Teaching Writing through Collaborative Efforts

Kayo Sakemi, Midori Ichiko, Yukiko Sakai, Keio Kurata

Keio University, Tokyo, JAPAN

Background and Purpose

Report Writing is a newly launched course for first-year students in the Faculty of Letters at Japan's Keio University. The goal of the course is to gain the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in writing assignments in the university's undergraduate program. The course was developed through a research project in which faculty members and undergraduate librarians worked together. The course was designed over a two-year period; it covers specific steps for report writing, such as choosing topics, searching databases, constructing outlines, and writing paragraphs (Table 1). During the 2015 fall semester, the course was taught for the first time by five project members (i.e., faculty members and librarians). The purpose of this poster is to share the collaborative effort of the project team, including an assessment of the first offering of the course.

Table 1. 2015 Session Schedule

#	Topic	Instructor	#	Topic	Instructor
1	Introduction	Kurata (F*)	8	Organizing ideas	
2	Identifying arguments	Kurata (F)	9	Constructing outlines	
3	Searching information	Asao (L*)	10	Writing workshop 1	
4	Searching articles	Sakemi (L)	11	Feedback 1	Sakai (F)
5	Reading critically	Ichiko (L)	12	Writing workshop 2	
6	Reading articles	Ichiko (L)	13	Writing workshop 3	
7	Citing articles	Sakai (F)	14	Feedback 2	

* F: Faculty members, L: Librarians

Methods

To examine students' acquisition of knowledge throughout the course, a multiple-choice test consisting of seven questions was administered without notice during the first and last classes, functioning as a pre- and post-test (Fig. 1). Each student also completed an evaluation questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale covering four aspects (i.e., overall contents and structure, instructors' knowledge and presentation, ease of understanding, usefulness of the content) during the last class session. The results of the tests and evaluation were reviewed along with students' final reports and analyzed to help improve the course with the collaborative effort of the project team.

Findings

1. Pre- and post-tests

Among 26 registered students, 21 students took both the pre- and post-tests. Two missed the pre-test; two missed the post-test; and one missed both tests. Each test was taken by 23 students.

Select a single answer choice:

Q1. Choose a correct statement about a college writing assignment.

a.The writing assignment should include the student's opinion.
b.The writing assignment should include a question, premises, and an answer as a conclusion.
c.When citing another's opinion, the statement should be quoted directly.
d.The question should be presented in the form of a hypothesis.
e. The premises should be shown as objective facts or data.
…

Fig. 1. A sample question of the pre/post test

On the post-test, students scored an average of 65.22 out of 100 points, 11.80 points higher than the average of the pre-test score (53.42) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Scores out of 100 points in pre-/post-tests

	Pre-test score	Post-test score	Difference
Average	53.42	65.22	+11.80
Maximum	85.71	100.00	+14.29
Minimum	14.29	42.86	+28.57
Median	57.14	71.43	+14.29

The score distribution has clearly moved from a lower level to a higher level (Fig. 2).
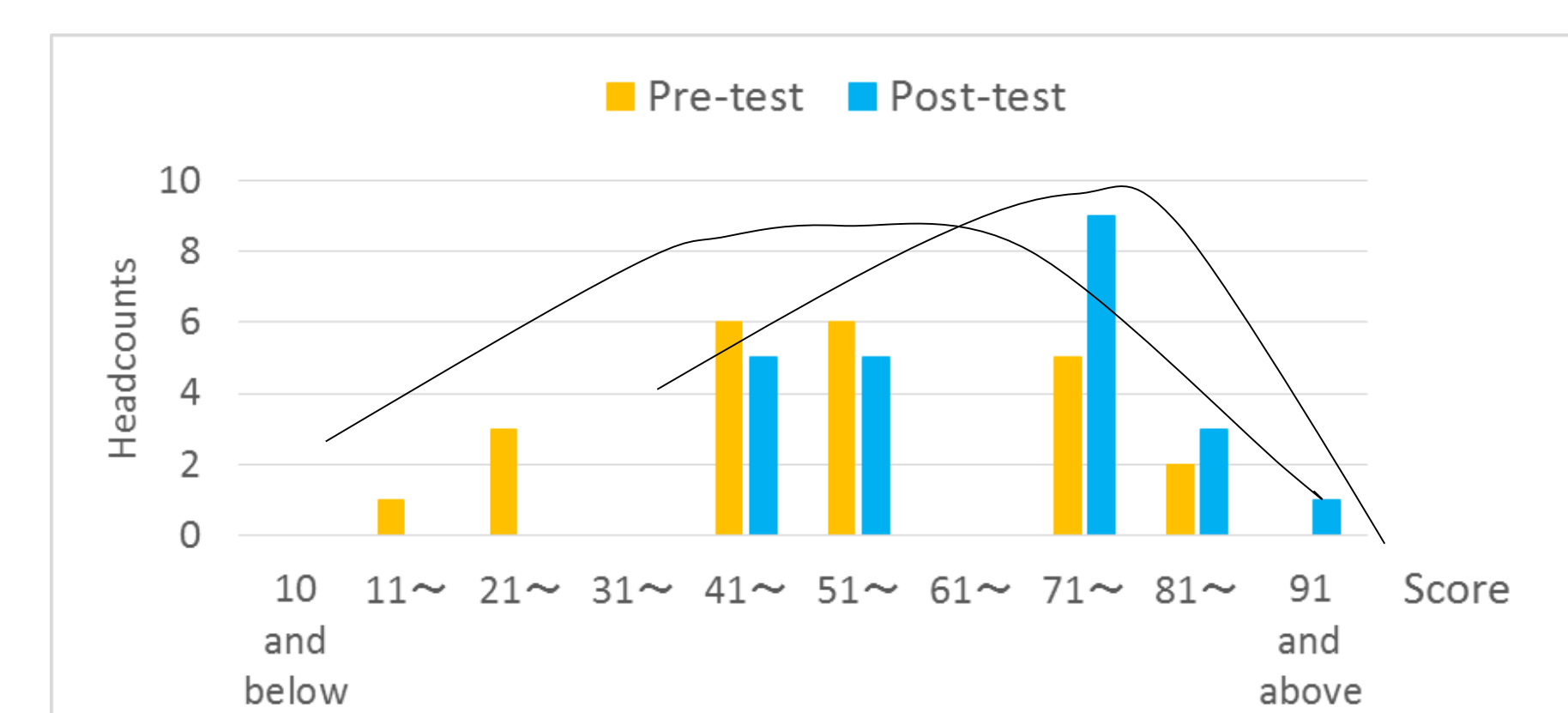

Fig. 2. Score distribution based on student headcount

Among 21 students who took both tests, 12 students (57.1%) earned higher scores on the post-test; five (23.8%) earned the same scores; and four (19.0%) had lower scores. No significant relationship was found between the final report scores and the pre/post scores.

The accuracy rate of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test for four questions; it was the same for one question and slightly lower for two others (Table 3).

Table 3. Accuracy rate by question

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference		Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Q1	17.4%	43.5%	+26.1	Q5	73.9%	95.7%	+21.8
Q2	65.2%	87.0%	+21.8	Q6	82.6%	78.3%	-4.3
Q3	4.3%	4.3%	0	Q7	34.8%	56.5%	+21.7
Q4	95.7%	91.3%	-4.4				

2. Student evaluation

The student evaluation (Fig. 3) was sufficiently high (4.47 out of 5 points, on average). The content was evaluated as useful (4.78), but somewhat difficult to understand (4.13).
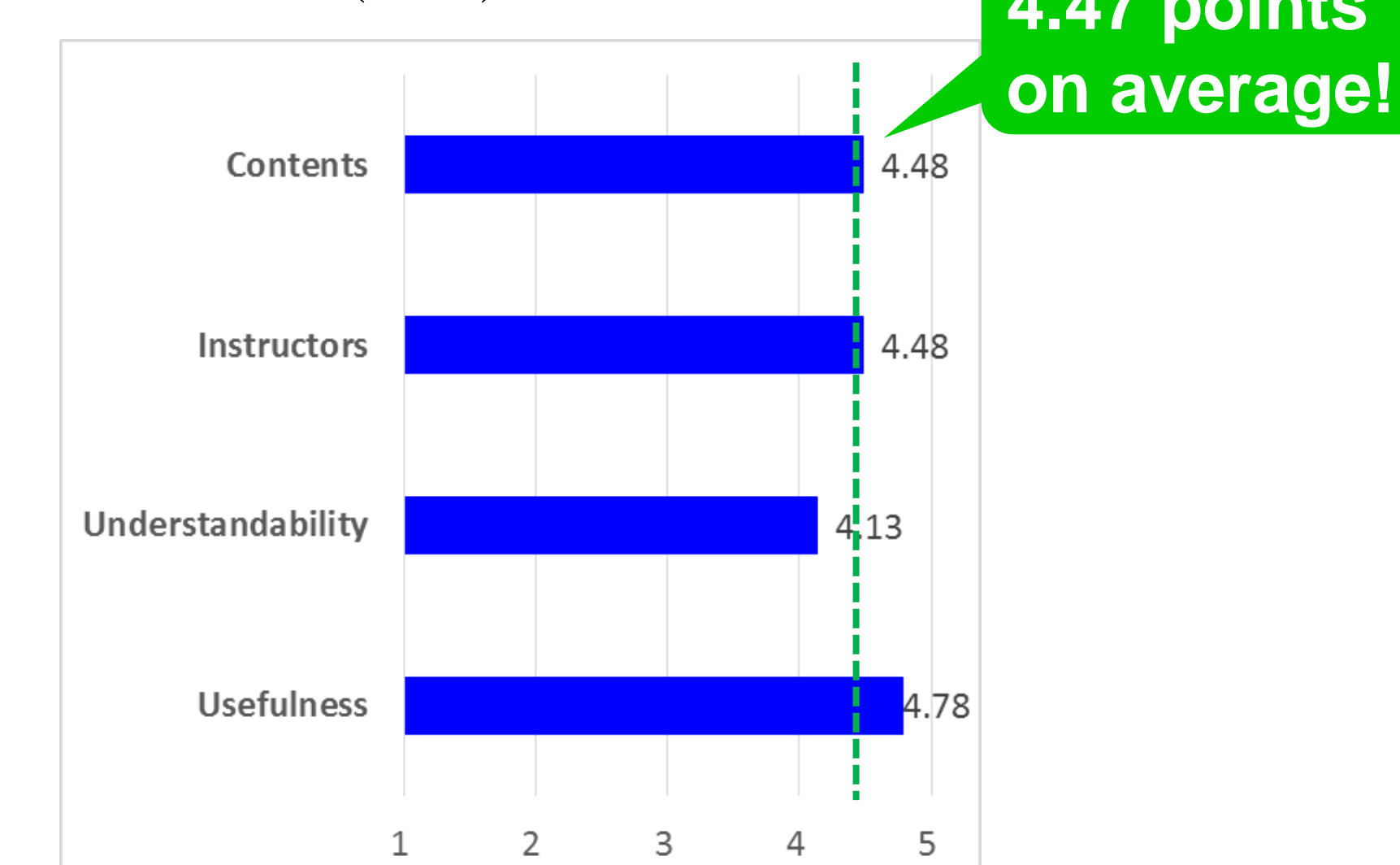
4.47 points on average!

Fig. 3 Average points by aspect

Some constructive comments of students are as follows:

--"This is an eye-opening experience to know there is a certain way of writing a report for a college assignment."
--"I appreciate having my assignment corrected."
--"I got lots of advices from multiple instructors."

--"I needed more examples of various types of writings."
--"The timing of the writing workshop was too late."
--"I was wondering how much I could write [about] my original texts because the premises and conclusions had already been provided."

Practical Implications

The findings showed efficiency in the student experience, though the course's effectiveness is not yet completely known. Student achievement results, factoring in the details of the course content and teaching methods, should be further analyzed by employing the different skills and expertise of various faculty members and librarians to strengthen course design.

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Author Information

Kayo Sakemi, MLIS, Librarian
kayo7@lib.keio.ac.jp

Midori Ichiko, MLIS, Operating Director,
midori@lib.keio.ac.jp

Hiyoshi Library, Keio University
4-1-1 Hiyoshi, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama-shi,
Kanagawa 223-8521 Japan

Yukiko Sakai, PhD, MSIS, Associate Professor
yukiko@a2.keio.jp

Keiko Kurata, MLIS, Professor
kei.kurata@keio.jp

School of Library and Information Science,
Keio University
2-15-45 Mita Minatoku,
Tokyo 108-8345 JAPAN

慶應義塾大学
Keio University