

# A comparison of computer-mediated peer corrective feedback between high and low-proficiency learners in a Japanese EFL writing classroom

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*The present study compared the efficacy of computer-mediated peer corrective feedback (CF) among two groups of high-proficiency (n=11) and low-proficiency (n=19) postsecondary Japanese EFL students. They completed a 10-week process writing composition, during which the students were given explicit instruction in metalinguistic peer CF. They then received CF from their peers and instructors. The researchers conducted a quantitative analysis of compositions, and the students' perceptions of the process were elicited using qualitative surveys. The results corroborate previous studies which found low-proficiency learners lack the aptitude to engage in meaningful peer CF. However, the qualitative portion of the study found that both proficiency groups had largely positive views of the peer CF process and revealed some interesting distinctions between the groups.*

**Keywords:** EFL, writing, Japan, corrective feedback, computer-mediated

## Introduction

Corrective feedback (CF) in the realm of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been examined extensively in a range of cross-contextual and cross-cultural studies (Mori, 2002; Rouhi & Azizian, 2013; Rummel & Bitchner, 2015; Sato & Lyster, 2012; Yoshida, 2008). CF has most often been provided by the teacher traditionally; however, researchers have taken a strong interest in the efficacy of peer CF in both oral (Sato & Balinger, 2012) and written English (Ferris, 2003; Rollinson, 2005; Susser, 1994). Corrective feedback can be

utilized in a variety of ways, by employing direct or indirect feedback, and by adjusting the degree of focus, the use of coding, how reformulations are employed, and the necessity of revisions (Ellis, 2009).

There is still much debate however as to how and in which contexts written corrective feedback should be employed. While the benefits of providing peer CF – which is done between two students – are obvious, researchers have argued that low proficiency English learners lack the linguistic competency to accurately monitor one another's work, and therefore cannot provide beneficial feedback (Sheen, 2007). Advances in technology have made it much easier for learners to interact with each other and provide feedback on peers' work, with a number of scholars noting the benefits of administering feedback electronically rather than using paper and pen (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2014; Lee, 2005; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Yeha & Lobb, 2009). However, many of these studies predated the advent and widespread use of cloud-based, online platforms such as Google Docs. This necessitates further study to determine whether such platforms amplify the aforementioned benefits.

What follows is an exploratory study regarding how the use of computer mediated corrective feedback (CMCF) may be utilized to promote written peer CF among both high- and low-proficiency Japanese learners of English in postsecondary writing classes.

## Literature review

Beginning in the 1980s, there was a shift in the methodology of teaching writing in both L1 and L2 classrooms. The new method, called the *process approach*, emphasized that the most valuable lessons to be learned from writing are to be found in the process of writing and not the final product. Though now common practice in many writing classes, the process approach ushered in a revolution with how writing is taught. Using a non-linear style, the process approach encourages writers to follow four main stages to complete a piece of writing: prewriting, drafting, feedback, and revision (Ferris, 2003). According to Nation (2008), the main goal of guiding learners through the writing process is to help them improve their ability at each stage, thereby helping to improve the quality of the final product. Throughout the process, the different stages of the writing process are to be revisited over again in order to revise and refine the piece of writing. By completing the process, the writer is given greater awareness of their target audience, the stages of writing, and their own writing abilities.

Susser (1994) argued that along with awareness, intervention is another key tenet of the writing process. Traditionally, this intervention has been in the form of feedback given by the instructor. Feedback is widely accepted as an essential part of learning as it defines good performance, and helps learners to set goals, self-evaluate, and reflect on their performance (Ertmer, Richardson, Belland, Camin, Connolly, & Coulthard, 2007). Typically, feedback is given in the form of error correction. Teachers are given the choice to provide learners with negative evidence that an error has been made, or positive evidence by supplying the correct form.

However, much of the research on the effectiveness of feedback has been based on oral CF. There is still debate on the value of written feedback in second language acquisition (SLA). Unlike oral CF, where corrections are given immediately after an error has occurred, written CF is delayed. Additionally, Yusof, Ashikin Ab Manan, and Ashaari Alias (2012) claimed that written CF is less cognitively demanding as oral CF because it does not require immediate cognitive comparison and correction; therefore, oral CF is largely focused on

form and clarity of message and delayed written CF is pedagogically different in that it can target more global issues such as content, organization, audience, and logical coherence.

### *The effect of correction on learning*

The greatest discrepancy regarding written CF stems from the question as to whether correction actually leads to learning. Truscott (1996, 1999) argues strongly that it does not. He conceded that while CF helps learners correct errors for a subsequent draft of a composition, there is no transfer to a new piece of writing. That is, these corrections make no contribution to the overall development of a writer's accuracy. However, most researchers agree that the benefit of written CF extends beyond revision. Ferris (2004) has taken the stance that written feedback does indeed help learners improve their written accuracy over time. While Truscott (2007) admits there exists a plethora of studies that show accuracy gains in subsequent revisions (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Lee, 1997), there are few studies that show growth in new compositions. Contrary to Truscott's findings though, Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) did find that exposure to written CF helped learners use articles more accurately overall as well as in subsequent writing. Moreover, these gains were significantly greater in the long term than those of the control group. Therefore, while Truscott's (2007) claim continues to challenge researchers to empirically demonstrate the correlation between written CF and learning, it is becoming an ever more difficult position to take.

To further understand why the connection between written CF and learning is still a subject of debate, it is necessary to acknowledge that corrective feedback is a spectrum of varying methodology and practices. At the core, corrective feedback is providing learners with a response or prompting them to help bring the learners attention to the error so that they may correct it (Ellis, 2007). All error correction (both oral and written) can be given in various forms: 1. negative evidence that an error has been made; 2. supplying a correct form; or 3. metalinguistic information about the error. Feedback can be further categorized as either direct (explicit) or indirect (implicit). When considering written CF, common methods of direct feedback are crossing out unnecessary words, inserting missing objects, and writing-in correct forms of structures. The underlying trait is that the correction very explicitly calls attention to where an error has been made and often provides the proper structure. Indirect written CF, on the other hand, is less straightforward. Here, a teacher might just underline problematic sections or write the total number of errors in the margin and ask the writer to find and make their own corrections. Researchers have also proposed using error codes as a way to give more implicit feedback to writers (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986). With a code, the teacher can signal where an error has been made and give a classification of what kind of error it is (for example, "WC" for word choice) and the writer can then attempt to correct it.

Currently, there is a dispute over which type of written CF, direct or indirect, is more conducive to learning. Ferris (2002) believes that because indirect feedback requires the learner to provide their own correction, it might be more beneficial than direct correction. However, studies exploring this issue have yet to offer an answer which is empirically verifiable in one direction or the other (Chandler, 2003; Robb et al., 1986). Chandler (2003) hypothesized that while indirect CF requires more cognitive processing, it causes a delay in confirmation of whether the learner's hypothesis is correct. Therefore, direct CF is more productive because the learners are immediately given the correction and do not

have to wait to find the answer. Kubota (2001) further questioned the efficacy of using a coded error system of written CF and found that students might overlook the symbols or misunderstand their meaning. Kubota (2001) also found that the corrections students did make were at the expense of their creativity. Rather than trying to elaborate or correct the problematic passage, students resorted to deleting or reducing it. Therefore, Kubota (2001) concluded that research should focus on how to provide learners with CF that encourages them to be both creative and more accurate.

### *Peer feedback*

One possible solution to Kubota's (2001) problem of encouraging both accuracy and creativity is peer feedback. With the rise of the process approach, peer response and feedback became more widely implemented in L2 classrooms. Proponents of peer CF have argued that there is a solid rationale for having learners review and edit their classmate's compositions. Since writing (and all language for that matter) is a socially constructed activity, cognitive development results from interaction (Belcher, 1989; Bruffee, 1986; Carson & Nelson, 1994). Therefore, writers need ongoing interaction with an interlocutor to refine their abilities. Indeed, peer feedback helps writers by providing them with a very real, concrete audience. By allowing multiple peers to give CF, writers benefit from receiving more perspectives on their work. As a result, writers receive much more feedback than they would from the teacher alone (Ferris, 2003). Through being exposed to more ideas and opinions, writers not only have the chance to improve the accuracy, but they also can further develop the content of their composition. Paulus (1999) found that feedback and comments from peers lead to meaningful revisions. Learners can improve organization, structure, and vocabulary through peer CF. Perhaps most importantly, peer CF gives students one of the crucial elements missing in many teacher-fronted approaches: a real audience. According to Tsui and Ng (2000), peer CF lowers apprehension and encourages writers to be more motivated with the help of positive CF.

Learners not only benefit from receiving feedback but also in the process of providing it. Ferris (2003) argued in favor of peer response stating that by reading and responding to others' work, students gain confidence, perspective, and critical thinking skills. Learners are exposed to models of both correct and incorrect pieces of texts, which then can affect their own writing (Patchan & Schunn, 2015). In constructing feedback, learners must practice various revision skills, such as problem identification, diagnosis, and suggesting solutions. This builds a greater awareness and enables learners to be more self-reliant and even self-edit their own work (Rollinson, 2005). Research indicates that students who review and give feedback on each other's work show more significant improvement in their own writing than those who just receive peer CF (Lundstorm & Baker, 2009). However, one important factor in fostering effective feedback is training in specific review strategies. Reviewers need to be trained on how to give meaningful feedback to each other. Through training, learners can be given the tools necessary to identify and diagnose issues, and they become more comfortable critiquing a peer's writing. Berg (1999) concurred and noted that with such training, learners make more meaning-based revisions and are able to improve their own writing over multiple drafts.

Along with the theoretical grounding, there are also practical benefits to peer CF. Yusof et al. (2012) commented that it might be difficult for teachers to provide all of their students with timely feedback on their compositions. By allowing learners to give feedback

on each other's work, writers can receive CF more quickly. Educators working with large classes and under strict time constraints should appreciate the reduced workload of having to check each draft of the students' writing. Moreover, Ferris (2003) found that peer review promotes a sense of classroom community. Unlike CF from the teacher, peer feedback is more informal and therefore can create more of a two-way conversation, where negotiation of meaning can take place. This is especially true in some cultural contexts such as Japan, where teachers are viewed as the purveyors of information and learners as passive recipients (Aubrey, Colpitts, & Nowlan, 2015). In such a context, learners may have had fewer opportunities to pose questions regarding their language and engage in negotiation of meaning with the teacher. Additionally, through the process of correcting each other's work, learners partake in what Swain (2006) defined as "languaging". Simply put, "When engaged in writing, learners *language* about language; that is, they deliberate about how to best express their intended meaning" (Storch, 2011, p. 276). Swain (2005) argued that by interacting and examining language together, learners engage in deeper cognitive processing which is facilitative of greater long-term retention. Last but not least, and perhaps the most practical benefit of peer CF is that students truly value it. Ertmer et al. (2007) found that students both valued and benefited from peer review. Not only that, but they found that receiving quality feedback from peers helps a writer improve their own ability to give written CF to others.

### *Computer-mediated feedback and google docs*

Though used in classrooms for decades, recent advances in technology have allowed for new possibilities regarding peer CF. Though few in number, the studies that have investigated the benefits of CMCF have shown promising results. First and foremost, CMCF can provide writers with immediate feedback on their composition. Any person who has used word processing software such as Microsoft Word will be familiar with the instant feedback it provides on spelling and grammar. Going beyond just spellcheck, Yeha and Lob (2009) reported that using word processor tools such as colored annotations helped learners focus their attention on specific errors and information within a text. CMCF not only provides writers and reviewers with more tools, but it also allows them to easily and unobtrusively leave comments on their peer's work. AbuSeileek and Abualsha'r (2014) made use of the 'track changes' feature in Microsoft Word 2010 for learners to provide each other with peer CF. Using this feature, deletions were automatically "double struck" through and insertions were highlighted in a different color. While it is true that these methods are also possible using old-fashioned, paper-based editing, Liu and Sadler (2003) found that learners using CMCF left more comments and made more revisions than learners using traditional peer feedback. Lee (2005) added to this finding by stating that using such programs benefited both learners' writing and communication skills and encouraged learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

A more recent development that greatly eases document editing, collaboration, and sharing, was the introduction of cloud-based platforms, such as Google Docs. The use of services like Google Docs allows students to simultaneously work on the same document from different locations. Kessler, Bikowski, and Boggs (2012) noted that the kind of synchronicity offered by Google Docs was previously impossible with standard word processors. Google Docs enables the students to access the composition from any device that can connect to the Internet. While the distraction of mobile phones in the classroom

is evident for educators, with writing, it might be more beneficial to bring the learning to their screen. The familiarity with mobile devices and software students presently have due to their engagement with social media and other online platforms should ensure they do not struggle incorporating this kind of technology into their learning. Brine, Wilson, and Roy (2007) stated that “not only are the devices mobile, so are the individuals using them, which allows for learning to be situated within a real-world setting and provides context sensitivity” (p. 4). Students are able to interact with one another and their shared work at their own convenience. Being able to interact with each other remotely has other social benefits as well. CMCF helps ease the social and psychological pressure placed on learners as they correct each other’s work face to face (Ho & Savignon, 2007; Savignon & Roithmeier, 2004). The ability to give feedback remotely frees the learners from apprehension associated with facing the recipient of their feedback face-to-face.

From the standpoint of the instructor and researcher, one of the most attractive features of Google Docs is its *revision history* function. *Revision history* provides the instructor with an in-depth overview of all the changes and revisions that the work has gone through up until the current version. Accessible to anyone with “edit” permission (one of three options available to the user when sharing a file), the instructor can track every change that has been made to the document. They can monitor when the writing was done, what comments have been left, the changes that have been made, and how the composition has been revised for each subsequent draft. Brine, Wilson, and Roy (2007) noted this function allows educators a unique ability:

For each iteration of the document, Google Docs can be used to identify grammar and spelling mistakes by indicating in the version record exactly where they occurred, while students can provide an explanation to support their view, and finally show the correction for the specific version of the document. (p. 1063)

Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, in using this function educators can identify what CF was offered at which point of the revision process, and whether or not the students were correctly able to revise the text. The revision history function offers teachers a more analytical tool to observe students’ use and uptake of teacher and peer CF.

### *The challenge of English proficiency and peer CF*

Peer written CF is not without its critics. Ghani and Asgher (2012) point to numerous issues regarding the effectiveness of peer CF. Firstly, the quality of feedback is questionable. Some students (and researchers for that matter) question their peer’s ability to provide specific, correct and useful feedback (Allaei & Connor, 1990; Leki, 1990). Furthermore, even when provided with high quality feedback, writers might be more hesitant to actually make revisions than if the CF came from the teacher (Leki, 1990).

One critique, and perhaps the greatest barrier to implementing peer CF in the classroom effectively, is how students’ own proficiency and confidence affect their ability to give their partners CF accurately. Sheen (2007) remarked that it is reasonable to expect that writers with a higher language aptitude will be more able to engage in written CF. Due to higher proficiency writers having greater analytical language ability, they are better equipped to both give and receive feedback. This view is corroborated by Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, and Carey (1987), who found that low proficiency learners not only detected fewer errors and problematic sections but also did not have adequate strategies for revising

those errors that were found. Patchan, Hawk, Stevens, and Schunn (2013) found that the difference between the feedback given by high- and low-proficiency students was not only in quantity but also in quality. To explain this, she categorized feedback as either praise or criticism. While encouraging, praise given through written CF is often too vague to be valuable (e.g., “Nice” or “Good job”). Criticism, however, tends to be more specific, draws the learner’s attention to the weaker parts of the composition, and encourages them to strengthen their writing through revision. High-proficiency learners are able to provide more criticism, identify more problems, and offer more solutions. Lower proficiency students, on the other hand, typically provide more praise than criticism. Patchan et al. (2013) speculated that this phenomenon was in part due to the lower proficiency learners’ inability to distinguish between high and low-quality texts.

While there are certainly grounds for making these criticisms, the benefits of peer CF outweigh the potential pitfalls. This is especially true considering that training writers to review and give feedback on each other’s work has been shown as a way to avoid many of the issues EFL learners face (Berg, 1999; Rollinson, 2005). While different proficiency learners give varying types of feedback, through training and practicing peer review, learners of all levels are able to improve their revision abilities and acquire more strategies for dealing with problematic sections of text. Indeed, the act of reading for evaluation and revision is beneficial for all learners. Cho and MacArthur (2011) found that learners who only read each other’s texts produced lower-quality writing than learners who engaged in written peer CF. Therefore, while lower proficiency students might not give as much high-quality feedback as more proficient learners, the act of providing peer corrective feedback on writing remains a beneficial exercise.

Despite the depth of research related to peer CF, both computer-mediated and otherwise, in a number of contexts, there is still some ambiguity as to whether or not both high- and low-proficiency learners can benefit from this pedagogical tool. Furthermore, greater research is needed in this area in the context of Japanese EFL writing education. Thus, this study was designed to explore the following questions:

1. How do high- and low-proficiency Japanese postsecondary students in EFL writing classes perceive the process of engaging in peer CF?
2. How do the types of peer CF given differ between these two proficiency groups?

## Methods, participants, materials & procedures

### *Participants*

The present study was conducted at two universities in Japan in the spring of 2016. There were 11 students in the high proficiency group at University A ( $n = 11$ ; nine females and two males) in two elective, academic writing courses. One of these students was a Thai exchange student, the remainders were Japanese. The lower proficiency group at University B was comprised of third-year, Japanese university students enrolled in a basic level English reading and writing course. Data from 19 students ( $n = 19$ , 17 males and two females) was collected for analysis.

## The writing task

**Overview.** Both groups of students were tasked with completing a composition on a topic of their choosing. The students at University A wrote a 2000-word research essay, while the students at University B completed 300-word compositions. The length of these compositions reflects the students' ability to write coherently in English. All classes of students were given explicit instruction and training in conducting peer-review. Over the course of a ten-week period, the students completed a first-draft followed by a peer review, a second-draft followed by a teacher review, and a final-draft. For the purpose of the peer review, students were trained in the use of a metacognitive, peer correction feedback framework developed by the instructor-researchers (Table 1) which was utilized in offering both peer and teacher CF. All drafts were composed in Google Docs, and students were asked to complete their peer reviews using Google Docs' *comment* function. The students were then given a short survey (Appendix A) to elicit their opinions on the peer-review process.

Table 1. Peer/teacher corrective feedback framework

Symbol	Meaning
SP	spelling
G	grammar
PF	punctuation/formatting
WO	word order
ME	meaning
T	tense
V	vocabulary
^	missing word
?	other mistakes

**University A (high proficiency students).** The study at University A was conducted in two advanced, English for Academic Purposes (EAP)-focused courses, consisting of nine and two students respectively. The study, including both the training component and the writing process, was conducted over ten weeks of the semester. Students were tasked with composing a 2000-word essay on a controversial subject of their choosing, upon approval from their instructor.

As students' comprehension of English grammar rules and vocabulary usage was quite strong, peer corrective feedback training focused on the use of the aforementioned metacognitive symbols in identifying mistakes in classmates' works. Students also worked together in collaborative activities to identify common grammar and formatting issues that regularly appear in Japanese EFL writing classes using Google Docs and were told to identify errors using the *comment* function in order to familiarize them with this process.

After finishing the first draft of their paper, students worked in groups of three (in the larger class) and man-to-man (in the smaller class) to offer one another peer CF. In order to encourage students to engage more deeply in the peer CF process, the quantity and quality of the feedback they provided their partners with was weighted into the grading of their final paper. After the peer CF was assessed by their instructor, students revised their papers and received teacher CF before finishing their final draft.



**University B (low proficiency students).** The writing composition (including both the training component and writing process) was administered over the course of ten weeks in a 15-week long semester. As stated above, the 19 students in this class were asked to complete a 300-word composition on a topic of their choosing. The participants were an intact class of third year students enrolled in a basic (the lowest proficiency categorization at this institution) English reading and writing course. As third-year basic students, the participants generally had low motivation for studying English. The students had thus far completed, at minimum, six years of English courses in secondary education, and an additional two years in their postsecondary programs.

In the weeks prior to starting the writing process, the students were trained in giving feedback. During four class periods, the learners were given a 'find the mistakes' handout (Appendix B) where learners read a short piece of writing containing errors. They first tried to identify the errors on their own, and then after three minutes, they worked together in pairs to find and correct errors. On the left side of the handout, the learners were provided with the metalinguistic error codes identified above. Beyond identifying errors, the learners were also asked to write comments and follow-up questions to facilitate a dialogue with the writers for peer CF, and thus accustomize them to this process.

For the fifth week of the semester, the class met in a computer lab in order to familiarize themselves with Google Docs. After signing up for the service, the students created a new document, wrote a short writing assignment (topic provided by the teacher) and shared it with a peer. The students then reviewed each other's writing and practiced leaving coded feedback using the comments feature of Google Docs. The following week, the students wrote their first draft of their composition and shared it with the same partner. Similar to the high proficient students, the quantity of feedback they provided their partners with was weighted into the final grade of their paper (the quality or type of feedback was not considered when grading).

## Results

### *Quantitative measures*

Among the high-proficiency learners, an average of 36.9 errors were correctly identified in the peer-review process. As one student was late in submitting their assignment, they did not receive peer CF, thus their results were discarded, leaving a total of ten students for correction ( $n = 10$ ). Assuming a target length of 2000 words, the high-proficiency group offered 1.845 feedback items per 100 words. The most frequent corrections offered were grammar (36.216%), punctuation and formatting (16.486%), and vocabulary (15.405%). The least frequently offered feedback items were tense (0.008%), word order (0.030%), and spelling (0.054%) respectively.

Among the 19 papers written by lower-proficiency learners, a total of four corrections were given to each other. This is an average of 0.21 errors corrected per paper. Assuming a target length of 300 words, the low-proficiency group offered 0.07 feedback items per 100 words. Of these four corrections, each were given by different students and were from the following categories: grammar (25%), word order (25%), tense (25%), and vocabulary (25%). However, participants provided each other with more follow-up questions (15 questions total, an average of 0.79 per document) and general feedback (20 instances total, an average of 1.05 per document).

## Qualitative measures

As the quantitative instrument provided little data among the low-proficiency student group, a qualitative piece was also introduced to elicit students' perceptions of the peer CF process. The survey was given to the participants after completing the writing task and the results are displayed below in Table 2 (low-proficiency), and Table 3 (high-proficiency) respectively.

Table 2. Results of the qualitative survey for low-proficiency group (n = 19)

Items	SA*	A	N	D	SD
1. I can share my ideas and opinions in English.	10% (2)	32%(6)	37% (7)	21%(4)	0% (0)
2. I enjoy writing in English.	10% (2)	37%(7)	32% (6)	16%(3)	5% (1)
3. I learned something from reading my classmates' writing.	10% (2)	63%(12)	21% (4)	5%(1)	0% (0)
4. My classmates' comments and feedback were helpful to my writing.	16% (3)	42%(8)	42% (8)	0%(0)	0% (0)
5. I would like to use English in my future.	26% (5)	32%(6)	26% (5)	10%(2)	5% (1)
6. I think English is important for my life.	21% (4)	42%(8)	32% (6)	5%(1)	0% (0)

Note. \*Respondents rated the survey items on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly agree (SA), 2 – Agree (A), 3 – Neutral, 4 – Disagree (D), 5 – Strongly disagree (SD).  
\*\*Numbers in parentheses are the raw numbers of participants.

As three students in the high-proficiency group did not respond to the survey, the total number of respondents dropped to 8 (n = 8) for this section of the study.

Table 3. Results of the qualitative survey for high-proficiency group

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I can share my ideas and opinions in English.	13% (1)	63% (5)	0% (0)	13% (1)	13% (1)
2. I enjoy writing in English.	38% (3)	13% (1)	0% (0)	38% (3)	13% (1)
3. I learned something from reading my classmates' writing.	13% (1)	63% (5)	13% (1)	13% (1)	0% (0)
4. My classmates' comments and feedback were helpful to my writing.	38% (3)	38% (3)	0% (0)	25% (2)	0% (0)
5. I would like to use English in my future.	50% (4)	25% (2)	0% (0)	13% (1)	13% (1)
6. I think English is important for my life.	75% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)	13% (1)	13% (1)

## Discussion

The results of the treatment provide further support to the claim made by other researchers that low-proficiency learners do not have adequate proficiency to effectively provide each other with corrective feedback (Hayes et al., 1987; Patchan et al., 2013; Sheen, 2007). Despite having participated in four corrective feedback sessions, a majority of the participants in the study gave no feedback targeting form. Of the 19 participants in the low-proficiency

group, there were only four instances of CF targeted at form. Analyses of the Google Docs files for individual participants revealed that they did not even highlight problematic areas. This substantiates Hayes et al.'s (1987) finding that low-proficiency learners were not only unable to provide feedback, but they also were not able to detect errors in each other's writing. The quality of the learners' CF in this group was also poor. A large majority of the comments given during the treatment were simple comments of encouragement. This trend was also reported by Patchan et al. (2013), who argued that praise comments like "good job!" were too vague to be of much value to the learner.

While the participants in the low-proficiency group were unable to give feedback on form, they were able to provide each other with more valuable feedback on the content of their writing. This was seen through the use of follow-up questions. Nine of the 19 participants provided each other with follow-up questions (a total of 15 instances). This signaled to the recipients to further elaborate on the topic. Ferris (2003) asserted that one of the main benefits of peer review was that writers have a greater chance of receiving more comments and opinions on compositions read by multiple editors. While this was true for the lower level learners, in this study less than half of the students actually provided comments on their peers' work. Furthermore, only about half (58%) of the participants reported on question 4 of the survey that they believed that their peers' comments were useful. However, there was a greater positive response (73%) to question 3 showing that these students believed they learned from just reading each other's work. It seems, therefore, more beneficial to encourage writers at this proficiency level to simply read each other's work in order to be exposed to more texts so that they can see both successful and unsuccessful examples of writing (Patchan & Schunn, 2015). Additionally, when asked to provide each other with corrective feedback, these learners should focus more on global issues like content and organization. Having limited declarative knowledge of the L2 form, it should come as no surprise that low-proficiency learners avoid providing each other form-focused CF. Consequently, CF training for low-proficiency learners should be focused on content, not accuracy.

Whereas low-proficiency learners could only provide each other with content focused CF, high-proficiency learners demonstrated a strong ability to find mistakes on one another's papers. While the accuracy of student feedback and of subsequent revisions was not measured for the purposes of this study, an average of 36.9 corrections per peer review indicates students were able to identify several points for revision. Therefore, regarding the second research question, the results of this study show that high-proficiency students differ from lower in that they were able identify and diagnose issues in their peers' writing as well suggest solutions to problems, whereas lower-proficiency students were able to give more content driven feedback such as follow-up questions and general comments. This again seems to reinforce Hayes et al. (1987) claim that lower-proficiency learners do not have the knowledge or skills to identify problems or give feedback on form.

According to the results of the survey, it appears that learners, both high- and low-proficiency, had positive attitudes towards written peer corrective feedback. The third and fourth questions of the survey, in particular, ask about how the participants felt about reading and responding to each other's work. 73% of the low-proficiency participants and 75% of the high-proficiency learners responded that they learned something from reading their peers' work. This result further supports the theory that learners benefit from exposure to successful and unsuccessful examples (Ferris, 2003; Patchan & Schunn, 2015). 53% of the low-proficiency students responded that the comments they received from their peers

were helpful, while the remaining 47% gave a neutral response. 75% of the high-proficiency learners responded positively to receiving feedback from their classmates.

Taking an in depth look at the low-proficiency students' documents, it appears that while many received comments and follow-up questions, they did not incorporate the feedback into subsequent drafts of their writing. While follow-up questions were presented as a way to encourage writers to explain more about the topic, multiple students did not respond to any of the questions left by their peers. Another student replied directly to the comments as one would on a forum rather than incorporating them into a subsequent draft. Therefore, one explanation is that these learners did not fully grasp the concept of the writing process and revision. Perhaps with more training and practice on drafting, feedback, and revision would help the writers to be more successful. However, another possibility could be that the writers were less willing to accept corrections from their peers than they would from a teacher (Leki, 1990). It might simply have been that the students in the low-proficiency group did not have confidence in their ability to give quality feedback in content or form and therefore did not feel it necessary to revise or integrate comments and ideas from their peers.

Among the eight high proficiency students who returned the qualitative survey, the comments offered were highly positive. One student commented, "Checking other students' papers were helpful [sic] for thinking about my own mistakes." However, some students also were critical of the process of peer CF, with another student suggesting they preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback and arguing that metacognitive peer CF was difficult to understand.

Also of significance was the answers both treatment groups gave when responding to the question as to when they used English. While four of the low-proficiency learners remarked that they used English generally when speaking with foreigners with an additional three explicitly noting this occurred in casual social situations ("bar," "club," and "restaurant"), among the high-proficiency learners, four of eight students directly referred to engaging with exchange students and another two mentioned speaking to foreigners generally. Five students also made reference to using English in other courses. These results indicate a disparity both in terms of opportunity to use English, and motivation to do so. Further studies in this area might examine how these affective factors influence students' willingness and ability to engage in peer CF.

### *Limitations*

Due to this study being conducted across three classes, in two universities in Japan, it is highly context-specific. As an exploratory study, the goal was to extract potential benefits for low and high-proficiency learners and in the process, perhaps determine how peer CF learning activities might be adjusted for different learner types. The inability of the low-proficiency learners to offer one another peer CF made it challenging to draw strong comparisons between the two groups. Hopefully this study can help shape further research into the benefits and challenges associated with CMCF in the context of EFL classrooms in Japan.

A large body of literature exists related to CMCF (AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r, 2014; Ertmer et al., 2007; Liu & Sadler, 2003), peer CF training (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Rollinson, 2005), and different ways of incorporating peer CF into EFL writing classes (Ellis et al., 2008; Farokhi & Sattarpour, 2011; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009). The potential effects of employing various CF types, the use or non-use of peer CF training, and other factors may

have impacted the results. However, in order to narrow the focus of the study, the authors decided to leave these questions to future research.

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## Appendix A

### Writing survey

Please answer the survey questions below. Please answer honestly. This survey won't affect your grade and is completely anonymous.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can share my ideas and opinions in English.					
2. I enjoy writing in English.					
3. I learned something from reading my classmates' writing.					
4. My classmates' comments and feedback were helpful to my writing.					
5. I would like to use English in my future.					
6. I think English is important for my life.					



1. How much time did you spend preparing for this class each week? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Do you use English outside of this class? (*circle one*) Never      Sometimes      Often
- ✂ When do you use English? \_\_\_\_\_
- 

## Appendix B

### “Find the mistakes” peer review training

#### Find the mistakes! - 4

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

English Editing Guide  
(英語編集ガイド)

<b>SP</b>	spelling mistake example: I am a university <u>stoo</u> dent ( <b>SP</b> )
<b>V</b>	vocabulary mistake (wrong word) example: I have ba <u>it</u> o today (Part-time job)
<b>T</b>	tense mistake (past, present, future) example: Yesterday, I <u>will go</u> ( <b>T</b> ) to the store.
<b>G</b>	grammar mistake example: I will go to Shikoku at ( <b>G</b> ) Saturday
<b>WO</b>	word order mistake example: What do you like <u>sports</u> ( <b>WO</b> )?
<b>ME</b>	meaning mistake / can't understand example: I will visit <u>Biwa Lake</u> there ( <b>ME</b> ) relax.
<b>?</b>	different mistake
<b>^</b>	word is missing example: I <u>a</u> student. ^ am

I am joining a club which means i am a member of a brass band at Kyoto Sangyo University. We active Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday! We are going to cheer other clubs at Kyoto Sangyo University.

I play clarinet. When I was junior high school student, I find clarinet and joined brass band club at my junior high school.

Playing instrument makes me fun. At first members of club cannot make good tune but little by little, we can make a good tune. It is so fabulous and I am so fun. If you want to try something or want be enthusiam you should playing instrument. They just be make you feel happy and growing.

**Write 2 questions that you want to ask the author!**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ ? 2. \_\_\_\_\_ ?