

Bukatsudo: To Improve Japanese Students' English Writing

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Abstract: This paper discusses the unique challenges of Japanese ESL writers studying in Western universities, and it offers the solution of structuring writing centers based on the frameworks of *bukatsudo*—Japanese extracurricular clubs that teach mastery of specific disciplines. After a brief introduction, the paper identifies the challenges faced by Japanese ESL students and articulates how *bukatsudo* acts as a solution. It then explores the cultural identity of Japanese students compared to Western students and discusses Japanese writing styles. The paper also explores studies discussing L1 and L2 transfer among Japanese ESL writers and briefly discusses evolving pedagogies in Japan before offering a conclusion and recommending additional research.

Key words: Bukatsudo, Japan, ESL, L2, Writing Center, Culture.

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Introduction

Recently, I completed an English course addressing different genres of writing from a social justice perspective. Recurring issues included the plight of students hailing from marginalized communities and the challenges that institutions face creating inclusive classrooms. Japanese ESL (English Second Language) students attending Western universities are one such marginalized group. Distinct frameworks influence these students, and those frameworks can create diverse writing styles. Providing the best educational outcome for this group means addressing the challenges they face as L2 (Second Language) English writers. Unfortunately, traditional university writing centers may not address the unique needs of these students. In Japan, students participate in extracurricular clubs called *bukatsudo*. Though they often focus on sports, *bukatsudo* can also explore academic subjects. After-school clubs modeled after *bukatsudo*, teaching and contrasting Japanese and Western styles of writing, will deliver stronger academic essays from Japanese students and create an atmosphere of positive cross-cultural exchange.

Concerns

Culture

Japan's culture places more emphasis on group conformity, whereas Western culture values a more individualistic ideology. Rohlen (1989) wrote that in "Japanese society, compliance, cooperation, and the benign qualities of power have been explained as deriving from a different cultural tradition than that of the West, one shaped primarily by Confucian norms and world view" (p. 36). Japanese society indoctrinates students to value social harmony and conformity over independence. McKinley (2013) described how principles of *aimai* and *haragei* (*ambiguity* and *implied meaning*) influence Japanese writers, who try to "avoid direct confrontation" (p. 6). This paper will discuss Japanese culture more in-depth under "Who are these students?" in the "Background" section.

Rhetorical style

Thrush (1997) cited Haneda and Shima (1982) stating, "Some cultures, including the Japanese, often prefer a narrative organization . . . which can place the main point of the text near the end rather than at the beginning, as is preferred in [the] United States," and Thrush also explained that "Japanese writing tends to be writer-oriented . . . while United States writing is reader oriented" (p. 417). Ueno (2023) described "Rhetorical issues [that] include cultural differences in the rhetorics of writing, challenges in expressing ideas in English, developing an academically critical voice, and imagining the audience" (p. 20). These differences in rhetorical style may be because of Japan's group-

based culture. Differences in rhetorical style, however, are not the only challenges that Japanese ESL students face.

Perceptions

When measuring themselves against native English writers, ESL students may feel “less capable due to the lower quality of their writing in a foreign language, and slow writing pace” (Ueno, 2023, p. 23). Perceptions about the inductive style of Japanese writing also create stereotypes. Choi (2021) wrote, “it is not difficult to find tutorial and training materials for ESL teachers, which include sentences such as ‘All the Japanese students write in a uniform manner that is different from Western students’” (p. 132). Choi (2021) also described how these “writers’ diverse voices can be easily blamed for their poor writing by their instructors or even by themselves, and many of them have . . . heard that they need to develop ‘American ways of thinking’” (p. 133). Both the perceptions of the students and the stereotypes they face based on cultural differences distract from a more relevant issue: writing proficiency.

Proficiency

Early and repeated exposure to English improves the writing ability of ESL students. Aizawa and Rose (2020) noted that high school students taught subjects using English in the primary curriculum performed better at the university level than students who studied English using a curriculum written in Japanese (p. 8). But, as of 2020, only a small portion of Japanese schools immerse students in the English language by presenting an entire course curriculum in English (Aizawa & Rose, 2020, p. 3). While English is not the national language in Japan, because these students are taking classes that aim to improve their English-speaking ability, the pedagogical method that achieves the best outcome is relevant. Ueno (2023) described how a Japanese student “faced language challenges since he was an English learner. One cause of this difficulty was understanding the sources. For instance, the student pointed out that difficult words, especially adjectives and adverbs, hindered his understanding” (p. 26). Proficiency comes with practice, but it also requires knowledge.

Knowledge

Studies document a preference for inductive writing styles by Japanese students (Kubota, 1998, p. 70). In a study analyzing the rhetorical structure of essays produced by Japanese students in both Japanese and English, Kubota (1998) found that almost 50% of the time, Japanese students applied a different rhetorical structure when writing in English (p. 81). Kubota (1998) also observed that for students using similar rhetorical styles in Japanese and English, the only negative transfer from L1 (primary language—Japanese) was that of poor organization, which affected both their Japanese and English essays, and those that scored significantly lower in English showed either low

proficiency using ESL or lacked composing experience in English (p. 83). Some students with dissimilar styles, who structured their essay differently in English than in Japanese, also scored lower on their English essays because of low proficiency and lack of composing experience (Kubota, 1998, p. 85).

Among the students who wrote using different rhetorical structures in English than in Japanese, there were some who received above average scores in English and below average scores in Japanese (Kubota, 1998, p. 85). Other students, however, made conscious choices to alter the structure of their English essays based on their understanding of Western expectations, more exposure and practice writing in English, and a deeper understanding of writing processes across both languages (Kubota, 1998, p. 85). Kubota's study implies that, with increased proficiency and knowledge of the similarities and differences between two languages, ESL students may write better papers. Brooks (2012) wrote, "As teachers, we need to see the writing process as a complex system of interacting parts that is unique to each student" (p. 177). This paper further discusses Japanese writing style and L1 to L2 transfer under "Writing in Japan" in the "Background" section. Now, we will explore what universities can do to improve outcomes for Japanese ESL students.

Solution

Writing centers

Writing centers are already working with ESL students. Choi (2021) described research conducted at "Midwest University, one of the largest U.S. public universities where international students comprised 15% of the total undergraduate students and 36% of the graduate students" (p. 127), and noted that though all the students were eligible to use the writing center, ESL students made up 70% of its visitors (p. 128). Unfortunately, in their current form, writing centers are not always helpful for these students. Okuda and Anderson (2018) wrote, "For international L2 students, who may lack experience with the expected disciplinary genres and who have underdeveloped English language academic and social support networks, this issue becomes even more problematic" because the students need more direct and explicit feedback from their tutors than is "mandated by the center's official protocol and underlying philosophy" (p. 392). Choi (2021) described issues with the expectations that ESL students bring into the writing center, noting that they expect "their papers to be 'fixed' and 'cleaned'" (p. 135). Universities need to offer writing centers that support the needs of ESL students, and their purpose and function needs to be clear. For Japanese ESL students, *bukatsudo* will set clear student expectations and provide an inclusive environment.

Bukatsudo

Bukatsudo is not a “one size fits all” solution to the problems faced by all ESL students. Different students face unique challenges based on unique frameworks of culture, rhetorical style, perceptions, proficiency, and knowledge. *Bukatsudo* offers a framework for improving outcomes for Japanese students and building cross-cultural exchange.

What exactly is bukatsudo?

Bukatsudo refers to after-school, extracurricular clubs that serve as a source of group socialization and are “a major feature of Japanese secondary education (Cave, 2004, p. 384). Traditionally associated with sports, there are also cultural clubs, such as “newspaper club, . . . singing, folk dance, and discrimination studies” (Cave, 2004, p. 391), and they exist to teach “basic human things such as use of language” and as a place “for students to learn basic social skills through practical experience” (Cave, 2004, p. 396). Older students, called *senpai*, typically run the clubs, overseeing younger students, called *kohai*. Japanese students attend *bukatsudo* to achieve mastery of skills through observation and practice. Writing center sessions structured as *bukatsudo* have the potential to help Japanese ESL writers, but there are some potential problems.

Potential problems

There are some negative associations with *bukatsudo*. Cave (2004) noted that in the 1920s and 1930s, the clubs were “wholly run by older students . . . with a nominal supervisor who never attended” and it was common for *senpai* to strike *kohai* (p. 390). Some incidents include a suicide that occurred in 1985 after a student was bullied and another student who died from heat exhaustion at a baseball club in 2000 (Cave, 2004, p. 390). Applying the name *bukatsudo* to a western writing center could also be culturally insensitive to the very students it seeks to help. Fortunately, these potential problems have simple solutions.

Bullying is a recognized problem throughout most cultures. The problems described in the examples above occurred with students who were younger than college level students. Proper monitoring by university staff will mitigate any potential power imbalances that might put some students at risk of bullying. Additionally, older students assigned to senior roles in the centers could receive specialized training before promotion to *senpai*. Concerns about cultural appropriation are also easy to resolve.

The first step in addressing any concerns of cultural insensitivity is to discover if there is a problem. Universities should survey Japanese ESL students before beginning sessions. If there are problems with adopting the Japanese names, writing centers can still apply the pedagogies under different names. For example, the *Bukatsudo Writing Center* becomes a *Japanese & English Writing Club*, while the *senpai* becomes a *mentor*. After addressing the potential problems, and with proper structuring,

bukatsudo writing centers offer a practical solution to the writing problems of Japanese ESL students.

Bukatsudo writing centers

Graduate students pursuing degrees in, or those interested in, Japanese studies offer a source of potential *senpai*. Senior, more practiced Japanese ESL students are ideal mentors because younger, less experienced students can benefit from their experiences. These sessions should be open to all students to foster cross-cultural exchange and inclusivity. This paper will not attempt to specify all the curricula that writing centers might include, but the curriculum should apply relevant pedagogies designed to assist Japanese ESL students. For example, McKinley (2013) recommends providing “students with some highly structured formulas that require students to assemble a strong claim and [a] balanced, concisely stated and supported argument . . . to more easily display linear logic and avoid an inductive development” (p. 14). The writing centers should also develop Japanese students’ L1 writing, because L1 writing proficiency affects L2 writing.

Brooks (2012) described multiple frameworks that impact L2 writing ability, including L1 proficiency (p. 176). In describing a study of Japanese university students, Kubota (1998) wrote, “The kind of transfer observed was, in fact, that of L1 writing skills, as manifested in the positive correlation between Japanese and English organization scores” (p. 88). To improve Japanese ESL writing, writing centers must address shortcomings in L1 writing ability. This means that the schools best equipped to implement *bukatsudo* writing centers are those with Japanese language programs, as they will have staff and a student body fluent in Japanese that can facilitate such cross-language exchanges.

Properly structured *bukatsudo* writing centers, built around relevant curriculum and with staff and senior students equipped to discuss the writing styles of both languages, will improve Japanese ESL writing outcomes. In a study discussing the effects of properly structured practice on ESL writing ability in a Japanese writing course, Matikainen (2024) reported that students reported “lack of confidence in macro-level writing features, and need for discipline-embedded writing instruction” (p. 6), with most of the students reporting that they were “not confident” or “so-so” in their “writing ability confidence.” By the end of the course, the number of students who felt “very confident” in their writing ability had doubled (from 2 to 4) and those who felt “confident” had tripled (from 5 to 14) (p. 8). *Bukatsudo* writing centers can offer students a place to build confidence and perfect their writing under the tutelage of experienced mentors, and they can foster cultural exchanges between both students and teachers.

Background

Who are these students?

IIE Open Doors (2023) reported that out of over one million international students attending U.S. universities from 2022 to 2023, only 1.5% were from Japan. In contrast, Chinese accounted for 27.4% (p. 1). The small number of students from Japan, along with their unique cultural frameworks, place L1 Japanese students at greater risk of marginalization when attending universities. To ensure an inclusive learning environment, and to resolve the challenges with which L2 English students from Japan contend, educators must understand Japanese cultural frameworks.

Japanese collectivism

Japanese culture began as a collection of village communities, and these groups of “only a half dozen or so households” formed the basis of Japanese society, where “private community ordering functioned as the principal source of constraint,” unlike “western Europe and China” where regulatory control came from individual rulers (Haley, 2010, p. 321). Even as Japanese society changed in response to influences from China, it was still composed of self-governing agricultural communities (Haley, 2010, p. 322).

China also introduced Confucianism to Japan, creating a culture based on “compliance, cooperation, and the benign qualities of power” (Rohlen, 1989, p. 36). Confucianist philosophy, combined with a group-oriented culture, yielded a society that places a great deal of import on social harmony. These frameworks influence how Japanese students conduct themselves, and they can affect how Japanese students approach the craft of writing. Principles of *aimai* (ambiguity) and *haragei* (implied meaning) are “often used to avoid direct confrontation” and to avoid sharing “potentially offensive opinions [allowing] . . . the target party to inductively draw its own conclusions based on the context” (McKinley, 2013, p. 6). This focus on social harmony builds a society that values conformity.

From an early age, Japanese children learn conformity. “Japanese mothers . . . focus more on emotional maturity, compliance to adult authority, and courtesy in social exchange . . . [building on the principle of] *sunao*, meaning a natural positiveness and acceptance of things, especially adult guidance” (Rohlen, 1989, p. 19). Later, in elementary school, teachers avoid “asserting direct authority or using criticism . . . [and] gradually shape the children’s understanding . . . by repeated practice of selected daily tasks . . . that socialize the children to high degrees of neatness and uniformity” (Rohlen, 1989, p. 21). McKinley (2013) noted that this conformity, emphasized at such an early age, “may also impact on the level of argumentation and critical thinking in Japanese students’ writing (p. 13). Throughout the child’s early education, students’ education focuses on *shudan seikatsu*—group living—rather than “cognitive development, or play, or greater independence” (Rohlen, 1989, p. 20).

Teachers organize students into groups when they are as young as four years old, and the *han* (small group) serves as the basis for classroom organization (Rohlen, 1989, p. 23). These small groups teach collective responsibility, and the peer groups, through actions of group reward and group punishment, become responsible for the behavior of their individual members (Rohlen, 1989, p. 24). In the end, this focus on group living and conformity over individual development and expression creates a cultural framework that differs significantly from that seen in Western classrooms.

East versus West

Japanese and American students have observed the distinct cultural frameworks at work in classrooms when studying abroad. Citing Atkinson (2003, McKinley (2013) wrote, “The importance of critical thinking is stressed differently in East Asian cultures where social practices focus on collective concordance and compliance” (p. 9). Taylor (1983) discussed how, “One American student admitted to Tokyo University, the nation’s highest ranked university, was shocked to make the discovery that ‘there was no such thing as the free exchange of ideas you expect at an American university. Students were afraid to ask questions. They were afraid someone might ridicule them for not knowing the answer’” (cited in Davidson, 1995, p. 43). A Japanese graduate student studying in the UK discussed frustrations with the Western focus on critical thinking, writing that the “Japanese education system doesn’t encourage us to have our own ideas” and “our ability of analysis or thinking deeply is totally paralyzed because of Japanese social condition which is regarded as ‘peaceful society’ by many people” (Davidson, 1995, p. 44). Testimonies such as these have promoted “the idea that Japanese students have an inability to think critically (McKinley, 2013, p. 9). While these cultural differences are real, they do not fully explain the difficulties that Japanese students face as L2 English writers in Western classrooms.

If Japanese students have an inability to think critically, then they may also have an inability to craft a coherent argument. An inability to craft a coherent argument implies that they are incapable of meeting the writing demands of Western classrooms. Fortunately, other studies contradict the problems described by Atkinson and Davidson’s work. For example, McKinley (2013) described a 2001 study by Stapleton using writing samples “from 45 undergraduate students in courses with the title ‘English Writing’ in order to propose a model of assessment for critical thinking” (p. 9). Stapleton (2001) noted that in their responses to assigned essays, “Participants supported their opinions with reasons and evidence, although there were significantly fewer arguments and less evidence,” and though there were differences in the quality of their arguments, “participants demonstrated a fundamental understanding that opinions require support” (p. 526). Stapleton’s work implies that Japanese students can think critically, and therefore that they can write argumentative essays, though their cultural frameworks may affect their writing. Cultural frameworks, however, are not the

only element affecting Japanese students' writing ability. One must also consider differences in writing style.

Writing styles

Researchers have observed different writing styles between Japanese and Western students. Japanese apply a more inductive form of writing, contrasted by the deductive style used by Western students. Kubota (1998) wrote, "Japanese texts tend to be organized inductively whereas English texts tend to be organized deductively, and that Japanese students tend to use an inductive pattern in ESL writing" (p. 70). In a more recent study, a Japanese student, Koji, had trouble with Western writing. Koji drafted his senior thesis in English, and his advisor informed him that his draft "was abstract and difficult to follow" (Ueno, 2023, p. 24). Koji drove himself "to the point of exhaustion and demotivation" as he aligned his text to a western writing style (Ueno, 2023, p. 25). This abstract style can include "not directly stating the thesis in the introduction, but rather hinting at it" (McKinley, 2013, p. 5). Koji shows that inductive writing remains a characteristic of Japanese writing today.

Inductive writing

The inductive writing style observed with Japanese students is partially attributable to the group-oriented culture already described. Principles of ambiguity and implied meaning—*aimai* and *haragei*—tenants of Japanese collectivism, result in indirect essays. Davies and Ikeno (2002) noted that *kenkyo* (modesty) is also a principle contributing to the Japanese inductive style, and wrote, "Self-assertiveness is more or less discouraged, while consideration for others is encouraged" (p. 143). "The Japanese principle of *kenkyo* may lead Western teachers and researchers to interpret Japanese students as having inhibited ability to develop an individual sense of voice and personality in their writing" (McKinley, 2013, p. 5). Another element contributing to the inductive writing style is a narrative format called *kishotenketsu*.

Kishotenketsu

Kishotenketsu is a narrative format that appears in Japanese writing. Cahill (2003) cited Nakamura (1997), Okuaki (1993), and K. Wang (1991), writing that, according to Japanese accounts, it was "used in poetry and then adapted to narrative and expository writing as an organizational formula for novice essayists or exam takers . . . and as a tool of invention or arrangement for advanced writers" (p. 185). *Kishotenketsu* comprises four parts, "with *ki* forming an introduction, *sho* and *ten* creating a "body and function to develop the essay," and *ketsu* serving as its conclusion (Cahill, 2003, p. 185). The parts also function as introduction (*ki*), development (*sho*), turn (*ten*), and conclusion (*ketsu*), and they may apply to "lines of poetry, to four consecutive sentences or ideas in a single paragraph of prose, or to the four parts of a whole essay" (Cahill, 2003, p. 171). These parts bear similarity to Western essay styles.

Ki

McKinley (2013) cites Hinds (1983) and Takemata (1976) noting that in Japanese essays, the writer uses the *ki* portion of the composition to begin their essay, just as Western writers would present their thesis statement at the beginning (p. 5). However, because of the inductive writing style developed by Japanese cultural frameworks, they do not state their thesis directly, and the reader must infer the argument.

Sho

The *sho* portion is a development phase, where the author presents commentary and evidence; it is comparable to body paragraphs in Western essays (McKinley, 2013, p. 6). In an inductive style of writing, this portion of the essay might serve as an attempt to move the reader toward the author's conclusion. McKinley (2013) noted that the *sho* portion can occur "in alternation with *ten*—the transitional phase" (p. 6).

Ten

Hinds (1983) noted that the *ten*, or topic-shift, "is what sets the Japanese writing style apart from the generally accepted English language essay format" (McKinley, 2013, p. 5). Cahill (2003) wrote that Japanese scholars recognize *ten* as having a broad range of interpretations with more than one application (p. 185). This paper explores these additional applications below under "The turn (*ten*)."

Ketsu

Ketsu forms the conclusion of Japanese essays structured around *kishotenketsu*, but unlike Western essays, the main idea appears at the end of the essay rather than the introduction. Kubota (1998) as wrote that "the main ideas do not appear until the end and that the paragraphs before the main ideas do not constitute the reasons or evidence for the main ideas" (McKinley, 2013, p. 6). This perceived lack of support for the main ideas occurs because of the Japanese inductive style of writing, where writers expect the reader to infer meaning.

Disagreements on structure

Cahill (2003) references Kubota (1997) citing "a host of Japanese scholars writing in the last few decades to illustrate the general state of disagreement over *ki sho ten ketsu*" (pp. 180-183), as listed in the quotes below:

- Aihara (1984) and Ichikawa (1978) . . . both regard expository essays as typically displaying a three-part introduction-body-conclusion structure rather than *ki sho ten ketsu*, which they would confine to use in stories, defining *ten* as climax.
- Kokai and Fukasawa (1982) allow use of *ki sho ten ketsu* in both persuasive and narrative writing, but though they describe narrative *ten* as a marker of digression, in persuasive writing it is integrated into the argument of the essay.

- Okuma (1983) advocates the use of *ki sho ten ketsu* in journalism, describing *ten* as the “point” of the story and *ketsu* as the final “twist” . . .
- . . . Tokoro (1986), Kabashima (1980), Sawada (1977), and Kinoshita (1990) question or criticize the use of *ki sho ten ketsu* in academic, business, and expository writing” . . .
- Haga and Sugitani (1993) . . . recommend the Western five-part oratorical format consisting of (a) introduction, (b) exposition, (c) argument, (d) refutation, and (e) conclusion. They also recommend the Japanese five- or six-part arrangement of *ki sho ho jo (ka) ketsu*, where *ho* means “expansion,” *jo* “addition” or “comparison,” and the optional *ka* “transition”; this arrangement is also compatible with *ki sho ten ketsu* if *ho jo (ka)* is considered a subdivision of *ten*.
- Haga and Sugitani (1993) [also] stress that the terms described are not to be applied rigidly or formulaically; whether an essay is divided into three, four, five, or six parts is less crucial than ensuring an essay’s overall “orderly arrangement, unity and coherence.

The turn (*ten*)

Mok (1993) described the common view of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*, stating the “style begins with a long indirect introduction of the topic, which is further developed in the second part, followed by an abrupt transition or a vaguely related point, before all the previous parts come together in a conclusion (p. 153). Cahill (2003), however, noted that “the ‘turn’ is not a rhetorical move of ‘circularity’ or ‘digression’ as commonly assumed but rather serves as the occasion to develop an essay further by alternative means. The implication for second language writing is recognition of greater similarities in essayist literacy across these languages than previously supposed” (p. 170). “This redefinition demythologizes the turn . . . into something closer to the Western rhetorical notion of amplification, broadly understood. The significant pedagogical implication is that . . . the Japanese essay . . . [is] more like the English essay than is commonly accepted” (Cahill, 2003, p. 173). Whether one focuses on the similarities or differences between Japanese and Western writing, it should be apparent that writing proficiency in one language influences proficiency in the other language.

L1 and L2 transfer

Several studies examined the effect that L1 knowledge has on L2 writing ability. Researchers have noted evidence that cultural differences are not the root cause of the challenges Japanese students experience in crafting English essays. One study reported instances of Japanese students using deductive writing in their essays, noting that when writing in the persuasive mode, 20% of Japanese writers choose to use the deductive pattern of *specification* (stating the main idea and a summary of supporting arguments in the beginning), while across multiple writing modes, they used the deductive pattern of *explanation* (stating the main idea without a summary of supporting ideas in the

beginning) in 30% of their essays (Kubota, 1998, p. 70). In an earlier study conducted by Kobayashi in 1984—cited by Kubota (1998)—the rhetorical patterns and locations of thesis statements were the same whether Japanese university students in Japan wrote in Japanese or English, and in another study conducted by Oi in 1984, also cited by Kubota (1998), “similarities in some lexical patterns and organizational patterns were observed between the two Japanese groups” (Kubota, 1998, p. 71). The earlier 1984 studies showed Japanese students applying similar structures regardless of the language in which they wrote. Kubota’s study in 1998 produced slightly different results.

In a study using 46 Japanese students, Kubota (1998) conducted a study comparing the “rhetorical organization of essays written in Japanese and in English . . . and then group the students into similar and dissimilar groups” (p. 80). Similar groups used similar styles across both languages, while dissimilar groups were those that used a different rhetorical style and organization from one language to the other. The essay groups comprised those writing expository essays and persuasive essays, with 55% similar and 45% dissimilar for the expository group, and 46% similar and 54% dissimilar for the persuasive essay group (Kubota, 1998, p. 81). The near even split of both groups, with nearly half using a different rhetorical structure for English than for Japanese, implies that there is more to the problems of Japanese ESL students than cultural differences. Kubota (1998) noted that the negative transfer that occurred in essays that were similar “was mainly that of poor organization” (p. 83).

Kubota (1998) noted “a few instances” where students’ essays using similar structures received lower scores in English than they did in Japanese, but these instances appeared related to “low proficiency in ESL and/or the lack of composing experience in English” while in contrast there were “many instances of positive transfer” (p. 83). Positive transfer refers to L1 frameworks that have a positive impact on L2 writing. Students who crafted dissimilar L2 essays showed comparable results.

For the dissimilar essays, where structures differed between the L1 and L2 essays, there were some students who “experienced a large decline in scores from Japanese to ESL,” but this also seemed to be because of the students’ “low proficiency in English and the lack of composing experience in English” (Kubota, 1998, p. 85). Interestingly, for some of the dissimilar essays, students achieved an above average ESL score for their organization and scored below average on their Japanese paper—these students produced better organization in English than in Japanese (Kubota, 1998, p. 85). Several students made conscious choices to use dissimilar structures based on their understanding of audience expectations, or they scored higher because of more experience writing in English.

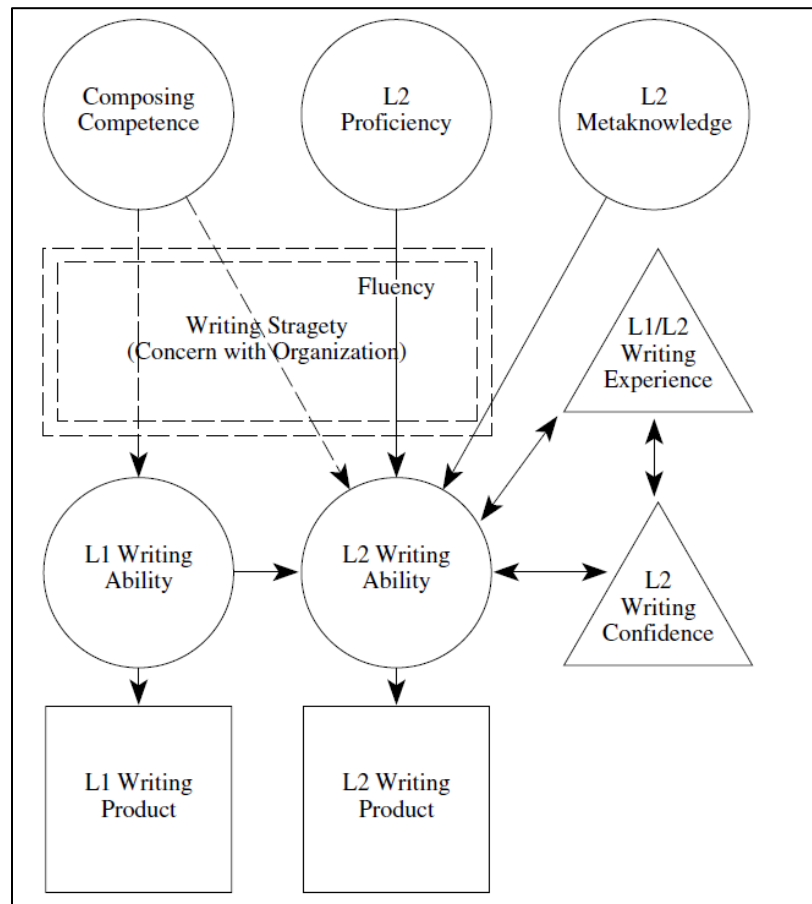
Kubota (1998) described the following cases where students scored higher on their English essay and lower on their Japanese essay (p. 85), quoted in the list items below:

- One student scored poorly on his Japanese essay because he failed to connect two different arguments; his ESL essay contained a cohesive tie between the arguments, resulting in a higher score.
- Several students who scored higher were found to have better ESL skills based on previous experience writing essays or journals in English.
- Some students consciously placed the main idea at the beginning of their English paper and at the end of their Japanese paper. One such student said he was more concerned with making his thesis clear in English and more concerned with making the words flow in Japanese, because he felt the flow was more important in Japanese texts organized by *kishotenketsu* while English texts were more deductive.
- Another student reported that after she learned from a Japanese professor that English writers apply deductive writing, she began to write that way and started receiving higher scores on her English papers. That student also felt that the main idea should be at the end of Japanese texts, as she learned in high school under the *kishotenketsu* style.

Kubota (1998) also reported that there were some students who did not consciously choose to write the essays differently. “[One] . . . said that a deductive style, in her opinion, is preferred for expository prose in both languages, but her personal preference is ‘the style with an unexpected twist at the end’ and the one in which ‘everything is brought together at the end.’ The structure of her Japanese essay looks consistent with the style she likes. [Another student] . . . did not use dissimilar structures consciously either, but the location of the main idea was Final in Japanese and Initial in English. She said, ‘I think English is more logical than Japanese . . . In Japanese, things are often written ambiguously.’” (p. 86).

Kubota (1998) wrote that his results “demonstrate L1–L2 transfer of writing ability rather than L1 specific rhetoric . . . [and the] student’s essays and interview data indicate that insufficient L2 skills are attributable to the lack of attention to organization, simple text structures, ineffectiveness at connecting paragraphs, inadequate paragraphing, and misinterpretation of the prompt” (p. 86). In contrast, many of the students who performed better had a combination of more writing skills and stronger L2 language skills. Brooks (2012) cites a figure from Sasaki and Hirose (1996) that captures the constraints affecting L1 and L2 writing ability (p. 176). See Figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1 (below) from Sasaki and Hirose (1996) p. 161. This image shows the multiple constraints influencing L1 and L2 writing proficiency.



Writers face numerous constraints, and some influence both their L1 and L2 writing ability. Figure 1 (above) from Sasaki and Hirose (1996) shows how one's competence at composing, along with writing strategy which includes organizational style, affects both L1 and L2 writing ability. Additionally, L1 writing ability influences L2 writing. Writing experience across both languages also affects L2 writing. According to Figure 1, the only factors that are unique to L2 writing ability are L2 proficiency, one's confidence in one's ability to write in L2, and one's knowledge about L2 (metaknowledge). These influences overrode differences in culture, as demonstrated by Kubota (1998).

Evolving pedagogies

Japan's teaching strategies for English proficiency have evolved. Wok (1903) described classrooms where students received "little or no direct instruction in writing in their native language" and that because of a lack of formal training beyond basic writing skills in elementary school, "most Japanese students L1 rhetorical skills remain underdeveloped" (p 156). Students took English courses and learned about composition, but little writing beyond the sentence level occurred (Wok, 1993, p. 157).

Brooks (2012) described training that mirrored Western culture, stating, “Because Japanese students are expected to participate in the global academic community the rhetorical structures taught to Japanese students may not, in fact, be so different from the style of deductive argumentation that is taught to students in academic writing classes in Europe and North America”; Brooks cited a study by Rinnert and Kobayashi (2002) noting “that commercially available reference books in Japan, designed to teach high school students how to write a good essay in Japanese, almost always encourage students to use a deductive style, i.e., to present their opinions logically, using reasons and examples to support their assertions; and to begin with a strong thesis statement that presents their opinion at the start of their essay” (p. 175). For the students to develop proficiency in the writing styles described in those references, they need to practice using English.

Aizawa et al. (2023), discuss English medium instruction using English to teach other academic subjects to build proficiency in the L2 language (p. 838). They describe the challenges faced by students entering such programs at the university level who had limited exposure to English in their earlier education, and they state that “rather than using proficiency as a barrier of entry . . . better language support systems could be put in place to equip students with the academic language skills to undertake discipline specific activities . . . with greater levels of support given to lower proficiency students” (p. 856). Japanese ESL students studying at Western universities could also benefit from programs that offer such support.

Conclusion

Positive cross-cultural exchanges yielding stronger academic essays from Japanese ESL students are achievable using writing centers structured as *bukatsudo*. Universities that already have Japanese language programs are uniquely situated to implement such writing centers that will benefit Japanese ESL students. Universities that implement such programs may also benefit from increased enrollment by Japanese ESL students based on a more inclusive school culture that better equips them to perform in Western universities. Because student’s L1 writing ability affects L2 writing, centers that explore both Japanese and English writing styles can better serve Japanese ESL students. Additionally, *bukatsudo* writing center sessions can serve Western students studying Japanese, fostering a multi-cultural learning environment that improves L1 and L2 writing for all involved. Additional research on how Japanese ESL students would view the creation of such clubs and the creation of relevant curriculum for a pilot program would benefit Japanese ESL students and the universities that host them.

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