

Effectiveness of Teacher and Peer Feedback on Student Conference Abstracts

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Introduction Abstracts: Essential but Challenging



Writing quality English-language abstracts for application to academic conferences is essential for graduate students at Japanese universities of science and technology. However, it is a challenging and time-consuming competence for the majority of graduate students to acquire. This study, as part of a longitudinal research, looks into common problems with conference abstracts written by graduate students at a Japanese university of science and engineering. It focuses on comparing feedback on abstract drafts made by peers with teacher feedback.

Method Draft + Feedback + Re-Draft + Feedback

The data set is taken from forty M1 (1st year Master's) students of ICT majors who were asked to write two drafts of a conference abstract. The second draft was revised based on the feedback on the first draft provided by the teacher, and, for half the sample, by a peer, both using a genre-based checklist (copies available).



Results and Discussion 1

Content Easy to Change, Grammar Difficult

The collated feedback indicates that students were able to change content and organization (inclusion and ordering of key moves), and that the most difficult aspects to improve include grammar errors (e.g. subject-verb agreements and plurals), and insufficient highlighting of key moves. Comparison of peer and teacher feedback shows that peer feedback is less useful than teacher feedback and that students who are weak in writing are also weak in correcting peers' abstracts. It seems that some training of weak students is necessary to increase the effectiveness of peer feedback.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF DRAFTS WITH PROBLEMS

Criteria	Draft 1 number of problems	Draft 2 number of problems	Change
Has 6 moves/ correct sequence	36	14	-22
Background/ Introduction	36	13	-23
Research Purpose	25	13	-12
Methods/ Procedures	34	17	-17
Results/ Findings / Analysis	26	22	-4
Discussion / Conclusion / Implications	34	20	-14
Future Works/ Research	29	15	-14
Transitions	22	5	-17
Long sentences	10	0	-10
Personal Pronouns	11	2	-9
Subjects	17	0	-17
Lexicon	2	0	-2
Rules and conventions	13	13	0
Grammar	36	37	+1
Word limit	3	0	-3
Total	334	168	-166

Results and Discussion 2

Teacher Effective But Peers Less

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF FEEDBACK COMMENTS BY TEACHER AND PEERS

Draft 1	Total Comments	Average per draft
Teacher	222	11.1
Peer	85	4.25

TABLE 3: SELECT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEACHER AND PEER FEEDBACK

Draft 1	Teacher	Peer
6 moves not included/ wrong order	24	8
Background	21 'too long' = 7 'too short' = 0	13 'too long' = 3 'too short' = 3
Using "I" using "we" too often	6	10
Future research (missing)	21	5
Grammatical errors	20	4

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENCES IN TEACHER AND PEER FEEDBACK ON SAME DRAFT

	Teacher Comment	Peer Comment
Example 1	Add moves 4 and 5.	No problem.
Example 2	More or less impossible to understand.	I was able to understand the generally contents.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Checklist Successful, Train Students to Give Feedback

Overall, results of the use of the checklist suggest students are quickly able to improve aspects of the content, structure and formatting of the abstract. Improvements related to grammar are not so amenable to improvement. In terms of peer feedback, it seems that students need more training to be effective. The ability to give useful feedback is likely to increase students understanding of the abstract writing task and enhance learner autonomy.

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