

Action Research Summative Report

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1) Title: Improving Senior High School Students' Writing Abilities through Various Activities: especially, by Developing a Rubric with Students and Teachers

Introduction:

More practical English Language Teaching has gradually been focused on, especially since new government guidelines for teaching were introduced in Japan in 2013, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has also been regarded as one of the notable approaches/methods. This proposed project will focus on the process of development in students' writing abilities by implementing various communicative activities including performance tests and developing a rubric with students and teachers over the course of the school year. The aims are to improve students' writing skills as a whole and help them to recognise their improvement of target language acquisition by themselves. In order to achieve this objective and gather data, the following four methods will mainly be used; four-skill integration, communicative writing activity, the activity for self-evaluation and peer-evaluation, as well as a questionnaire/reflection for developing an effective rubric to assess writing. It will include, but be limited to the 2nd year international course students' "English Communication II" study during 2015-2016 school year.

2) Context:

Year: 2nd Year of Senior High School (International course)

Class size: 38 students × 1 (the top stream), 26 students×2 (the standard stream)

Level: intermediate

Subject: English Communication II

Time: 50 minutes × 4 per week

Textbook: ELEMENT English Communication II (KEIRINKAN)

Issues:

(1) Almost all the students did not know how to compose paragraphs well.

(2) About 30 students having returned from studying abroad at the end of the first term took this course from September; thus they did not know how this lesson would be instructed.

(3) Some students are not satisfied with the evaluation criteria for their performance examinations.

3) Goals:

(1) to give as many opportunities as possible for students to acquire English, such as Timed-conversation, Fan essay, Timed-reading, and Communicative Writing activity, as well as integrating four skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking.

(2) to foster students' speaking abilities so that they can speak English for 3 minutes and argue their own ideas and opinions about the given topic, using conversational strategies.

(3) to encourage students' essay-writing abilities so that they can use more than 300 words to argue their own ideas and opinions about the given topic in English academically, critically and coherently

(4) to make rubrics more reliable and valid to satisfy students' results, giving students the time to critically

evaluate themselves and peers regularly and referring to their own ideas and opinions.

4) Steps taken (since September):

(1) I revised the handouts

I referred to the task-sheets based on the instructional framework presented by James F. Lee and Bill VanPatten (2003, p, 228). There are mainly three steps in them – pre-reading, reading and post-reading. First, students need to deduce the content of the texts from true or false questions before reading, which can foster their predictive skill – the skill to predict the content and language of a text before reading. In the second phase, students need to read the text many times in order to complete the tasks, namely comprehension questions and vocabulary input, and also interact with others. In the last phase, students need to retell the passage using their own words to deepen their understanding. At the end of the class, students personalise a topic related to the lesson through timed-conversation activities.

(2) Speaking and Writing performance assessments with rubrics:

These assignments/assessments are to help the students to deepen their understanding and widen their perspective about the topic on the textbook as well as to foster both their speaking and writing abilities. Each student wrote an essay and talked about the topic related to one in the textbook, namely a bicycle-sharing system, racial discrimination, solutions for water crisis, and discourse on selective breeding. I sought to make evaluation criteria more meaningful and content-focused in order to foster their writing and speaking fluency.

(3) Communicative Writing activities:

Students had opportunities to give others feedback on essays, giving positive comments and underlining some sentences, such as ones that they wish to have more information on to deepen their understanding about the topic. According to the research by Robb, Ross, and Shortreed in 1986, ‘writing improved less as a result of feedback on errors than as a result of having additional opportunities to write’ (qtd. in Lee and Vanpatten, 2003, p.269). Through these activities, learners started to gradually pay more attention to meaning as opposed to form. They sought to develop their writing skills by negotiating with others and using the given rubric in class.

(4) Weekly Essay homework:

Students write a short-essay about a variety of controversial topics with at least 150 words. Almost all the topics are related with other subjects, mainly social studies. This homework is intended to foster self-education for both English and other subjects. They usually have a week or two. Some students found it helpful and useful to practise writing a short-essay for English Proficiency tests, such as GTEC, STEP EIKEN, IELTS, TOEFL and TOEIC-SW.

(5) Flash Writing:

This activity is to foster students’ writing fluency within the given time. Once every one or two weeks, with an exception being one week before the deadline for an essay, students wrote as many words as possible about the given topic within five minutes. The topic is usually related to the one they are reading in the textbook. Before doing the task, students have a couple of opportunities for brain-storming

with their partner.

(6) Questionnaire and Reflection:

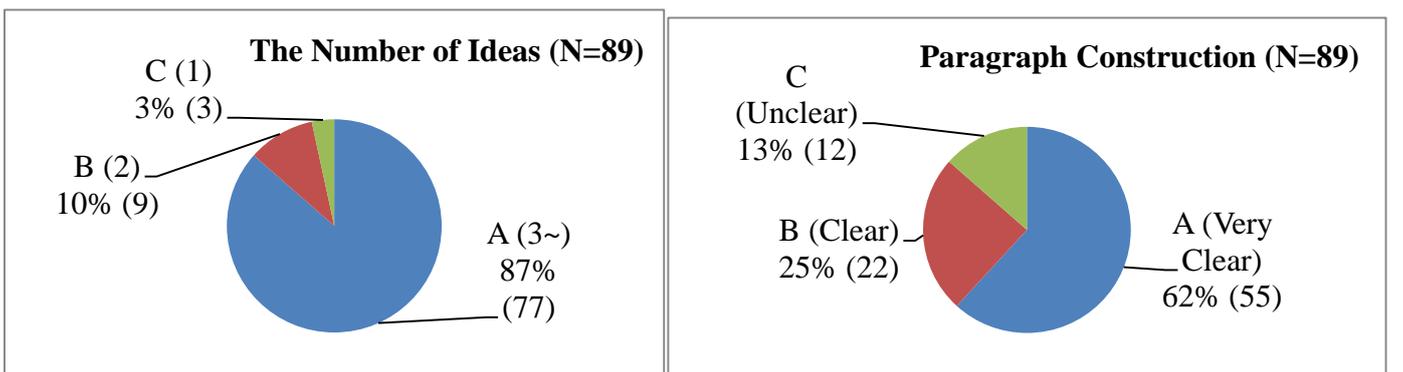
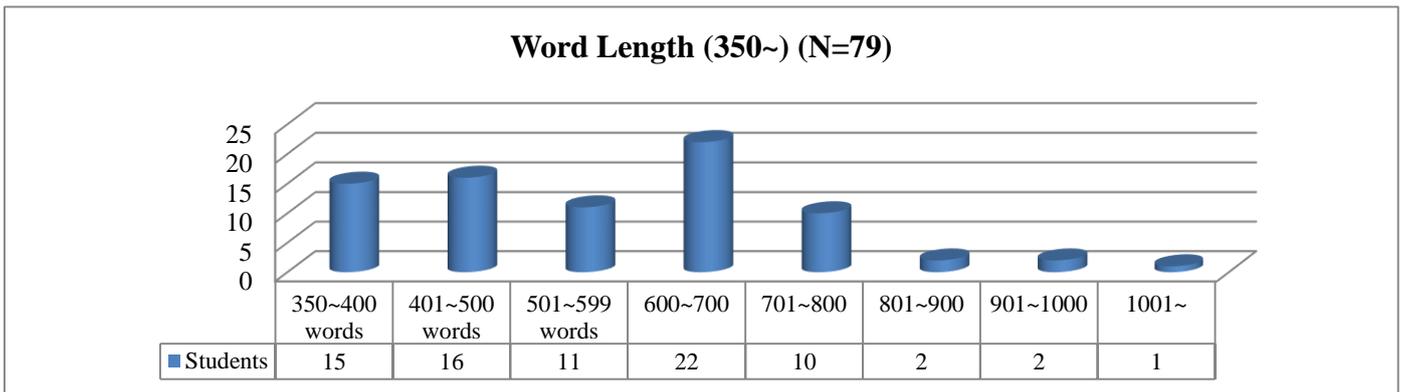
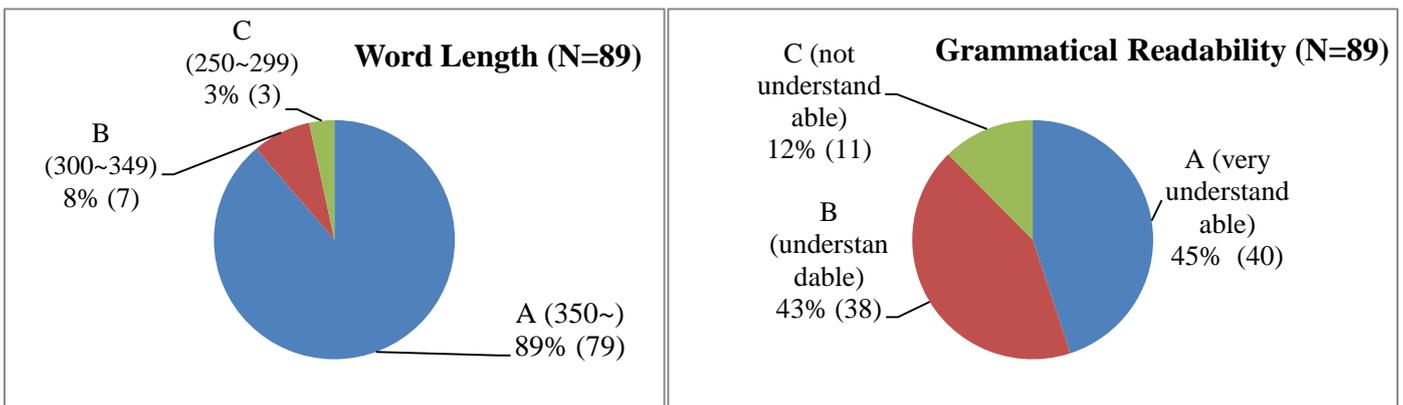
I created a questionnaire and a reflection sheet to know which activity is difficult, easy, or useful for students and what students find difficult about writing essays. After every performance test, both teachers and students answered a questionnaire about the used rubric and communicative activities so as to know which category and activity they have found useful and helpful to improve and evaluate their writing. This helped me to reflect upon future communicative activities and future evaluation criteria in order to make them more invaluable to foster their target language abilities. This also helped me to make rubrics and formative assessment tasks more credible and valid to students.

5) Results:

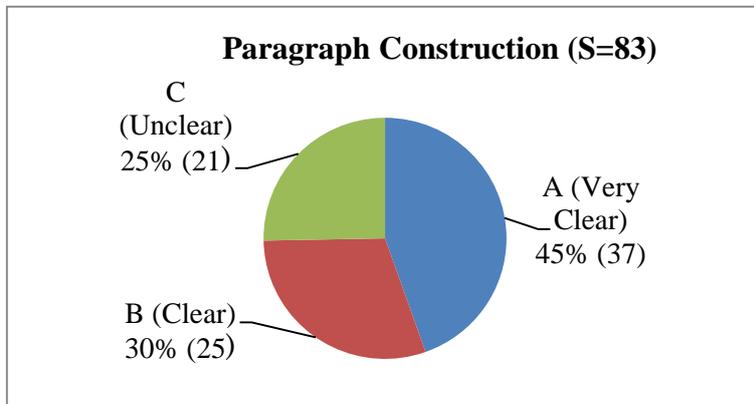
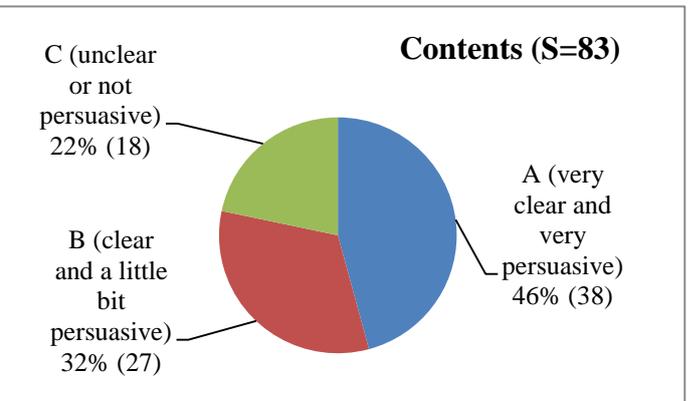
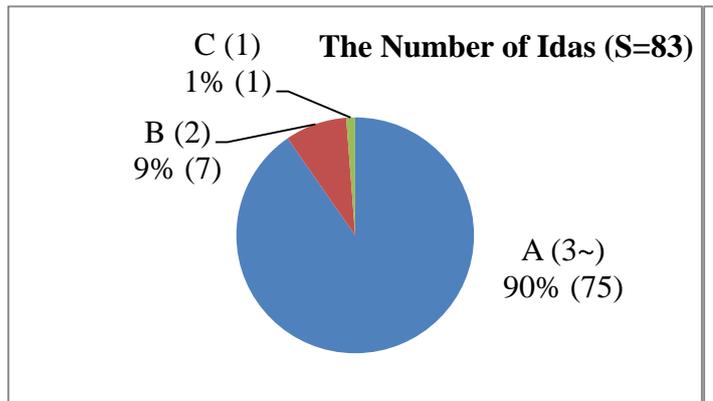
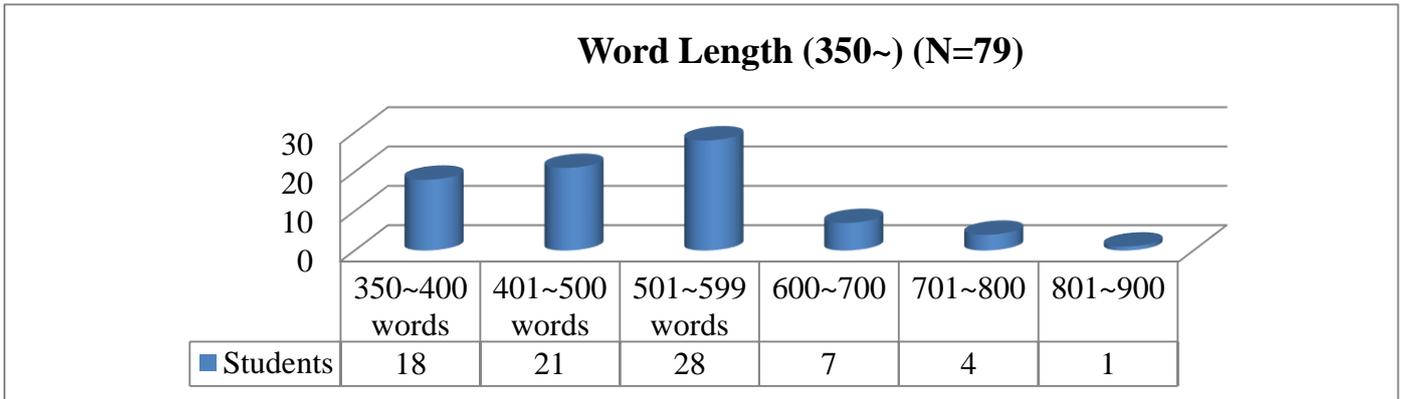
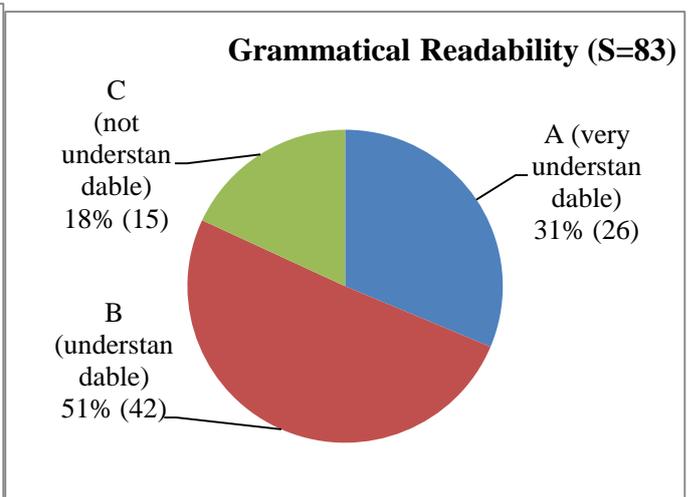
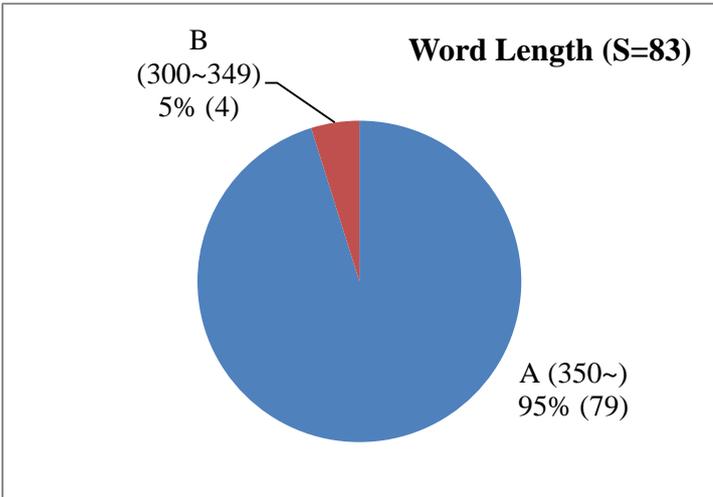
I) The Comparison between the Results of Writing Performance Tests in December and January

The two results of essay assessments in December and January are focused on in order to show how much the students improved their writing abilities. I am also looking at this data because the evaluation criteria for the two are similar.

<Solutions for Racial Discriminations> (December, 2015)

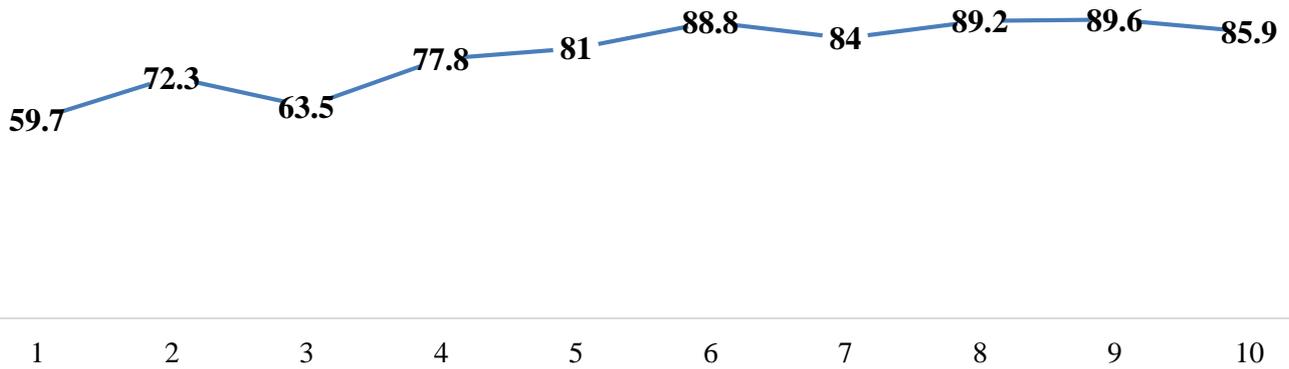


<Solutions for Water Crisis> (January, 2016)



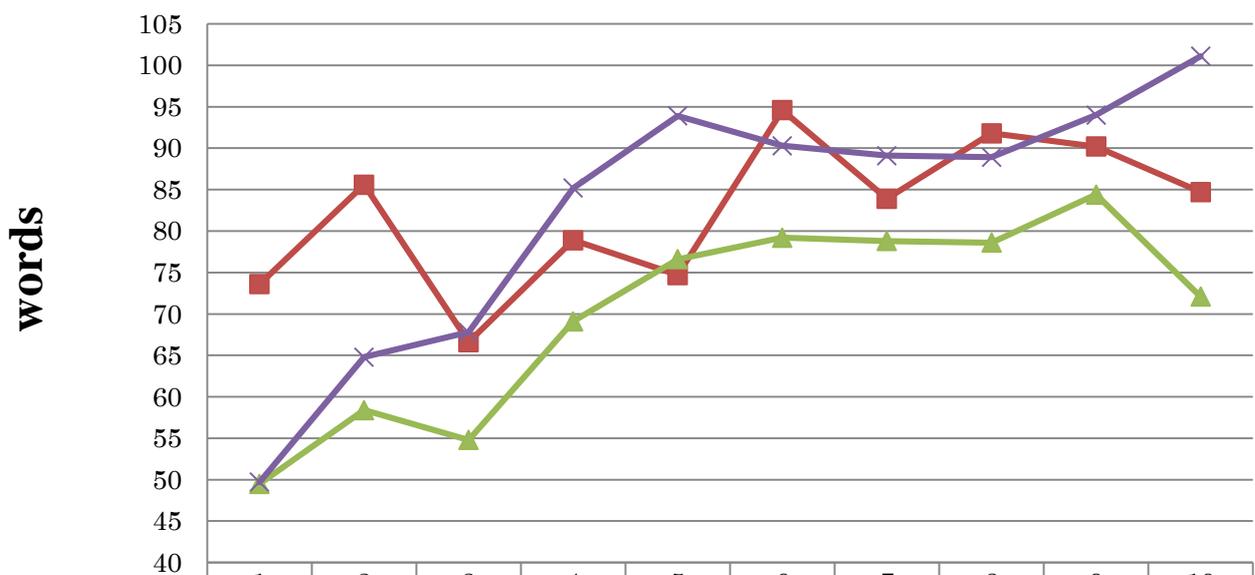
II) The Result of Flash Writing

AVERAGE WORD LENGTH (ALL THE CLASSES)



	Date	Topic	Average Word Length
1	The 23 rd of October, 2015	The Person You Admire	59.7
2	The 30 th of October, 2015	Halloween	72.3
3	The 4 th of November, 2015	A Measure against Racial Discrimination 1	63.5
4	The 11 th of November, 2015	A Measure against Racial Discrimination 2	77.8
5	The 13 th of November, 2015	Cross-Cultural Communication	81.0
6	The 18 th of November, 2015	A Multicultural Society	88.8
7	The 10 th of December, 2015	Environmental Issues	84.0
8	The 13 th of January, 2016	Winter Holidays	89.2
9	The 12 th of February, 2016	Solutions for Water Issues	89.6
10	The 9 th of March, 2016	Selective Breeding	85.9

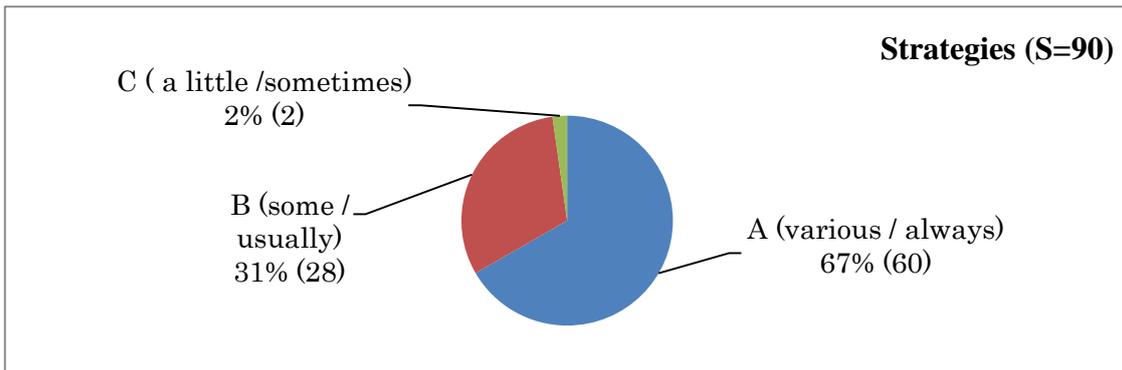
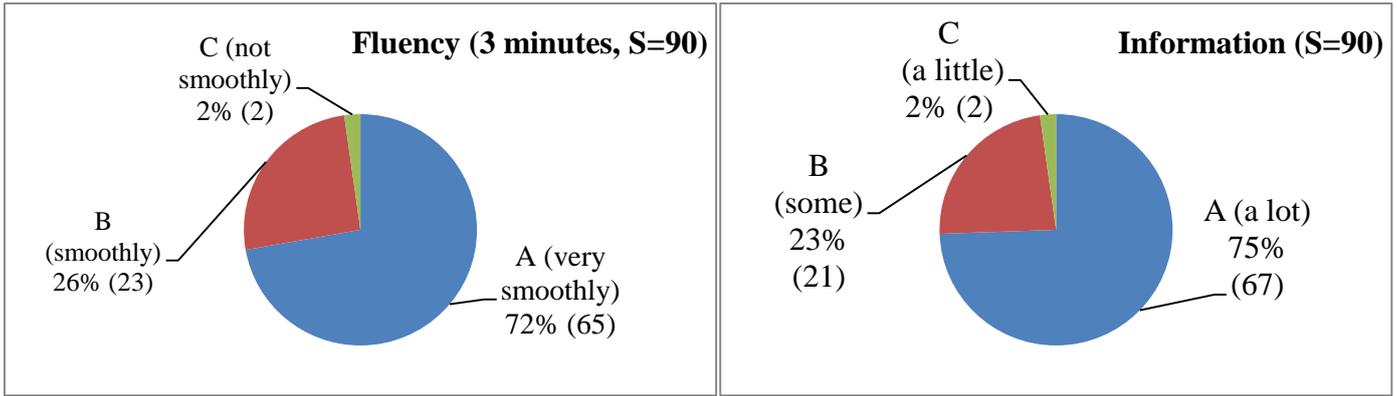
Average Word Length (each of the classes)



Upper-stream	73.6	85.6	66.6	78.9	74.7	94.6	83.9	91.8	90.2	84.7
Standard 1	49.5	58.4	54.8	69.1	76.6	79.2	78.8	78.6	84.4	72.1
Standard 2	49.7	64.8	67.8	85.2	93.9	90.3	89.1	88.9	94	101.1

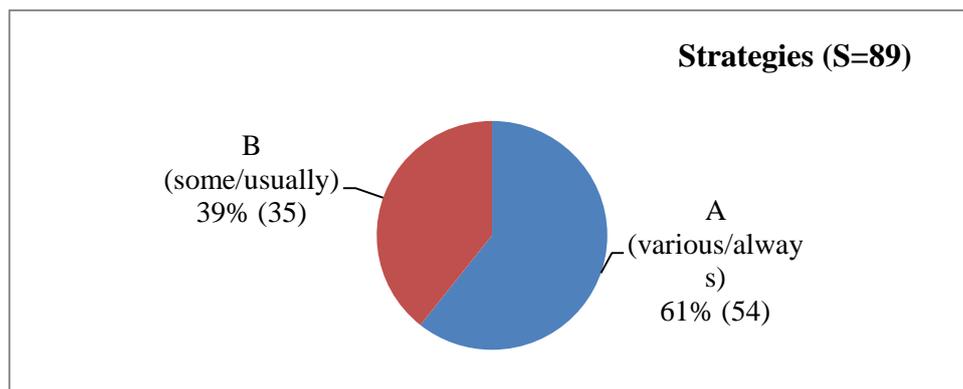
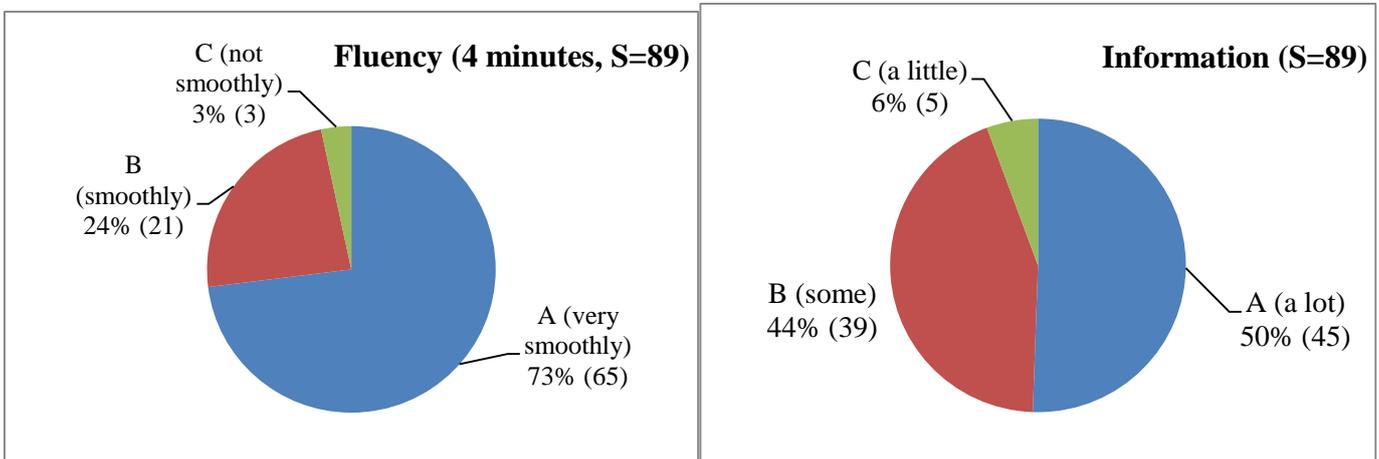
III) The Result of Speaking Performance Tests

<Solutions for Racial Discriminations> (December, 2015)



<Solutions for Water Crisis / Selective Breeding> (March, 2016)

*The topic for the speaking test in March was either 'Solutions for Water Issues' or 'Selective Breeding,' which were chosen by a lot on the examination day.



6) Findings:

- All the students are able to now write more than 300 words, according to the result of the writing performance test conducted in January, due to the allotment of marks for word length. Comparing with the fact that half of returnee students, who had returned to school last September and not known how to write an essay, could not write more than 200 words in the beginning of the second term, this result seems that their writing proficiency has progressed a lot in terms of word counts. Therefore, it can be concluded that the first objective that students would be able to write an essay using more than 300 words was accomplished.
- Regardless of the classes and learners' target language proficiency, they actually tend to focus on the word length more than the content and the paragraph construction even though about 90 per cent of the students sought to argue at least 3 ideas according to the result of the writing performance test in January. Most of them actually have difficulties in writing supporting sentences and concluding sentences coherently, which I think is a result of paragraph construction in January. The result taught me the importance of communicative writing activities, which I started to implement into my class from the second term. In the standard stream classes, students tried to read their partner's essays and give him or her some good feedback in the allotted time. Most of them, however, tended to avoid asking follow-up questions to deepen their understanding, especially when they found something convoluted in the essay. Time management and the difficulty of the activity will need to be reconsidered.
- According to the result of the average word length (all the classes) in Flash Writing activity, it seems that students improved their writing fluency within five minutes. Comparing between the first and the latest attempt, the average word length in the latter is about 25 words higher than the former. As the topic was usually related to the one that students were considering at that time, they got accustomed to expressing their ideas and opinions faster. In addition, their writing speed was improved due to the fact that they did not always need to pay attention to their grammatical accuracy, spelling mistakes or coherency, but the word length. Yet, accuracy and coherency are also classified into the components of writing abilities; thus, the activity to better learners' writing accuracy and coherency, such as communicative writing activities, will have to be emphasised.
- According to the result of the average word length (each of the classes), it seems that the standard stream 2 class improved their writing fluency more than the other two classes. However, it is rather difficult to conclude that their paragraph organisation skills and the contents were developed. The students in the standard stream 2 were very obedient and competitive; thus, most of them sought to concentrate on just their writing speed and paid less attention to the contents and the writing accuracy.
- Comparing the two results of speaking performance tests, it seems that almost all the students improved their speaking fluency. In addition, almost all the students seem to be able to use more conversation strategies than before. However, as the topics in March were rather difficult for students, the number of students who used various conversation strategies decreased. Moreover, although the negotiation for meaning, such as confirming the arguments, sometimes happened during the test, most of the students,

especially in standard streams, tended to avoid asking their partner to clarify his or her opinions and the meaning of the words they did not understand. Thus, it sometimes tended to become a one-sided speech rather than conversation. This result might show that some students in the streams had not prepared for discussing such controversial topics in speaking yet even though about half of the students could write an essay with more than 500 words by using reference.

7) Future Issues:

- I will need to choose topics more familiar to the students, as well as disputable if possible.
- I would like to gradually focus on the content and the paragraph construction more than the word length, when I assess their writing skills because it can foster their reading skills as well.
- As for Flash Writing, it may be good to let each student decide his or her goal/word length in the beginning of the school year and of each term, and to log their word length by themselves. This can motivate the students to realise the aim and foster their writing fluency within the given time.
- I may have to reassess the rubrics for Flash Writing activity as well, because, without the evaluation criteria, the students will not know how many words they will need to be able to write within the given time in general. Notwithstanding, regardless of the target language proficiency, there are both slow writers and fast writers and it is not always good to write fast. Therefore, it will be essential to consider learners' abilities.
- A number of supplementary handouts and resources will be necessary, when students start to practise paragraph writing, so as to help the students to broaden their perspective and facilitate their critical thinking. I, however, will really need to find the appropriate level for the students to distribute supplementary handouts to them, because they will get demotivated if they find difficulty in reading.
- The activity to better learners' writing accuracy and coherency, such as communicative writing activities, will have to be emphasised. For example, I will need to encourage the students to ask their partners more questions during communicative writing activities in especially standard-stream classes, because half of them tended to ignore their partner's arguments they did not understand and kept reading. In addition to this, I will need to spend more time on this activity because the word length is rather long.
- I would like to implement to-and-fro debate activities into my class if I take charge of the third year students next school year. I, however, will probably need to choose easier controversial topics for students to make scaffolding in the beginning. As some international course students belong to the English debate club, they may be able to assist me in teaching how to practise this type of discourse.
- I will need to make clearer rubrics for both writing and speaking to truly satisfy students with their results. For example, I will need to clarify what conversation strategies to evaluate in speaking tests and how to assess paragraph construction in writing tests. In order to accomplish this objective, I will need to get more detailed answers from the students through questionnaires. Moreover, it might be good to let them discuss the evaluation criteria and the descriptions for both writing and speaking performance tests together in the beginning of the school year and of each term so as to better rubrics.

B) Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan: (Lesson 10: Water Crisis)

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- Level: Second year students of senior high school (International Course)
- Class size: 40 students×1 class (the upper stream) and 26 students×2 classes (the standard stream)
- Text book: ELEMENT English Communication II (KEIRINKAN)
- Unit Goal & Objectives:
 - (1) Students will develop their critical thinking skills about solutions for water issue.
 - (2) Students will be able to have a four-minute conversation with their partner about solutions for water issue.
 - (3) Students will be able to write an essay about solutions for water issue with 350 words and more.
- Procedure:
 - Day one: Pre-reading, Skimming the whole text (Part1-4), Part1
 - Day two: Part1
 - Day three: Part2, Flash-Writing (This Class)
 - Day four: Part2, Communicative Writing Activity
 - Day five: Part3, Flash-Writing
 - Day six: Part3, Communicative Writing Activity
 - Day seven: Part4, Flash-Writing
 - Day eight: Part4, Communicative Writing Activity
 - Day nine: Comprehension, Practice Speaking Assessment
 - Day ten: Self-Evaluation, Peer-Evaluation, Questionnaire, and the Deadline for Fun Essay
- Today's lesson Plan:
 - 1. Flash Writing (topic: a measure against racial discrimination, 12.5 minutes)
 - (1) Brain-storming (2 min×2)
 - (2) Flash Writing (5 min)
 - (3) Counting words (1.5 min)
 - (4) Small talk (2 min)
 - 2. Pre-reading
 - (1) Small talk (3 min × 3 times = 9 minutes)
 - (2) True or False question 1: (0.5 min)
 - Guessing and answering the T or F question in the handout before reading Part3.
 - 3. While-reading
 - (1) True or False question2: (2 min + 1 min = 3 minutes)
 - (1) Reading Part 2 silently and answering the T or F question in the handout.
 - (2) After that, checking the answer in pairs
 - (2) Vocabulary Input: (3 min × 2 times + 1 min = 7 minutes)
 - Matching the underlined English words and Japanese ones
 - Giving the meanings in Japanese, pronouncing the new words and practice (Translating Japanese into English in pairs)
 - (3) Quick Reading1: (2 min)

- Reading Part 2 silently and timing the speed.
- (4) Detailed question: (5 min + 2 min + 1 min = 8 minutes)
- Reading Part 2 silently and answering the detailed questions about the story in English.
 - checking the answer in pairs
- (5) Reading Practice: (6 min)
- (3) 1st time-Teacher & Students
 - (4) 2nd time-Reading in a soft voice by themselves
 - (5) 3rd time-Students & Students
- (Shadowing: one of them doesn't see the textbook in turn)
- (6) Quick Reading2: (2 min)
- Reading Part 2 silently and timing the speed.

That's all for today's lesson.

4. Post-reading (If we have enough time to do.)

(7) Vocabulary Output

- Reading the definitions of the new words and filling in the blanks with listed below.

(8) Retelling

- Retelling the story of Part 2 with several sentences in pairs/a group.

(9) Timed-Conversation

- Writing their opinions about the lesson and talking in pairs.

C) Sample Hand-outs

Lesson 10: Water Crisis (Part 2 / Paragraph 4~6)

Small Talk:

- 1) What did you learn/realise from Lesson 10 (Part 1)?
- 2) What kind of water crisis have you come up with?
- 3) What do you think causes the issue?

Pre-Reading

True or False question: First of all, guess true or false before reading paragraph 4~6.

Circle T or F.

Q1: We are certain to need much more water in the future. T / F

Q2: Changes in lifestyle contribute to water shortages. T / F

Q3: "Virtual Water" has nothing to do with the total consumption of water. T / F

While Reading

Vocabulary Input: Match the underlined English words and Japanese ones.

- 1) The increasing world population, now over seven ()
- 2) It is evident that they world will need more water in the future. ()
- 3) In 1900 a person used only 350 cubic meters of water on average per day, ()
- 4) ..., all devices that did not exist long ago. ()
- 5) A large amount of water is also consumed in growing crops... [consume] ()
- 6) ... called "virtual water," which refers to the indirect use of water. ()
- 7) ...; producing meat is a particularly inefficient process, ... ()

[A:平均で B:道具 C:人口 D:非効率な E:明らかな F:消費する G:~に言及する]

Play janken-pon. Winners say Japanese and losers translate into English. When you have finished, change the role. I would like you to memorize all words or phrases.

Quick Reading 1 Read paragraph 4~6 silently and time your speed by yourself. (seconds)

Detailed question

Now answer the following questions in English. You may want to scan the text.

1) Q: What will the world population be by 2050?

A: _____

2) Q: What is "virtual water"?

A: _____

Check your answer with your friend.

Reading practice

Let's practice reading! 1st time- read the story with your teacher, check your pronunciation of the words you find difficult. 2nd time-read it again in a soft voice by yourself, 3rd time-shadowing; play janken-pon, losers shadow your partner without the textbook. Please change the role in each paragraph.

Quick Reading 2

Read paragraph 4~6 silently and time your speed by yourself. (seconds)

Post Reading

Vocabulary Output: Fill in the blanks with the words listed below.

- 1) _____: having form in three dimensions
 - 2) _____: to make by machine in a large quantity
 - 3) _____: a fuel derived from plants or animal waste
 - 4) _____: to believe; think
 - 5) _____: a regular action; routine
 - 6) _____: the basic unit of capacity of the metric system, equal to 1.056 liquid quarts or 0.908 dry quarts
 - 7) _____: to speak of; mention
- [suppose / cubic / habit / manufacture / litre / bio-fuel / refer]

Retelling: I want you to retell paragraph 4~6 with several sentences. You may use key words below if necessary. Play Janken-pon, winners first tell one sentence about the first information of part two. Then, losers will continue to tell the story with one sentence. Take turns retelling the story.

- < population explosion / water shortage / changes in lifestyle / crops >
- < bio-fuels / consumption / eating habits >

Timed-Conversation

“Solutions for Water Issues” is your fun-essay topic. This activity is useful for you to complete your speech text of a speech. First answer two questions ①~③ below. Then, start timed-conversation with your partner next to you. Play Janken-pon, losers start talking.

You have THREE minutes.

The list of conversation strategies

- opener / How about you? / shadowing / rejoinders / follow up questions / closer*
- Could you say that again, please? ←Use this, if you don't understand what your partner says.*

- ① Which kind of water crisis have you come up with?
- ② What do you think causes the issue?
- ③ What do you think people can do in order to solve the issue?
- ④ What else do you think people should do for the problem?

Learning & Reflection Diary: Please write what you learnt and realised through Lesson 10 part 2.

[Brain-Storming Sheet – Environmental Issues]

Environmental Issues

Flash Writing 6

Class: _____ **Number:** _____ **Name:** _____

Please keep writing your ideas/opinions about the given topic for 5 minutes.

You need not worry about grammatical errors and/or spelling mistakes.

However, you need to keep writing for the given minutes without your dictionary because this activity is helpful to improve your writing fluency within the given time. This paper will be collected.

Topic <

Environmental Issues

>

words

D) Rubric 1 (Writing): Solutions for Water Crisis (January)

Description: 350 語以上で水危機の解決策についてエッセイを書いてください。

イントロダクション・ボディ・コンクルージョンに分け、5 段落書いてください。

水危機の解決策について 3 つ意見・考えを挙げてください。

エッセイの最後に語数を必ず書いてください。

必要であれば参考文献の使用及び文中に引用をしてもかまいません。

ただし、教科書に記載されていることをそのまま引用することは禁止とします。

CATEGORY	A	B	C
Word Length	350 語以上 (5 points)	300~349 語 (3 points)	250~299 語 (1 point)
The Number of Ideas/Opinions	3 つ以上考え・意見が明確に述べられている。(6 points)	2 つ考え・意見が明確に述べられている。(4 points)	1 つ考え・意見が明確に述べられている。(2 points)
Contents	各段落において主張がとても明確であり、具体的事例や統計を含めていることから説得力がある。 (5 points)	各段落において主張は明確だが、抽象的な例・統計であるため、説得力があまりない。(3 points)	各段落において主張が不明瞭、または例・統計がほとんどない。 (1 point)
Paragraph Construction	Introduction, Body, Conclusion が明確である。また各段落のトピックセンテンス・サポート・結論が書かれており、よく構成されている。 (6 points)	各段落においてトピックセンテンス・サポート・結論が書かれている。しかし内容が明確でない箇所がたびたびある。(4 points)	Introduction, Body, Conclusion が不明瞭である。また、各段落においてトピックセンテンス・サポート・結論がちゃんと書かれていない。内容が少し分かりづらい。 (2 points)
Grammatical Accuracy	文法ミスが少ないのでとても読みやすく、内容を理解しやすい。(3 points)	いくつか文法ミスがあるが、読みやすく、内容を理解しやすい。(2 points)	文法ミスが多くあるが、かろうじて読みやすく、内容を理解できる。 (1 point)
Bonus	自分の意見をサポートするために 3 つ以上の参考文献及び本文中に引用がある。 (2 points)	550 語以上書いてある。 (2 points)	トピックに関連する絵や写真が使われている。(1 point)
			Total Points
			Points

Comments from the teacher:

G) Rubric 2 (Speaking):

A) Solutions for Water Crisis / B) Arguments for or against Selective Breeding (March)

Description: 4分間与えられたトピックについて話してください。

与えられたトピックに関して自分の考えや意見を述べてください。

できる限り多くの **conversation strategies** 及び **follow-up questions** を用いてください。

CATEGORY	A	B	C
Fluency	4分間会話が流暢に続いた。 (4 points)	4分間会話がほとんど流暢に続いた。 (2 points)	4分間会話がなんとか続けられた。 (1 point)
Contents	与えられたトピックに関して具体的な例・情報・経験などを述べ、筋の通った形で自分の意見をうまく主張した。 (6 points)	与えられたトピックに関して例・情報・経験などを述べ、自分の意見をうまく主張した。 (4 points)	与えられたトピックに関してなんとか自分の意見を主張した。 (2 points)
Strategies (conversation strategies and follow-up questions)	様々な conversation-strategies 及び follow-up questions を適切なときに用いて、相手に意見や考えを述べる機会をうまく与えられた。 (5 points)	大抵 conversation-strategies 及び follow-up questions を適切なときに用いることができたが、相手に意見や考えを述べる機会をあまりうまく与えられていなかった。 (3 points)	conversation-strategies 及び follow-up questions を用いることができたが、一方的に話しがちだった。 (1 point)

Total Points	Points
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Comments from the teacher: