

A Text Analysis of L2 Writing Syllabi in Japanese Higher Education

日本の大学における英語ライティング授業の シラバスに関するテキスト分析

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Abstract

The discourse on writing in second-language (L2) curricula and syllabi has been inadequately addressed as a means of evaluating educational ideologies and practices that shape classroom realities. This study applies a teaching and learning writing model to examine English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing course syllabi from 37 institutions selected by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology under the Top Global University Project. The results indicate the marginalisation of academic essay writing in Japanese university EFL courses in favor of process- and skills-based approaches. The genre-oriented, socially contextualised, and sociopolitical dimensions of L2 writing curricula remain underdeveloped and fail to align with Japan's evolving socioeconomic landscape. The biased writing discourses embedded in syllabi highlight persistent challenges in Japan's EFL writing education.

Key words : L2 writing curriculum; writing curriculum discourse; writing instruction; text analysis; higher education; language learning policy

概 要

日本の大学における第二言語（英語）ライティング授業のカリキュラムやシラバスに関する議論は、教育理念や言語学習実践を評価する上で重要な枠組みであるが、これまで十分に調査されていないとの報告がある。本研究では、文部科学省スーパーグローバル大学創成支援事業で選定された37の大学教育機関における英語ライティングコースのシラバスを評価した。その結果、日本の大学におけるEFLコースでは、学術的なエッセイの書き方が軽視され、プロセスやスキルに重点を置いたアプローチが主流となっていることが判かった。また、第二言語のライティング指導に関する、ジャンルや社会的文脈を重視した第二言語のライティングカリキュラムの開発は依然として限定的であることも判かった。

キーワード：L2ライティングカリキュラム、ライティングカリキュラムディスコース、ライティング指導、テキスト分析、高等教育、言語学習政策

1. Introduction

The focus and learning outcomes of Japanese primary school English curricula could benefit from further refinement (Sakakibara, 2019; Terasawa, 2022), alongside improvements in the coherence of syllabi between primary and junior high school English education (Ng, 2016). Previous research on the curricula and syllabi of English education in Japan has mainly focused on the country's policies and history (Butler & Iino, 2005; Glasgow, 2014; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Terasawa, 2022). At the primary education level, there has been a tendency for the English curriculum, syllabus, and policies related to studies to promote the early introduction of English into the Japanese school curriculum since its introduction (MEXT, 2019; Kumazawa, 2018). Therefore, the focus has shifted to research on the content, policies, and proposals for improvement of English education curricula in elementary, junior high, and high schools (Ng, 2016; Takekoshi et al., 2017). Numerous studies have provided a historical overview of the Japanese government's general curriculum for high schools, including state control over the curriculum and school-based curriculum development (Nakayasu, 2016; Nishioka, 2017).

However, there are gaps in the curricula, syllabi, and policy studies regarding English pedagogy for primary schools, high schools, and higher education in Japan. First, few previous studies have focused on English writing syllabi in high schools and higher education in Japan. These relevant studies have usually focused on English pedagogical politics. Second, although studies regarding policies for English pedagogy in primary through high schools in Japan exist (Wakimoto, 2013), few studies in higher education have gathered and analysed curricula and syllabi related to English pedagogy, especially for second language (L2) writing in Japanese universities (Gashi, 2016; Miller et al., 2021).

Overall, research on English L2 writing in higher education in Japan has increased over the past few years (Long & Watanabe, 2023; Nicholas et al., 2023). However, few studies have examined syllabi for English L2 writing at the tertiary level. Therefore, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the conceptualization of writing and writing learning, which forms the basis of second language writing curricula and syllabi at universities in Japan. A comprehensive understanding of the current state of L2 writing syllabi would allow us to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, focusing on its crucial components and understanding the relationships between the conceptualisation of not only contents of the L2 writing in writing syllabi but also professional development (Yu et al., 2022). This study deductively analyses the L2 writing syllabus in higher education in Japan using a framework developed by Yu et al. (2022). Further, it employs the data coding framework of teaching and learning writing discourses by Ivanič (2004) to analyse the writing syllabi discourse sets of 37 universities designated as part of The Top Global University Project by the Japanese try of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), aiming to contribute to writing instruction and syllabi development in research and practice.

2. Literature Review

The national curricula reflects the quality and transparency of a country's educational system. Curricula include a plan for the systematic implementation of educational activities and reflect the cultural beliefs, social and political values, and organisational structure of the targeted educational institution (Stabback, 2016; Su, 2012). The English pedagogy curriculum encompasses broad ideas that represent different philosophical and theoretical perspectives on language and its learning process, along with the dynamics

and roles between teachers and students (Allen, 1984; Sekhar & Swathi, 2019). Furthermore, curricula cover aspects such as the design, execution, assessment, oversight, and administration of educational programs (Nunan, 1988).

2.1 Curriculum: MEXT, Japan

The high school curriculum as defines the skills and competencies that schools aim to cultivate through overall educational instruction as well as within individual subjects (MEXT, 2020). Efforts have been made to clarify the educational objectives of each school and ensure that the basic policy for curriculum organisation is shared with families and communities. Additionally, each school must comply with the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law Education to help achieve the objectives of (a) the harmonious development of students as human beings according to the stages and characteristics of their physical and mental development and (b) full consideration of the characteristics of their courses and departments and the actual conditions of their schools and regions (MEXT, 2020).

The goals for foreign language education (English) in Japanese high schools are (1) to foster English communication skills for understanding and thinking, (2) to accurately comprehend information and ideas through language activities, and (3) to cultivate the ability to express and communicate ideas effectively in English (MEXT, 2019).

The specific curriculum for English writing, as defined by MEXT, has the following characteristics: 1) students can write and communicate in detail about everyday topics (life outside school and the local community) using multiple paragraphs to convey information, thoughts, and feelings with clear reasons and evidence; 2) activities are introduced in a class where students read what they have written in English, ask and answer questions, and share their opinions and feelings; and 3) students listen to or read news or lectures in English on social topics, are introduced to activities in class, write in detail about them using multiple paragraphs with clear reasons, and clarify their opinions (MEXT, 2019).

MEXT has implemented initiatives regarding the English language related to universities. One is a Top Global University Project, a funded project that began in 2014 (MEXT, 2022b), with 37 Japanese universities selected for this project. These universities must achieve the following common outcome indicators over ten years: 1) measuring and understanding the English language levels of Japanese students, 2) expanding the enrolment of international students, 3) working to improve the English language skills of Japanese university students, and 4) using external English test scores for undergraduate admissions (MEXT, 2022b). These steps suggest that English language subjects were emphasised at the selected universities.

2.2 Syllabus

A syllabus is a written document that reflects the content of detailed lesson objectives, relevant texts, and assessment methods. It is a plan to be achieved through teaching, and student learning and teaching are strictly conducted according to syllabi (Breen, 1984; Parkes & Harris, 2002), however, in practice, there are instances where the aforementioned defining characteristics of the syllabus are not adhered to. A syllabus is an official document, record, contract, or instrument negotiated by people who conduct lessons and people who participate in the lessons (Breen, 1984; Parkes & Harris, 2002). Furthermore, syllabi related to language learning are also concerned with teaching and social purposes. Yalden (1984) states that the structuring principles of a syllabus in relation to language learning should outline how the target language will be learned. Consequently, the success of a course depends on how well the syllabus objectives and outlines are designed (Tokatlı & Keşli, 2009). A well-structured, clearly articulated, and comprehensive

syllabus is the most essential and valuable tool for students (Tokath & Keşli, 2009), as it can prevent misunderstandings regarding to course goals, objectives, assessment criteria, grading policies, expected behaviors from both students and faculty, as well as assignments, readings, and activities (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). Furthermore, a more clearly defined syllabus in terms of structure, content, materials, and grading components enhances students' ability to process the information learned and leads to improved final grades (Littlefield, 1991).

2.3 Ivanič's (2004) framework for teaching writing

In this study, syllabi pertaining to writing classes within the context of English pedagogy constitute a central focus of investigation. This section elaborates on six distinct discourses related to the teaching of writing, as identified by Ivanič (2004): *"skills, creativity, process, genre, social practice, and socio-political"* (p. 225).

The skills discourse features emphasised in the syllabi of English writing courses are the importance of the correct formation of English letters, lexicogrammatical resources, sentences, and linguistic accuracy (Ivanič, 2004). In skills-discourse-driven writing, learning to write means acquiring the syntactic patterns that produce well-formed sentences and the loose cohesive patterns within and between paragraphs characteristic of well-formed writing (Ivanič, 2004).

In English writing classes driven by creative discourse, authors are encouraged to explore topics that are personally meaningful and engaging, prioritizing content and style over precise linguistic accuracy (Yu et al., 2022). In creative discourse-centred writing classes, writing itself has value, and most written content is based on learners' experiences (Ivanič, 2004).

Cognitive psychologists proposed a model of the writing process, emphasizing three key components: planning, translating, and reviewing, alongside two interacting factors: task environments and the writer's long-term memory (Flower & Hayes, 1980). During this period, writing instruction shifted toward "the practical processes of planning, drafting, and revising writing rather than on product features" (Ivanič, 2004, p. 231). Process discourse thus integrates both cognitive and practical dimensions of writing (Ivanič, 2004). Furthermore, process discourse provides frequent opportunities for feedback from peers and teachers (Yu et al., 2022).

Genre studies have evolved through three foundational research frameworks: North American New Rhetoric Studies (NR), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Hyon, 1996).

NR studies encompass rhetorical, compositional, and professional writing research, integrating North American perspectives into diverse areas of first-language English pedagogy (Miller, 1984). These studies often employ ethnographic methods, rather than linguistic ones, to analyze genres (Bazerman, 2000).

Swales's (1990) rhetorical-linguistic framework significantly contributed to the historical development of ESP (Devitt, 2015). This framework enhances genre awareness, particularly benefiting individuals unfamiliar with specific genre tasks or contexts. Numerous studies have adopted a genre-based approach under the ESP framework to investigate academic essay writing by L1 and L2 learners (Wang, 2017).

Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), genre studies originated from two English sub-disciplines: literary studies and composition studies (Devitt, 2000). Language forms are shaped by key aspects of the social context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). SFL-based genre studies focus on analyzing genres within primary and secondary school settings and workplace nonprofessional texts, rather than concentrating on academic or professional writing at the college level (Hyon, 1996). In Australia, the "process approach" is often positioned in opposition to the "genre approach" in writing

education (Reid, 1987; Stierer & Maybin, 1994). The genre-centered perspective conceptualizes writing as a socially contextualized text type (Ivanič, 2004).

In writing classes where social practice discourse is the foundation, writing is linked to social purposes (Ivanič, 2004). They focus on meeting specific social objectives and are taught in real-life situations and simulations (Ivanič, 2004); thus, writing topics include practical content such as business letters and self-introductions (Yu et al., 2022).

The English writing syllabus focuses on socio-political discourse covers topics such as power, politics, society, representation, identity, ideology, social activism, and social change, aiming to enhance English language learners' understanding of critical literacy (Ivanič, 2004).

2. 4 The Current State of English Writing Instruction

Challenges and Insights from High School to University Curricula in Japan Analyzing English writing curricula, course content, and pedagogical strategies in university syllabi offers critical insights into their alignment with high school instruction (Komiyama, 2018). Oi (2014) noted that classroom-based English writing practice is markedly limited in both high schools and universities compared to other language skills. A 2014 MEXT proficiency test involving approximately 70,000 third-year high school students revealed that nearly 90% displayed writing skills equivalent to those of junior high school students. Komiyama (2018) and Kashiwagi (2016) highlighted stagnation in high school English writing instruction, where writing is often perceived as the most challenging and least prioritized language skill. Kashiwagi (2016) underscored the lack of research on effective writing pedagogy and assessment, while Komiyama (2018) identified barriers such as teachers' insufficient confidence, limited instructional time, and student anxiety. These challenges highlight the marginalization of writing instruction in secondary education, a pattern that may persist in Japanese universities. Consequently, stand-alone English writing courses in higher education remain rare. Tokeshi et al. (2018) acknowledged increasing interest in EAP implementation at Japanese universities but emphasized the absence of established guidelines for EAP curriculum design, teacher training, and administration.

2. 5 Previous research on syllabi and curricula for English language pedagogy in Japan

Research on syllabi and English language education curricula in Japan is limited. Most were conducted in accordance with English as a subject in primary schools (Takegoshi et al., 2017). In an examination of the initial introduction of English language teaching as the main subject in elementary schools in Japan, Takegoshi et al. (2017) explored three core disciplines of the new curriculum: overall objectives, subjects related to teaching methods, and classes related to the main subject. They also predict that future primary school teachers must have a basic understanding of and a broader background in linguistics, literature, society, and cross-cultural communication (Takegoshi et al., 2017). In Japan, a curriculum is being developed to systematise English language education from elementary to high school (Sakyu, 2021). However, this remains a challenge.

No research has specifically focused on English writing syllabi in Japanese elementary schools; instead, existing studies have examined the English curriculum as a whole. Hyun-Sook (2019) evaluated elementary school English curricula in Japan and South Korea using a questionnaire survey of 1,167 junior high school teachers in both countries. Regarding the impact of primary school English curricula, Japanese students showed their familiarity with learning English and as a basis for intercultural communication (Hyun-Sook, 2019). Limited research exists on syllabi for English writing in Japanese high schools; however, there

have been reports on surveys of the entire English curriculum. For example, Glasgow (2014) investigated the impact of including instruction in the high school foreign-language curriculum implemented in 2013 (Hashimoto, 2013), which mandated that teachers deliver English lessons despite it not being their first language. The interviews in Glasgow's (2014) study revealed that a discrepancy or contradiction regarding teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of the first language's uses during the classroom activities and curriculum requirements.

Finally, there is also limited research on English writing syllabi at Japanese universities. Nakamura et al. (2012) reported that a Japanese junior college restructured its syllabus for career improvement, aiming at advancing basic English language skills to enable students to continue improving their life skills throughout their lives. For instance, the following studies have examined the syllabi of English education and language learning programs in Japan: Gashi (2016) conducted a comparative analysis of the national syllabi for English education in Sweden and Japan through hermeneutic analysis and word count. The findings revealed that the Swedish syllabus emphasised the Common European Framework of Reference for Language levels and student assessment criteria. However, the Japanese syllabus was more prescriptive, concentrating on specific content areas such as grammar and oral communication. Moreover, Japanese syllabi prioritise teacher- and authority-determined content and objectives and are more systematic, significantly emphasising grammar, reading comprehension, and preparation for university entrance exams—elements that hold substantial value within Japan's educational culture (Gashi, 2016).

Critically and comprehensively reviewing English syllabi and curricula in Japanese universities can help identify successful course designs for L2 writing classes. The success of a course depends on how well the objectives and overview are outlined in the course syllabus, and a well-prepared, clearly stated, and comprehensive syllabus is an important beneficial resource for students (Tokath & Keşli, 2009). Moreover, studies have indicated that when a course syllabus is explicit about aspects such as assignment count, content, resources, and grading criteria, it better aids students in processing information within the learning environment and contributes to improved academic performance (Littlefield, 1991). Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the syllabi trends in English writing courses at Japanese universities?

RQ2: To what extent do the syllabi of L2 writing teaching at 37 Japanese universities conform to the writing discourse framework, and what trends do they reveal?

3. Methodology

3.1 Context and data collection

The English syllabi of 37 Japanese universities were selected by MEXT, Japan, as part of the Top Global University Project from 2014 to 2023. The Japanese government provides priority support to universities that undertake new initiatives to realise and accelerate exchange and collaboration among world-class universities, improve their structures, reform their human resources and teaching systems, and strengthen their systems to develop students' global competence for thorough internationalisation (MEXT, 2022a). Owing to their funding and policy priorities, these universities are likely to create more comprehensive English-language curricula. A review of the Top Global University Project websites of the 37 universities showed that they all aimed to increase the number of international students and faculty members, courses offered in English in order to improve their language proficiencies.

This study investigated the syllabi for English language teaching published at these universities, particularly English writing courses offered to first-year students (mainly during the first or second semester). The results indicate that many universities have organised target English classes in common liberal arts courses for undergraduate students. The curriculum content of the English language classes in each department or faculty member had diverse characteristics that could significantly impact the results. Therefore, the syllabi for English writing courses offered independently in each department were omitted from this study.

3. 2 Coding scheme and data analysis

The analytical frameworks from Ivanič (2004) and Yu et al.'s (2022) studies were applied in this study. The English writing syllabi of the 37 selected universities were analyzed to determine their appropriate coding. Initially, the syllabi were examined using Yu et al.'s (2022) content analysis approach, which involves systematically analyzing components to understand their focus, structure, and alignment with educational objectives. Subsequently, they were reviewed through the lens of Ivanič's (2004) original framework. A tentative coding scheme was then developed. During the coding process, the author referred to the course assessments outlined in the syllabi and applied Yu et al.'s (2022) unit analysis. This unit analysis examines specific elements or components within syllabi, such as subject overviews, lesson plans, achievement goals, and assessment methods. Additionally, guided by Ivanič's (2004) framework and its theoretical underpinnings, the author repeatedly reviewed the course outlines, objectives, and assessments in the relevant syllabi to identify keywords or phrases aligned with the frameworks proposed by Ivanič (2004) and Yu et al. (2022). In each syllabus, the frequency of codes corresponding to Ivanič's (2004) discourse categories was calculated.

4. Findings and Discussion

4. 1 L2 writing-related curriculum types

Table 1 shows the distribution of L2 writing-related curriculum types across 37 universities in Japan. Only 57% of the syllabi were designed solely for English writing lessons at universities. For example, at University 5, the English syllabus consists of a mix of writing and reading. Furthermore, 15% of the target universities did not have an English syllabus for first-year students. For example, at University No. 22, first-year university students could take English as a medium of instruction in class, and the system was designed to allow students to take specific courses in English rather than learning English. Additionally, although English classes are available to support students preparing for proficiency exams like the Test of English for International Communication and the International English Language Testing System, University 26 lacked a syllabus specifically for an English writing class. Additionally, opportunities to learn English writing were offered in 5% of the English learning, listening, reading, and speaking classes. Another 5% offered English writing tasks in combined speaking and writing classes. This suggests that opportunities to learn English writing in universities are treated peripherally.

Of the 57% of the syllabi designed only for English writing, less than half (43% or nine syllabi) included the core concept of EAP. When EAP concepts were reflected in the syllabi, the following trends were observed: reading and understanding English technical books and articles, writing abstracts and presentation drafts, understanding plagiarism, and paragraph writing.

Table 2 shows the results of the distribution of L2 writing-related curricula for 37 universities in Japan.

Table 1 *The distribution of L2 writing-related syllabus types in 37 universities in Japan*

	Syllabus types/ descriptions	Number of universities	Proportion
1	Syllabus designed for only English writing	21	57%
2	English writing practices are incorporated into the reading-writing lesson syllabus	5	14%
3	No English writing lesson syllabus (e.g., English medium instruction, the Test of English for International Communication)	5	14%
4	English writing practices are incorporated into the speaking-writing lesson syllabus	2	5%
5	English writing practices are incorporated into the listening-reading-speaking-writing lesson syllabus	2	5%
6	English writing practices are incorporated into the listening-writing lesson syllabus	1	2.50%
7	English writing practices are incorporated into English for general academic purposes in the syllabus	1	2.50%
	Total	37	

Table 2 *The distribution of L2 writing-related syllabi for 37 universities in Japan*

	Discourse clusters	Distribution	Number of universities	Sum	(Proportion)
1	One type	Skills	20	24	(65%)
		Process	4		
2	Two types	Skills-Process	5	7	(19%)
3		Skills-Social practice	1		
4		Skills-Socio-political	1		
6	Three types	Skills-Process-Genre	1	1	(3%)
7	No syllabus		5	5	(13%)

Table 2 shows that 65% of the English writing syllabi were developed around one type of discourse. In particular, the trend in English writing lessons regarding English writing skills discourse focused on the correct formation of characters, words, and sentences in English essays written by university students, emphasising vocabulary size expansion and grammar training. According to the English writing syllabus of University 2, one learning objective included, 'learners can recall and apply basic rules (punctuation) in academic essay formatting'. Furthermore, in each week's lesson plan in University14, the following statements appeared: 'Week 3 - understanding the definition of a paragraph; Week 4 - practising paragraph writing; and Week 7 - opportunities to learn about paragraph and sentence connections.' Additionally, in the syllabus of University 21, the learning objective was developing basic language competence skills, including grammar and vocabulary, emphasising frequently used vocabulary in information technology. Grammar and vocabulary extensions were mentioned in five out of the 20 syllabi, suggesting that grammar and vocabulary extensions are important learning items.

Another feature centred on skills discourse is the focus on writing instruction, which focuses only on finished products. The main objective of teacher evaluation is to assess the written material as the final product. These trends can be determined from the syllabus evaluation items.

4.2 Process discourse

At University 2, we identified skill and process discourses in the English writing syllabus. The process discourse advocates learning the processes and procedures for composing texts when learning to write (Ivanič, 2004). Writers have multiple opportunities and sufficient time to plan, draft, and revise (Yu et al., 2022). For example, the lesson plans in the syllabus of University 2 revealed that Week 2 focused on paragraphs and topic sentences, Week 3 on supporting sentences, Week 11 on definitions, opinions, facts, and format, Week 12 on peer review, and Week 13 on revision and documentation. The following goal was included in the learning achievement objective section: 'Understand the writing process and use it for drafting and editing to produce a short academic essay'. However, we found that although process discourse features were reflected in the lesson plans, they were not reflected in the assessments. For example, the English writing assessment at University 2 included: 1) vocabulary assessments: 10%; 2) class participation: 30%; and 3) writing assignments: 60%. In other words, the students' essays were the main focus of this assessment.

For process discourse, assessment items should focus on essay drafting and procedures. However, analysing the syllabi and assessment items of four universities offering English writing classes that utilised process discourse characteristics did not reveal any assessment targets mentioned above. Yu et al. (2022) confirmed the disparity between process-discourse-based English writing course contents and assessment items.

4.3 Genre-oriented discourse

Features of genre-oriented discourse were identified in the English writing syllabus of University 4. For example, the class objectives stated that students must learn various development methods such as 'cause and effect', 'classification', and 'compare and contrast'. This genre-oriented discourse seems to follow Swales's (1990) genre-based approach that incorporates an SFL framework, namely the Sydney School. Swales's genre analysis was primarily intended to provide an approach for teaching general English and English for academic research. This approach to genre instruction is believed to increase genre awareness and is useful for those who are unfamiliar with genre tasks or contexts. Many writing teachers working in ESP and EAP believe that teaching with explicit genre awareness can provide learners with concrete opportunities to acquire conceptual and cultural frameworks that enable them to complete writing tasks independently (Cheng, 2006). ESP researchers have analysed the oral and written language demands of non-native speakers in academic and professional settings (Hyon, 1996). Genre studies that use the ESP framework have focused on higher education in Japan (Fukayama, 2007; Tojo, 2015).

4.4 Social Practice Discourse

The L2 writing syllabi, grounded in social practice discourse, highlight pragmatic writing topics. The underlying premise of this approach is that writing is purposeful communication situated within a social context (Yu et al., 2022). Notably, at University 21, the relevant syllabus explicitly aims to develop the fundamental English reading and writing proficiency required for professional research and work in innovation and information technology domains. Course content and assignments address contemporary issues within information and communication technology, such as design, innovation, technology, and society. The syllabus design aims to facilitate the integration of English writing lessons, writing topics, and students' professional aspirations.

4. 5 Socio-political discourse

In English writing classes focused on socio-political discourse, topics cover areas such as politics, power, society, ideology, expression, identity, social action, and social change (Ivanič, 2004). For example, in the English writing syllabus of University 5, half the class time was focused on textbooks that contained various interesting articles on social and academic topics. In the second half, the text stated that the students were given a simulated experience of an American university humanities class through an American television historical documentary. The lesson plans included statements about the news, media, education, and summary papers.

5. Conclusion

Most studies on L2 writing have concentrated on instructional methods, teacher feedback, assessment practices, and student learning experiences, often overlooking aspects related to the L2 writing curriculum. Specifically, limited attention has been given to the discourse surrounding the L2 writing curriculum, which serves as a critical lens for understanding the educational philosophies and beliefs that significantly shape classroom practices. This study relies on a teaching and learning writing discourse framework to analyse syllabus documents from EFL writing classes at 37 universities selected as part of the Top Global University Project conducted by MEXT, Japan. The results indicate that Japanese university EFL writing syllabi and instructions involve the peripheral learning of how to write academic essays. Furthermore, a striking feature of the EFL writing discourses in Japan is that most are skill discourses based on a process approach, wherein L2 syllabi writing focuses on genres. Biased writing discourses (concentrating too much on products) are still central to the curriculum and syllabus, and several concerns remain regarding current EFL writing education in Japan.

Regarding English teaching in L2 writing courses at Japanese universities, the curricula revealed a limited discourse that focused only on the final product. Moreover, other discourses are extremely limited. Process- and genre-oriented approaches include English writing, which is frequently introduced in L1 or L2 writing in mainland China and Australia (Yu et al., 2022). Thus, there is a need to re-examine English writing instruction and lesson planning in Japan, which also includes features of other writing discourses. This requires collaboration between L2 writing lesson teachers, curriculum developers, and writing teachers.

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