Written Corrective Feedback: Student Preferences and Teacher Feedback Practices

Bradley Irwin
Nihon University College of International Relations, Japan

Abstract

This case study explores the intricate interaction between students' preferences for written corrective feedback and actual teacher feedback practices in a second year academic EFL writing class in a Japanese university. Specific institutional and instructional details establish the context in which written feedback is being provided. A quantitative data analysis approach was incorporated using questionnaires and by thoroughly examining samples of teacher feedback. Data was collected from students using a survey and protocol questionnaire at the end of the course. Teacher written feedback practices were examined by collecting and analyzing students' graded essays and also by interviewing the teacher at the end of the school term. The results showed that while many of the students' feedback preferences were addressed by the teacher, there were some points of divergence. The results also show that while the teacher attempted to offer various types of feedback, it remained largely teacher centered, resulting in students having a somewhat passive role in the feedback process. This study concludes that while there is a need for teachers to take their students' feedback preferences into account, diversity and a range of feedback strategies are more important considerations.

Keywords: Teacher feedback; student preferences; L2 writing

Introduction

In the last twenty-five years, approaches and methods to teaching English composition to ESL writers have continually evolved. However, throughout all of these years of changes, one aspect of composition instruction has remained consistent: the inclusion of teacher feedback. In fact, for many ESL composition instructors, teacher feedback is considered the largest investment of time and energy, eclipsing even the amount of time spent preparing and conducting lessons (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005)

Written corrective feedback in product oriented ESL composition classes, such as those where the teacher only reads a final draft of paper or essay, tend to reflect a summative assessment approach and is often used as a way to justify a grade. This type of feedback has been described as an ineffective and futile exercise (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981). Connors & Lunsford (1993) and Straub (1996) also argue that a summative assessment approach in product oriented ESL composition classes can lead teachers to become careless and insensitive with their comments. This type of feedback also tends to result in short, overly directive comments that run the risk of undermining students' writing styles (Connors & Lunsford, 1993). Moreover, Truscott (1996) has argued that not only is corrective feedback of this nature (done once, on a final draft) ineffective and that it does nothing to reduce the amount or frequency of errors in subsequent student writing, it can also negatively impact students' ability to write for communicative purposes. So strongly does he feel about the ineffectiveness of this practice, he argues that corrective feedback should be abandoned all together (Truscott, 1996; 2007).

Because of the vast amount of time and energy spent on the feedback process, pinpointing the most effective methods is essential for all instructors. Teachers should not have to worry that all of their effort has gone to waste, or worse, that their feedback strategies have been counter-productive. Indeed, there are cases where even carefully considered feedback has resulted in revisions that have made students' work weaker (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Thankfully, there is a wealth of research that has consistently shown that students not only see teacher feedback as critical to improving their composition skills but that they value it above other forms of feedback such as self or peer evaluation (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Lee, 2008; Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, written corrective feedback is broadly defined as direct or indirect error correction, words of encouragement or praise, comments, advice, and suggestions that instruct students to make changes to their written compositions.

Perspectives on Teacher Feedback

Ferris (1997) found that over three-quarters of the error corrections and advice about structure and content proposed by teachers were incorporated into subsequent drafts. This points to the fact that students take teacher feedback and comments very seriously. Ferris & Hedgcock (2005) even go so far as to lament that the high levels of incorporation of teacher comments and the diligence with which these comments will not be ignored, places a burden on instructors to make sure that, "feedback is helpful, or at least does no harm!" (p. 188).

While the study conducted by Ferris (1997) indeed makes the case that teacher commentary is valued and taken seriously by some students, other researchers have remarked that some

students may not even read the advice and feedback provided by the teacher unless explicitly instructed to do so (O'Flaherty, 2016). These wide ranges of uptake strategies by students' point to the need for instructors to carefully consider the kinds of feedback that are being provided and whether or not it is necessary to explicitly instruct students to take time to read the comments. There is nothing more disheartening for a teacher who has spent hours carefully crafting feedback than to pass back an assignment and watch as his or her students casually tuck their papers away into a file without taking more than a moment to casually glance at the red marks on the page.

What is it that makes feedback in one case so successful while in another case an exercise in futility? Until recently, much of the research into students' perceptions of feedback, as well as the effects of teacher feedback, has been presented in a decontextualized manner. So, while we know that students tend to see teacher feedback as useful and a means to help improve their writing (Ferris, 1997; Hyland, 1998), we know almost as much about the type of feedback being provided by teachers as we do the contexts in which they are being presented. That is to say, we know very little about either.

As Ferris (1997) and O'Flaherty (2016) illustrate, a wide range of factors can contribute to the success or failure of teacher feedback. Classroom contexts such as class size and grade level; instructional contexts such as product or process oriented writing classes; even the kind of writing itself, whether it be journals, essays or tests, have to be considered when trying to determine the efficacy of teacher feedback (Hedcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991; Lee, 2005). Other research has pointed to the type of feedback being provided as having an important role in shaping student perception. Local or global feedback (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, Zamel, 1985), peer or self-evaluation (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), and direct or indirect error feedback (Saito, 1994) have all been shown to contribute significantly to students' perceptions of teacher feedback practices. Perhaps the most difficult factors to consider when evaluating the success of feedback are individual learner traits such as linguistic and educational backgrounds, cultural differences, proficiency with the target language and even motivations for taking a class (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Lee, 2008). Oladejo (1993) even points to the amount of exposure to the target language (unrelated to L2 proficiency) as effecting students' attitudes and utilization of teacher commentary. As Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) state, "We cannot simply look at teachers' written comments or transcripts of their oral feedback as well as students' revisions and conclude that we know everything we need to know about a particular teacher, student, or class" (p. 189).

Because much of the previous research into written corrective feedback has been done in a decontextualized manner, a case study approach was preferred over collecting larger pools of data. In this way, it was possible to provide a much deeper understanding and level of detail to connect the learning context with attitudes towards written corrective feedback. This richer description can also help form best practices when expending the time, effort and resources it takes to adequately provide feedback in composition classes. The present study will address the following research questions:

What expectations do students hold regarding teacher feedback practices?

To what extent do teachers' feedback practices address their students' expectations and desires?

Method of Study

Participants

The participants in the study were thirty-eight second year students enrolled in an international relations program at a Japanese university. Classes at the university were streamed using the Assessment of Communicative English (ACE) Placement Test. The ACE placement test was designed by the Association for English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) and was administered in December at the university while the students were in their first year of study. This means the students were placed in the class approximately four months prior to the beginning of the school term in April. The average score of the ACE Placement Test corresponded roughly with an A2 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale.

Of the thirty-eight students, eighteen were female and twenty were male. Thirty-seven of the students spoke Japanese as a first language while one female student, who was from China, spoke Chinese as her first language. Twenty of the students had studied (or were studying) a foreign language aside from English (Spanish, German and French). Although several students were planning on studying abroad during the summer break, none of them had any experience of studying or staying in an English speaking country for an extended period of time (longer than a week).

All of the students in the international relations program took required first year English classes during the spring and fall terms of their first year at university. The first year courses were ninety-minute lessons held twice a week for fifteen weeks in the spring term and fifteen weeks in the fall term. Aside from the student from China, all other students had studied English in junior and senior high school for six years in a form focused (grammar intensive) environment. The secondary school education of the student from China was unknown.

The teacher who participated in the study had over fifteen years of experience teaching English composition in an EFL (English as a foreign language) setting and had been working at that particular university and teaching the English academic writing class for over four years.

Classroom Context

The course the students were enrolled in was an elective course that met weekly for two ninety-minute sessions during a fifteen-week term in the spring (April - July). The course was designed as a basic academic writing course to help students develop skills to write short essays. This course was the first time that students would have had the opportunity to take an academic writing course at university. While the course was not designed to teach novel (or new) grammar points, grammar instruction was included so that students could have an opportunity to produce meaningful English while consolidating their prior knowledge of major syntactic rules.

The instructor adopted a process-oriented approach to English composition that incorporated elements of communicative language teaching. There were four major writing assignments throughout the course. Of the four assignments, three followed a draft-revision cycle where the teacher provided feedback at various stages of the student writing. The remaining assignment (the first assignment of the course) was a timed writing assignment where the

teacher only provided feedback on the terminal (and only) draft. In this case, the teacher used the feedback as a means to justify a grade. The instructor also conducted one feedback conference with each of the students at the end of the second writing assignment (the first multiple draft essay the students wrote).

Data Collection

A quantitative approach was used to analyze data collected in the form of a survey conducted at the end of the school term. Because of similar instructional contexts, a form or Lee's (2008) survey was adopted for this study. The survey was comprised of twelve questions, eight of which consisted of a five point Likert scale. The remaining four questions asked students to select an answer which most closely matched their opinions about a range of topics. A protocol questionnaire was also administered by the teacher during individual writing conferences to gain an understanding of the students' general opinions about the course, their teacher's feedback, and their perceptions of their own English ability. The survey and protocol questionnaire appear in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.

Regarding the teacher's feedback practices, twenty random samples of the teacher's feedback (five from each of the four assignments) were collected for analysis. With the exception of the first assignment, the last three assignments required students to write a rough draft (first draft) and a final draft. In the case of these three final assignments both the first and final drafts were analyzed together since feedback was provided by the teacher on each copy. This was done to examine the focus of the feedback students were receiving in terms of structure and organization, content or language. In the case of the final three assignments, the teacher provided the majority of the corrective feedback on the rough draft. The type of feedback provided on the final copy consisted mainly of written commentary about the student's strengths and weaknesses. Since the teacher had remarked that feedback was a chance to give students the individual attention they deserved, the focus of the written commentary was also examined.

Results

Teacher Feedback Practices

Of the twenty essays collected for analysis each averaged approximately 150 words in length. There were a total of 525 feedback points which averaged 26 distinct feedback marks per essay, or approximately one feedback point for every 5.7 words. Table 1 shows the type of feedback that the teacher provided across all of the assignments.

Table 1: Feedback Categorization.

Feedback type	Feedback Points	Feedback Percentage
Lexical Feedback: misspelling and incorrect word choice	89	16.9%
Grammatical Feedback: verb tense, pronoun, article, and preposition errors	158	30.1%
Structural Feedback: punctuation errors, sentence fragments, comma splices (etc.)	105	20%

Feedback type	Feedback Points	Feedback Percentage
Content Feedback: feedback relating to details and ideas	105	20%
General Comments: words of praise or encouragement	68	13%
Total	525	100%

Lexical feedback was defined as feedback that specifically addressed lexical errors such as misspellings and incorrect word choice. A total of 16.9% (89) feedback points were classified as lexical feedback. Grammatical feedback was defined as feedback that addressed usage errors such as verb tense, pronoun, article, or preposition errors. 30.1% of the feedback the teacher provided addressed these types of mistakes. Structural feedback was defined as feedback that addressed structural problems such as punctuation mistakes, sentence fragments, run-on sentences and comma splices. This type of feedback accounted for 20% of the total feedback provided. Content feedback was defined as feedback that directed students to develop further or add more details to certain statements or ideas. This type of feedback was generally seen as statements from the instructor like, "Can you tell me more?", or, "More details, please". Content feedback represented 20% of the feedback provided. Finally, general comments mainly consisted of comments such as, "Nice idea", or "Interesting point". These type of comments accounted for 13% of all the feedback provided by the teacher.

After consulting with the teacher about the type of feedback strategies used it became apparent that two distinct feedback strategies were being employed. Because the first assignment was an in-class writing assignment, the teacher had only a terminal draft to provide feedback on. The remaining three assignments followed the typical draft-revision cycle of a process-oriented approach to English composition. Table 2 shows that content feedback became much more pronounced in the final three assignments. The teacher was more concerned with developing thoughts and ideas when the students were writing multiple drafts.

Table 2: Differences in feedback type between single draft and multiple draft assignments.

Feedback Type	Assignment 1 Feedback Points (%)	Remaining 3 Feedback Points (%)	Total Feedback Points (%)
Lexical Feedback: misspelling and incorrect word choice	45(30%)	44(11.7%)	89(16.9%)
Grammatical Feedback: verb tense, pronoun, article, and preposition errors	53(35.3)%	105(28%)	158(30.1%)
Structural Feedback: punctuation errors, sentence fragments, comma splices (etc.)	38(25.3)%	67(17.9%)	105(20%)

Feedback Type	Assignment 1 Feedback Points (%)	Remaining 3 Feedback Points (%)	Total Feedback Points (%)
Content Feedback: feedback relating to details and ideas	7(4.7%)	98(26.1%)	105(20%)
General Comments: words of praise or encouragement	7(4.7%)	61(16.3%)	68(13%)
Total	150(100%)	375(100%)	525(100%)

The feedback strategies between the two types of assignments not only shifted focus from accuracy to content but also changed in the way they were presented to students. For assignment 1, the teacher used a direct method of providing feedback. The teacher provided the corrections for the students. For the three remaining draft-revision assignments, the teacher used a combination of direct and indirect (or coded) feedback that pointed out the errors but allowed for the students to make the corrections. Table 3 analyzes the direct and indirect feedback strategies concerning the lexical, grammatical and structural feedback of the final three assignments. Assignment one was not included because all errors were corrected by the teacher. A total of approximately 216 feedback points were analyzed (Lexical = 44, Grammatical = 105, Structural = 67).

Table 3: Feedback strategy for assignments 2, 3 and 4.

Feedback Strategy	Lexical Errors (44 feedback points)	Grammatical Errors (105 feedback points)	Structural Errors (67 feedback points)	Total Feedback Points for Each Category
Correction Provided (direct feedback)	0%	28%	71%	77(35.7%)
Underlined / Circled Error (indirect feedback)	87%	10%	3%	51(23.6%)
Categorized Errors (coded / indirect feedback)	13%	62%	26%	88(40.7%)
Total Direct Feedback	0%	28%	71%	77(35.7%)
Total Indirect Feedback	100%	72%	29%	139(64.3%)
Total Feedback	44(100%)	105(100%)	67(100%)	216(100%)

The teacher did not provide any direct corrections for lexical errors. For all words that were misspelled the teacher simply underlined the words with the expectation that the students would provide the corrections. For incorrect word choices, the mistake was underlined and the code WW (wrong word) was written beneath. In the case of grammatical errors, the teacher provided corrections for the students slightly over a quarter of the time. It was noted that the teacher thought some of the mistakes students were making were beyond their grammatical ability and it was easier to simply provide the correction than attempt lengthy grammar explanations. Codes such as VT (verb tense), SV (subject - verb agreement) and A (article) were commonly used to draw the students' attention to specific mistakes. Finally, structural error feedback represented the category with the most direct feedback provided by the teacher. The teacher felt that structural feedback was the most difficult type of feedback for the students to understand. However, for punctuation mistakes or run-on sentences, concepts that the teacher was fairly certain the students understood codes such as P (punctuation) or RO (run-on) were used.

Another point of analysis examined the amount of corrective feedback provided relative to the total number of mistakes in each essay. The teacher had stated that, from the stand point of student motivation (or demotivation), it was not always desirable to correct every single mistake a student made. Therefore, each essay was reexamined to determine how many mistakes were not addressed in the feedback the teacher provided. After reexamining each essay, an additional 205 potential feedback points (errors that were not addressed by the teacher) were noted. Similar to earlier findings, there was a marked difference between the teacher's approaches to providing feedback for the single draft assignment (assignment 1) compared to the multiple draft assignments (assignments 2–4). For the single draft assignment, far fewer potential feedback points were noted. Therefore, the teacher corrected a higher percentage of the students' mistakes for the single draft assignment reflecting the summative nature of the feedback on this single draft essay assignment. Each feedback point was then categorized to provide an idea of the types of errors the teacher was not addressing. Table 4 represents the differences between assignment one and the remaining assignments as well as the percentage of each type of mistake that was not addressed. Content feedback and general comments were not included in the table because it could not be determined if or where the teacher might have provided this type of feedback.

Table 4: Categorization of unmarked errors.

Unmarked Errors (errors the teacher did not address)	Assignment 1 (single draft)	Remaining 3 Assignments (multiple drafts)	Total Unaddressed Feedback Points
Lexical Errors	2(9.1%)	18(9.8%)	20(9.7%)
Grammatical Errors	8(36.4%)	44(24.1%)	52(25.4%)
Structural Errors	12(54.5%)	121(66.1%)	133(64.9%)
Total Errors	22	183	205(100%)

When asked how the determination was made regarding which errors in the students' writing were not addressed, the teacher gave varying responses. Since lexical errors (misspelled or incorrect word usage) were the most obvious type of mistake the teacher tried to provide feedback as often as possible. Grammar mistakes that did not greatly impact the students'

meaning (or, "make the sentence sound funny" in the words of the teacher) tended to be left unaddressed. Finally, with regard to structural errors, the teacher did not always feel confident of some of the rules concerning punctuation (commas, semi colons, colons, etc.) so these mistakes were either ignored intentionally or missed altogether because of a clear understanding of the grammar rules.

Since the teacher had provided 525 points of feedback out of a potential 730 mistakes in the student essays, the teacher had addressed approximated 72% of the mistakes the students had made. In the single draft essay, the teacher corrected 86% of the mistakes students made while for the multiple draft essays, the teacher only corrected 67% of the total number of mistakes the students made.

Finally, on each of the final drafts of the process oriented assignments (assignments 2–4) the teacher provided a scoring rubric and written commentary to each student. The commentary tended to be approximately one paragraph in length (about five sentences with a total average of approximately fifty words). The written commentary for each student followed a similar pattern. The student was addressed by name, one or two sentences praised the students' strengths, one or two sentences pointed to specific weaknesses in the writing and one or two sentences suggested points that the student should be careful of in future essays. The commentary was always hand written and signed by the teacher similar to how someone might write a short personal letter.

Students' Perceptions on Feedback

A general survey in the form a questionnaire using a five point Likert scale was conducted to determine the students' experiences and preferences regarding written corrective feedback in their English classes at university. For each question, students were instructed to check a box that most closely matched their experience or preference. Table 5 represents the students' experiences and preferences.

Table 5: Students experiences and preferences for written corrective feedback.

	Always (100%)	(75%)	Sometimes (50%)	(25%)	Never (0%)
1. How often have your previous English teachers provided feedback on your compositions or essays?	42.1%	18.4%	26.3%	13.2%	0%
2. To what degree do you want your teacher to provide written feedback on your assignments?	47.4%	36.8%	13.2%	2.6%	0%
3. To what degree do you read the written feedback your teacher provides?	44.7%	23.7%	23.7%	7.9%	0%
4. Is your teacher's feedback legible?	63.2%	23.7%	13.2%	0%	0%
5. When your teacher provides feedback in English, to what degree	29%	44.7%	26.3%	0%	0%

	Always (100%)	(75%)	Sometimes (50%)	(25%)	Never (0%)
do you understand it?					
6. To what degree do you prefer feedback in English?	28.9%	42.1%	21.1%	7.9%	0%
7. To what degree do you want your teacher to correct every mistake you have made?	52.6%	23.7%	23.7%	0%	0%
8. Does your teacher's feedback help to improve your writing?	73.7%	23.7%	2.6%	0%	0%

Questions one and two dealt with the frequency of feedback provided by teachers and the frequency that the students wanted to receive feedback. Students reported that their English teach often (18.4%) or always (42.1%) provided feedback on their written assignments. However, 84.2% of students answered that they often (36.8%) or always (47.4%) wanted feedback from their teacher.

When asked about the frequency with which they read their teacher's feedback, only 44.7% of the students responded that they always read the feedback provided. While this percentage largely matches the number of students who responded that they always want their teacher to provide feedback (47.4%), it still represents a large number of students who are not taking full advantage of the feedback their teachers' are providing.

One issue that has arisen in other studies (Ferris, 1995) but seems to be absent with these students is the legibility of their teacher's feedback since 85.9% of respondents reported that their teacher's writing was often (23.7%) or always (63.2%) legible.

An important question to consider was how well the students understood the written feedback when it is provided in the target language. In this survey, 29% of students answered that they always understood the feedback, 44.7% answered that they often understood the feedback and 26.3% answer that they sometimes understand the feedback. No students answered that they rarely or never understood the feedback when it is written in English.

These percentages correspond closely with the next question which dealt with the student's preference for the feedback language: 28.9% always wanted the feedback in English, 42.1% often preferred English, and 21.1% sometimes preferred English. However, 7.9% of students indicated that they preferred the feedback in English on rare occasions.

More than half of the students surveyed (52.6%) indicated that they wanted their English teacher to point out all of the mistakes they made while nearly a quarter (23.7%) felt their teacher should often point out all of their mistakes. This means that over three quarters of the students surveyed felt strongly that their teacher should provide ample and robust feedback on all of the mistakes in their written compositions. While the teacher had previously indicated that there was a potential for demotivating students by attending to all of the mistakes they had made in an assignment, these results clearly indicate that the students in this class did not share the same belief as their teacher.

Finally, when asked if they thought their teacher's feedback helped them improve their writing, the majority (73.7%) answered that it always helped. A further 23.7% of the students felt that the feedback they received often helped them improve their writing. This means that nearly all students (97.4%) found a positive connection between the feedback their teacher was providing and the improvement of their writing skills.

After exploring the students' experiences and preferences regarding the feedback they receive from their teachers in general, a separate survey was conducted to see how closely their teacher's feedback matched the students' expectations in this specific course. In order to evaluate how closely the teacher's feedback matched the students' expectations the students responded to seven questions by choosing an answer that most closely matched their opinion. The following tables (6–9) show the questions asked and the distribution of the students' answers. These questions were adopted from Lee (2008).

Table 6: What kind of feedback style would you prefer your teacher write? (In a statement)

Feedback Style Preferences	
Written comments (in English), error corrections and grades (scores)	63.2%
Written comments (in English) and error corrections	5.3%
Written comments (in English) and grades (scores)	21%
Error corrections and grades (scores)	2.6%
Only written comments (in English)	0%
Only error corrections	7.9%
Only grades (scores)	0%
None of the above	0%
Total	100%

The results from these questions show that students prefer their teacher to use a range of feedback methods. Although 7.9% of the students had a preference for only one form of feedback (error corrections), the remaining 92.1% had a desire for at least two forms of feedback. Of the 92.1%, the vast majority of students (89.5%) wanted the teacher to include written comments in English when feedback was provided. These results indicate that the teacher's feedback practices closely matched the needs and preferences of the students in this class.

Table 7: In the future, which feedback method do you want your teacher to do more of? (In a statement)

Future Feedback Method Preferences	
Provide error corrections	68.4%
Give more scores and grades	0%

Future Feedback Method Preferences	
Write comments in English	2.6%
Current feedback methods are adequate	23.7%
Other (Please specify)	5.3%
Total	100%

When asked what they wanted to see more of in future compositions, students clearly had a desire to see more error correction. The students may have felt that too many of their mistakes were going uncorrected by the teacher. This high rate of response calls into question the teacher's decision to let 33% of the mistakes the students made go unattended.

The students who chose "other" wrote that they wanted the teacher to more clearly indicate what makes a good essay and to better explain the coding used when indicating the type of mistakes that the students had made.

Table 8: What are the most important types of errors you want your teacher to focus on? (In a statement)

Error Type Focus Preferences	
Sentence structure and style (structural mistakes)	2.6%
Vocabulary and expressions (lexical mistakes)	47.4%
Grammar and sentence pattern (grammatical mistakes)	36.8%
Content and ideas	13.2%
Other (Please specify)	0%
Total	100%

When asked about the type of error correction feedback that students wanted their teacher to focus on, 47.4% answered that lexical mistakes were the most important followed by 36.8% who felt grammatical corrections were most important. Very few students (13.2%) felt their teacher should focus on content and ideas and even fewer (2.6%) felt that structural mistakes were most important.

As shown in Table 4, lexical mistakes received the most focus from the teacher with 90.3% of all of the student errors corrected. Conversely, structural mistakes were only corrected 35.1% of the time indicating this category received less focus than each of the other categories. It can therefore be said that the focus of the teacher's feedback matches the desired focus of the students.

Finally, the students were asked how they would like their teacher to respond to the types of errors they were making; whether they preferred direct or indirect feedback. Table 9 shows how the students responded.

Table 9: Direct vs. Indirect Feedback.

How would you like your teacher to respond to the mistakes you make?		
Direct Feedback (47.4%)	Strike out the mistake and correct my errors for me (He ~~flied~~ to Japan) flew	47.4%
Indirect Feedback (15.8%)	Underline my mistake and I correct the mistake (He <u>flied</u> to Japan)	10.5%
	Use a symbol to indicate a mistake in the sentence that I must find and correct (He flied to Japan.*)	5.3%
Categorized Indirect Feedback (36.8%)	Underline my mistake, use code to identify the type of mistake and I correct it (<u>He flied to Japan</u> [V])	36.8%
Total		100%

These tables show that students were basically split on the type of feedback they preferred to receive from their teachers. With slightly more students preferring indirect feedback from the teacher (52.6%) it is difficult to draw a link between the types of feedback the students' desired compared to the type of feedback the teacher provided. As Table 3 showed, 35.6% of the teacher feedback was direct while the remaining 64.4% of the feedback was indirect.

Students' Reactions to Feedback Conferences

The teacher in this study indicated that in order to ascertain the level to which students were understanding the written feedback that was being provided, individual feedback conferences were conducted. These conferences were held after the second assignment was returned and students had been given a chance to read what the teacher had written on their papers. These conferences were held in the back of the classroom (a large lecture style room) and generally lasted anywhere from one to five minutes. During the conferences the teacher explained to the student some of the errors they had made. The teacher generally focused on mistakes that were a recurring problem in the text (mistakes that had been made more than once). The students were also given time to ask the teacher any questions they had about their assignments and the feedback that the teacher had written. On the day of the feedback conferences three students were absent so data was collected from the remaining 35 students. The conferences were conducted entirely in English.

Table 10: Questions from the writing conference and a brief breakdown of the responses.

Writing Conference Questions			
1. How do you feel about writing in English?	Very Confident 5.7%	Confident 22.9%	Not Confident 71.4%
2. How much effort did you make on this assignment?	Significant Effort 8.6%	Appropriate Effort 34.3%	Inadequate Effort 57.1%

Writing Conference Questions			
3. How well do you understand the feedback on the assignment?	Mostly Understand 20%	Somewhat Understand 37.1%	Inadequately Understand 42.9%
4. How well do you understand the teacher's comments on the assignment?	Mostly Understand 17.1%	Somewhat Understand 42.9%	Inadequately Understand 40%
5. Can you correct your mistakes using the feedback from your teacher?	Yes 40%	Maybe 57.1%	No 2.9%

When the teacher asked students about their confidence level with regards to English composition, the vast majority (71.4%) indicated that they did not feel confident about their writing skills. While the teacher expressed some surprise at the high number of students who did not feel confident, research has shown that Japanese students tend to assess their own writing skills at a level much lower than their teachers' assessments (Matsuno, 2009; Heine, Kitayama & Lehman, 2016). Similarly, the majority of students (57.1%) did not feel they had made enough effort on the assignment.

Student responses to questions three and four about the degree to which they could understand the teacher's feedback and comments were quite similar. Fifteen students (42.9%) answered that they understood only 50% or less of the feedback the teacher provided while fourteen students (40%) indicated that they understood 50% or less of the teacher's comments. While these numbers seem high, it is important to note that the second assignment was the first time for students to receive coded feedback from their teacher since all of the feedback on assignment one (the in-class writing assignment) was direct and not coded. In fact, by the end of the course 100% of students responded that they understood the feedback at least 50% of the time, as indicated in Table 5.

Finally, only one student answered that they could not correct their mistakes by using the feedback provided by the teacher, possibly owing to a lack of understanding regarding the code the teacher used.

Discussion

The small sample size of data used for this research means that generalizations about the impact and effectiveness of written corrective feedback across a variety of ESL or EFL contexts are difficult to make. That being said, the smaller scale case study approach better situates the students' and teacher's attitudes and practices in relation to written corrective feedback. As Yin (2009) states, case studies are "an empirical enquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 14).

The results of this study at times paint a somewhat conflicting picture. For example, during the writing conferences, only one-fifth of students indicated that they mostly understood the feedback provided by the teacher while on the survey at the end of the course, nearly three-quarters answered that they usually or always understood it.

There are several possible explanations for such a range in results. First, it is possible that by the end of the course the students' language proficiency had drastically risen. However, given the short time frame between the writing conferences and the end of the term, this explanation seems unlikely. Conversely, the teacher may have adjusted the level of language used in the feedback to better match the students' level of understanding.

A final explanation for these conflicting results also remains possible. The students may not have understood the feedback on their first assignment because they may have simply lacked an understanding of the process oriented approach to academic writing that the teacher had incorporated into the curriculum. Since this was the first time that these students had been offered an academic writing course at university, their previous L2 essay writing experiences would have occurred in high school, most likely in preparation for their university entrance exams. The nature of this type of entrance exam preparation in Japan is notoriously product driven. Therefore, the students may have misunderstood the purpose of the draft-revision cycle that the teacher was trying to initiate which would have led to difficulty in understanding the purpose of corrective feedback.

In fact, several other results of this study point to the students' possible desire for a more product oriented approach. For example, not only did half of the students in this class want the teacher to attend to all of their mistakes, they also had a preference for having the teacher directly correct the mistakes for them. Furthermore, rather than have the teacher try to help the students improve the content of their assignments, the majority of students wanted the corrective feedback to focus on lexical and grammatical mistakes.

Without having a thorough understanding of the benefits of the process approach to writing, the entire endeavor may have seemed quite tedious to the students. This all points to the need for the teacher to better explain or justify to the students the pedagogic choice for making the writing course process oriented rather than product oriented.

The Role of Indirect Feedback

The issue of the type of feedback a teacher should provide is very complex and requires careful consideration. The type of assignment, what constitutes an error, which errors should be addressed, student proficiency, and classroom goals are among several factors that must be taken into account. Chief among these considerations is whether or not to provide direct or indirect feedback in error correction (Ferris & Hedgcock 2005).

Although several researchers describe studies in which students realize the inherent value that indirect feedback has on their learning (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Komura, 1999), the students' opinions in the survey described previously were split between a preference for direct and indirect feedback. While students may have various reasons for preferring one type of feedback over another, "indirect feedback clearly has the most potential for helping students to continue developing their L2 proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 269). Furthermore, teachers can avoid appropriating their students' texts by opting to use indirect over direct feedback.

Individual Feedback Conferences

While feedback conferences in writing classes are sometimes viewed as a means for teachers to save time and energy that might be used marking papers (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), the

teacher in this study used them in addition to providing written feedback on the students' assignments. Instead of replacing written feedback, these conferences were used as a means to interact with the students individually and to help clarify any potential problems they may have had with the indirect feedback the teacher was providing. This notion closely followed Conrad and Goldstein's (1999) idea that writing feedback conferences can provide immediate clarification of difficult issues. Reid (1995) also points out that since some students are auditory learners these face-to-face conferences more closely match their learning styles.

Moreover, while it is often remarked that Japanese students tend to be reticent to speak out or ask questions in language classes (Lucas, 1984; Brown, Robson & Kosenkjar, 2001; Yashima, 2002), these individual conferences allowed students who were otherwise inhibited to interact freely with the teacher.

Although it may not always be possible for teachers to conduct individual writing feedback conferences because of time issues, class size or room space, these types of conferences allow students the opportunity to not only interact directly with the teacher but also allow for any problems to be addressed immediately. Even though, it is tempting to see these conferences as a replacement for more traditional types of time consuming written feedback, Arndt (1993) showed that students preferred individual feedback conferences in addition to written feedback, rather than in lieu of written feedback.

Diversity of Feedback Styles and Promoting Active Student Roles

While the teacher in this study included both written feedback and feedback conferences, students were passive recipients, rather than active participants, in the feedback process. A more comprehensive approach that included peer feedback practices may have prompted students to take a more active role in addressing problems in their compositions.

As peer feedback promotes collaborative learning and can be done at any stage of the writing process, it offers numerous practical benefits for language learners. Not only can students receive feedback from someone other than their teacher, they can transition from passive recipients to active participants in improving their writing skills (Hirvela, 1999). Furthermore, this type of collaboration can serve as a team building exercise to strengthen ties between students within the classroom (Liu & Hansen, 2002).

By modeling the feedback process, structuring the tasks and progressively building feedback skills throughout a course, peer feedback not only has the potential to motivate students to take a more active role in their learning, it also has the potential to reduce a teacher's corrective feedback workload (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004, Kamimura, 2006). In this study, 28% of the student errors in the texts were left unattended. Leaving more than a quarter of the students' mistakes unattended may have the undesirable effect of reinforcing bad writing habits. Had peer feedback strategies been incorporated at an earlier stage in the writing process, the students may have been able to correct some of the easier lexical and grammatical mistakes before the teacher received the essays. This would have allowed the teacher to have more time to focus on providing feedback on errors that would otherwise have been left unattended due to time constraints.

Even though researchers such as Leki (1990) and Carson and Nelson (1994) have pointed to validity and cultural issues concerning peer feedback, Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) describe students' reactions to peer feedback as having "uniformly positive results" (p. 232).

This is not to say that peer feedback should replace other types of teacher-centered feedback. In fact, Ferris (2003) and Zhang (1999) explicitly warn about the exclusive use of peer feedback. Rather, by incorporating a pedagogical approach that combines peer and teacher feedback, the diversity of these styles will enrich students' learning experiences.

Conclusion

Unlike many other studies into written corrective feedback, the scope and focus of this case study was not to determine whether teacher feedback had a significant effect on the reduction of student composition errors. Rather, this study contextually situated the interaction between one teacher's feedback practices and a group of students' preferences and expectations.

To address the first research question of this study regarding students' feedback expectations, it is evident that students prefer that their teachers provide direct lexical and grammatical error corrections and to attend to all of their mistakes. Indirect feedback that simply pointed out that a mistake had been made did not seem particularly beneficial to this group. This preference resulted in a divergence between the students' expectations and teacher practice which relates to the second research question. In some situations, such as the case when students requested that all composition errors be directly corrected by the teacher, it can be argued that the teacher's pedagogical beliefs rightly superseded students' desires.

While teachers may feel that their students' desires and expectations place a heavy burden on them, they should be heartened by one finding of this study. The vast majority of students felt that the feedback they received from their teacher helped them improve their writing skills.

One avenue of future study into written corrective feedback could be comparing the roles that direct and indirect feedback have on student perceptions in both product and process oriented writing classes.

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Corresponding author: Bradley Irwin
Email: irwin.bradley@nihon-u.ac.jp

Appendix A: Student Survey (adapted from Lee, 2008)

How often have your previous English teachers provided feedback on your compositions or essays?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

To what degree do you want your teacher to provide written feedback on your assignments?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

To what degree do you read the written feedback your teacher provides?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

Is your teacher's feedback legible?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

When your teacher provides feedback in English, to what degree do you understand it?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

To what degree do you prefer feedback in English?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

To what degree do you want your teacher to correct every mistake you have made?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

Does your teacher's feedback help to improve your writing?

5	4	3	2	1
Always		Sometimes		Never

In the future, what kind of feedback would you prefer your teacher write?

Written comments (in English), error corrections and grades (scores)	
Written comments (in English) and error corrections	
Written comments (in English) and grades (scores)	
Error corrections and grades (scores)	
Only written comments (in English)	
Only error corrections	
Only grades (scores)	
None of the above	

In the future, which feedback method do you want your teacher to do more of?

Provide error corrections	
Give more scores and grades	
Write comments in English	
Current feedback methods are adequate	
Other (Please specify)	

What are the most important types of errors you want your teacher to focus on?

Sentence structure and style (structural mistakes)	
Vocabulary and expressions (lexical mistakes)	
Grammar and sentence pattern (grammatical mistakes)	
Content and ideas	
Other (Please specify)	

In the future, how would you like your teacher to respond to your errors?

Strike out the mistake and correct my errors for me (He ~~flied~~ to Japan) flew	
Underline my mistake and I correct the mistake (He <u>flied</u> to Japan)	
Underline my mistake, use code to identify the type of mistake and I correct it (<u>He flied to Japan</u> [V])	
Use a symbol to indicate a mistake in the sentence that I must find and correct (He flied to Japan.*)	
None of the above methods	
Other (Please specify) _____	

Appendix B: Writing Conference Questionnaire

1. How do you feel about writing in English?
2. How much effort did you make on this assignment?
3. How well do you understand the feedback on the assignment?
4. How well do you understand the teacher's comments on the assignment?
5. Can you correct your mistakes using the feedback from your teacher?