Action Research Year-End Final Report in 2024-2025 Revised

Masako Ota

1. Title

The impact of focus-on-form instruction and communication strategies on Japanese junior high school students' communicative competence

2. Context

Level: First grade Junior High School Students Class size: 34 students (16 male, 18 female) Textbook: New Horizon 1 (Tokyo Shoseki)

3. Goals and objectives

I want my students to develop communicative competence in speaking and writing through increased student interaction and teacher and student feedback.

- (1)70% of students will be able to engage in small talk conversations for one minute by December and for two minutes by March 2025.
- (2) I will speak less than 15 minutes per class.
- (3) By March 2025, 70% of students will be able to write their compositions with more than 30 words with fewer grammatical mistakes through the fun essays.
- (4) In the final survey, more than two-thirds of students will indicate that they like English

4. Literature review

(1) Communicative language teaching (CLT)

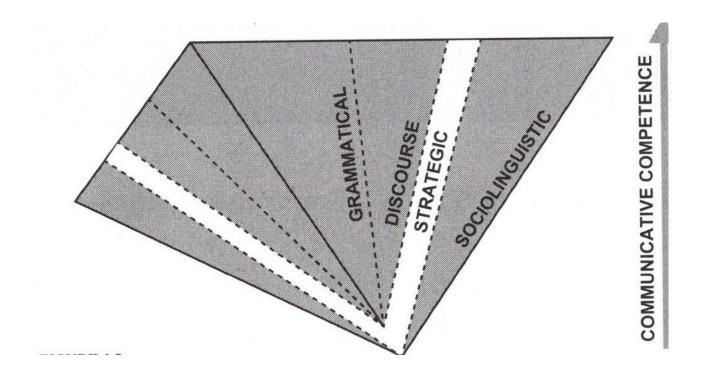
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach helps learners develop communicative competence, which was proposed by Canale & Swain (1980) and Savignon (1997). Communicative competence has four main parts:

- 1. Grammatical competence knowing grammar rules,
- 2. Sociolinguistic competence using language in the right way,
- 3. Discourse competence making sentences flow naturally, and
- 4. Strategic competence using communication strategies.

Since CLT focuses on developing communicative competence, grammar instruction plays an important role, despite the common misconception among some language teachers that CLT disregards grammar teaching.

Lee & VanPatten (2003) explain that communicative language ability—the ability to speak and understand others—improves when learners communicate, not just by practicing grammar rules (p.51). In CLT, "the

instructor was no longer simply the drill leader but was also charged with providing students with opportunities for communication, that is, using the language to interpret and express real-life messages" (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p.10).



The Components of Communicative Competence (Savignon, 1997, p.49)

(2) Focus-on-form instruction (FFI)

Grammar drills and practice are not very effective in improving communicative language ability. So, how can we teach grammar in a communicative way? The answer is focus-on-form instruction (FFI). In this approach, teachers help learners notice grammar forms through comprehensible input and output activities.

Research on Second Language Acquisition over the past 50 years shows that traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method, which focus on drills and pattern practice, are not effective (Sato, 2022, p.10). Ellis (2006) also states, "A traditional approach to teaching grammar based on explicit explanations and drill-like practice is unlikely to result in acquisition of the implicit knowledge needed for fluent and accurate communication" (p.102). Lee & VanPatten (2003) add that traditional methods do not provide enough meaningful input, so learners cannot build their grammar knowledge properly. They also mention that "Research conducted since the late 1980s suggests that learners who are engaged in meaningful or meaning-based approaches to grammar (called focus on form) do as well as or better than those who are engaged in activities that are nonmeaningful or not part of some communicative intent" (p.123).

Unlike traditional methods, focus-on-form instruction is based on language acquisition theory. This means that learners receive comprehensible and meaningful input, which helps them learn the language effectively. According to Lee & VanPatten (2003), input should be "manipulated in particular ways to push learners to become dependent on form and structure to get meaning and/or to privilege the form or structure in the input so that learners have a better chance of attending to it" (p.142). This kind of input helps learners notice grammar forms while focusing on meaning (Ellis, 2001, p.20).

In addition to input, output is also important. Lee & VanPatten (2003) state that "Although input is necessary for creating a system, input is not sufficient for developing the ability to use language in a communicative context" (p.168). They (citing Terrell, 1986, 1991) also explain that "Just because a learner has incorporated a particular form or structure in the developing system does not mean that it can be accessed easily (and thus produced automatically)" (p.169). This means that learners need opportunities to use grammar repeatedly in communication to improve both fluency and accuracy.

3) Communication strategies (CSs)

Communication strategies are useful ways to help with communication. They include both spoken and non-spoken actions that help people reach a communication goal, even when there is a problem (Brown, 2015, p.30). According to Savignon's "inverted pyramid" (2002, p.8), all learners, whether they are good or not at speaking, need strategic competence. This means that in conversations, learners can practice listening again and repeating what others say, no matter how much English they know (Fujimoto, 2021, p.11).

They are very helpful because even beginners can use them to start, continue, and end a conversation properly. Here are some common conversation strategies:

- Opener: Start a conversation. (*Hi. / How are you? / How are you doing?*)
- Rejoinders: Show interest in the conversation. (*I see. / Sounds good.*)
- Shadowing: Repeat what your partner says to confirm understanding.
- Fillers: Avoid silence and give yourself time to think. (Well. / Let me see.)
- Follow-up questions: Ask more questions to get extra information or keep talking. (*What else? / When?*)
- Closer: End a conversation. (*Nice talking with you. You too.*)

These simple phrases help learners keep a conversation going and exchange information in English.

4) Information-exchange task

When designing lessons, setting a clear goal is essential. An information exchange task serves as an effective lesson goal. Furthermore, establishing a lesson goal helps in creating detailed lesson plans and clarifies the subgoals. According to Lee & VanPatten (2003), a lesson goal framed as an interactive information exchange task enables instructors to structure the lesson while identifying subgoals throughout the process.

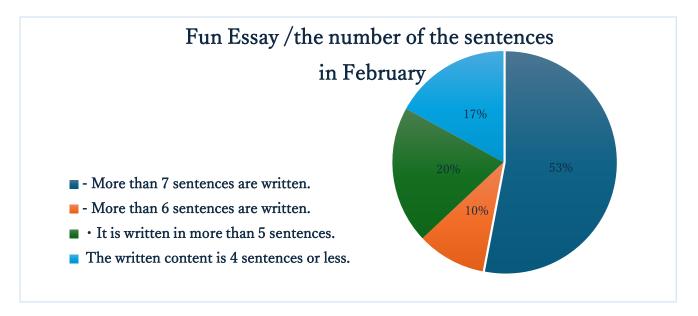
5. Research questions

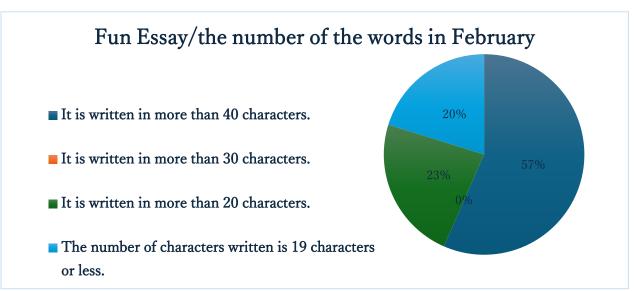
- (1) How does focus-on-form instruction change students' attitude toward learning English?
- (2) How do communication strategies improve students' speaking ability?
- (3) How does focus-on-form instruction together with performance tests improve students' communicative competence?

6. What I did

I mainly did three things in class throughout the second semester: using a focus-on-form instruction, introducing new communication strategies, conducting two performance tests, and administering the survey.

In each unit of the *New Horizon* textbook, there are three grammar points. Focus-on-form instruction includes four steps: input (meaning), input (form), noticing, and output. In step 1, students listen to the teacher's English and fill in the blanks in English or Japanese. Students can understand the meaning of the sentence. In step 2, students listen to the same sentences and circle the words they hear. Students can comprehend the forms by circling the words they hear. In step 3, students fill in the blanks of the explanation of the grammar points by themselves. They can notice the grammar rule by themselves. In step 4, students talk with their peers while referring to a model dialog. As for the communication strategies, students already used the opener, rejoinders, and closer smoothly. I introduced partial shadowing and follow-up questions. These communication strategies were included in the model dialog in step 4. Most of the students could use partial shadowing, but follow-up questions were not used smoothly. I would like to continue introducing them. I conducted two performance tests in January and March. In January, students talked about their experiences during the winter vacation in pairs. Since students had already established the goal time (two minutes) for their conversation, Yoshi-sensei advised me to conduct the performance test by extending the time from two minutes to two minutes and thirty seconds. So, I conducted it in March. Students talked about their favorite event of the year with their peers. After adding only thirty seconds, some students got stuck in their conversation after finishing their prepared dialogue based on the model. Fifty percent of the pairs were able to talk for two minutes and thirty seconds. I was happy to see that some could continue their conversation using follow-up questions. During the speaking test in the hall, other students wrote essays in the classroom. I showed the number of sentences and words they wrote in February. Eighty percent of the students were able to write more than five sentences. About sixty percent of the students wrote more than forty words. My goal was for seventy percent of the students to be able to write compositions of more than thirty words. The percentage did not reach this goal; however, some were slightly below thirty words, writing between twenty-six and twenty-eight words. Overall, eighty percent of the students wrote more than twenty words.





7. Result of the survey

The survey result

The survey was conducted in April, July and February. And students wrote their comments every time the unit was finished. I will show you the result of survey and comments. The regarding the students' attitude toward learning English has seven questions: 1) Can you understand the content you spoke about in your pair or it was from the textbook?; 2) Can you continue the conversation when talking with peers?; 3) Can you understand the content your friend wrote or it was from textbook?; 4)How many sentences English class?; 5) How much do you understand English class?; 6)Do you enjoy English class?; 7)Do you like English?

Listening

Figure 1. Can you understand the content you spoke about in your pair or it was from the textbook?

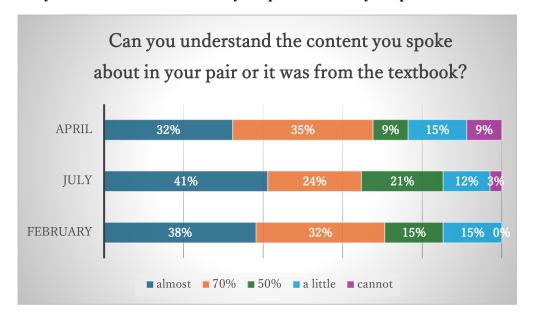


Figure 1 shows the survey results about listening. In April, 9 percent of the students could not understand the content they spoke about in their pair or it was from the textbook. In February, no students could not understand. 85percent of students could understand the content they spoke in their pair or it was from the textbook, however 15 percent students still understand a little.

Talking

Figure 2. Can you continue the conversation when talking with peers?

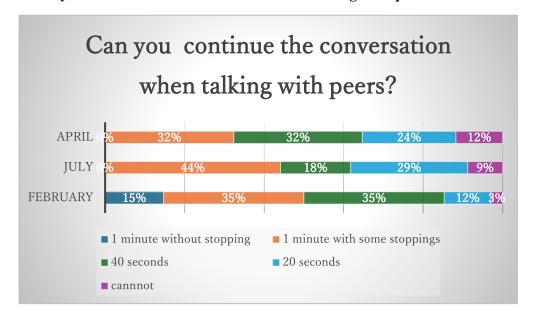


Figure 2 shows the survey results about talking. Overall, students showed improvement in their speaking ability, especially in July, with more students being able to talk for longer durations. However, full fluency (1 minute without stopping) remained unachieved in later months.

Reading

Figure 3. Can you understand the content your friend wrote or it was from textbook?

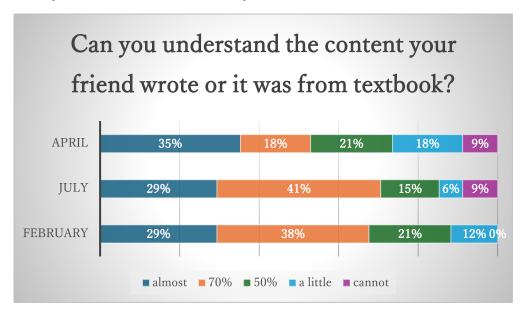


Figure 3 shows survey results about reading. The results indicate that students' ability to understand their friends' writing or textbook content fluctuated over time. While the percentage of students who could understand almost everything remained stable at around 29-35%, the number of students who understood 70% increased in July (41%), suggesting some improvement.

Writing

Figure 4. How many sentences can you write essays or speeches in English?

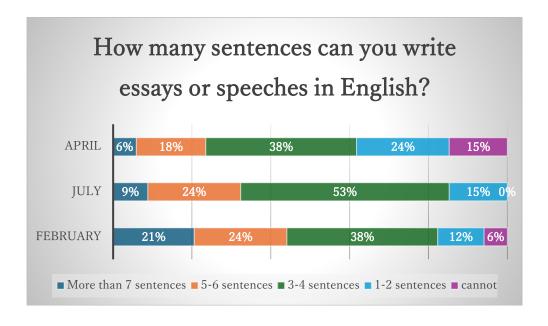


Figure 4 shows the survey results about writing. The results suggest that students' ability to write essays or speeches in English improved over time. The percentage of students who could write 3-4 sentences increased significantly from 38% in February to 53% in July, indicating growing confidence in writing. Additionally, the number of students who could write more than 7 sentences remained relatively stable,

while those who could write only 1-2 sentences or could not write at all decreased. This suggests that overall writing proficiency improved, though further support may be needed to help students expand their writing beyond 5-6 sentences. In the last essay, 83 percent of the students could write with over 5-6 sentences.

Figure 5. Understanding
How much do you understand English class?

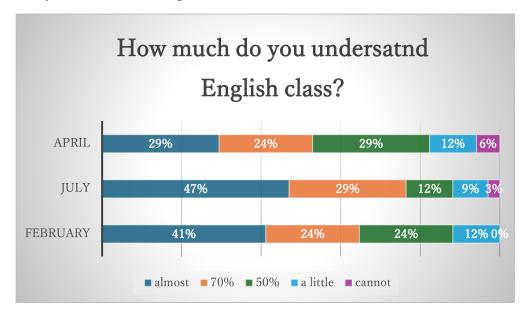


Figure 5 shows the survey results about understanding. Students' understanding of English class has improved over time. The percentage of students who "almost" understand the class has increased, while the proportion of those who understand only "a little" or "cannot" understand has decreased. This suggests that their comprehension skills have developed, likely due to continuous learning and practice.

Figure 6. Class

Do you enjoy English class?

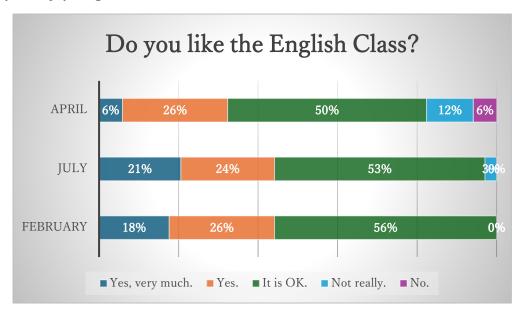


Figure 6 shows the survey results about the preference of English. The results suggest that students' overall preference for the English class has remained relatively stable over time. While the percentage of students who responded with "Yes, very much" fluctuated, the majority consistently found the class acceptable ("It is OK") or enjoyable ("Yes"), also no students answer "No" and "Not really" in February. It indicates all students like English class now.

Figure 7 English
Do you like English?

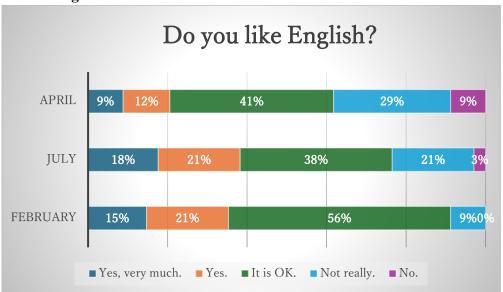


Figure 7 shows the survey results about their preference for English. Comparing April to July, the number of students who like English has increased, indicating a positive trend. Although some categories slightly declined in February, the percentage of students who responded with "It is OK" increased an no students selected "No." This suggests that overall, students' perception of English is moving in a good direction, with more students feeling comfortable or positive about the subject over time.

Majority students' comments from the survey

Category	Comments
Fun (8)	I enjoyed talking with my classmates.
	It is fun asking questions an expanding the conversation.
Growth (2)	As I spoke in pairs, I gradually became able to speak fluently.
	I want to speak English fluently like native speakers.
Motivation	I want to talk with many people in English.
(4)	It was interesting to know my classmates' opinion through the pair talking.
Difficulty (3)	Even though I practiced speaking a lot, I sometimes couldn't say what I want.

Students' speaking & Writing (fun essay) record July & February / Full point is 20 in each

Level	category	July	February
high level student A	speaking	11	18
	writing	20	20
middle level student B	speaking	13	20
	writing	12	12
low level student C	speaking	10	14
	writing	15	10

8. What I learned

I had been teaching English with the traditional methods like grammar translation and audio-lingual methods. Most of English teachers are using this way. I have only 2 years experiences for teaching at a junior high school, however I found the best way of teaching English to develop their communication skills using CLT and FFI. Thanks to the continuous survey, I found the developments of students' communicative competence visually.

I started applying focus-on-form instruction and saw a positive change in my students. I have got many positive comments that they enjoyed the conversation with peers. According to Ellis (2006), "focus-on-form entails a focus on meaning with attention to form arising out of the communicative activity" (p. 100). Comparing survey results from April and February, their responses are positive I showed it before. Additionally, their term test' scores were above average, even though I didn't include drill practice in the lessons. This gave me the confidence using CLT and FFI.

9. Future Issues

As Sato (2022) wrote, I, too, don't want to regret not trying new things or failing to continue learning and growing as a teacher. While many English teachers still rely on traditional teaching methods, I aim to apply the knowledge and skills I have gained so far—and will continue to study through the MA TESOL program—in my future classes. I want my students to enjoy talking with their peers and enjoying their communication in English. Many English teachers want their students to get high score in

paper test like the term tests, the entrance examinations. They think that the traditional way is the best to get them. I want my students to get high scores to build their confidence and to change other English teachers' mindsets from traditional methods to new ones. I have a confidence as I found the results showing that by continuing to practice focus on form and performance testing, students' communication skills will improve and they will be able to do well in term tests, mock exams and entrance exams. (Sato 2022 p.110)

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https://www.chart.co.jp/subject/eigo/cnw/94/94-7.pdf

Applendix

Today's Lesson Plan

Time	Interaction	Activity & Procedure
2	T-Ss	(1) Greeting
3	S	(2) Sing a song / "Santa Claus is coming to town"
1	T-Ss	(3) Step 1: input (meaning)
1	S	• Ss listen to teacher's English and fill in the blanks in English or Japanese.
		• Ss check the answer with peers.
1	S-S	(4) Step 2: input (form)
		• T tells the same sentences again.
1	T-Ss	• Ss circle the words they hear.
1	S	Ss check the answer with next classmate
1	S-S	· Check the answers together.
		(5) Step 3: Grammar Point (notice)
1	T-Ss	• Ss fill the blanks by themselves at first and share idea with peers.
2	S	Check the answers together.
2	S-S	(6) Step 4: Activity / How do you feel when you see this picture?
2	T-Ss	Ss choose adjectives that fit each picture and fill in the blanks on the bingo sheet. They make pairs and ask their peers about the adjectives. When
2	T-Ss	the adjective is the same, Ss circle the picture. The student who gets the
3	S	most bingos is the winner.
20	S-S	(7) Writing Practice
		• Ss write the sentences they used in the activity.
		(If they cannot finish it, they will be doing homework)
1	S	(8) Give homework and say goodbye
1	T-Ss	

Total Time:45minutes

S-S:24minutes

S:11minutes

T-Ss:10minutes

Unit 10: Winter Vacation Story3 p.106-107

Our goal: 人やものの様子を説明するために、視覚的な判断をつたえることができる。

Step I	先生の話を聞いて、分かったことをまとめよう
--------	-----------------------

	誰が/何が	状態	どうして?
ı			
2			
3			

Step 2 もう一度話を聞いて、聞こえた方にOをつけよう

- ① Keita ate Ramen for lunch, so he (looks / looked) so happy.
- ② A: Hi, Bob. You (look / looks) so tired. Are you tired?

B: No, I'm not. I stayed up late last night, so I'm sleepy now.

3 A: Look at that girl! She (look / looks) sick. Is it right?

B: Yes, she is. She is Mary. She has a fever.

Step 3 Grammar Point

●He is happy. (意味:)		
→ He looks so happy. (意味:		
☆happyのような()は、HeやCar等の主語の	(状態や性質/やりたいこと)を説明する。
☆Look+形容詞の形で()という意味	非になる。
☆主語がYouの時は()、3人称単数の時は()となる。

Step 4 Activityどんなふうに見えるかな?ゲーム

☆ビンゴシートの()にWord Boxから1つずつ形容詞を選んで記入しよう。

(1回選んだ形容詞は他のものには使えません!)

Model dialogue

A: Hello (B), how are you?

B: I'm (great / good / fine). How about you (A)?

A: I'm (great / good / fine).

※by the way ところで

※By the way, look at this picture (①~⑨から1つ選ぶ).

How does (it/she/he) look?

B: (It/She/He) looks (old).

○ 選んだ形容詞が同じ場合

A: Me too! It looks (old).

→ Both of you can put a circle on the picture.

二人同じの時はビンゴシートの絵にOつける。



🗙 違う場合

A: Oh, really?! It looks (*scary)! *scary 怖い

ightarrow Both of you [CANNOT] put a circle on the pictures.

二人が同じ形容詞でなかった時はその絵にOをつけない。

*Switch roles 役割交代

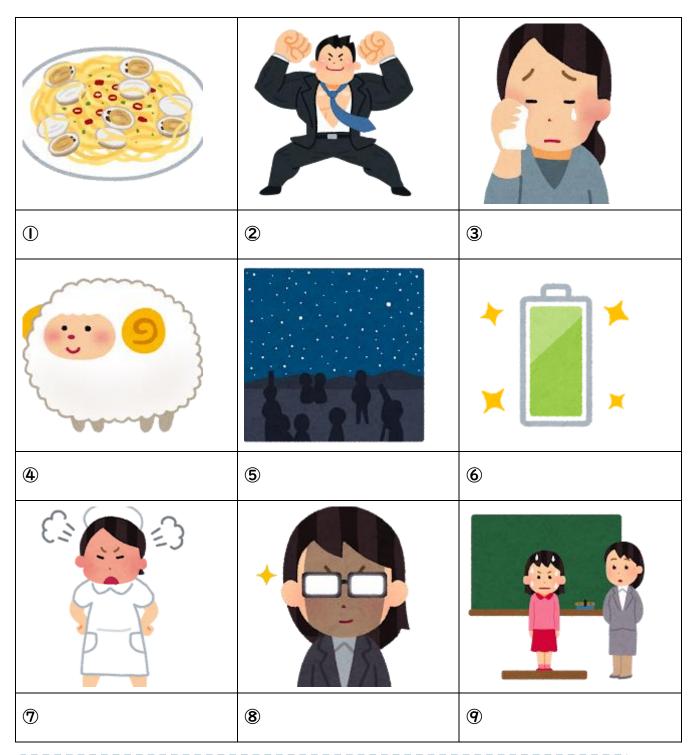
→Look at this picture(①~⑨から選ぶ). How does it look?

()looks ().

☐ If you finished,

A: Nice talking with you.

B: Nice talking with you too.



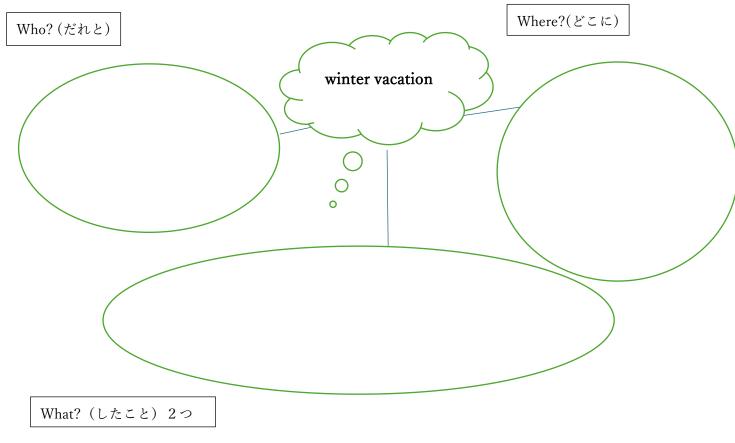
Words List: angry, happy, cool(かっこいい), beautiful, sad, new, smart, old, big, delicious, cute, strong, young, nervous(緊張している), crowded(混んでいる), difficult(むずかしい), excited(ワクワクしている)

performance test material

5, Did she enjoy winter vacation?

	My winter vacation!
	ClassNoName
Step1) R	ead Masako sensei's essay. Then answer the questions.
	Masako sensei's essay
	I'm talking about my winter vacation. My sons and their families visited my house. I went to Centrair. I went there with them. At Centrair, I ate ice cream and saw a big airplane. I really enjoyed it. Then, we went to a shrine together. This was my winter vacation. (8 sentences with 50 words / 8 文 50 文字)
Q&A	
1, Where	did Masako sensei go during winter vacation
2, Who d	id she go there with?
3, What	did she eat and see there?
4, Did sh	e go to a shrine?
	·

Step2) Think about your winter vacation. (日本語可)



Q&A

- 1, Where did you go?
- 2, Who did you go there with?
- 3, What did you do there? (write two things)

4, Did you enjoy winter vacation?

Step3) Talk about it with your friends!

Model dialog

Hello, how are you? I'm (good / happy / sleepy / bad). And you?

A: Let's talk about our winter vacation.

B: Ok!

A: Where did you go?

B: I went to Centrair during winter vacation.

A: Oh, you went to Centrair. (Sounds fun. / Nice! / Great! / OK.)

Who did you go with?

B: I went there with my family.

A: With your family. I see. What did you do there?

B: I saw a big airplane and ate ice cream.

A: (Sounds fun. / Nice! / Great! / OK.) Did you enjoy winter vacation?

B: (Yes, I did. / No, I didn't.) How about you? Where did you go?

*Change your role.

言葉が出てこないとき: Well… Um… Uh… Hmm… Let's see…

B: Nice talking with you.

A: You, too.

Memo

Name	Where	Who	What (two things)
Ex) Masako	Centrair	Family	• ate ice cream
			• saw a big airplane
			•
			•
			•
			•
			•
			•

Peers' comment sheet/ I distributed it when they practiced the speaking.

発表者名 () Name_____

Categories(項目)	Comments (コメント)
関心・意欲・態度	
正確さ	
C.S.使用状況	
内容・流暢さ	

Fun essay: My winter vacation

冬休みの思い出を絵に描こう!		•
Essay さあ!思い出を英文で書こう!(文の数と文字数を最後に書いっ	てください)	
との:心で出て人人で目とう:(人の妖に人)妖に敢反に目で		
Class No Name	¬ \ _	≑ π.

Speaking Test 評価表:自己紹介(/20points)

category	point	condition
(項目)	point (得点)	(Evaluation Criteria)
Fluency & Content (7)	7	I was able to introduce myself smoothly from beginning to end, and I was able to ask and
		answer questions to the other person smoothly. I was able to introduce myself in detail,
		using more than three types of verbs and stating the reason.
	5	I was able to introduce myself and ask and answer questions and answers to others
		smoothly, and I was able to use more than three types of verbs in my self-introduction.
	3	There were times when I was interrupted by self-introductions and questions and
		responses to others, but I was able to use more than three types of verbs in my self-
		introduction.
	1	Self-introductions and questions and responses to others were sometimes interrupted,
		and even in self-introductions, no more than two types of verbs were used.
	0	
Communication Strategy (3)	3	I was able to react properly to the other person's response.
	2	I was able to react to the other person's response (Aizuchi) at least once.
	1	I couldn't react to the other person's response.
accuracy (7)	7	I was able to converse with proper pronunciation, and there were no mistakes in my
1. grammar		vocabulary choice and grammar.
2. vocabulary	5	I was able to converse with proper pronunciation, but there were some mistakes in
3. pronunciation		vocabulary choice and grammar.
	3	There were some errors in pronunciation, some mistakes in vocabulary choice and
		grammar, but I understood what they were saying.
	1	There were errors in pronunciation, vocabulary selection, and grammar that prevented
		me from understanding what was being said.
attitude (3)	3	I was able to make good eye contact, and I was able to introduce myself and have a
1. eye contact		conversation in a loud enough voice.
2. Loudness of voice,	2	We could make eye contact from time to time, and my voice was loud enough to hear
aggressiveness		what was being said. Aggressiveness was normal.
	1	There wasn't much eye contact and his voice was quiet. Lack of positivity.
	1	There was a much eye contact and me voice was quiet. Dack of positivity.

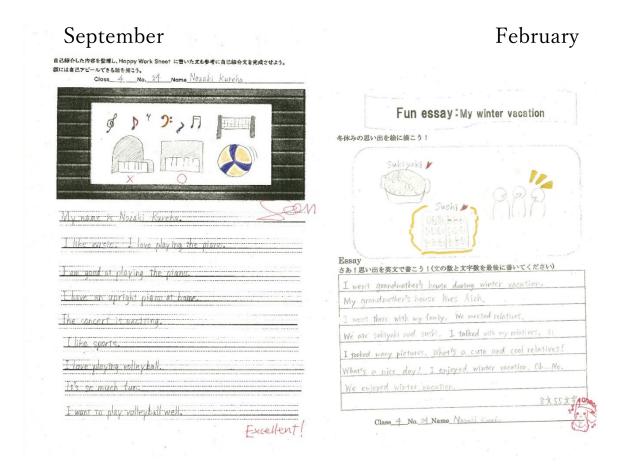
Writing / Fun Essay

Class___No.___Name___

Categories(項目)	Points	Criteria(評価基準)
content	7	I use appropriate grammar and expressions for my winter
		vacation, and there are almost no grammatical errors. • In
		addition to the English written in the model sentence, I am
		writing in English.
	5	• I use appropriate grammar and expressions for my winter
		vacation, and there are some grammatical errors.
	3	· I have been able to use appropriate grammar and
		expressions for my winter vacation to some extent, and there
		are many grammatical errors.
	1	• There are many errors in grammar and expressions, and the
		content is not well understood.
Sentence length	4	- More than 7 sentences are written.
	3	- More than 6 sentences are written.
	2	• It is written in more than 5 sentences.
	1	• The written content is 4 sentences or less.
Interest, Motivation, and Attitude	5	Illustrations are drawn and carefully finished using colors.
Tittitude	3	The illustration is drawn, but the color is not painted.
	1	He draws very few illustrations.
Number of characters	4	It is written in more than 40 characters.
	3	It is written in more than 30 characters.
	2	It is written in more than 20 characters.
	1	The number of characters written is 19 characters or less.

合計	•
仁>= +	points
ПнІ	DOMES

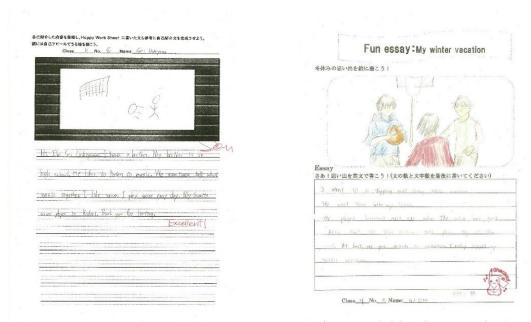
Fun Essay: Student A (Middle level / The evaluation by a term test was 3)



10 sentences / 47 words / simple sentences only

8 sentences / 55 words/simple & complex sentences

Fun Essay: Student B (High level/The evaluation by a term test was 5)



9 sentences/ 43words

7 sentences / 48 words/simple&complex sentences

Questionnaire Survey(アンケート) December 2024



Class	_No	_Name	

★当てはまる□に▽をいれてコメントも書いてください。

スコ (はよる□に図をviii(コグン)で音vi (へたとvi)
I. (聞くカ)ペアで話した内容や教科書の音源の英語が・・・
□ほぼわかる $□$ 70%くらいわかる $□$ 半分くらいわかる $□$ 30%くらいわかる $□$ ほとんどわからない
2. (話す力)ペアで話すとき・・・
□つかえずに 分間話が続く □少しつかえるが 分話せる □40 秒くらいは話せる □20 秒くらいは話せる
□ほとんど話せない
3. (読む力)ワークの長文の問題や教科書の本文が・・・
□ほぼわかる □70%くらいわかる □半分くらいわかる □30%くらいわかる □ほとんどわからない
4. (書く力)まとまりのある英作文(スピーチ(友達紹介など)や日記など)が・・・
□7 文以上書ける □5~6文なら書ける □3~4文なら書ける □1~2 文書ける □ほとんど書けない
5. 英語の授業はわかりますか
□ほぼわかる □70%くらいわかる □半分くらいわかる □30%くらいわかる □ほとんどわからない
6. 英語の授業は楽しいですか
□とても楽しい □楽しい □ふつう □あまり楽しくない □楽しくない □

□とても好き □好き □まあまあ好き □あまり好きではない □好きではない



8. コメント

7. 英語の授業は好きですか。

