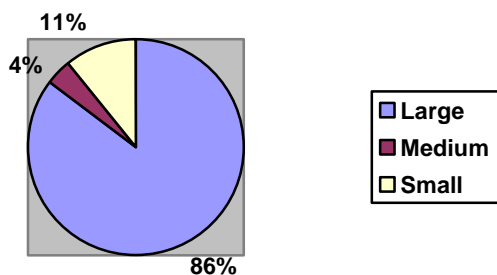


No. of students: 28
Average: 2.79

For Loud Voice, 82% of the students said that they were able to speak in a loud voice during the class. 14% of the students shaded the middle star and 4% for small stars.

Students were able to speak loudly because they were very confident of using the vocabularies and target languages they learned in this lesson.

Chart 3: Eye Contact

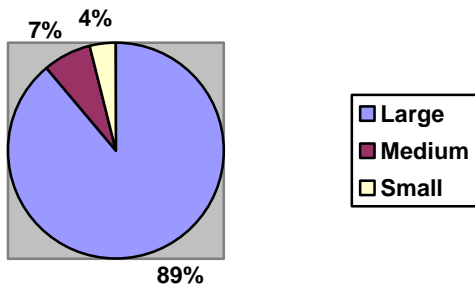


No. of students: 28
Average: 2.75

For Eye Contact, 86% said that they were able to do it in the entire activity. 1% of the class (1 student) scored a middle star. And the rest of the students, 11% (3 students), scored the small star.

Since July the results of students' self-evaluation in this area is average but not as impressive as this month. Students became aware of the importance of this non verbal way of communication.

Chart 4: Cooperation

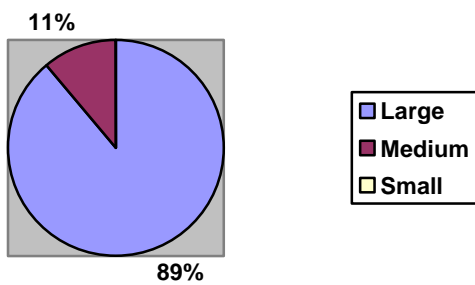


No. of students: 28
Average: 2.86

There were 89% of the students who scored themselves a large star for this activity. The 7% scored a middle star and 4% for the small star.

It is difficult for my students to cooperate not only to their classmates but to the tasks they have to do for the activity. But there were times that they can perfectly cooperate as well. Among those is the final lesson. I was so delighted how they moved quickly and followed the rules.

Chart 5: Just Try



No. of students: 28
Average: 2.86

There were 24 students which is equivalent to 89% who scored themselves a large star, 4 students, 11%, and none scored a small star.

I believe that students were well prepared for this activity. They were equipped with vocabularies and target languages they will use during the activity and probably the main reason why they were able to accept the challenge and enjoy the activity.

Students' Comments – March 19, 2014

Lesson 9 -3

What I worked hard

Speaking

Comments	No. of students
I did the "All English Challenge".	12
I was able to speak in English.	9
I spoke in English clearly.	1
I spoke in a loud voice.	2

Motivation and Attitude

Comments	No. of students
I did my best and spoke in English.	2
I smiled while doing the activity.	1
I enjoyed the activity.	1

What I was able to accomplish

Speaking

Comments	No. of students
I was able to speak in English	11
I spoke and use gestures.	1
I was able to do the "All English Challenge"	4
I was able to make a conversation in English.	1
I was able to ask questions in English.	1

Vocabulary

Comments	No. of students
I was able to learn new words	4

Motivation and Attitude

Comments	No. of students
I became very good in English.	1
I was able to do eye contact while speaking with my partner	2

What I want to improve

Speaking

Comments	No. of students
I want to speak louder.	2
I want to speak fluently.	2
I want to improve greeting in English.	1
I want to speak only in English during the activity.	2
I want to be able to speak English more.	3

Vocabulary

Comments	No. of students
I want to learn difficult English words that I easily forget.	1
I want to learn more food vocabularies.	1

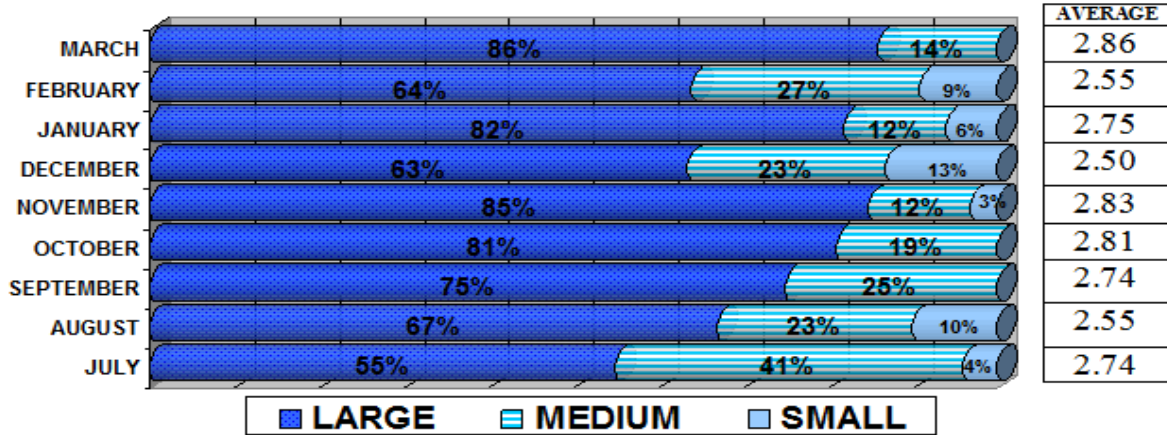
Motivation and Attitude

Comments	No. of students
I want to improve eye contact.	1
I want to speak with gestures.	1
I want to study English more.	1
I want to master the English language.	1
I want to learn more.	1
I want to do my best in Grade 6.	1

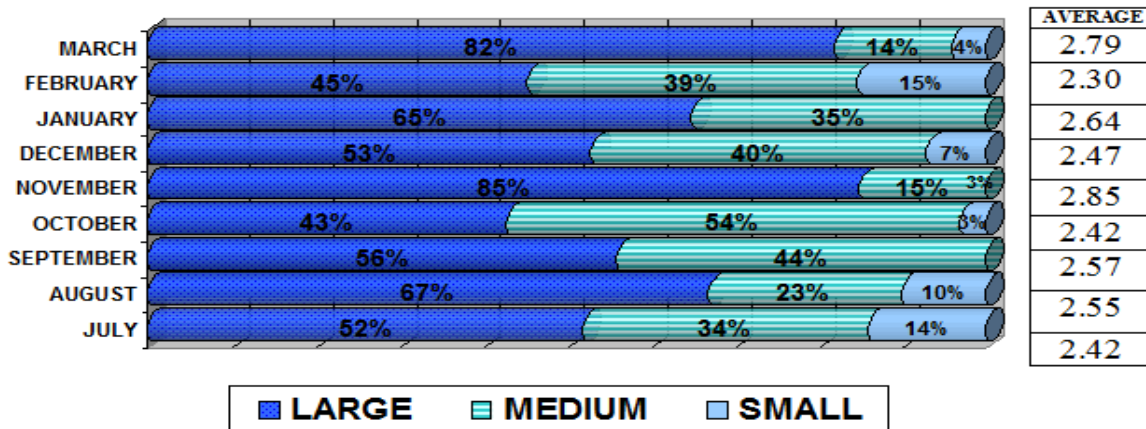
Self-evaluation Results for the Month of July – March
(2013-2014)



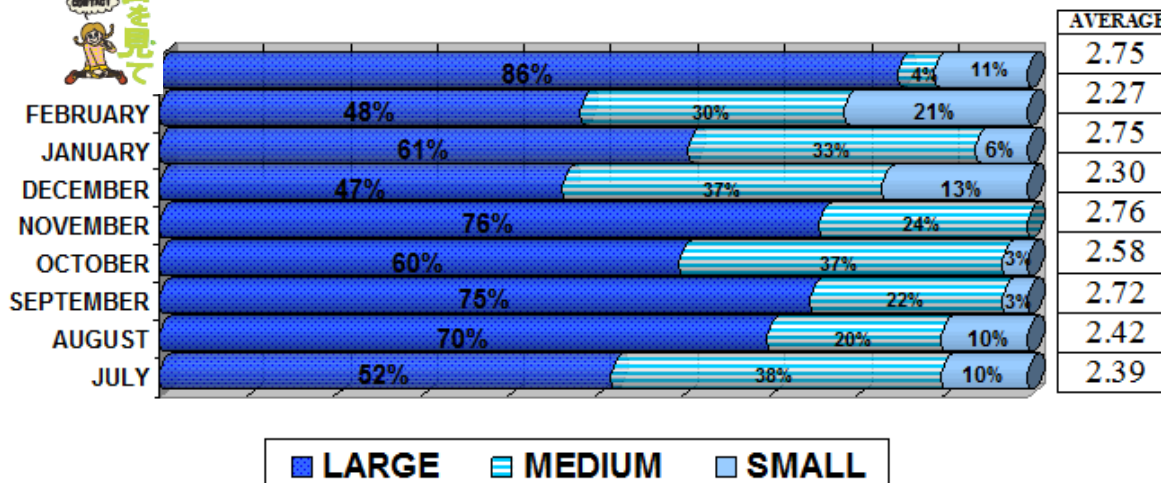
SMILE



LOUD VOICE

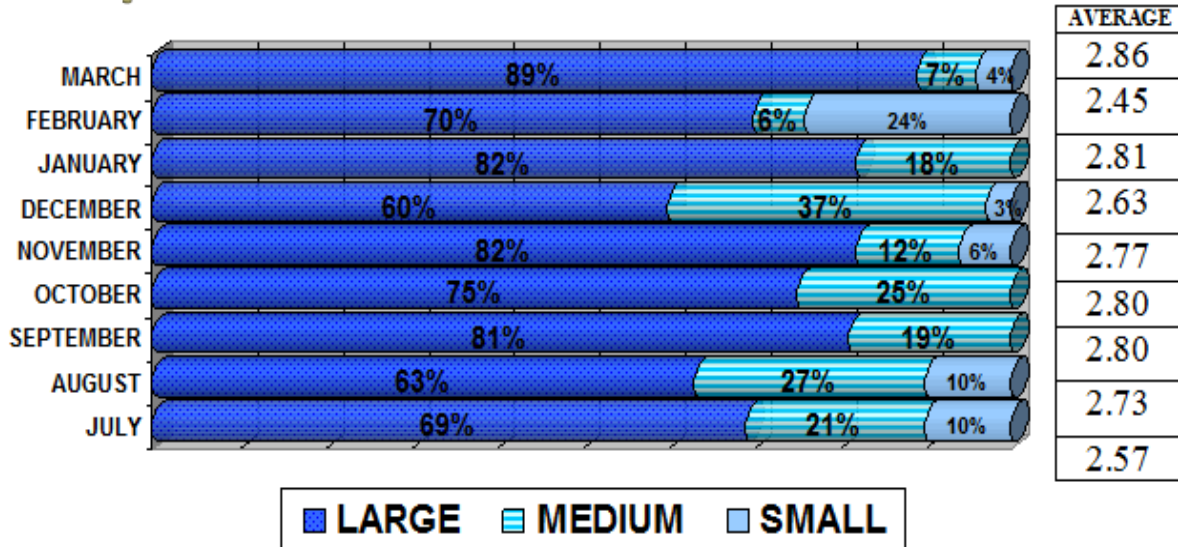


EYE CONTACT

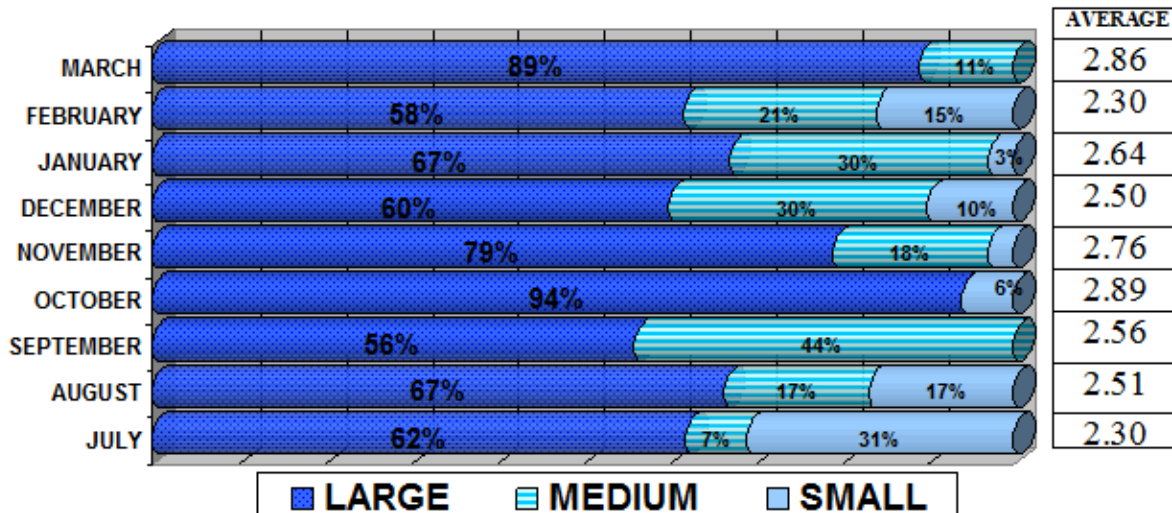




COOPERATION



JUST TRY



The result of students' last self evaluation shows a very significant increase in all categories. Students think that they improved particularly on how well they can cooperate with their classmates. 10% of the students scored medium and small star while the rest confidently scored themselves a large star. It is very valuable to have this result in this area considering the fact that it was a major problem for us teacher on how to engage students to work well with each other.

Speaking Test

Lesson 9: What would you like? March 19, 2014

Name: _____

Grade 5 - 3

Fluency 迅速な応答 quick response			
Delivery 大きな音声 volume			
Strategies 繰り返し確認する shadowing			
Impression 印象的な impressive			

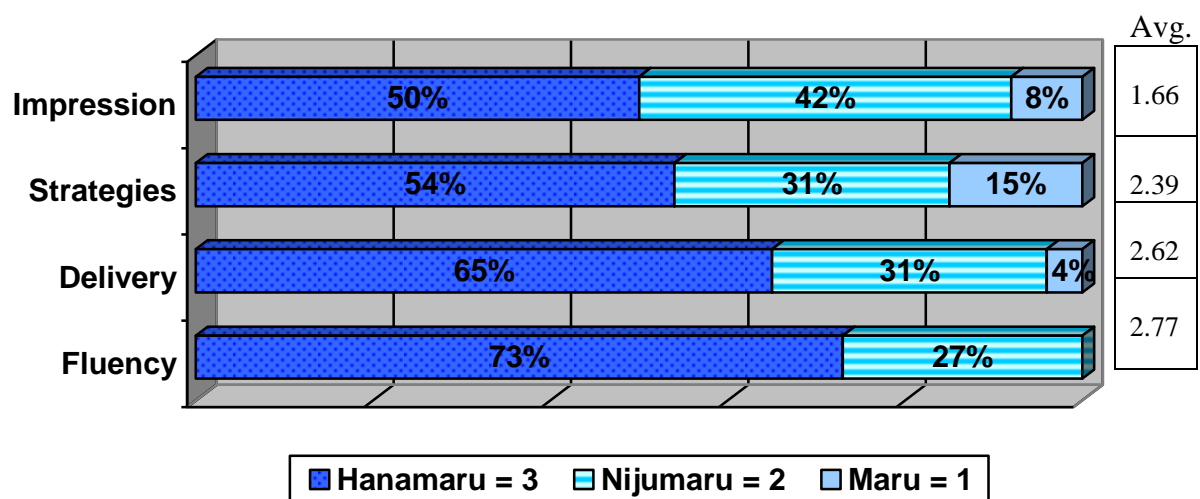
Evaluation Sheet

Name: _____ Class 5 -

Going to a Restaurant

Worksheet

Speaking Test Results Lesson 9: What would you like?



Date: March 19, 2014, No. of students: 26