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Leveled Courses for Academic Writing

習熟度別アカデミックライティング

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1. Introduction

After three years of non-credited Academic Writing Summer Workshops, credited *Special Lectures on Academic Writing and Presenting in English* with similar content were initiated for graduate students in 2011. These Special Lectures were held for the second time in the first semester of 2012. This report describes the methods and reasons participants were divided into leveled courses and analyzes participant improvement based on the division.

2. Methods and reasons for division into leveled courses

For the 2012 Special Lecture, 27 students of seven majors registered. During guidance, these students took an entrance test (Max.=20) similar to that of the previous year^[1]. In addition they took a survey about their interests, English abilities, the number of academic papers read, etc. In an attempt to create homogeneous courses students were divided into groups (Figure 1) based on two factors: their entrance test score and their self-indicated English ability. The beginner group consisted solely of students with low entrance test scores and self-indicated beginner English ability. Students with a low entrance test score and a self-indicated low-intermediate ability were assigned to the low-intermediate group, but also students with a high entrance test score and a self-indicated beginner ability were assigned to the low-intermediate group. The intermediate group consisted of students with high entrance test scores and a self-indicated low-intermediate or intermediate ability.

Assigned Course	Entrance Test Score and Self-indicated English Ability																	
	5	7	8	9	9	10	12	12	13									
Beginner (B)	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B									
Low-Intermediate (LI)				9	10	11	12	12	13	14	16	16						
				LI	LI	LI	LI	LI	LI	B	B	B						
Intermediate (I)										14	16	16	17	18	18	18	19	19
										LI	LI	LI	LI	LI	I	LI	LI	I

Figure 1. Course Division with Score Overlap

When the Special Lecture was organized for the first time in 2011, students were divided into courses mainly according to their interests indicated in the pre-course survey^[1]. Respectively, three courses were formed: a writing course, a presenting course and a mixed writing-presenting course. However, student self-indicated interests and student preparedness did not always coincide. Specifically, the students who wanted to concentrate on presentation skills had indicated that a certain amount of their papers were written, but in reality the written amount was less than expected, of a lower quality, or written in Japanese. Therefore, papers needed to be rewritten into English before presentations could be prepared. The courses with a writing focus faced other problems, such as students having little or no research data to write a paper on, irregular attendance and late assignment submission. This resulted in a shift of class focus and delayed teaching schedules because of the breakdown of the scaffolded structure of the assignments. To avoid similar problems in 2012, course division was based on student levels and, to a lesser extent, on student preferences.

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3. Results and Discussion

At the end of the first semester of 2012, 21 students took the exit test to measure their improvement. As shown in Figure 2, the average student level at the beginning and at the end of the course was the highest of the three years. In contrast, the average improvement for 2012 was the lowest. Figure 3 indicates the improvement for each level. Both the beginner and the low-intermediate course improved their average score significantly: the beginner course average score increased by 6.75 from 9.5 to 16.25 and the low-intermediate course average score increased by 5 from 12.4 to 17.4. The intermediate course had a slight gain of 0.63.

	Entrance	Exit	Improvement
2010 (Max. =16)	8.14	12.77	4.64
2011 (Max. =16)	7.58	13.92	6.33
2012 (Max. =20)	13	17	4

Figure 2. Average Score and Average Improvement

	Beginner			Low-intermediate			Intermediate		
	Entrance	Exit	Improvement	Entrance	Exit	Improvement	Entrance	Exit	Improvement
	5	13	8				14	18	4
	7	17	10				16	15	-1
	8	17	9				16	18	2
	9	18	9	9	18	9	17	19	2
	10	17	7	10	16	6	18	18	0
	12	14	2	13	16	3	18	18	0
	12	16	4	14	17	3	18	17	-1
	13	18	5	16	20	4	19	18	-1
Average	9.5	16.25	6.75	12.4	17.4	5	17	17.63	0.63

Figure 3. Entrance/Exit Test Scores and Improvement

The higher the entrance score is, the harder it will be to improve because the students have already nearly obtained the highest possible score concerning the knowledge tested on the entrance and exit tests. See the previous discussion in Vanbaelen and Harrison^[1]. Accordingly, the limited improvement of the intermediate course was predictable. Participants in the two other courses improved proportionally more. Half of the students of the two lowest levels had an entrance score of 50% or lower. Nevertheless, students in these two levels were able to attain exit test scores similar to students in the intermediate course.

4. Conclusion

This report discussed the methods and reasons for dividing the participants of the 2012 Special Lecture into leveled classes and analyzed participant improvement. Students were divided based on entrance test scores and their self-indicated English abilities. The beginner and low-intermediate courses started with little knowledge on paper-writing but were able to increase their understanding to a level comparable with that of the intermediate course.

5. References

[1] Ruth Vanbaelen and Jonathan Harrison (2011) "Academic Writing Workshop vs. Semester-course Participant Improvement", 第 55 回日本大学理工学部学術講演会、日本大工理工学部、口頭発表、2011 年 11 月 26 日

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