研究論文

A study note of writing class in Japanese university EFL context

大学での英語ライティング指導に関する予備的研究

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要旨
留学前に英文ライティングの知識を持たず英語圏に留学をした日本人学生が苦戦を強いられるという話を聞く。昨今の国際化と連動する中で、日本の大学においても英文ライティングの指導が以前にもまして求められるようになってきた。その一方で、現状の英語教育においては、適切な準備や指導がまだ不十分との指摘もある。本論では、米国におけるライティング教育の流れを簡単にまとめつつ、大学教養科目としての英語ライティング授業を担当する立場における自身への課題整理という視点から、ライティング授業指導の現状と改善点について考察する。

1. Introduction

A high level of proficiency in English composition is indispensable for success in studying abroad. However, the difficulty of English composition is well known. Matsuda & Hammill (2004, p.268) mention that ‘academic composition is a second language even in one’s native language.’ Therefore, it becomes all the more difficult for English-language learners to write academic essays. Gosden (1996) talks about Japanese doctoral students who had not been formally taught English academic composition until they had to write their first academic research articles (p.113). This episode highlights the tendency of Japanese English education to pay little attention to the instruction of writing a composition although the increase in academic writing in a global context

is making English writing proficiency more necessary for students than before. Casanave (2004, p.15) says, "It is not enough to know thyself. Teachers must also know the content of their fields and which issues are historically important and currently unresolved." Following this suggestion, I will briefly review composition studies in the US from a historical point of view, since "composition studies are characterized by paradigmatic waves of thought shifting from one to the next, each strong reaction to the preceding paradigm" (Downs & Wardle, 2012, p124). Another discussion will be about writing classes in a liberal arts education program. This discussion is presented from my own perspective about my teaching experiences with writing in an EFL (English as Foreign Language) context at a Japanese national university.

2. Historical review of US composition history

Before academic composition gained its current status in the curriculum of US higher education, teachers and scholars needed much time and effort in the course of exploration. They experienced controversial issues over composition studies while witnessing various paradigmatic shifts in its short history of English writing pedagogy during the last century or two.

When Harvard University established a freshman English composition course in 1875, this movement led to a rapid institutional growth in composition instruction in the US, which was not paralleled elsewhere (Grabeniv & Kaplan, 1996, p.11). In addition to this dynamic change, Adams Sherman Hill, Boylston Professor at Harvard, published *Principles of Rhetoric* in 1878. In the textbook, Hill claimed rhetoric was an art, not a science (MacLeod, 2007, p.30). He implied writing should need skills, but not knowledge or scientific research. In other words, composition program needs teachers, but not scholars. MacLeod points out that this view pushed down teaching writing to an entry level-teaching job in Harvard's composition program (MacLeod, 2007, p.30).

The coming twentieth century saw several movements in the teaching methods of English composition. From the mid-1940s to mid-1960s, the notion of controlled composition was a predominant approach (Partridge, 2001, p.55). In the following mid-1960s, a new movement occurred and took textual manipulation beyond the sentence level to the discourse level, focusing on the teaching of 'rhetorical function' (Partridge, 2001, p.56). Because of the need to deal with discourse-level composition, the pedagogy of teaching composition changed from product-oriented

to process-oriented. On this particular shift, Newsweek in December 1975 published the landmark article, "Why Johnny cannot write." It was "the so-called literacy crisis" (Malenezyk, 2012, p.91), which alleged US students were hopeless at writing. Because of this thought-provoking question to educators, composition was identified as an important academic basic skill for all students in US universities. First year composition was born under the shadow of remediation and a focus on correctness (MacLeod, 2007, p.29). Keeping this significant position, composition studies brought various pedagogies into university curriculum for a few decades in the last century: FYC (First-year composition), WAC (Writing Across curriculum), BW (Basic writing), and WAW (Writing about writing) to name a few.

In summary, composition studies in US higher education has been creating its history along with undergoing various paradigm shifts. In the course of the history of writing instruction, pedagogical changes always put a focus on the better ways of teaching in order to promote students' academic writing skills.

3. English composition in Japanese pre-university education

In contrast to the eventful history of composition studies in the US, Japanese English education seems to have placed little emphasis on teaching composition as if it might have ignored the importance of the subject. Based on this standpoint, I will look at English composition in pre-university education from two perspectives.

3-1. Writing class

Writing skill has gained a lower priority as compared with other skills in English classes in Japanese compulsory education. Under Japanese postwar-governmental reforms, English education became compulsory in secondary education. Then, almost half a century later from the post-war reform, English education finally started in K5 and K6 in 2011. As is often the case, grammar-based reading instruction lies in the center of English class with strengthening students' reading skills. In addition, speaking skill gains much higher interest than before in the middle of vigorous globalization of this age. This curriculum tendency may be the reason behind the cause of the unpopularity of teaching writing at school. In addition, the education setting in the public

schools are not always teacher-friendly. Students often need individual guidance for writing better. However, there are sometimes forty students in one writing class; this class size is too large for one teacher to give individual guidance to all forty students at one time during class. Additionally, pre-university students, who are busy with preparations for entrance examinations, would not appreciate time-consuming writing assignments at school and at home. These disadvantageous conditions may attribute the cause that teaching writing is not popular at school before pre-university education.

3-2. Writing skills

In writing education, Japanese students have most of the writing opportunities during their elementary school days. Gosden (1996, p.114) interestingly points out that "stress was laid on the contents of writing rather than on the skills" at school. His finding indicates that Japanese students may have few opportunities to build their writing skills in pre-university education. One subject that provides language skill-training is Language Arts class, which is often found in K12 education in Europe and the U.S. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Language Arts as a subject that aims at developing the student's comprehension and capacity for use of written and oral language in the area of reading, spelling, literature, and composition. This skill-based type of language learning class is conducted to foster not only students' writing skills but their critical ways of thinking. These two proficiencies are indispensable for writing, and unfortunately it is often said that both of them are lacking in Japanese students.

4. Writing in university English education

At the pinnacle, so to speak, of academic writing, are dissertations and theses (Jordan, 1997, p.167). However, composition study maintains a low status in Japanese higher education. If the study aims at writing up these academic papers, each discipline should conduct English composition classes since dissertations and theses are the final outcomes of specialized academic areas. Currently, however, this is frequently not the case. Sadoshima (2014) explain why the Japanese traditional academic system does not pay so much attention to English writing in university curricula. She mentions that the traditional system was originally from the model of the German university system that was aiming at elite education. This type of education let students visit their professor and get

coaching individually about how to write a thesis (Sadoshima, 2014). Following this German-born coaching-style, Japanese students are supposed to have research guidance from his or her regents' professor in a seminar group and learn how to write a thesis. Another chance is getting much advice from their seniors belonging to the same seminar group (Sadoshima, 2014). Now is a time when about half of the high-school graduates in Japan have a higher education. Universities and colleges are not a learning place for a few elites anymore. In addition, dissertations and theses are not the only reasons for students to write in English. The current age of internationalization has created a new academic environment that pushes them to communication in English, and English writing has become a significant information medium. All of these conditions make people aware that teaching writing should be expected to play a more significant role than before in liberal arts programs at university

5. Writing class in general education

Writing classes in general education in my work place allow teachers to choose textbooks and construct lessons as they like under a non-binding course guideline. Jordan presents four research areas: People, Places, Language, and Materials or media in EAP (Jordan, 1997, p.276). I want to examine the two areas of People and Materials in looking at writing class, although my examination is within the limitations of writing classes in the Japanese EFL context.

5-1. People

5-1-1. Writing students

First, the area of People should put the highest priority on students. More than anything, differentiated guidance according to the level of proficiency should be considered. In citing Leki (1995), Flowerdew and Peacock point out that it is important to design writing tasks taking into account the linguistic and conceptual stages of students' writing proficiency, and they introduce three-stages of specific writing activities (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001, p.187).

- The early stage: gap-filling, sentence completion, dictation and information transfer
- The intermediate stage: the focus on cross-disciplinary genres; the narrative, procedures, reports, explanation, exposition and discussion of the subject.

- The advanced stage: research skills with a focus on cross-disciplinary genres as well as general writing.

These three-stage learning is very applicable to writing class in EFL context.

5-1-2. Writing teachers

The next highest priority in the area of People is teachers. Many Japanese universities cannot maintain entry level-teaching jobs without part-time instructors and English teachers from non-disciplinary educational institutions. Such instructors and teachers usually teach more than one freshman English composition classes in general education, while coping with laborious work in class. The same is true in my university. Unfortunately, however, such dedicated teachers often find their teaching jobs less important and undervalued in the academic culture of the university, which is traditionally rooted in academic disciplines with scholarly history. However, writing is an important academic skill for students regardless of whether they acquire the skill in general education or their department's education. It is possible to discuss extensively between the curricula of liberal arts and major subjects as seen in Composition Across curriculum (WAC) in the U.S. universities. This cross-disciplinary approach of writing course will make many part-time instructors and teachers feel involved in the English education of the university, and they may find their entry level-teaching jobs educationally worthwhile by going along with faculties in disciplines. However, it is still more important for university administrators to raise their awareness that any educators at any level can be assets for the institution.

5-2. Materials

5-2-1. Writing vocabulary

Overseas postgraduates attending writing classes at university in the UK responded to a questionnaire saying that vocabulary was the most difficult part in writing (Jordan, 1997, p.46). For dealing with difficulties in writing, Matsuda and Hammil (2004) suggest that English second-language (L2) learners need to maximize their use of effective learning strategies and the resources available to them (p.273). About the problem of vocabulary, students can not only build up their vocabulary but also can make use of various types of dictionaries such as learners' dictionaries, collocation dictionaries, and thesauri in traditional print or electronic dictionaries as well as free

online forms. Even if students do not know as many words as English native-speaker students, they can compensate to some extent for lack of their lexical knowledge if they figure out how to use dictionaries effectively in writing. In that sense, teachers should instruct students how to make use of different types of dictionaries as linguistic tools in their writing.

5-2-2. Writing conventions and grammar

The same questionnaire conducted by Jordan found that writing style comes next out of six rankings of difficulty in writing (Jordan, 1997, p.46). About writing style, Matsuda and Hammil (2004) claim L2 writers tend to encounter particular challenges because of their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds (p.270). They say L2 learners should get explicit instruction about rules and conventions of English writing that are rhetorically and culturally different from the ones of their first language. When English learners have very little experience with discourse-level writing in English, they can neither notice academic writing-rules such as an appropriate format and plagiarism, nor imagine the audience to whom they have to write. Teachers should consider these pedagogical aspects in teaching paragraph writing and essays. Concerning grammar, non-native students do not have as good mental grammar of English language as English native speakers in their linguistic knowledge. Therefore, they cannot sense grammatical correctness intuitively in writing. In this respect, teachers should equip students with the basic knowledge of pedagogical English grammar and give explicit instructions to students any time they need them in their writing.

6. Summary

Since English composition is still unexplored in the history of Japanese English education, writing teachers at university will have to learn a great deal to be able to provide better instruction. At the same time, writing classes should be given as high a priority as speaking classes. Additionally, class size should also be given strong consideration. If the present guidelines for writing courses in my work place will be rewritten, the new teaching guidelines should include not only explicit skill-based teaching instructions for various stages, but also contain specific approaches to cope with students' difficulties in writing. In any case, professional skills and a comprehensive knowledge of writing will be more important for teachers in future writing classes in the Japanese university EFL context.

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