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Student and Teacher Perceptions of Individual Writing Tutorials: A Match or a Mismatch?

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Abstract

This study examines first-year Japanese university students and their teachers' perceptions on the benefits and challenges of individual writing tutorials which were a required part of an academic writing course. The most common problems about student writing addressed in these tutorials included supporting details and evidence for body paragraphs, development of a thesis statement, paper organization, development of an outline prior to writing the first draft, development of topic sentences, and coherence/unity within the paper. The study found these tutorials to be beneficial from both teachers' and students' point of view, especially because face-to-face tutorials facilitate higher-quality feedback both in terms of comment generation and comprehension as well as providing personalized scaffolding for students. In addition, the study found that individual tutorials aid in critical thinking and autonomous learning strategy development. Despite the overwhelmingly positive role writing tutorials play in facilitating students' academic writing development, the teachers find them extremely time-consuming and mentally demanding. The teachers, however, attest to the positive impact attending tutorials have on students' essay assignment grades.

An increasing number of Japanese university students are faced with the need to not only improve their English communicative skills for their global futures but also to become able to handle academic materials in English. Many Japanese universities and their English as a Foreign Language programs are moving towards English for Academic Purposes curricula. As a direct result of this, EFL teachers are given the task of preparing their students to write academic papers in English. This is a huge burden on many of these teachers; helping to

generate students who are able to write coherent and well-developed papers in academic register. While many universities are acknowledging this by providing help to teachers, for example by establishing writing centers, not enough is done to explore the best ways to prepare the students for this demanding task of becoming a proficient academic writer in English.

One successful way of meeting student needs involves writing conferencing. This one-to-one strategy has been prominent in L1 writing for a long time but has become more popular in L2 writing as well. As L2 writing instruction transitioned from product-oriented instruction to process-writing instruction, individual writing conferencing also found its place in L2 writing. However, it is still underutilized in the field and not enough research has explored the benefits of including it in L2 writing curricular. Incorporating individual writing conferencing into EFL writing instruction in Japan however has the potential to provide a powerful learning tool for students to develop their academic writing skills.

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Literature Review

L1 Writing Conferencing

Both individual and small-group conferencing have gained importance in teaching writing. Muriel Harris (1986), founder of Purdue University Writing Center, states that writing conferences are "opportunities for highly productive dialogue between writers and teacher readers" (p.3) and should be integral part of teaching writing because of several benefits. Firstly, they result in improved student writing due to personalized, scaffolded instruction as well as the face-to-face opportunity resulting in better quality and comprehension of feedback. Secondly, teachers save time from having to write extensive feedback. Thirdly, writing is about so much more than only improving one's linguistic abilities. Writing conferences provide an opportunity to improve student writers' critical thinking skills through the interactive collaboration. Lastly, writing conferences serve an important social function as the teacher is transformed into a collaborative writer instead of serving in a dominant role. Anderson (2000) points out that the most important functions of writing conferences are to communicate with the student about their text and to provide students with strategies to become better writers.

Writing conferences in L1 setting have been extensively studied, and many of the studies have discussed the important benefits they provide for student writers. Many studies have found a positive effect of writing conferences not only on the final quality of student writing but also on students' increased ability to take part in the writing process (e.g. Bell, 2002; Hewett, 2006; Wong et al., 1996). With well-structured and well-led writing conferences, students gain confidence and competence (Bandura, 1993). The individually-tailored instruction in conferences helps students complete their writing assignments at their own pace, not at the pace of their classmates (Lerner, 2005). Writing is a highly personal task, and depending on the student, the time requirement or effort required at different stages of the writing process very likely differ from student to student. Because writing conferences promote autonomy in students, they increase student achievement (Koshik, 2002) in addition to increasing their level of self-efficacy (Snowman & Biehler, 2003). Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as, "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p.71). He also explains that these beliefs can be developed through experiences, such as a mastery experience. A positive and constructive writing conference experience can contribute to an increased self-efficacy on students. Students also improve their higher-learning and critical thinking skills through writing conferences as this social act allows them to progress from a novice writer to a more proficient and independent writer (Flynn, 1993). As shown above, the benefits of individual writing tutorials in L1 have been well documented which has led to them being adopted by many L2 writing teachers also.

L2 Writing Conferencing

One-on-one writing tutorials with the teacher are ideally suited for L2 learners because of the characteristics of the interaction. Writing centers where more experienced peers help writers with their writing process are popular at universities and are becoming popular in Japanese universities as well. However, research has shown that writing centers may not serve the purpose for L2 students. Many L2 writers desire and expect their tutors to take on authoritative roles and to be responsive to differing needs (Harris, 1997; Thonus, 1999a). Teachers are often more equipped to serving these functions than student tutors.

Surprisingly little research has been done on one-on-one conferencing in L2 writing though. Eckstein (2012) has discussed the philosophical underpinnings of a writing conference program as well as the extent to which teacher practice corresponds to this philosophy. In

another paper (2013), he has examined the effectiveness of individual writing conferences across different proficiency levels, with the finding that lower-level students do not view this collaborative learning experience as favorably as higher-level students do. However, Eckstein also concludes that writing conferences can provide an extremely useful mentoring relationship that can provide valuable feedback beyond traditional writing instruction. Thonus has analyzed what happens in individual writing conferences through a discourse analysis perspective (1999) as well as using discourse analysis to define success in these conferences (2002). In her analysis of student writer and expert writer tutors at a writing center, she found the following successful tutor behaviors cited as the most important both from the student and the tutor perspective: helping with thesis statement development, helping with the development and clarity of essay content, stressing student ownership in their writing, and facilitating further interaction between the student and the teacher.

Maliborska and You (2016) examined teacher and student perceptions in regards to individual writing conferences in a first year composition course for international students, and found that writing conferences generally were evaluated as being an effective and important part of a writing course. In their study, the instructors felt that one-to-one feedback helps the students in revising their essays while the students felt that the conferences were a chance to receive individual feedback and help with their writing. Based on the results of their study, their advice for successful writing conferences include requiring students to become an active participant in the conference rather than a passive listener, and to ensure that students take them seriously, preparedness and participation in these conferences should be included in the course grade.

Conrad and Goldstein (1990) note that writing conferences with second language learners "do not necessarily do what the literature claims they do," (p. 456). They also indicate that this could be because students' effort and participation in the conferences play a crucial role. Active student participation and successful negotiation of meaning resulted in better essay drafts. When the conferences were dominated by the teacher, the results were not as positive. Due to the importance of student engagement, mandatory high-stakes writing conferences which students are accountable for are a crucial element of their success. If writing conferences are a structured and mandatory part of writing instruction, they may yield a more successful result. Ferris and Hedgecock (1998) suggest (cited in Canagarajah, 2002) personalizing feedback strategies to individual learning styles and needs during writing conferences.

Strong (2003) provides some guidelines for enhancing the effectiveness of teacher-student writing conferences. Firstly, they should be conducted in a way that encourages student participation and student negotiation. They should not merely be an opportunity for the teacher to give feedback but more importantly, they should be an opportunity for the student to be the more active participant. Through this engagement, students not only improve their drafts but learn important skills to become more autonomous writers as they critically assess their drafts with the help of the teacher. He also discusses the importance of written feedback and advises against error correction. Instead, he suggests identifying error types and utilizing open-ended or guided questions to aid students in improving their writing. Lastly, he recommends audio recording the conferences which allows for the students to have a permanent record of what was discussed with the teacher. They can then refer back to the details from the recording during the revision process.

It is also important to make sure that students understand the purpose of tutorials as well as how to be an active participant during a tutorial. Nicosia and Stein (1996) recommend using introductory tutorials with groups of students in order to familiarize them with the process and making sure they understand what their role is. They say this can help prevent any confusion students may have about tutorials. Even though more than 90% of the respondents in Takaesu, Sudo, and Christianson's (2010) study that was conducted at the same institution as the present study indicated that tutorials were useful, the study also found that some students felt that the tutorial system needs to be explained by teachers more effectively, the need to reduce student anxiety about tutorials should be considered more carefully, and there is a need to integrate the tutorials into students' long-term study more in a better way.

Writing as a Social Act

Student writing can be considered a social act because during the writing process, students interact with other students, the teacher, and any other targeted audience for their texts. Any writing assignment they write is addressed to someone, from their peers who read and comment on them during peer review to the teacher who grades the final product. Also, student writing incorporates values, beliefs, and experiences from the writer's social environment. Most teachers expect students to collaborate with peers and the teacher during the writing process, another feature that makes it a social act. Canagarajah describes this as "a relationship of collaboration on a common project" (2002, p.199) Using writing conferences as part of the L2 writing program fits perfectly with the view of writing as a social act as it

provides opportunities for students and teachers to collaborate on a social act.

Sommers (2013) urges teachers to see student writers as "apprentice scholars". She argues that the quality of feedback given by teacher is crucial, and she found that much feedback is useless as students feel that the feedback is written to the paper, not given to the student. Writing conferences are an ideal opportunity to communicate feedback to the student in a meaningful way through social interaction. Sommers (2013) also stresses the importance of taking students' ideas seriously. Similarly, Bardine, Bardine, and Deegan (2000) recommend that L2 teachers focus on the writer's ideas and try to give positive and specific feedback for students' writing development and find ways to motivate them. Atwell (1998) adds that "our decisions must be guided by 'what might help this writer' rather than 'what might help this writing'" (p. 228). All of this research emphasizes the importance of the social aspect of the writing conference.

Much of the research on writing conferences, like the studies discussed above, have examined the usefulness of these conferences for students or the strategies teachers use in conducting them. Because of the collaborative nature of conferences, examining teacher and student perceptions of what happens during this interactive learning experience is important and could provide vital information on the effectiveness of them. This, in turn, can inform teaching practice. In order to help teachers conduct effective writing classes, it is also helpful to know what are the most common themes and issues discussed in these conferences. This knowledge can inform teacher practices in the classroom and guide teachers on what aspects of the writing process needs more focus. This current study attempts to extend the existing research about L2 writing conferences by holistically investigating the perceptions of Japanese university students and their writing instructors about writing tutorials in a mandatory academic writing course as well as discovering what are the most common problems students seek help for at these conferences. This study addresses the following four research questions (RQs):

Research Question 1: How beneficial are individual writing tutorials from the students' perspective?

Research Question 2: What are the most commonly addressed writing issues in the writing tutorials?

Research Question 3: What are the most useful and the least useful aspects of the writing tutorials from the students' perspective?

Research Question 4: What are the strengths and challenges of writing tutorials from the instructors' perspective?

Methodology

Participants

One-hundred-sixteen first year students in seven different Academic Reading and Writing (ARW) class sections answered a paper-based survey about writing tutorials at the end of the 10-week spring term in June 2016 and at the end of the 10-week autumn term in November 2016 at a prestigious private university in Tokyo. The students' proficiency level is approximately 400-600 on the TOEFL PBT. Upon entering the university, the students take the TOEFL PBT after which they are divided into class levels. The respondents of this study are in two different levels; a mainstream level of about 400 to 500 TOEFL PBT and a more advanced level of over 500 to 600 TOEFL PBT. In each class there were between 22-25 students in the class.

The two teachers who are the authors of this paper taught the seven different class sections of the respondents. Combined, the two teachers have about 24 years of experience teaching Japanese university students. One teacher was born and raised in Finland and did her undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States. The other teacher was born and raised in the United States, but is of Japanese descent. She did her undergraduate study at a Japanese university and her graduate school studies in the United States.

The Course

The required Academic Reading and Writing (ARW) course met three times a week for 70 minutes each time. The course focuses on academic reading skills such as scanning, skimming and annotating the text. In addition, the students are taught to critically read the text by analyzing, questioning and evaluating the text. The readings are considered academic texts which university students in the United States would read in a first-year introductory course. The readings are related to the theme of the term. In the spring term, the readings in the mainstream class focus on Education. In the fall, these students read texts on Culture, Perception and Communication and Race. In the spring term, the advanced level students read about Education and Culture and Perception and Communication. In the fall, the focus is on Race and Bioethics.

In addition to reading, the class focuses on argumentative essay writing. In this part of the class, students are taught how to locate sources using the library database, how to critically evaluate the sources using skills from their academic reading skills, and how to cite their sources in the different parts of the essay. They also learn the other basic components

of argumentative essay writing including brain storming topics, outlining, forming an argumentative thesis statement, writing effective topic sentences, using and analyzing evidence and sources in their body paragraphs, and writing the conclusion. During the course, students work on their essays independently as homework. A significant amount of time during the course is also designated for peer review in class.

The essay topics are aligned with the topics they read about in the class. In the spring term, half of the respondents who were in the mainstream course wrote one argumentative essay on the topic of education. The other half of the respondents in the advanced course wrote two argumentative essays in the spring term. Their first topic was education and the second topic was culture, perception, or communication. In the fall term, both groups of respondents wrote two argumentative essays. The students in the mainstream class wrote on the topic of culture, perception, or communication for their first essay. Then, for the second essay the topic was race. The advanced level students wrote about race and bioethics in the fall term. The argumentative essays range from 600 to 1000+ words. The goal is for the students to write progressively longer essays each time.

In addition to the class time, students have two class hours a week dedicated to tutorials. According to their student handbook, "Tutorial periods are scheduled to give you time to talk individually to with your ARW teacher about specific problems or questions you have about your writing assignments and what you have written". The tutorials are conducted in English. The goal each term is for each student to attend three to four tutorials that last about 10-15 minute each. Both of the teachers of this study included tutorial attendance and participation as a factor in the students' final grades. More frequent and participatory attendance at tutorials had a positive effect on a student's final grade. Students are also instructed by the teacher that tutorials are "student-led." This means that students have to come to the tutorials with questions about their essay or the problems they are having with the writing process to ask the teacher.

Questionnaire

The survey for this study consisted of five questions including three multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions about the ARW tutorials during the 2016 academic year. The multiple choice questions asked the number of times students attended a tutorial in that term, what was the purpose for attending tutorials, and how beneficial tutorials were to students. The open-ended questions asked the most useful aspects of tutorials and the

least useful aspects of tutorials. The open ended questions were answered in English only. Furthermore, the two teachers kept a qualitative log about tutorial sessions, noting student questions and teacher advice on these questions.

Results

Student Questionnaire

This section will present the results of the paper-based student questionnaire by presenting the quantitative and qualitative results for each question.

Q1: Attendance

The first question asked how many times the student attended a tutorial. In terms of frequency of tutorial attendance, about 71% of the students, 83 students, said they attended three or more sessions in the term. About 28% of the students, 32 students, attended one or two tutorials a term, and about 1%, or one student, never attended a tutorial during the term. This means that the majority of the students utilized the time outside of the class to meet with the teacher to consult on their writing assignments during the spring and fall terms in 2016.

Q2: Reasons for Going to Tutorials

Students go to tutorials to discuss various parts of their essay. The second question asked about the reasons for attending tutorials. Table 1 below ranks the reasons students came to tutorial from 1 being the most popular reason and 11 being the least popular reason. For this question, students were able to circle all that applied to them.

Table 1 ***Ranking of the most common reasons by students for attending tutorials***

1. Supporting details/evidence (N=72)	7. Introduction (N=43)
2. Thesis statement (N=71)	8. In-text citations (N=33)
3. Organization (N=59)	9. Conclusion (N=31)
4. Outline (N=57)	10. Works Cited List (N=30)
5. Topic sentences (N=49) Coherence/Unity (N=49)	11. Formatting (N=25)
6. Counterargument/Refutation (N=44)	

Supporting Details/Evidence

According to students, the most common reason for going to tutorial was for students to discuss their supporting details and evidence used to support these ideas. When students write argumentative essays, they must provide outside evidence to support their own ideas. Students often struggle with this because they find it difficult to find reliable academic sources that support their original ideas. In addition, often times students have difficulty 'unpacking' the evidence. They struggle in introducing, explaining, and analyzing the evidence. As a result, they often seek advice during tutorials on how to find sufficient evidence which supports their idea or instruction on how to explain the evidence in a logical and coherent way.

Thesis Statement

According to student answers, the second most common reason for going to tutorials is to seek guidance on their thesis statement. Students often struggle with forming an argumentative thesis statement. Japanese students in particular often have difficulty with forming an argument which requires student to take a stand on an issue. This may be because students are not acclimated with having an opinion or questioning ideas as most of their education in the past had focused on rote memorization of facts and teachers as figures of authority. In addition, sometimes their arguments are too vague so that they seek help to narrow their focus. Furthermore, students also struggle with how they will prove their argument presented in their thesis statement. Often times students have not done enough research which results in them lacking sufficient reasons on how to prove their argument, so they also seek advice for finding additional and logical reasons to prove their argument.

Organization

The third most popular reason for having tutorials is to discuss the organization of student essays. Organization of an essay could be both at a macro or micro level. At the macro level, students often seek advice at the end stages of the essay writing process to discuss which body paragraph should come first. For example, they want advice on whether they should organize the paragraphs in chronological order, from the weakest paragraph to the strongest paragraph in regards to the strength or importance of the reason, or conversely, from strongest to weakest. At the micro-level students often seek advice on organization within their body paragraph. They want to discuss if their topic sentence and evidence has coherence. Additionally, at times students lose their focus and have more than one topic or idea for each paragraph. Thus, students are suggested to divide their ideas or reorganize and develop each

idea effectively.

Outline

In the initial stages of writing, students are told to write an outline so that they start thinking about their essay topic and main argument. Students often come to tutorials in the initial stages if they have multiple interests and do not know which topic to pursue, or if they have decided on a topic but they are conflicted about which side of the argument to take. By seeking advice on their outlines, teachers can gain a general idea of a student's essay topic and argument. Teachers can discuss potential challenges they could face in the latter stages of the essay with students. For example, multiple ideas in one paragraph or incoherence between the topic sentence and the evidence, or problems with topic sentences. In addition, often students will seek advice on how to organize the main ideas of their essay so that when they start writing, they know the order of their ideas is logical.

Topic Sentences and Coherence and Unity

The fifth most common reason of tutorials was topic sentences and coherence and unity, both chosen by 49 students. Students often go to tutorials for suggestions on their topic sentences, often because students tend to state facts as topic sentences. Thus, they are often given input that a topic sentence should express the argument of the paragraph in the student's own words, and a topic sentence should also show a clear connection on how it will support the essay's overall argument. The students are often told that the rest of the paragraph needs to introduce and analyze the evidence that reinforces the topic sentence. Thus, the topic sentence should not only state the topic but the argument for that specific paragraph.

In addition, students come to tutorials to discuss coherence and unity. In terms of coherence and unity, a common problem involves the essay digressing from the topic sentence or the ideas being illogical. Students are recommended for one paragraph to focus on one idea and are also given suggestions to use transition signals and to be clear about what they want to say. Often times students' ideas are vague and unclear, so ideas need to be developed and be more specific. In addition, to better organize and understand their ideas students are given input to use transition signals for logical transitions between and within paragraphs.

Counterargument and Refutation

Counterargument and refutations was the sixth most popular reason for going to tutorial. This not being in the top five reasons was surprising because this is a section of the essay students are unfamiliar with and often struggle with when first introduced to argumentative writing. Often times for Japanese students presenting a counterargument which challenges

one's own argument seems unnatural. The refutation of the counterargument also poses difficulties for students. The teachers give advice about the refutation by giving example counterargument and refutation paragraphs and also teaching students commonly used phrases for this section. In addition, students want advice about where to place their counterargument and refutation.

Introduction

Students come to tutorial for advice on their introduction. Students often lack confidence about the attention-getter of their essay. They may feel that this hook does not catch the reader's interest or they seek for advice on how to 'hook' the reader to their topic. Sometimes the hook is lengthy or the hook and the thesis statement are not strongly connected.

In-text Citations, Conclusions, Works Cited List. and Formatting

Formatting was one of the least common topics sought out for advice. This is probably because often times classes were held in the computer room and students were given class time to work on their essays and ask questions. Often during this class time the teacher explicitly explains and demonstrates the requirements for formatting. The Works Cited List and In-text Citations are another topic that students limitedly sought advice in tutorials. The reason is probably similar to the one above. When classes are conducted in the computer room students receive explicit direction on the Works Cited List and different ways to do in-text citations in MLA style, the style used in ARW classes. In addition, they receive reinforcement in their computer classes outside of the ARW class on the use of Works Cited List generators, such as Easybib and Zotero. Advice required for conclusions was also very limited. This is probably because conclusions are formulaic. It requires students to paraphrase their thesis statement and then explain how they have proven their argument followed by a final comment, such as suggestion of results or consequences or call for an action.

Q3 & Q4: Benefits of Tutorials & Reasons

The third question inquired about how useful the tutorials were for the students. About 84% of the students, 97 students, answered that tutorials were very beneficial while 16%, 19 students, said they were somewhat beneficial. No student indicated that tutorials were not beneficial at all, the third option. As the results show, 100% of the students find tutorials to be beneficial.

The fourth question further investigated the reasons for the usefulness of tutorials. One primary reason why students view tutorials to be beneficial is because it is difficult to ask

questions during class due to time constraints, or they feel the classroom environment is not feasible to do so. For example, one student said: "I was able to ask many questions individually at once… because it is hard to ask about the essay in class." In addition, one-to-one time with a teacher during writing conferencing is also favorable for students because, as one student put it: "Japanese students are shy to ask questions in class in front of their classmates."

Another reason why students feel tutorials are beneficial is because it raises their confidence and motivation in English. By discussing their assignments individually students can get positive feedback from a teacher on a section they may have been diligently working on, or were unconfident about, and this way, they can gain confidence on their writing ability through the comments from their teacher. Tutorials are scheduled during specific points of the drafts of the essay, so if students have not finished certain parts of their essay they are unable to get sufficient feedback. This can act as a positive force on making sure students complete their work as can be seen from one student's comment: "It motivates me to write the essay within time limits".

In addition, tutorials are useful because it hones students' critical thinking. Students must think rationally about their essay topic such as think about logical connections about their ideas and also think about the importance or relevance of their arguments. For example, a student commented by stating: "She [the teacher] gave me the exact point of where to fix my essay. Yet, she did not give me the whole answer to how I should be fixing it, so I had to think on my own as well. So in the end it improved my writing." Another student commented by saying: "I could learn how to think and which kinds of data is needed". Thus, tutorials provide students with a time to self-reflect on their essays to detect problems such as inconsistencies or lack of coherence.

Finally, tutorials appear to be a valuable platform that allows students to discuss their ideas with their teacher who would ultimately evaluate their assignment. For example, one student remarked: "The most useful aspect is that the teacher explained strange parts of my essay clearly and listened to my new idea." This shows that this student appreciated the feedback and the time to talk to the teacher to discuss new ideas. In addition, another student stated: "It enables me to see my thoughts and ideas objectively and make it clear by discussing with the teacher." Tutorials are advantageous for students because by having the time to converse with the teacher, students can share their self-reflections of their ideas.

Q5: What were the least useful aspects of tutorials

The last question asked about the least useful aspects of tutorials from the students' perspective. According to the results, many respondents expressed that time constraints were the least useful aspect of tutorials. Teachers only have a limited time with each student due to their teaching load and availability. All students are limited to 10-15 minutes per session with the teacher, thus some students may need more time that is allotted for them. Students who are especially struggling with writing skills or with their essay topic may need more individual attention than other students. One student expressed: "Some students might need a lot of time, more than others." In addition, because some students find tutorials incredibly useful and like the one-to-one time with the teacher, they would like to have more sessions with the teacher. For example, a student response stated: "It would be great if we had more time to spend during tutorials." In addition, first year students have a rigorous schedule with not only English courses but required general education courses. As a result, sometimes, as one student wrote, it is "hard to find a time that suits both the teacher and student."

On the other hand, the students also seem to understand that tutorials place a burden on them. One student said: "If a student has no questions, tutorials become useless." This is because if students have not prepared specific questions about the content of their essay or essay writing skills it is a waste of time for both the student and the teacher. Tutorials are student led and thus require students to be assertive in taking responsibility for their tutorial session and their writing assignment. Japanese students in particular have been passive learners in their classroom prior to entering to university. They are acclimated to being passive recipients of knowledge from the teacher. Tutorials force students to be active participants in the essay writing process during the tutorial. One student commented that a disadvantage for tutorials is that: "It is for active learner" while most students are accustomed to being disengaged in the learning process and are acclimated to being told what to do which may result in them finding tutorials to be challenging.

Teacher Logs

This section presents the results of the qualitative logs teachers kept on the tutorial sessions. For each session, they noted student questions and teacher advice on these questions. In addition, this section shares the overall reflections by teachers from the tutorial sessions.

Teacher Perceptions: Student Problems

Both instructors kept a log of student problems about their essays. From the logs, the teachers perceived the most problematic area was the thesis statement. In the initial stages of the essay, the thesis statement was not argumentative meaning that the thesis statement did not express an opinion. In addition, students would write a generalization, so the thesis statement lacked focus. The second most problematic issue in their essays was that students did not 'unpack' the evidence in body paragraphs. This implies that students failed to introduce the outside source they used, so students were instructed on phrases that introduce the evidence. In addition, students failed to analyze the evidence, thus students were advised to explain the evidence by making connections to the topic sentence and the thesis statement. The next problematic issue was refuting counter-arguments. While students were able to present a counter-argument, they had difficulty in weakening the counterargument and linking it back to their own argument. In addition, students struggled with coherence. Their writing lacked logical connectors or transitions that assist in the smooth flow of ideas in a paragraph. Additionally, like thesis statements, topic sentences were also challenging to students. In the initial drafts that students brought to tutorials, the topic sentence students formed would often be facts and not arguments that helped to support the overall thesis of the essay. Lastly, vague language was struggle for students. It was difficult to understand their ideas due to a lack of abstract and concrete ideas.

Teacher Perceptions: Reflections

The teachers reflected on their notes on tutorials. For each tutorial session, each teacher kept a log of what problems the student had with their essay, what the student perceived to be their problem (the reason why they came to tutorial), and the advice the teacher gave the student. The teachers analyzed these logs independently and then the two teachers had a candid discussion about what they had discovered with each other. Through this evaluation of notes and dialogue with each other, they were in agreement with the following conclusions. Firstly, tutorials are extremely time consuming because the teacher spent about 10 ～ 15 minutes with each student. Tutorials are conducted before or after teaching and often done in consecutive sessions with students, hence, it is also very taxing on the teacher. Furthermore, considering that 71% of the respondents went to tutorials 3 or more times, tutorials take up more time than what is allocated in the teacher's teaching load. However, tutorials are rewarding because there is a direct correlation with the effort students put into tutorials and

essay grades. For the teacher, this aspect, seeing the vast improvement from the original draft, is the most gratifying result of the time spent on tutorials. Students who are motivated to come to tutorials want to come to tutorials to further improve their writing abilities in English and this is reflected on the final draft of the essay. Since tutorials are outside of the regular classroom and conducted one-to-one, students sometimes use the tutorial time to consult on their personal issues unrelated to the writing assignment. While it is an honor that students feel comfortable to discuss personal issues, it takes away from the time to focus on the writing assignment. Finally, the teachers concluded that the students who need to come the most do not sometimes come to the tutorial session. This is extremely unfortunate because it is these students who could benefit most of the one-to-one time with the instructor to make vast improvements with their writing. It is uncertain if the students do not come because they have procrastinated and have not met the deadline for the draft or if they are afraid to come to tutorials because they lack confidence to have one-to-one time with the teacher.

Discussion

This section attempts to answer the research questions posed at the end of the introduction at the beginning of the paper by further analyzing the results of the survey results and the teacher logs.

RQ1: How beneficial are individual writing tutorials from the students' perspective?

The results of the questionnaire overwhelmingly indicated that students find one-on-one writing tutorials useful. Many of the students commented on the fact that during this time, they are able to ask specific questions about their writing and the issues they are facing, something that is usually not possible during class time. They also pointed out that because of the way the teachers conduct the tutorials, referring to the fact that the teachers do not give them the 'answers' but think collaboratively with the student about how to move forward or resolve the issue they are having with their essay, they are able to improve both their thinking and writing skills. Some students also indicated that these types of tutorials may be especially useful for Japanese students because many of them may be hesitant to talk about the troubles they are having in a whole class context. Another important effect of tutorials seems to be increased self-confidence of students, a vital feature for their continuing studies and for developing into autonomous learners.

RQ2: What are the most commonly addressed writing issues in the writing tutorials?

The students and teachers were mostly in agreement about the most common writing features addressed in tutorials. Both of them mentioned problems with thesis statements and topic sentences, developing and using evidence as support in body paragraphs, and coherence and unity as being frequent stumbling blocks for these student writers that needed addressing in their one-to-one meetings. The teachers and students also agreed that counter-arguments as well as refuting these counter-arguments also caused problems for the student writers. On the other hand, the teachers pointed out that another frequent problem they had to address during these tutorials was abstract and vague language used by students, something that the students themselves do not seem to recognize as a serious problem. However, as this problem was not listed as one of the options in the survey, that may be why no students mentioned it as they did not think of writing it under other problems. Also, it is possible that students may include this in one of the other categories, such as under the category of explaining supporting details. Also, the students expressed having many challenges with developing their outlines, something the teachers did not recognize as a major problem for the students.

RQ3: What are the most useful and the least useful aspects of the writing tutorials from the students' perspective?

The students found the individual one-to-one nature of the tutorials as one of the most useful aspects of them because this allows them to focus on their individual writing challenges. They also commented on the usefulness of this time as a social act that allows them to enhance not only their writing skills but also their critical thinking skills. Students also appreciated having this opportunity to receive input from the teacher about the progress and quality of their draft, which helped them to have an indication as to the final grade of their paper or the amount of work still needed to complete the paper in a satisfactory manner.

As for the least useful aspects, most students commented that this time will be wasted if the students are not prepared. As mentioned previously, the teachers expect these sessions to be student-led; therefore, if a student is not well-prepared, the time will be wasted both for the teacher and the student. The students indicated that they understand this. Some students also commented on the limited time available for each student. Several students commented on the fact that some students need more help than others, and therefore, they felt that there should be some sort of distribution of time based on this need. For example, a very strong writer may not need to come to the three tutorials scheduled for each student while a weaker

student may require six tutorials in order to get a maximum benefit out of them. Therefore, many students felt this should be taken into consideration by the teacher when allocating tutorial times.

RQ4: What are the strengths and challenges of writing tutorials from the instructors' perspective?

Based on the qualitative teacher data, the most important and pragmatic aspect of tutorials is the fact that if students take advantage of them, meaning that they both come to tutorials and are prepared for them by having good questions, this effort and preparedness will directly result in a higher-quality student paper, and as a consequence, in a higher final grade. The time the teachers need to invest on this beneficial end result for students, though, exceeds the time allocated in their teaching load for these tutorials. The one-on-one nature of these meetings makes them extremely demanding for the teacher, both mentally and emotionally, especially because some students come to tutorials more than required while some others come to not only discuss problems with their writing but also personal issues. The teachers also regret the fact that while most of the students take advantage of the tutorial time, some students who could benefit the most from this one-to-one time do not come as often as they should in order to make substantial progress with their writing skills.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study found that both teachers and students feel that tutorials are beneficial. While giving feedback of drafts on paper is beneficial, tutorials feedback is of better quality and students are able to comprehend the feedback better because of the face-to-face interaction between the teacher and student due to the fact that the teacher is able to give students personalized scaffolded instruction, a finding similar to Harris (1986). Instructional scaffolding aids in stronger understanding of feedback and by chunking the feedback by making it specific to a certain section in each tutorial session helps students tremendously. Individual tutorial sessions also facilitate in developing students into more autonomous learners and writers. Furthermore, tutorials are beneficial because this one-to-one interaction between a student and a teacher aids in the critical thinking development through discussion between the interlocutors, similar to Flynn's argument (1993). Development of critical thinking is essential as it is an essential skill not only in the classroom but in the future workplace. Another powerful effect of individual tutorials is that they shift the teachers' role from authority figure to a collaborator, and allow teachers to treat student writers as

"apprentice scholars", as urged by Sommers (2013). However, as Nicosia and Stein (1996) also point out, teachers need to ensure that their role in the tutorial is that of an advisor and collaborator, not evaluator. This is important for decreasing student anxiety which was shown to be an issue in Takaesu, Sudo, and Christianson's (2010) study. Even though this did not seem to be an issue with the students in the present study, it is a vital consideration when conducting one-to-one tutorials.

This study merely examined the perceptions about and reasons for attending writing tutorials with this group of students. While the purpose was to investigate whether the teachers and the students who participated in this study were in agreement about the reasons and usefulness of these one-to-one conferences, it may be useful to also examine the quality of writing of the same group of students. It would be constructive to analyze their essays in detail to quantify the improvement they made with their essays, and more specifically, which aspects of their writing improved the most, and to try to examine if the tutorials were in fact the reason for these improvements. Further research should also investigate what strategies used during the tutorials by teachers are most effective, and in what ways could the tutorial sessions be improved to maximize their benefit for students.

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