i. Greetings and News Updates
ii. Members' Voices
iii. Stories of Learning and Teaching Practices
iv. Short Reflective Articles
v. Looking Back
vi. Looking Forward
vii. SIG Matters

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Learner Development Through Genre Awareness – Exploring Alternative Academic Texts to Prepare Senior High School Students for University Courses

The process of preparing high school students for university courses taught in English is not quite as easy to implement as imagined. In my teaching context, a rural high school in the upper reaches of Tohoku, I am fortunate to be afforded opportunities to present students with material that goes beyond the textbook. Weekly, students that are interested in continuing their studies abroad or curious about how to engage with English outside of the classroom congregate after school once a week to the Writing Club (WC) or ライティング・クラブ. During this time I try to prepare students for the rigors of university work, with a focus on writing skills. However, I found that focusing solely on academic writing in the form of a typical five-paragraph academic essay which focuses on the strict structure of an introduction, three body paragraphs and a conclusion, does little to engage these young learners and meaningfully develop their writing skills and expand their understanding of English composition in different academic contexts. In addition they are less familiar with writing for an audience beyond their classmates or instructor. To help the students become familiar with academic writing as a genre in a wider sense, I wanted to expose them to text that is structured differently from a 5-paragraph essay but can still be considered academic. I wanted my students to build an awareness of academic English through exposure and analysis of a variety of texts.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT AND CHANGING THE WRITING CLUB GOALS

Initially my design for the club was based on writing essays like the five-paragraph essay mentioned above. My goal was for each student to be able to write an argumentative essay with minimal grammar errors by the end of the school semester. Throughout the first four meetings, I noticed engagement, enthusiasm and attendance was slowly decreasing. By the third meeting the number of club members attending had reduced from seven to four. I wondered if there was a way I could engage all the club members. While the club was initially advertised as a writing club that could help students pursue English in the university setting, I realized that each student had a different idea of what that meant.

In the fourth meeting, I asked the students what they expected a writing club would be like. Here were some of the answers. These answers are translated from Japanese.

- *“The club is for improving grammar and making sentences clearer.”*
- *“I want to write stories and learn how to use new words.”*
- *“Learn how to write a good essay in English so I can go to a university abroad.”*
- *“The club will be fun, I can learn more about English and the world, maybe study internationally.”*

Not only were the expectations very different depending on the student, the students were also at varying levels of English proficiency. My original goal of them being able to write their own essays

independently was not realistic given the current trajectory of the club. In an effort to remedy the engagement issues and develop them as writers I drew upon the ideas of a few familiar scholars. I decided that I wanted to focus on raising the students' awareness of genre and register in writing through less structured club activities.

LEARNER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AWARENESS RAISING

I recalled the work of Dr. Suresh Canagarajah who designed an academic writing course that focused on genre exposure and developing the students rhetorical sensitivity and language awareness. Immediately I resonated with this passage in one of his articles.

> Spending the whole semester on mastering one type of essay and language is unwise, as you will find that genres and registers change in different academic fields and contexts of writing. The processes this course develops will help you deal with any type of writing product you encounter and expand your writing repertoire for different contexts.' (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 219)

This genre and register change in different academic contexts is something I feel is often unclear to students. Defining genre simply, it is a category or type of art, writing, music, that shares a distinct set of features or theme. Register refers to the level of formality and style of language that the writer chooses based on the audience, purpose, and context. For example the students' current textbooks don't provide explanatory essays or newspaper articles.

However, university courses may assign novels, articles and other complex texts that the students have little to no experience with. My goal was to have the students experience this jump in difficulty themselves before they encountered it in a higher stakes setting. Some examples I have used are listed below.

Examples of Academic Text

- Student essays (Including my own)
- University textbooks
- Newspaper articles
- JALT Journal Articles (reflection articles, conference reports)
- The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *An I-Novel* by Minae Mizumura, Semi-autobiographical work, where she consciously intersperses English phrases and sentences throughout her Japanese text.

While I am limited in some regards to time and access to materials, the engagement in the club has steadily been improving. Some constraints are that the club's time duration can change depending on other school events or room availability. While the library as the club venue is ideal for the amount of space and selection of books they have access to, there are times when it is unavailable. In addition I can be assigned impromptu tutoring which divides my attention during the club hours. Obtaining physical copies of English textbooks and novels has also been difficult due to funds not being available for the club yet. So far, only eight Writing Club sessions have taken place.

My goal was to expose students to alternative academic writing and ultimately develop them as learners who are able to notice and appreciate the differences and similarities within the academic genre ranging from textbooks, essays and novels. I feel that raising genre awareness really is one of the ''secrets'' when it comes to being a good writer. It helps bridge the gap between what is considered ''correct'' academic writing and what is actually enjoyable to read.

WHAT A TYPICAL WRITING CLUB LOOKS LIKE

Each Writing Club session lasts one hour and is divided into 3 parts: comparison between texts, genre and register analysis with discussion, and writing practice.

Comparison Between Texts

For each session, I choose two different texts for comparison. One is from a textbook the students use regularly. Previously, we have analyzed the following texts in the Writing Club. In the students current textbooks, the writing has a very simple layout that, while easy to read, doesn't have the features of higher level academic text they will encounter in the university setting. Many of the textbook passages are written as a personal narrative. Text 1 is an example of what they encounter.

Text 1

> *"Eskimos go whale hunting in April when the ice on the Bering Sea starts to break up. In 1983, I went whale hunting for the first time at Point Hope. The hunters wait on top of an iceberg for the whales. When the right moment arrives, they sail out on boats called "umiak."*
>
> *They are not always successful in whale hunting. But if they are lucky, all the villagers come running to pull the whale onto the ice. I still remember seeing an old Eskimo lady come dancing and singing, to give thanks for the gift from the sea.*
>
> *Once the whale is placed on the ice, an elder of the village says a prayer. Then the young people start cutting it up, carefully following the elder's instructions. The meat is shared by all the villagers, and in the end they push the huge head bone of the whale back into the sea, saying, "Come back again next year!"* (Sanseido, 2022, p. 117)

Text 2 is an example of a passage from an Introduction to Sociology textbook we also examined.

Text 2

> *Language and Culture*
>
> *Even while it constantly evolves, language shapes our perception of reality and our behavior. In the 1920s, linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf advanced this idea which became known as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or linguistic relativity. It is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and therefore understand their world through the cultural meanings embedded in their language. The hypothesis suggests that language shapes thought and thus behavior (Swoyer, 2003). For example, words have attached meanings beyond their definition that can influence thought and behavior. In the U.S. where the number thirteen is associated with bad luck, many high-rise buildings do not have a 13th floor. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for "death."* (Conerly et al., 2021, p.131)

Students were then given fifteen to twenty minutes to write down notes and use their dictionaries or translation applications on their personal iPads. To help guide this activity I have provided the questions below for them to answer. Students take note of anything they find interesting or confusing in the reading material that's been laid out. They are encouraged to Google search their own answers and compare their results with other students.

Example questions translated from Japanese:

1. What's the purpose of the media? (The WC is primarily using textbooks, articles and student essays but eventually will branch out into poster presentations and newspaper articles.)

2. Do you notice any differences between the writing styles or English used?
3. How would the media look in Japanese/English?
4. What makes the media more or less academic?

These questions are meant to be answered from the students' unique perspectives, drawing from their current knowledge and awareness of English and Japanese. I tell them that their unique perspective as an emergent multilingual (not solely based on reading ability, speaking ability i.e. academic performance) provides the value in the answers. The way I have framed this to make it digestible for the students is by using this image I have created below (Figure 1).

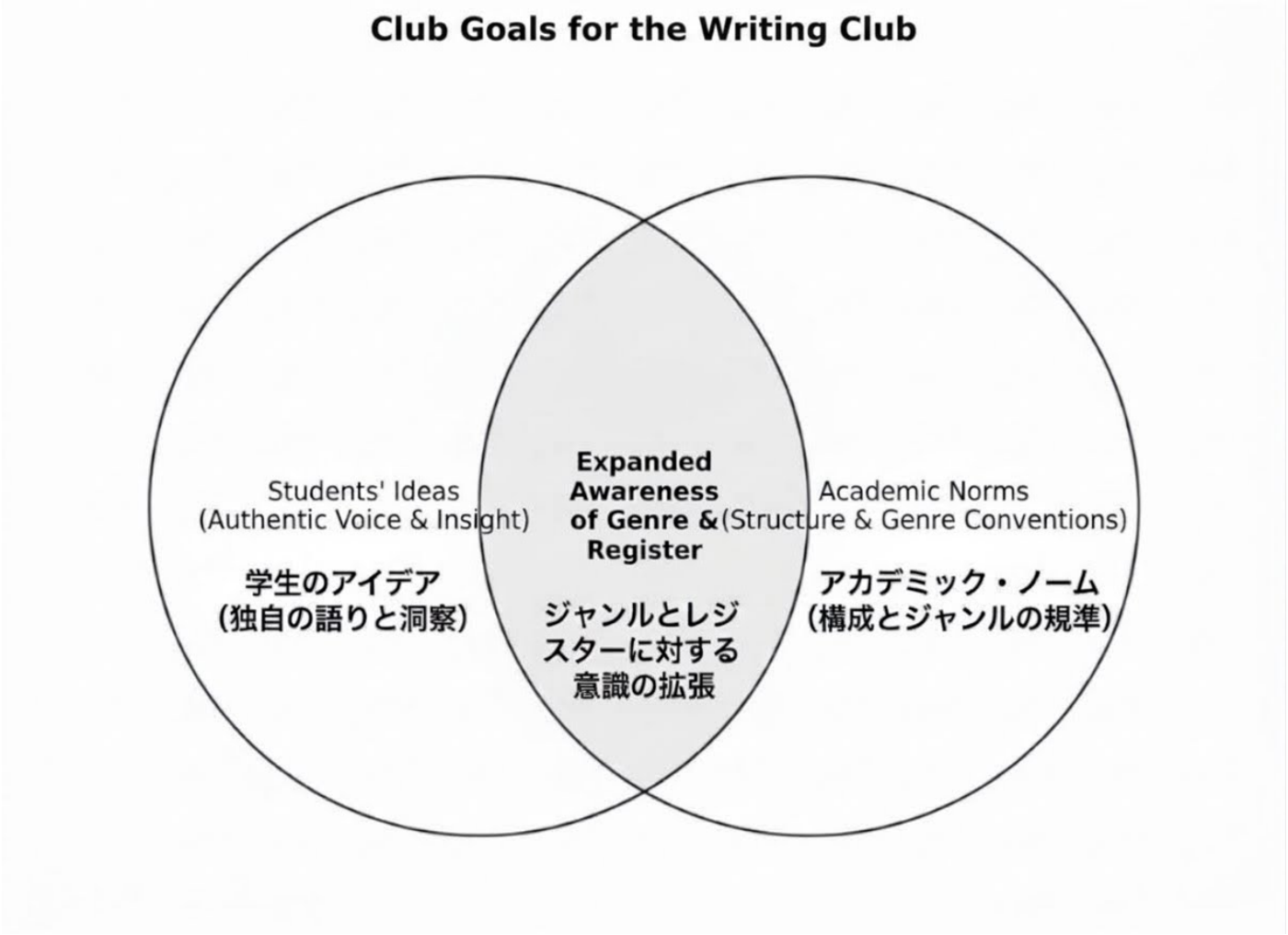
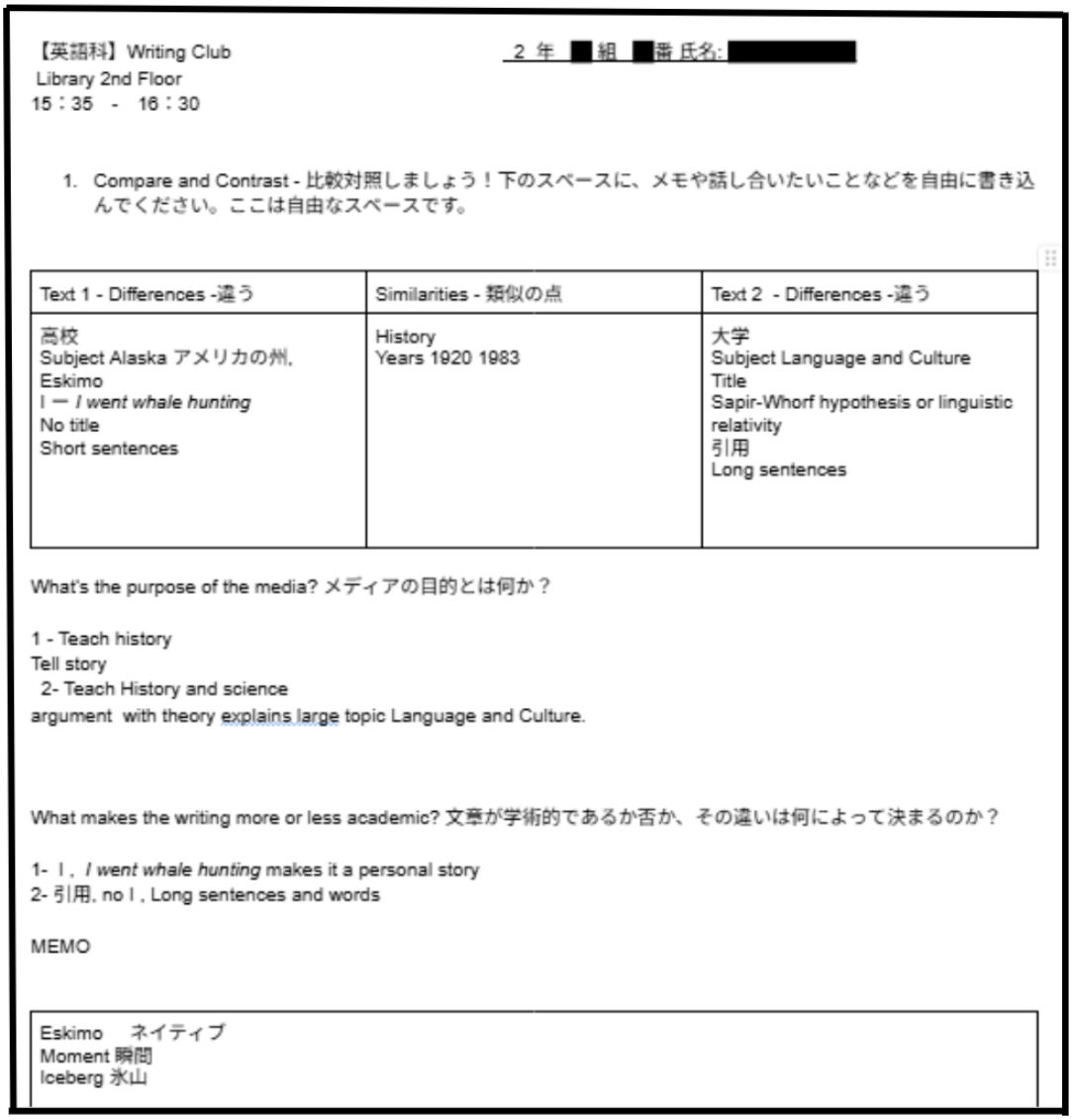


Figure 1. Club goals

Their input and analysis of current academic norms from text examples can lead to discussions that help everyone involved increase their awareness of genre and register. Genre and register is not a static concept but always evolving. Canagarajah frequently argues against treating language systems, genres, and registers as fixed entities. He mentions that these concepts are historical, ideological, and continuously evolving structures that can shift through social interaction and the agency of multilingual writers. New textual forms can emerge out of linguistic contact, defying static boundaries.

> *Students need to develop a critical awareness of the conventions of academic writing so that they can negotiate them according to their own rhetorical purposes and identities* (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 15).

I tell the students that they should try and fit academic writing to their own needs and purposes so it can better accomplish what they are trying to achieve. Simply copying an academic paper or blindly following structures will stunt their growth as a writer. I try to convey that the Writing Club is not a remedial course; it's meant to supplement what they already know. I try to help the students organize their thoughts here by using digital worksheets I have made with some notes in Japanese (see Figure 2).



【英語科】Writing Club
Library 2nd Floor
15：35 - 16：30

2 年 [redacted] 組 [redacted] 番 氏名: [redacted]

1. Compare and Contrast - 比較対照しましょう！下のスペースに、メモや話し合いたいことなどを自由に書き込んでください。ここは自由なスペースです。

Text 1 - Differences -違う	Similarities - 類似の点	Text 2 - Differences -違う
高校 Subject Alaska アメリカの州, Eskimo I ー *I went whale hunting* No title Short sentences	History Years 1920 1983	大学 Subject Language and Culture Title Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or linguistic relativity 引用 Long sentences

What's the purpose of the media? メディアの目的とは何か？

1 - Teach history
Tell story
2- Teach History and science
argument with theory explains large topic Language and Culture.

What makes the writing more or less academic? 文章が学術的であるか否か、その違いは何によって決まるのか？

1- I , *I went whale hunting* makes it a personal story
2- 引用, no I , Long sentences and words

MEMO

Eskimo ネイティブ
Moment 瞬間
Iceberg 氷山

Figure 2. Example of a digital worksheet

GENRE AND REGISTER ANALYSIS WITH DISCUSSION

Next, I comment on what the students noticed, such as word choices and sentence length then provide context. I use a mixture of Japanese and English with the help of machine translation to help me explain these difficult concepts. For example, one student noted that both Text 1 and Text 2 mentioned above had the purpose of teaching the history of a particular subject. However, Text 1 used a first person narrative while Text 2 did not. I commented that Text 1 is simply retelling an experience related to the history of the Eskimos. The use of a first person narrative helps engage the reader to help them visualize the life of Eskimos. The narrator is not explaining any theories with their experience. The text is not meant to introduce a larger concept. In the context of an English textbook it is meant to teach students basic story structure. In Text 2 I then explained that these ideas, like the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, are introduced early in order to explain human behavior. The purpose

is giving a historical background on ways human behavior has commonly been explained. I pointed out the word “suggests” and how it hedges the text. By using the word “suggests” it gives respect to other possible theories not yet stated in the text. The following paragraphs go on to introduce more theories, therefore this kind of hedging helps the reader keep an open mind by not assuming the theory is the only way to interpret human behavior.

The above explanation broadened the students’ idea of what purpose a text can have. A text might be “Telling history” noted in Figure 2 or it might have a story telling structure through a first person narrative (using I). In future discussions the student became more informed on what the purpose of a text could be. Drawing from their previous discussions and teacher explanations they have clear examples they can reference.

2. Genre and Register Scale - ジャンルとレジスターのスケール .

How academic do you rate the two texts? From 1 to 5, 5 being the most academic.

Text 1 1 2 3 4 5 Formality 1 2 3 4 5

Text 2 1 2 3 4 5 Formality 1 2 3 4 5

Genre and Register Aspects

1. Organization - How are the two texts organized ?

Chronological Order? Paragraphs? Chapters? Lists? Headings? Other?
時系列順？段落？章？リスト？見出し？その他？

1- 時系列順 - 段落
2 - 時系列順 - 見出し- 作文

2. Language Choice - Describe the words, are they simple or complex? Formal or Informal
How would you compare this word choice in Japanese?- 単純な言葉ですか、それとも複雑な言葉ですか？また、フォーマルな表現でしょうか、それともインフォーマルな表現でしょうか？

1— Simple , dont know some words but can guess
2- complex , dont know many words

日本語で表現する場合、どのような言葉の選択と比較できるでしょうか？

3. Writer Voice- What pronouns do they use if any? Do we get to know the author? What is the point of view?書き手の声——どのような代名詞が使われているか（あるいは、使われていないか）。書き手自身の姿は見えてくるか。視点はどのようなものか。

1- I
2 people

4. Content and Audience - Who is the writing intended for? What situations is this writing used (classroom report? Work meeting? etc.) 内容と対象読者 — この文章は誰に向けたものか？どのような場面で使われるものか（授業のレポート、職場の会議など）？

1- Textbook, students
2- textbook, students, 研究者

Figure 3

In Figure 3, the students were asked to rank each text on a scale of non academic (1) to academic (5) and informal (1) to formal (5). Students compared their ratings with one another and discussed their reasoning for their rating. This provided an opportunity for the students to consider the other members' opinions. My role here was to not give them a definitive rating but to support the conversation by asking the students to consider aspects such as intended audience and vocabulary choice. In addition they were asked to consider how the organization, writer voice, content and audience of the text could contribute to how academic or formal it can be. They were asked to consider how impactful a misjudgment in academic language and formality by the author could be. For example, I asked what would happen if "I" and personal experience were used in Text 2 to explain complex theories. How would that affect the credibility of the text? These kinds of questions can help the students deepen their discussion with one another. By having these discussions students may be able to develop a reflective and critical awareness of composition.

WRITING PHASE

There are numerous writing activities I can use in the Writing Club which is a low-stakes setting where the students' writing isn't graded. Students can attempt to write similarly to a piece of writing discussed, or write a reflection on what they have learned in the Writing Club. I have provided an example below of a second year student, pseudonym, Dempo, S. who is planning to attend school in the US to study international affairs.

> *Abstract is new idea for me. The teacher says the writing way of abstract is important. Page number and information so reader can search(citations within the abstract). We can help new readers understand the paper and history of the research by understanding the abstract. It is a introduction but also summary. I think I can not search every paper (mentioned) in the abstract. We searched at two and one was needed payment to read (We looked up two of the papers mentioned in the abstract and one was behind a paywall). In Japan we use many pictures to give information, I think adding one to the introduction can help readers. The abstract can save time by giving information but it (can) also take time(to research the papers mentioned).*
>
> *Dempo, S.*

The student brought up how abstracts were prevalent in academic articles but not in newspapers, magazines, or university student essays despite both of them citing research and having a central argument. This led into a discussion about the purpose of an abstract and how it relates to the presentation of more complex ideas and data. An abstract can help in preparing the reader for dense content as often research or scientific writing can ''jump'' into the middle of a conversation that is already happening among scholars in a particular field. The student then commented on how he felt background information and a main argument could be clearer if presented in a more accessible format like a graph or table. According to the student the abstract in question referenced a long list of articles that simply seemed quite time consuming to look into for potential readers who were unfamiliar with the references.We then compared a few different abstracts to compare and contrast how an abstract can be written to be more accessible.

REFLECTION ON LEARNER DEVELOPMENT AND CONCLUSION

In attempting to broaden the students' awareness of different writing styles I hoped to create a dynamic space much like how Pratt describes in her research. The "contact zone" is a dynamic (social) space where languages, cultures, and knowledge intersect (Pratt, 1991). The contact zone is not a place where students are formulaically introduced to different genres but instead come in contact with them through their own volition. As of now the club hasn't quite reached the point where students are spontaneously exploring different texts but the concept of providing students low-stakes environments to use English

has emboldened some of the students to be more proactive by asking more questions and developing their own research processes during the club.

The development of the Writing Club has felt like a valuable investment as I have seen students start to build an appetite for engaging with English beyond their textbooks. I was initially worried about the materials being too difficult for the students to engage with. However I realized that from a developmental standpoint, comprehension is not the first step in engaging with material. With the use of their tablets, one another and the teacher they have multiple pathways to comprehension. I found that the students were surprisingly autonomous. This observation made me realize that if given space and time students are less self conscious about struggling with comprehension. The students have also given positive feedback. After eight meetings, I have accumulated anonymous feedback (translated from Japanese). Each of the four students are represented below.

- *"Learning new things has been fun, I want to try my best to understand English in many ways."*
- *"Some days I don't have much to say, the topics can be difficult. I would like to choose the topic (texts) for just one day."*
- *"I am able to understand how to compare difficult writing. Even though my grammar is poor, I am still trying my best to write everyday. I don't have to worry about a bad grade, I can simply write."*
- *"Researching things you don't know is important. Learning more about genre and writing can help me understand my university course work."*

This feedback, while brief, allows me to evaluate the students overall motivation. I feel that the students' willingness to engage with the Writing Club has increased. This feedback also guides me to more seriously consider the topics that the students want to discuss.

I will conclude by saying that it took some time for this club to run smoothly as it requires managing varying levels of comprehension through student discussions. In addition, the selected texts aren't always going to be easy to compare and contrast but building the students' awareness of genre and register through this kind of exposure I believe will help the students have some idea of what studying abroad and using English in a higher level setting could entail. For educators working at the high school level that want to prepare their students for university-level studies, I recommend providing a low-stakes setting where they can explore a variety of texts similar to the Writing Club.

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Classroom Practices and Challenges in the Interdepartmental English Language Program for Fostering Autonomous Learners

1. INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on my teaching experiences at junior and senior high schools as well as university, I have always designed and conducted my classes with a focus on autonomy. It was in 2020 that an original autonomy-focused course titled “Learning to Learn English by Your Design” was introduced at my university and my ideal form of education finally became a reality for the development of learner autonomy. It has been seven years since the course began, but I took a two-and-half-year leave from the second semester of the 2021 academic year to 2023 academic year, so I have been in charge for four years. In this paper, I will introduce “Learning to Learn English by Your Design” and reflect on my four years of teaching practice together with future challenges.

The English Program Committee at my university, which oversees the interdepartmental English language program, reviewed and revamped the content of the general education English curriculum in the 2020 academic year. The major difference from the previous curriculum in place from 2014 to 2019 academic years is that the number of required English courses in the second year was reduced by one class (2 credits), and in its place, the number and variety of elective courses were significantly increased. While there were mixed opinions regarding the reduction in required courses, the English Program Committee at the time recognized the value in students voluntarily and proactively taking courses that aligned with their interests and passions and made efforts to schedule elective courses on days and at times that were as convenient as possible for students.

The course cluster newly established in the 2020 academic year is the “Foundation Reinforcement Courses,” consisting of four courses: “Basic Grammar for Communication,” “English Pronunciation Skills,” “More Reading Skills,” and “Learning to Learn English by Your Design.” Each of these courses was introduced as a means to effectively develop the English abilities and skills that students deemed necessary, taking into account the results of a questionnaire survey conducted in the 2019 academic year among students in some of the required English classes. Under the previous curriculum, most English elective courses were offered in the second year or later; however, by making all four courses designated as “Foundation Reinforcement Courses” available starting in the first semester of the first year, the university has created a learning environment that enables students to actively engage in English study from an early stage after entering college. Furthermore, by limiting class sizes to 20 students, the university has facilitated a more personalized learning experience.

The new curriculum emphasizes a student-driven approach to learning, and “Learning to Learn English by Your Design”, one of the “Foundation Reinforcement Courses”, is a perfect embodiment of this educational philosophy. This course was positioned as the successor to “Freshers’ English” (see Hayashi, 2018, 2020 for details), which was a required course for all first-year students in the first semester under the previous curriculum. However, it differs from “Freshers’ English” in that it is now an elective course open to students from all faculties and departments. Furthermore, it places greater emphasis on learning English itself, aiming to help learners set their own English learning

goals, create plans, engage proactively, and take responsibility for their learning. Additionally, the inclusion of individual counseling sessions as part of the course was a new initiative, designed to provide more personalized guidance by working closely with each student.

2. COURSE OVERVIEW

In preparation for launching the course "Learning to Learn English by Your Design," I conducted a study tour at the University of Helsinki in Finland during the summer of the 2019 academic year. Through observing classes that were aimed at fostering learner autonomy and discussions with the instructors in charge, I was once again keenly reminded of the importance and necessity of learners' autonomous efforts. This led me to develop course content that promotes self-directed learning tailored to Seikei University students, resulting in the creation of the original syllabus for "Learning to Learn English by Your Design," as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Syllabus

What would you like to do with English? To make that dream a reality, what specific study methods and schedule should you follow? Wouldn't it be great if you could design your own English learning plan? This course is specifically designed to support you in designing your English learning journey. **In this course, you will reflect on your English learning goals, practice various learning methods, understand their effectiveness, and explore the approach that best suits your learning style. Each student will set short-, medium-, and long-term goals and learn how to plan and execute their studies based on their progress, as well as how to review and adjust their plans accordingly. Take a fresh look at your current learning style, consider more effective approaches, and become a "successful English learner." Whether you have sufficient English proficiency and specific goals you'd like to achieve, or you simply want to improve your English skills, we strongly encourage you to take this course. The journey to achieving your English learning goals may not be easy, but in this course, your instructors will serve as your guides and supporters every step of the way.**

As clearly stated in the syllabus, drawing on the work of Holec (1981) and Cotterall and Crabbe (1999), the following five steps are incorporated to promote self-directed learning:

(1) Setting goals
(2) Determining learning content
(3) Choosing methods of learning
(4) Monitoring learning progress
(5) Reflecting on what has been learned

Although these five steps are crucial for self-directed learning, simply explaining them as such would make students feel very abstract and difficult to grasp. Therefore, rather than providing explicit explanations, I devised ways to ensure students could think concretely and engage actively at every stage of the five steps. For example, regarding (1) goal setting, since it is difficult to have students immediately come up with English learning goals, I have them answer questions related to goal setting—such as "What would you like to do using English?"—to guide them toward setting goals while encouraging them to reexamine their relationship with the language (See Hayashi, 2018, 2020 for details). Throughout the course, I have structured the lessons so that each student would proactively engage in their own English learning by following the five steps mentioned above, with me supporting this autonomous approach. Then, during the final session's reflection, I explicitly explained for the first time that all the activities conducted in class are deeply connected to self-directed learning, prompting students to reconsider the purpose and significance of those activities. My intention was to link what they actually engaged in with the theory in a more coherent way, thereby enhancing their learning experiences. For students, it seemed to be the moment when they realized that what they had been

doing without fully understanding it was, in fact, meaningful because everything they engaged in was linked to the development of their autonomy. I always enjoy this “aha moment” at the end of the course.

3. STUDENTS

Although “Learning to Learn English by Your Design” has a class size limit of 20 students, more than 100 students apply to enroll each year, making it one of the most popular courses. It is regrettable that, as a result of the lottery, more students were unable to enroll each year; however, under the new curriculum launched in the 2026 academic year, we are meeting student demand by increasing the number of sections offered for this course.

Looking at the breakdown of enrolled students over the past seven years, the course is primarily taken by first- and second-year students, but there is a consistent number of third- and fourth-year students each year, albeit in small numbers. Although enrollment sometimes skews toward students from specific faculties or departments due to scheduling constraints, classes are almost always composed of a mix of students from all faculties and departments. Furthermore, while some students are highly motivated to learn English, others feel apprehensive about the language; both motivation and English proficiency levels vary widely.

4. COURSE CONTENT

The course content generally follows Table 2. However, I have made adjustments to incorporate the specific needs of students in each class, encouraging them to take a proactive approach to their studies. The following provides an overview of the main activities.

Table 2: Course Content

1	Orientation, English and Me (1)
2	Overview of Seikei University’s English Courses, English and Me (2)
3	Seikei’s Extensive Reading Method for English, English and Me (3)
4	American English and British English
5	Thinking About Studying Abroad (1): Experiences of Studying Abroad
6	Thinking About Studying Abroad (2): Introduction to Seikei University’s Study Abroad Programs
7	Introduction to English Learning Websites
8	Let’s Identify Your English Learning Style
9	Let’s Consider Learning Methods Suited to Various English Learning Styles
10	Let’s Consider Various English Proficiency Exams, English Learning Goals and Plans (1)
11	Let’s Reflect on Your Motivation for Learning English
12	Let’s Consider Vocabulary Learning, one-on-one meetings
13	Tips for Speed Reading and English Learning Methods Using Online Materials, one-on-one meetings
14	English Learning Goals and Plans (2): Revision and Reflection, one-on-one meetings

4.1 SETTING GOALS FOR ENGLISH LEARNING

To help students set goals for their English learning, an original worksheet is used to guide students through a step-by-step goal-setting process, and students are encouraged to consider “ultra-short-term goals,” “short-term goals,” “medium-term goals,” and “long-term goals” (see Hayashi, 2018, 2020 for details). Although these goals are set once, students’ interests and priorities may change, so students are given opportunities to add to or revise their goals. At the end of the semester, students are required to submit a final version of their goals.

What I have found through my practice is that many students have difficulty in setting coherent learning goals. Each goal is independent of each other without having clear connections among the sub-divided goals. For example, some students include the TOEIC score as an objective indicator only in the

long-term goal, but there is no mention of score in the other sub-divided goals. Another example is due to their lack of knowledge about English proficiency tests. Even though students' interests are shifting from exam-oriented English to English for oral communication, they are unfamiliar with tests that assess speaking and listening skills. Among several roles of teachers, I use the role of "resource" (Celce-Murcia, 1991) and provide information on those tests, such as an online "Telephone Standard Speaking Test."

4.2 STUDY ABROAD SESSIONS

We hold study abroad sessions for two consecutive weeks. In the first week, students use a worksheet to reflect on their current feelings and concerns regarding study abroad. Then, using the "Study Abroad Guidebook" distributed annually by the university's International Office as a reference, they research the types of study abroad programs they are interested in, the requirements for each, and what is needed to study abroad. In many cases, students find it difficult to understand certain requirements and specific terms related to study abroad, such as a "bridging program." Thus, I provide a more detailed explanation as needed.

The following week, a special session is held, featuring guest speakers who share their personal study-abroad experiences. The guest speakers vary each time. I have invited students (seniors) who participated in short-, medium-, and long-term study abroad programs; graduates who attended graduate school abroad after completing their undergraduate degrees; and graduates who studied abroad while in college and now work in English-language professions. My intention in inviting members of the university community was that I believed they could serve as "near peer role models (Murphey, 1996). All of whom have shared not only their study abroad experiences but also their approaches to learning English. In addition, external lecturers, including my acquaintances who work at foreign-affiliated companies or have experience at NPOs, are invited to provide students with opportunities to consider the skills and abilities necessary to thrive in a global society. These sessions proved inspiring for the students, and the Q&A sessions featured groundbreaking exchanges.

4.3 ENGLISH LEARNING STYLES

Using a questionnaire on learning styles titled "Perceptional Learning Style Preference Questionnaire" (Reid, 1987), students are guided to understand their own English learning styles and preferences. For the six learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual, and group, students categorize them into three groups: those they prefer to use, those they combine with other styles, and those they rarely use. This process helps them analyze their self-perception and actual practice in relation to their English learning styles. However, in order to develop a critical perspective questionnaire result and to make them be aware that there is often a discrepancy between perception and reality in any aspects, students are asked to conduct self-assessments to determine whether such a gap exists. Then students consider learning methods suited to each style and share their ideas with the entire class.

Furthermore, drawing on the work of Hiromori (2023), students attempt to expand their English learning styles. Students are asked to rank the four English language skills in order of proficiency and then match their strongest skill with the learning style they use least often, as well as their weakest skill with the learning style they prefer most. This exercise encourages them to recognize the importance of broadening their learning approaches. Students are then asked to try out these learning methods for one week and reflect on their experiences. Student feedback includes comments such as, "The 'Expansion of English Learning Styles' was a real eye-opener; I feel like it actually suits me surprisingly well." The comment exemplifies Pashler et al. (2008)'s criticism of research on learning styles. They have pointed out a lack of scientific evidence of the relationship between learning style and instructional method and referred to a possibility that instructional methods are versatile regardless of differences in learning styles. Students tend to stick to their

preferred way of learning, but 'The Expansion of English Learning Styles' have enabled students to discover new learning methods they had never previously considered and develop their ability to adapt flexibly.

4.4 MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

Students are asked to reflect on their English learning experiences to date from a motivational perspective. First, they are asked to consider the periods when their motivation increased or decreased from the beginning of their English learning to the present, and the factors behind these changes, thereby prompting them to reflect on the evolution of their own motivation. Next, using concrete examples, I explain intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to deepen students' understanding of these two types of motivation, and then guide them in exploring methods that would be effective for them personally to boost their motivation.

It sounds difficult for students to understand intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

4.5 ONLINE JOINT CLASSES WITH HIROSAKI UNIVERSITY

As part of the course, we are conducting online joint classes with Hirosaki University during the first semesters of the 2025 and 2026 academic years (See Hayashi, 2025 for details on the practice of the 2025 academic year). With the understanding and cooperation of Professors Sanae Katagiri and Jagno Reik of Hirosaki University, we have arranged approximately four sessions (30 minutes each) of online group discussions with students enrolled in their course, "Guided Autonomous Language Learning." Although there are differences in course content, format, and enrollment numbers, like "Learning to Learn English by Your Design", "Guided Autonomous Language Learning" aims at fostering learner autonomy. Providing an opportunity for like-minded learners to study together facilitates collaborative learning. Students from both universities are grouped together. In the first year, we used both Teams and Zoom as platforms as a trial, while in the second year, we used Zoom exclusively to facilitate collaborative learning within the same groups. The students have positive comments on the online joint classes (see Hayashi, 2025 for details). Although Hirosaki and Tokyo are physically distant, peers who share similar challenges yet are actively engaged in learning English serve as "near peer role models" (Murphey, 1996), inspiring one another and helping sustain their English learning.

4.6 ONE-ON-ONE SESSION

A one-on-one advising session is included as part of the course. In order to have such a session, I took ALC's English Study Advisors' Certificate and learned advising skills and strategies to encourage students to be autonomous learners. Adapting and expanding those skills I acquired, I enjoy the session with each student. Since we often cannot finish all the meetings within class time, we sometimes hold sessions outside of class; however, these sessions allow me to understand each student's concerns and provide guidance regarding their English studies. They also serve as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the students both as learners and as individuals.

The topics vary but a majority of students would like to know how to keep up with their studies. Students and I as an advisor reflect on what we have learned about motivation in the class and think about some concrete ways to keep up with their studies through interactive dialogue. I also share what I have done to keep up with my study as one of the examples and we try to come up with ideas that they can stick with without straining themselves.

What I have found through my four years' practice is that not all the students desire to have such a one-on-one session. For some students, sessions sound demanding and they sometimes express that they do not have enough knowledge about English language learning to have the session with me. They might think that the session is related to their evaluation. Therefore, it is important that the purpose of the session is clearly explained beforehand and both teachers and students

have a mutual understanding that the session is not for assessing their performance but for having productive dialogue for their learning.

5. FUTURE CHALLENGES

5.1 STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH LEARNING

For many students who studied English in high school to prepare mainly for college entrance exams, knowledge and experience of learning methods other than the so-called "exam-oriented English" are extremely limited. When asked to reflect on their English learning methods up through high school, students mostly mention vocabulary memorization and reading comprehension; only a few mention shadowing. While it is educationally desirable for students to think for themselves and share their ideas rather than having teachers unilaterally impart knowledge, I have keenly realized that it is not easy to elicit ideas from students especially regarding English learning methods. This will be mainly due to the Japanese educational system which Freire (1992) defines as "banking models. Based on the concept of behaviorism, information is considered to be transmitted from teachers to students and students are expected to play passive roles in classrooms. Students are used to such teacher-centered classrooms, so it is difficult to introduce a learner-centered classroom where students are expected to be "highly personal act" (Yoshida, Conti, Yamauchi & Kawanishi, 2023: 3). Concerning English language learning, it will be more challenging for students to express their ideas. Therefore, it is important to first introduce learning methods that are relatively easy for students to implement such as extensive reading to make them aware of the existence of learning methods which are different from "exam-oriented English," and to gradually transform their mindset and perspective on "English learning methods." On a technical level, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have identified learning strategies used by several types of learners and provided insight into introducing new learning methods by demonstrating a wide range of models together with materials.

5.2 ONLINE JOINT CLASSES

I have been conducting joint online classes with Hirosaki University since the 2025 academic year, and in the 2026 academic year, we standardized part of the course content. Specifically, regarding "English learning styles," we used the same questionnaire to help students deepen their understanding of their own learning styles and then provided an opportunity for them to exchange opinions; however, we would like to develop a more systematic curriculum to encourage lively discussion.

It would also be desirable to offer courses from both universities on the same day and time slot. However, looking back on the past two years, this proved difficult due to scheduling constraints. Consequently, to align with Seikei University's schedule, Hirosaki University faculty and students participated during Hirosaki University's lunch break, adjusting the number of regular class hours. Although nearly all Hirosaki University students participated each time, sufficient consideration must be given in future implementations to ensure this does not impose an excessive burden on them.

5.3 APPROACHES TAILORED TO DIFFERENT GRADE LEVELS

While there are many advantages to organizing classes that mix students from all departments and academic years, a review of past practices has revealed a striking difference in attitudes, goals, and plans regarding English learning between first- and second-year students who have only recently completed their college entrance exams and third- and fourth-year students who are beginning to think about employment and their future. While these differences are natural and it is certainly meaningful for students to recognize them and set goals that reflect how they view their English learning based on my teaching experience with "Learning to Learn English by Your Design," I have come to believe that separating first- and second-year students from third- and fourth-year students would allow for more effective instruction. Therefore, starting with the new curriculum for the 2026 academic year, the English Program Committee decided to establish two distinct courses by adding

the subtitles “Transition to Higher Education [First- and Second-Year Students]” and “University and Beyond [Third- and Fourth-Year]” to the course titles, thereby establishing two distinct courses. This will allow us to narrow our focus more precisely than the current curriculum does, dividing English learning into two major phases—the four years of university and the period following graduation. I expect this will foster a more multifaceted perspective and lead to the establishment of continuous, comprehensive English learning goals and study plans. Although the former course, “Transition to Higher Education [First- and Second-Year Students]” has already started, the latter course, “University and Beyond [Third- and Fourth-Year Students],” is scheduled to begin in the 2028 academic year. I will report on how the two different but related courses work on another occasion.

6. CONCLUSION

The “Learning to Learn English by Your Design” course launched in the 2020 academic year to foster autonomous learners. Regardless of differences in English proficiency or motivation, the course has enabled each student to reexamine their relationship with the language, consider learning methods suited to their individual needs, establish their own learning approach, and, as the course title suggests, actively design their own learning path. A variety of process-oriented activities has enabled students to engage in the five steps for fostering autonomous learners in the classroom and beyond. Reflecting on my teaching experience over the past five years, I also highlighted some challenges for future improvement.

The number of Japanese universities that provide self-access centers to encourage self-study outside of class has been increasing (e.g., Hirosaki University, Bunkyo University, Otemon University). However, to the best of my knowledge, very few universities currently offer a course like “Learning to Learn English by Your Design” in the interdepartmental English Program. In general, many high school students fail to find significance or meaning in studying English once the entrance exams are over and end up taking required English courses in college without a clear sense of purpose. If they have purposes or reasons for studying English beyond “university entrance exams”, they can maintain their motivation to study English for other reasons even after the exams are over (Hiromori, 2023). Therefore, it is important to help high school students who have completed their university entrance exams develop the ability to reflect on their approach to English learning and their personal relationship with the language to further enhance their motivation to study English and to approach their “ideal L2 selves” (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Therefore, establishing courses like “Learning to Learn English by Your Design”, which aim to foster autonomous learners, is significant and meaningful. The journey of learning English is not easy, but it is important to support students as they move forward step by step to be autonomous learners, accumulating success and gaining a sense of accomplishment.

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