

# Teacher Recommendations for Writing Programs in Japanese Universities

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**Abstract**—This paper investigated the recommendations from six EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers about improving EFL writing courses in Japan. The study focused on any commonalities among the responses concerning three themes: (1) describing the general writing curriculum, (2) modifications in meeting student needs, and (3) identifying innovative approaches. Answers also differed in how teachers assessed the quality of their composition curriculum, with some expressing doubts about the rubrics to evaluate students' papers. Some instructors focused on academic writing, and others emphasized writing emails and business and technical reports. Regarding the second theme, teachers urgently agreed on the need to improve vocabulary, particularly concerning basic knowledge of collocation and grammar. Instructors regarded their organizations as capable of meeting the demand of advanced students with abundant academic writing resources; nonetheless, the advanced students needed the assistance of a trained tutor to improve their writing. Teachers responded to the third question in various ways, with the analytic method, a guided group writing approach, online writing software, a process approach, and online grammar checkers. Instructors implemented roleplay and other writing activities to gain students' interest. Some teachers had innovative ideas, but they faced constraints from their universities or their students' proficiencies. This data clearly shows varied methods among these universities and that learners continue to require assistance with formatting and essential writing functions.

**Index Terms**—EFL, English writing, Japanese student, writing programs

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a result of increased globalization and the demand for higher-level abilities among graduating students, Japanese institutions are gradually modifying their curricula. Writing, which has long fallen behind in staffing, funding, and attention, is now being treated more seriously, albeit the hurdles remain formidable. Because Japanese high schools continue to offer few real writing experiences, professors must now teach basic processes in writing an academic research paper. They range from knowing how to access and use the library's resources and digital facilities to gather information, form outlines, topic/supporting sentences, and correctly format the rhetorical framework for an academic research paper. However, all too often, most writing practice tends to remain at the sentence or paragraph level though in some cases, teachers may still be required to work closely with graduate students and provide intensive one-on-one

training.

Furthermore, such students must be able to handle feedback from essential reviews of works they have submitted for publication. Classes may also include many international students who have received entirely different writing instruction, thus posing a new pedagogical problem. A further issue is a competition in attracting top students to private and national universities. Therefore, the institutions have added facilities and new courses each year; in some cases, writing centers provide offers for one-to-one instruction. Finally, another challenge is helping students integrate their writing skills into academic papers in their field and mastering the jargon, technical English, and various style formats that their conferences require.

As there are many changes and challenges for EFL writing instructors in Japan, this paper investigates six EFL instructors' recommendations regarding their institutions. Specifically, one aim is to learn how the process approach to writing has been adapted, how often assignments are required, how often tasks are needed, and how teachers conducted their evaluations. Furthermore, the study will discuss analysis and recommendations for students' needs and innovative approaches to teaching writing. Overall, the research will focus on teacher concerns, commonalities, and essential differences in the responses. In short, it is vital to obtain a snapshot of the quality of EFL writing instruction within foundation courses and how teacher educators have adopted various conceptual frameworks for organizing and evaluating their programs. The results might stress the importance of re-thinking and re-organizing current programs or initiating new writing courses.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### A. Teachers' Pedagogical Practices, Reasoning, and Reflections

One of the first issues to consider in writing is how teachers need to make clear the descriptions of assignments, their overall purpose and benefit to the students, and the teacher's expectations and means of evaluation. Such transparency does a lot in reducing anxiety. Concerning lower-level, superficial errors, Wadden and Peterson [1] found that they increase with higher levels of conceptual writing; moreover, many investigations in writing confirm that discrete grammar error corrections rarely result in long-term achievement. Thus, as students gain more proficiency, they need more training in editing and proofing. Teachers recommend picking out outstanding essays or reports and highlighting them onscreen to point out successful writing. Regarding editing, students need to learn,

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as Pinker [2] points out, to avoid wordiness as too many scholars intentionally use ambiguous phrasing instead of stating something in simpler terms, desiring “to trick their listeners with grandiose jargon” (p. 2). In short, with increasing levels of difficulty and terminology, students will have to struggle to be concise with the higher levels of abstractness and complexity in their topics.

Wadden and Peterson [1] details the basic practices that instructors must follow to reinforce writing as a process. One of the most critical difficulties is how teachers provide assignments that involve a clear explanation and open dialogue of the lesson’s elements and aims and a suggested writing approach to fulfill these objectives and the deadlines. Students, all too often, have been trapped in a fixed theme and had to achieve a set number of words or pages to receive credit. Today, the focus is on motivating students by allowing them to pursue their interests within a broader theme while still meeting course objectives.

There is still comprehensive agreement among teachers that the significance of knowing the rules of writing (related to the many genres, particularly as it relates to organization, evidence, and style) is a second core practice. Students will have better respect and grasp of the writing task if they comprehend these principles. It is unfortunately common for students to be completely unfamiliar with the style guides in their professions; for instance, general articles have adopted APA (American Psychological Association), Chicago Manual of Style, or MLA (Modern Language Association), physics articles AIP (American Institute of Physics) style manuals, chemistry ACS (American Chemical Society) style guide, biology CES (Council of Science Editors) manuals, mathematics AMS (American Mathematical Society) Handbook, and engineering the 2009 IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) style manual.<sup>1</sup> This crucial aspect of writing is frequently overlooked in undergraduate classes, leaving students unaware of the plethora of generic requirements and conventions, rules governing language and presentation, conventions, notations, citations, and other aspects, and how such guidelines are updated each year.

A third practice involves explicit guidance for students to use reference work and databases for a specific topic. By understanding where particular relevant resources are in the institution's library or media centers and the best methods of making and keeping track of notes, students will be far less anxious and far more efficient. Outlining is also an aspect that students need to learn far more about; the University of Southern California Library discusses the benefits of a good outline: (1) the student will be much less likely to have writer's block and stay organized and focused, (2) the outline will help ensure the proper coherence (flow of idea) in the final paper, (3) a detailed outline ensures that the student will always have the means to identify problems, gaps, and to recalibrate their writing if it shifts out of set boundaries, (4) the outline can be a means of staying motivated, (5) it helps the student to organize multiple ideas about a topic as they need to analyze most research problems from a variety of

perspectives; thus, allowing for one to sort out which modes of analysis are the most appropriate to provide the most robust findings [3]. Reference [4] cites that good outlines typically experience three steps. First, there is a scratch outline generated from one’s freewriting procedure and classifying the details into a format that is easy to comprehend and follow. The scratch outline leads to an informal outline that allows individuals to set words and possible topic sentences. Then follows a standard outline and a straightforward direction showing how the writer's supporting ideas relate to the topic sentence. In short, it can aid one in better distinguishing between ideas of equivalent significance and ones of lesser significance.

Finally, the role of revision and how students incorporate it into the writing process requires far more time and practice. Students need to learn not to depend totally on online grammar and spelling checkers. Because such programs operate with a fixed number of linguistic rules, they cannot recognize every mistake and make errors. They also need to learn to proofread exclusively one mistake at one time, the importance of reading slowly and reading every word, separating the text into individual sentences, circling every punctuation mark, and even reading the paper backward. Horkoff [4] points out that students need to truly understand the purpose of revising and editing and how important it is to take a second look at one's ideas. This revising will allow one to add, cut, move, or change information to make the students’ ideas more explicit, accurate, and engaging.

According to Horkoff [4], teachers should be aware that words like *critic*, *critical*, and *criticism* may elicit negative feelings, but this process reveals issues. In short, students should adopt a skeptical attitude and pretend to be one of their readers, asking whether you (as an outside reader) are satisfied or dissatisfied. In brief, as writers and thinkers, students must learn to be constructively critical of themselves and have high expectations for their work, which necessitates some psychological training. Finally, it allows students to take ownership of an essay, and their self-evaluation is now valued and supported by the system.

### B. Grammatical Errors

The history of addressing grammatical accuracy has a long history: Johnson [5] found in his study the most prevalent errors included: spelling, capitalization, punctuation, lax repetition or omission, apostrophe mistakes, pronoun agreement, verb tense agreement and errors, grammatically mistaken sentence structure (run-ons and fragments), errors in the adverb and adjective usage, and mistakes in the conjunction and preposition usage. The list provided by Witty and Green [6] from 170 timed papers differed with the researchers finding fragments, dangling modifiers, mislaid modifiers, pronoun agreement, inaccurate connectives, unclear pronoun reference, misuse of simple past tense forms such as “would”, confusing forms by the resemblance of meaning or sound, pronoun agreement, mistaken tense, and unclassified mistakes. Having examined 20,00 articles, Hodges [7] listed problems: agreement, apostrophe, comma, exactness, omission of words, reasonable use, reference of pronouns, spelling, unnecessary commas, and wordiness.

<sup>1</sup> Enago Academy. Listing of Style Guides. Available: <https://www.enago.com/academy/different-scientific-writing-style-guides/>

A more current study by Connors and Lunsford [8] found vastly different issues: an unneeded shift in person, comma splice, fragmented or run-on sentence, “*Its/It’s*” mistake, lack of a comma in a series, misplaced or dangling modifier, missing or the wrong preposition, missing/incorrect endings, mistaken verb form or tense. The list continues on with errors such as no comma after the introductory part, no comma in non-restrictive component, no comma in a compound sentence, possessive apostrophe mistake, pronoun agreement mistake, fragmented sentence, subject-verb agreement, tense change, unclear pronoun reference, unnecessary comma with restrictive element, and wrong word. In a second study, Lunsford [9] found that the most prevalent mistakes from two sets of 25 papers were: wrong words (79), comma splices (61), the omitted comma after an introductory term or expression (55), possessive apostrophe mistakes (48), subject-verb agreement mistake (41), neglecting internal quotation with the page number (35), homonym mistake (32), and absent term (31).

During the two following decades, investigators have persisted in examining mistake patterns. Most remarkable, conceivably, is Gary Sloan’s 1990 “Frequency of Errors in Essays by College Freshmen and by Professional Writers” [10], which discovered that “[t]he distribution of errors in the students’ writing is consistent with figures from previous studies... Connors and Lunsford found 9.52 errors per essay or 2.26 errors per 100 words; The study of [9]’s figures for the same are 9.60 and 2.04” (302). Reference [11]’s complex and carefully nuanced examination, which investigates eight mistake patterns, deserves to be read. The patterns involve end punctuation, faulty predication, orthography, pronoun reference, syntactic parallelism, the formation of possessives, the punctuation of final free modification, and compound sentences. However, for this essay, he emphasizes the necessity to consider all types of mistakes he analyses in as rich a context as attainable because “the causality of student error is very complex” (p. 495). His discoveries imply that the “raw number of errors . . . seems to be growing during college,” although surprisingly, student authors “simultaneously are making measurable growth . . . toward mature competence” (pp. 494–495). Therefore, Haswell [11] concluded that dealing with common mistakes as a source instead of an indicator may still be too early for university-age learners (p. 495). The second trend that Lunsford [9] mentioned is a profound transformation in the writings educators ask learners to write in first-year composition courses. Each kind of genre produced significantly different error rates: investigated discussion or paper (287), an assertion with infrequent or no references (186), close examination or reading (141), compare/contrast (78), individual narrative (76), reflective analysis (16) and reflective cover letter (3). Although the initial research contained some reports and many readings of primarily academic papers, most papers were personal narratives. Patterns of teachers’ responses to students’ essays were analyzed, which showed misspelling as the most common error by some 300 percent.

Thus, researchers and teachers are now more aware of the complexity of grammatical accuracy over the past few decades. Over the past few decades, there has been

tremendous change in educational practices and new perspectives for writing courses. Still, it is unclear how EFL teachers in Japan adopt such ideas and techniques in their classrooms. Moreover, the obstacles, issues, and challenges to innovation in Japanese higher education need to be specified so that other teachers can better manage to bring about change (see Table I and Table II).

TABLE I: ACCURACY OUTPUT (ERRORS / 100-WORD RATIO) AMONG THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES

Between Groups Within Groups Total	Sum of Squares	Df (degrees of freedom)	Mean Square	F (F-ratio) <sup>2</sup>	Sig (significance)
First Draft	309.7	3	103.2	5.269	0.00269***
Second Draft	64.3	3	21.444	2.153	0.103

TABLE II: EFCT (ERROR-FREE CLAUSE TOTALS) OUTPUT AMONG THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES

Between Groups Within Groups Total	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
First Draft	634.6	3	211.52	4.73	0.00495*
Second Draft	829	3	276.34	5.931	0.00128**

### III. PRELIMINARY DATA

Reference [12] gathered data that characterizes the complexity, accuracy, and fluency in Japanese L2 (second language) writing. It studied the growth of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) in Japanese L2 university students’ English writing. The investigator instructed sixty-five students from four institutions in Kyushu (Japan) to compose a 30-minute self-introduction essay with 10 minutes for editing; half were to self-edit, while the other group used an online grammar checker. The researcher aimed to know how to describe the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of Japanese L2 writing and whether there were any significant differences in the writing of Japanese first- and second-year students between the four colleges evaluated. The author also discussed differences in syntactical complexity and grammatical accuracy between the first and second drafts. The average number of words utilized by pupils was 173.3. There were no statistically significant changes in complexity between the two drafts; however, statistically significant disparities in error rates existed.

In short, the data showed that little progress was being made over a school term. According to the data, students needed more significant help writing more extensive sentences, enhancing their general fluency, and editing their work. Furthermore, both teachers and students are not fully aware of the need for syntactic complexity and the need for students to formulate and write their ideas down faster

<sup>2</sup> The proportion of two mean square numbers is named the “F-ratio.” It usually comes close to a 1.0 number when the null assumption or hypothesis is valid. A significant F-ratio indicates that the deviation among subjects’ means exceeds what one anticipates to find by circumstance.

(fluency). More research needs to deal with how students might be progressing in their L2 writing skills and what teacher recommendations are.

#### IV. The STUDY

##### A. Rationale

Because many Japanese EFL teachers are not currently aware of common changes or innovative practices and procedures occurring throughout universities in Japan, this research aims to identify commonalities in practices and perspectives and identify new approaches that can facilitate academic writing.

##### B. Research Questions

- 1) Is there any commonality among teachers regarding whether or not their university has a specific curriculum that addresses writing?
- 2) Is there any commonality among teachers about how they see students' needs?
- 3) What specific innovative approaches are teachers interested in or are implementing?

##### C. Instrument

The survey has 21 questions divided into three themes: institutional-related practices, students' needs, and innovative approaches to teaching writing, which has 15 prompts. The questions came from this literature review and colleagues and associates at other universities. Part one is eliciting information about the nature of each institution's curriculum, how the process approach is incorporated, and how evaluation is conducted. Part two concerns students' needs and examines the most pressing needs of the students and the nature of writing materials, texts, and curriculum. Furthermore, questions focus on making writing more appealing and what kind of writing should prioritize. Part three relates to how teachers are improving the practice of writing and if they are utilizing any computerized software in this regard; in addition, there are also a variety of prompts relating to innovative writing activities that might have been implemented.

##### D. Procedures

The investigators collected data from 2019 and 2020 regarding the questionnaire and recordings. The recording (1 hour and 21 minutes long) involved various EFL professors at Hiroshima University or surrounding areas.

##### E. Data Analysis

The researchers reduced the responses from each questionnaire and conducted content analysis to categorize and summarize written or verbal responses. Then, the investigators attempted to identify themes, patterns, and relationships, which they could apply to generate findings.

##### F. Subjects

The researchers extracted data on a questionnaire from six subjects who worked as writing instructors at national or city

universities and one group discussion recording similarly based on these questions.

#### V. RESULTS

##### A. Theme 1. Writing Instructions

How often learners receive instruction to compose and how long the papers are, on average, two of the most important aspects of a writing curriculum. Responses ranged from one paragraph per week to final reports ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 words, with fourth-year graduation reports ranging from 12 to 100 pages. One of the themes mentioned by the lecturers was abstract writing with a word count ranging from 150 to 300 words. Students in Hiroshima University's Communication 2A class must complete paragraph-length projects culminating in a final report. In contrast, students in Academic Writing I and II have a choice of written assignments ranging from little exercises to lengthy compositions. The first part of the final report is approximately 1000 words long, while the second part is roughly 2500 words long. Students incorporated some writing into the poster sessions. Teachers expected students in intensive writing classes to write one paragraph per week; however, this varies by class level.

Regarding how instructors emphasized writing at one's institution, was there a focus on interactive writing, academic writing, email, or social media correspondence? Teachers urged students to learn how to write each paper's sections correctly and be aware of their responses' organization, flow, content, and format, focusing on academic writing. Teachers saw that students needed practice writing emails and business and technical reports. One of the concerns is that students frequently express dissatisfaction with the amount of assigned homework.

Similarly, teachers provided a wide range of responses when asked how they rated the quality of their writing curriculum. Some professors were perplexed because no such comprehensive framework exists to supervise or review any curriculum across their schools. As a result, there has never been an official evaluation of the effectiveness of any one course. Part-timers had no idea how the full-time teachers conducted any evaluations because full-time employees did not provide any of the information acquired. Other teachers claimed that while evaluation corresponds to students' TOEIC exam scores, they have not reviewed writing aspects outside the classroom. A representative from another institution described how the faculty dean and departmental dean examined all subject syllabi annually. Professors who engage in FD (Faculty Development) may also evaluate the quality of a particular writing subject by looking at the course's final products, for example, thesis writing. They have invited other professors to hear about the papers and see the finished items at a talk. The Registrar's Office receives completed English theses, which the department dean reviews. On the other hand, this final step can be more concerned with the number of pages than anything else.

Some professors claimed that their programs adequately prepared students to generate academic abstracts,

<sup>3</sup> These marks indicate (double) significant difference, whereas one signifies just significance.

presentations, and research papers. In contrast, others argued that their programs did not adequately prepare students to produce academic abstracts, presentations, or research papers. However, a significant improvement issue was a lack of concentration and the necessity for each class curricula to target students' needs to study a specific style/aspect of writing appropriate to their degree level. According to one instructor, many professors believe that the curriculum does not adequately meet the demands of pupils, even though it has improved in terms of mixing writing and reading during the last five years. A combination of reading and writing courses was deemed ineffective.

There was an emphasis on graduate programs and the need for particular goals regarding gaps or difficulties with the curriculum that professors believed lacked countermeasures. Because there are many competing aspects in the broader curriculum, one instructor suggested that their program be tightly focused on specific goals. As a result, students' needs are not being satisfied to the fullest extent possible. The program should emphasize either writing or speaking, but not both. Another instructor mentioned that the program offered intensive writing courses as an elective. Students might graduate without learning basic or advanced writing abilities; making the intensive class required would allow them to extend their skillset dramatically. Another school focused on graduate degrees, where students can come from various educational backgrounds and how some may need to brush up on basic skills or, in some instances, learn how to write an entire essay from beginning to end.

Although graduate schools consider most graduate students to have some academic writing and formatting expertise, this is not always the case. Another issue noted is how courses should allow professors to select their resources while adhering to a set curriculum. The teachers also discussed the following topics:

- 1) Courses should be condensed;
- 2) A more cohesive curriculum should be established so that courses can build on each other;
- 3) Teachers should only be able to teach these courses if they understand writing (L1: first language and L2: second language);
- 4) Universities should include more explicit teaching of structure and rhetoric in curricula and grammar and vocabulary. More practice is required;
- 5) A greater emphasis should be placed on correctly developing pupils' talents;
- 6) A more consistent teaching of writing skills in the students' first language is also required;
- 7) In general, students need more training. Teachers must recognize that children have limited writing experience.

Instructors raised concerns concerning the efficacy of an available rubric for evaluating students' writings, which did not appear to be applied frequently despite being based on course topic and level. The adjustment, however, reflects course content rather than student-level because graduate and undergraduate students have similar student levels. When it comes to feedback and student output, responses differed. Some instructors claimed that there is not enough feedback or that it depends on the students or teachers in question, while others argued that the emphasis is more on clarity and logic

than grammar. According to one teacher, students discover errors only if they obstruct clarity. One teacher noted that each teacher has their evaluation technique and rubrics for grading students' writings. Teachers highlighted how a working rubric is shared and customized for each class in more advanced courses. The lecturer then grades the essays submitted by the students. Although instructors advise students that they can disseminate papers written in English more widely worldwide, most students write graduation papers in Japanese, according to other universities.

One instructor described how the faculty developed a criterion for evaluation to assist the course assessor in assessing papers and distinguishing acceptable articles from those too general to be passable. The simultaneous examination of the written thesis and a one-hour test at the Master's level generated the concept of a pass or fail—black or white—designation. Furthermore, graduate faculty assess 20-page capstone papers to see if they contain original ideas, well-developed points of view, and significant insights that others lack or if the writers plagiarized. Teachers provided students with step-by-step instructions on producing a fine paper, writing higher-quality articles, preventing copying and pasting, and avoiding incorrect citations. The authors of rejected articles received one chance to amend their work. A seminar on the presentation of written work was also presented, which was a strategy used by the supervisor to see if the students understood what they had correctly written.

Finally, universities assign few Japanese-speaking full-time and part-time academics to writing courses. Native speakers teach the majority of oral communication courses; as a result, Japanese EFL teachers rarely gain the ability to teach these courses. Eventually, while teachers provide feedback on students' essays, many students ignore it and do not adequately review their work; they also rarely extend their papers and make them more in-depth.

### *B. Theme 2. Describing Students' Needs*

Teachers cited the need to improve vocabulary, fundamental knowledge of collocation, and grammar; another requirement was to improve spelling. There was more agreement on the issue of the most pressing need for students regarding their writing, with teachers citing the need to improve vocabulary, particularly concerning basic knowledge of collocation and grammar. Additionally, students tend to require guidance with formatting and basic writing skills since they lack experience with essay organization and the production of complete sentences. Another challenge is being able to write plainly and simply. On the other hand, instructors believed their universities were well-equipped to meet the needs of advanced students, stating, in one case, that there was an excellent selection of academic writing reference materials. Advanced students, on the other hand, require the assistance of a trained instructor to improve their studies; thus, LinkedIn e-learning programs seem to be beneficial.

Another instructor stated that small class sizes allow teachers to identify more advanced students and provide prompt feedback, as students usually require minor adjustments. These students struggled with using nouns and pronouns and conjugation problems with articles and verbs.

It was stated that the distinction between significant verbs and quasi-verbs in Japanese requires many class discussion periods. Another issue mentioned was how learners can consult dictionaries and write down words or phrases, but teachers felt that they could only handle pieces of sentences; as a result, they can only read about what they are putting down. Few students can write fluently and efficiently to communicate their thoughts and understand how to phrase them. As a result, good practice and training are necessary, emphasizing writing longer sentences and offering appropriate reading resources as soon as possible. When asked about students who were less proficient in writing, instructors said that many of their students had “little practice and training about writing”. Most of their writing courses aim to help students prepare to write in English in academic settings. Many people with weak writing skills are just out of high school and have never written anything longer than a paragraph before. Instructors believed that it was also critical for students to write to someone, whether a pen pal or a presentation, that could elicit a reaction.

There was little agreement on whether the writing resources, text, and curriculum were hard enough for pupils. All of the instructors thought their resources were adequate because the type of writing done at the secondary education level was the practice of translating Japanese sentences into English. According to teachers, students had never been taught continuous methods of thinking in English in a logical unit. The technique might be a plausible option if students were encouraged to compose short writing pieces every week and then submit them to partners or groups the following week, providing positive feedback. However, class size and unsupervised group work may make this problematic. Teachers also told students how essential and helpful writing skills were for their future job possibilities.

Furthermore, contests, such as “haiku” contests, promote interest; while students are often said to be uninterested in writing essays, short creative writing can be interesting. A presentation competition that was open to both Japanese and English-speaking candidates drew much attention as an example of increasing motivation; the students memorized and wrote down their speeches before giving them. In short, teachers said that students who take elective writing courses understand the need to improve their writing skills and are driven to do so. Unfortunately, students tend to use the Writing Center<sup>4</sup> for editing and proofreading rather than as a strategy for becoming autonomous writers; consequently, any awareness focuses on grammar and vocabulary rather than structure and logical growth. There is a substantial discrepancy between what learners desire to accomplish and what some educators think they need to learn.

### *C. Theme 3: Innovative Approaches to Teaching Writing*

Teachers looking for new approaches to teaching writing obtained various responses, with the analytic method being considered beneficial in constructing a research report. Another professor talked about the benefits of using a guided

group writing approach. Teachers advised students to use the ETS (Educational Testing Service) “Criterion” online software to help them focus on mechanics. Teachers thought that using a process approach to writing was the most effective and that including online grammar checkers like “Grammarly” in the writing program was beneficial as well. Because they were either too pricey or not engaging enough, instructors considered e-learning programs problematic [13].

When it came to innovative ways to publicize student work, professors noted John M. Swales’ work at the University of Michigan [14]. In contrast, others mentioned Google and Storybird websites, one worry being student privacy. Another person suggested using Moodle’s “Workshop” option to share student papers for assessment and peer criticism. Finally, when asked about any knowledge-creating writing activities that piqued their attention, they listed roleplays, generic and focused summaries, pre-test warm-ups such as essay test simulations, journal writing, letters particularly to prospective internship companies, and one-minute papers.

## VI. DISCUSSION

When looking back at teacher recommendations, it is evident that some instructors had innovative ideas, but they faced constraints from their institutes or their students’ levels. A second key issue is the skill gaps visible in undergraduate and graduate students; this issue will challenge all professors because new methodologies and content will always depend on assumptions about what students have learned and achieved in prior years. It was clear that supplies, process, and feedback were significant concerns for these educators. Some teachers have referred to a shared rubric that focuses on students’ improvements in logical reasoning: (1) topic sentence, (2) supporting sentences, (3) conclusion, and (4) grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Another instructor discussed how, for their beginners, content issues are generally not considered for evaluation because mastering basic writing skills, e.g., paragraph formation, grammar, and flow, is far more important than content or variety at this level. At the same time, other instructors discussed how their rubric included a mix of analytic, holistic, and primary trait scoring if time allowed. Instructors also used peer assessments. Teachers also explained how liberal arts classes focus less on content and more on structure or thinking. In contrast, instructors evaluate sources’ critical thinking regarding how students argue content and if students provide adequate information. However, content is a challenging subject for teachers, as critical remarks were dependent on the number of pupils in a class, and writing a comment in a way that would allow them to think about it more deeply was difficult. One teacher pointed out that instructors should add the fifth thinking talent to an “Eikaiwa” (English Conversation) I & II topic where they teach the four skills.

One challenge is to have sufficient language and pragmatic understanding in both cultures to provide meaningful feedback and the question of how much feedback to give students. Another challenge is piquing students’ interest in academic or creative writing, while another offers them a

<sup>4</sup>The Writing Center. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Available: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/editing,-and-proofreading/>

diverse range of writing opportunities to develop their skills thoroughly. One instructor mentioned that videos on paper writing are an essential part that teachers should address more. According to one teacher, students are also ill-equipped to respond to the educational process of obtaining peer-based evaluation. Publishers and schools should widely distribute writing-related videos.

Class sizes are also a consideration since more institutions face financial constraints, resulting in larger and larger classes, making it more difficult to provide customized input. Furthermore, there is a need for increased teacher training, particularly in identifying ability gaps and concerns with proofing and editing. According to one study, complexity, accuracy, and fluency (number of words written) did not improve over an academic year [15]. Therefore, teachers should be aware of their students' long-term development (or lack thereof), particularly fluency and productivity. Teachers are frequently unaware of how long it takes certain pupils to write just one page. Finally, detecting and understanding students' requirements is a constant component, but giving genuine, relevant material that students can appreciate and use is considerably less so. This problem is complicated because students' demands vary and are at different levels, with some requiring assistance with vocabulary. In contrast, others require more sophisticated collocation, syntax, and editing knowledge.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This article has researched six EFL teachers' recommendations to clarify any changes and challenges EFL writing teachers in Japan face. The research questions focused on whether commonality exists among instructors about if their institutions have a specific curriculum that addresses writing, whether similarity exists among instructors regarding how they find students' needs, and what innovative methods instructors are implementing or considering.

The first question revealed a wide range of writing lengths, from one paragraph each week to term papers from 1,000 to 2,500 words, with a fourth-year graduation thesis ranging from 12 to 100 pages. While some instructors emphasized academic writing with its organization, flow, content, and format, others focused on writing emails and business and technical reports. Responses also varied as to how they evaluated the quality of their writing curriculum. Although graduate schools expect most graduate students to have some academic writing and formatting knowledge, this is not always the case. Teachers raised concerns about the effectiveness of an available rubric for evaluating students' essays. While instructors provide feedback on students' papers, many students ignore it and do not adequately review their work to make it more in-depth.

More agreement was observed on the second question, the issue of students' needs with the urgent necessity to improve vocabulary, particularly regarding basic knowledge of collocation and grammar. Teachers considered their institutions capable of meeting the demand of advanced students with ample academic writing references. Still, the advanced students needed the assistance of a trained teacher

to improve their writing. Few students can write fluently to communicate their thoughts and express them. They had never been taught techniques of thinking in English in a logical unit. There is a remarkable difference between what students intend to accomplish and what some teachers think they need to learn.

Teachers responded to the third question in various ways, with the analytic method helping write a research paper. Instructors have used a guided group writing approach, ETS "Criterion" online software, a process approach, and online grammar checkers such as "Grammarly" in the writing program. Attention receiving writing activities include roleplays, summaries, pre-test warm-ups, journal writing, letters to prospective internship companies, and a one-minute paper. Some teachers had innovative ideas, but they faced restrictions from their schools or their students' levels.

It is clear that in 2021 and 2022, there is a need for more information about EFL courses and curricula to be shared among teachers. While some innovations are proving helpful, as some improved e-learning programs, teachers need to know how they may be advantageous to students at various levels. This data clearly shows varied approaches among these institutions and that pupils continue to require assistance with formatting and essential writing functions, mainly as many students appear to have little expertise with essay structure and being able to write clearly. Further research is necessary concerning how administrators prioritize writing and are open to change and innovation, particularly with instruction and evaluation.

## APPENDIX

### CURRICULUM QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Part I. General

Does your university have a specific curriculum/courses that address writing?

#### **If no, then:**

1. Do you think your university will address this topic of developing a specific writing course in the next few years?
2. Why isn't writing (as a specific course with its own curriculum) included in your university?
3. Is there any interest in writing among the teachers at your university?
4. Are your students aware of the need to improve their own writing?

#### **If yes, then:**

1. Do you think that this curriculum adequately addresses students' needs?
2. How does the university go about evaluating the quality of the writing curriculum?
3. What gaps or issues need to be changed in regards to this curriculum?
4. How does your writing curriculum incorporate the process approach into a working syllabus?
5. How is the evaluation of students' essays handled? Is there a working rubric that the university uses, and is it adjusted for various levels of proficiency?

6. How is the issue of content (depth, variety, critical thinking) handled and evaluated?
7. How often do students write each semester, and how long (on average) are these papers?

### Part 2. Students' Needs

1. What do you think is the most pressing need of your students in regard to writing?
2. Is your university equipped to address the needs of more advanced students in regards to writing?
3. Is your university also equipped to address the need of EFL students who have had little practice and instruction in regards to writing?
4. Are the writing materials, texts, and curriculum that you have seen challenging enough for your students?
5. How do you think it is possible to make students more excited about writing?
6. What kind of writing should be prioritized in your university? Interactive writing? Academic writing? Email / social media correspondence?

### Part 3. Innovative Approaches to Teaching Writing

1. Have you studied various new approaches to teaching writing? If so, what methods, techniques, ideas, and approaches seemed interesting?
2. Are you familiar with any e-learning (Educational Testing Service, ETS's Criterion) or other software packages that aid in learning, and would they be useful at your university?
3. Are you familiar with new approaches to publicizing student output?
4. Do you think any of these knowledge-making writing activities might be of some interest to you or to your colleagues? If so, why?

Solving real problems	[ ]
Generic and focused summaries	[ ]
Pre-test warm-ups (essay test simulations)	[ ]
Response papers	[ ]
Letters	[ ]
Synthesis papers	[ ]
The discussion starter	[ ]
Believing and doubting game	[ ]
Analysis of events	[ ]
The learning log	[ ]
Project notebooks	[ ]
The writing journal	[ ]
Problem statement	[ ]
One-minute paper	[ ]
Role playing	[ ]

**Thank you for your time.**

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Long and Watanabe investigated and collected the data and analyzed it. Long composed the draft; Watanabe revised it, added the abstract and conclusion, proofread the article, and finalized the formatting; both writers had endorsed the last copy.

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