

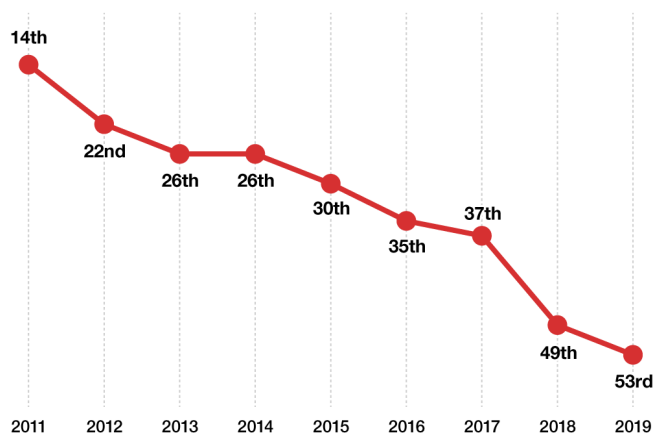
2021 Final AR Report: Developing Effective Strategies to Improve English Written Communication Skills in the Japanese Classroom

1. Introduction

The Asia-Pacific region is a dynamic and changing area of the world. Japan is one of many nations competing for increasing global economic and diplomatic influence, and English has become central to this globalization. Many Asia-Pacific nations are making significant advances in the English proficiency levels of their citizens. However, for the greater part of recent decades, Japan's English education system has been relatively slow in developing the communicative skills of its learners, while instead promoting grammatical-accuracy. A 2019 study by the Swiss "Education First Foundation" has found Japan is currently ranked 53rd in the world in terms of English proficiency, below: Vietnam 52nd, China 40th, and South Korea 37th. Moreover, Japan has fallen from 14th to 53rd since 2011. This situation of Japan falling behind is outlined in Figure 1. In response, MEXT will introduce a new curriculum into schools from around 2024. Moreover, the university sector will make changes to student entry based more on a comprehensive four-skills integrated test, whose preparation may be outsourced to private companies. Today, Japan is attempting to bring the English communicative ability and written skills of its citizens to a higher global standard.

Figure 1

Japan's EF English Proficiency Index World Ranking



Note: *Education First* Data from English Proficiency Index (Retrieved from Nippon.com, 2019)

I work at a private senior high school where most students hope to go onto higher education at private universities. My action research seeks to examine how my writing lessons can further students' skills through the implementation of freewriting and related communicative tasks. It also investigated whether the process benefits students when they sit English proficiency exams. My target class of third-year students is focused on passing grade Pre-1 of the Japanese Eiken national English proficiency exam, so I would formulate ways to structure my teaching in order for students to achieve this goal. The Japan-wide Eiken English proficiency test which assesses reading, listening, written and spoken skills, including a written section requiring students express their opinion on social issues. In order that students complete this section successfully I have come to focus my lessons on having students write quickly and succinctly on given topics. These tests have grown in importance in recent times as they offer a pathway for students to gain preferential entry to the university of their choice.

2. Literature Review

As part of this research, I will examine and present an overview of seven relevant areas of research in this field.

Communicative Competence

Communicative Competence (CC) has been defined by Lightbown and Spada (2013) as that "ability to use language in a variety of settings, taking into account relationships between speakers and differences in situations" (pp. 214-215). Hence, messages can still be communicated effectively despite lacking grammatical accuracy. This enables learners who would otherwise have trouble communicating in a communicative language teaching (CLT) setting to interact more effectively. Lee and VanPatten (2003) outline an explanation of CC and its four main components identified by Savignon (1998) namely: *grammatical competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, *discourse competence*, and *strategic competence*. The first two emphasize learning the social and "appropriateness" rules of a language, while the latter two focus on the use of verbal and non-verbal communication to mitigate breakdowns when they occur in communication. These competences offer communicators the tools to be able to solve problems and "repair" inevitable miscommunications that arise during interactions. Savignon argued that while all competences are interrelated, it is most important for learners to acquire strategic competence as it promotes the development of CC "although its importance in relation

to the other components diminishes as knowledge of grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules increases” (p. 49). Teachers need to combine and adjust their focus on these individual competences according to the differing developmental processes of their learners’ CC.

Communicative Language Teaching

This is an approach to language teaching designed to promote communication skills for “real world, meaningful purposes” (Brown, 2007, p. 378). It can offer a more balanced and effective means of teaching both receptive and productive skills than earlier teaching approaches, such as grammar-translation (GTM) or audio-lingual methods (ALM). CLT has been defined as being “based on the premise that successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings” (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 159). This broader definition has been the rationale for many approaches to language learning that have evolved in recent decades. CLT contrasts with traditional GTM and ALM methods of instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 215) which tend to restrict learners in their ability to communicate effectively in their L2. Additionally, the over-reliance on accuracy that these methods promote “often leads learners to feel inhibited and reluctant to take chances in using their knowledge for communication” (p. 159). There is ample evidence to show that there are clear advantages in developing a communicative approach in the classroom with its emphasis on meaning-focused communication.

Skills Integration

A highly effective way to improve CC has been demonstrated by the successful integration of the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Brown (2007) states that “the integration of the four skills – or at least two or more skills – is the typical approach within a communicative, interactive framework” (p. 286). It had long been the case in the Japanese classroom that skills are taught separately. However, in a longitudinal study conducted by Sato and Takahashi (2008), a high school curriculum was revitalized after the adoption of integrated speaking and written performance tests on the same topics. By shifting away from traditional approaches to assessment and teaching one-skill at a time, students’ fluency and accuracy was recorded to make considerable progress.

Brown argues in favor of skill integration and that: “often one skill will reinforce another; we learn to speak, for example, in part by modelling what we hear, and we learn to write

by examining what we can read.” (2007, p.287) By integrating skills, teachers can more authentically replicate real-world language usage while simultaneously helping to make their lessons more motivating and interesting for learners.

Freewriting

Freewriting is designed primarily to increase the speed and quantity of what students’ produce. It was defined and developed by Elbow (1973), and his research in this area is seen as ground-breaking, contributing to significant developments in the teaching of written skills. He proposed that within a time frame, students write down any ideas or thoughts that came to mind without stopping. By doing so, they would be avoiding tendencies such as self-editing and the fear of making errors that have the potential to disrupt the flow of written thoughts and diminish the amount of writing output.

Freewriting, has been seen to develop through regular practice. Since the initial phase of writing should target the generation of ideas, this must be separated from the editing process, which should come later. Studies have shown that with freewriting tasks, where topics are set by the teacher, students benefit by overcoming initial hesitations they may have had starting off the writing process (Elbow & Belanoff, 2000). It is seen to be particularly effective when students feel unburdened in their free-writing by the notion that their teacher will check and grade their writing. In this way, they can write as freely and unrestricted as is possible. Elbow (1998a) asserted that the freewriting process enhanced students’ written fluency by converting their stream of consciousness into textual form. In this way they would be unburdened by text they had already produced. His then-new approach to teaching writing shifted the focus towards developing self-confidence and promoting inspiration among students so that they ultimately developed more sophisticated, quality pieces of writing.

Complexity in Writing

Freewriting, as a means of developing fluency, can build one of the three main foundations of language production in second language acquisition. Along with the other two foundations: accuracy and complexity, it makes up the three-tiered model first put forward by Skehan (1989; 1998). Housen and Kuiken (2009) explain the terms thus:

Complexity has thus been commonly characterized as “[t]he extent to which the language produced in performing a task is elaborate and varied” (Ellis, 2003, p. 340), accuracy as the ability to produce error-free speech, and fluency as the ability to process

the L2 with “native-like rapidity” (Lennon, 1990, p. 390) or “the extent to which the language produced in performing a task manifests pausing, hesitation, or reformulation” (Ellis, 2003, p. 342). (p. 461)

Taken together, these three constructs are commonly referred to as CAF in linguistics. With the growing body of literature on the subject, numerous metrics have been put forward as appropriate measures of complexity, such as number of words per sentence or the number of different words per sentence.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy appears to be a key factor in determining the level of success achieved by students in their endeavor to becoming better writers. Student self-efficacy beliefs can be defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Bandura outlined how learner beliefs have major potential to influence learner outcomes than could be otherwise predicted by their actual learning ability. Bandura (1997) explained that those with higher assessments of their own writing ability become better writers. He went on to explain that “[p]eople with a high sense of efficacy have the staying power to endure the obstacles and setbacks that characterize difficult undertakings” (p. 8). Later on, Bown (2009) showed student level of self-efficacy is crucial in influencing their adoption of learning strategies.

Bandura (2001) outlined the vital role self-efficacy plays in learners’ levels of motivation, goal-setting, the amount of effort spent carrying out a task. Moreover, “[u]nless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (Bandura, 2001). Low self-efficacy levels by Japanese students could be seen to be a result of a number of factors. As mentioned before, an overemphasis on accuracy in the traditional Japanese classroom has impacted the development of communicative language skills in Japan, in particular when comparisons are made with other Asian countries. Although, steps have been taken in recent to redress the situation. Komiyama (2017) has stated that a “reason that writing instruction is neglected in the high school classroom is that traditionally Japanese teachers spend a considerable amount of time correcting students’ grammatical errors, which often ends up lowering students’ confidence in their writing” (p. 362).

Mixed Methods Approach

There has been considerable discussion within the second language research community as to the most appropriate research method or methods to use when researching second language acquisition. Historically, quantitative methods dominated, but in recent times there has been significant movement toward the use of qualitative methods. Dörnyei (2007) defined quantitative data as data that objectively uses numbers, requires categories prior to collecting data, is centered on studying variables of a group, and which is presented through the use of statistics. This he contrasts with qualitative data: data that most often appears in textual form, is not collected with the purpose of being directly counted, and is rich with complex details about individuals within a group. Some research questions can be best investigated with one or the other of these methods; however, there are some questions that benefit from a combination of the two. As researchers discovered this, mixed methods research (MMR) was born. MMR can be defined as the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data within a single study, which is then mixed at one or more stages of the research process (Dörnyei, 2007). MMR, has proved itself to be a popular method among the research community so as to provide better reliability to its results and enable more informed conclusions to be drawn.

3. Research issues and research questions

Research shows that freewriting and its subsequent effects in developing learner fluency, plays a considerable role in improving a learner's written skills. My AR1 began with a general aim of developing of students' written skills by attempting to restructure an accuracy-focused "writing" class in my school's curriculum. Before my first year of AR, these writing lessons were based on grammar-translation and the memorization of sentences. I brought in changes centered around the implementation of free-writing tasks, with noticeable improvements in learner motivation and confidence levels.

Subsequently, as MEXT gave schools directives to adopt a more communicative curriculum and universities began changing their ways of admitting students, my research also began to change. My lessons began focusing more on essay-writing on social issues. My AR2 became more concerned with the role freewriting skills-development and self-efficacy plays in students' passing such proficiency testing where essay writing has become integral.

This is a longitudinal study employing both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to measure the effectiveness of freewriting on learners' ability to write essays. The questions that

developed from the first year of AR that formed the basis of research questions in my second year of AR (2020), were as follows:

- (1) What effect do free-writing activities have on developing students' confidence in their own written skills?
- (2) What effect do skills acquired during free-writing activities have on the development of skills to write more complex essays?
- (3) How have free-writing and essay-writing activities impacted students' written skills to prepare them to pass Grade Pre-1 of the Eiken exam?

4. Method

My teaching context is that of a Japanese private-sector, senior high school, situated in central Japan. The target research class is a third-grade writing class, in an English-specialist course of students, comprising 26 senior high school students, aged 17-18 years old: 22 females and four males. Some of the students have experienced living in other countries due to their parents being posted to work overseas. Additionally, a significant proportion of students use a main language other than Japanese in their home environments and have been raised to be bilingual or multilingual. They have been grouped together as a unit since they were first graders, and I have taught them since that time. My class with them is two fifty-minute periods in succession.

For my AR2 I hoped to discover ways in which students' written skills could also improve students' essay-writing skills and the passing EIKEN grade Pre1, in particular. My school requires our students to sit such tests on multiple occasions during the school year. As Tanner (2016) outlines, a key advantage of freewriting skill development is that it helps learners prepare for the essay writing sections of English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL, IELTS, and Eiken. These tests rely on students being able "to generate ideas and write quickly with a focus on content over error-free prose"(p. 9). In addition to producing an expected number of words, a key focus of essays at the Grade Pre-1 (or Grade 1) level of Eiken is their focus on contemporary issues of society and culture, technology, the environment and so on (see Appendix A). The test has three sections: reading, listening and writing. Each is worth one-third of their total score. Hence, a low or high score in the writing section can considerably affect the overall chances of students passing or failing.

To bring about this result, I implemented a number of innovations to my lessons, such as:

- informing students of the basic structure of English essays, which differ to those written in Japanese
- teaching students about the usage of key connective phrases, such as “therefore”, “as a result,” and “on the other hand” (see Appendix C).
- having students engage recursively in free-writing so as to improve their skill at writing speedily. In this way, they could complete the writing section of the test faster, freeing up time they may need for other sections of the exam, such as the reading comprehension sections.
- setting written take-home essays, using the essay section of the first (written) stage of the Eiken Grade Pre-1 test as a model. I downloaded model answers from the short-essay written sections of their online sample exam (Eiken Foundation of Japan, 2020) for them to emulate (see Appendix A). Word limits were set in the 120-150 word-range, as per the actual tests.
- having them follow the accepted writing conventions of producing essays containing paragraphs and indentation, with introductions, a main body and conclusion. Necessary care was to be taken with spelling, grammar and with legible handwriting.

During my AR1 I had developed a rubric to evaluate the essays (see Appendix B). As of April, 2020, the majority of the class, (17 out of 26 students) had passed Grade 2 and had reached the point where Grade Pre-1 is the goal on which they would be focusing. Lessons were loosely based around the textbook “TOPIC TALK ISSUES” (EFL Press), supplemented with my own materials. I continued developing communicative activities prior to freewriting, post-freewriting peer-feedback and settled on a rubric to develop student essay-writing skills. Essay skills were given a new emphasis to focus more on expressing opinions about social issues, as indicated by grade Pre-1 of the Eiken exam. A list of freewriting and essay topics set throughout the year is given in Table 1.

Table 1*Freewriting and Essay Topics for AR2: 2020*

Freewriting Topics (20)	Essay Topics (11)
1. Health	1. How was your three-month isolation caused by COVID-19?1
2. Family	2. Do you think it is OK for parents to physically punish their children?
3. My Passion	3. Write a review of the short film (about homelessness) watched in class.
4. Social Media	4. Does social media have a positive effect on society?
5. Animals	5. Should animals be treated better?
6. Culture	6.. What culture or cultures do you belong to?
7. TV/ Movies	7. Write a movie or TV show review (students' own choice).
8. Summer Vacation	
9. Own Choice of Topic (1)	
10. Shopping	8. Do commercials influence people to buy things they do not need?
11. Own Choice of Topic (2)	
12. Own Choice of Topic (3)	
13. School	9. Are Japanese high schools too strict?
14. Superstitions	
15. Nature	10. Should we do more to protect the environment?
16. Fashion	
17. Celebrities	11. My Language Learning Story
18. Jobs	
19. Christmas/ New Year	
20. High School Memories	12. My Future

Data from class-wide surveys, focus-student interviews and freewriting wordcount record sheets were collected as per the schedule outlined in Table 2. Wordcount record sheets were filled in post-freewriting, provided data after every weekly session. I carried out two surveys and focus-interview sessions apiece during first and second semesters. Surveys included quantitative data gathered using a 5-point Likert scale and qualitative data using open-response questions. Students gave consent to participate in this research, under pseudonyms. Focus interviews were audio-recorded.

Table 2*Triangulation Design of AR2, 2020*

Instrument	Time Administered							
	Semester 1			Semester 2				
	April/May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Class survey	no school	○		○				○
Focus interviews	no school		○		○		○	
Wordcount record sheets	no school	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Freewriting analysis	no school	○				○		
Essay analysis	no school	○				○	○	

In addition to focus-interviews with six students, I examined five pieces each (a total of 30 items) of their writing for writing complexity using a variety of online tools. I examined the first and last pieces of freewriting and each students' subsequent homework-essay in addition to a final essay produced by them in class. Four key sets of data were analyzed: the number of different words used, the percentage of different words-to-total wordcount ratio, and the incidence of verb and connective usage.

5. Results

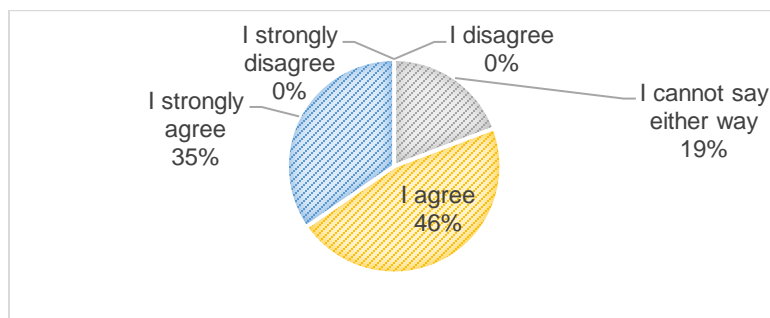
Answers to my research questions are as follows:

- (1) What effect do freewriting activities have on developing students' confidence in their own written skills?

On the issue of the impact freewriting and essay-writing had on students' confidence to write in English, 81 per cent of respondents expressed agreement that the freewriting-focused writing class helped their confidence to write in English, with the remainder of respondents (19%) being neutral. The results are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Student responses to: "This Writing class helped improve my confidence to write in English."



Samples of comments from my focus students who were interviewed on the benefits of freewriting, include:

- "It helped me remember English vocabulary I had studied." (Maria)
- "I stopped stopping when I write. I no longer get so worried about making mistakes when I write so now my writing pace is faster." (Maya)
- "My writing got smoother and my hesitations to write sentences disappeared." (Mika)
- "I could feel my writing power improve every time (I did freewriting)." (Anna)

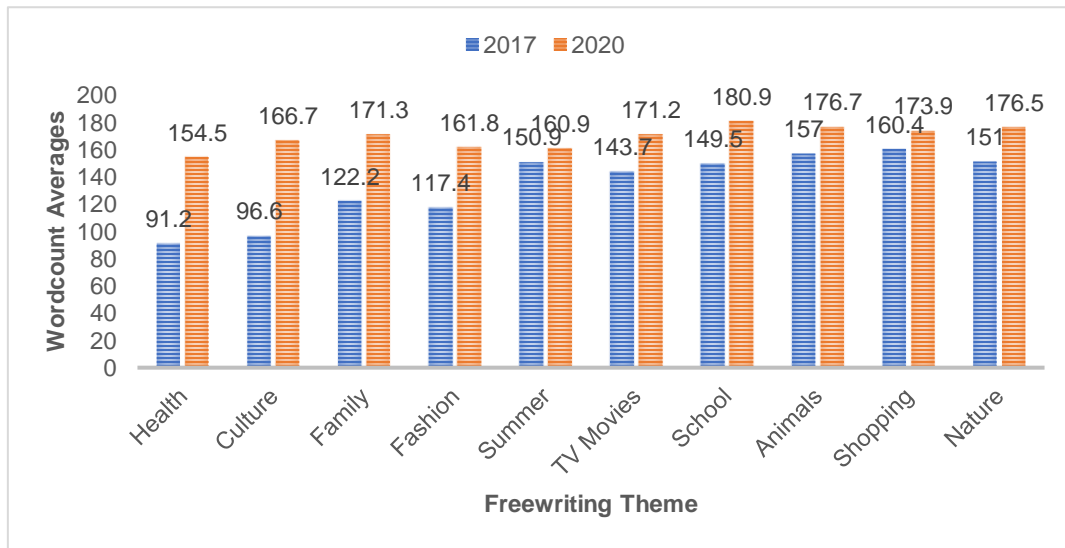
- “Before I used to hate writing, but now it has become fun.” (Shion)

Based on this survey data it appears that this Writing class with its emphasis on freewriting and essay writing has been successful in overcoming any negative perceptions students may have had about their confidence in their own writing skills.

On the other hand, I began wondering if wordcounts alone were enough in examining whether or not students written skills were developing. In my initial year of AR, wordcounts generally rose steadily throughout the year. However, during my AR2 this occurred only during the first few months (see Figure 3). The higher wordcount figures for AR2 could be attributable to the more communicative nature in which my lessons had become, the more frequent setting of writing tasks, or simply due to the higher proficiency for students this year, compared with those in 2017.

Figure 3

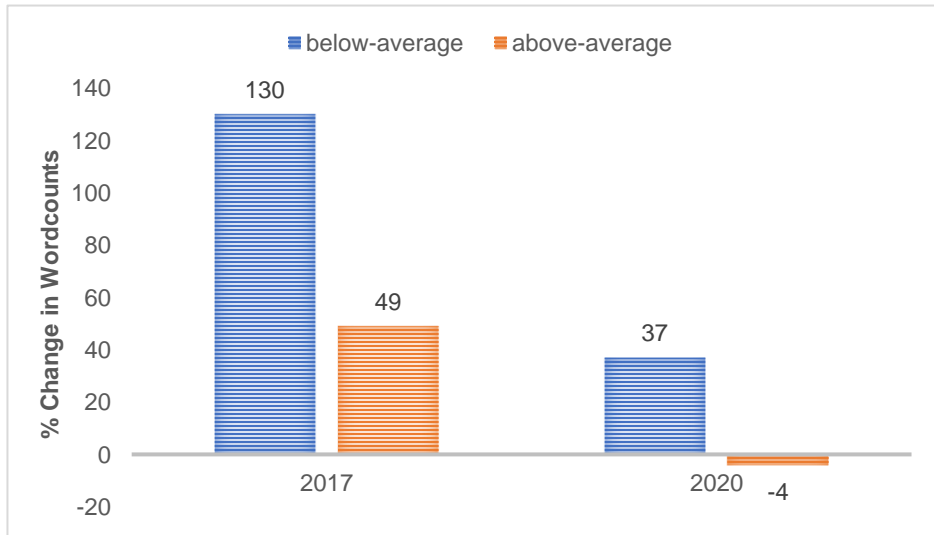
Freewriting wordcount averages according to theme



Data also seemed to show lower-to-intermediate students increasing the wordcounts at a rate substantially greater than their higher-proficiency level classmates (see Figure 4). It could be inferred that students with lower confidence and proficiency benefited the most from confidence-building freewriting tasks. Those with higher proficiency may have less room for improvement.

Figure 4

Comparison of wordcount changes by below- versus above-average students

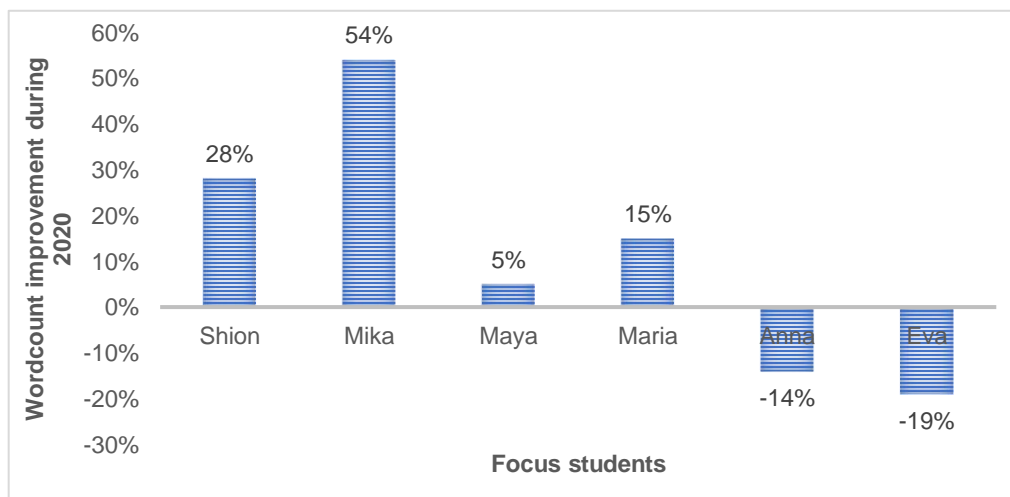


(2) What effect do skills acquired during freewriting activities have on the development of essay-writing skills?

Over the course of the year, wordcount aggregates did not increase as much as was the case during my AR1, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Change in wordcounts for six focus students (pseudonyms used) over the first 10 weeks of study



Talking with students, it seemed to me that the benefits of freewriting seemed less about these tallies and more about the process itself, and how it contributes to an improvement in the quality or complexity of the writing. I investigated this by examining quantitative and qualitative data from six focus students over the course of the year. The four measures of complexity chosen for

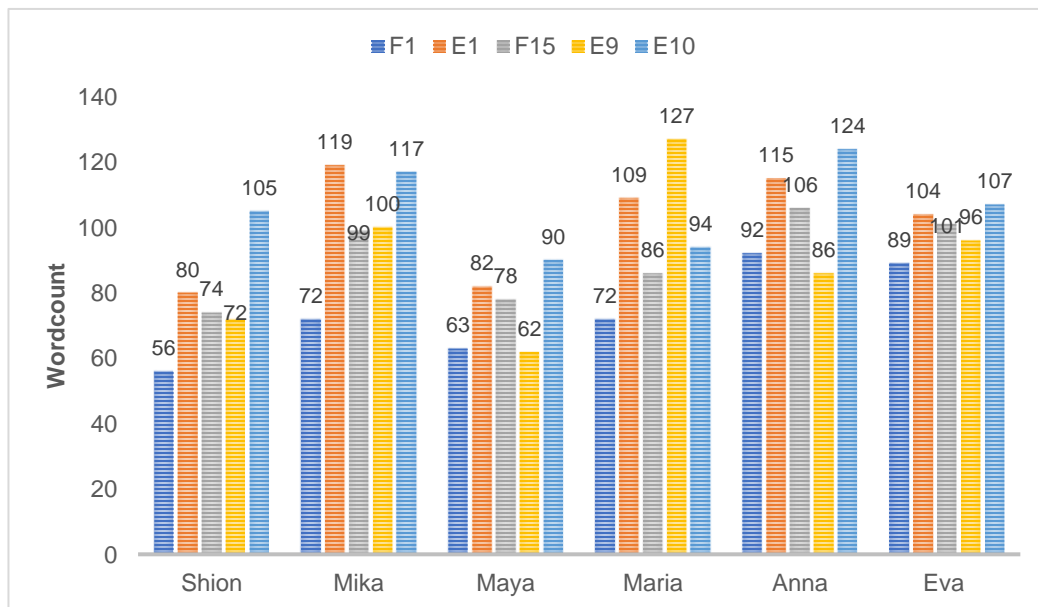
this study were: the number of different words, the number of different words as a proportion of total words, and the numbers of verbs and connectives used. Here I will outline two of them.

Number of different words

Figure 6 displays the number of different words used by focus students in these five selected pieces of writing. Number of words is considered important in writing as it is an indicator of lexical complexity. For example, it could represent an ability to paraphrase and summarize. Maria wrote a significantly greater number of different words in her writing than was true in the case of Shion.

Figure 6

“Number of different words” rating for focus students’ five selected freewriting & essay-writing sessions.



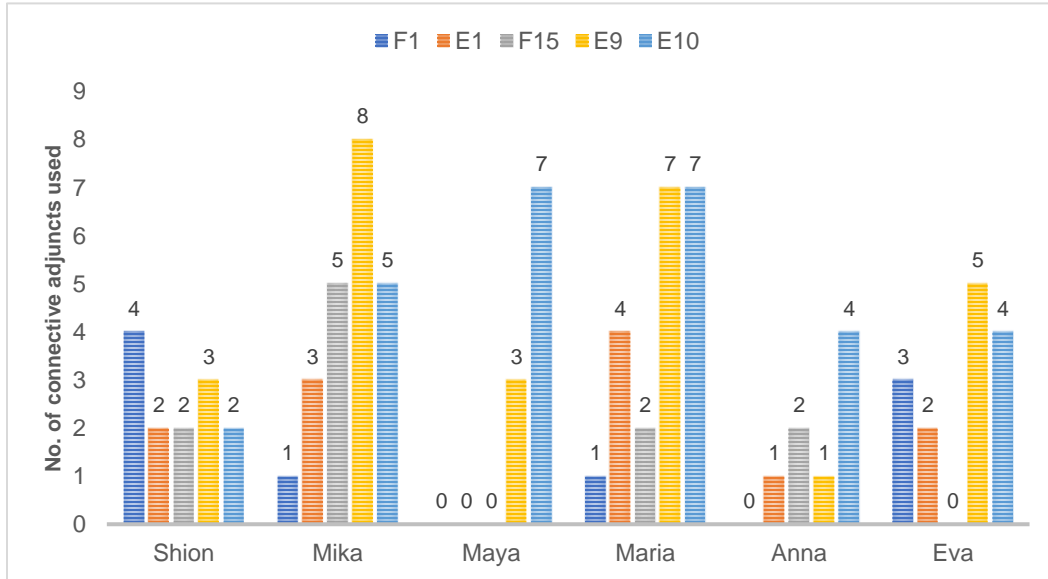
Frequency of connectives usage

Figure 7 shows the number of connectives used by students in their writing from the list of 39 I had given them at the start of the year. Again, E9 appears to be the piece of writing in which students chose to use the most connectives, so further research could look into the reasons for this. Maya showed little usage in the first three writing tasks, yet by the end was using them at a rate higher than all other students except for Maria. Therefore, it could be inferred that her writing became more complex in terms of coherency over the period of study. Anna, despite her high wordcounts and essay grades, showed the lowest overall incidence of connectives usage.

While connective usage can help the reader to understand the message of a piece of writing, this data suggests that connectives frequency may not be a determining factor in writing complexity.

Figure 7

Number of connectives adjuncts used for focus students' five selected freewriting and essay-writing sessions.



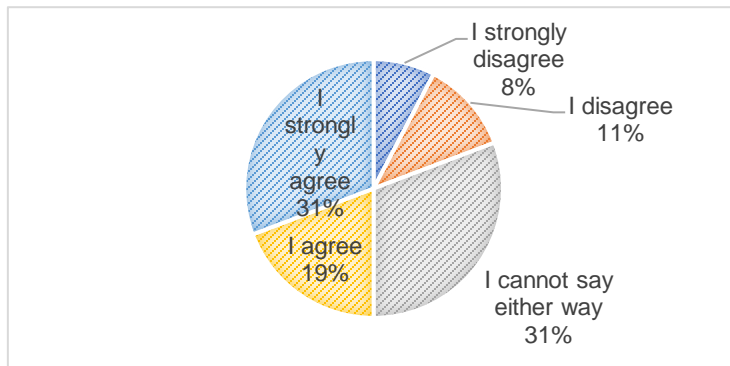
Therefore, it appears that over the five pieces of writing analyzed that students generally improved the number of words used and the frequency of connectives usage. It could thus be inferred that improvements in writing complexity in their writing occurred, at least in regard to these factors.

(3) How have the skills developed during freewriting and essay-writing prepared students to pass Grade Pre-1 of the Eiken English proficiency test?

Over the period of the study, seven students in the class passed grade Pre-1 of the Eiken exam, and a number also passed grade 2. One in two students agreed or strongly agreed that it helped them pass the Eiken exam. However, 31 per cent were neutral and 20 per cent it did not help. The results are displayed in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Student responses to the statement: "This Writing class helped me pass the Eiken exam."



As outlined, a key goal of my research was to assist students in passing Grade Pre-1 of the Eiken exam. Elbow (1998b) explained a major benefit of freewriting is its effect to help generate flexible thinking by causing you (the writer) “to end up thinking something you couldn’t have started out thinking” (p. 16). Through regular freewriting practice, students came to write faster which can benefit those taking the Eiken test. They also came to learn to write more coherently, using various essay structural conventions and rhetorical markers. My lessons provided students with multiple opportunities to think deeply about contemporary issues, which are often featured in Eiken testing. In interviews for with my participants, focus students made references to the fact that freewriting and essay-writing activities developed their skills to the point where they could pass the test, and they thought they most likely would not have done so without taking my class. Some qualitative data gained through interviews with focus students in August include:

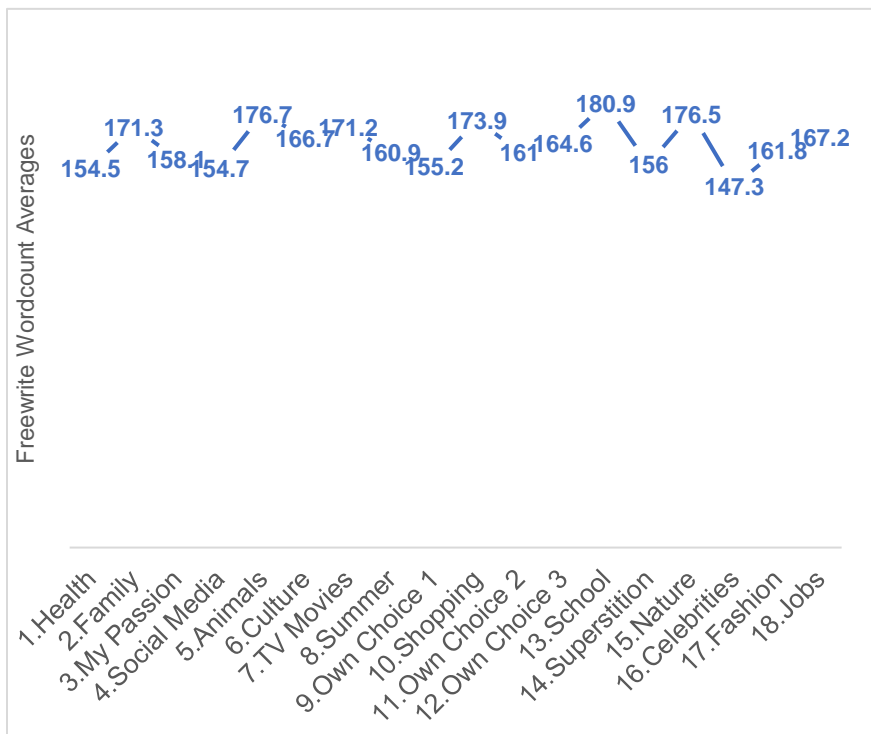
- “I learned tips to write good essays that helped me pass the exam, such as useful phrases and style of paragraphs.” (Maria)
- “It was useful that topics we did in class were similar to Eiken topics.” (Anna)
- “My writing speed improved so when I did the writing section of the Eiken exam I finished it early and I could spend extra time on the other sections.” (Mika)
- “I was surprised this time I got a good score (in the Eiken exam’s writing section) and without that I wouldn’t have passed Grade 2 overall.” (Maya)

- “This time I got 14 points out of 16 for the essay section which was better than last time. My writing technique got better and I got confidence to say my opinion about social issues. Thanks to this I could pass Eiken Grade Pre-1.” (Eva)
- “I don’t need Eiken test results for the vocational college I will enter next year, so it wasn’t useful to me.” (Shion)

Generally speaking, students expressed satisfaction and seemed motivated by lessons during the first six months of the year. However, as the year progressed from the summer to autumn months and progressively more students sat and passed exams for their post-secondary studies, motivation did seem to fall. Wordcount averages peaked during late September: the week students wrote about “School” (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

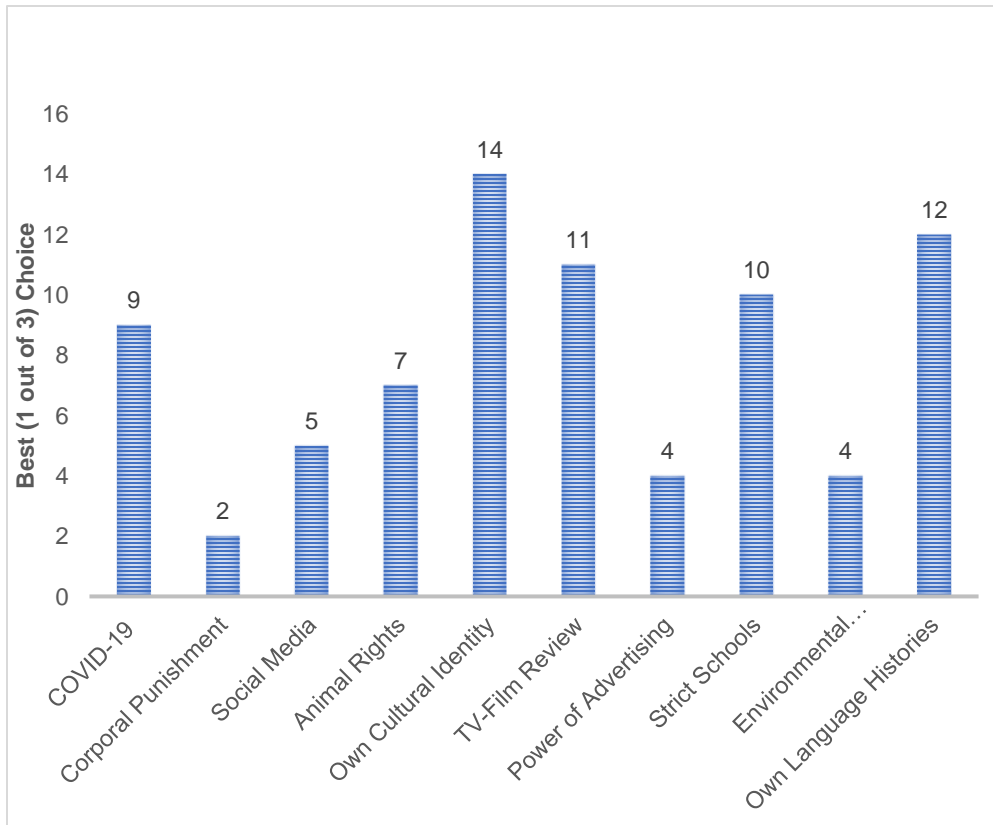
Freewriting wordcount averages according to theme



Next year I may set less social-issue-style essay-topics during the latter half of the year, as these seem to be less motivating for students. In the December class survey, I asked students to nominate the top three essay topics they liked the best. The results are displayed in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Popularity of essay topics among students.



The most popular proved to be: “What culture or cultures do you belong to?” followed by: “My language learning story.” The least popular topic was: “Do you think it is ok for parents to physically punish their children?” followed by: “Do commercials influence people to buy things they do not need?” Therefore, it might be inferred that students prefer writing about more personalized essay topics and less about the more social issues-style of essay. Nonetheless, both are important when trying to put together a curriculum which seeks to balance the needs of learner motivation with that of essay-writing skill development.

6. Discussion

Having demonstrated advantages of incorporating freewriting into a high school writing curriculum, I collected data that helped draw inferences attesting to the view that essay writing skills can also be positively impacted through the implementation of freewriting activities in class. Negative thought projecting during the initial stages of essay writing can interrupt the flow

of and hamper the development of such essays. Elbow (1998b) explained that such tasks provide a “fast easy way to get a first draft” so that writers can “avoid the reluctance and procrastination that so often stops us” (p. 152), while becoming free “from constant nagging by the internal editor” (p. 156). Quantitative and qualitative data obtained over the course of my second year of action research suggests freewriting not only increases the level of writing output, but also adds to the complexity of writing produced by learners.

7. Conclusion (or Implication)

Freewriting has been well-documented by Elbow (1998b) as writing where “the words come to mind fluently, nonstop, without planning or conscious choosing” (p. 147). This happens when it “effortlessly captures onto the page some of the precious virtues of unplanned spoken language” (p. 152). The Japanese education system has become known for its emphasis on accuracy to the point where students fear making errors, and this greatly hampers productive of skills such as speaking and writing. Data collected in my research supports the view that activities such as freewriting are extremely beneficial in helping students overcome their inhibitions in being able to write freely. Through my action research I have outlined numerous benefits of freewriting and related tasks that can be readily applicable to the Japanese high school classroom. Teachers at this level often express concerns that teaching writing to a class of students of different writing proficiencies is too “difficult” or “complicated” and that marking essays is too “time-consuming” or “subjective”. I disagree. By the implementation of appropriate rubrics, feedback processes among students and the innovative integration of skills, including the complementary freewriting and essay-formulating skills, students will improve their writing abilities.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A:

Grade Pre-1 Eiken Essay Model Answers

Writing Assignments: Short Essays

EIKEN Pre1 Model Topics and answers:

TOPIC #1: Do you think that people's lives are influenced by music?



A: I think that people's lives are influenced by music. There are two reasons to support my opinion.

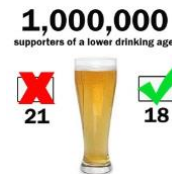
Firstly, music helps people maintain a sense of group identity. Cultures around the world have music unique to their location, and it helps people come together as one. For example, traditional Japanese music reminds Japanese people that they are included in the Japanese community.

Secondly, music has the ability to alter people's moods. The music that people listen to has the power to affect their emotions, and therefore influences the actions that they take. For instance, upbeat songs can make people happy and energetic, while slow songs can make people relaxed and calm.

According to the reasons stated above, I think music influences people's lives.

(Word count: 122)

TOPIC #2: Do you think that the drinking age should be lowered in Japan?



A: I think that the drinking age should be lowered in Japan. I have two reasons to support my opinion.

Firstly, lowering the drinking age allows adults to monitor that young people are drinking responsibly. Right now, it is a fact that many young people drink illegally, and yet adults ignore such behavior. For example, adults should allow and monitor when young people drink, instead of ignoring them and pretending that they don't know it is happening.

Secondly, younger people are responsible enough to drink. It is inconsistent that people in Japan are considered adults at age eighteen, but they cannot drink. For instance, if eighteen-year olds are trusted to vote in elections and join the military, they should also be trusted with drinking responsibly.

According to the reasons stated above, I think that the drinking age should be lowered in Japan.

(Word count: 142)

Appendix B:

Essay Rubric



WRITING Assignment # _____



A	Word Count	1	2	3	4	5	/5
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Note: points for word counts will be awarded using the top scorer as a baseline and other scorers awarded a proportionate score. For example, if the top scorer wrote 100 words, then:

Words	Points
81~100	5
61~80	4
41~60	3
21~40	2
0~20	1

		Try a bit harder!	OK!	Good job!	Subtotals
B	Presentation: - handwriting - paragraphs (3+ sentences) - indentation -	1	2	3	/3
C	Usage: - spelling - grammar - punctuation	1	2	3	/3
D	Structure: - introduction (topic sentence) - reasons - conclusion	1	2	3	/3
E	Word Style: - formal/ high-level words - no slang/shortened words - easy-to-understand	1	2	3	/3
F	Content: - original - gives examples - evidence of research	1	2	3	/3
Comment:				TOTAL	/20

Name: _____ Class 3-1 No. _____

Appendix C:

Connectives Reference List for Students

first	firstly
second	secondly
third	thirdly
finally	additionally
in addition	furthermore
moreover	actually
above all	similarly
in the same way	comparatively
meanwhile	however
nonetheless	on the other hand
on the contrary	as a result
in this way	for that reason
consequently	hence
thus	therefore
in conclusion	by the way
of course	for instance
in other words	from now on
unfortunately	fortunately
hopefully	