Monitoring Student Performance with Self-Evaluation Checklists: An Ongoing Case Study

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Introduction

Monitoring behavior with self-evaluation checklists can help learners develop metacognitive skills, enhance their learning strategies, and assist them in becoming independent, confident learners. By keeping a record of what they have done and how well they have done it, learners can begin to judge for themselves where their strengths and weakness are and what they need to work on next. Checklists and evaluation forms have been commonly used, for example, in public speaking and composition courses in which students rate themselves (or their peers) on criteria such as organization, content, and language. This type of self-regulating behavior is particularly important in larger classes in which one-to-one interaction with the instructor may be limited. The present paper presents several examples of self-evaluation checklists[1] that the author has used in his courses along with preliminary data from ongoing action research involving the use of self-evaluation checklists with learners in intermediate-level speaking and writing courses.[2]

Background

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of attention paid to educational assessment in general (e.g., Arater & McTighe, 2001; Guskey & Bailey, 2001; Marzano, 2001; McMillan, 2001; Reeves, 2002; Smith, Smith, & De Lisi, 2001) and assessment in foreign lan-

guage in education in particular (e.g., Alderson, 2002; Apple & Shimo, 2002; Brown, 1998; Chen, 2006; Coombe & Hubley, 2003, Luoma, 2004; Weigle, 2002). This research has begun to confirm what many teachers have known for a long time: self-evaluation can play a powerful role in motivating students to improve their performance. Rolheiser and Ross (c. 1998) describe it this way:

> Self-evaluation is defined as students judging the quality of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of doing better work in the future. When we teach students how to assess their own progress, and when they do so against known and challenging quality standards, we find that there is a lot to gain. Self-evaluation is a potentially powerful technique because of its impact on student performance through enhanced self-efficacy and increased intrinsic motivation. (paragraph 3)

A number of models and forms of various types have been proposed to aid teachers who would like to implement self-assessment in their courses. Rolheiser and Ross (c. 1998), for example, propose that self-evaluation is a multi-factor, interactive process that plays an essential role in the learning process. Self-evaluation is especially important in this process because it promotes what they call "an upward cycle of learning." This cycle is divided into four stages: defining criteria, applying criteria, giving feedback, and setting goals. By going through this process and reflecting on their behavior, students learn to set higher goals for themselves and consequently work harder to achieve those goals. More effort leads to better results, which builds confidence, and increasing confidence enhances motivation, which in turn sustains effort that leads to better performance.

The Present Study

In the ongoing action research, self-evaluation checklists are used primarily to monitor speaking and writing performance, although extensive reading and listening comprehension are also being observed in some courses. Examples of some of these checklists are included in the appendices.[3] The reader should note that some of them are being revised to reflect changes in course contents prompted by midterm courses evaluation surveys. Appendix A is an example of a checklist used for establishing beginning of the course performance objectives in an oral communications course. Other checklists used in that course to guide and monitor participation in small group discussions appear in Appendices B and C. In the writing courses, two checklists are used to monitor the quantity and contents of student journal writing on a weekly basis (Appendices D and E[4]), and another checklist is used for self-evaluation of in-progress and final versions of research essays (Appendix F). The reader should note that items in these checklists do not necessarily represent the entire contents of the course syllabi and that in some courses quiz and test scores are part of the data as well.

Participants

The participants in this study are Japanese learners of English as a foreign language at a junior college and a university in Japan. Data is being collected from approximated 150 students enrolled in six intermediate-level courses. One of the courses focuses on oral communication, one on listening, one on reading-listening, one on writing-speaking and two on writing. The data reported below comes from pilot studies conducted with participants in the oral communication course (non-English major, second-year university students) and one of the writing courses (English major, second-year junior college stu-

dents).

Procedure

The self-evaluation checklists in the study are normally distributed to the students during the first class meeting of the semester along with the course syllabus. The purpose and use of the checklists are carefully explained and examples of "A" quality student work or model assignments such as book reports or journal entries are presented. As a general rule, the teacher reviews the checklists individually with students each week during the course to give feedback and to be sure they are kept up to date and done properly. At the end of course, the instructor meets one-to-one with the students to review their work for the entire semester, using the checklists and other data as guides to assess their achievement.

Data Analysis and Results

The data is analyzed in several ways depending on the contents and design of the checklist used. For example, a simple descriptive analysis is used to identify patterns of performance in the journal writing assignments such as *word count* (Are the students writing enough? Are they responding sufficiently in the exchange-journal tasks?) and *topic record* (Is there enough variety in their writing?). Another type of analysis used for the discussion checklists involves examining the data to see how closely students' evaluations match the teacher's evaluations. That is, do the instructor and students share the same interpretation of the evaluation criteria? For example, how much content (e.g., the 5Ws and H) and what types (e.g., facts, opinion, feedback) is needed in a discussion? Examples of preliminary descriptive data for a pilot group of students are presented in Figures

1-8 following the Appendix.

Figure 1 shows the average self-evaluation scores for performance in small group discussions. On the whole, the students indicated their performance was in the "good" range with their strongest point being voice quality and their weaker points being contents and body language. These evaluations were consistent with the teacher's observations. On the one hand, the teacher had to sometimes caution the students to not shout and to speak with a lower volume so as to not disturb nearby groups or nearby classrooms. On the other hand, the teacher frequently had to encourage the students to include more details (i.e., who, what, where, when, why, how). As for body language, the teacher often needed to direct many students not to sit awkwardly (e.g., twisting and hanging over the backs of chairs), to sit up straight, and not to slouch.

Figures 2 and 3 present the self-evaluations of two students, Ken and Taro (not their real names) regarding their participation in small group discussions. Ken tended to evaluate himself on the high end of the scale in the "good" range, whereas Taro evaluated himself on the lower end in the "fair" to "poor" range. The pattern of evaluation was consistent across categories (interaction, contents, etc.) for each student with some but not dramatic variation between categories. Other students displayed similar patterns. On the whole, students' evaluations of themselves did not vary widely from the teacher's assessments, but students tended to give themselves slightly higher scores for contents and interaction, suggesting perhaps a gap between teacher and student expectations. Weekly reviews of the checklists with individual students were helpful in motivating many of the quieter students to speak up more. Frequently demonstrating how to apply the guidelines in Appendix A often achieved very good results.

Figures 4-8 present data on students' journal writing performance. Students overwhelmingly described and gave their opinions of recent events in their current lives (Figures 4-5), more than double the percentage of times they wrote about the past (childhood through high school years) or the future (several months from now and beyond). These current-life topics dealt mainly with club activities, shopping trips, gatherings with friends, movies, and part-time jobs. When students did write about the past no particular topic stood out (Figure 7), and when they wrote about the future the topics were extensions of their current-life topics or their dream for the future (Figure 8). The focus on topics from current life most probably reflects the goals and contents of the materials used in course, which emphasized self-expression and personal experience rather than content knowledge and current events. However, with more teacher guidance the students could have been directed to expand the scope of their writing.

As for the quantity of writing (Appendix D), the minimum requirement was 300 words per week *on average*. Having students record the number of words they wrote was often very effective in getting the less productive writers to write more over the course of the semester. If they fell behind, they knew that they could catch up later without penalty. In addition, because students exchanged journals and read each others' work, they knew how much other students were writing, and this observation may have motivated some students to set higher goals for themselves.

Preliminary Conclusion

Experience with a variety of self-evaluation and self-monitoring checklists in combination with explicit instruction and goal-setting suggests that they are generally effective in developing metacognitive

skills, enhancing learning strategies, and assisting learners to judge for themselves where their strengths and weakness are and what they need to work on. They have also been very useful in helping students understand why they received a particular grade (A, B, C, etc.) for the course as a whole. Nevertheless, there are a few difficulties that need to be taken into account. One problem is asking students to engage in too much detailed recordkeeping, especially if they are unclear of the value or validity of what they are doing. Another is not supervising the students closely enough. That is, some students do not keep their records up to date, complete, or accurately enough to provide meaningful information. Teacher guidance, feedback, and frequent personal interaction with the students are essential factors in making self-evaluation work well.

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1st Annual Conference of the JACET Kanto Chapter, Waseda University, Tokyo, June 25, 2006.

[2] "Self-evaluation" does not mean that the students determine the grades for their assignments and courses instead of the teacher. In this paper self-evaluation refers to the understanding and application of explicit criteria to one's own work and behavior for the purpose of judging if one has met specified goals.

[3] The layout and contents of the materials in the appendices have been modified or abbreviated to fit space limitations. Space for quiz or test scores have been omitted in some cases.

[4] For this particular course, topics were coordinated with the themes and topics of the course textbook, in this case, J. Richards, *New Interchange 2*, Cambridge, UK: CUP.

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Appendices
Appendix A: Guidelines for Classroom Performance in Oral Communication Skills

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1. Attendance   4 3 2 1 0

Attends regularly. Arrives punctually. Submits Absences Reports on time. Attaches appropriate documents to Absence Reports. Completes make-up homework on time. Make-up homework is complete and properly done.

2. Readiness   4 3 2 1 0

Sets up name card promptly. Marks attendance record accurately and promptly. Sets out textbook, handouts, homework, etc. promptly.

3. Attentiveness   4 3 2 1 0

Listens to the teacher carefully. Follows the teacher's instructions. Takes notes when necessary. Asks questions when does not understand.

4. Written Homework   4 3 2 1 0

Homework is punctual, complete, and well done.

5. Reading Aloud   4 3 2 1 0

Uses good pronunciation and intonation. Speaks with a clear, firm voice. Uses good phrasing. Has good posture. Keeps chin up.

6. Question & Answer Practice   4 3 2 1 0

Gives appropriate, smooth, and complete answers. States main points clearly. Gives *details*, *examples*, and *opinions*. Express *feelings* and relates *personal experiences* as appropriate. Can make original *questions* based on the text.

7. Small Group & Pair Discussions   4 3 2 1 0

Speaks English. Speaks with a clear, firm voice. States main points clearly. Gives *details*, *examples*, and *opinions*. Express *feelings* and relates *personal experiences* as appropriate. Interacts with others: *"I see." "Oh, really?" "How about you?" "That's interesting."* etc.

8. Summarizing   4 3 2 1 0

Can explain the main points of the lesson or discussion clearly in several well-formed sentences. *"Today's discussion was about..."*

9. Drill & Role Play   4 3 2 1 0

Responds quickly, smoothly, completely, and correctly. Makes original sentences based on the basic pattern. Can use the basic patterns in original dialogues. Can memorize and perform short, routine dialogues.

10. Speech   4 3 2 1 0

(   ) Delivery: Timing, posture, hands, chin up, eye contact, paper position, voice, pace.

(   ) Contents: Follows the *format*. Uses s*ignal words* ("first, next, finally, on the other hand," etc.). States *main points* clearly. Gives *details*, *examples*, *opinions*. Express *feelings* and relates *personal experiences*.

(   ) Language: Usage is correct and appropriate. Communicates effectively.

11. Body language   4 3 2 1 0

Sits properly. Good posture, eye contact, appropriate gestures, etc.

Key: 4 = Excellent, 1 = Poor, 0 = Not done

Appendix B: Checklist for Discussions

1. Did you speak English? Did you encourage other students to speak,too?

2. Did you speak with a clear, strong voice? With feeling? With good pronunciation?

3. Did you have good posture? Good eye contact? Good body language?

4. Did you develop the content?

DETAILS:	When?" "Where?" "Who?" "What?" "Why?" "How?"
EXAMPLES:	"For example?" "For instance?"
REASONS:	"Because ( )." "My reason is ( )."
FEELINGS:	"How did you feel?"
	"I felt (happy, sad, excit<u>ed</u>)."
	"It was (interest<u>ing</u>, bor<u>ing</u>)."
OPINIONS:	"What did you think?" "How was it?"
	"Which is better?
	"In my opinion ( )." "I think ( )." My viewpoint is ( )."
Judgment:	"That was (great, good, OK, so-so, bad, awful)!"
Comparison:	"It was (better than, more interesting than, similar to, different from, the same as) ( )."
Prediction:	"(Next time, In the future) I want to ( )."

5. Did you participate actively?

FEEDBACK:	"I see." "Oh, really?" "That's (interesting, strange, surprising, wonderful, terrible, etc.). "
	"I think so, too." "I agree." "Me, too." "Well, I have a different idea."
	"I had a different (similar) experience."
INTERACTION:	"Could you repeat that, please?" "I have a question."
	"What do you think about ( )?" "How about you?"

Appendix C: Group Discussion Score Sheet

Use this score sheet to help improve your ability to participate actively and effectively. Key: 4 = Very good, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair (so-so), 1 = Poor, 0 = Did not participate

	Date	Topic	Speaking English	Voicequalityanguage	Body language	Contents	InteractionTotal	Total
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
Total								

Notes: (1) **Speaking English:** I used English as much as possible and encouraged others to speak, English, too. (2) **Voice:** I spoke clearly with good pronunciation, good rhythm, and good intonation. (3) **Body language:** I had good posture and good eye contact. I used appropriate gestures and appropriate facial expressions. (4) **Contents:** I gave details, examples, reasons, and opinions. I expressed my feelings appropriately and related personal experiences. (5) **Interaction:** I interacted with others using expression such as these: "I see." "Oh, really?" "How about you?" "That's interesting." "I have a question." "Could you repeat that, please?" "Pardon me?" "Me, too!" "I agree."

Appendix D: Journal Writing Record

Day	Date	Topic	How many words did you write in YOUR JOURNAL?	How many words did YOU write in your PARTNER'S JOURNAL?	WHOSE JOURNAL did YOU READ this week?
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
Totals:					

◆*Try to write about many different topics. Examples:* advice, books, cars, career, childhood, cities, clothes, countryside, celebrations, club, complaints, customs, dreams, entertainment, feelings (happy, excited, disappointed, proud, annoyed, etc.) food, friends, health, hobbies, holidays, hopes, housing, daily life, lifestyle, likes & dislikes, magazines, money, movies, music, news events, party, people, places, problem, school life (junior, high, university), shopping, sports, transportation, travel, vacation. ◆**Type of writing:** (1) Description, (2) narration, (3) sequence (procedure), (4) opinion, (5) comparison and contrast, (6) advantage and disadvantage, (7) pro and con (for and against), (8) explanation, (9) other.

Appendix E: Journal Topic Record

Check the topics that you wrote about this week. Checking more than one is OK.

| Class | Current Life | | | Opinions, Likes & Dislikes | | | Past Experiences | | | Future Plans | | | |
	Daily Life	School life	Friends, Family	TV, movies	News events	Problems in society	Childhood	Vacation	Travel	Activities	Career	Dreams	Other
1.													
2.													
3.													
4.													
5.													

Try to write about many different topics. Examples: advice, books, cars, career, childhood, cities, clothes, countryside, celebrations, club, complaints, customs, dreams, entertainment, feelings (happy, excited, disappointed, proud, annoyed, etc.), food, friends, health, hobbies, holidays, hopes, housing, daily life, lifestyle, likes & dislikes, magazines, money, movies, music, news events, party, people, places, problem, school life (junior, high, university), shopping, sports, transportation, travel, vacation.

Appendix F: Academic Writing Checklist and Self-Evaluation

Preliminary Work: □List of topics □Thesis statements □Graphic □Outline

Draft 1: □Outline □Introduction □Body □Conclusion □Works Cited

Draft 2: □Outline □Introduction □Body □Conclusion □Works Cited

Draft 3: □Outline □Introduction □Body □Conclusion □Works Cited

Overall Evaluation (4 = Excellent, 1 = Poor, 0 = Not done)

1. I *attended* class regularly.   4 3 2 1 0
2. I came to class *on time*.   4 3 2 1 0
3. I *participated* actively in class.   4 3 2 1 0
4. I used *English* as much as possible in class.   4 3 2 1 0
5. I did all the *homework* and in-class *assignments*.   4 3 2 1 0
6. My homework was completed *on time*.   4 3 2 1 0
7. My work was done *neatly*.   4 3 2 1 0
8. I used proper *margins*, *line spacing, page numbers*, etc. 4 3 2 1 0
9. My writing was *well organized* (topic sentences, etc.). 4 3 2 1 0
10. I supported my topics with *details* and *examples*.   4 3 2 1 0
11. I used *indirect quotations* and *paraphrase* correctly. 4 3 2 1 0
12. I used *direct quotations* correctly (citations, etc.).   4 3 2 1 0
13. I avoided *plagiarism* (see 11 and 12 above).   4 3 2 1 0
14. I used transition words (*in addition*, *however*, etc.). 4 3 2 1 0
15. I used a variety of *sentence types*.   4 3 2 1 0
16. My *Works Cited* list and citations matched correctly.   4 3 2 1 0
17. My *Works Cited* list used correct MLA style   4 3 2 1 0
18. My *grammar*, *spelling*, *punctuation*, etc. were good. 4 3 2 1 0
19. My oral presentation was well done.   4 3 2 1 0

Figures

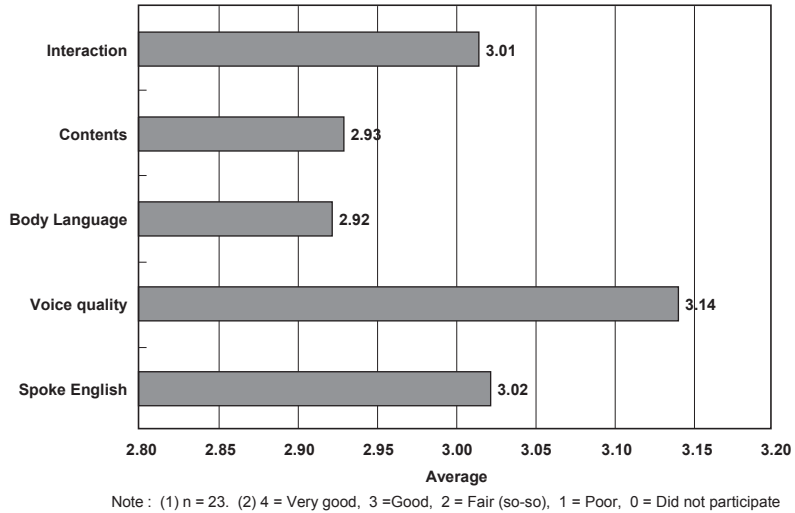## Fig. 1 Students' Self-Evaluation of Discussion Performance

Note : (1) n = 23. (2) 4 = Very good, 3 =Good, 2 = Fair (so-so), 1 = Poor, 0 = Did not participate

Fig. 2 Discussion Self-Evaluation: Student Profile 1 ("Ken")

Note : 4 = Very good, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair (so-so), 1 = Poor, 0 = Did not participate
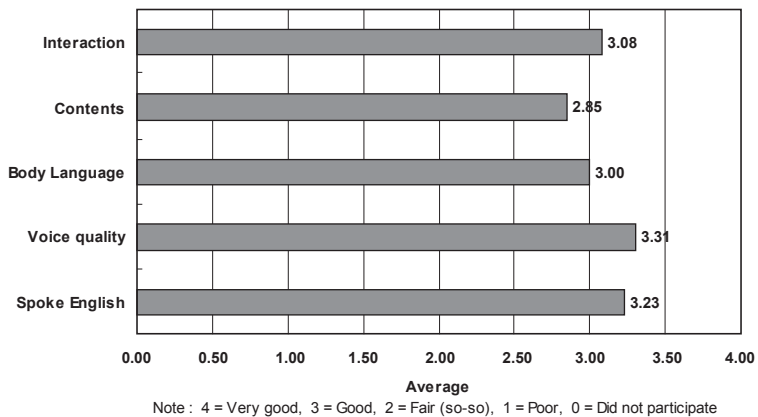
Fig. 3 Discussion Self-Evaluation: Student Profile 2 ("Taro")

Category	Average
Interaction	1.50
Contents	1.42
Body Language	1.92
Voice quality	1.75
Spoke English	1.33

Average

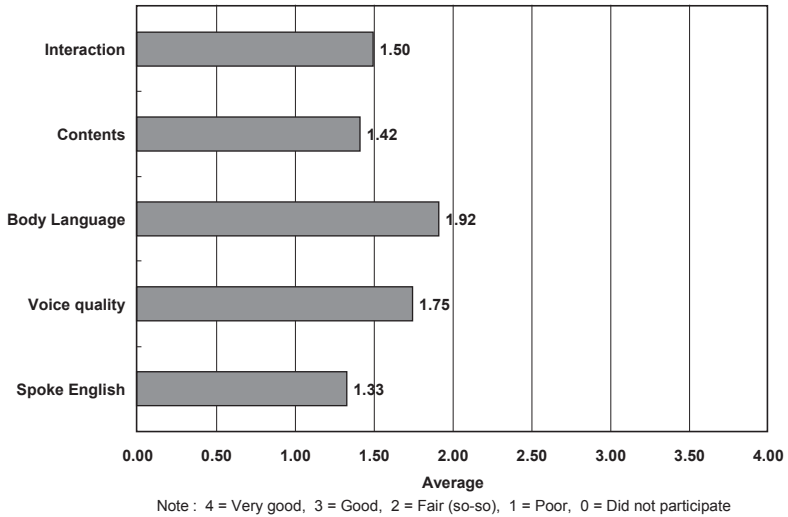Note : 4 = Very good, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair (so-so), 1 = Poor, 0 = Did not participate

Fig. 4 What Topics Did Students Most Commonly Write About in Their Journals?

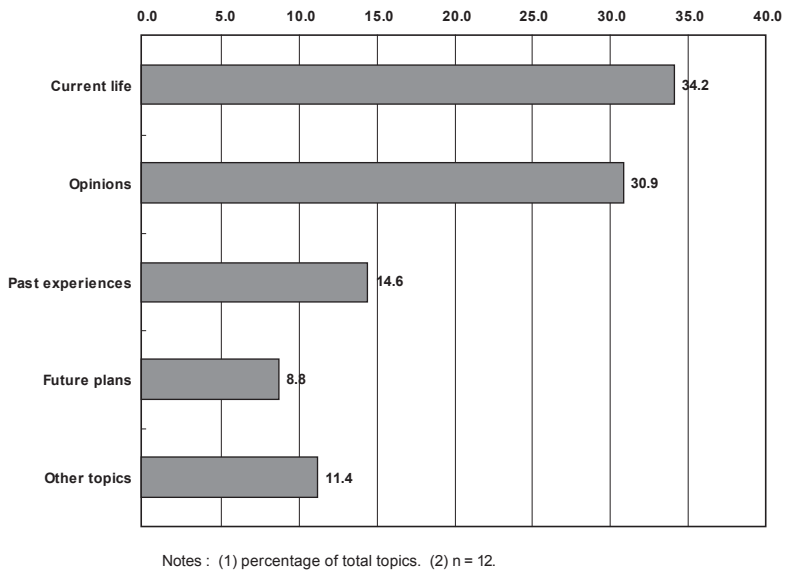| Topic	Percentage
Current life	34.2
Opinions	30.9
Past experiences	14.6
Future plans	8.8
Other topics	11.4

Notes : (1) percentage of total topics. (2) n = 12.

Fig. 5 What Current Life Topics Did Students Write About?

	0.0	2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0	10.0	12.0	14.0	16.0

- Daily life: **14.3**
- School life: **0.8**
- Friends & family: **5.3**
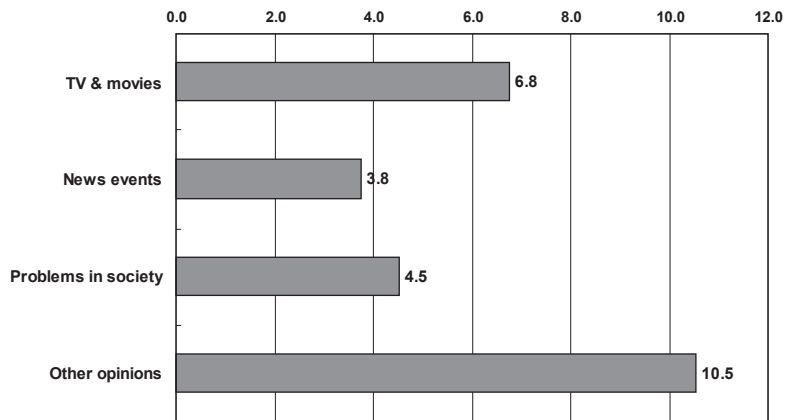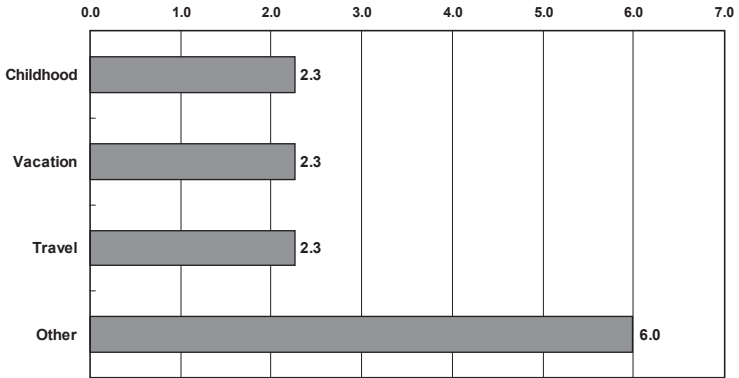- Other current life: **9.0**
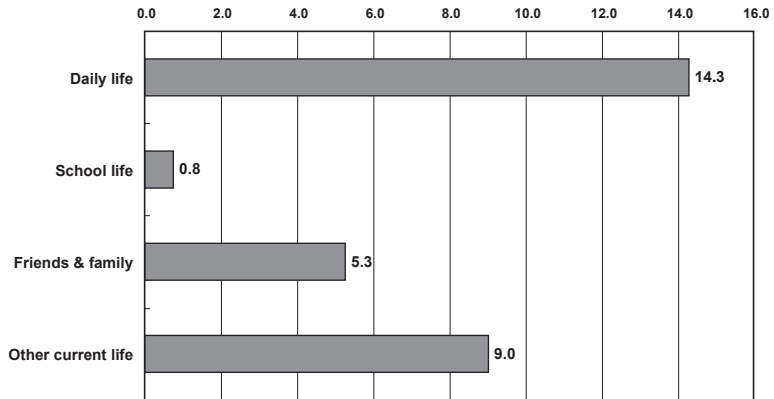
Notes : (1) percentage of total topics. (2) n = 12.

Fig. 6 What Topics Did Students Write Opinions About in Their Journals?

	0.0	2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0	10.0	12.0

- TV & movies: **6.8**
- News events: **3.8**
- Problems in society: **4.5**
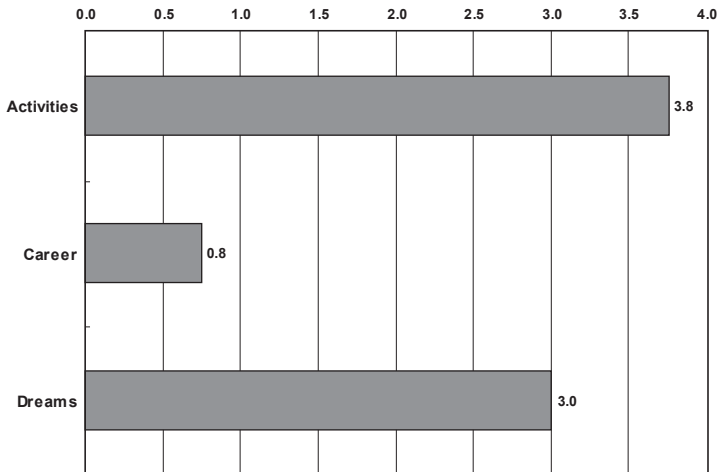- Other opinions: **10.5**

Notes : (1) percentage of total topics. (2) n = 12.

Fig. 7 What Past Experiences Did Students Write About in Their Journals?

Notes : (1) percentage of total topics. (2) n = 12.

Fig. 8 What Future Plans Did the Students Write About in Their Journals?

Notes : (1) percentage of total topics. (2) n = 11.