

15 - Fostering Students' Feedback Literacy Through Collaborative Feedback Training

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Abstract

The implementation of Japan's new Course of Study (MEXT, 2017) places significant emphasis on integrating writing instruction throughout education, including English language learning. This initiative underscores the value of peer feedback, aligning with research advocating collaborative learning and effective writing pedagogy (Hyland, 2022). In order to provide more effective peer feedback, Sutton (2012) conceptualized Feedback Literacy (FL), which has been further developed in the subsequent studies (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020; Zhan, 2022). Synthesizing these studies the authors remodelled FL into a framework encompassing **Appreciation, Reception, Production, and Metacognition** dimensions. Of these, this study focuses on the dimension of **Production**, with a special attention on how to support learners to produce more quality feedback, that is, more global rather than local feedback to a writing exemplar. Six Japanese learners of English (CEFR A2 level, aged 13-15) participated in eight sessions designed for enhancing feedback literacy; five sessions involving explicit instructions on providing FL and the other three for observations on learners' behaviors without scaffolding from the instructor. Collaborative dialogues were transcribed and analyzed, focusing on episodes related to text comprehension and feedback provision, each further categorized into three subcategories of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Findings demonstrated a notable shift from local issues (grammar, vocabulary) to more global feedback on the overall qualities of discourse, suggesting the series of intervention effectively supported the participants' abilities to provide more global feedback to writing samples. The study highlights the positive impact of structured collaborative feedback activities on enhancing students' abilities to provide meaningful and constructive feedback to each other.

Keywords: Feedback literacy, peer feedback, L2 writing, collaborative learning, global feedback

1. Introduction

Feedback has long been recognized as an essential element for learners' growth and success, and particular attention has been paid to the ability to receive, understand and utilize effective feedback in recent years following Sutton (2012) who was one of the earliest to conceptualize 'feedback literacy' followed by a number of researchers to further refining the concept. The purpose of the present study is to observe the nature of students' feedback literacy through collaborative feedback trainings using writing samples, and to investigate how such an intervention can actually improve their L2 writing skills. By examining the nature of collaborative peer feedback, this study seeks to provide practical insights into how learners can effectively engage in giving and receiving feedback, thereby promoting a supportive and interactive learning environment. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the development of more effective writing instruction methods that emphasize the importance of feedback literacy in L2 learning.

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2. Literature Review

In this review, the evolution of the conceptualization of feedback literacy is provided in a chronological order first, followed by an overview of the quality of peer feedback, and the research questions that guided the present study will be presented.

2.1 Evolution of the concept of feedback literacy

Sutton (2012) was one of the earliest to underscore the importance of fostering students' feedback literacy: Viewing feedback literacy as a series of situated learning practices, Sutton proposed the concept of 'feedback literacy' as consisting of three dimensions: 1) **the Epistemological** (acquiring academic knowledge), 2) **the Ontological** (investment of identity in academic work), and 3) **the Practical** (acting upon feedback). Sutton's conceptualization of feedback literacy is based on his study on students' and teachers' views on feedback at a university setting, and was aimed at exploring the nature of productive feedback on academic experiences of university students in general. In relation to fostering students' feedback literacy in the context of peer-feedback for L2 writing, the third dimension of the three stated above is of particular focus of our interest, which Sutton clarified as ability to read, interpret and use written feedback.

Carless and Boud (2018) further refined developed Sutton's (2012) conceptualization for feedback literacy by outlining four features of feedback literacy: **1) Appreciating Feedback**, **2) Making Judgments**, **3) Managing Affect**, and **4) Taking Action**. The first feature, **Appreciating Feedback** refers to "both students recognising the value of feedback and understanding their active role in its processes (p. 1316)" and "demands that learners acquire the academic language necessary for understanding, interpreting and thinking with complex ideas (p. 1317)" as Sutton (2012) claimed. The second feature, **Making Judgments**, refers to students' capability "to make decisions about the quality of work of oneself and others (p. 1317)" which is vital for them to make most of the feedback processes. The third feature, **Managing Affect**, refers to "how students manage their emotional equilibrium [that] impacts on their engagement with critical commentary (pp. 1317-1318)" which is related to what Sutton (2012) emphasized in his conceptualization of **the Ontological** dimension of feedback literacy. Finally, the fourth feature, **Taking Action**, refers to taking action in response to feedback, which is more or less the same conceptualization to the **Practical** dimension in Sutton (2012). Each of the four features of feedback literacy conceptualized by Carless and Boud (2018) has three subcategories as presented in table 1. Having conceptualized feedback literacy as consisting of the four above-mentioned features, Carless and Boud (2018) propose the following two activities namely, peer feedback and analyzing exemplars, as sound pedagogical interventions to foster students' feedback literacy. They also underscore the importance of teacher roles in the process and note:

Enabling activities are only likely to be successful in developing student feedback literacy if teachers create suitable curriculum environments for active learner participation, and also provide related guidance, coaching and modelling (p. 1321).

Further building on the line of research in the field of feedback literacy, Molloy et al. (2020) attempted to clarify how learners understand and use feedback by analyzing the feedback process of learners at two universities. The analysis of their study lead to 31 categories in seven groupings: **1) Commits to Feedback as Improvement**, **2) Appreciates Feedback as an Active Process**, **3) Elicits Information to Improve Learning**, **4) Processes Feedback Information**, **5) Acknowledges and Works with Emotions**, **6) Acknowledges Feedback as a Reciprocal Process**, **7) Enacts Outcomes of Processing Feedback**. In the study of Molloy et al (2022), there was a clear shift in focus on the learners' active roles in the process of feedback, both as receivers and providers of feedback, while the original conceptualization of feedback literacy in relation to managing the affective equilibrium in receiving feedback found in Sutton (2012) and Carless and Boud (2018) is maintained. Another new dimension added to the conceptualizations of feedback literacy in **Enacts Outcomes of Processing Feedback**.

In response to Molloy et al. (2020)'s call for a quantitative study to investigate the nature of feedback literacy, Zhan (2022) conducted a study involving 555 universities in China and devised the following six categories in feedback literacy: **1) Eliciting**, which refers to the students' ability to "solicit information from different resources to improve their learning (p. 1090)", **2) Processing**, which is to

“comprehend and judge the feedback received (p. 1090)”, **3) Enacting**, which refers to the students’ ability to “set goals, plan and monitor their actions to close the feedback loop (p. 1090)”, **4) Appreciation**, or learners’ disposition to “acknowledge the value of feedback in their learning (p. 1090)”, as well as to “regulate their emotions to positively engage with negative and critical feedback (p. 1090)” **which is conceptualized as 5) Readiness**, and **6) Commitment, which refers to the learners’ disposition to** “enthusiastically engage with feedback by investing their time and effort in continuous improvement (p. 1090)”.

Zhang and Mao’s study in 2023 is, to our best knowledge, one of the earliest empirical studies that has investigated the effects of teaching on students’ feedback literacy in L2 writing. In the experiment, pre-study questionnaires and post-study questionnaires, as well as interviews, teaching slides, course outlines, assessment rubrics, and writing materials were collected, and the research was conducted from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The questionnaire was developed by referring to Zhan (2022)’s ‘the scale of students’ feedback literacy’ with minor modifications to suit L2 writing. It consists of 5 dimensions and a total of 20 items: **1) Eliciting, 2) Making Judgment, 3) Appreciating Feedback, 4) Taking Action, and 5) Managing Affect**. The results revealed that through the teacher’s systematic approach to foster student feedback literacy, the students “reported enhanced capacities to elicit feedback, make judgments, and take actions, as well as strengthened dispositions to appreciate feedback and manage affect (p. 1)”.

The literature review lead us to re-organizing the conceptualization of feedback literacy to consist of the following four dimensions: **1) Appreciation** (emotional engagement), **2) Reception** (understanding feedback), **3) Production** (providing relevant feedback), and **4) Metacognition** (reflecting on the feedback process). Of the four above-mentioned dimensions, the third dimension of the **Production** is the focus of the present study. It is because the leading cause of failure in peer-review activities in writing classes has been pointed out the incapacibilities of producing meaningful and constructive feedback during peer-review sessions. In the following section, the construct of quality feedback will be explored.

2.2 The Quality of Feedback in L2 Writing

Research indicates that providing ‘global feedback,’ which addresses the overall structure and logical flow of a text, is often the most challenging aspect for L2 learners (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008; Sasaki, 2000). Unlike local feedback, with primary focus on the grammatical, lexical, as well as conventional, global feedback requires learners to have a comprehensive understanding of how to organize ideas, maintain coherence, and ensure that the writing aligns with its intended purpose. Storch (2013) and Yang and Zhang (2010) claim that learners often struggle with this type of feedback because it requires higher-order thinking skills and a deep understanding of textual coherence. Hyland likewise (2006) illustrates the challenges L2 writers face in providing global feedback because it involves recognizing complex discourse patterns, while L2 learners who tend not to be familiar with the conventions and organizational structures prevalent in English academic writing.

In contrast, L2 writers often focus on local issues like grammar and vocabulary when providing feedback, as they find it easier to identify surface-level errors compared to more abstract, structural elements (Ferris, 2003).

Taken together, it seems valid to aim at supporting students to focus more on global issues rather than local issues only, as inexperienced writers tend to do, while supporting to enhance their feedback literacy, and the following research questions were set for this study.

1. Does collaborative feedback training using exemplars enhance students' ability to provide global feedback?
2. If so, does enhanced ability to provide global feedback lead to better quality in the production of writing?

3. Method

In order to investigate the above stated research questions, a series of intervention to enhance feedback literacy was devised targeting six students taking a class to enhance their L2 English writing

skills at a private after-school class in Japan. They were 13-15 of age, and their English proficiencies were from beginner (Eiken Grade 3[#] to Eiken Grade pre-2[#]).

The intervention was designed based on Eiken writing materials available on its official website, because Eiken is one of the most recognized English tests in Japan, and all of the students were studying for that test. There were 5 interventions in total, each of which consisted of peer-feedback session using sample student writing followed by teacher feedback to the sample. More specifically, the students first read the sample writing in five minutes individually. They were then given 10 minutes to discuss with a partner and collaboratively give “feedback” to the sample writing (peer feedback: PFB). The instructor (the first author) then gave the teacher feedback (TFB) to make sure the students came to realize the main point of the feedback to be given to the sample writing. The students then revised the sample writing individually (Figure 1).

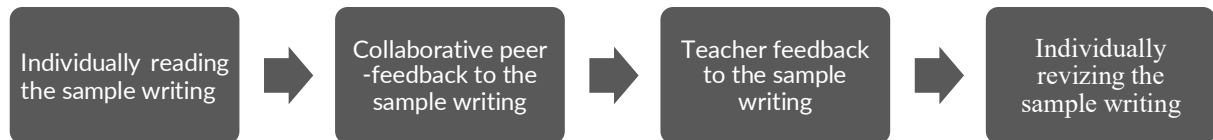


Figure 1 - The Process of the Intervention for Fostering Feedback Literacy Devised for the Present Study

Two types of data were collected for this study. The students’ interactions during the feedback sessions were audio-recorded with written consents, and later transcribed. The individually produced revised writings were also collected each time[#]. The students also gave feedback to writing samples individually before and after the interventions to allow authors to investigate the students’ progress on their feedback literacy. All of the sessions took place with one-week intervals on average (from 2023/12/6 to 2024/2/7).

The writing samples to be given feedback by the students collaboratively in the sessions were taken from Eiken websites for Eiken Grade 2 writing tests. This material was thought to be at the appropriate level for the participants of the present study and relevant as it is a high-stake proficiency test in Japan. All of the five materials were written in response to the following prompt: *Today some companies allow their employees to wear casual clothes like jeans or T-shirts. Do you think the number of such companies will increase in the future?* They were created by the first author so that they would have problems that correspond to the key points noted on Eiken websites namely, “No relevance for the topic”, “Coherence in the argument”, “No relevant support to the argument”, “Not enough information for the readers provided”, and “Vocabularies that are not usually used in English”. The actual samples used for the interventions are presented in table 1.

Table 1 - The Writing Samples Used for the Interventions and Their Foci

Writing Sample Used for Intervention 1
1. More companies might let employees wear casual clothes like jeans and T-shirts. 2. I have two reasons to support my opinion. 3. First, 1) <u>there are lots of different types of jeans, like damaged ones or tight ones.</u> I only mentioned two, but there are various designs. Hence, workers have various choices of jeans. Second, 2) <u>jeans go well with many other clothes.</u> T-shirts, coats, and jackets are adjusting to jeans. Thus, jeans must be practical for employees. For these reasons, more companies will let people wear casual clothes at work.
The main focus of FB for Intervention 1: No relevant argument for the topic
Writing Sample Used for Intervention 2
I think more companies will let their employees wear casual clothes. I have two reasons to support my opinion. First, 1) <u>companies do not want their employees to feel a lot of stress at work.</u> 2) <u>If employees are allowed to wear casual clothes in the office, they will feel more comfortable.</u> Second, 3) <u>wearing suits makes employees look more formal and gives a good impression.</u> Suits make it possible for workers to look smart and neat. Thus, it is sometimes better to wear suits. For these reasons, more companies will let people wear casual clothes at work.
The main focus of FB for Intervention 2: Coherence in the argument
Writing Sample Used for Intervention 3
I think more companies will let their employees wear casual clothes. I have two reasons to support my opinion.

First, people will need to buy lots of new clothes. Buying lots of clothes will cost a lot of money.

1) My father has lots of jeans. He likes fashion and my mother likes it, too. If the companies think that their employees will not do it. I want to wear suits, but my friends don't want to. Also, T-shirts and jeans are much cheaper.

Second, 2) wearing suits makes employees look more formal. People who visit the company might feel impressed by this. For these reasons, more companies will let people wear casual clothes at work.

The main focus of FB for Intervention 3: No relevant support to the argument

Writing Sample Used for Intervention 4

I do not think that more companies will allow their employees to wear casual clothes like jeans or T-shirts.

I have two reasons why I think so.

1) The first reason is that if employees wear casual clothes, they will look less formal.

2) The second reason is because employees will feel too relaxed.

For these two reasons, I do not think that more companies will allow their employees to wear casual clothes like jeans or T-shirts.

The main focus of FB for Intervention 4: Not enough information for readers provided

Writing Sample Used for Intervention 5

More companies will allow casual clothes in the future.

I have two reasons to support my opinion. One reason is that it is comfortable for 1) salary men who work for the company. If they can wear jeans or T-shirts, they can be more relaxed.

Also, wearing suits makes people look all the same. It is like wearing 2) seifuku, which means workers do not express their personalities and their fashion cannot be stylish.

For these reasons, more companies will let people wear casual clothes at work.

The main focus of FB for Intervention 5: Vocabularies that are not usually used in English

The transcribed interactions of each pair were first segmented based on the contents, and then divided into two categories; **Feedback** or **Reading Comprehension**. Our initial intention was to investigate the students' interactions for giving feedback only, but **Reading Comprehension** was added to the coding scheme because there were so many instances where the students were working together to understand what the writing samples actually meant. Both **Feedback** and **Reading Comprehension** were further divided into the three subcategories: **Vocabulary**, **Grammar**, and **Discourse**.

There were 198 segments in total. In order to check the interrater reliability of two raters in coding categories of the six types of collaborative dialogue between the participants (Feedback-Vocabulary, Feedback-Grammar, Feedback-Discourse, Reading Comprehension-Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension-Grammar, Reading Comprehension-Discourse), the authors asked a rater who is not part of the study to code 86 segments (43.4% of the total; 3 randomly chosen sessions out of the total of 8 sessions) after a brief explanation of the coding scheme. The rate of agreement was found to be acceptable ($\kappa=.682, p<.001$), and the rest of the coding was conducted by the first author, with consultation to the second author where necessary.

Of these, **Vocabulary** and **Grammar** were defined as part of **Local feedback** in this study, which are feedback that focuses on specific, smaller aspects of the text, such as word choice, sentence structure, and grammatical accuracy. In contrast, **Discourse** was constructed as **Global feedback** in this study, which is feedback that addresses the overall structure of the text, including the logical flow, coherence, and the effectiveness of the writing's intent and message.

4. Results

Table 2 presents that Group A initially focused more on **Reading Comprehension** than on **Feedback**. In the pretest of the first writing session, there were 13 mentions related to **Reading Comprehension**, while there were only 6 segments of **Feedback**, showing that 68% of the focus was on **Reading Comprehension**, with only 32% on **Feedback**. However, as interventions progressed, the proportion of **Feedback** mentions increased. For example, in Intervention 4 and Post-test 2, **Feedback** accounted for 100% of the focus for this group.

Another significant change found in this group is that **Feedback on Discourse**, categorized as global feedback, initially accounted for only 17% of all feedback, but by the final stage, it had increased to 100%. This indicates that the focus shifted from **Local Feedback** on Vocabulary and Grammar to **Global Feedback** on the overall structure and meaning of the text.

Table 2 - Number of Segments in Each Category in Group A Interactions

A	Turn	Seg	Feedback			Reading Comprehension		
			Vocabulary	Grammar	Discourse	Vocabulary	Grammar	Discourse
Pre	121	21	3	2	1	10	1	2
Intervention/ 1	129	18	1	1	1	12	0	2
Intervention/ 2	68	10	0	2	3	4	1	0
Intervention/ 3	65	9	0	0	8	0	1	0
Intervention/ 4	54	5	0	0	5	0	0	0
Intervention/ 5	78	14	1	0	8	4	0	1
Post1	38	6	1	0	4	0	0	1
Post2	41	6	0	0	5	0	0	0
Total	594	89	6	5	35	30	3	6

Table 3 presents that, in the same way as Group A, Group B also had a ratio of 57% for **Feedback** and 43% for **Reading Comprehension** in the first test, but that the ratio of **Feedback** increased to 100% in the fifth intervention, Post 1, and Post 2, indicating a decrease in the degree of **Reading Comprehension**. However, when examining the types of **Feedback**, there was no significant transition from **Local Feedback** (feedback on vocabulary and grammar) to **Global Feedback** (feedback on discourse) in Group B. The average number of times **Global Feedback** was given from Pre-Test to Post 2 was 5, but in the first test, it was 6. This shows that Group B was able to give **Global Feedback** from the start.

Table 3 - Number of Segments in Each Category in Group B Interactions

B	Turn	Seg	Feedback			Reading Comprehension		
			Vocabulary	Grammar	Discourse	Vocabulary	Grammar	Discourse
Pre	79	13	2	0	6	6	0	0
Intervention/ 1	47	8	1	0	4	2	0	1
Intervention/ 2	45	12	0	0	5	5	0	1
Intervention/ 3	48	12	0	0	8	3	0	1
Intervention/ 4	26	5	0	0	4	0	0	1
Intervention/ 5	19	4	0	0	4	0	0	0
Post1	28	6	1	0	4	0	0	0
Post2	37	8	1	2	5	0	0	0
Total	329	68	5	2	40	16	0	4

Table 4 shows that, similar to Groups A and B, the ratio of **Feedback** and **Reading Comprehension** in Group C was 44% and 56%, respectively, in the first test, and *Post-test 1* consisted of 100% **Feedback**, while *Post-test 2* consisted of 75% **Feedback**, showing that the number of **Feedback** questions had increased since the first test, and the proportion of **Reading Comprehension** questions had decreased. However, for Group C, one student was absent from each of the first and second tests, so a separate group was formed from the third test onwards, and sufficient data could not be collected. As a result, there were no trends specific to this group, but looking at the details of the **Feedback**, the percentage of **Global Feedback** was 100% for the first three of the six sessions, so it can be seen that, like Group B, **Global Feedback** was given from the first session.

Table 4 - Number of Segments in Each Category in Group C Interactions

C	Turn	Seg	Feedback			Reading Comprehension		
			Vocabulary	Grammar	Discourse	Vocabulary	Grammar	Discourse
Pre	32	9	0	0	4	3	0	2
Intervention/ 1	38	6	0	0	4	2	0	0
Intervention/ 2	25	6	0	0	4	0	0	1
Intervention/ 3	59	7	1	0	2	4	0	0
Intervention/ 4	47	4	2	0	2	0	0	0
Intervention/ 5	66	9	2	0	4	2	0	0
Post1	267	41	5	0	20	11	0	3
Post2	37	8	1	2	5	0	0	0
Total	329	68	5	2	40	16	0	4

6. Discussion

The results indicate a shift across all groups from an initial emphasis on **Reading Comprehension** to **Feedback**. In Group A, the pretest revealed a 68% focus on **Reading Comprehension**, with only 32% on **Feedback**. As interventions progressed, **Feedback** mentions rose steadily, reaching 100% by Post-test 2. Initially, Group A's **Feedback** primarily addressed **Vocabulary** and **Grammar (Local Feedback)**, but by the final stages, **Global Feedback** on discourse increased from 17% to 100%, marking a clear shift toward discourse-level considerations.

In Group B, the first test showed a 57% focus on **Feedback** and 43% on **Reading Comprehension**. This group similarly achieved 100% **Feedback** mentions by the fifth intervention, maintaining this focus in both Post-test 1 and Post-test 2. Unlike Group A, Group B consistently provided **Global Feedback** from the beginning, with an average of 5 of those per session, indicating readiness to address discourse-level elements from the outset.

Group C initially allocated 44% of its focus to **Feedback** and 56% to **Reading Comprehension**. By Post-test 1, instances of **Feedback** increased to 100%, though they declined to 75% in Post-test 2, with a proportional decrease in **Reading Comprehension** mentions. Due to attendance issues, a separate group was formed after the second session, limiting consistent data collection for Group C. Nonetheless, Group C showed an early capacity for **Global Feedback**, with 100% global feedback noted in three of the six sessions, similar to Group B's trend.

In sum, these results illustrate a general shift from **Reading Comprehension** to **Feedback** across all groups. Group A, in particular, demonstrated an increase in **Global Feedback**, from 17% initially to 100% by the final stages. We will explore the impact of these shifts on students' revisions as well as the nature of discussions related to group dynamics and its influence on the development of feedback literacy.

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