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A STUDY ON THE APPLICATION OF PEER RESPONSE IN JAPANESE WRITING COURSES: TARGETING INTERMEDIATE JAPANESE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Peer response is defined as a method where "learners enhance their writing by reading each other's work, exchanging opinions, and providing information to collaboratively improve their compositions" (Ikeda, 2004). This study reports on the implementation and teaching outcomes of introducing peer response activities into the Japanese Basic Writing II course during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. It further examines the effectiveness of peer response and explores future research directions.

KEYWORDS: *Writing Instruction, Peer Response, Revision, Blended Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the deepening of globalization, the role and significance of foreign language education in higher education have become increasingly prominent. Writing ability, as a critical manifestation of overall language proficiency, has garnered significant attention. In traditional writing instruction, teachers primarily undertake the responsibilities of knowledge delivery and evaluation, while students passively receive feedback, lacking autonomy and engagement. Concurrently, with the rapid development of information technology, numerous innovative teaching methods and tools have emerged, revitalizing classroom teaching. Against this backdrop, peer response, a teaching approach that emphasizes collaboration and interaction among learners, has gained recognition for its ability to enhance students' writing skills through dynamic exchanges. However, despite its theoretical advantages, the practical application of peer response remains underexplored, particularly in Japanese as a second language (JSL) learning environments. Consequently, this study focuses on exploring how peer response can be effectively introduced into Japanese writing courses, aiming to provide innovative insights and practical experiences for foreign language teaching.

Peer response (PR) represents a form of peer learning that has been widely utilized in English education, particularly among native English speakers, as a method of writing instruction. It is defined as a process where "learners enhance their writing by reading each other's work, exchanging opinions, and providing information to collaboratively improve their compositions" (Ikeda, 2004). In recent years, peer response has been actively applied in Japanese education, particularly in writing activities. Traditionally, teachers guide students through feedback by correcting their compositions—a conventional and mainstream approach. However, the introduction of peer response has increased communication and interaction among learners, fostering their critical reading skills. Moreover, since peer response activities do not rely on teacher intervention, learners can more comfortably provide and receive opinions and suggestions during peer review.

Significant progress has been made in research on the application and practice of peer response in Japanese education, particularly in comparing the efficacy of peer response and teacher feedback. Liu (2007), through a survey of intermediate and advanced Japanese learners in China, investigated the relative advantages of teacher feedback and peer response. The study found that peer response had a significant positive impact on improving composition formatting. Similarly, Tanaka (2008) demonstrated through empirical research that compositions revised through peer response received significantly higher content evaluation scores. These findings indicate that peer response is at least as effective as traditional teacher feedback in some dimensions of writing instruction and uniquely advantageous in promoting students' self-revision and improving the quality of their writing. Although existing literature confirms the

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educational value of peer response from various perspectives, there remain many underexplored areas at the practical level. For example, specific designs for the initial introduction of peer response into courses and its dynamic impact on students' emotional attitudes have yet to be comprehensively addressed. Addressing these questions is critical for refining implementation strategies and integrating peer response smoothly into the teaching process.

Given this research context, this study seeks to introduce the peer response teaching method into Japanese writing classrooms and further explore its design and implementation strategies to reveal its effectiveness and potential challenges in Japanese writing instruction. Specifically, the study will systematically document the process of introducing and implementing peer response in the *Japanese Basic Writing II* course during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. It will report the teaching outcomes of peer response, analyze its effectiveness in achieving course objectives, and propose future directions for improvement and research.

2. OVERVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION

To comprehensively understand the application and pedagogical effects of peer response in a Japanese writing course, it is essential to detail the course structure and implementation methods. The course design and its learning objectives not only laid the groundwork for the successful integration of peer response but also reflected the alignment between instructional strategies and student needs. This section elaborates on the course background, student composition, and assessment methods, providing a clear picture of the actual implementation of peer response in this study.

2.1 Course Overview

The *Japanese Basic Writing II* course, offered during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, is a compulsory course for Japanese major students. It spans 16 weeks, with two 90-minute classes per week. Excluding the initial guidance sessions and the final review week, the core teaching content was completed within 13 weeks. The course is designed to establish a solid foundation for students' future academic writing, systematically enhancing their writing skills, techniques, and strategies to prepare them for more complex writing tasks. The course is designed to achieve a variety of objectives. Firstly, it aims to ensure that students gain a solid grasp of the fundamental knowledge and rules of Japanese writing, with a focus on accuracy in grammar, expression, and formatting. Secondly, the course encourages students to develop the ability to engage in discussions on moderately complex topics related to society and culture, which includes the capacity to articulate personal opinions and provide well-reasoned arguments. Lastly, through the iterative processes of writing and revising, students are guided to critically assess their compositions from the reader's perspective, which is intended to enhance the logic, structure, and content of their writing, ultimately improving its overall quality.

The course adopted a blended learning approach, combining in-person and online activities. Classroom sessions were primarily dedicated to teaching writing principles and facilitating interactive activities such as discussions and writing exercises. Homework assignments, including submission and feedback, were managed through an online platform, enhancing the course's flexibility and offering students additional opportunities for self-directed learning and feedback. The course's progression demonstrated systematic and incremental planning. Using societal topics as thematic threads, students were guided from basic writing skill development to mastering complex techniques, covering key aspects such as material collection, logical structuring, content drafting, and revision. The detailed course schedule (refer to Table 1) comprehensively addressed critical components of writing training, supporting the holistic development of students' Japanese language skills.

Table 1: Course Content

Session	Content and Activities	Assignment
1	Guidance session	None
2	Unit 1: Introduction to "Environmental Issues" (Topic discussion)	Methods for information search
3	Writing preparation (learning about structure, expression/grammar)	Mind map, submission of first draft
4	Composition revision (methods for revision and feedback)	Submission of second draft
5	Unit 2: Introduction to "Coexistence in Society" (Topic discussion)	Summary writing methods
6	Writing preparation (learning about structure, expression/grammar)	Mind map, submission of first draft
7	Composition revision (peer response, teacher feedback)	Submission of second draft
8	Unit 3: Introduction to "Science and Technology" (Discussing pros and cons)	Persuasive writing techniques

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Session	Content and Activities	Assignment
9	Writing preparation (learning about structure, expression/grammar)	Mind map, submission of first draft
10	Composition revision (peer response, teacher feedback)	Submission of second draft
11	Unit 4: Introduction to "Cultural Understanding" (Discussing regional cultures of interest)	Interviews
12	Writing preparation (learning about structure, expression/grammar)	Mind map, submission of first draft
13	Composition revision (peer response, teacher feedback)	Submission of second draft
14	Unit 5: Writing application letters for jobs	Submission of first draft
15	Feedback session	Submission of second draft
16	Review session	None

2.2 Enrolled Students

This course was designed for third-year Japanese major students at University A, with a total of 84 students divided into two classes of 41 and 43 students, respectively. These students generally possess Japanese language proficiency equivalent to the N2 level and have previously acquired foundational writing skills in the *Japanese Basic Writing I* course during the prior semester. Most students started learning Japanese from scratch, while a smaller number began studying Japanese in their final year of high school.

2.3 Course Assessment

The course employed a comprehensive assessment system to evaluate students' learning outcomes. This system not only focused on final exam scores but also emphasized students' performance throughout the semester. Its purpose was to encourage students to excel in multiple areas, thereby enhancing their writing skills and engagement in the classroom. The assessment criteria were divided into four main components. Class participation (20%) evaluated students' engagement and attitude during classroom activities, particularly in peer response sessions, to foster critical thinking and writing skills through interaction. Attendance (20%) reflected students' learning attitude and discipline by ensuring consistent participation and a steady focus on course content for gradual improvement in writing. Assignments (30%) assessed students' submitted drafts and their revisions across five units, emphasizing improvements in structure, content logic, and language expression, while highlighting the importance of feedback and revision in academic writing. Quizzes (30%) tested students' understanding of writing knowledge, techniques, and strategies in alignment with classroom instruction and practical application. This multidimensional assessment framework emphasized the learning process and aimed to holistically encourage progress in various aspects of writing, providing a strong foundation for more advanced academic writing tasks. This multidimensional assessment framework emphasized the learning process and aimed to holistically encourage students to make progress in various aspects of writing, laying a solid foundation for more advanced academic writing tasks.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF PEER RESPONSE

Since most students were encountering peer response for the first time, it was necessary to teach them the fundamental concepts of peer feedback from the ground up. The course content was divided into five units. In Unit 1, the instructor demonstrated how to provide feedback and revise compositions. Peer response was formally implemented starting in Unit 2. The fifth unit, focusing on application letter writing, did not include peer response activities (see Table 1).

3.1 Methods and Considerations for Implementation

This section details the feedback process for first-draft submissions and the specific implementation of peer response in each unit. To ensure students thoroughly understood the evaluation standards and could apply them effectively, the fourth class session was dedicated to a demonstration activity. The instructor randomly selected a first-draft composition from each class as a case for group discussion and feedback. During this session, the instructor guided students in systematically analyzing and evaluating compositions across four dimensions: format, structure, content, and expression. The discussion on format addressed the alignment between style and content, adherence to formatting requirements, and the correct use of references and citations. In terms of structure, emphasis was placed on the clarity of introductions, the logical development of arguments, and coherence between paragraphs. Regarding content, the focus was on the credibility of data and materials, the clarity and organization of conclusions, and the originality of ideas. Expression was analyzed through grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary usage, and identifying spelling or language errors. This comprehensive demonstration conveyed the core standards and steps for composition evaluation

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while enhancing students' familiarity with and confidence in the feedback process through teacher-student interaction. The session provided both theoretical and practical foundations for subsequent peer response activities.

Table 2: Evaluation Criteria for Compositions (First Draft)

Category	Evaluation Content
Format	Whether the writing style is appropriate for the content, whether formatting requirements are followed, whether citations are accurate, and if applicable, whether references are properly formatted.
Structure	Whether the background and issues are clearly explained, whether relevant materials and data are provided, whether personal opinions are clear and well-supported, whether a conclusion is included, whether the text is coherent, and whether transitions between paragraphs are clear.
Content	Whether the materials or data used are credible, whether the conclusions are logically summarized, whether the language is concise and easy to understand, and whether the content demonstrates originality.
Expression	Whether grammar, sentence structures, and overall structure are correct, whether vocabulary and expressions are accurate, and whether there are no writing errors (e.g., spelling mistakes, omissions, or conversion errors).

The instructor introduced the evaluation criteria (Table 2) in class and demonstrated how to provide feedback and revise a sample composition based on these standards. This approach effectively conveyed the process of giving feedback to students. Moreover, since the feedback process was completed through discussion rather than a one-sided lecture, interaction between the instructor and students, as well as among students themselves, increased significantly. Peer response activities officially began in the seventh session. The instructor distributed the evaluation criteria outlined in Table 2 and required students to pair up, read each other's drafts, and provide comments or suggestions. Students were instructed to mark revisions and assign scores on their peer's compositions. After class, each student revised their first draft based on the feedback received and submitted a second draft. This process placed students at the center of the learning activity, with the instructor minimizing intervention.

To ensure that students could benefit from peer response activities, the instructor conducted a simulation session before formally starting peer reviews. In this session, a revised but still imperfect sample composition was provided. Students, working in small groups, discussed the problems in the sample and suggested improvements. Through collaborative efforts, students inspired each other and gradually learned how to provide more targeted and constructive feedback under the instructor's guidance. During this session, the instructor explained the key points of each evaluation criterion in detail, such as what constitutes "clear" structure or "accurate" expression. This simulation not only alleviated students' initial anxiety about participating in peer reviews but also improved their confidence and feedback quality through immediate instructor guidance. Additionally, the discussions and interactions during the simulation reinforced students' understanding of the evaluation criteria, encouraging them to apply these criteria more proactively in their peer evaluations. This preparatory activity established a strong foundation for the formal implementation of peer response, minimizing ineffective or superficial feedback caused by unfamiliarity with the process.

3.2 Outcomes and Challenges

At the end of the course, feedback was collected from a subset of students through surveys and individual interviews to evaluate the introduction of peer response in the writing course. The results indicated that most students viewed this teaching method positively, highlighting its significant impact on improving writing skills and learning experiences.

First, many students expressed that peer response introduced them to a novel learning method and that they wished to continue using it in future courses. For instance, one student remarked, "Through peer response, I realized the importance of writing from the reader's perspective." This suggests that peer response helps students assess their own work from different perspectives. Another student mentioned, "Objective evaluations helped me reflect on my work better, and I naturally recall the evaluation criteria when writing." This feedback indicates that peer response not only helped students identify deficiencies in their writing but also encouraged them to actively reference and apply evaluation standards during the writing process, fostering more disciplined writing habits. Some students further

noted, “Self-evaluation allowed me to review my content more easily and identify weaknesses.” This underscores the role of peer response in cultivating students’ reflective abilities. Another perspective emphasized the diversity of feedback channels provided by peer response: “Receiving opinions from multiple peers is more effective than relying solely on teacher feedback. A single perspective is limited, and hearing from others clarifies my weaknesses.” This feedback highlights the advantage of multi-perspective reviews in helping students gain a more comprehensive understanding of their own work.

However, the surveys also revealed some challenges in implementing peer response. Some students noted, “It is hard to give meaningful comments and suggestions,” reflecting limitations in their critical thinking and language expression skills. These challenges suggest that instructors should provide more detailed guidance before implementing peer response. For example, instructors can use demonstrations and exercises to help students understand the core elements of effective feedback and clarify that the initial goal of peer response is to attempt providing comments, rather than striving for perfect or profound suggestions.

Another student remarked, “I frequently make grammar and expression errors myself, so it’s hard for me to evaluate others’ compositions.” In response, instructors can encourage students to mark sections of uncertainty or unclear expressions instead of focusing solely on correcting errors. This approach allows students to gradually improve their evaluative skills while resolving questions through subsequent discussions with peers or the instructor.

Overall, compared to traditional teacher-centered writing instruction, peer response significantly increased classroom interaction and student participation. Communication between the instructor and students, as well as among students, was greatly enhanced. Through multi-layered writing exercises, reading, discussions, and critical thinking, students improved not only their writing but also their overall Japanese language proficiency. This method positively contributed to achieving the ultimate goal of the writing course: fostering comprehensive writing skills and language competence.

Nonetheless, the challenges identified highlight areas for improvement in this teaching method. Instructors need to adjust course pacing and teaching methods to address student needs and practical difficulties, maximizing the effectiveness of peer response in writing instruction. In future teaching, more flexible organizational formats and technological support could be explored, such as leveraging online platforms to assist peer response, further enhancing the applicability and effectiveness of this method.

4. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study summarized the introduction and implementation of peer response activities in the *Japanese Basic Writing II* course during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, reported on the pedagogical outcomes, and discussed the effectiveness and challenges of peer response. Through this initial attempt to incorporate peer response activities into the course, the study clarified the implementation process, educational outcomes, and key challenges associated with this teaching method. The inclusion of peer response addressed the limitations of traditional teacher-centered composition grading, increased student interaction, and provided an effective means for fostering critical thinking and self-reflection among students. The findings indicate that peer response not only helps improve the quality of student compositions but also enhances their overall language proficiency, underscoring its significance in language education.

Firstly, the study revealed that peer response plays a pivotal role in developing students' writing skills. Through repeated cycles of drafting, reviewing, and revising compositions, students gradually learned to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their writing from a reader's perspective and improve their techniques through reflection. Course feedback indicated that most students found peer response helpful for identifying shortcomings in their compositions and gaining new writing insights through collaborative learning. This suggests that peer response creates a dynamic and interactive learning environment, significantly enhancing students' engagement and interest in writing. Additionally, peer response proved particularly effective in developing students' critical reading skills. By assessing their peers' work, students progressively learned to systematically analyze the content, structure, formatting, and language of compositions. These enhanced analytical skills benefit not only their performance in writing courses but also their academic research and broader language learning endeavors. However, some students noted difficulties in

providing constructive feedback due to their underdeveloped critical thinking abilities, highlighting the need for greater emphasis on fostering these skills in the future.

Secondly, the study identified several issues associated with peer response activities. Some students acknowledged that their weaknesses in grammar and expression impacted the quality of their feedback on peers' compositions, indicating that a lack of foundational language skills may limit the effectiveness of peer response. Furthermore, some students exhibited resistance to the activity, particularly due to a lack of confidence in evaluating their own or others' work. This suggests that during the implementation of peer response, instructors should pay closer attention to students' psychological needs and use demonstrations and positive reinforcement to build their confidence and gradually help them adapt to this new learning approach.

Thirdly, the design and implementation of peer response activities must be flexibly tailored to the specific needs and language proficiency levels of students. The findings suggest that instructors could integrate native language support at certain stages to help students better understand and apply evaluation criteria. Additionally, leveraging online tools such as platforms like "Xuexitong" could further diversify the forms of peer response, enhancing both its efficiency and variety. This blended learning model, combining online and in-person activities, caters to the diverse learning needs of students and provides more opportunities for effective implementation. The results of this study demonstrate that peer response, as a student-centered teaching method, significantly benefits Japanese writing courses. However, to maximize its effectiveness, several operational challenges must be addressed. Future research could explore optimal strategies for introducing peer response at different course levels and investigate how to effectively develop students' critical thinking skills and feedback techniques. Additionally, further exploration of how teaching technologies can support the peer response process could help optimize its implementation, better serving students' learning needs in writing instruction.

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