

Student Feedback: An Examination of Error Correction in Japanese Junior Colleges

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Abstract

This report examines error correction and feedback in English language learning among students at a Japanese junior college. Focusing on oral and written communication, it analyzes the impact of various feedback types—ranging from direct correction to implicit cues—on language development and motivation. Through classroom observations, surveys, and performance analysis, the study evaluates the effectiveness of different correction strategies and student preferences. Key findings reveal that explicit correction is often preferred for its clarity, and students generally appreciate being corrected. Despite current trends toward minimizing teacher involvement in communication-based ESL classes, this report emphasizes the teacher's continued importance in communication-based learning. It draws on existing research to support its methodology and offers practical guidance for English teachers in Japan, particularly those facing challenges in providing or interpreting student feedback.

List of abbreviations used in this report:
ESL-English as a Second Language

Key Words: [Error Correction] [Feedback] [ESL]

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1. Introduction

This report investigates the role of error correction and feedback in English language learning among students at a Japanese junior college. By focusing on both oral and written communication, the report aims to understand how different types of feedback, ranging from direct correction to implicit cues, influence students' language development and motivation.

Previous research on feedback in language learning has highlighted its significance in facilitating language acquisition and fostering learner autonomy. However, the specific impact of different feedback strategies on English language learners in a Japanese context remains relatively unexplored. This report seeks to start filling this gap by examining the

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effectiveness of various error correction methods and the preferences of Japanese junior college students.

Through a combination of classroom observations, surveys, and student performance analysis, the research investigates the following questions:

- How do different types of feedback impact language accuracy and fluency?
- What are the preferences of Japanese junior college students regarding error correction and feedback?
- How does error correction influence students' motivation and engagement in language learning?

The report's findings suggest that explicit correction is often favored by students for its clarity and directness. Additionally, the research indicates that students almost always prefer to be corrected when they make mistakes, emphasizing the importance of teacher-provided feedback. The research highlights the continued significance of the teacher in modern ESL classrooms in Japan, despite recent trends towards minimizing teacher presence.

The students from whom this data was gathered were 60 English Department students, and the data was gathered over the course of 2 years. This means that all of the students chose to study English, which could have an impact on their motivation. The data was gathered from 2022-2023, as the college was recovering from a downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The class the students participated in is called 'Integrative English', where students focus on speaking and writing skills. The class is generally small, with about 20 students. All of the students were first year students in a women's college. All of these points should be taken into consideration when reading this report.

This report hopefully offers a valuable resource for English teachers in Japan who may be struggling to provide effective feedback or interpret student responses. By understanding the preferences and needs of their students, teachers can tailor their feedback strategies to optimize language learning outcomes.

This research investigates the effectiveness of different error correction strategies and the preferences of Japanese junior college students regarding feedback in English language learning, highlighting the significance of explicit correction and the enduring role of the teacher in modern ESL classrooms.

2. Literature Review

Feedback alone is not enough to promote comprehensive learning; it must be coupled with effective teaching methods to fully support student progress. Burns and Seidlhofer (2019) emphasize that the most successful learning environments are those where feedback is used alongside well-structured teaching methods (p 255). By combining feedback with specific

instructional strategies, teachers can ensure that feedback reinforces the learning objectives and drives students toward tangible improvements.

This concept of integrating feedback with teaching strategies is echoed by Bley-Vroman (1990), who insists that feedback must be goal-oriented and aligned with specific learning outcomes to be effective (p 22). Without this alignment, feedback loses its ability to guide students meaningfully. Nolasco and Arthur (1987) further elaborate on this, suggesting that feedback is most effective when applied during controlled tasks, which build student confidence before fluency-based activities. The structured approach allows feedback to serve as a stepping stone from basic skill acquisition to freer application of those skills, which can then build learner confidence when speaking.

Moreover, as Harmer (2007) points out, group feedback sessions that integrate feedback with collaborative tasks can enhance reflective learning (p 351). By combining feedback with interactive teaching techniques, students are able to gain insights from both the teacher and their peers, which reinforces their understanding and stimulates independent thinking.

Finally, the motivational aspect of feedback cannot be overlooked. Williams and Burden (1997) highlight that feedback, when paired with rewarding teaching strategies, has a positive impact on student motivation (p 26). This idea is further supported by Lepper and Hoddell (1989), who assert that feedback perceived as informational – especially when it complements a supportive teaching environment– is more likely to enhance motivation. On the contrary, when feedback is disconnected from effective teaching, or perceived as controlling, it may have the opposite effect, reducing students' motivation and engagement.

For this report, the author came across three questions which are important when any educator looks at feedback.

1. how to get quality feedback from students,
2. how feedback can specifically affect and improve our teaching and
3. how feedback can be looped back into the class to stimulate autonomous learning.

(Murphey and Woo, 1998)

While this source focused on using logs to achieve this, the questions can be applied to this report (Murphey and Woo, 1998).

3. Methodology

3.1 Who are the students?

The criteria used to find the answer to this question is taken heavily from Tessa Woodward's 2001 list of questions (pp 19-21). Such a list is important, as information can let the teacher understand the students' perceptions of themselves and their learning. Students'

feelings about being in control of their own learning and different factors to which students attribute to themselves contribute to their successes and failures in learning (Williams and Burden, 1997, 5.3).

In this report's case, the students are Japanese junior college students. It is a woman's college, so they are all female, and are studying in an English department. This means that most of them have chosen to study English, unlike junior high school and high school students, who have no choice but to study it. This should have a positive impact on their motivation. It should also be pointed out that for a two year college, the students will be directly heading for employment after graduation, with few exceptions. Therefore, the learners' motivation can range from a love of English, to studying to gain a qualification for employment. The learners are 18 to 20 years old. The class is called 'Integrative English. It is a first-year class. This class focuses on the speaking and writing skills in preparation for the learners going to study abroad at the end of the course. The class is quite small – about 20 students, and provides plenty of conversation opportunities, as well as group work, with information seminars from the teacher.

3.2 Data Collection

The data was gathered at the start of the first class of each semester. This was done to help the teacher understand the needs of the students and aid with feedback collection as the year progressed. The data was in the form of a simple survey given directly to the students. This survey was inspired by Penny Ur's 2012 error correction feedback survey. The questions have been slightly edited, and were translated into Japanese, with both English and Japanese present. This was to ensure that students understood exactly what the teacher was looking for.

For the feedback survey this report used, please refer to Appendix 1.

3.3 Timeframe

The timeframe for this data was 2021 to 2023. Over these two years, the college had taken a heavy hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. This affected airline and hospitality jobs, which the college's English department heavily relied on. This resulted in a downturn in the number of students. This resulted in a relatively small sample size of 60 students. Despite this, the results are quite uniform throughout the two years, and should still provide useful information on using feedback in a Japanese learning environment.

3.4 Ethics

The teacher directly told the students that this survey was being used for both academic research and to give the teacher an idea how to provide feedback to a new class. All students were informed of this before they answered the questions.

Oral correction

When you make a mistake in class, you think it's ... if the teacher	very good	good	not very good	bad
1. ... ignores it, doesn't correct at all.				
2. ... indicates there's a mistake but doesn't actually tell you what's wrong, so you have to work it out for yourself.				
3. ... says what was wrong <i>and</i> tells you what the right version is.				
4. ... says what was wrong and gets you to say the correct version yourself.				
5. ... says what was wrong and gets someone else to say the correct version.				
6. ... explains <i>why</i> it was wrong, what the rule is.				

Written correction

When you make a mistake in a written assignment, you think it's ... if the teacher	very good	good	not very good	bad
1. ... ignores it, doesn't correct at all.				
2. ... indicates there's a mistake (e.g. underlines it) but doesn't actually tell you what's wrong, so you have to work it out.				
3. ... tells you what's wrong (e.g. 'spelling') but doesn't actually give you the correct version, so you have to work it out yourself.				
4. ... writes in what it ought to be.				
5. ... corrects (any of the ways 2-4 above) but doesn't make you write out the correct version.				
6. ... corrects (any of the ways 2-4 above) and makes you rewrite correctly.				

Fig. 1 Ur, 2012, p 246-257

4. Results

4.1 Speaking feedback

The data presents how students feel about various correction methods during speaking activities:

1. Teacher ignores the mistake (no correction at all):
 - No students strongly agree or agree with this method.
 - 1 student disagrees, and 59 strongly disagree, making this method the least favored (0% agreement).
2. Teacher tells you that you made a mistake, but you must correct it yourself:

When you make a mistake speaking in class...	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Teacher ignores it; no correction at all			1	59
2. Teacher tells you that you made a mistake, but no details – you have to try and think yourself	3	12	23	22
3. Teacher tells you the problem directly	28	27	4	1
4. Teacher tells you the problem and you must repeat the correct version	42	17	1	
5. Teacher asks your classmates to help you	37	19	4	
6. Teacher tells you the mistake directly, and then explains the grammar	55	5		
Number of students: 60				

- 25% of students (15 out of 60) agree or strongly agree with this method, while 45 students disagree or strongly disagree.

3. Teacher directly tells you the problem:

- 91.67% of students (55 out of 60) agree or strongly agree, showing that this is a highly preferred method.

4. Teacher points out the problem, and you must fix it yourself:

- The highest approval rate, with 98.33% (59 out of 60) agreeing or strongly agreeing, indicating a strong preference for active correction while allowing self-repair.

Overall, students show a clear preference for direct correction or being guided to self-correct, with minimal support for ignoring errors.

4.2 Writing feedback

The data presents how students feel about various correction methods during writing activities:

When you make a mistake with writing ...	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Teacher ignores it; no correction at all	0	0	1	59
2. Teacher tells you that you made a mistake, but no details – you have to try and think yourself	4	12	22	22
3. Teacher writes the correct version for you	47	12	1	0
4. Teacher uses red pen to correct you	43	16	1	0
5. Teacher uses a different color to correct you	39	20	1	0
6. Teacher corrects the mistake, and then gets you to write the correct version	52	8	0	0
Number of students: 60				

1. Teacher ignores the mistake (no correction at all):
 - No students agree with this method.
 - 1 student disagrees, and 59 strongly disagree, making this the least favored correction approach (0% agreement).
2. Teacher tells you that you made a mistake but doesn't correct it:
 - 26.67% of students (16 out of 60) agree or strongly agree with this method, while 73.33% disagree or strongly disagree.
 - This method is somewhat acceptable but still not highly favored.
3. Teacher writes the correct version for you:
 - 98.33% of students (59 out of 60) agree or strongly agree, showing this is a highly preferred method.
4. Teacher uses a red pen to correct you:
 - 98.33% (59 out of 60) strongly agree or agree, making it another highly popular method among students.
5. Teacher uses a different color to correct you:
 - 98.33% of students (59 out of 60) strongly agree or agree, showing that students are generally comfortable with color-based corrections, whether red or another color.
6. Teacher corrects the mistake and gets you to rewrite it:
 - This method has the highest approval rate, with 100% of students (all 60) strongly agreeing or agreeing with the approach, indicating a strong preference for active correction paired with self-revision.

Students overwhelmingly prefer direct correction by the teacher, especially when the teacher writes the correct version or uses different colored pens to highlight mistakes. The least favored approach is ignoring the error entirely.

5. Discussion

The results of both speaking and writing feedback preferences reveal distinct patterns in how students perceive and value error correction, highlighting their preference for teacher involvement, particularly in ways that support their learning through direct or guided correction.

For speaking feedback, students clearly favor methods that actively involve the teacher in identifying and guiding them through their mistakes. The overwhelmingly negative response to the teacher ignoring errors (no students agreed with this method, and 59 strongly disagreed) indicates that students expect their mistakes to be addressed, not overlooked. When students are informed of their mistakes but are left to correct them on their own, 25% of students find this method somewhat helpful, but the majority still reject it.

This shows that while self-correction may have some merit, students prefer more structured guidance. The most favored methods involve either direct identification of the error (91.67% approval) or a mix of teacher intervention with student-led correction (98.33% approval). This suggests that students value feedback that both acknowledges their mistakes and empowers them to make improvements, highlighting a balanced need for direction and autonomy in the correction process.

For writing feedback, similar preferences emerge. The least favored method is for the teacher to ignore the mistake (0% approval), reinforcing the idea that students expect their errors to be addressed. When the teacher merely points out an error without providing the correct form, there is slightly more acceptance (26.67% approval), but the majority still favor direct intervention. The highest approval ratings are reserved for methods where the teacher provides direct corrections, such as writing the correct version for the student (98.33%) or using colored pens (whether red or other colors) to highlight mistakes (98.33%). The highest level of approval, however, comes for the method where the teacher both corrects the mistake and requires the student to rewrite it (100%). This method of error correction not only provides direct feedback but also encourages active student engagement with their errors, reinforcing learning through revision.

In both speaking and writing activities, students show a clear preference for error correction strategies that involve direct teacher intervention, particularly those that guide them toward self-repair or require active participation in correcting the mistake. These findings suggest that students value corrective feedback that is clear, immediate, and encourages their involvement in the learning process. The low approval rates for methods that ignore errors or rely solely on student correction without teacher support imply that students feel more confident and supported when the teacher plays an active role in the feedback process. This highlights the importance of balanced corrective feedback strategies in educational settings, where both direct and guided error correction can optimize student learning.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the clear preferences of Japanese junior college students for structured and teacher-involved feedback in both speaking and writing activities. The data shows that students overwhelmingly reject methods where errors are ignored, favoring direct correction or guided self-correction. In speaking, students value feedback that identifies mistakes clearly, while in writing, they appreciate corrections that include a teacher's intervention, especially when paired with opportunities for self-revision. The results suggest that students prefer an interactive approach to feedback that provides both clarity and autonomy, supporting their learning process.

These findings are significant in reinforcing the role of the teacher in modern ESL classrooms, particularly in Japan. Despite recent trends encouraging minimal teacher involvement in communication-based learning, students clearly benefit from explicit correction and structured feedback mechanisms. Teachers are instrumental in not only identifying mistakes but also in guiding students toward self-improvement. Ultimately, this report underscores the necessity of balancing direct correction with opportunities for student autonomy, ensuring that feedback serves as a motivational and educational tool, fostering both language development and learner confidence.

This research hopefully provides some insights for English teachers in Japan, helping them tailor their feedback strategies to better meet the needs of their students, ultimately optimizing learning outcomes in communicative-based ESL classrooms.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1. Feedback survey used for the data in this report:

When you make a mistake speaking in class...	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Question	X			

Feedback

例：(example)

Speaking Correction

When you make a mistake speaking in class...	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Teacher ignores it; no correction at all 先生は、正解を全く教えてくれません。				
2. Teacher tells you that you made a mistake, but no details – you have to try and think yourself 先生は、間違えたと伝えてくれますが内容を詳しく教えてくれません。自分で取り組み考えないといけません。				
3. Teacher tells you the problem directly 先生は、間違った点を全部教えてくれます。				
4. Teacher tells you the problem and you must repeat the correct version 先生は、間違った点を伝えてくれます。そして正解になるまで繰り返し教えてくれます。				
5. Teacher asks your classmates to help you 先生は、クラスメイトが私を助けるように頼んでくれます。				
6. Teacher tells you the mistake directly, and then explains the grammar 先生は、直接間違った点を全部伝えてくれます。そして文法を教えてくれます。				

Written Correction

When you make a mistake with writing …	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Teacher ignores it; no correction at all 先生は、正解を全く教えてくれません。				
2. Teacher tells you that you made a mistake, but no details – you have to try and think yourself 先生は、間違えたと伝えてくれますが内容を詳しく教えてくれません。自分で取り組み考えないといけません。				
3. Teacher writes the correct version for you 先生は、正解を書いてくれます。				
4. Teacher uses red pen to correct you 先生は、赤ペンで添削してくれます。				
5. Teacher uses a different color to correct you 先生は、カラーペンで添削してくれます。				
6. Teacher corrects the mistake, and then gets you to write the correct version 先生は、間違いを直してくれます。そして、学生に正解を書かせます。				

