

# Enhancing peer feedback practices through screencasts in blended academic writing courses

**Bradley Irwin**

*Nihon University, Japan*

*irwin.bradley@nihon-u.ac.jp*

*The case study presented in this paper investigates the roles that the Moodle workshop activity module and peer feedback screencast training have on the development of formative peer feedback practices in low level English academic writing classes. The development of 26 first-year Japanese students' peer feedback practices were tracked over 6 separate feedback sessions. The findings indicate that without training, students produced vague and unhelpful peer feedback. However, the intuitive structure of the Moodle workshop module and screencast feedback training sessions helped develop the skills necessary to offer critically evaluative feedback that proved useful for essay revision. Further findings show that although students were initially reluctant to offer feedback written in English, their use of the target language increased with adequate practice. Finally, student perceptions of their own abilities point to a highly significant relationship between screencast feedback training and improvement in peer feedback practices. These results suggest that the combination of the Moodle workshop activity module and feedback training screencasts facilitate effective peer feedback practices even in low level L2 academic writing courses.*

**Keywords:** blended learning, academic writing, Moodle workshop module, screencasts, effective peer feedback

## Introduction

In university level academic writing classes, providing teacher-centered written corrective feedback can take up an enormous amount of time and effort. In fact, some authors report that teachers invest more

time providing feedback to students' written work than they do preparing or conducting actual lessons (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). To make matters worse, the effectiveness of this type of feedback to improve student compositions has been widely debated by L2 researchers (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Truscott, 1996, 1999). This large investment in time and energy is only exacerbated in process-oriented writing classes where students may submit multiple drafts of each written assignment.

As an alternative to relying solely on teacher feedback, some researchers have pointed to the effectiveness of incorporating peer feedback into various stages of the writing process (Zamel, 1985; Long & Porter, 1985). L2 acquisition researchers have also found that peer feedback practices lend support to the notion that L2 development is facilitated through interaction (Ellis, 1991; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Mangelsdorf, 1989).

Detailed studies have also outlined several other benefits of student-centered peer feedback. Hirvela (1999) found that providing opportunities for peer feedback allowed students to take a more active role in their own learning thus increasing their motivation. Leki (1990) found evidence that by providing peer feedback, students can develop the skills they need to revise their own writing. Leki further noted that by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses in their classmates' writing, students feel more comfortable with their own compositions. Furthermore, researchers have found that peer assessment activities increase interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of classroom community (Hirvela, 1990; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, 2002).

Another intriguing benefit of peer feedback is the effect that a perceived change in readership can have on student writing. In classes that don't incorporate elements of peer feedback, all writing takes place in the context of a single reader, the teacher. However, by shifting away from a single reader, students are able to produce more authentic texts (Chen & Brown, 2011; Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena, & Struyven, 2010). Mittan (1989) also argues that unlike teacher-centred feedback, peer feedback gives students an opportunity to receive responses from a more authentic audience.

However, peer feedback practices have not been universally praised by L2 researchers and there are several practical limitations to consider. Among the most prominent and valid concerns regarding peer feedback is the notion that the ability to provide effective feedback is a skill that develops through practice and experience. Because students lack the requisite experience necessary to provide appropriate feedback, their comments can often be vague and unhelpful (Leki, 1990; Tseng & Tsai, 2007). Keh (1990) also found that inexperience led students to provide feedback that avoided problems of meaning and instead simply focused on surface errors. Finally, Horowitz (1986) and Carson and Nelson (1994) describe findings that suggested that not only did inexperience make it difficult for peer evaluators to identify problems with their classmates' writing, they also provided misleading and harmful responses.

Another problematic aspect of peer feedback in L2 contexts has to do with learner language proficiency. Low proficiency L2 learners may not only lack the experience required to give effective feedback but also the language skills to identify errors related to grammar and vocabulary. Topping (1998) describes an initial anxiety and reluctance to provide peer feedback and that students may reject peer feedback because they lack the language ability needed to perform the task correctly. This inability to detect writing errors can be particularly problematic in academic writing contexts since accuracy is deemed highly important (Hyland, 2003). When considering feedback to improve grammar errors, Zhang (1985) noted that teacher feedback was more effective than either self-correction or peer feedback.

Lastly, a final practical limitation of peer feedback can be considered logistical in nature. In large classes, collecting, allocating and distributing student essays for peer evaluation can be very time consuming and problematic. Teachers can also find it very difficult to adequately assess whether peer feedback is being carried out correctly. As a result, some teachers find the process frustrating and give up, stating, "I tried peer feedback in my class, and it didn't work. I don't think it's appropriate for ESL writers." (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p.227)

## Purpose of the study

Little research has explored the effects that computer-mediated communication learning tools have on peer feedback practices in L2 academic writing contexts. Those studies that have investigated the role of technology in L2 peer feedback practices have tended to focus on summative error correction feedback rather than formative content development feedback (Chen & Brown, 2011; Tseng & Tsai, 2007). There are even fewer studies that investigate the relationship between technology and formative peer feedback that focuses on developing essay content in low proficiency L2 contexts.

In this study, rather than using computer-mediated peer feedback as a means to identify and reduce the amount errors in students' compositions, the practice of peer feedback was approached in a way that allowed students to provide effective formative feedback that could be used to improve the content and depth of detail in their classmates' written compositions during revision.

## Methods

### *Research questions*

In order to ascertain the extent to which low proficiency English language learners can produce, understand, and apply formative peer feedback focused on content, three research questions were proposed:

1. How do peer feedback practices differ before and after students receive peer feedback screencast training?
2. Can students provide effective formative feedback that contributes to improving the content of their peers' writing?
3. How do students view peer feedback practices in blended learning environments?

### *Participants*

This case study analyzes data collected from 26 Japanese university students enrolled in their first year of study in the international relations department of a private university in Japan. Prior to enrollment in the class, students' proficiency levels were assessed using the Assessment of Communicative English (ACE) Placement Test. The majority of students (N = 22) were assessed as having an A1 level while the remaining students (N = 4) achieved an A2 level.

### *Instructional context*

The learners were enrolled in a first year compulsory English language academic writing course that incorporated a blended learning approach. Students attended two 90 minute lessons per week during a fifteen week term in the fall (Sept. – Jan.) of 2017. Aside from the academic writing course, the students also attended a communicative English course held for the same number of hours conducted by another teacher during the fall term. Therefore, students had 6 hours of English language instruction during each of the 15 weeks of the term for a total of 90 class hours.

Although the class met twice a week in a traditional classroom setting, the teacher utilized the Moodle (v.3.2) Learning Management System (LMS) as a means to deliver course content and assignments, as well as a platform for conducting peer feedback and sharing completed essays.

Throughout the fifteen week course, students were expected to complete six individual writing assignments. The teacher adopted a process oriented, multiple draft approach to writing that involved a brainstorming and outlining phase, a drafting-feedback-revision phase and final submission phase. While the brainstorming and outlining phases were assigned as homework activities, the actual writing phases (drafting and final submission) were conducted as in-class assignments to ensure that students did not overly rely on translation software to complete their essays. Having students complete activities that would be considered homework in a non-blended course as in-class assignments, such as essay writing, is an example of using flipped learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, 2014). This flipped learning style meant that the teacher could provide support during the drafting phase. This flipped approach was also adopted for the peer feedback screencast training sessions. The writing assignments varied in length between 150–300 words and the six topics included: health and nutrition, inspirational people, cultural events, customs and traditions, literature, and innovative technology.

### *Peer feedback delivery*

The teacher in this study employed the Moodle workshop activity module, which is a plug-in designed specifically for self or peer evaluation, in order to overcome the previously mentioned concerns regarding peer feedback allocation and distribution. This module proved particularly useful because the teacher could control the students' essay submission style, the number of peer feedback allocations that each student received, the grading strategy used to provide feedback, and the weighting of grades.

### *Student written submissions*

Although the workshop activity module allows for some flexibility regarding submission style, it was decided that students should type their essays directly into Moodle's editor. The main reason for this decision was a desire to avoid the possibility that students would complete their essays before class (potentially over relying on translation software to assist them) and upload them to the workshop module from a storage device.

### *Peer feedback allocations*

One of the most compelling reasons for using the workshop activity module to conduct peer feedback is the ability to control how the students are allocated their classmates' written assignments. Each student was allocated two submissions at random to provide feedback on. While it is possible to hide the identity of an essay's author as well as the identity of the assessor, the teacher decided that the social interaction aspects of peer assessment outweighed any concerns about bias or favoritism. Allowing the students' identities to be known provided writers and assessors a chance to ask questions or clarify misunderstandings directly with each other during and after the feedback process.

### *Grading strategies*

The workshop activity allows instructors the ability to weight grades for both the submission and assessment of student work on a scale of 0–100. To encourage students to actively fulfill the requirements of providing adequate peer feedback, submissions accounted for 80% of the overall grade for each activity with peer feedback making up the remaining 20%.

There are four peer feedback grading strategies within the workshop activity that determine how students provide feedback to each other, including: accumulative grading, comments, number of errors, and rubric. For the purpose of this study it was determined that the rubric grading strategy was the most appropriate because each criteria, level and corresponding numeric grade could be adequately described in both English and Japanese, thus lowering the cognitive load required for providing feedback. Furthermore, the rubric grading strategy included an optional free text field that allowed students to provide overall feedback in the form of comments. Therefore, the peer feedback that each student provided to his or her cohort included a numeric grade based on clearly defined rubric criteria and comments on the essay content.

### *Data collection*

Data were collected from each of the six feedback sessions by analyzing all samples of student feedback, examining the effects of the feedback on revision, and from a post-task survey administered at the end of the course. The survey results elucidated the students' overall perceptions of the effects that the process of giving and receiving feedback had on their English writing abilities.

### *Peer feedback sessions*

Peer feedback sessions were conducted for each of the six writing assignments after students had completed the brainstorming, outlining, and drafting phases of the writing process. During each feedback session, students were randomly allocated two of their classmates' writing assignments and were instructed to use a workshop embedded grading rubric provided by the teacher to assess each of the works. Because the students' English proficiency levels had been assessed as basic users, a decision was made to include a Japanese translation of the rubric in order to avoid any misunderstandings.

The grading rubric consisted of five unique criteria to evaluate the content of the submissions and included scores for writing length (word count) and paragraph format, inclusion

of thesis statement, correct use of target vocabulary, logical organization, and depth of details. After completing the scoring rubric, students were asked to leave constructive comments about their classmates' drafts.

In order to address the first research question concerning the effect that screencast feedback training had on peer feedback practices, the workshop comment setting in the first feedback session was left as optional (the default setting) and students were able to complete the feedback task without leaving a constructive comment. This was done in order to gauge the number of students who would freely leave comments. In the remaining five sessions the setting was switched from optional to forced, meaning students had to enter text into the comment field in order to submit the feedback.

For the first two peer feedback sessions, aside from instructions on how to fill in the grading rubric, no specific or focused feedback training was conducted. However, for the remaining four feedback sessions, students were given training using screencasts prior to completing the feedback tasks. (For descriptions of the peer feedback training sessions please refer to the following section entitled *Peer feedback training*.)

In order to encourage students to fulfill the requirements of the peer feedback assignments, a part of their grade for each composition was apportioned to feedback. Therefore, the scores students received for their written compositions accounted for 80% of their grade for each workshop assignment while the peer feedback they submitted made up the remaining 20%. For the first two feedback sessions (before training), since there were no specific criteria given to complete the peer feedback task, all students received the full 20% for completing the assessment rubric and providing a comment. However, as specific criteria for providing effective peer feedback comments were explained to the students during the subsequent peer feedback screencast training sessions, a rubric to evaluate the quality of feedback was introduced. Adopting a framework for effective peer feedback proposed by Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), the student generated feedback was evaluated using four criteria: use of affective language (Did the feedback include praise or mitigation expressions?), specificity of feedback (Was the feedback general or localized?), suggestions for revision (Did the feedback specify ways to improve shortcomings?), and inclusion of revision examples (Did the assessor provide examples of how to revise shortcomings?)

Because students were expected to complete the writing assignments in class, the peer feedback sessions were assigned as homework. To facilitate this process, the teacher utilized screencasts to both present an aspect of effective feedback and to model the process. After students had completed their essays they were generally given two to three days to complete the peer feedback. This allowed time for assessors to complete and submit the feedback task and for students whose work had been assessed to receive, read, and understand the feedback comments. In the lesson following the peer feedback homework assignments, students were given approximately 10 to 15 minutes to meet with the classmates who had provided feedback for their assignments to conduct "mini feedback conferences." These feedback conferences were provided to give students an opportunity to meet with their classmates and clarify any misunderstandings they might have had about the peer feedback.

### *Peer feedback training*

After the first two peer feedback sessions had been completed and students had become accustomed to using the Moodle workshop activity module, students engaged in four

feedback training sessions. The first feedback training was conducted in class while the remaining three training sessions were posted to the class Moodle page as screencasts.

In the first feedback training, to encourage students to reflect on the nature and method of peer feedback, they were posed three questions:

1. What is peer feedback?
2. Why do we do peer feedback? (What purpose does it serve in a writing class?)
3. How do we do peer feedback?

The goal of this initial reflective peer feedback training session was to allow students to generate a number of working definitions of peer feedback, to show them that this type of feedback can be used to accomplish a variety of goals, and to validate its importance within the structure of process writing pedagogy. At the end of this training session, a number of guidelines concerning acceptable responses were mutually agreed upon. Two guidelines of particular note that developed from students' beliefs about their lack of English proficiency were:

1. Students should focus their feedback comments on content (organization, ideas, and details) rather than on form (grammar and orthography).
2. Students should have the option to use their L1 (Japanese) when writing their feedback comments.

While the first notable guideline about feedback comments focusing on content was readily accepted, the second pertaining to the use of Japanese during the feedback process was approached with hesitation. Researchers such as Mittan (1989) and Berger (1990) found that if scaffolded and modeled correctly, any L2 learner at any proficiency level can produce effective peer feedback using the target language. However, more recently, several studies have found that students produce more constructive comments and corrective suggestions when using their L1 during the feedback process (Cook, 2001; Myers, 2010; Scott & De La Fuente, 2008; Wang & Wen, 2002). With those studies in mind, the suggested guideline to allow students the option to provide feedback their Japanese L1 was accepted.

After the initial training session had established a definition, purpose, and guidelines for peer feedback, the remaining three training sessions modeled the feedback process using screencasts. Screencasts were chosen as the preferred manner of conducting feedback training sessions because several studies have shown that they are an effective and engaging method for students to receive feedback (Ali, 2016; Alvira, 2016; Morris & Chikwa, 2014). Students could also re-watch the screencasts as many times as necessary to identify any fixed or formulaic expressions that the teacher was using to craft the feedback. All screencasts were recorded entirely in English with an average duration of eight minutes. The essays selected for inclusion in the screencasts were samples of student produced writing from previous assignments in the course.

The basic format of each screencast remained consistent throughout the three sessions. First, students were walked through the process of using the assessment rubric to analyze the essay. Then a section of the essay that the reader found particularly interesting was selected to be included in the feedback comment as praise worthy. Next, readers were shown how to identify sections of the essay that were lacking in detail by posing themselves who, what, where, when, why, and how questions. If the reader was unable to adequately answer several of these questions about certain statements in the essay, those sections were marked as being potential sources for critical feedback. After that, ways to improve the

content of the essay in terms of organization and detail were proposed. Finally, using feedback principles outlined in studies by Mittan (1989) and Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), the teacher modeled how to craft the feedback comment into the form a short, personal letter. Each comment followed a similar pattern of beginning by addressing the essay writer by name, offering praise for something they had done well, identifying sections that needed improvement, providing advice for improvement, and ending the letter with a valediction.

## Research findings

**Research question 1.** How do peer feedback practices differ before and after students receive peer feedback screencast training?

In order to set a baseline for comparison between the students' peer feedback practices before and after feedback training, during the first two feedback sessions, students were simply instructed to complete the scoring rubric included in the Moodle workshop activity module and to leave their classmate a comment about their essay. They received no explicit instructions from the instructor about what kind of feedback was expected aside from a simple direction to, "Provide your classmate with a comment to help them improve their writing." In the first feedback session, comment submissions were an optional component of the feedback and students were able to complete the activity without entering any data into the comment text field. Unfortunately, this resulted in over half (58%) of the students leaving no feedback comment about their classmate's essay. The remaining feedback comments (42%) were classified as 'general comments' that mainly consisted of one or two word phrases such as 'nice' or 'good job'. Interestingly, although the comments were all too short to be helpful with essay revision, they were all written in English.

During the second pre-training feedback session, the feedback comment setting was changed to 'forced'. This meant that in order to complete the task, all students would have to enter a written response into the comment text field. The number of students who left feedback comments increased to 100%. Comments were then classified into five distinct categories: one word comments, general comments in English, general comments in Japanese, comments on form, and comments on content. General comments were those considered to be too unspecific to be used for the revision process. This included such comments as, "Nice writing", "You worked hard", and "I like ice cream too." Comments on form (CF) were considered to be those that made reference to specific grammar mistakes. Finally, comments on content (CC) were those that referenced global problems of organization or lack of details. Comments such as, "You need to tell more details." or, "Think about your sentence order." were included in this category.

Although all students were now submitting feedback comments, there was almost no overall increase from the first feedback session in the quality of the feedback being provided. In fact, of the 50 peer feedback comments collected, only 3 (6%) were deemed to be specific enough that they could be used in revision to improve essay quality. The remaining 47 (94%) comments were classified as being too general to help classmates improve their writing. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of the five categories previously mentioned.

Table 1. Pre-training feedback session 2

<b>Feedback category</b>	<b>Number of feedback comments (N = 50)</b>
One word comment	11 (22%)
General comment in English	17 (34%)
General comment in Japanese	19 (38%)
Comment on form (in Japanese)	2 (4%)
Comment on content (in Japanese)	1 (2%)

With the introduction of peer feedback training, three new categories emerged: critical evaluations (CE), critical evaluations with suggestions (CES), and critical evaluations with extended suggestions (CEES). Because guidelines had been established during the first training feedback session that comments should be limited to issues of content, students did not provide any comments related to form for the remainder of the feedback sessions. CEs were defined as comments that specifically located content problems such as statements lacking sufficient details or organizational issues that made sections of the essay incomprehensible. CESs were defined as comments that located specific content problems and offered suggestions for making improvements. The last category, CEESs were those comments that not only located specific content problems and offered revision suggestions but also included examples of how those suggestions could be carried out.

Aside from the specific categories described above, since the focus of the feedback sessions were to help students give feedback to their classmates that could be used to revise and improve their essays, comments were further classified into two broad categories: unhelpful for revision and helpful for revision. One word comments and general comments, whether in Japanese or English, were categorized as unhelpful for revision and the data from these types of feedback were combined for the sake of clarity in Table 2. While the contribution that unspecific, global CC have on the revision process remained unclear throughout this study, this category, as well as, CE, CES, and CEES, were classified as helpful.

After the first feedback training session had established a purpose and guidelines for providing peer feedback, more than half (56%) of the comments remained unhelpful. However, the number of critical evaluations rose to nearly a quarter (22%) of the feedback provided.

Interestingly, the number of comments classified as unhelpful actually rose by 2 (to 60%) after the second feedback session. Although it is difficult to say exactly why this slight increase occurred, it may have had to do with the topic of this assignment. Students had been asked to write about an inspirational person and the majority wrote about a close family member. The personal nature of these essays may have resulted in reluctance for peer evaluators to engage critically with the essays.

After the final feedback training session, only 5 (10%) comments remained in the unhelpful category because of their vagueness. Of the remaining feedback comments, 32 (64%) engaged with the essays in a critical manner. Table 2 shows the type of feedback comments students provided after each of the four feedback training sessions.

Table 2. Post-training categorization of feedback

Feedback category	Distribution of feedback after each training session			
	1	2	3	4
1. Unhelpful	28 (56%)	30 (60%)	25 (50%)	5 (10%)
2. CC	11 (22%)	10 (20%)	8 (16%)	13 (26%)
3. CE	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	8 (16%)	15 (30%)
4. CES	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	5 (10%)	10 (20%)
5. CEES	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)

The amount of English used to provide feedback comments across the four training sessions was also tracked. While the percentage of English used to provide feedback remained relatively consistent in the unhelpful comment category, there was a perceptible increase across each training session for the comments considered helpful to revision. After the initial training session in which the optional use of Japanese to provide feedback was included in the feedback guidelines, no students attempted to use English. However, by the final feedback session almost a quarter (24%) of comments were written in English. Of these comments in English, 8 (16%) were critical evaluations while 4 (8%) were comments on content. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of English comments for each feedback category across the four feedback training sessions. One word and general comments, which were deemed unhelpful to revision, were omitted from this graph.

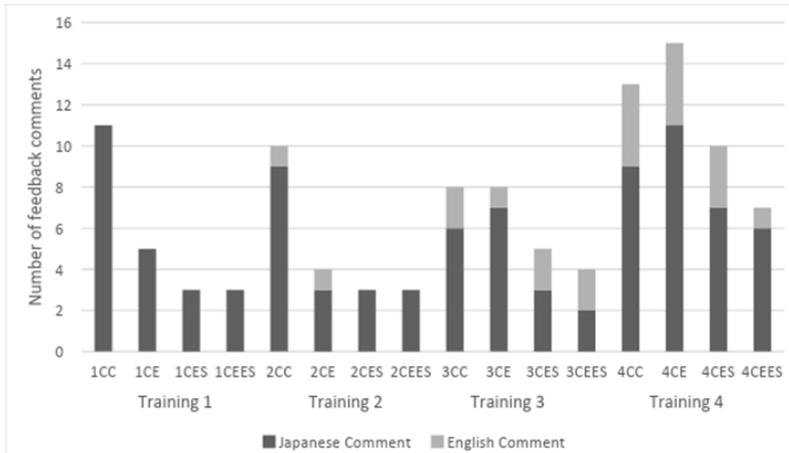


Figure 1. English feedback usage after each training session

**Research question 2.** Can students provide effective formative feedback that contributes to improving the content of their peers' writing?

In order to determine the effectiveness of peer feedback, each essay was analyzed to determine whether the feedback had been used during the revision process. Since the peer feedback provided during the initial pre-training feedback sessions was deemed too

general to be helpful, these essays were not included in the analysis. Moreover, only those comments that were deemed helpful to revision were included. Therefore, post-training comments that were deemed unhelpful were also omitted from analysis as they would have had no effect on the revision process.

After the first training session, when only half (50%) of the helpful feedback comments evaluated the essays critically, only 7 (31.8%) of the comments were used to improve the content of the subsequent draft. Interestingly, as the number of helpful feedback comments that included critical evaluation increased to 32 (64%) after the final training session, the number of comments used in revision rose to 35 (77.8%). In fact, it was determined that all of the feedback that was classified as CE, CES, and CEES was used by students to revise their papers after the final training session. Table 3 shows the number of helpful feedback comments provided compared to the number of feedback comments used in revision after each training session.

Table 3. Percent of helpful feedback comments used in revision

Training session	Number of helpful comments	Comments used in revision	Percentage of comments used in revision
1	22	7	31.8%
2	20	9	45%
3	25	14	56%
4	45	35	77.8%

**Research question 3.** How do students view peer feedback practices in blended learning environments?

To collect students' perspectives on peer feedback practices in blended learning environments, a survey was conducted at the end of the course. Students were informed that the survey was voluntary and that their answers would be collected anonymously. On the day that the survey was conducted, two students were absent from class. The remaining 24 students completed the survey in its entirety.

The first section of the survey asked students about their English writing experiences and the extent to which they had participated in blended learning environments to practice English essay writing. The next section of the survey asked students about their experiences giving and receiving written peer feedback in traditional in-class learning environments and in blended learning environments. The final section of the survey used a five point Likert scale to gain a better understanding of the students' self-reported ability to give peer feedback before and after feedback training and their perceptions of the effect that providing peer feedback in blended learning environments had on their English essay writing skills. Students were also encouraged to leave their thoughts and opinions about peer feedback with an open-ended question.

While nearly half (45.8%) of students reported having a significant amount of experience studying English in a blended learning environment, a majority (70.9%) reported having no experience at all using blended learning to practice English essay writing. Table 4 reveals the students' past experiences with writing in English, blended English learning, and blended English essay writing.

Table 4. Amount of experience with English essay writing, computer-based English study, and English essay writing in blended classes

	Student responses (%)		
	Paper-based English essay writing (in-class)	Computer-based English study (blended)	Computer-based English essay writing (blended)
1. A lot of experience	10 (41.7%)	11 (45.8%)	0 (0.0%)
2. Some experience	8 (33.3%)	4 (16.7%)	2 (8.3%)
3. A little experience	2 (8.3%)	3 (12.5%)	2 (8.3%)
4. Very little experience	4 (16.7%)	3 (12.5%)	3 (12.5%)
5. No experience	0 (0.0%)	3 (12.5%)	17 (70.9%)

Table 5 shows the amount of experience students had with written peer feedback tasks in both traditional and blended learning environments. The findings from this section of the survey indicate that students in both traditional and blended learning environments have little experience providing written feedback to one another. While half (50.0%) of students indicated that in traditional learning environments they had no experience giving written feedback to their classmates, this number increased to nearly all (91.7%) of respondents reporting on written peer feedback tasks in blended learning environments.

Table 5. Amount of experience providing written feedback in traditional and blended learning environments

	Student responses (%)	
	Traditional, in-class written peer feedback tasks	Blended learning written peer feedback tasks
1. A lot of experience	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)
2. Some experience	3 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)
3. A little experience	3 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)
4. Very little experience	4 (16.7%)	2 (8.3%)
5. No experience	12 (50.0%)	22 (91.7%)

The final section of the survey used Likert scale items to ask students about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the peer feedback training screencast sessions and their feedback practices conducted over the course of the school term. The results of the Likert scale items are reported below in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6 reveals the students' opinions about the impact that feedback training had on their ability to write peer feedback. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the students' perceptions of their ability to give appropriate and useful feedback in English and Japanese before and after they received feedback training. Regarding their ability to provide feedback in English, there was a highly significant difference in the before training ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) and after training ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) conditions;  $t(23) = 28.80$ ,  $p = 0.00001$ . When asked about their ability to provide feedback in Japanese, a highly significant difference was also observed in the before training ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and after

training ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ) conditions;  $t(23) = 19.01$ ,  $p = 0.00001$ . These results suggest that students strongly believe that feedback training is beneficial to improving their ability to provide appropriate and useful feedback to their classmates.

Table 6. Student perception of their ability to give feedback pre and post peer feedback training

Item	Strongly disagree		%		Strongly agree		Mean (SD)
	1	2	3	4	5		
I can give appropriate and useful feedback to my classmates in English (pre-training)	75.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.25	(0.44)
I can give appropriate and useful feedback to my classmates in English (post-training)	0.0	0.0	4.2	20.8	75.0	4.71	(0.55)
I can give appropriate and useful feedback to my classmates in Japanese (pre-training)	33.3	41.7	20.8	4.2	0.0	1.96	(0.86)
I can give appropriate and useful feedback to my classmates in Japanese (post-training)	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	83.3	4.83	(0.38)

Table 7 shows the students' perceptions of the positive impact that various actions associated with peer feedback had on improving their ability to write in English. It is interesting to note that some of the conventions associated with peer feedback, such as reading authentic, student produced essays and the simple act of sharing essays with classmates, rather than just with a teacher, were viewed by students as contributing positively to improving their essay writing abilities. Overall, 66.7% of students felt that reading their classmates' essays helped them improve their own writing ability ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). With regard to the perceived effect that sharing essays with classmates had on improving their writing skills, three-quarters (75%) of students strongly agreed that there was a positive effect ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ). These results show that aside from actually writing and receiving feedback, students view the acts of sharing and reading their classmates' essays very positively.

Table 7. Student perception of positive impact of peer feedback on writing

Item	Strongly disagree		%	Strongly agree		Mean (SD)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Reading my classmates' essays helped me improve my English writing ability	0.0	0.0	4.2	29.1	66.7	4.63 (0.58)
Sharing my essays with my classmates helped me improve my English writing ability	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	75.0	4.75 (0.44)
Receiving feedback from my peers helped me improve my English writing ability	0.0	0.0	12.5	12.5	75.0	4.63 (0.71)
Writing feedback for my classmates helped me improve my English writing ability	0.0	0.0	8.3	25.0	66.7	4.58 (0.65)

Finally, students were asked an open-ended question to share their thoughts and opinions about the peer feedback practices in the course. The majority of the students answered this question in Japanese. Several of their responses have been translated below.

Student A: "I was worried I could not give my classmates good feedback. At first, I didn't know what to do. The training helped me understand how to focus my comments."

Student B: "I think getting feedback from my teacher is the best way to improve my accuracy. However, reading the comments from my classmates helped me think about the content of my essays. I think I could improve a lot."

Student C: "I could watch the screencasts many times to understand the teacher's explanation. Giving feedback is difficult but this helped a lot."

Student D: "I could understand my classmates' comments and criticism easily. I will ask my friends to check my writing in the future."

Student E: "Reading my classmates' essays helped me think more about my own writing. I could get many ideas from this activity."

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that screencasts are a very effective means of delivering peer feedback training to low level English learners. Initially, the peer feedback that students produced before receiving training was vague, unhelpful, and ineffective. However, the training sessions allowed students to have a better understanding of the nature and purpose of peer feedback as it relates to improving the content of essays in an academic writing course. The screencast training sessions also provided students with a structured model to engage with their classmates' essays in a critically evaluative way. That is to say, as students repeated the process of conducting peer feedback, they developed skills that made their comments more focused, specific, and effective.

process. As the number of feedback comments that provided critical assessments and suggestions for revision increased, the number of comments that were used in the revision process also increased. The content of the compositions improved as the peer feedback comments improved.

Of course, it is also very important to note the students' own perceptions of the feedback process outlined in this study. Not only did students feel that receiving feedback from their classmates had a positive impact on their written essays, they also felt that the act of providing feedback had a positive impact on their own writing. They evaluated the screencast training sessions as having a highly significant impact on their ability to craft effective peer feedback for their classmates. They also indicated that their writing in general benefited from the reflective nature of the peer feedback process.

An area for future research relates to the effects that "meta-feedback" have on the development of students' feedback practices. Because the Moodle workshop module allows teachers to not only view the feedback that students write for each other but to also provide comments and grades on that feedback, students have a secondary source of input to help them craft their responses. An empirical study of the effects of feedback on feedback, or "meta-feedback," may interest some researchers.

It would also prove useful to investigate the decision making process that students used when incorporating their classmates' feedback into their revisions. Exploring the reasons that some feedback was ignored may lead to a more efficient peer feedback process. Moreover, the revisions were not limited to those based on peer feedback. It would be interesting to understand what other factors led students to make certain revisions.

## Conclusion

Although many educators would not consider a low proficiency English L2 context suitable for including elements of peer feedback practices, this study's findings demonstrate that technological solutions, such as the Moodle workshop activity module, can provide educators with an effective platform to incorporate pedagogical approaches to peer feedback. These results challenge the notion that peer feedback can be ineffective for low level learners. This study also shows that by modeling the feedback process using screencasts, building the response skills progressively, and structuring the response task to focus on writing content, low proficiency English L2 learners can produce effective peer feedback. The intuitive design of the Moodle workshop activity module meant that many of the logistical and organizational problems associated with peer feedback such as allocating, distributing, and collecting students' essays and peer feedback responses were not a factor in this course. It proved an effective platform for evaluating the quality of feedback being provided so that the teacher could intervene quickly when problems arose.

## References

- Ali, A.D. (2016). Effectiveness of using screencast feedback on EFL students' writing and perception. *English Language Teaching*, 9(8), 106–121.
- Alvira, R. (2016). The impact of oral and written feedback on EFL writers with the use of screencasts. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 18(2), 79–92.
- Berger, V. (1990). The effects of peer and self-feedback. *CATESOL Journal*, 3, 21–35.

- Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education.
- Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2014). *Flipped learning: Gateway to Student Engagement*. Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education.
- Carson, J. G., & Nelson, G. L. (1994). Writing groups: Cross-cultural issues. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 5*, 1-19.
- Chen, J. C. C. & Brown, K. L. (2011). The effects of authentic audience on English as a second language (ESL) writers: A task-based, computer-mediated approach. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 25*(5), 435-454.
- Conrad, S. M., & Goldstein, L. M. (1999). ESL student revision after teacher-written comments: Texts, contexts, and individuals. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*, 147-180.
- Cook, V. (2001). Using the first language in the classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 57*(3), 402-423.
- Ellis, R. (1991). The interaction hypothesis. In E. Sadtono (Ed.), *Language acquisition and the second/foreign language classroom* (pp. 179-211). Singapore RELC.
- Ferris, D. R., & Hedgcock, J. S. (2005). *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, process, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gielen, S., Peeters, E., Dochy, F., Onghena, P., & Struyven, K. (2010). Improving the effectiveness of peer feedback for learning. *Learning and Instruction, 20*, 304-315.
- Hirvela, A. (1999). Collaborative writing instruction and communities of readers and writers. *TESOL Journal, 8*(2), 7-12.
- Horowitz, D. (1986). Process not product. Less than meets the eye. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(1), 141-144.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring the pill: Praise and criticism in written feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 10*(3), 185-212.
- Keh, C. L. (1990). Feedback in the writing process: A model and methods for implementation. *ELT Journal, 44*(4), 294-304.
- Leki, I. (1990). Potential problems with peer responding in ESL writing classes. *CATESOL Journal, 3*, 5-19.
- Liu, J., & Hansen, J. G. (2002). *Peer response in second language writing classrooms*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Long, M. H., & Porter, P. A. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*, 207-227.
- Mangelsdorf, K. (1989). Parallels between speaking and writing in second language acquisition. In D. M. Johnson & D. H. Roen (Eds.), *Richness in writing: Empowering ESL students* (pp. 134-145). New York: Longman.
- Mittan, R. (1989). The peer review process: Harnessing students' communicative power. In D. M. Johnson & D. H. Roen (Eds.), *Richness in writing: Empowering ESL students*. (pp. 207-219). New York: Longman.
- Morris, C. & Chikwa, G. (2014). Screencasts: How effective are they and how do students engage with them? *Active Learning in Higher Education, 15*, 25-37.
- Myers, T. S. (2010). *Comparing comments in the L1 and the L2 during the peer review process* (master's thesis, University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio). Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9997/7bf41bb4184b4c5bab65c8740cc85b5c34a1.pdf>

- Scott, V. M., & De La Fuente, M. J. (2008). What's the problem? L2 learners' use of the L1 during consciousness raising, form-focused task. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 100–113.
- Sluijsmans, D., Brand-Gruwel, S., & van Merriënboer, J. J. G. (2002). Peer assessment training in teacher education: Effects on performance and perceptions. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27, 443–454.
- Topping, K. (1998) Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities. *Review of Educational Research*, 68(3), 249–276.
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46, 327–369.
- Truscott, J. (1999). "The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes": A response to Ferris. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8, 111–122.
- Tseng, S. C., & Tsai, C. C. (2007). On-line peer assessment and the role of the peer feedback: A study of high school computer course. *Computers and Education*, 49(4), 1161–1174.
- Wang, W. & Wen, Q. (2002). L1 use in the L2 composing process: An exploratory study of 16 Chinese EFL writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 11(3), 225–246.
- Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, 79–102.