Feedback in EFL Writing : Integration of Students' Perceptions Over Time and at the End of Term

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INTRODUCTION

In the process writing approach, writing is generally considered as a recursive structure of pre–writing, writing, revising, and editing. In this process, revising has been considered an important factor in successful communication in final products (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987 ; Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, & Stratman, 1986). It is crucial to write multiple drafts and receive a variety of comments on drafts from a real audience. Teacher, peer, and self–directed feedback have been used in writing classes as responses from the audience. In L2 writing, majority of previous studies on feedback are in ESL contexts and a few researchers have focused on EFL writing. In addition, most of them (e. g., Arndt, 1993 ; Carson & Nelson, 1996 ; Enginarlar, 1993 ; Ferris, 1995 ; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996 ; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang, 1998 ; Zhang, 1995) have examined students' opinions or perceptions. These studies either administered questionnaires and/or had interviews after students received feedback or at the end of the semester. No surveys have examined what feelings and opinions students have to feedback at different times. It is likely that students who are inexperienced in essay writing or unfamiliar with feedback have different reactions to feedback at the beginning and the end of the course. Examining feedback in EFL

contexts and investigating students' on–going perceptions over time as well as final perceptions of feedback at the end of a term seems to be important in the studies of feedback.

There are numerous differences in instructional context between ESL and FL writing classes. For example, ESL students are divers in their linguistic (L1), cultural, and prior educational backgrounds. International students studying in various US institutions come from non–English–speaking countries all over the world (Leki, 1992), and international students are different from US resident ESL students (Reid, 1998). In many FL classes, however, students share similar backgrounds in their first language, culture, and education. Students' expectations of writing courses are also different. The primary goal of writing for ESL students is to acquire necessary skills for academic settings to continue their education, while the goal for FL students is mainly to practice the target language (Ferris, 1999 ; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996). Furthermore, ESL students are required to write English outside ESL composition classes. In FL environment, however, students have fewer opportunities to communicate in the written target language in real situations. These differences in FL settings from ESL may impact EFL writing, and EFL students' reactions to feedback may not be similar to ESL students'.

Previous studies in L2 writing address problems and controversial issues on feedback. First, understanding whether students appreciate feedback or not is important. There are mixed reactions to feedback. In a study by Mendonca & Johnson (1994), ESL students answered that peer feedback was valuable and beneficial for revision. However, Mangelsdorf (1992) and Nelson & Carson (1998) reported that ESL students had positive, negative and ambivalent responses on the effectiveness of peer review. It is interesting that students in Hong Kong showed differ-

ent perceptions of peer feedback. Sengupta (1998) reported that ESL students in Hong Kong perceived no value in peer evaluation. In the survey by Arndt (1993), students at an institution in Hong Kong, where English is the official medium of instruction, reported that peer feedback was of little help and that they had more negative feelings about peer feedback outside the collaborative context of team writing. In Keh's survey (1990), on the contrary, Chinese college students in Hong Kong answered that peer feedback was valuable in gaining a conscious awareness of audience. As to teacher feedback, Zamel (1985) suggested that teachers' comments were ineffective. However, Cardelle & Corno (1981) reported that 75% of 80 students in a college Spanish course answered that teacher feedback was helpful for their motivation and final performance. Ferris (1995) also reported that 93.5% of 155 ESL students felt the teachers' commentary was helpful. Enginarlar's survey (1993) revealed that EFL students in Turkey had a highly favorable opinion of the utility and didactic value of teacher feedback.

It is also helpful to know which type of feedback students favor. Zhang (1995) found that ESL students in an American university overwhelmingly preferred teacher feedback over peer and self feedback. Nelson & Carson (1998) reported that ESL students preferred teacher feedback to peer response. In the study by Mendonca & Johnson (1994), however, ESL students answered that both teacher and peer feedback were important and useful. Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, & Huang (1998) reported that ESL students in Hong Kong and Taiwan wanted both teacher and peer feedback and that they wanted to have peer feedback as one type of feedback. In a case study by Cohen & Cavalcanti (1990), EFL students wanted more feedback from their teachers about content and organization than about grammar and mechanics. Leki (1991) noted that ESL students expected their teachers to correct grammatical errors

and they did not approve of teacher responses which dealt only with organization and content. Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1994) found that ESL students wanted to receive teachers' commentary both about formal text features and about idea development on early drafts as well as on final drafts. Their survey also revealed a stronger focus on linguistic accuracy among FL students and a more desire to communicate ideas among ESL students. In Ferris's (1995) study, ESL students paid attention to teacher feedback on content and organization in preliminary drafts and focused on vocabulary and mechanics in final drafts.

The effect of ESL students' cultural backgrounds on their preference for the types of feedback is also debatable. Mangelsdorf (1992) stated that ESL students with Asian backgrounds preferred teacher commentary to peer review. Zhang (1995) suggested that the cultural backgrounds of ESL students should be considered because Asian students definitely preferred teacher feedback over peer feedback. Carson & Nelson (1996) reported that writing groups may be problematic for students from collectivist cultures(e. g., Japan, China). In Nelson & Carson's study (1998), Chinese students were likely to value peer comments less than Spanish–speaking students due to their cultural background.

In ESL writing, responding to students' writing has received more attention than it had, as the focus in teaching composition to ESL writers has changed from written products to writing processes (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998 ; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). In teaching EFL in Japan, more attention has been paid to feedback as more emphasis has placed on developing students' communicative competence. Since the middle of the1980s, Monbushou (the Ministry of Education of Japan) has undertaken a reform in education. For Japanese EFL students, communicative competence in English is necessary for effective communication in the international community and important for advancement in an in-

formation society (Monbushou, 1998, 1999). In order to understand written communication, students should have awareness as to whether their writing has communicated their intended meaning. If communication is unsuccessful, students need to find out what problems readers have in understanding their writing. Feedback from an audience is important not only for ESL students but also for EFL students.

In most EFL classes in Japan, students are very similar in their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Japanese EFL students receive writing instruction through the grammar and translation method and have little experience of essay writing. Students study grammar and memorize model English sentences translated from Japanese. Japanese EFL teachers usually correct grammatical errors, spellings, and mechanics with red pens. Only teachers evaluate students' writing, and students expect to have teacher feedback on sentence–level corrections. Japanese high school students have little collaborative work with peers in English classes and in other classes as well. Many high school students and graduates attend cramming schools to pass university entrance examinations. They compete with each other. In these contexts, what perceptions of teacher, peer, and self–directed feedback do Japanese EFL students have? Do Japanese EFL students' perceptions change as they become familiar with feedback? Do they favor a specific type of feedback over other types? Do they have the same negative responses to peer feedback as Asian ESL students showed in the previous studies?

EFL students in other contexts will react differently to feedback from Japanese EFL students do. Examining Japanese EFL students, however, will provide some insights into a comprehensive understanding of EFL writing. The present study examines Japanese EFL students' perceptions of teacher, peer, and self–directed feedback over the course

of the semester and their perceptions at the end of the semester. Furthermore, this study attempts to integrate two different data of students' perceptions in the time.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 45 Japanese first–year undergraduate students from two classes (22 majoring in international socio–cultural studies and 23 in British and American cultures) at a private women's college in Tokyo. They took the same writing course from the same instructor (the researcher). The English proficiency ranged from 380 to 553 in TOEFL, and the mean score was 436 (SD=30.01). As to the educational background,41students had been educated in secondary school in Japan and studied English generally in grammar–translation methods for six years. Three students had attended English–speaking high schools abroad for one year, and one participant studied Art in an American university for three years.

Writing Class

The participants took a 15–week writing course which met two days a week, with each class lasting 90 minutes. The instructor was a Japanese teacher with a degree in TESL, and her specialty was writing. The course was mainly based on a process approach, and the students gradually learned process writing through expressing themselves on various topics. The students used a textbook (Johnson, 1994) as an information source and a linguistic source. Using reading passages and exercises in the textbook, the students did various pre–writing activities such as brainstorming ; discussions ; free writing ; listing, clustering and branching ideas ; and outlining. They wrote eight essays in class as well

TABLE 1

Schedule of Writing Course

Week	Class	Topic	Feedback on draft	Feedback on final version	Journal
1	1	Introduction			
	2	"Elderly People"			Entry 1
2	[holiday]				
	3	"Sexual Harassment"		peer, teacher	Entry 2
3	4				
	5	"Smoking on Campus"		teacher	Entry 3
4	6	–– group report			
	7		teacher		Entry 4
5	8	(Revise)			
	9			peer, teacher	Entry 5
6	10	"School Regulations"			
	11			peer, teacher	Entry 6
7	[holiday]				
	12	"Most Beautiful Thing" –– fairy tale		Entry	
8	[holiday]		teacher		
	13	<comment on 3 ESL essays>	<peer>	Entry	
9	14	"Rewriting Fairy Tales"	self, peer		
	15	(Revise)	teacher		Entry 9
10	[holiday]		teacher		
	16	"Discrimination against Foreigners"			
11	17				Entry 10
	18		self, peer		
12	19	(Revise)			Entry 11
	20		teacher		
13	21	(Revise)		teacher	Entry 12
	[winter break]				
	22	Topics chosen by student			
14	23		self, peer, teacher		Entry 13
	24	(Revise, Edit)			
15	25			teacher	Entry 14
	26	Review			

as at home, including a group report and a narrative story. Essays were about 100–200 words in length at the beginning and became longer (200 –400 words) at the end of the semester. The students wrote essays on the same topics, except for the last essay, because working on the same topics made it easier for them to help each other in pre–writing activities and peer feedback. Since most of the students had not studied essay writing in English, emphasis was placed on prewriting and writing in the first half of the semester and on revising essays incorporating feedback in the second half. The schedule of writing activities is shown in Table1. The students also kept journals in English, as journal writing adds practice and fluency.

Feedback

The students studied feedback step by step. In the first few weeks, they read peers' essays and wrote brief impressions. In the fifth week, the students reviewed group reports. In the eighth week, they commented on three ESL students' sample essays in Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey (1981). In the fifth and eighth weeks, the students had group discussion and class discussion on feedback. The teacher coached the students and led the discussions.

After becoming familiar with reviewing each other's drafts, the students studied how to incorporate feedback in revision. In the ninth week, they wrote self–directed feedback following the three questions : (1) What is the main idea of the essay? (2) What is the most interesting part of the essay? (3) What parts of the essay need to be revised? Then, the students wrote peer feedback using the same questions. The students distributed their essays randomly to peers and often did not know who was writing comments until they received the feedback. They were told that the purpose of peer review is not correcting grammar but com-

municating a message. The questions used for feedback were derived from Ferris & Hedgcock (1998), Leki (1995), and Reid (1993). The questions were translated into Japanese, and the students used Japanese for feedback. They compared comments of their own and of peers', and examined how and why their intended meaning was not communicated to the audience. After this activity, they received teacher feedback, which was the same in regard to the three questions. In the next week, the students revised the draft incorporating feedback : they talked with their peers and the teacher if they did not understand or disagreed with their comments.

In the next stage, the students were asked to be more independent from the teacher. They revised their first drafts with only self–directed and peer feedback, and then revised the second drafts with teacher feedback. They followed the same procedures of conducting self–directed and peer feedback. This time, however, they used a feedback sheet which consisted of five questions : (I) What is the most interesting part of the essay? (II) What is the main idea? Is it difficult to understand the main idea? Explain why? (III) What parts of the essay need more information about content? What do you suggest adding? (IV) Can you easily follow the rhetorical development? What are your suggestions about organization? (V) Do you find any problems with the English? Write your suggestions. The students spent approximately 20 minutes to write self–directed feedback and 30 minutes to write peer feedback for one essay. Most of the students received peer feedback from two peers, and some had three peer responses. The same form as self–directed and peer feedback was used for teacher feedback.

Data Gathering and Analysis
As sources of data, this study uses journal entries and a question-

naire. Journal entries provide teachers with students' on–going perceptions of feedback over the course. The aim of journal study is "to explore learners' reactions to classroom language learning in order to discover what they think is important about what happens in the classroom" (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 190). A questionnaire administered at the end of the course, on the other hand, reveals students' final perceptions of feedback.

The students were given the assignment of keeping weekly journal entries in English. In the first class, the teacher taught the students how to make journal entries. They were not given journal prompts to respond only to feedback. They were asked to use their journals in various ways to discover and explore ideas, reflect on the class, and ask questions. The purposes of journal writing were to understand oneself as a writer and to communicate with the teacher. The focus was placed on meaning rather than form, and the journal entries were not graded.

The journal entries were photocopied with the students' permission, and read by the researcher and another Japanese writing teacher with a degree in TESL. The researcher read all of the entries, and the colleague read the entries #2, 5, 9, 11, and 12. The two persons identified responses to feedback and coded them such as teacher, peer, or self–directed feedback. Each reader wrote comments on major points independently, and the comments were compared. For instance, the researcher and the colleague identified the same seven responses to peer feedback in the entries #2. The colleague wrote that some students (e. g., Student 3, 12, 15, 16, etc.) were interested in other students' essays and comments and that a few students (e. g., Student 20) did not have confidence in their essays. She also wrote that students' comments on peer feedback were superficial like "interesting." These points suggested by the colleague were very similar to the researcher's. As to the other jour-

nal entries, identifications and comments by the two persons were also very similar and internally validated. The summary of the analyses of the journal entries written by the researcher was read and confirmed by the colleague.

In a questionnaire, the students answered eight questions : (1) Is teacher feedback easy to understand? (2) Is peer feedback easy to understand? (3) Is peer feedback easy to write? (4) Is self–directed feedback easy to write? (5) Do you want to receive teacher feedback hereafter? (6) Do you want to receive peer feedback hereafter? (7) Do you want to write peer feedback hereafter? (8) Do you want to write self–directed feedback hereafter? They answered the questions referring to a 7–point scale, where 7 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree. After that, they answered an open–ended question in Japanese : "What are the benefits and the problems of the three types of feedback?"

The students' opinions were read by the researcher and the colleague who examined the journal entries. Since the students had the same opinions but expressed them in different words, the researcher classified the opinions. For example, Student1 had three points about peer feedback : to encourage with positive responses, to give responses from readers of the same age and the position, to work hard with peers' essays. After reading Student1's opinion about peer feedback, the colleague judged whether the points are appropriate or not. In analyzing the students' opinions about feedback, the researcher and the colleague agreed on the points for more than 97%.

The students were also asked about the effectiveness of feedback in improving their writing : (a) Is teacher feedback effective? (b) Is peer feedback effective? (c) Is self–directed feedback effective? and (d) Is writing feedback helpful? A Likert–type scale, where 7 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree, was used.

RESULTS

Perceptions Over Time in Journal Entries

Over the 15–week course, the students wrote approximately 14 journals each in English. Altogether, they handed in a total of 458 journal entries with an average of 10.2 entries per student. Table 2 shows the number of the journal entries. The students expressed their perceptions of feedback in 93 entries altogether. The written reactions concerning peer feedback greatly exceeded those of teacher and self–directed feedback.

TABLE 2
Number of Journal Entries with Perceptions of Feedback

Journal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
Total Entries	37	41	39	39	37	36	35	33	31	29	27	16	23	35	458
Teacher Feedback	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	1	6	2	1	18
Peer Feedback	0	7	2	0	10	0	0	10	8	2	18	2	4	6	69
Self–directed Feedback	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	6

N   45

The students' perceptions of peer feedback changed over the course. Early perceptions were general and simple (e. g., "having others' opinions was interesting," "different views are important," and "feedback is helpful"). One student wrote, "Reading comments which was written by friends for my essay was also interesting." (S. F., Entry #2)[1] The students did not explain why feedback was interesting or how feedback was helpful. As the students practiced feedback, their perceptions became more specific, definite, and text based. They came to write about what comments they received and explain what they actually did with the feedback. For example, one student wrote : "They (peers) all pointed out the same problems, one of which is that my thesis should be more focused one to limit a main idea in the short essay." (M. O., Entry #11) In

her revision, the student focused on the Japanese word "gaijin" (foreigner or outsider) in discussing Japanese people's discriminatory attitudes towards non–Japanese residents and made her point clearer.

Negative perceptions of peer feedback also changed. At the beginning, the students showed reluctance to providing peer feedback because they did not have confidence about their reading peers' essays or writing comments. One student wrote, "To be honest, I'm not sure what is true for the topic. I wanted more time to read friends' essay." (S. F., Entry # 2) Another said, "I can't write English quickly when my opinion for other essay is need in class. I am very sorry." (A. T., Entry #3) The students had negative reactions to themselves when they started peer feedback. However, as they learned how to incorporate peer feedback, they showed negative responses to their peers rather than to themselves. Some students wrote the following perceptions : "I summarized peer responses. And I considered concrete ways about peer responses. Frankly speaking, I was confused." (A. Y., Entry #11) ; "I thought revise was so difficult to do. Because I thought that's point was O. K. but other people thought that's point was not O. K. That time I cannot find the way how to change my essay." (A. I., Entry #11)

At the end of the semester, however, the students wrote many positive perceptions of peer feedback. One student reported, "It was the first experience that having a response from the classmates. Reading the classmates writing and giving the response was the first experience too. First time I don't like doing it. But, now I think it is a good work to do it." (S. M., Entry #14) Another student wrote, "And I have to appreciate my classmate, because they have helped me when I was writing an essay and revised." (M. Y., Entry #14)

As to teacher feedback, the students' perceptions were also mixed. One student said, "Teacher responses realize me what was ambiguous.

So that is really important for me." (M. I., Entry #12). Another student reported, "You gave me very useful advises about my essay. 'You should reduce examples.' So, I reduced 2 examples...." (A. Y., Entry #9) The student actually deleted two examples of fairy tales and elaborated on two other examples to make her essay more persuasive. A few students, however, showed negative responses writing that they were shocked with negative comments, many corrections, and bad grades.

Another important point is that the students came to be aware of readers as they practiced feedback. Some students realized that they had never thought of audience : "We didn't think a reader when we wrote." (M. K., Entry #5) ; "I don't think of readers." (R. Y., Entry #9). Other students did not realize that their meaning was not communicated to readers until they received feedback : "When I hear the readers say that they can't understand what I would like to say, I feel so sad." (H. T., Entry #9) The students read their essays and feedback to understand why they were not successful in communication and asked their peers and the teacher for more explanation. They realized that "to think together is very important." (A. T., Entry #12) The students also came to think about who the audience was. One student wrote while she was writing on the topic of Japanese people's discrimination against non–Japanese residents : "When I write an essay, I think the essay is read by Who? This time, foreigners or Japanese or both of them?" (C. S., Entry# 11) Some students seemed to think of not only a real audience in front of them such as peers and teachers, but also an audience beyond the class. The results from a questionnaire and end–of–course discussions by Keh (1990) also revealed that the students in Hong Kong felt that peer feedback was useful in gaining a greater sense of audience. As Mendonca & Johnson (1994) and Zamel (1983) assert, peer review may allow students to develop audience awareness.

A further note to be made is that the students gradually understood the importance of revision. Many of them said, "I had never revised my own essay. I hadn't known how to revise." (R. Y., Entry #12) It was difficult for the students to identify problems by themselves. Critical comments and constructive suggestions from their peers and teacher were helpful for revision : "After revising my essay, I think my essays better than the essay before revising. This is because I got peers' responses and teacher's responses" (A. K., Entry #12) Some students came to use feedback to detect problems, diagnose causes, and find strategies for revision. This is the process of revision that Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, & Stratman (1986) proposed in their working models. Although the students were not explicitly instructed how to revise, some of them seemed to understand the process of revision. One student wrote : "I have one thing that I found myself through this essay. That is I need 3 times to write and 2 times to get responses at least." (M. I., Entry # 12) She needed multiple drafts and multiple responses from her audience. As a result of revising drafts with feedback, the students may understand that writing is a recursive process of pre–writing, writing, and revising.

Perceptions in the End–of–Semester Questionnaire

Figure1 shows the students' opinions about feedback in the questionnaire administered at the end of the semester. The students felt that it was more difficult to write comments than to understand feedback. Therefore, they did not want to write reviews as much as they wanted to receive feedback. The students' little experience of writing feedback could be a factor of this result. Like the students in the survey conducted by Mendonca & Johnson (1994) and Jacobs et al. (1998), the Japanese EFL students in this study needed both teacher and peer feed-

back. However, they did not want to practice self–directed feedback so strongly.

FIGURE 1
Student' Opinions about Feedback
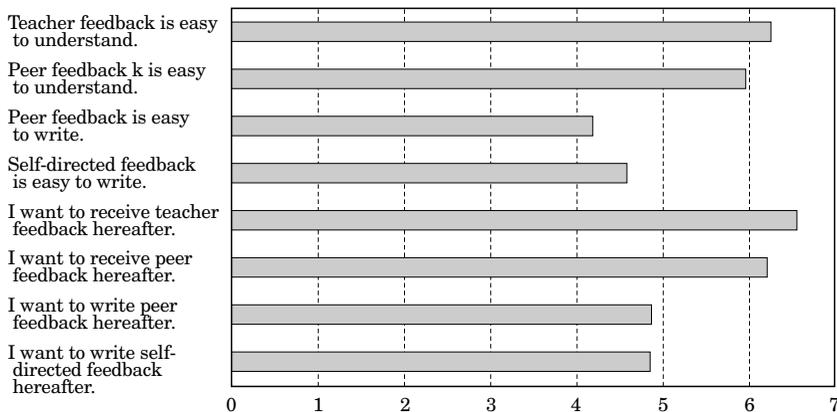
N=43
Respondents referred to a 7-point scale, where 7 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree.

Table 3 displays the students' perceptions in an open–ended question asking about benefits and problems of feedback. The number in a parentheses refers to the percentage of the respondents who had the same opinion. Table 3 shows that the Japanese EFL students took their teacher and peer feedback seriously like ESL students (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990 ; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996 ; Ferris, 1995). The students wanted the teacher to give them specific comments on specific problems. The benefits of teacher feedback were in detecting linguistic problems, commenting on organization, and giving advice on content. This result was similar to that of Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1994) : ESL students preferred comments on content and organization, while FL students expressed more concern for grammar and vocabulary. Some students in this study said that the teacher pointed out grammatical and lexical problems which neither the writer nor peers could find. They

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also appreciated the teacher's negative comments and asked her for concrete suggestions for revising drafts. From these opinions, the Japanese EFL students expected the teacher to be a linguistic adviser as well as a writing counselor. In Enginarlar's (1993) study, Turkish EFL students also perceived teacher feedback with attention to linguistic errors, guidance on composition skills, and comments on content effective.

TABLE 3

Students' Perceptions about Benefits and Problems of Feedback

Feedback	Benefits	Problems
Teacher	point out mistakes/errors in grammar, language use and vocabulary (72.1%) comment on essay organization (55.8%) give negative feedback (32.6%) provide concrete measures to revise (30.2%) advise on content (27.9%) review the entire essay (14.0%) point out problems that the writer has not realized (11.6%) give concrete and clear advice/help (9.3%) make objective comments (7.0%) read the essay in detail (7.0%)	not understand students' ideas (4.7%) give too strong comments (4.7%) have to follow a teacher's advice (4.7%) hard to read handwriting (4.7%)
Peer	point out problems that the writer has not realized (67.4%) help think about readers (23.3%) give different ideas and views (20.9%) encourage with positive response (16.3%) give responses from readers of the same age and the position (9.3%) help clarify ambiguous parts (7.0%) help review myself (7.0%)	write little negative feedback (21.1%) give inappropriate feedback (14.0%) provide few suggestions (11.6%) give little feedback on grammar and vocabulary (7.0%) cannot write advice (11.6%) hard to write feedback(11.6%)
Self–directed	find out one's own problems (76.7%) read one's own essays objectively (30.2%) useful for revision (7.0%) reorganize ideas (7.0%)	not useful (4.7%) cannot find one' own problems (4.7%)

N 43

The students in this study considered peers as fellow members who are running with them in a writing marathon. The benefits of peer feedback were to point out problems they had not realized, to help think about readers, to encourage with positive reviews, and to have responses from persons of the same age and position as their own. These points were the same as the advantages of peer feedback reported in earlier studies (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994 ; Mittan, 1989). Some of the respondents were not satisfied with peer feedback because of weak critiques, few negative comments, inappropriate feedback, and few concrete suggestions. These problems were similar to negative opinions suggested by ESL students (Mangelsdorf, 1992 ; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997 ; Nelson & Carson, 1998). The students in this study wanted their peers to become critical readers who read drafts for meaning and make comments that only fellow runners can give. One student wrote, "I learned that writing feedback to peers is not only pointing out good and bad points but also understanding and accepting peers themselves."

FIGURE 2
Students' Perceptions of Effectiveness of Feedback
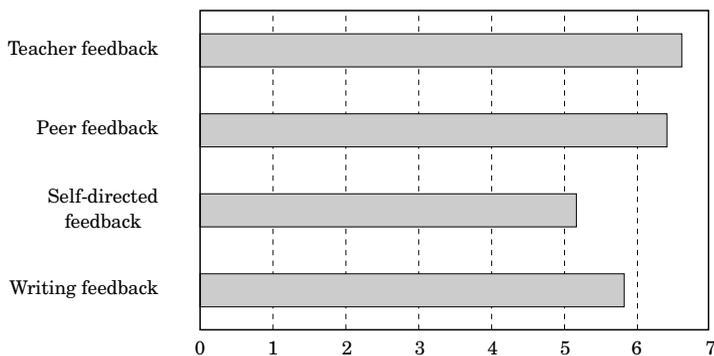
N=43
Respondents referred to a 7-point scale, where 7 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree.

Figure 2 shows the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of feedback. Many of the respondents evaluated highly both teacher and peer feedback. Self–directed feedback was perceived as the least effective activity, though the students wrote some benefits of it in the open–ended questionnaire. They perceived that receiving feedback was more beneficial than writing feedback. These results relate to the students' opinions that feedback is easy to understand but difficult to write and that it is more desirable to receive feedback than to write it.

DISCUSSION

The information from each source, the students' perceptions of feedback over time collected from their journal entries and their perceptions at a given point in time collected from their responses to the questionnaire, was important in understanding the students' writing and feedback. However, the integration of the different data in the time and source of data collection provided more information and merit further discussion.

It is important to use students' perceptions during the semester and their perceptions at the end of the semester complementarily. Figure1 shows that writing feedback was more difficult than understanding feedback for the students. However, it was not clear from the questionnaire what difficulty the students had. Perceptions in the journal entries were helpful to understand this problem. At the beginning of the semester, the students said that they could not read peers' essays fast or write comments in a short time. Some students showed reluctance and negative attitudes toward providing peer feedback. Then, the students came to realize that giving feedback is not simply finding good and bad points but giving advice for revision ; and they found that it was more difficult. It is a difficult task for the students in this study

with rather low English proficiency in TOEFL scores and little writing experience to read essays critically, diagnose problems, and offer suggestions for revision. As Berg (1999), Keh (1990), and McGroarty & Zhu (1997) suggest, training is essential for peer feedback. It is dangerous for teachers to be disappointed with the students' negative perceptions and difficulties in writing feedback at the beginning of the course and draw a conclusion that feedback is not effective for them ; in the same way, it is inappropriate to be satisfied with the students' perceptions at the end of the semester and neglect difficulties that they had at the beginning and ignore the process of how they formed their perceptions. Considering students' writing ability and experience, teachers should make plans for students to practice feedback step by step. Learning how to provide feedback is a process, and teachers have an important role to play in this process. In order to understand this process, teachers need both students' perceptions of feedback over the course and their perceptions at the end of the course.

It is also important to synthesize different sources to understand students. In journa l entries, the students wrote fewest reactions about self–directed feedback (Table 2). They wanted teacher and peer feedback more eagerly than self–directed feedback (Figure 1), and their perceptions of effectiveness of self–directed feedback was the lowest among the three types of feedback (Figure 2). The students seemed to have more interest and stronger reliance on teacher and peer feedback than their own feedback. In journal entries and the questionnaire, the students said that self–directed feedback was difficult because they could not find problems in their own essays by themselves. However, it is desirable for teachers not to give up self–directed feedback. In the questionnaire, many of the students found self–directed feedback was beneficial for finding one's own problems and reading one's own essays objectively

(Table 3). Some students wrote that writing self–directed feedback twice before and after receiving teacher and peer feedback would be more effective. In order to be an independent writer, students know that they should learn self–directed feedback. Teachers can lead students to effective self–directed feedback with teacher and peer feedback and help students develop as independent writers.

Another important point was that relating two different data sources brought up questions which were not detected in a single source. The first question was : "Why did the Japanese EFL students write fewer reactions to teacher feedback than to peer feedback though they perceived that both were effective?" This question would not have arisen if only the perceptions at the end of the course had been examined. In the11th week, the students were asked to revise drafts only with peer and self–directed feedback. They said in their journal entries, "I don't know how to revise," "Please tell me what I should do," and "I am waiting for teacher feedback". These responses were not written in the 9 th week when the students revised drafts with the three types of feedback together. The students always seemed to expect teacher feedback. When they were required to be more independent from the teacher, some showed stronger dependence on teacher feedback. The questionnaire at the end of the semester also showed that the students expected the teacher to be an expert who criticized their writing and corrected language mistakes. A few students wrote that students have to follow teachers' advice. In Japanese culture, students may consider teachers as authority figures and feel a large power distance between teachers and students (Nelson & Carson, 1998). Because of this culture, it might be difficult for the Japanese EFL students to write about teacher feedback directly in their journals. The interview data collected by Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1996) revealed that teachers' intervention

largely shape learners' expectations concerning goals of written teacher comments. Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand how their students perceive teacher feedback during the course. In order to have more reactions to teacher feedback, anonymous journal entries or writing in Japanese may be useful for Japanese EFL students.

The second question was : "Why did the Japanese EFL students evaluate peer feedback highly?" Mangelsdorf (1992), Zhang (1995), Carson & Nelson (1996), and Nelson & Carson (1998) reported that cultural backgrounds caused negative attitudes of Asian students toward peer feedback. Asian students who have similar cultural backgrounds have different reactions to and perceptions of feedback in different writing situations. It is necessary to understand the distinct nature of L2 writing(Silva, 1993), and it is also important to realize that students are different in different writing contexts.

The Japanese students' journal entries and the questionnaire provided some clues to the second question. The students wrote lots of reactions to writing and reviewing a group report and pre–writing activities in groups in their journal entries. Some students said that exchanging opinions is fun and useful ; others wrote that they learned when to listen to others and express themselves, how to negotiate with peers and unite different opinions into a consensus. As the students got to know each other through writing a group report, experiencing group review, and doing other group activities, they came to consider peers not as competitors but as partners. This might cause sympathy among the students and help them prepare for peer feedback. It is important for teachers to establish a collaborative atmosphere in class in order for peer feedback to be successful. Table 3 also indicates that the students accepted their peers as fellow members. Students who have had little collaborative work need to work together before peer feedback.

In addition, the homogeneous classroom context could have a positive influence on peer feedback : the same sex (all female students), the same age group (18–19 years old), similar prior educational backgrounds (having been educated in high school in Japan), and common problems in writing (low proficiency and little experience of essay writing). The class might function as a community in which members worked together to achieve the same goal of writing.

Using the students' first language seemed to be another factor for the Japanese EFL students' better perceptions of peer feedback than the other Asian students in the previous studies. As Figure2 and Table3 show, the students thought that writing feedback was difficult. It is hard for students with rather low English proficiency to write peer feedback in English and to read comments written in English. If the students in this study had used only English, they would have had far more difficulties. When the students had a brainstorming only in English, they wrote negative responses : "I am shy of speaking." (M. I., Entry #2) ; "If it is possible, I don't want answer the question." (C, T., Entry #2) ; "when I thought I have to speak, I'm very nervous." (R. Y., Entry #2) However, when the students had a discussion in Japanese and made a summary in English, their responses were positive : "It was interesting to discuss. I want to do these work again and to use discussion to write my essays." (H. T., Entry #8) ; "It was good for me to be able to listen other students' opinions." (A. K., Entry #8) ; "Today, we were talking about discrimination against foreigners. In my group, we tried to talk about it in English." (M. Y., Entry #10) Using Japanese not only in discussion but also in feedback seemed to facilitate communication and produce positive group dynamics. Villamil & Guerrero (1996) reported that the use of the native language as a tool of task control in a homogeneous L2 context helped students understand each other.

Furthermore, using written feedback may work successfully. Few Japanese students have had peer response group. In this project, the students often did not know who was writing comments until they received feedback. Unlike peer response groups, the students did not have to worry about the feelings of peers in their presence or the harmony of groups, especially when they were conveying negative messages. Written feedback might be less threatening for Japanese students than oral work in groups. Arndt (1993) also reported that his students in Hong Kong felt written comments more "face–saving" than oral responses. The preference of written or oral peer feedback may be a culturally related perception.

In this study, using both the students' journal entries and survey data made it possible to understand both processes (i. e., students' perceptions over the course) and results (i. e., students' perceptions at the end of the course). Furthermore, the integration of the students' diachronic perceptions and end results of their perceptions provided more information than a single data source would have and deepened the discussion on feedback.

CONCLUSION

It is useful for teachers and researchers to survey students' perceptions of feedback at the end of semester. However, it is more helpful if students' perceptions throughout the course as well as their perceptions at the end of the course are available to examine. The students' perceptions of feedback in their journals revealed that they gradually learned what writing is and how feedback functions in the process of writing. The students' perceptions at the end of the semester supported the responses in their journal entries. The two data sources were complementary. By integrating data collected from students' journal entries over

the semester with that collected from their responses to the end–of–semester questionnaire, this study presented a more comprehensive and complex picture of Japanese EFL students' perceptions of feedback than either of these data sources would have. In addition, this integration of data raised new questions regarding student reactions to feedback which would have implications for teaching and future research.

The present study has described Japanese EFL students perceptions of feedback. No complex statistical analysis was conducted as the number studied was small. The situation of classroom–oriented research in which the researcher was the teacher may have affected somewhat the objectivity of the study. Another limitation is that the analyses of the students' perceptions in this study may remain at the surface level. Because of their limited proficiency of English, the students may not have expressed their responses in their journal entries as fully and deeply as in their first language. Because of their cultural backgrounds, they may not have freely written responses to teacher feedback in their journals. Moreover, in this study, the researcher did not examine what comments from the teacher, peers, and themselves actually helped the Japanese EFL students revise parts of their drafts and how they did so. Further study is needed to examine this problem at different times throughout the course.

The limitations of this study suggest the necessity of further study on feedback in EFL writing contexts. Compared to research in ESL writing, little research has been conducted on EFL writing. EFL student writers are different in different instructional settings. More studies on feedback and students' perceptions of feedback in various EFL writing contexts will contribute to a better understanding of L2 writing.

NOTE

(1) When statements by an individual student are quoted, her initials and journal entry number are stated ; and when statements represent several students' reactions and are synthesized, no initials or journal entry numbers are stated. The statements are presented with their errors as the students wrote.

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