# Students' perceptions on peer and teacher feedback

## ピアおよび教師フィードバックに対する大学生の認識

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　本論文は、学生がクラスメイトや教師から受けたフィードバックをどのように受け止めるかを探るため日本の大学レベルの EFL の授業内で検証されたものである。フィードバックは教師の最善の意図と努力にもかかわらず聞き入れられないことがあるため、筆者はプレゼンテーションのより良い授業方法とフィードバックに対するよりオープンなアプローチを取り入れることに努めた。主な調査項目はフィードバックがどの程度役に立っているのか、そして学生がフィードバック自体をそもそも有難く受け入れているのか、の二点である。学生たちは三週間の授業の中でプレゼンテーションの練習とフィードバックの共有、内容修正を経て再度プレゼンテーションをし、最後にそれら各ステップの有効性に関するアンケートに答えた。その結果、調査対象の大多数がクラスメイトからのフィードバックと教師からのフィードバックの両方を高く評価していることがわかった。更に、講師からフィードバックを受けるよりクラスメイトから受ける方が若干モチベーションが高まるという結果が見られた。

Keywords:
presentation peer feedback（PPF）, peer assessment（PA）

## 1. Introduction

It is almost certain that every teacher has graded and commented on hundreds, if not thousands, of presentation scripts and slideshows over the years. Tuck（2017）notes that instructors spend a great deal of time grading and giving feedback in the form of comments. Deadlines for printed submissions are often set before the actual presentations, allowing the provision of targeted feedback students can act on to improve their materials. Nevertheless, Forsythe and Johnson（2017）observe that a common student complaint is the lack of sufficient feedback received in a timely manner. During the presentations themselves, teachers can typically be seen collecting slips of paper from the audience to include peer evaluation as one element of the presentation grade, judging presenters numerically on criteria such as body language, content,

and visual aids, while the instructors provide oral and paper rubric-based feedback. However, despite a teacher's best intentions and efforts, it is not uncommon to observe the same mistakes being repeated even after having been addressed. As Carless（2022）points out, teacher-driven feedback is "unlikely to provide a good investment of time and resources"（p. 143）.

With COVID-19 forcing an online exodus, feedback that may have been oral or paper-based likewise became digital, unlocking the potential for greater detail in feedback. The author discovered a PC app designed for text automation, called *aText*（Tran, 2019）, which replaces user-defined phrases with text from a database of comments of one's own creation, allowing for instantaneous replication of lengthy detailed feedback, including explanations, examples, and fixes with just a few keystrokes. With this tool, the author's expectation was that scripts and slide-shows collected on *Dropbox* and returned to the students with generous amounts of specific feedback would result in all problems being eliminated in the final presentation, but this expectation was completely unfounded. Feedback originating from the author alone seemed ineffective. Rather, as Carless（2022）posits, "students need to be at the centre of feedback processes"（p. 143）.

This report investigates the role of peer feedback, how it may be effectively applied in an oral communication class setting, and what students' perceptions are regarding feedback they receive from their peers in comparison to that from their teacher. It details a three-week pilot study beginning with a preparation day, followed by a practice day, and concluding with the actual presentation. This paper describes each step of the process but does not include statistical analysis of data gathered from the questionnaire. These findings will be reported on in a future paper. The present study seeks to ascertain to what degree presentation feedback, both from the teacher and peers, is regarded as being beneficial and is welcomed from the perspective of Japanese university students in oral communication classes.

## 2. Literature Review

Peer assessment（PA）has been defined by Topping（1998）as "an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status"（p. 250）. One of the first large-scale literature reviews on PA was conducted by Topping in 1998, in which he found that it was usually equally as beneficial as teacher feedback. He noted that simple quantitative feedback could lead to positive formative effects for students, observing that "learning by teaching…might become learning by assessing"（p. 254）. Indeed, Liu and Carless（2006）highlight PA's formative merits,

stating that PA's objective is more about learning than assessment, with the key actors being the assessors rather than the assessed. Amongst other benefits, Topping points out that delivery of feedback is more timely and greater in volume, and that students are able to locate themselves in relation to their peers in terms of performance. However, the vast majority of the literature at the time was on PA in writing. As recently as 2020, research on peer feedback in writing still seemed to be much more prevalent than speaking（Li et al., 2020）.

White（2009）notes that most PA literature focuses on one of two issues: the evaluation of student contributions to group assignments or the validity and reliability of such assessment types. In contrast to this, there is very little reporting on the experiences and perceptions of students regarding PA. In White's own research on student-centred assessment in a Japanese higher-education setting, students reported positive perspectives on PA and believed it promoted their learning. On the other hand, doubt was raised about the reliability of assessments, noting that familiarity may give rise to student bias, and that numerical scores were given, but were not defined qualitatively.

In support of PA, Patri（2002）reports that student-given evaluations have a high reliability, comparable to instructor-given grades, when the students are supplied with a solid set of criteria to follow（i.e., a rubric）. Yamaguchi（2018）also notes that most students participating in her study valued PA, although only about half of them were able to overcome the weaknesses pointed out by their peers by the final assignment. Nevertheless, PA may be more effective than instructor assessment（Li et al., 2020）. In Sellick and Bury's（2018）study on Japanese university students, they found that students found the opportunity to do PA in their oral communication class to be valuable, but reported high levels of both worry and nervousness.

For PA to be effective, it has been noted that clear explanations, a degree of coaching, and an element of revision are also necessary. Sellick and Bury（2018）suggest that discussing and fully explaining grading criteria holds great importance. Furthermore, they observe that student training should not be "a purely top-down approach" but should involve discussion（p.71）. Students often need guidance to fully grasp the purpose and goals of assignments, and Vygotsky's（1978）widely accepted concept of scaffolded learning underscores the importance of providing support to inexperienced assessors in what their aims should be. In this light, Winstone and Carless（2019）raise the point that a frequently overlooked factor in PA is the necessity to provide coaching to students on how to conduct peer feedback. Boud et al.（2001）support this in their assertion that lack of preparation and training leads to ineffective PA. Moreover, when given the required support and resources needed, assessments made by "higher education students of their peers' oral presentations may be more effective in improving

those presentations than the evaluations of the teachers themselves"（Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2018, p.146）. Importantly, as Henderson et al.（2019）point out, for feedback to be productive, students must feel the need to act upon it, for example, in the form of revision. Finally, Race et al.（2005）draw the conclusion that PA should be incorporated into grading somehow for students to treat it in a more serious and careful manner.

PA is not without its faults. Students may exhibit negative responses to peer feedback, especially when the assignment of grades is involved（Patton, 2012; Wilson et al., 2015）. While the authoritative position of the instructor in a teacher-student relationship generally leads to confidence in the feedback received by students, Shute（2008）notes that with PA, the degree to which an assessee appreciates and acts on feedback depends on the perceived authority of the source of feedback and the level of trust they have with the assessor. In an important study of 939 students conducted by Ballantyne et al.（2002）, besides questioning the competency of their peers in marking, the researchers found that students felt PA could be too time-consuming and unfair when feelings were involved. Despite this, the students surveyed felt encouraged to reflect and compare their own work with their peers.

While a plethora of research exists on the topic of PA, there is still relatively little research in the context of Japanese higher education, particularly in regard to presentations conducted in oral communication classes. Researchers Cornelius and Kinghorn（2014）report that the majority of their first-year Japanese EFL students felt comfortable with PA but lacked confidence, while White（2009）notes that it is useful but difficult. In a 2016 study, Toland et al. found that most participants（83.7% of 129 students）felt having a classmate watch their video recorded presentations was helpful, while 68.2% believed they gave helpful feedback to their partners. The present study set out to contribute observations to the relatively young field of PA in the Japanese university setting about students' perceptions of peer feedback, including its utility and desirability. Teachers at higher education institutes may find this report helpful in modifying the presentation assignments of their own courses.

## 3. Research Questions and Methodology

In order to better understand how feedback about oral presentations is perceived by students, the following research question and sub-question were posed:

RQ1: How much value do students place on feedback on their presentations?

RQ2: Do students place higher value on feedback given by their instructor, their peers, or are they seen to be of equal importance?

## 3.1 Participants

The participants in this report included a total of 169（64 intermediate-level freshmen, 28 intermediate-level sophomores, 77 advanced-level sophomores）students from seven classes at Kansai University. The oral communication class students（from the faculties of literature, law, engineering, sociology, and economics）were surveyed after three weeks of instruction and practice of presentations in the academic year of 2022.

## 3.2 Method

To explore students' thoughts on the usefulness and desirability of feedback from their teacher and peers, the following three-week system was developed, which amounted to 20% of their grade. This 20% was broken down into four distinct parts, with no grades being assigned for Week One. In Week Two, 5% of their grade was finalized. Submitting finished materials on time awarded them with 2%, while the remaining 3% was dependent on the quality of the feedback they gave to their group members, with whom they would be practicing their individual presentations. Their presentation materials were assessed by the teacher, with the maximum of 7.5% only being possible if they resubmitted their materials following the feedback they received from their peers or the instructor. The final 7.5% was derived from peer evaluation in Week Three. In introducing the activity, students were asked for their input and cooperation in a survey to investigate how instructors could better teach presentations.

Week One, labelled "Presentation Preparation," focused on specific requirements and tips regarding the basic components of slideshows, posture, eye contact, and the use of gestures. The grading rubric that would be used was also elaborated on. Students were instructed to complete a script and slideshow for Week Two, but that they need not strive for perfection, as revision of materials was a necessary part of the process. Presentation materials were collected via *Dropbox* and the author used its internal comment function in conjunction with the *aText* app to highlight all the students' errors and, where possible, add suggestions for reorganization or other revisions. These edited documents were then returned to each student through *Dropbox's* sharing function. This comprised the teacher-feedback portion of the project. No feedback was provided orally or on paper.

Week Two was their "Presentation Group Practice", in which they were put into random groups of four or five with whom they would share both their presentations and their feedback.

The point was stressed numerous times that the feedback they received from their peers would have no impact on their own grade whatsoever at this point in the process. On the contrary, they would be evaluated on the quality of the feedback they gave to others. Thus, the Week Two lesson began with a discussion on what constitutes good feedback, including a TED Talk video (Renninger, 2020) and a pop quiz on the appropriateness of typical feedback given by students (e.g., "I liked it." = ×). The groups were given time to discuss each example's quality, and this was followed by a slide showing how each of the unhelpful comments could be modified to make them specific, actionable pieces of advice. For example, the unspecific comment, "you should use more gestures," could be appended with the following to make it more concrete and actionable: "in particular, when you talk about your second point."

Students were given a three-page handout with spaces to provide feedback for each member of their group (including space for self-reflection) as well as instructions and examples of specific areas they could focus comments and suggestions on, and language they could use in the form of sentence stems. In lieu of number-based feedback, students used the standard Japanese symbols (i.e., ◎○△×) to indicate their group members' performance. In Japan, a double circle indicates an achievement of excellence, while a single circle shows something is correct or otherwise acceptable. A triangle cautions that something is deficient in quality, accuracy, or appropriateness, and an '×' means that the item in question is severely flawed. This system of symbols was adopted in the hopes that they would be received more warmly than coldly objective numbers. Using these symbols, students judged their fellows in three areas: Physical Message (e.g., eye contact, gestures), Fluency & Delivery (e.g., smoothness of speech and volume), and Content. The advanced level classes had an additional category, Discussion. They were required to write questions based on their topic and lead a short group discussion. Additionally, there were spaces for them to add both "Positive points" and "Point(s) to improve". Upon completion, students took pictures of each page of feedback, uploaded the pictures to *Dropbox*, and then cut and distributed the feedback slips to each member of their group, keeping their self-evaluation slip for themselves. Because the goal of this activity was to provide feedback that was of practical benefit, students were told that they could write in either English or Japanese. They were asked to provide English translations or write in simple Japanese, as they would be assigned a grade for their written comments by the instructor.

Finally, in Week Three, students were put into a second set of random groups for their "Presentation & Discussion" class. Up until the evening of their presentation day, resubmissions of revised materials based on the peer and teacher feedback were strongly encouraged, and in fact, students who did not revise materials would be ineligible to earn a perfect score[1]. After

reminding them about the goals, the grading system, and the survey to complete at the end, students gave their presentations, conducted their discussions, used a *Google Forms* document to evaluate each presentation, and completed the survey.

### 3.3 Instrument

The survey was administered online using *Google Forms*. All the items listed in 3.4 below were in the form of five-point Likert-scale questions, with higher numbers corresponding to a stronger sense of agreement. Instructions and questions were all presented in machine-translated Japanese, having been proofread by a professional translator. Every class completed the survey in under ten minutes.

### 3.4 Survey Questions

The survey itself was to glean insight not only about feedback, but also to determine their perceived value regarding the instruction given, resources provided, and teaching style. The 26 questions were divided into four sections: Background (previous experience with English presentations), Preparation/Initial Instruction (teacher instruction on delivery, PDF resources), Presentation Practice Day (value of practicing and of receiving feedback from the teacher and group members, language of feedback they wrote), Final Presentation Day (level of success felt and what they attribute it to). The two optional writing questions were about the reason for their choice of giving feedback in English or Japanese, and a space for comments.

For the purposes of this article, discussion will be limited to the nine questions listed in Table 1 below, in order of appearance in the survey. These come from the third and fourth sections of the survey, entitled "Presentation Practice Day" and "Final Presentation Day", respectively. The complete survey can be found in the appendix in a modified form, with these nine questions preceded by an asterisk and numbered in the same way they are in Table 1 below.

Table 1　*Survey Items*

| Item | Survey question | Lickert-scale labels |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Did you feel it was helpful to get feedback from your classmates on your presentation materials and/or delivery style? | 1: not at all helpful . |
| 2 | Did you feel it was helpful to get feedback from your teacher on your submitted materials? | . 5: extremely helpful |
| 3 | Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Feedback from group members is more valuable than feedback from the teacher. | 1: strongly disagree . |
| 4 | Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Feedback from the teacher is more valuable than feedback from group members. | . . |

| Item | Survey question | Lickert-scale labels |
|------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 5 | Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Feedback from group members and the teacher is equally valuable. | . 5: strongly agree |
| 6 | Did you feel feedback from your teacher was more motivating or demotivating? | 1: highly demotivating |
| 7 | Did you feel feedback from your peers was more motivating or demotivating? | 5: highly motivating |
| 8 | To what extent did you feel that giving feedback to other students help you to see problems in your own presentation? | 1: not at all helpful 5: extremely helpful |
| 9 | How important do you think feedback is? | 1: not at all important 5: extremely important |

## 3.5  Results

The numerical results are shown in Table 2 below, as percentage values of the sample of 169 students.

Table 2  *Breakdown of survey questions results by number of respondents*

| Item | Construct measured | Likert scale – responses in percentages | | | | |
|------|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1 | helpfulness of peer feedback | 0 | 0.6 | 14.2 | 42 | 43.2 |
| 2 | helpfulness of teacher feedback | 1.2 | 2.4 | 23.1 | 31.9 | 41.4 |
| 3 | peer = more valuable | 1.2 | 10.6 | 55 | 23.7 | 9.5 |
| 4 | teacher = more valuable | 0 | 4.7 | 58 | 24.9 | 12.4 |
| 5 | peer/teacher = equally valuable | 1.2 | 6.5 | 24.3 | 29 | 39 |
| 6 | teacher: demotivating ⟷ motivating | 0 | 1.8 | 21.3 | 44.4 | 32.5 |
| 7 | peer: demotivating ⟷ motivating | 0.6 | 1.8 | 14.8 | 46.7 | 36.1 |
| 8 | giving feedback = helpful | 0 | 3 | 11.8 | 40.8 | 44.4 |
| 9 | feedback: unimportant ⟷ important | 0 | 1.8 | 5.3 | 44.4 | 48.5 |

The results show that students are more receptive to peer feedback than that from their teacher (overall agreement rates of 85.2% vs 73.3%, respectively, derived from combining Likert scale 4 and 5, ignoring the neutral 3 as well as the scores of 1 and 2 which show disagreement). Comparable numbers of students found both teacher and peer feedback to be extremely helpful (41% and 43%), but while 42% chose "helpful" for peer feedback, only 32% of them chose the same for the teacher. Slightly more students indicated that teacher feedback was unhelpful, although they were not substantial in number (3.6%). Questions 3 and 4, which are contrary in nature, yielded comparable numbers of people in agreement with each (33.2% for peers and 37.3% for the teacher). With over 50% of respondents choosing the neutral answer of three for Questions 3 and 4, it is unsurprising that the majority (68%, derived from

combining the 29% who chose 'agree' and the 39% who chose 'strongly agree'）agreed that feedback from both peers and the teacher were equally valuable. As for the impact of feedback on motivation, once again comments received from peers（82.8%）were seen as slightly more motivating than teacher feedback（76.9%）, but in both cases, only a fraction of the respondents saw feedback as demotivational（1.8% for teacher feedback compared to 2.4% for peers）. Finally, most students（85.2%）found that pointing out flaws in others' presentations helped them notice their own shortcomings, and only a small proportion of them（1.8%）failed to see the import of giving and receiving feedback.

## 4. Discussion

The purpose of this report was to discover students' attitudes regarding the utility and desirability of feedback from their teacher and peers. RQ1 sought to examine how much value students placed on feedback, and it was found that the majority of students do in fact appreciate feedback of some kind, with only 7.1% of respondents choosing a neutral response（5.3%）or a negative one（1.8%）. RQ2 asked whether students placed higher value on teacher feedback, peer feedback, or whether they were equally valuable. Judging from the results of the questionnaire, it is evident that peer feedback is seen as both more helpful and more desirable than what the teacher alone could provide, as suggested by Murillo-Zamorano and Montanero（2018）. Comments from their classmates could better motivate them to improve, and the experience of observing their peers and earnestly considering and imparting advice led them to discover problem points in their own work, which echoes Ballantyne et al.'s（2002）finding that students felt encouraged to pursue self-reflection and to reference their own abilities in comparison to peers. This is something that may be out of the question in genuine teacher-student interactions unless the teacher's own authentic slideshows are offered up for critique. In Week One of this activity, for example, the author demonstrated deliberately flawed presentation techniques and slides and invited students to identify the nature of the problems, which is inherently artificial. Contrarily, the process of true, honest commentary between students also seems to deepen their rapport as classmates. Unfortunately, the foresight to add this as part of the survey was lacking, but this seemed to be the case judging solely based on the friendly and supportive demeanor exhibited by students during the Week Two lesson. Although the author was initially concerned about how group feedback would be received when there was no insulating layer of anonymity, students found the experience to be beneficial to their level of motivation.

One possible contributing factor to the perceived helpfulness of feedback is its timing. In the case of this study, there was a time lag between submission of materials and their grading and return. Peer feedback was given on the same day that students practiced their presentations, but teacher feedback took up to a week to be returned.

Another point of consideration that should be addressed is whether the language in which feedback is given has a strong effect on its reception. As mentioned in the description of Week One, "Presentation Preparation", the author gave detailed and lengthy feedback using a text-replacement app, which allowed for the insertion of saved comments of unlimited length to be tweaked and personalized quite quickly. However, everything written by the instructor was in English. As the feedback is all digital, the assumption was made that students are both knowledgeable and capable of using online translation tools if they felt the need to do so. Perhaps students view peer feedback more favorably because it is supplied in their native tongue. As expected, more students wrote their observations in Japanese, but not overwhelmingly so. Eighty-five students（50.3% of the sample: 48 first year intermediate, 16 second year intermediate, 21 second year advanced）wrote in Japanese, while 51（30.2%: 4 freshmen, 8 intermediate sophomores, 39 advanced sophomores）chose to write in English, and 33（19.5%: 12 first years, 4 intermediate second years, 17 second year advanced）of them wrote in both languages. Out of the 30 students who answered the optional survey question asking why they chose to write in English, five reported that it was for the teacher's benefit, while 21 of them wrote something along the lines of it being for English class or their own English betterment. The other four had no clear reason for doing so. As almost exactly half of them wrote in Japanese only, it does not seem definitively irrefutable that language was the determining factor in their preference for peer feedback over teacher feedback.

This leads to the limitations of this paper. One factor that has not been explored is whether teacher feedback in the students' native language would be seen to be as valuable as English-only feedback or feedback from peers. This study was also only conducted amongst the author's own students at a single university, and thus may reflect their attitudes towards one particular teaching style and method of feedback. They may not be representative of student perceptions at large.

## 5. Conclusion and future research directions

This study began as an investigation into how students perceive feedback, stemming from their apparent lack of interest in incorporating teacher comments, and from a student's sugges-

tion to include a trial presentation week to allow them the chance to receive and act on feedback before giving a final presentation. It has become clear that students who participated in the study found input from their classmates to be both more helpful and more motivating, but the exact reasons are unknown. due to a distinct lack of a qualitative dimension to the study. Likewise, Toland et al. （2016）, in their study of mobile-video-based PA for presentations note that "students identified cultural differences between Western and Japanese styles of presentation to be a possible point of tension"（p. 193）. The precise nature of these cultural differences may make for a fruitful target of further inquiry.

Future research should include face-to-face interviews with students to assess the factors which led them to value peer feedback more highly. Expanding the study to include more classes, and more importantly, classes taught by other teachers, would help to round out the representability of the results. Finding research partners may not be an easy task if the current presentation teaching style is repeated; the demands on time for delivering speedy and thorough feedback for all students is quite intense. Therefore, devising a less time-consuming system would likely be favourable. Finally, creating a more reliable survey tool to repeat this study would allow for rigorous statistical analysis which could lead to more solid findings that could benefit teachers across the board.

## Note

1） It was found with the previous year's cohort that without this requirement, resubmission rates varied drastically depending on year level, proficiency level, and faculty. Intermediate-level students' resubmission rates amongst first-years were 6% for literature majors and 32% for law, and 41% for engineering second-years. Advanced-level students' rates were much higher, at ranging from 48% to 65%.

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# Appendix

*Google Form survey questions: Presentation and Feedback Process*

| Background | |
|---|---|
| Item | Question |
| 1 | What previous experience do you have giving presentations in English? |
| 2 | How many times have you done English presentations before this term? |
| 3 | Did you miss any of the first steps of the presentation process? |

**Preparation / Initial Instruction**

| | |
|---|---|
| 4 | How helpful was the instruction about presentation components (what to make for the visual aids and script)? |
| 5 | How much did you refer to the PDF files when preparing your visual aids? |
| 6 | How helpful was the Useful Phrase list? |
| 7 | How much did you refer to the Useful Phrase list when preparing or practicing your script? |
| 8 | How useful were the tips and information about presentation delivery (posture / eye contact / gestures)? |
| 9 | How helpful was the practice of posture, eye contact, and gestures with a partner? |
| 10 | How conscious of posture, eye contact and gestures were you during your presentation? |

**Presentation Practice Day**

| | |
|---|---|
| 11 | Did you feel it was helpful to practice your presentation in groups? |
| *12 | 1. Did you feel it was helpful to get feedback from your classmates on your presentation materials and/or delivery style? |
| *13 | 2. Did you feel it was helpful to get feedback from your teacher on your submitted materials? |
| *14 | 3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Feedback from group members is more valuable than feedback from the teacher. |
| *15 | 4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Feedback from the teacher is more valuable than feedback from group members. |
| *16 | 5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Feedback from group members and the teacher is equally valuable. |
| *17 | 6. Did you feel feedback from your teacher was more motivating or demotivating? |
| *18 | 7. Did you feel feedback from your peers was more motivating or demotivating |

Final Presentation Day

| | |
|---|---|
| 19 | How successful do you feel your final presentation was? |
| 20 | What factors do you feel influenced the level of success of your presentation? |
| *21 | 8. To what extent did you feel that giving feedback to other students help you to see problems in your own presentation? |
| 22 | Did you write the feedback for your group members in Japanese or English? |
| 23 | (*optional*) If you wrote in English, why did you choose to write in English? |
| *24 | 9. How important do you think feedback is? |
| 25 | How many times would you have liked to do this (i.e. practice + feedback → real presentation) during the year (spring & fall)? |
| 26 | (*optional*) Comments about Presentation Group Practice, Feedback, & Presentation/Discussion: |

Note: Items marked with an asterisk are the ones included in the results and discussion sections.