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Introduction

Feature Articles

Decolonising a Literature CLIL Course in Japan: CEFR
Integration and Course Design Recommendations

by Tara McIlroy.....4-19

Japanese EFL Students' Perceptions of Composing
Haiku in English

by Atsushi Iida.....20-28

Literature in Practice

The Picture Books of Allen Say: Instructing ELLs in
Language Learning and Cultural Exchange

by Andrew Nessler.....29-33

Conference Report

Growth Mindset in Education: JALT2023 Conference
Report

by Mary Hillis and Luke Draper.....34-41

Textbooks

Formulating a Postgraduate Textbook on Translating
Modern Japanese Literature

by Richard Donovan.....42-47

Submission guidelines.....48

*Feature Article***Japanese EFL Students' Perceptions of Composing Haiku in English**

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The current study examines the perceptions of Japanese EFL writers regarding the task of composing English-language haiku. Drawing on a mixed-methods research approach, 405 survey responses were statistically analyzed and self-reflective essays written by seven focal students were coded based on the positive and negative learning experiences. The results of this study revealed that the overall perceptions of 405 Japanese EFL students concerning the task of writing haiku were positive. The study also found that, even among the seven students who responded negatively to the survey, they still considered haiku composition to be valuable. However, it became apparent that these students experienced feelings of uncertainty, confusion, or resistance when they encountered difficulty in recognizing the significance of the task itself or when attempting to express emotions within the constraints of the haiku structure in a target language.

Key words: second language poetry writing; haiku; perceptions and attitudes; EFL learners

There is a growing body of literature addressing the value of poetry writing in second language (L2) writing classrooms (Chamcharatsri & Iida, 2022; Hanauer, 2010, 2012; Iida, forthcoming; Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2022; Liao, 2018; Nicholes, 2022). Poetry writing in a target language is an effective literacy practice because the distinctive quality of poetry as a linguistic form lies in its ability to directly shape sound pattern, form, and meaning, thereby creating a wide range of effects on the listener and reader (Peskin & Hanauer, 2023). Through poetry writing, L2 learners can find the opportunity to discover their own voices, negotiate meaning, and express themselves in the target language (Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2022). This approach transforms traditional views of L2 learning in the classroom by allowing L2 learners to flexibly express themselves and explore a new language through a creative format. Poetry writing thus offers a new avenue to experiment

freely with the target language, expanding beyond rote memorization of linguistic and structural knowledge.

An important aspect of researching L2 poetry writing is to examine the perceptions and emotional reactions of L2 learners. This focus on affective dimensions in L2 learning is supported by a theoretical perspective that emotions are inextricable from language acquisition (Dewale, 2010; Prior, 2016). Based on this view, previous studies have explored L2 learners' experiences through poetry writing in the target language. For example, Hanauer and Liao's (2016) interview-based study explored the experiences of creative and academic writing among 19 ESL students attending an American state university. This qualitative study revealed that the students had both positive and negative experiences in the classroom. Positively, they recognized creative writing to be useful for increased emotional engagement, gaining a sense of expressing their own voice and memories, and promoting their self-

understanding. On the other hand, their negative experiences stemmed from a sense of difficulty in communicating personal voices and an unfamiliarity with the creative genre.

Another study conducted by Iida (2012) examined 20 university students' perceptions of writing haiku in the Japanese EFL classroom. The overall analysis of their self-reported data revealed 19 different issues that fell under four themes related to English-language haiku writing: difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude. Although challenges (e.g., syllable adjustment, incorporating seasonal references, self-expression, or word choice) appeared, the students generally felt intrigued by the composing process, had a greater sense of achievement, and positively viewed the task of composing haiku. Most recently, Iida (forthcoming) further investigated the perceptions and attitudes toward composing haiku among a group of 60 EFL students who demonstrated exceptional performance in the book of haiku project. The project required the students to design and create an original, handmade booklet of poetry, including a cover page, table of contents, an introduction, ten poems, and a description of each poem. The analysis of 60 self-reflective essays identified eight major themes: affect, awareness, change, difficulty, discovery, L1 and L2 differences, skills, and writing. The study revealed that, while haiku composition contributed to students' skills development and their increased awareness of audience, emotional expression, and the English language, they struggled with linguistic differences between L1 and L2 as well as applying the fundamental principle of traditional Japanese haiku to English-language poetry.

In this way, previous studies explored L2 learners' experiences with creative writing, though often on a small scale, focusing primarily on advanced or high-achieving groups of students. While these qualitative studies identified certain affective dimensions, the broader impact of poetry writing on L2 learning remains relatively unexamined. Of particular interest in L2 creative writing research is the investigation of the overall perceptions of L2 learners who engage in a semester-long poetry writing project as well as the attitudes of low-achieving students regarding L2 poetry writing. The current study, therefore, aims to examine the emotional experiences of Japanese EFL students concerning L2 poetry writing and uncover the potential factors that facilitate or impede their achievement of

creating poetry in a target language. Specifically, this study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What is the general tendency of Japanese EFL university students' perceptions regarding the practice of composing haiku in English?
2. What challenges and difficulties did Japanese EFL university students encounter during the process of composing haiku?

Methodology

The current study employed mixed-method research. It involved statistical analysis of questionnaires and coding of reflective essays written by Japanese EFL students.

Research Site and Participants

Participants were 405 first-year university students who registered for a required, first-year college English course during the academic years of 2014–2017 at a four-year public university in Japan. Of these students, 147 were education majors, 47 were nursing majors, and 211 were science and technology majors. All participants were born and raised in Japan and had studied English for six years under the Japanese educational system. Despite having no prior experience of writing poetry in English, they had read and appreciated Japanese haiku in elementary school as part of the school curriculum. Haiku was, therefore, a culturally familiar genre to them.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected in a total of 18 sections of the first-year college English course over the four years. Drawing on *evocative voice pedagogy* proposed by Iida (forthcoming), I taught a 15-week course by incorporating the task of composing haiku into regular lessons under a coordinated English curriculum. As presented in Table 1, I designed a semester-long, book of haiku project, which could be accomplished in the limited time available (see Table 1).

Table 1
Overview of the book of haiku project (Iida, forthcoming).

Week	Stage	Content of Each Lesson
1		Introduction of the project
2	Genre familiarity	Understanding the concept of haiku
3		Reading haiku
4		Exploring significant memories
5	Haiku composition	Haiku writing
6		Peer-review (1)
7		Peer-review (2)
8		Mapping significant memories
9		Book introduction
10	Multimodal haiku design	Background information of each haiku
11		Book design
12		Discussing evaluation criteria
13	Poetry reading presentation	Presentation (1)
14		Presentation (2)
15		Course review

Evocative voice pedagogy consisted of three stages: genre familiarity, haiku composition, and multimodal haiku design. The first stage of the project involved poetry reading exercises to understand and familiarize the genre of haiku. Participants first read traditional Japanese haiku to review structural rules and then read English haiku to analyze and understand how voice is constructed. The second stage consisted of a series of writing exercises to create haiku. After exploring and writing freely about ten significant memories, each participant wrote a poem for each memory. They then participated in a peer review session and made revisions based on feedback from classmates. During this peer-review session, participants read a peer's poem, thought of a theme, wrote down their own interpretation, and discussed how the poem could be revised to express their intended meaning more properly. The third stage involved designing a book of haiku. Participants were assigned to create their own original booklets of haiku, consisting of a cover page, a table of contents, an introduction, and ten poems. In addition to writing practice through evocative voice pedagogy, poetry reading presentation was integrated into this course. This was not only for sharing their books of haiku with classmates but also for providing participants with the

opportunity to develop their presentation skills in English. On the final day of the lessons in Week 15, they were assigned to reflect on the book of haiku project through a survey and self-reflection essay. Each participant answered the survey consisting of nine question items with a five-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat agree, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree). In addition, they wrote any thoughts and concerns about the project in approximately 1,200 characters in Japanese. The purpose of using their first language in this reflective practice was to help participants to engage in deeper introspection and analysis of their learning process. The use of Japanese here was intended to remove any potential language barrier that could inhibit their reflective practice.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of two stages: calculating the survey results and analyzing the self-reflection essays. The first stage of analysis was to analyze the participants' overall perceptions through their survey responses. Each question item in the survey was analyzed with basic statistical measures including mean, mode, standard deviation, maximum, and minimum. The second stage involved examining the experience of composing haiku

among low-achieving students. For this purpose, seven focal participants scoring below an average of 2.5 points on the perception survey were selected for further in-depth analysis. Initially, all written responses in the seven essays were translated into English by myself. Subsequently, based on Hanauer and Liao's (2016) methodological guideline, the translated responses were coded depending on their emotional orientation: positive or negative. The experiences under each category were further sub-categorized to gain a deeper understanding of the issues associated with these emotions. This resulted in two main coding categories concerning the task of composing haiku: positive learning experiences (14 responses) and negative learning experiences (14 responses). The frequency of each code under the main categories was then determined by calculating the number of participants

who referenced a certain code in their essays.

Results

This section presents the overall analysis of Japanese EFL university students' perceptions concerning the task of composing haiku in English. It first shows the results of quantitative analysis of the survey. It then identifies several issues that emerged in the coding process of the self-reflection essays produced by seven focal participants.

Japanese EFL Writers' Overall Perceptions of Composing Haiku

Table 2 summarizes the results of the statistical analysis of nine question items concerning the task of composing haiku in English.

Table 2

Japanese EFL students' perceptions of composing haiku (N=405)

Question Items	Mean	SD	Mode	Max	Min
1. The book of haiku project is meaningful in my English learning.	3.97	0.80	4	5	1
2. The book of haiku project is fun and interesting.	4.06	0.86	4	5	1
3. I feel a sense of achievement throughout the book of haiku project.	4.28	0.83	5	5	1
4. Haiku writing is meaningful in my English learning.	3.83	0.83	4	5	2
5. Through haiku writing, I can learn to express my emotions or feelings in English.	3.62	0.82	4	5	1
6. Haiku writing enables me to write my thoughts succinctly in English.	3.61	0.81	4	5	1
7. Haiku writing helps me develop my writing skills.	3.62	0.85	4	5	1
8. Haiku writing helps my vocabulary learning.	3.92	0.85	4	5	1
9. I would recommend this learning approach to other Japanese students.	3.63	0.92	4	5	1

As can be seen in Table 2, the mean value of all question items was above 3.5. This indicates that participants in general had positive perceptions and responses to the book of haiku project. The participants in the study felt a strong sense of accomplishment through the project (Question 3: Mean 4.28). They also found the project fun and interesting (Question 2: Mean 4.06). Furthermore, they recognized that not only the book project but also haiku composition itself was meaningful for their English language learning. This was reflected in the mean values of 3.97 and 3.83 on Questions 1 and 4, respectively. Moreover, the participants reported that composing haiku in English helped them learn new vocabulary (Question 8: Mean 3.92). In this way, this group of Japanese EFL writers found the activity of

composing haiku in English to be meaningful, valuable, and motivating.

Issues and Challenges of Composing Haiku in English

This section discusses the positive and negative learning experiences of seven participants who scored below an average of 2.5 points in the survey. Table 3 displays the issues that emerged under the main theme of positive learning experiences related to composing haiku in English. The table includes the name, definition, and example written responses of each code. The names shown in the example responses are pseudonyms.

Table 3

Positive learning experiences

Issues	Definition	Example
<i>Fun</i>	A learner's enjoyment and interest in engaging in the task of composing haiku	Through taking this class, I learned for the first time about the English haiku project. I wondered how to express 5-7-5 in English, whether I should adjust words to 5-7-5, or simply translate a haiku I had in mind in Japanese. However, when I started to write haiku, it was completely different. I learned to create haiku using syllables and felt interested in this project. (Mio Tanaka)
<i>Perception change</i>	A learner's change in perception concerning L2 learning	In this haiku writing class, my insecurity regarding English composition has lessened somewhat. (Mio Tanaka)
<i>Audience awareness</i>	A learner's perception of improving audience awareness	I have come to think about how to effectively communicate with others when writing haiku. (Ryo Kitayama)
<i>Confidence</i>	A learner's perception of developing confidence in L2 learning	I felt that my English language skills improved through learning haiku and creating English sentences. In the past, I lacked confidence in constructing English sentences and often doubted if my English writing was good enough. However, in this English learning experience, I gained confidence in my own English writing as I created sentences, composed haiku, and even completed a book. When I presented it, I became more confident in using English compared to before. (Yuto Hashimoto)
<i>Motivation</i>	A learner's development of motivation in learning English	In high school, English was mostly formal and focused on reading and listening, so I didn't feel motivated to study much. However, writing haiku in English this time is different from my English learning in high school. The project has clear purposes and it is easier to get accustomed to, and it is not too difficult. I believe there is a big difference in motivation for learning English compared to my high school days. (Yuto Hashimoto)
<i>New forms of expression</i>	A learner's perception of acquiring new forms of expression in English	When writing haiku, I try to avoid being too direct. When attempting to express one thing, I find myself experimenting with various phrases. This enables me to rapidly learn many ways of expression. (Mika Saijo)
<i>Vocabulary</i>	A learner's perception of the contribution of composing haiku on expanding L2 lexical knowledge	When making English sentences by myself, I encountered unfamiliar words and searched for them, which allowed me to acquire new vocabulary knowledge. English haiku involves using a 5-7-5 structure with syllables, so I was able to learn about the syllables of words. As I continued, I naturally became aware of syllables (I still make mistakes or don't understand sometimes, though). (Nanase Yokozeki)
<i>Discovery</i>	A learner's new finding through composing haiku in English	In Japanese, hiragana gives a gentle impression, but I noticed that haiku in English can have a more formal tone. When I want to create a relaxed atmosphere in my haiku, I prefer to use Japanese. On the other hand, when I want to create a haiku with a firm and contrasting atmosphere, using English would be a good choice. Even if the content I work on is the same, I believe that visual elements of language also have an impact, and different languages can give completely different impressions. I am now studying Italian as a foreign language, and once I become proficient in Italian, I would like to try writing haiku in Italian. I think it will likely create something with a distinct impression, different from English or Japanese. (Mika Saijo)

As shown in Table 3, there were eight sub-themes identified under the category of positive learning experiences: *fun*, *perception change*, *audience awareness*, *confidence*, *motivation*, *new forms of expression*, *vocabulary*, and *discovery*. Participants reported positive emotional reactions and perceived benefits from writing haiku as a form of L2 learning. It is noteworthy that even Japanese EFL students who responded negatively to the survey

found composing haiku to be an effective and meaningful task for L2 learning.

Table 4 presents the issues found in the main theme of negative learning experiences with regards to haiku writing in English.

Table 4
Negative learning experiences

Issues	Definition	Example
<i>Skepticism</i>	A learner's doubt, questioning, or uncertainty about the practice of composing haiku in English	We had a group discussion about the content of haiku after looking at the teacher's examples, but each group had completely different ideas, and our group's opinions were different from what the teacher intended to convey. I think that even if we try to summarize it concisely using English and make it haiku-like, it would be meaningless if everyone interpreted it differently. It is precisely because of the Japanese language that we can infer the hidden meanings and scenes with minimal characters, but I feel that there are limitations when expressing them in English words. (Hiroki Kondo)
<i>Confusion</i>	A learner's confusion, frustration, or challenge encountered during the process of writing haiku	There is a big difference between writing haiku in Japanese and writing haiku in English, and it initially bewildered me. Expressing within the structure of 5-7-5 syllables is already challenging, but in English haiku, it requires creating 5-7-5 in syllables instead of characters. In Japanese, each character is generally one syllable (small characters are counted as one), so 5-7-5 corresponds to 5-7-5 sounds/characters. However, in English, it confused me that it is not about the number of characters but about the number of syllables to achieve 5-7-5. (Mio Tanaka)
<i>Resistance</i>	A learner's dislike, or disinterest in the activity of writing haiku in English	This is just my personal opinion, but I don't think writing haiku in English is particularly desirable. (Hiroki Kondo)
<i>Emotional expression</i>	A learner's perceived difficulty in emotional expressions in English	When writing haiku in English, I believe that I couldn't express emotions richly. I assume that it's because I'm unfamiliar with what symbols represent in English for various objects and things. (Ryo Kitayama)
<i>Vocabulary</i>	A learner's perceived difficulty in lexical choices in the process of composing haiku	In haiku, syllables play an important role, so I had to think about how to use words effectively to express my intended meaning. I found it challenging to choose the right vocabulary. (Yuto Hashimoto)
<i>Task</i>	A learner's perceived difficulty in the task of composing haiku in English	For those of us whose English skills are still not very good, just writing sentences in English is difficult. So, writing haiku must be very challenging. First, because I did not pay attention to the number of letters in English words at all, I had to search every time I used a single word. Also, while ideas came to me in Japanese, the translated words did not always express exactly what I wanted to say. It was very difficult to find the right words. (Mika Saijo)

As can be seen in Table 4, six sub-themes fell under the main category of negative learning experiences: *skepticism, confusion, resistance, emotional expression, vocabulary, and task*. Participants realized that their negative impressions and the various challenges they faced during the process of composing haiku led to overall negative

learning experiences. It was apparent that seven Japanese EFL students encountered difficulty in expressing themselves in a target language while adhering to the haiku structure.

Table 5 summarizes emergent issues and the frequency count of the number of participants.

Table 5

Summary table of emergent issues related to positive and negative experiences (n=7)

<i>Issues under positive experiences</i>	<i>Occurrence</i>	<i>Issues under negative experiences</i>	<i>Occurrence</i>
Fun	2	Skepticism	3
Perception change	1	Confusion	3
Audience awareness	1	Resistance	2
Confidence	1	Emotional expression	3
Motivation	1	Vocabulary	1
New forms of expression	1	Task	2
Vocabulary	5		
Discovery	2		
Total number of experiences	14		14

As shown in Table 5, one of the common issues among the focal participants was vocabulary. This indicates that composing haiku in English helped them learn new lexical items in the target language. The issue of vocabulary, however, was also listed in the negative learning experiences. For instance, one participant struggled with finding suitable words to express his intended meaning. Furthermore, Table 5 highlights several other common issues that the participants encountered in the learning process. Notably, they felt uncertain, confused, and resistant when composing haiku in English. In addition, they perceived difficulty in expressing emotion in English as well as with the task itself.

Discussion and Implications

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of Japanese EFL students concerning the task of writing haiku in English, with a specific focus on identifying common issues and challenges encountered in the process of L2 poetry writing. It is acknowledged that the number of participants were limited, and it is important to note that the data for the current study relied solely on their self-reported documents. Despite these limitations, this study provides two significant findings that contribute to the existing literature in TESOL and applied linguistics.

First of all, this study reveals that Japanese EFL university students had positive perceptions and experiences through composing haiku in English. The results of the survey demonstrated scores over 3.5 points

across all nine question items. Particularly noteworthy was the finding that these students regarded the semester-long book of haiku project as meaningful and valuable. They also perceived the task of composing haiku as an effective method for acquiring L2 vocabulary. In addition, this group of Japanese EFL students reported that haiku writing enabled them to express their emotions in English, improve their ability to convey ideas succinctly, and enhance their overall L2 writing skills. This finding aligns with the results of a recent study conducted by Iida (forthcoming), which demonstrated that L2 writers learn to become more aware of word choice and emotional expression by writing haiku in English.

The second major finding of this study is the identification of several types of difficulties and challenges that Japanese EFL students encountered in the process of composing haiku. It became apparent that the negative learning experiences were not only a result of their negative reactions towards the task itself but also stemmed from the inherent nature of composing haiku. As illustrated in Table 4, the focal students felt uncertain, confused, and resistant when they lacked a clear understanding of the significance of poetry writing or were unfamiliar with the genre and specific task of writing haiku. Additionally, this study revealed that Japanese EFL students had trouble expressing emotions effectively in English while adhering to the 5-7-5 syllable structure. This is consistent with the major findings in previous research on L2 poetry writing: Regardless of their L2 proficiency level, L2 writers face difficulty when

they have to express their emotions in the target language (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Hanauer & Liao, 2016; Iida, 2012, forthcoming; Liao, 2018).

Based on these research findings, this study provides practical suggestions for teaching English-language haiku writing in the Japanese EFL classroom. In order to enhance students' understanding of the nature of haiku writing, Japanese EFL teachers can integrate outdoor writing activities by taking them outside the classroom and assigning them to write poems inspired by their surroundings. By immersing themselves in the natural world and actively observing the world around them, students can naturally incorporate sensory details and seasonal references into their writing. This experimental approach can help to establish a deeper connection between the internal and external world of individuals (Hanauer, 2010). As for the issue of 5-7-5 syllable structure, an alternative approach to English-language haiku writing is to use the total number of words, instead of syllables. A recent study conducted by Iida (forthcoming) found that the collection of over 8,000 English-language haiku poems written by EFL students consisted of an average of 13 words in the 4-5-4 word structure. Applying this empirical evidence to the teaching of poetry writing may be particularly beneficial for novice L2 writers or EFL learners who struggle with counting syllables in English words. By focusing on word counts, teachers may be able to lessen students' cognitive burden in the L2 writing process and reduce their potential negative emotions. Taken together, incorporating outdoor writing activities and word-based guidance provides a more accessible and manageable framework for L2 writers to create poetry in the target language.

Lastly, this study provides an important methodological implication. As discussed, students who responded negatively to the survey still perceived haiku writing as a valuable and effective activity in their reflective essays. This finding is a powerful reminder of the immense value of data triangulation. Relying solely on a single data source can limit research findings. By combining various data sources, we can enhance the reliability and accuracy of our findings, which enables us to properly assess the impact of literacy practice on L2 learning and gain deeper insights into our students' experiences in the classroom.

Author Biography

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