

## E-Journals Using Moodle Forums

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This paper will report on the practice of journal writing utilizing Moodle forums in a pre-intermediate EFL writing class at the writer's university. In this class, the student journals in the forums are made public among the classmates, who are encouraged to respond to each other on the forums. The teacher offers comments on almost every entry, but when she invites the students to respond to each other in particular forums, she waits until the students have made most of their responses. A questionnaire was given to the students at the end of the first semester asking ① what they thought was beneficial about journal writing, ② what they thought was not so good about journal writing, and ③ any other comments. The students' reactions were mostly favourable: They enjoyed this form of communication because it offered them a variety of different viewpoints and ideas. On the other hand, the fact that the journals are public had both positive and negative aspects. The educational reasons for this journal writing, student reactions, and tips for teachers on how to make a success of this kind of journal writing will be discussed.

Key words: audience effect, communication

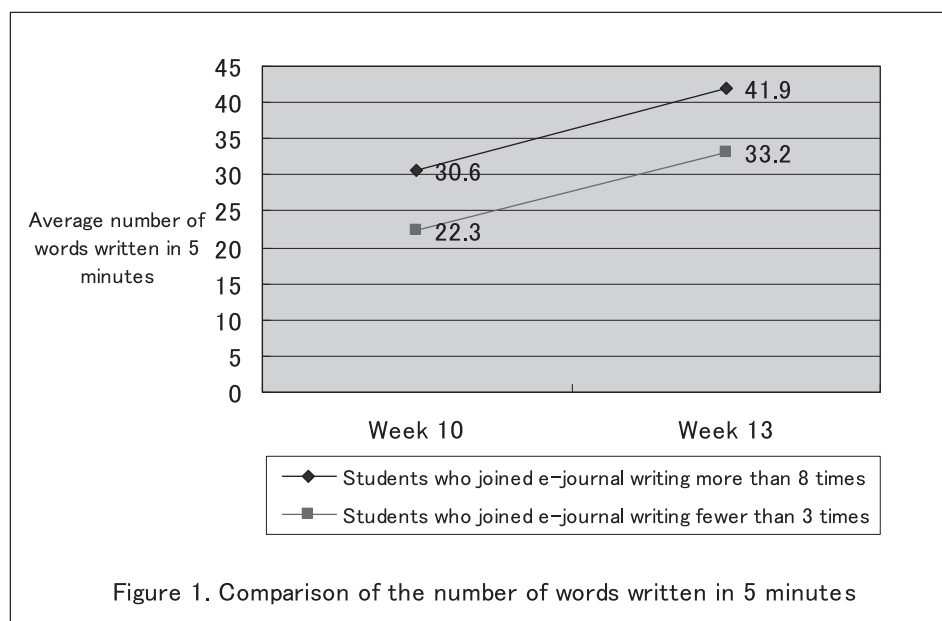
### 1. Dialogue journal in EFL classes

A dialogue journal is a written “conversation between a teacher and an individual student” (Peyton & Reed, 1990: 3). I started using journals in my general English course and EFL writing course four years ago. Students write down their ideas and thoughts in notebooks as if in a diary. The teacher responds by commenting on the content. In principle, the teacher does not correct the students' linguistic mistakes. Since students write their thoughts almost spontaneously, they will write as if speaking, but they are “relieved of the stress imposed by the immediacy of speaking situations” (Burton & Carrol, 2001: 4).

One of the purposes of my use of dialogue journals in the EFL classes is to have students use English for authentic communication with the teacher (the writer), based on the Interaction Hypothesis which states that “*negotiation for meaning*, and especially negotiation work that triggers *interactional* adjustments by the NS (native speaker) or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective

attention, and output in productive ways” (Long, 1996: 451-2).

Yamada (2005) compared the language performances of the students who regularly joined an arbitrary e-journal writing programme and of those who rarely joined it. A significant difference was seen in the number of words they wrote in five minutes (See Figure 1). This study indicated a relationship between the participation in journal writing and the fluency of writing. However, as to which could be the effect of which cause, we would need further research.



(adapted from Yamada 2005)

## 2. Use of the Moodle Forum for journal writing

When I started using e-journals in my EFL writing class four years ago, I had my students send their journals in emails. In a class of about 25 students, my email box ended up being cluttered with a huge volume of students' emails and my replies to them. Tracing particular students' records was also difficult, since creating a box for every student was not practical.

While e-mails could be used for dialogue journals, sorting out and keeping your students' mails from other emails will be troublesome. Using one of the programmes that can be obtained on the Internet will enable us to create our own page for journal writing on the Internet. The writer's university introduced an e-learning software package called Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) five years ago. Moodle contains various features you would be able to utilize such as Assignment, Chat, Dialogue, Forum, Journal, Lesson, Quiz, Workshop, and so on. I have used Journal and Forum for the journal writing in the EFL Writing course, where students posted their journals every week. Students can post their journals at the university, at home, or even abroad, wherever they can log in on the Internet. Actually, three students kept

posting their journals from the U.S.A. while they were taking an intensive English course there one summer.

Moodle has been developed “guided by a ‘social constructionist pedagogy’” (Moodle Docs, 2008). The Moodle developer team (<http://moodle.com>) says:

Activities are at the heart of a course management system. Moodle was designed by an educator and computer scientist, with “social constructionist” principles in mind. “Constructionism asserts that learning is particularly effective when constructing something for others to experience. This can be anything from a spoken sentence or an Internet posting, to more complex artifacts like a painting, a house or a software package. The concept of social constructivism extends the above ideas into a social group constructing things for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings. When one is immersed within a culture like this, one is learning all the time about how to be a part of that culture, on many levels.”

This philosophy is indeed behind the motive of my use of Moodle Forum for the EFL Writing class. The Moodle Journal provides students with personal pages on the Internet, where they can post their journals, which only the teacher can read and respond to, and which other students will not have access to. The Journal is a private page like a personal notebook, and students can use it in a totally private environment.

While the dialogues in the Journal are one to one dialogues between a student and his/her teacher, those in the Forum are between one student and his/her whole class, including the teacher. Students can make comments on other students’ postings whenever they want to. In the Forum, students post and read each other’s ideas and thoughts, and collaboratively create their learning environment for deeper understanding and a variety of thoughts on different issues. Guided this way, they will create their own learning culture on the Internet.

### **3. The practice**

In this section, I would like to describe how I have been using the Moodle Forum for journal writing.

#### **3.1 Topics for the journals**

Basically, a journal is “a written record that you make of the things that happen to you each day” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). However, the use of the Moodle Forum will create an audience effect, and students are always aware of their readers. Especially when it is a compulsory part of course work, you would not expect your students to write about their private lives. The purpose of the journal writing here is to enable students to express and exchange their opinions and thoughts in the target language among their classmates where meaning is primary. Therefore, rather than having students write about their private lives,

students are given certain topics to write about, and they express their thoughts and opinions<sup>1</sup> on them. Topics are given to the students because writing will be easier for students who find it difficult to write when they are told to write about just anything<sup>2</sup>.

The following shows a list of the topics I gave in one semester:

#### Week 1 (April 14 - April 21) “Spring Holiday”

Write about your last spring holiday in about 80 words and post it in e-learning.

#### Week 2 (April 21 - April 28) “Global Warming”

米の脱温暖化策-世界を読めない大統領

耳を疑う発表内容だった。ブッシュ米大統領は何を考えているのか。

地球の温暖化を引き起こす二酸化炭素(CO<sup>2</sup>)などの温室効果ガスの排出について、「2025年までに米国での排出量の伸びを止める」と表明したのだ。裏を返せば、これから17年間は排出増が続くのもやむをえない、という宣言といえる。

(中 省略)

脱温暖化がテーマとなる洞爺湖サミットには、大統領をめざす候補たちも呼ぼうではないか。

This is from Asahi Shinbun(<http://www.asahi.com/paper/editorial.html>). What do you think of the writer's opinion? Write down your opinion in about 80 words and post it in e-learning. If you like, visit this site, too: [http://www.heartmath.org/million\\_hearts/](http://www.heartmath.org/million_hearts/)

#### Week 3 (April 28 - May 12) “Golden Week Holiday”

Write about the Golden Week Holiday. It can be about your GW Holiday, or the Golden Week Holiday in general.

#### Week 4 (May 12 - May 19) “Globalization and Cross-cultural Understanding”

What do you think of this opinion?

ビジネスのグローバル化に伴い、国際ビジネスに関わる人材需要が増え、外資系企業や日系企業の海外ビジネス部門への求人応募に関わる機会が増えている。外国語が出来るということで、応募してくる人達がいるが、それだけでは国際ビジネスは円滑に推進できない。国際ビジネスに携わる人材には幅広い資質が求められる。担当職種に必要な知識、スキル、経験はもちろんのこと、日本人と取引先国の人達との物の見方、考え方、文化、慣習、価値観、メンタリティの違い等を社会や歴史感の違い等から認識する感性がまず必要であろう。

(中 省略)

<sup>1</sup> The difference between journal writing and other writing such as essay writing is that in journal writing, students can focus on communicating their thoughts without being worried about their grammatical mistakes as long as they are communicative, whereas in essay writing, grammatical mistakes will be corrected and students are expected to think carefully about paragraphs and the organization of the paragraphs and revise the drafts.

<sup>2</sup> This might be unique to Japanese culture, where people tend not to initiate discussions.

(中 省略)

異文化コミュニケーションとは異なる文化背景を持つ人達とのコミュニケーションであり、何も海外の人達とのコミュニケーションだけとは限らないと思う。若者と中高年者とは一般的な価値観やライフスタイルが異なるし、業界の違いや、大企業と中小企業間でも企業文化や風土が大きく異なるため、転職により、異文化コミュニケーションの難しさを実感する機会は増えるであろう。応募先の企業文化が自分自身のキャリアビジョンにマッチングするかどうかを見極め、自分が応募先の企業にどのように貢献できるか、その根拠を論理的にPRすることが、転職を成功させる上で大切ではないだろうか。

from: [http://www.crie.co.jp/ten-shoku/howto/column/opinion\\_vol05.html](http://www.crie.co.jp/ten-shoku/howto/column/opinion_vol05.html)

#### Week 5 (May 19 - May 26) “Japanese As No.1”

What do you think of what Mr Aso is saying here? Write down your opinion in about 80 words.

・・・お金がかんなくて、えらく評価の高い例として、ホンジュラスを例に引きます。小さな中米にあります国ですが、この国に出て行った海外青年協力隊員が、何でこの国の子供はこんなに勉強できねんだろうと。特に算数の計算がひでえと。これは何とかせんと、これは先はないぞというので、みんなで調べた結果、この国の算数の教科書が悪い。そこで教科書をみんなでつくろうじゃないかということで、別に算数の先生がいたわけじゃないんですが、いわゆる営農指導員とか、いろいろ技術指導員なんかがみんな集まって、58人で算数の教科書をつくりました。先生用に副読本もつくった。結果として、子供は学校におもしろがって来るようになり、ホンジュラスの子供の成績が上がり始めた。隣の国はすぐ気がつくので、ぜひその教科書をおれんところにも譲ってもらいたいと来たので、昨年、ホンジュラス政府は、この日本の海外青年協力隊員がつくった算数の教科書をホンジュラス最初の国定教科書にしております。

(中 省略)

・・・若い人たちが現場にいて、現場の人と接触する。その人たちの評価が高い。私は、そこらが今、日本という国が持っている最大の多分、底力というものはこれだと思っております。・・・

(平成19年度全国自治会連合会東大阪大会 麻生太郎 講演より 福井市自治会連合会『自治会だより』抜粋)

#### Week 6 (May 26 - Jun2) “Watching news”

Watch one of the following news stories, and write down what you think in about 80 words.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7418041.stm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7318630.stm>

### Week 7 (June 2 - June 9)

Write a story about these children in more than 80 words. Use your imagination.



(from UN photo gallery: Children rummage through a garbage dump in Brazil for valuables to sell.)

### Week 8 (June 9 - June 16) Current News

Choose one piece of news that has interested you recently, and write about it in more than 80 words.

### Week 9 (June 16 - June 23) Response to Week 8

Read the postings of Week 8 (Current News). Choose one posting (not your own) that interests you most, and reply to the opinion. Write about 80 words.

### Week 10 (June 23- June 30) Let's share our problems!

The theme for this week is "Let's share our problems!" In this forum, let's write about our problems when we are studying English. As for me, learning new words is getting more and more difficult year by year. It is partly because I have become lazy. When I read, I often skip the words I don't know, not bothering what they exactly mean, but just guessing the meanings. I think it is good when I need to read a lot and get messages quickly, but if I keep doing that, I will never learn new words! Also, sometimes I end up not understanding the text at all! However, even if I stop, try and learn new words, I simply can't learn new words easily. I'm too old to learn new things... Do you have any advice for me?

Anyway, this week, let's write about our problems studying English. If you don't have any problems, but want to help other students (or me) with their (or my) problems, you can respond and write your advice to your classmates, too.

### Week 11 (June 30-July 7) Summer holiday is just around the corner!

I know, I know, you would say, "Before that, we'll have the exam week!" However, you still have some time before the exam week. Why not just dream about your summer holiday? Summer holiday is just around the corner! What do you like doing in summer? What did you use to do in summer when you were a child? How about at high school, or last year? What do you want to do this year? What kind of adventure are you planning? Write about Summer Holiday!

### Week 12 (June 30 - July 14) Responses to Week 10 or Week 11

Post a response to a posting in Week 10 (“Let’s share our problems”) or Week 11 (“Summer holiday is just around the corner!”). If you like, respond to many people. I’ll give you extra points for extra postings!

### Week 13 (July 14 - July 21) What I am proud of about Japan

When you associate with foreign people, you will often be asked about Japan and Japanese culture. There are good things and not-so-good things, aren’t there? Today, I’d like you to think about what you like about Japan, i.e., what you are proud of about Japan. Write more than 80 words.

### Week 14: The Final (July 21 - July 28) Feedback on Journal writing activity

Hello! This is the final week of journal writing. Thank you very much for posting your valuable opinions and thoughts. I hope you enjoyed this activity.  
Today, I’d like you to give feedback on this journal writing activity. Please write about ① what you thought was good about journal writing, ② what you thought was not good about journal writing, and ③ other things you want to write.  
Thank you very much! Take good care of yourself, and have a great summer holiday!

Many of the topics are social issues which I expected would arouse the students’ interest. Only in Week 1 and Week 3, I had the students write about their daily life. In Week 10, when I saw the students had developed good relations among themselves, I had them write about their problems.

## 3. 2 What happens in the Forum

Example 1 shows the exchanges about the rise of gasoline prices. Student A presents the topic about gasoline price and expresses her opinion about it. In response to her opinion, Student B develops the topic and writes about the inconvenience of public transportation in local areas. The teacher responds, and also writes about her own experiences related to the topic. Many of the students’ responses are both about what they think about the original postings and what they think about the topic themselves. We can see asynchronous dialogues in the Forum.

#### Example 1:

(Student A)

Recently, Things prices are soaring. A milk, a wheat flour, and a piece of bread is high prices. In addition, the gasoline is soaring. 1 liter is 170 yen in a service station. So that’s a vexing question. I think all things are more and more high price in the future. We have to more earn my living. Now, in Japan is car society. So drivers are in financial difficult about soaring the gasoline. We ought to practice strict economy.

(Student B’s response)

I think so, too. Everything is more expensive than ever.

Especially, I think that we should save gasoline. I go to Jin-ai University by my car, and then I

must drive on a road that has a slope. Therefore, I use much gasoline and cost much money. There are a lot of people living in Fukui who have cars. We give a great deal of damages because of gasoline price is higher.

I think public transports ought to be useful. There are many depopulated areas, so we can't go anywhere we want to visit. Don't you think so, (Student A's name)?

(Teacher's response)

I agree with you, (Student B's name). Fukui has to work harder to make its public transportation system much more convenient. At the same time, I wish we could do more ourselves. For example, I wish I could cycle to work every day. The other day, a friend of mine, who lives near my town in Fukui, cycled to Jin-ai University. He said it took him only 70 minutes by bicycle. 70 minutes! If I could cycle one way in 70 minutes, I would want to come to Jin-ai on my mountain-bike! Sadly, I can't cycle so fast. I've cycled to school several times, and every time, it took me more than 90 minutes one way... I could hardly do it every day...

Example 2 shows a posting in the last forum. Most students learned to express their opinions and thoughts more analytically and more logically as the journal writing proceeded.

Example 2:

(Student B)

I think journal writing has good points. First, we can watch other students' writings, so we can compare own journal with others. Then, we sometimes wrote comments to other students, or Ms. Yamada gave us some comments. When I got a comment, I felt delight and try to write more interesting. Therefore, I took some time to write journals. After that, it is a good point that we can post journals whenever we finish to write. We can post them at home or midnight. We can think about journal feeling relax. In addition, I can type faster than ever. It is a very useful point for me.

However, journal writing has bad points. It is that we can't notice our mistakes. If we submit writing by written papers, a teacher would return us the papers that correct our mistakes. Then, we understand what we should write journal about on the Internet. When we have not understood the topic meaning, we couldn't ask a teacher soon.

I dealt with every journal cheerfully. Thank you and I think that I want to study with pleasure like journal.

(Teacher)

Thank you very much for your very insightful comments, (Student B's name)! I'm glad to know that you enjoyed this form of studying English. Indeed, studying English is a lot of fun!

Although I encouraged the students to respond to each other anytime, they had a tendency to hesitate doing so unless they were told to respond. However, once they started responding to each other, this Forum became a place where students met and expressed their opinions to one another.



## 4. Students' reactions

At the end of the first semester in 2008, I invited my students to post their opinions about the e-journal writing using the Moodle Forum. Based on what individual students wrote there, I carried out another questionnaire to get quantitative data at the beginning of the following semester. This section will show both the positive and negative reactions of the students seen in the questionnaires.

### 4.1 Positive reactions

Firstly, some students pointed out its linguistic benefit. They stated that writing became much easier through journal writing and that this activity helped them increase their vocabulary. Some students wrote that it was good to form a habit to write every week, and that otherwise it would have been difficult to keep writing. Asked about the linguistic benefit in the second questionnaire, eleven students out of 18 said that their English has improved by writing journals (The average score was 3.61 in the five level scale. See Q17 in Table 1). Ten students out of 18 said that writing English has become easier by writing journals (The average score was 3.83. See Q18 in Table 1). As to the vocabulary size, seven students said writing journals helped and four students said it didn't (The average score was 3.17. See Q19 in Table 1). Asked if the comments were useful, all students but two said the teacher's comments were useful (See Q4 in Table 1). Thirteen students said that their classmates' comments were useful (See Q6 in Table 1).

Secondly, affective benefits were cited by many students. Thirteen students said it was fun to write journals (See Q1 in Table 1). Fourteen students said it was fun to write about their opinions and thoughts (See Q2 in Table 1). All eighteen students said that both the teacher's and their classmates' comments made them happy (See Q3 and Q5 in Table 1). All students except one said that it was fun to read other people's opinions and thoughts (See Q7 in Table 1). Fourteen students said it was fun to make comments on other people's opinions and thoughts (See Q10 in Table 1). Thirteen students said that writing in English has become more interesting by writing journals (See Q16 in Table 1). Thirteen students said that journal writing made them want to study English more (See Q23 in Table 1).

Thirdly, journal writing provided students with an eye-opening experience. Some students wrote that reading different ideas of other students made them realize that there are many ways of looking at things, and that this activity "broadened (their) horizon," as one student put it. All the students answered that they became acquainted with different kinds of opinions and thoughts (See Q8 in Table 1). Furthermore, all the students said that journal writing gave them a chance to think about different kinds of issues (See Q9 in Table 1).

Lastly, some practical benefits were pointed out. Twelve students said it was good that they could write anytime and anywhere (See Q24 in Table 1). One student stated that she can now type faster thanks to e-journal writing.

## 4.2 Negative reactions

Asked about the cognitive burden of writing journals, twelve students said it was difficult to write journals and only two students said it was not so difficult (See Q11 in Table 1). Twelve students said it was difficult to write their opinions and thoughts and four students said it was not so difficult (See Q12 in Table 1). Ten students said it was difficult to comment on other students' opinions and thoughts, and only two students said it was not so difficult (See Q13 in Table 1).

Some students stated that writing once a week was too much, or that it was difficult to post submissions by the deadlines. Asked if it was hard to write every week, twelve students answered affirmatively, and three students replied that it was not.

Asked if they wanted their English mistakes corrected, sixteen students out of eighteen agreed (See Q20 in Table 1). Asked if they would have become a better writer if their English mistakes had been corrected, fifteen students felt so (See Q21 in Table 1).

Asked if they were careful about their English (grammar, spelling, etc.) because other people would read it, fifteen students said yes (See Q14 in Table 1). Thirteen students said they were careful about what to write because other people would read it (See Q15 in Table 1). This shows most students were careful about their English and the content because of the characteristics of the Moodle Forum. This itself does not necessarily denote a negative reaction, but if they avoided writing their truthful opinions because of it, that could be construed as a negative result.

Table 1. The second questionnaire result

Q	Questions	N	min.	max.	average	SD
Q1	It was fun to write journals.	18	3	5	3.94	0.73
Q2	It was fun to write about my opinions and thoughts.	18	2	5	4.00	0.97
Q3	The teacher's comments made me happy.	18	4	5	4.56	0.51
Q4	The teacher's comments were useful.	18	3	5	4.44	0.70
Q5	My classmates' comments made me happy.	18	4	5	4.50	0.51
Q6	My classmates' comments were useful.	18	3	5	4.11	0.83
Q7	It was fun to read other people's opinions and thoughts.	18	3	5	4.61	0.61
Q8	I got to know different kinds of opinions and thoughts.	18	4	5	4.50	0.51
Q9	Journal writing gave me a chance to think about different kinds of issues.	18	4	5	4.39	0.50
Q10	It was fun to make comments on other people's opinions and thoughts.	18	2	5	4.06	0.87
Q11	It was difficult to write journals.	18	2	5	3.78	0.94
Q12	It was difficult to write my opinions and thoughts.	18	2	5	3.67	1.08
Q13	It was difficult to comment on other students' opinions and thoughts.	18	2	5	3.67	0.97
Q14	I was careful about my English (grammar, spelling, etc.) because other people would read it.	18	3	5	4.22	0.73
Q15	I was careful about what to write because other people would read it.	18	3	5	4.17	0.86
Q16	Writing in English has become more interesting by writing journals.	18	2	5	4.00	0.91

Q17	My English has improved by writing journals.	18	1	5	3.61	1.04
Q18	Writing in English has become easier by writing journals.	18	2	5	3.83	0.99
Q19	My vocabulary size has become larger by writing journals.	18	1	5	3.17	0.99
Q20	I wanted my English mistakes corrected.	18	3	5	4.44	0.70
Q21	I would have become a better writer if my English mistakes had been corrected.	18	3	5	4.17	0.71
Q22	Journal writing gave me good opportunities to use English.	18	3	5	4.67	0.69
Q23	Journal writing made me want to study English more.	18	2	5	4.06	0.94
Q24	It was good that I could write anytime and anywhere.	18	2	5	3.94	0.94
Q25	It was hard to write every week.	18	2	5	3.83	1.15
Q26	I had problems using the computer.	18	1	5	2.67	1.14

The scales for answers: 5=exactly, 4=roughly true, 3=neither, 2=not exactly, 1=not true

#### 4.3 Teacher's reaction to the students' reactions

The following is part of my reply to the students in the last Forum, where they wrote about what they thought of journal writing:

Now, I am going to write a little bit about what language acquisition research has found so far: First of all, the primary purpose of journal writing is to communicate one's thoughts to the reader(s) and meaning is primary here. Language is acquired in meaning-focused communication. Because you work hard to make yourself understood, you will polish your English. When your readers do not understand what you are saying, you will realize that there was something wrong with your English. This is called "negative feedback." This is the very opportunity language learning happens. You will negotiate meaning, and you will make your English more understandable. This is a very important process.

Secondly, some studies have shown that error-correction has very little effect on language acquisition or is even harmful. Many studies have shown that students write less and avoid challenges if their English is corrected.

Lastly, I'd like to give you a tip: If you want to check your spellings and grammar, use the Word programme. It will tell you where you have spelling errors and grammatical errors, though this grammar check is not always perfect. You can copy and paste the file you make using the Word programme onto E-learning.

The problem of error correction always crops up in journal writing. If students feel frustrated about their English not being corrected, that will decrease the motivation to write. To avoid this situation, what teachers could do would be either correct their English, or teach the value of expressing one's opinions and thoughts without worrying about grammatical mistakes. In another study (Yamada, in press), I compared a group of students whose errors were not corrected in journal writing with another group whose errors were corrected in journal writing. Both linguistic and affective effects were compared. All students in both groups stated in a questionnaire that they wanted their errors to be corrected. In the same questionnaire, more favourable reactions among the corrected group were seen, though even among the uncorrected group, overall reaction toward journal writing was still favourable. This study partially supported the teacher's corrective feedback for journal writing, while indicating that it is relatively ineffective in reducing learners' grammatical errors and may possibly have a negative

effect on the number of words they write. The more important point with dialogue journals is that meaning is primary and that students express their ideas without worrying about mistakes. Therefore, it is important that students themselves understand how language is acquired through interactive communication and how journal writing gives them such opportunity.

## 5. Practical tips for teachers

### (1) Create a warm atmosphere in class.

The audience effect on the Forum works both positively and negatively. In the Journal, where they write knowing that only the teacher and they themselves can read their journal, students feel quite safe and sometimes disclose quite private matters. However, in the Forum they tend to become defensive and avoid showing private feelings. The audience effect on the Forum will promote the students' effort to correct their own linguistic errors so that they can communicate their thoughts to their classmates, but on the other hand, it could make them cautious about expressing their opinions openly, or delay their postings on the Forum. You need to create good human relationships in your class for your students to feel it easy to express what they want to say. Also, in a culture where giving one's opinions openly is not done as a common practice, such as in Japan, you need to make an extra effort in this. For example, I try and have a chat with individual students before and after every class. In class, students frequently form pairs, work in groups, and exchange their ideas and opinions with each other. By having more opportunities to talk with each other, students will gradually develop friendship among themselves and with the teacher.

### (2) Explain the significance of writing dialogue journals.

The significance of keeping dialogue journals lies in the activity itself where students and their teacher use the target language as a means of real-life communication. By interacting with other people, students will productively connect input, internal learner capacities and output. When students understand this significance of the activity, the learning activity will have more of a beneficial effect. Especially such students who have studied the language by having their grammatical errors pointed out and students for whom practicing writing grammatically correct sentences was their main learning activity would tend to lose the purpose in this kind of language activity. Teachers need to explain the significance of the activities to the students and remind them of its significance from time to time.

### (3) Give tips to provoke conversation among students.

In regard to the hesitancy of students to comment on each others' posts, you could overcome the difficulty, which is sometimes caused by students' cultural values as mentioned above, by giving students some tips to provoke conversation. One possible strategy for assisting interaction could be to encourage the student who does the initial post to think of a provocative question to ask of other students who are asked to respond to them. This could provide students a clear

point of entry into the conversation. It may also be helpful to provide guidance to students on what constitutes good interaction. This guidance could include explanation about how to agree or disagree constructively, how to build on another's ideas, how to summarise ideas and so on.

**( 4 ) Enjoy genuine communication.**

In dialogue journals, students look forward to having successful communication with other classmates and their teacher. Teachers, too, should be genuinely interested in reading the students' opinions, sympathize, and respond to them personally. However, both students and teachers sometimes feel like writing and sometimes don't. When I use journal writing in class, I play soothing music and try and make it easier for the students to go into their own world. When you reply to your students' journals, find time when you feel relaxed. This will make it easier for you to respond to the students' writings.

**( 5 ) Give students topics to write about sometimes.**

Sometimes students do not know what to write about, and feel at a loss for topics. In such cases, you could talk with the students and find topics in the conversations, and give advice as to what to write. Sometimes students find it easier if they are given topics to write about, although it diverts from the original idea of journal writing to set their own themes to write about. In either case, teachers have to provide an environment where students can write their thoughts and opinions comfortably.

**( 6 ) Set the minimum numbers.**

Until they become fluent in writing, setting minimum numbers of words to write will push students to produce some writing with contents. For example, the students are told to write more than 80 words in the Moodle Forum here. To write more than 80 words, they need to go into details of an issue, such as by clarifying what they understand about an issue and expressing their opinions about it with convincing reasons, showing examples and evidence. As they get used to writing this way, they will gradually learn to write constructing their thoughts logically. With less fluent learners, I have chosen 30 to 50 words, but the content tends to become shallow with those numbers of words.

## **6 . Conclusion**

In this paper, I wrote about the use of journal writing using Moodle Forum in an EFL writing course. Moodle Forum provides students with a space on the Internet where they can meet their peers and their teacher anytime and exchange opinions with them. This asynchronous communication gives students time to think and write in their private space and time. The audience effect on the Forum could work both positively and negatively, so teachers are advised to create a good class atmosphere to make the best use of the audience effect. When students are given opportunities to communicate their ideas and thoughts where meaning is primary, they

will focus more on the meaning of what they write, and enjoy the real communication with their peers and their teacher. The Moodle Forum helps students to create a constructive learning culture and learn cooperatively.

In this paper, linguistic development of the students through using the Moodle Forum was not investigated because different variables could not be excluded in this classroom-based study, though many students perceived its linguistic benefits for developing their writing skills. How the journal writing using the Moodle Forum could help students' linguistic development needs to be researched further.

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