Action Research Final Report 2017-2018

1.Title: Writing Process and Essay Rubrics that Focus on the Content and Language Integration

: Studies on Japanese College Students learning English Writing

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2. Context:

Target class: English writing class at NUFS, 12 students

Level: second year at college, lower intermediate

Length and frequency: 90minutes, once a week, 15 weeks per semester, two semesters

Texts: A Passage to Paragraph Writing, by K. Endo (2011) & Introduction to Essay Writing, by Huizenga, J. et al (1997)

3. Goal:

My goal of the year was to facilitate the Japanese students to have critical thinking and to fully express their thoughts through highly academic passages in English. The targets were to build up writing rubrics and the process for the students to finally independently write intelligent essays.

4. Literature Review:

From my personal experience, I have believed that when the target is on expressing ideas, English works as an authentic tool to convey them to global audience. While developing communicative competence through conveying real messages in English, people acquire skills as English users. Based on the above belief, I relied upon the following theories and approaches for the research.

1. Content and Language Integrated Learning :CLIL

Language is simply the medium to convey content of interest according to Brown (2007:287). Content and Language Integrated Learning: CLIL approach of teaching languages focuses on conveying the content. It regards the language as a simple medium. The efficiency of the approach by valuing on the real world subjects is recognized widely by educators and European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (2018). Costa defines CLIL as "an approach that calls for the integrated teaching-learning of language and content" (2016:19). In addition, European Commission proposed an action plan (2004:16) to practice CLIL approach in Language education. As for the rubric for composition, Lee and Paulson (1992:33) showed uneven weighted list of criteria. Lee and Van Patten (2003) commented on this list of writing criteria which weighted differently reflecting the importance of the category (2003:271). According to these analytical scoring

criteria, the highest scores on the content indicate the students to focus on the thoughts not on the surface mistakes.

2. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching: CLT approach is reported to show efficiency of successful learning in communicative settings by Savignon (2002:8). According to her, CLT fosters learners with the four competences below in simultaneous and integrated use: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence" (2002:225). As a result, "the engagement of learners in communication allow them to develop their communicative competence" (Savignon, 2002:22). Brown mentions that CLT helps to engage in real- world context which enable the learners to exchange information between the peers (Brown& Lee, 2015:32).

3. Deep Active Learning

The term "deep" means focusing on the quality and content of learning according to Matsushita (2014). Deep active learning "engages students with the world as an object of learning while interacting with others, and helps the students connect what they are learning with their previous knowledge and experiences as well as their future lives." Thus, more than becoming able to complete tasks, learners develop their curiosity and involvement in the society and improve their dignity as a confident communicator through writing.

4. Assessment and Peer Assessment

According to Lee and Van Patten (2003:271), "consistent application of criteria is a fundamental consideration". Learners gradually understand what the goal is by repetition of using the assessment criteria during the course. Dörnyei listed the factors of successful criteria as follows: transparent rating system, comments of complement and suggestions added, reflect the students' relative improvement (2001:132-134).

The effect of peer assessment is reported by Porter that interaction between students increases opportunities for self-expression (Porter, 1986). Slavin also mentioned cooperative learning to be "one of the greatest success stories in the history of educational research"(1996:43). Roscoe and Chi (2007) note that students engage in a cognitively-demanding activity of peer assessment enhance their understanding of subject matter and writing (2007:1). Learners' autonomy to evaluate the learning system was reported by Dam (1995) to increase when learners were given a share of responsibility for conducting teaching-learning activities such as peer assessment (1995:2). Moreover, Queen Mary University of London (2018) holds a web page called Thinking Writing which displays the list of efficiency on peer assessment as follows:

"Getting students to make assessment judgements helps them to develop their own sense of what makes a good piece of writing and to understand how judgements are made."

"Composing feedback for others can help students to develop interpersonal skills as they learn how to communicate their judgements to others."

"The approach opens up possibilities for students to co-construct assignments and assessment criteria-with each other and with the lecturer-giving them a more active role in the learning process."

5. Motivation

Dörnyei refers to increase of student motivation by two aspects of group dynamics: in cohesive class groups and in group norms(2001:43). In detail, involved students are increasingly autonomous students (2001:103). An autonomous student is" a purposeful, goal-directed actor, who is in a constant mental balancing act to coordinate a range of personal desires and goals in the light of his/her possibilities, that is, his/her perceived competence and environmental support" (2001:8). Therefore, instructors can motivate learners by offering proper level of interesting tasks and timely assistance. Tasks and assistance need flexible and in variation because, according to Scheidecker & Freeman (1999), "motivating students….will never be a singular or simplistic process" (1999: 117). Brophy suggests for the instructors to encourage students to see them as allied with the students in preparing for the tests and tasks so that they will not be stressed by them but will be motivated to face them (1998:69). Finally, Williams mentions on language communication as conveying individual identity to other people (1994:77). His idea of learning language that enable us to exchange higher dimensional content of identity more than ideas and thoughts is the motivational goal for college students.

5. What I did:

New trials were made from September to introduce and continuously use a new rubric, addition of two steps more in writing process, and creating fill-in citation sheets to support students refer information were carried out. Final survey was done to reflect the overall course and the essay quality and students confidence, comments were assessed.

First, writing process in 1st semester was basically built as 5-week steps (Fig.4-2). In order to have the students cite proper references, instruction on plagiarism, direction to search books in the library and on web and cite following APA style was supported. Building an outline for an essay was lately introduced in the steps. Second, two rubrics were used

adjusting to the learners' developmental stage this year. Since the two had different criteria, it was hard to compare the improvement on essay quality through the year. My sub goal now is to modify the two rubrics and decide the time to switch them. Essentially, two rubrics need common core parts for better trace of the improvement. Third, activities including review time with mini binders were assessed for the new course according to the effectiveness and the likeness from the grades and survey results. Finally, since cohesive class is reported to be essential for the motivation and improvement by Dörnyei (2001, p.43), analysis on comments in the survey data regarding cohesiveness is also conveyed.

6. What Happened:

First of all, to reflect overall result of the course, change in confident length of an essay was checked in three surveys. The result in Figure 1 shows the peek shift of confidence from 300 - 400 words in April 2017 to 400 - 500 words in July 2017 and to 800 words in January 2018.
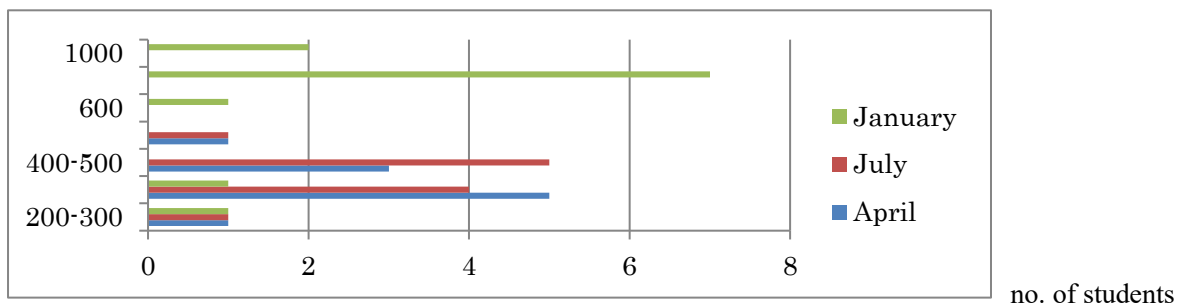
Word count

Figure1. Change in confident length of an essay.

Actual length of the essays they have accomplished in average is shown in the next figure.
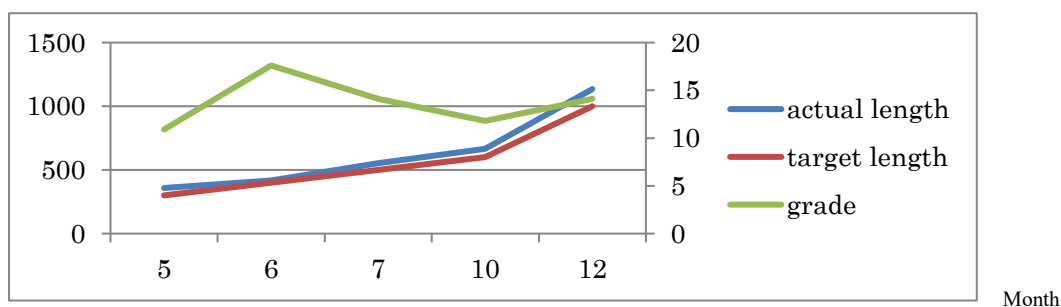
Word count

Figure2. Increase of average word count in essays through the year

Note: rubric 1-2017 was used from May to July, rubric 2-2017 from September to December

As is shown above, the target length was accomplished to finally reach 1000 words in December. Regarding the quality, the grades using rubrics were compared to show the content quality, which were kept not below 11.8 per 20 points. The results indicate that the students showed improvement to eventually write long essays with deep content in a year to reach average

of 1135words per essay (Table 1. AR February report). In detail, students made progress in discussion length and the content as well because the number of ideas during each discussion increased as in Figure 3.
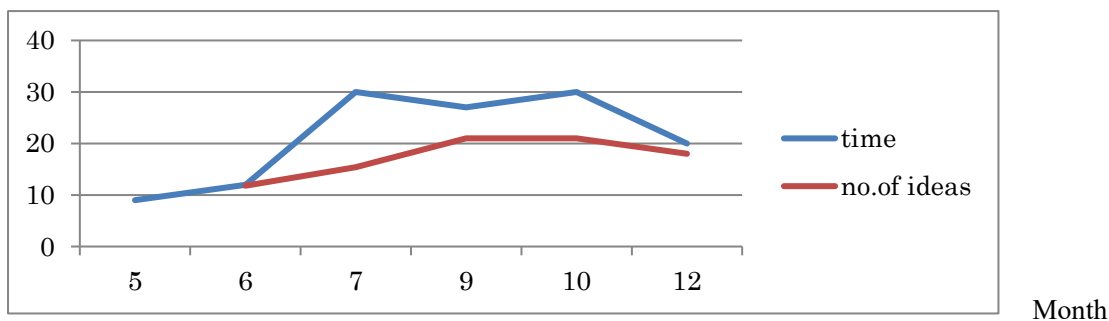
Minutes/ no. of ideas

Figure 3. Change in discussion time and numbers of ideas earned from discussions during a year

The drop of time in December is not because they could not discuss long but because they already earned enough ideas in 2/3 of given time. Hence we stopped discussion and proceeded to the next process. In the final survey, 12 out of 12 students valued the idea mapping (12 / 12 students) and peer discussion (11/12 students) (Figure 4, AR2 report and in appendix) and two comments in detail were made as below.

*It became my habit to make idea maps. (*1 out of 12 students)

Idea map is convenient. (1)

Next, the writing process was modified. The standard process took 5 weeks. Later in December, I added a step to create outline. For the 1000-word essay, the students needed 2 weeks more to visit the library for citation. Since normally 5week process seems appropriate, I would like to deliver lesson plans accordingly. Since motivational activities are needed to keep their concentration, I will discuss them below. The steps are in Figure4 and the former version is in Figure4-2 below, which has two steps less.
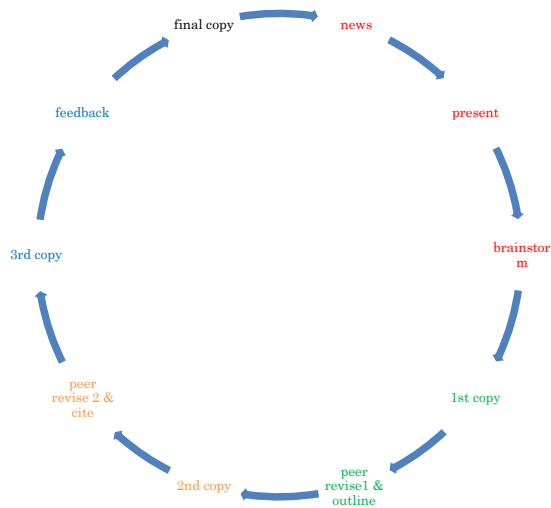
Figure4. Writing process starts from news discussion to final copy writing takes five weeks.

Note: Each color represents each week.

Figure4-2.　Writing process in 1st semester

Additional steps seemed to support the students work as their essay length and the quality improved. Their comments also recognized the usefulness of having a citation week and one more revision. The final survey resulted in supporting the effectiveness of peer discussion on the improvement of the essay quality (10 /12 students).

I can cite now. (1)

Peer discussion and revision is useful. (2)

Secondly, I would like to assess the effect of some steps. First, warm up discussion topic was always the weekly news the students checked each week. As is shown in Figure5, news was not popular among them at the beginning, but since the end of first semester, sharing the news became their favorite and useful activity. Popularity of four main activities was compared through the year from the surveys in Figure 5-2.
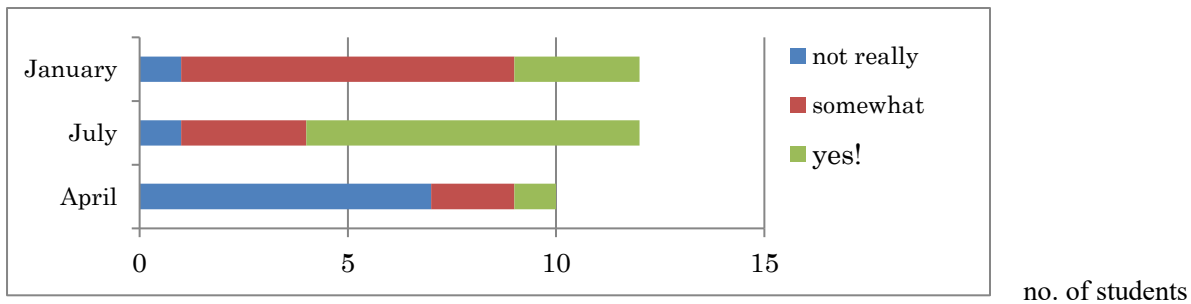
Month

no. of students

Figure5. Change in likeness and usefulness about news discussion through the year
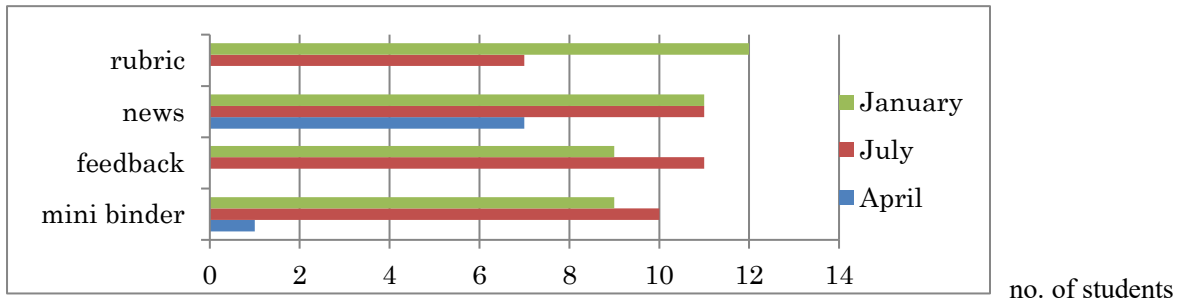

no. of students

Figure 5-2. Change in usefulness of activities through the year

When they started to write down three keywords of the news in second semester, they became more fluent in explaining the news. At the beginning, they could not continue sharing for 5 minutes on news but at the end they wanted to talk more than 10 minutes. It may have had a positive effect on the following brainstorming discussion on essay topics. During news sharing, they had hard time using English, but the ley words assisted them in 2nd semester. This was thanks to the second survey that informed me that students felt overwhelming with understanding news terms. It is suggested that giving a task of listing three key words worked as efficient support. For the next step, they wrote a first copy from their idea map. I showed them a paragraph structure first, then the passage structure, the usage of transition words, and later usage of references. The first rubric was referred to show the importance of these points. For the third step, drafts were exchanged between the students to revise. Peer revising was challenging at first as is observed in only a short time they could discuss in Fig.3, but within a month, they forgot hesitation to correct or comment to the peers. The final survey showed their high evaluation on its effectiveness (Figure4 in AR February report, appendix). During the peer revising, I created a list of check points to fit in a mini binder and students used them but later they did not need it. This showed their independence in a process. Comments in the final survey showed that they checked good and bad points to peers. They even suggested how to revise words or phrases as seen below. Eleven out of 12 students answered peer revising useful (Figure 4 in AR February

7

report).

Peer revising was truly useful. It was great because friends checked the mistakes I could not notice and they gave the expressions I never came up with. (1)

Outline was checked in the next step during the revision to overview the logical structure of the essay. This was only introduced later in December and students appreciated because they told me at class that they understood how to check their development of the ideas. When I used a mini book to make an outline, some said it was childish but some liked the way to make an outline (8/12 students liked it, Fig. 7, AR February report, appendix). Thus, I will occasionally use it. For the basic process, my plan is to create a fill-in sheet to have them check their outline while writing first copy. For the next step, second copy was written and second peer revision was discussed. After the revision, they submitted the 3rd copy and a week later, students and I gave feedback using the rubric. The final copy was submitted after feedback. References were searched through the process and used fill-in sheet I introduced in Action Research November Report.

Thirdly, I would like to assess the rubrics. The first rubric was a modification of the evaluation of criteria for composition shown by Lee and Van Patten (2003:272). The second one was revised from a common poster on writing scheme used in IB elementary schools (School Essentials, 2018). The first rubric had been criticized in AR discussion in July of its unclear expression. Since posters have feature of using easy but precise words in short sentences, the second rubric was created from posters for elementary school writers which I used to use in an IB school. As is reported in my AR November report, at the beginning, students had hard time using a new rubric because meeting the requirement on the content is hard (see the drop of grade points in October in Fig.2). Later, they gradually understood how to write meaningful essays (inclined points in December in Fig.2). The result of the survey tells that all 12 students mentioned the second rubric useful and used it whenever they revised with their partners as well as when they wrote essays. They could understand which points to improve.

Easy to understand which points need improvement (2 out of 12students)
First it was hard to comprehend but gradually got used to it. (1)
Teacher's explanation in Japanese was useful (1)

Finally, popularity of other activities is assessed. First, the ways of brainstorming are compared. Regularly, while students discussed with peers, they drew idea bubbles and filled in the ideas popped out during the discussion. Other ways included having simulation, drawing tables to compare and contrast, watching related YouTube videos, making books for outline, and using Instagram to widen the image. The survey result in AR February report showed their likeness on each activity (Fig.7-AR2). Especially, bubble (idea) mapping were highly appreciated by students at the final survey. The increased numbers of ideas are shown in Figure3 and the trust on bubble mapping and other brainstorming activities was already reported (Figure 4-AR in appendix).

Simulation to experience intercultural communication was a big topic at class and 10 out of 12 students liked the activity (Fig7-AR2). Although, the experience was hard to consider, reflect, reach to conclusion and write about. I need to add more follow up activities than just have them group chat for a week. Though I already reflected on this issue last November, I will report again when I carry on another simulation in the next course.

11. What I learned:

As I observed the students getting used to the 5-week writing process I had developed together with them, the core part was stabilized. Nevertheless, "environmental support" (Dörnyei, 2001:8) is always necessary for continuous work. Thus, I will prepare ways listed above to support them in each class. I assume options to add some weeks for citation or trying different ways of brainstorming have big possibility to enhance motivation as well as for deeper thinking from different approaches. The reason is that motivating students do not show simplistic process(Scheidecker,1999:117). The balance of basic process and optional parts may differ in each class. I would like to survey the next students on the usefulness of these optional activities. Since the students liked news sharing the most amongst the activities according to Figure7 in AR February report (11 /12students), the activity will be continued. The key to the successful news sharing may be due to repetition and having them list up key words.

The review time I gave students at class was appreciated as the survey showed 9 out of 12 students mentioned the usefulness of mini binders for review (Fig. 4-AR2, appendix). Thus, usage of mini binders is approved (cf. AR November report, appendix p. 6).

8. Future Issues:

First of all, one more step in the writing process should be introduced. I consider offering them another chance at a final day to present their final essays at class. On the day, they will submit self and peer assessment after listening to the presentations. The same rubric will be used for peer assessment.

The new rubrics will be carefully introduced to beginners. The improvements are the blank parts to be filled in by students to encourage them to reflect their own and partner's essays. To be fair on evaluation, rubric is necessary for both students and for instructors. When students know they are fairly graded, rubric can also work as a motivator. I will prepare an introductory rubric to use for first semester and then advanced rubric for later or advanced learners. In the new first rubric, I will use short and easy English with keywords to show the basic points. I also limited the required number of transition words and synonyms, so that I can raise the requirement in the second one. Hence, I keep the core criteria and enhance the requirement so that I can use the two in series (see rubric 2018-1 and 2018-2 in appendix). This year, I encouraged the students to read books to gain skills to use synonyms but they were reluctant to read. Therefore, the new rubric has 4 blanks in the 1st and 6 in the second for the synonyms in each essay to be filled in by them. Since I also wanted a space in the rubric for students to reflect on their own essay, I made blank spaces to fill in the synonyms used, transition words used and fragments found where they should take sentence structure. Moreover, I made another blank line for a peer to fill in obscure parts with the peer's name signed. Again, peer assessment effect is expected from the work.

This is how I will abandon negative criteria to not punish with minus point in rubric 2017-2 for motivational concern. As these to-be-filled- in- parts were common targets I repeatedly pointed out on teacher's feedback, I hope next year the awareness will raise more by focusing them in peer feedback. In addition, I made a new criterion to give 1 bonus point when I find them improved than in the former essay because Dörnyei mentioned to "make sure that the students' personal "milestones" should not go unnoticed (Dörnyei, 2001:126)" . Furthermore, his strategies for motivation is to grade the students for their "relative improvement rather than only their standard of achievement as compared to some external criterion" (Dörnyei, 2001:133). Thus, I expect students to get motivated by the bonus point category in the rubrics as they are rewarded for individual improvement.

Last but not least, students gradually got involved in the class and valued their peers highly to create cohesiveness as can be seen in the survey and the comments. In the final class, students wrote an advice for the next year students about

the class. The content was mostly the encouragement for the hard tasks and their confidence and likeness in writing. I could observe the cohesiveness as they showed trust in themselves, peers and in teacher.

I became good at writing. (4 out of 12 students)

It is heavy and hard, but never give up. I did not give up. (6)

I can express myself.

It is useful to discuss with teacher and friends.

I like writing.(9)

Teacher is helpful. Believe in her. (7)

Here is the key comment to show one student who found his way of expressing himself through the course and he developed his ideas to finally feel that his essay became his spirit. "Language …belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and is used to convey this identity to other people". This sentence was mentioned by Slavin (1996) and I agree as I have witnessed the students' dignity shown in the comment below.

I did not like write an essay.   However, I like that now because writing essay can tell my feeling, passion, and individual idea. You can write what you want to write…After that, your essay will become your spirit. (Ry)

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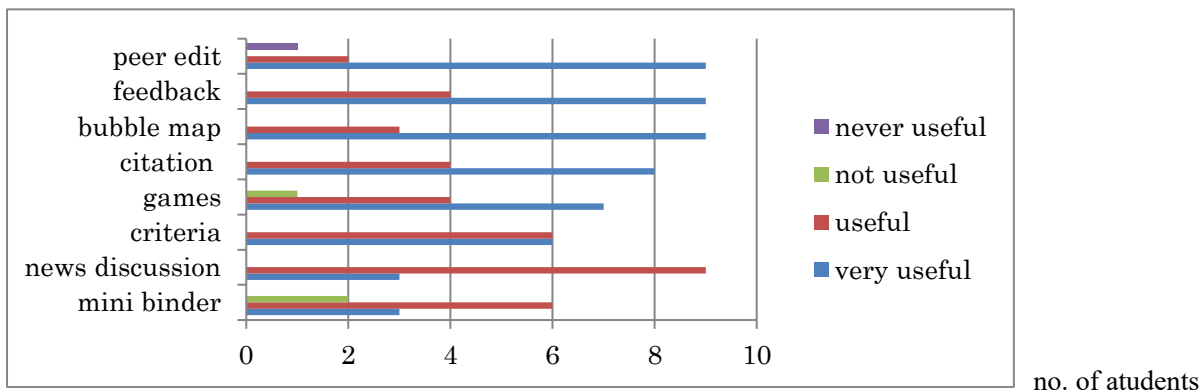
Appendix

no. of atudents

Figure 4-AR2 . Final survey results of students' reflection about usefulness of class activities

No. of students
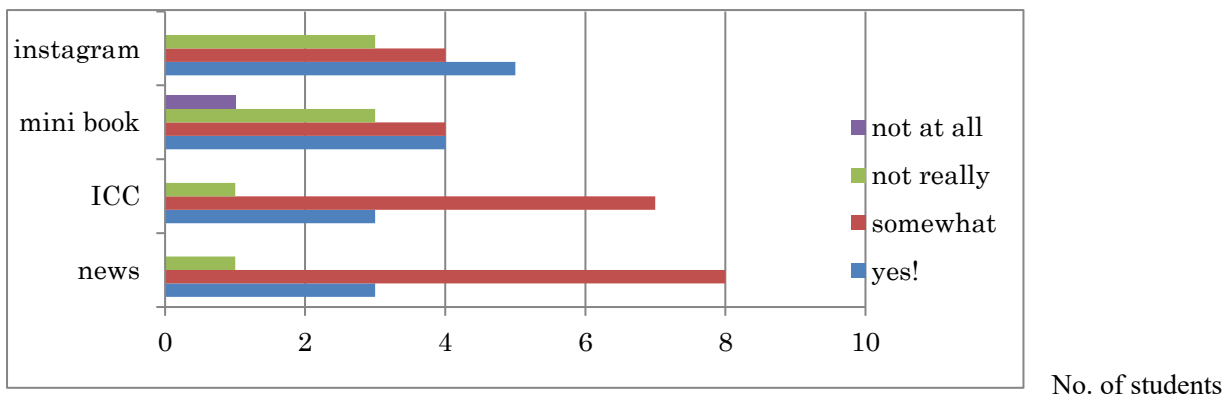
Figure7-AR2. Final survey results of students' reflection about liking of class activities

Appendix

Writing 2018-1   Name _____   Due Date _____ ✎

Essay Rubric   date of submission _____

Content (10 points)

- **Introduction** to grab the attention   1- 2
- **Body** to explain the thesis statement   1- 2
- **Conclusion** with clear point of view   1- 2
- Original content   1- 2
- Passage for the audience   1- 2

Points for Content ☐

Organization (5 points)

- Introduction with a clear **Topic Sentence**   1
- Body with **supporting details**   1
- **Transition Word**s connecting ideas (   )(   )(   ) 1
- **One topic** one paragraph   1
- Clear Conclusion to **summarize**   1

Points for Organization ☐

Grammar and Vocabulary (2 points)

- Complete sentences with **S+V**.   1
- Many synonyms used   (   )(   )   1
                       (   )(   )

- Fragment**!** _____
- Meaning **?**

_____ Checked by _____

Points for G & V ☐

Direction (3 points)

- Assigned number of words or more   1
- Before or on due date   1
- **Citation**   1

Points for Direction ☐

Improvement   Bonus Point ☐

Comments   _____ /20

Three essays weigh 60% of total score of a semester

Due Date ✍
Essay Rubric Date of submission

Content (10 points)

- Attractive （読みたくなる書き出し）statements in **Introduction**   1- 2
- **Body** with ideas and details to express the thoughts （考えを丁寧に説明） 1- 2
- **Conclusion** with clear point of view （はっきりと述べる） 1- 2
- Original content with unique and personal touch （自分らしい内容にする） 1- 2
- Addressing the audience （読み手の視点で） 1- 2

Points for Content

Organization (5 points)

- Introduction with clear **Topic Sentence** to grab the attention （惹きつける文） 1
- **Body** following a logical sequence （筋の通った展開） 1
- **Transition Word**s connecting ideas and details （接続語の使用） 1
- **One topic** in one paragraph 1
- Clear **Conclusion** to sum up the main idea （主題をまとめる文） 1

Points for Organization

- **Grammar   and   Vocabu**   Complete   sentences   with   **S+V.** 1
- Many synonyms （同意語）used (   ) (   )
  (   )(   ) (   ) (   )
- Variety of sentence structures and length used （文型、文の長さが多様）   1

- ✘ Fragment _____
- ✘ The words with confusing or obscure meaning （意味不明）   <u>checked by</u>

lary (2 points)

Points for G & V

Direction (3 points)

- Assigned number of words or more （指示された語数以上） 1
- Before or on due date（提出期日を守る） 1
- Proper **citation** （正しく引用） 1

Points for Direction

Improvement (努力点) Bonus Point

Comments

Total Score _____/20

Three essays weigh 60% of total score of a semester

Lesson Plan for April 2018 (from AR Feburuary Report)

Appendix

Lesson Plan April 2018

Goals: Ss can introduce the partners orally and in a written form. Ss can write in a paragraph form. Ss can share what they know about EFL.

time	Interaction T-Ss, S-S,S	Activity & Procedure	*
5	T-Ss	Greeting, Attendance	Rules sheet
		Introduction to the class rules, Moodles, and ELF	Show Mini
3	S-S	Ss share what they know about English as Langua Franca	binder
3	S-S	Pair Presentation to the class	
1	T-Ss	Brief introduction of definition, further search as HW	
		Pair Introduction	Worksheet
2	T-Ss	Sample conversation by T. Tell them to prepare to introduce the partner later.	S ask
10	S-S	Introduce between partners and fill in the sheet	details
15	Ss-Ss	Introduction about the partner to the class	Note on **WB**
		Introduction to Paragraph	Open Txt
2	T-Ss	Textbook p.2, topic sentence and supporting details, p.5, Indentation,p.7, structure	p.7 while
10	S-S	Write three things about the partner in a paragraph, talk about details while writing	writing
1	T-Ss	"Feel the usefulness of discussion before writing"	
7	S	Write about "me" in a paragraph	
3	Ss-Ss	Compare the two paragraphs	**collect** the
12	Ss-Ss	Present the difference	sheets
5	Ss-Ss	Concentration 64	refresh
		Category is chosen from the list of interest on **WB**	
4	Ss-Ss	Review time	WB
		Discuss what they learnt and write in mini binder and on WB	autonomy
6	T-Ss	Homework and Questions showing HW list	BBC app
		Search definition and three keywords on ELF in a mini binder, Txt p.5-7, 1-C, 1-D,1-E.weekly news	3 keywords
		sheet (explain how to fill in)	
1	T-Ss	Final greeting,, BGM	

Total time SS-SS 65minutes, T-Ss 18minutes, S 7minutes

Lesson Plan for an Essay

Week1: Introduction

Week2: brainstorm on topic 1, copy 1 for homework

Week3: peer revising copy 1 on topic1, check outline, copy 2 for homework

Week4: peer revising copy 2 on topic 1, copy 3 for homework

Week5: peer feedback and submit copy 3

Week6: instructor's feedback, brainstorm on topic 2

Later: chance to revise again for the final presentation, keep in portfolio

Appendix

Name._____

We have worked very hard to become a **good writer.** ✍

1. **Useful ?** Please circle.

		Very useful	useful	not useful	never useful
a.	Weekly news	4	3	2	1
b.	Reading log	4	3	2	1
c.	Synonyms, antonyms	4	3	2	1
d.	Bubble map discussion	4	3	2	1
e.	Peer editing for revise	4	3	2	1
f.	Mini Peer edit sheet	4	3	2	1
g.	White Textbook	4	3	2	1
h.	Red textbook	4	3	2	1
i.	Criteria	4	3	2	1
j.	Feedback in class	4	3	2	1
k.	mini binder	4	3	2	1
l.	Citation worksheet	4	3	2	1
m.	Games	4	3	2	1

2. **Did you like…?**

		Yes!	Somewhat	Not really	Not at all
n.	News?	4	3	2	1
o.	Writing ?	4	3	2	1
p.	Culture shock session ?	4	3	2	1
q.	Making mini book?	4	3	2	1
r.	Instagram resolution?	4	3	2	1

3. **editing**

	Yes!	Somewhat	Not really	Not at all
Peer editing に自信がつきましたか	4	3	2	1
ペアの話し合いで内容がよくなりましたか	4	3	2	1
Revise を繰り返すたびに内容がよくなりましたか	4	3	2	1

4. **Confident?**

今なら何語のエッセイを自信をもって書けますか。

200　　　400　　　600　　　800　　　1000words　　　それ以上

ライティングの力がつきましたか？

具体的にどんなことができるようになりましたか？

まだ自信のない点はありますか？　具体的に。

５．**In English?**

ディスカッション時、英語はどのくらい使えましたか？　　　　　_____％

できればどのくらい使いたいですか。　　　　　　　　　　　　　_____％

6.　２学期の criteria（評価基準）はわかりやすいですか？一学期のと比べてどうでしたか。

7．Criteria の**減点**項目（overdue -3）　をなくしても締め切りを守れると思いますか。
（減点はやる気をそぐので、なくしたいのですが。。。）

8．この授業の**よい点**や**改善点**があれば教えてください☺