

The Effects of Peer Feedback on Student Teacher's Teaching Demonstrations in an EFL Teacher-training Course in Japan

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1. Introduction

In Japan, students who want to be teachers have to take pre-service teacher training courses at a university. In these courses, microteaching is commonly used. Microteaching is a “technique used in the training of teachers, in which different teaching skills are practiced under carefully controlled conditions” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 365). Usually, one student demonstrates part of a lesson to his or her classmates. In many cases, the demonstration is video-recorded, and the student who performs the demonstration is later given peer feedback.

Studies on the use of microteaching followed by peer feedback for teacher training have been conducted since the 1970s and 80s. For instance, Cliffored, Jorstad, and Lange (1977) undertook a survey investigating how pre-service student teachers evaluated peer-group microteaching as part of their preparation for student teaching in a foreign language methods course in the United States. They found that the students considered this type of microteaching to be a valuable experience and “very helpful in preparing them for student-teaching experience” (p. 233). In the Japanese context, Ota (1980) maintains that although microteaching is not conducted with real students and is therefore artificial in nature, it is still effective because it gives student teachers opportunities to put theory into practice.

One of the more recent studies was conducted by Furuya (2006), who

attempted to clarify some of the problems in implementing microteaching in a teacher-training course. He noted that although class time is limited, it is of utmost importance to give student teachers the opportunity to perform two teaching demonstrations so that they can reflect on their first performance and later revise it with reference to the peer feedback. Mio and Makino (2010) also studied the use of microteaching and students' peer- and self-evaluation at a teacher training course in Japan. They offered a detailed explanation of the system of microteaching and evaluation they developed; however, their study did not empirically examine the effects and limitations of the system.

The present study is an attempt to explore what impact peer feedback has on student teachers' teaching demonstrations when given in an EFL teacher-training course in Japan.

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of peer feedback, as given to the practice teaching by student teachers in a teacher training course at a university in Japan. The following research questions were asked:

- 1) Does peer feedback help Japanese EFL student teachers improve their practice teaching? (Research Question 1, hereafter RQ 1)
- 2) Do the student teachers consider peer feedback to be helpful in developing their teaching skills in EFL? (RQ 2)
- 3) Does the amount of feedback correlate with improvement in the student teachers' practice teaching? (RQ 3)
- 4) What kinds of peer feedback are given to the student teachers? (RQ 4)
- 5) How do the student teachers actually make improvements in their teaching demonstrations? (RQ 5)

3. Procedure

3.1. Participants

Four Japanese university students (S1, S2, S3, and S4) participated in the present study. They were fourth year students who were taking teacher training courses in order to become EFL teachers. These students were chosen because they fully understood the purpose of the study and allowed us to use their data for the study. Their classmates acted as either junior high school or high school students. The limited number of participants was due to the nature of the present study which attempted an in-depth analysis of the students' teaching performances in the framework of a case study.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Peer feedback

Figure 1 shows the procedure for data collection.

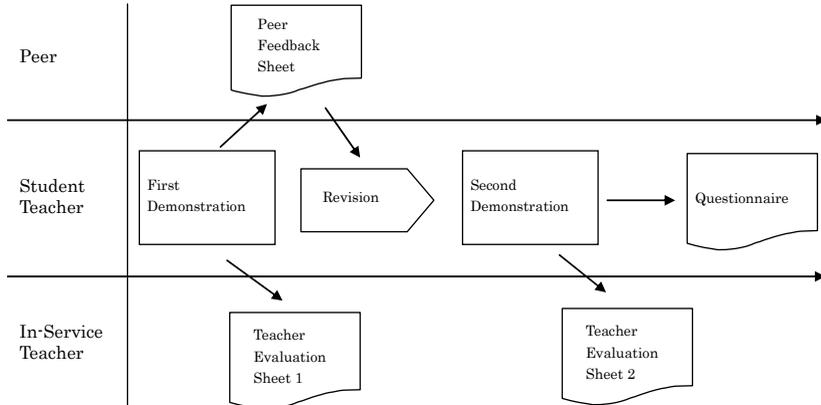


Figure 1. The procedure for data collection.

In the classes entitled “Microteaching 1” and “Microteaching 3,” each of the four students gave a twenty-minute teaching demonstration as a pre-test. They

taught part of a lesson to their classmates using an English textbook published in Japan. S1 and S2 designed a lesson for a junior high school classroom, while S3 and S4 prepared a lesson for a high school classroom.

The student teachers' first demonstrations were discussed in the class, and they received peer feedback from their classmates based on a peer feedback sheet. Appendix A shows the peer feedback sheet with five major feedback categories, such as (1) lesson plan, (2) teaching techniques, (3) teacher talk, (4) teacher-student interaction, and (5) classroom atmosphere. For each category several aspects were specified. For instance, in the category "teacher talk," the following four aspects were included: 1) uses supplementary teaching materials, 2) uses the blackboard, and 3) walks around the class to check how the students are doing. Taking these teaching aspects in consideration, the classmates wrote peer comments for each of the five categories.

The student teachers' first teaching demonstrations were video-recorded. The students reflected on the videotape of their own microteaching and attempted to revise their teaching plans according to comments given as peer feedback. Approximately four weeks later, the students gave the second demonstration as a post-test where they taught the same lesson they had dealt with in the first demonstration.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

After giving the second demonstration, the student teachers were asked to respond to a questionnaire that examined whether or not they found the peer feedback to be effective. Specifically, the students were asked to rate the effectiveness of the feedback on a six-point scale, where one means "least effective" while six means "most effective." They also wrote comments to indicate how effective or ineffective the peer feedback was in terms of the different categories (see Appendix B).

3.2.3 Teacher evaluation and feedback

Four experienced in-service English teachers (T1, T2, T3 and T4) served as evaluators. All of them taught at a public school in Japan and had more than five years experience in teaching EFL.

The teachers watched the student teachers' first and second videotaped demonstrations. They rated the demonstrations according to a teacher evaluation sheet. Appendix C shows the teacher evaluation sheet, which is similar to the peer feedback sheet. The teachers rated the student teachers' demonstrations in terms of the five major categories on a six-point scale, with one point as the lowest score and six as the highest score.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Teacher evaluation and feedback (RQ 1)

The in-service teachers' rating scores for the students' first and second demonstrations were compared to one another in order to examine any differences between the two. For each student teacher, the mean of the scores for the five different categories was calculated and used as the overall score. This overall score and the scores for the five different evaluation categories were compared for each of the two teaching demonstrations.

4.2 Students' response to the questionnaire (RQ 2)

The four student teachers' responses were analyzed to examine whether they considered peer feedback to be effective in revising their teaching skills.

4.3 Peer feedback in five categories (RQ 3)

The number of comments written for each category in the peer feedback sheet was counted. Next, the percentage of the comments in each feedback category was calculated for the respective student teachers. Finally, an attempt was made to

investigate whether there was any relationship between the amount of classmates' peer feedback and the qualitative change in the student teachers' second teaching demonstration.

4.4 Types of peer feedback (RQ 4)

The classmates' peer comments were examined in terms of their content.

4.5 Sample analysis of student teachers' pre- and post-demonstrations (RQ 5)

The students' first and second demonstrations were closely compared in order to trace the changes that were actually made between the two demonstrations as a result of the peer feedback.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Teacher evaluation (RQ 1)

Figure 2 shows the change in the overall score given by the in-service teachers for the four student teachers' first and second microteaching, respectively. All of the students demonstrated improvements in the second microteaching.

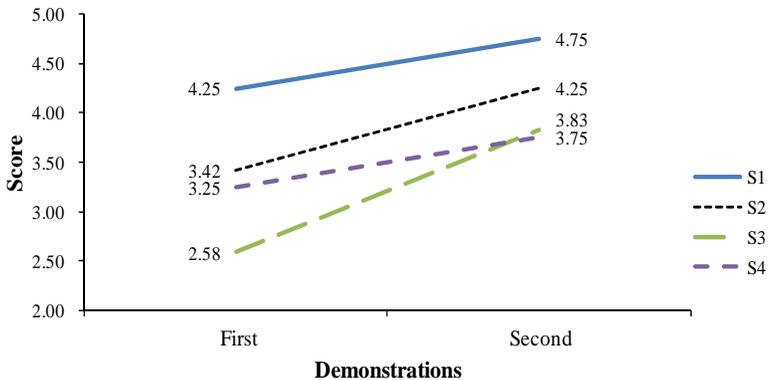


Figure 2. Changes in overall score between four student teachers' first and second demonstrations.

Figures 3 through 6 illustrate the difference in the scores for the five different categories between the student teacher's first and second teaching demonstrations. These results suggest that peer feedback has a positive effect on EFL student teachers' practice teaching in terms of the overall teaching quality and various aspects of teaching. S1 showed marked improvement in the category "teaching techniques." The three other students, however, showed the greatest improvement in the category "students' participation."

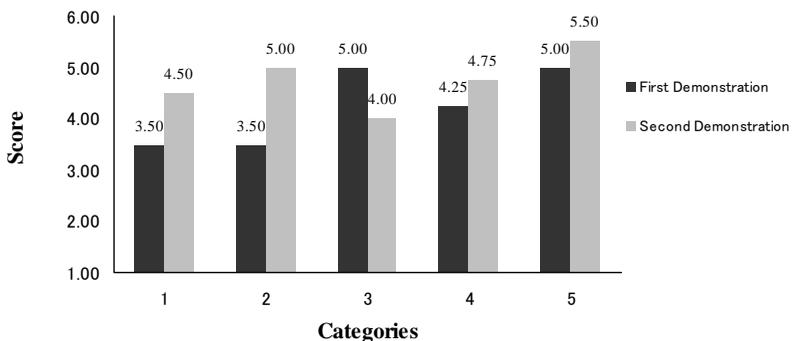


Figure 3. Differences in mean score in five categories between S1's first and second demonstrations.

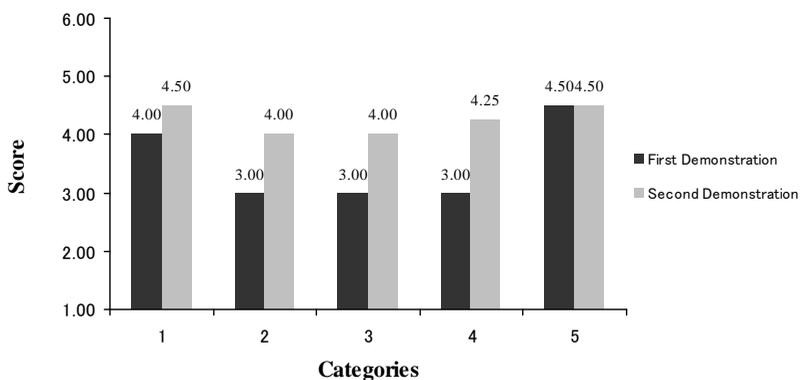


Figure 4. Differences in mean score in five categories between S2's first and second demonstrations.

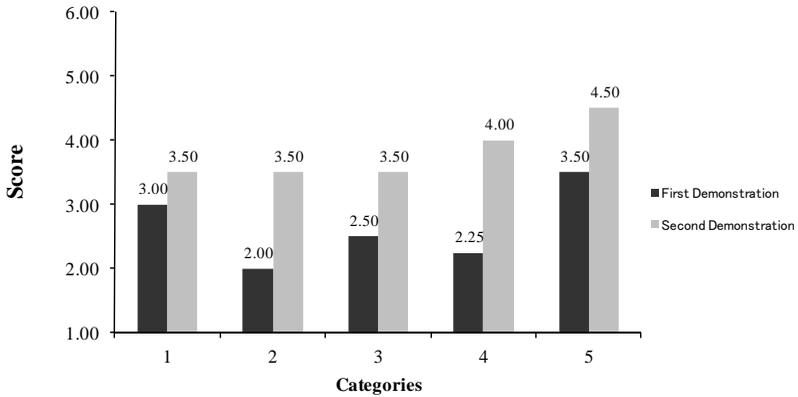


Figure 5. Differences in mean score in five categories between S3's first and second demonstrations.

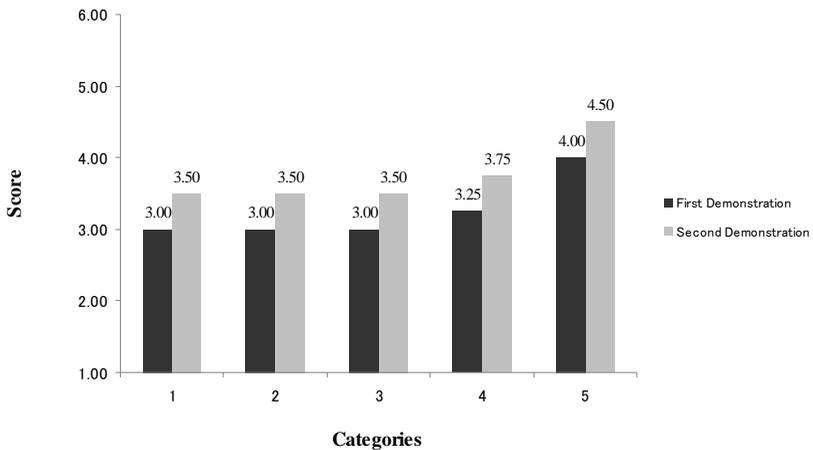


Figure 6. Differences in mean score in five categories between S4's first and second demonstrations.

5.2. Students' responses to questionnaire (RQ 2)

Figure 7 summarizes the student teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

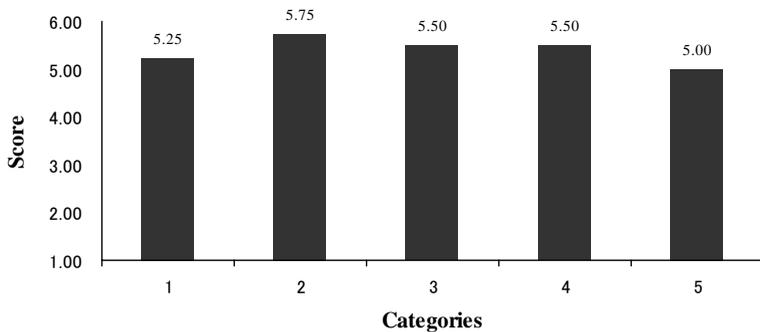


Figure 7. Summary of student teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

The student teachers gave a mean score of above five for each of the five different feedback categories. This shows that Japanese student teachers regard microteaching combined with peer feedback as a helpful technique to develop their EFL teaching skills. Table 1 shows examples of comments that the student made on the use of peer feedback.

Table 1

Examples of Comments Made by Student Teachers on the Use of Peer Feedback in Questionnaire

| Categories | Comments |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Lesson plan | It was a good help to write and revise the lesson plan for the second demonstration in terms of format and contents such as "Teacher talk." |
| 2. Teaching techniques | The feedback comments helped me to improve how to make and use supplementary teaching materials. |
| 3. Teacher talk | Because the comments pointed out that I had talked too fast in the first demonstration, I tried to talk slowly in the second demonstration. |
| 4. Student-teacher interaction | The comments suggested that the students should have had pair activities, so I gave them chances to work in pairs in the second demonstration. |
| 5. Classroom atmosphere | The comment that I was cheerful in the first demonstration made me quite confident in teaching. |

5.3 Peer feedback in five categories (RQ 3)

Figures 8 through 11 show the ratios of the peer comments as classified into five different categories for each student demonstration. For S1 and S2 the classmates' comments were concentrated on the category "teaching techniques," while for S3 and S4 the largest percentage of the comments fell in the category "student's participation."

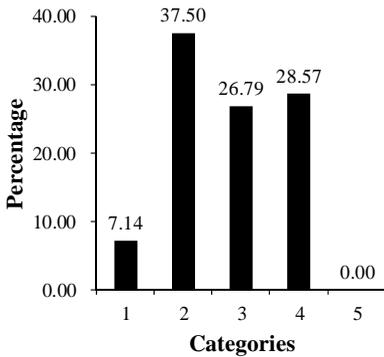


Figure 8. Percentage of peer feedback in five categories on S1's first demonstration.

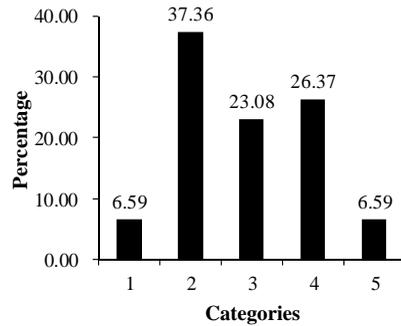


Figure 9. Percentage of peer feedback in five categories on S2's first demonstration.

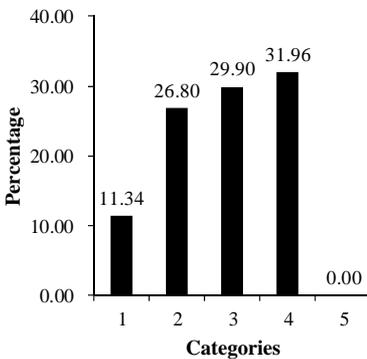


Figure 10. Percentage of peer feedback in five categories on S3's first demonstration.

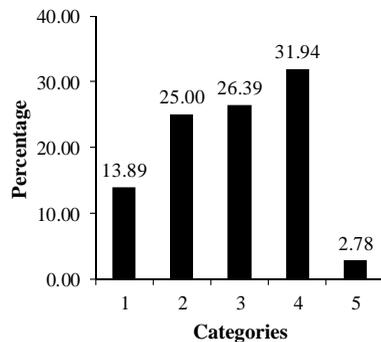


Figure 11. Percentage of peer feedback in five categories on S4's first demonstration.

Table 2 shows the rankings of the categories when viewed from the perspective of how much each student teacher improved by the second teaching demonstration. Table 2 also summarizes the rankings of the categories based on how many peer comments were given to each student teacher's first demonstration. As shown in the table, the category where the most dramatic improvement in microteaching was observed tends to correspond to the category for which the student received the largest percentage of peer comments. This suggests that the more feedback student teachers receive, the more improvement they can make in their practice teaching.

Table 2

Rank Orders of Degree of Improvement and Amount of Peer Feedback

| S1 | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Degree of improvement | 2 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Amount of peer feedback | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 |

| S3 | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Degree of improvement | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Amount of peer feedback | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 |

| S2 | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Degree of improvement | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Amount of peer feedback | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 |

| S4 | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Degree of improvement | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Amount of peer feedback | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 |

5.4 Types of peer feedback (RQ 4)

It was found that each student received peer comments for different aspects of microteaching. This might have resulted from the fact that each student taught different lessons and practiced different techniques. For instance, S1 taught how to use a sentence construction “look plus an adjective” by using a variety of picture cards and word cards. Therefore, she received a number of peer comments that belonged to the “teaching materials” category. Examples of the peer comments

given to each of the student teachers are shown in Table 3. Although the peer comments revealed different foci, they tended to be general in content, and some of them failed to provide specific suggestions that could be useful for revision. This tendency can be regarded as one of the limitations of peer feedback in microteaching often employed in a pre-service teacher training course.

Table 3

Examples of Peer Comments

| Student teachers | Categories | Comments |
|------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| S1 | 2.Teaching techniques | I could not see what were written on the word cards because I was sitting in the back of the classroom. |
| S2 | 4.Student-teacher interaction | You could have asked more questions. |
| S3 | 4.Student-teacher interaction | You could have given your students more feedback. |
| S4 | 4.Student-teacher interaction | You called on particular students many times. |

5.5 Sample analysis of student teachers' pre- and post demonstrations (RQ 5)

To answer Research Question 5, each student teacher's pre- and post-demonstrations were compared. It was found that the peer comments that students received from other students in the class were reflected in their second teaching demonstrations in terms of content and performance, and as a result, the overall scores of their second microteaching rated by in-service teachers increased. This suggests that peer comments play a significant role in helping student teachers improve their teaching performance.

The following are actual samples of peer comments on S1's first teaching demonstration, and show how S1 revised her teaching based on the peer comments.

Regarding S1's first demonstration, the peers made comments on the following points: (1) the pictures S1 used in the demonstration should have been larger and simpler; (2) she should have held the word cards higher so that every student in the class could see them clearly; (3) she should have stood still and kept the cards steady to show them in class, rather than moving them around; (4) she should have flipped the word cards from back to front so that she could flip them faster and more smoothly. Figures 12 and 13 show how S1 used the pictures and word cards in her first demonstration.

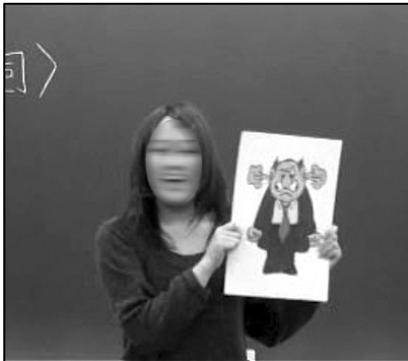


Figure 12. S1's use of pictures in the first demonstration.



Figure 13. S1's use of word cards in the first demonstration.



Figure 14. S1's use of pictures in the second demonstration.



Figure 15. S1's use of word cards in the second demonstration.

After receiving peer feedback, S1 revised her teaching in response to the comments by: (1) making the pictures larger and simpler, (2) placing the word cards high on the backboard in order for everyone in class to see them clearly, (3) standing still and keeping the cards steady, and (4) trying to flip the cards from back to front in a faster tempo. Figures 14 and 15 illustrate how S1 revised the use of the pictures and word cards in her second demonstration.

As a result, S1's second microteaching was considered to be improved in terms of the use of teaching materials and teaching techniques. Therefore, the overall score of S1's second teaching demonstration rated by in-service teachers increased from 4.25 to 4.75.

6. Conclusion

The present study explored the effects of feedback given to Japanese student teachers' teaching demonstrations. The following were the answers to the research questions set at the beginning of the study:

- 1) Peer feedback followed by microteaching can give some impact on developing these Japanese students' teaching skills in EFL;
- 2) The student teachers found peer feedback to be helpful to develop their teaching skills in EFL;
- 3) The amount of peer feedback correlated with the degree of improvement in the students' teaching demonstrations;
- 4) The peer feedback was helpful; however, some of the peer comments tended to be general in content and failed to provide specific suggestions for revision; and
- 5) The student teachers successfully incorporated some of the comments they received from their peers into their teaching demonstrations, and this led to marked improvements in their second performances.

This study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted within the framework of a case study, which attempted an in-depth analysis of data collected.

However, if a larger number of student teachers and in-service teachers could have participated in the study, we might have obtained a clearer picture of the effectiveness of peer feedback. Therefore, larger-scale studies that involve more participants are called for to confirm the present results. Second, the present study focused on the effectiveness of peer feedback. Some of the peer comments, however, were too general for the student teachers to find specific clues to revise their teaching demonstrations. By comparing peer comments and teacher comments, we will be able to clarify some differences between these two kinds of feedback, and thus elucidate several limitations of peer feedback used in microteaching in a teacher-training course in Japan.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to Ryota Fuse, Yoichi Masuda, Shinji Uchiyama, and Takaya Yokose, who served as raters in this study. Special thanks also go to Hiroyuki Endo, Emina Kato, Iori Sakamoto, and Sayuri Sugiyama, who performed two teaching demonstrations as student teachers in this study.

Finally, we would like to thank Masashi Takada, who helped us analyze data for this study. Without his cooperation, this study would never have been completed.

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Appendix A

Peer Feedback Sheet

Date : _____

Student Teacher : _____ Grade : _____

Your Name : _____

Please make comments on the student teacher's demonstration by referring to the following five categories.

1. Lesson Plan

- (1) Includes all necessary teaching components in the lesson plan
- (2) Contains well-prepared plan for writing on the blackboard
- (3) Prepares adequate teacher talk
- (4) Follows an appropriate format

2. Teaching Techniques

- (1) Uses supplementary teaching materials effectively
- (2) Uses the blackboard
- (3) Walks around the class to check how the students are doing
- (4) Teaches class with confidence

3. Teacher Talk

- (1) Gives clear explanations
- (2) Gives explicit directions for activities
- (3) Uses as much English as possible

4. Student-Teacher Interaction

- (1) Asks questions in appropriate manners
- (2) Gives students appropriate feedback
- (3) Uses variety of activities
- (4) Calls on as many students as possible

5. Classroom Atmosphere

- (1) Pays attention to each student in class
- (2) Shows a friendly attitude toward students
- (3) Makes a relaxed atmosphere in class

| | Good Points | Points for revision |
|--------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1. Lesson Plan | | |
| 2. Teaching Techniques | | |
| 3. Teacher Talk | | |
| 4. Student-Teacher Interaction | | |
| 5. Classroom Atmosphere | | |

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Date : _____

Name : _____

| | |
|----------|--|
| Criteria | 1 ←————→ 6 |
| | Least Effective Most Effective |

Please rate and make comments on the effectiveness of the peer feedback given to your teaching demonstration in terms of the following five categories.

1. Lesson Plan 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Includes all necessary teaching components in the lesson plan
 - (2) Contains well-prepared plan for writing on the blackboard
 - (3) Prepares adequate teacher talk
 - (4) Follows an appropriate format

2. Teaching Techniques 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Uses supplementary teaching materials effectively
 - (2) Uses the blackboard
 - (3) Walks around the class to check how the students are doing
 - (4) Teaches class with confidence

3. Teacher Talk 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Gives clear explanations
 - (2) Gives explicit directions for activities
 - (3) Uses as much English as possible

4. Student-Teacher Interaction 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Asks questions in appropriate manners
 - (2) Gives students appropriate feedback
 - (3) Uses variety of activities
 - (4) Calls on as many students as possible

5. Classroom Atmosphere 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Pays attention to each student in class
 - (2) Shows a friendly attitude toward students
 - (3) Makes a relaxed atmosphere in class

| | Effective | Ineffective |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. Lesson Plan | | |
| 2. Teaching Techniques | | |
| 3. Teacher Talk | | |
| 4. Student-Teacher Interaction | | |
| 5. Classroom Atmosphere | | |

Appendix C

Teacher Evaluation Sheet

Student Teacher : _____ Grade : _____

Your Name : _____

| | | | |
|----------|-------------|--------|------------------|
| Criteria | 1 | ←————→ | 6 |
| | Poor | | Excellent |

Please rate and make comments on the student teacher's demonstration by referring to the following five evaluation categories.

1. Lesson Plan 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Includes all necessary teaching components in the lesson plan
 - (2) Contains well-prepared plan for writing on the blackboard
 - (3) Prepares adequate teacher talk
 - (4) Follows an appropriate format

2. Teaching Techniques 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Uses supplementary teaching materials effectively
 - (2) Uses the blackboard
 - (3) Walks around the class to check how the students are doing
 - (4) Teaches class with confidence

3. Teacher Talk 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Gives clear explanations
 - (2) Gives explicit directions for activities
 - (3) Uses as much English as possible

4. Student-Teacher Interaction 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Asks questions in appropriate manners
 - (2) Gives students appropriate feedback
 - (3) Uses variety of activities
 - (4) Calls on as many students as possible

5. Classroom Atmosphere 1 2 3 4 5 6
 - (1) Pays attention to each student in class
 - (2) Shows a friendly attitude toward students
 - (3) Makes a relaxed atmosphere in class

| | Good Points | Points for revision |
|--------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1. Lesson Plan | | |
| 2. Teaching Techniques | | |
| 3. Teacher Talk | | |
| 4. Student-Teacher Interaction | | |
| 5. Classroom Atmosphere | | |