Research Note

Writing Support in Higher Education: How to Use Native Checkers to Improve the Quality of Research Writing

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— ＜Abstract＞ —

　　The purpose of this paper is to address three claims made by the Kabara and Lai (2015) article for this journal regarding the use of "native checkers" in Japan who are hired to improve the quality of research papers. Their position was that universities should seek an alternative to hiring "native checkers" because such people lack the ability to improve an argument, and therefore, cannot improve the quality of research writing. Our paper views this as too drastic a recommendation considering these hasty generalizations. We briefly examine the problems with the Kabara and Lai (2015) proposition and then offer a way in which such checkers can and do contribute to the improvement of the quality of research writing. Because Kabara and Lai (2015) sought "alternative options," our paper provides an example and descriptive data showing how the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University has effectively employed such individuals to help improve the quality of theses and dissertation submissions in the department.

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1. Introduction

Japanese universities continue to hire "native checkers" to proofread papers written by graduate students. While such a practice can apply to both Japanese and English text, the focus here is on "native checkers" hired to proofread/copyedit work done by ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. In 2015, Kabara and Lai suggested in this journal that an alternative to "native checking" was needed because individuals hired in this role lack the ability to improve an argument and therefore cannot improve the quality of research writing (Kabara and Lai 2015: 335). Their line of reasoning is that: 1) research papers are argumentative (Kabara and Lai 2015: 325); 2) "native checkers" lack the ability to improve an argument (Kabara and Lai 2015: 335); and 3) therefore, "native checkers" cannot improve the quality of research writing (Kabara and Lai 2015: 335). From this, they suggested that Japanese universities should seek alternatives to hiring "native checkers" (Kabara and Lai 2015: 335). However, Kabara and Lai (2015) also agreed that "native checkers," who act as proofreaders/copyeditors, could improve language issues in such papers, which suggested that they do have a role in improving the quality of research papers overall.

Our paper posits that "native checkers" can and do contribute to improving the quality of arguments and research papers, but much depends on what is meant by "native checkers" and what their role in the process of checking such research papers should be in the context of higher education. To clarify some of the confusion, we will briefly examine Kabara and Lai's reasoning, clarify the role that such people play in checking papers, and discuss some alternatives. In addition, because they called for an "alternative options," we will describe the approach taken in the Graduate School of Law that includes the training and employment of "native checkers" to assist in improving the quality of research writing in the department.

2. Examining the Kabara and Lai Premises

The first premise in the Kabara and Lai (2015) reasoning assumes that all research papers are argumentative, which is faulty (Beaufort 2007, Rose 2016). In many fields, not just law, research papers may include suggestions, recommendations, and hypotheses, or merely be expository (that is, with no thesis statement or hypothesis at all). In such instances, "native checkers" who take on the role of proofreader/copyeditor may improve the quality of research papers that are non-argumentative. We can infer this because Kabara and Lai (2015) agreed that such people assisted in improving language-related issues, and there have been thousands of successful publications that included the efforts of "native checkers" in this role for such papers. Therefore, we assert that "native checkers" can and do contribute to improving the quality of some research papers.

Concerning only argumentative research papers, Kabara and Lai (2015) have two main problems with the second assertion that "native checkers lack the ability to improve an argument." The first problem is definitional. Kabara and Lai never clarified what constituted a "native checker." Such a person could be anyone who happens to be a native speaker of English, but such a term could potentially include those with advanced degrees, or even, those certified as an experienced editor. Secondly, Kabara and Lai (2015) provided no empirical evidence that "native checkers," in part or as a whole, "lack the ability to improve an argument." As a result, their second premise is faulty and does not justify the conclusion that "native checkers" do not help improve the quality of an argument or research papers as a whole.

3. Qualifying the Role of "Native Checkers"

We acknowledge that there is a laissez-faire nature to the checking industry and that there are problems with this form of service (Harwood *et al.* 2009). However, this service remains indispensable to higher education (Conrad 2019). If the universities (or clients) are just hiring people off the street, then the overall quality of a check could probably suffer. In such cases, we can only say consumer beware. However, many "native checkers"

with advanced degrees do participate in this service industry and are contributing to the improvement of such papers. Regardless, the Kabara and Lai (2015) proposition provided no insight into the abilities of such people to improve the quality of an argument, whether they are people just off the street or those who have an advanced degree.

Moreover, since Kabara and Lai explained that Japanese universities hire such individuals to "proofread or copy-edit," we must assume that these same institutions follow some form of criteria in hiring those who undertake such a job. Indeed, many departments do require that such "native checkers" have at least a Master's degree. Thus, the scope of what or who is a "native checker" in this context is limited to those with Master's degrees. And, as noted above, given the large number of published material by ESL graduate students, the assumption should be that such checkers have contributed to the improvement of the quality of research papers as a whole. If not, then how do we explain the persistence of the checking industry and the success of so many published articles, theses, and dissertations over the last few decades?

The focus of the issue then turns towards whether or not those with advanced degrees have the ability to improve an argument in a research paper. In addition, we have to clarify what is the role of a proofreader in improving the quality of argumentation, which involves two things: language and reasoning. While it may be the case that some individuals with Master's degrees lack the ability to improve an argument, we must assume that such people in general can formulate, construct, and identify arguments in a research paper. That is, individuals with such advanced degrees should understand the bridge between the rules of language and the rules of reasoning. If not, this would represent a failure of higher education as a whole. Why?

The institutions of higher learning (colleges and universities) are responsible for exposing or "guiding" such Master's candidates with the rules of language and reasoning, which are important not just to developing an argument but constructing a sound hypothesis and other forms of thesis statements. If individuals with Master's degrees cannot bridge the understanding between the rules of language and reasoning, then they most

likely cannot formulate, identify, and construct such statements. This in turn would suggest (but prove) that they lack the ability to improve an argument in someone else's paper. However, this cannot be the case, given that colleges publish many theses and such individuals also publish articles in peer review journals.

Western colleges do teach such candidates the complexities of both sets of rules. With the rules of language, learners should have a strong grasp of the logic form of sentence structuring. For example, formulating and using conditional sentences illustrates ways to express suggestion, prediction, and argumentation. Throughout this learning experience, instructors introduce students to the fundamentals of inferences, reasoning, fallacies as well as cause and effect. For rules of reasoning, writing instructors and writing centers teach them to identify fallacies. When learning about ways to organize arguments, writing lessons will guide them through the Classical, Rogerian, and Toulmin forms of argumentation. In essence, they learn and practice how the two rules are bridged during their college experience.

In addition, since the 1990s, educational pedagogy has encouraged the teaching of peer review in college writing classes for both native and non-native speakers. With such instruction, they learn both the importance and process of peer review, which is not simply restricted to grammar correction but learning how to locate an argument (Timmerman and Strickland 2009). In fact, plenty of research existed before 2015 that showed the benefits of peer review on ESL learning and writing (Yu and Lee 2016). For example, Inoue (2005) opined that learners who successfully undergo this pedagogical strategy "evolve as writers, assessors, and theorizers of language."

If Inoue (2005) was correct, this would suggest that many ESL students have also acquired the skill to navigate over the bridge between the two sets of rules. Assuming that ESL students who have undergone such guidance can become "assessors" and "theorizers of language," then there should be no reason that "native checkers" who have undergone this same learning experience cannot as well. To conclude otherwise, would be to negate the entire pedagogical importance of peer review as an evaluative

tool in college writing classes (Norton 2009).

Given that Japanese universities are hiring people with Master's degrees to perform the role of a proofreader, and that higher education trains such individuals to understand the two sets of rules, this would suggest that they should have the ability to improve an argument in a research paper. We contend that such individuals are qualified to understand how the rules of language and reasoning operate in the construction of research papers (whether argumentative or not). The reason for this is that the universities have "guided" such individuals through such understanding, and many such individuals have publications under their belt.

Professionally speaking, a Master's degree is sufficient for such work (Shulenberger 2022). While a professionally certified proofreader might enhance such checking, it has not been a hiring requirement for Japanese universities simply because the number of such individuals is quite low and the costs would be higher. The point is that without empirical evidence, we cannot conclude that proofreaders (whether professional or not) lack the ability to improve an argument in a research paper. Thus, until proven otherwise, we feel that such people are qualified to undertake such a role in proofreading/copy editing.

However, we should clarify this role so as to not misrepresent what such individuals should or should not be doing when it comes to assessing the clarity or value of an argument in a research paper. The role of proofreaders is to focus on language-related issues (Einsohn *et al.* 2019). We should not diminish or devalue such a role even if all that a proofreader has done is to add a transitional marker to an argument. As Pinker noted, linguistic style is just as important in such papers because it helps get the message across, builds trust with the reader, and "adds beauty to the world" (Pinker 2014: 6-7). And, we have already established that such "native checkers" can improve the quality of research papers that are non-argumentative.

When it comes only to arguments, there is an inflection point that occurs as to who is responsible for fully improving such a statement in a paper. Following the logic of the peer review process, it is the role of the substantive editor (in this case, the supervisor of the graduate student) to

first validate the existence and strength of an argument. Succinctly, it is the job of the substantive editor to ensure that an argument is soundly present, not the "native checker." Technically speaking, then, it is not the job of a proofreader to improve the reasoning of an argument, but rather only to improve the language deficiencies in an argument (if necessary). Thus, the client might call upon the "native checker" to mitigate and correct any language issues related to the argument. In fact, as Rebuck (2004) noted much of such past checking has mainly been on such prescriptive elements.

Unfortunately, the Kabara and Lai (2015) proposition assumed that the role of a proofreader or "native checker" was to "guide" the writer fully through the development of an argument. But, this is not the case and many Japanese professors and supervisors assume such checking primarily involves prescriptive correction (Suzuki 2016). However, because such a separation in roles is not rigid, a proofreader (native checker) might mitigate the problems of language in an argument (and other aspects of a paper), while the editor (student's supervisor) might guide the reasoning of an argument. Therefore, since such "native checkers" (in this context) are qualified to improve language-related issues, and they appear to make such corrections, they can and do contribute to the improvement of both an argument and research paper as a whole.

However, none of this is an indicator of the ability of individual proofreaders (native checkers) to actually understand the rules of language and reasoning that are essential to developing an argument. Absent empirical evidence, we cannot assume that "native checkers" as a whole, or especially those with advanced degrees, lack this understanding. While it might be the case that some "native checkers" with Master's degrees might not be able to "bridge the gap" between these two sets of rules, technically speaking, their role as a proofreader only requires them to focus on the rules of language. Therefore, if a supervisor asks a "native checker" to help improve the language of an argument, then we would posit that they are engaging in their role as a proofreader and are assisting in improving the quality of such a statement.

As a matter of recommended practice, all three parties (student,

supervisor, and checker) should be communicating with each other to ensure such improvements occur in the text. The student, supervisor, or university (acting as client) should not expect or assume that it is the sole responsibility of the proofreader (native checker) to take on both roles. Meanwhile, the "native checker" should be careful about taking on such expectations, and they should work with the client to prevent such misunderstandings. Assuming, however, that our understanding of "native checkers" is incorrect: what would be the alternative?

4. Alternative Options

Kabara and Lai (2015: 335) suggested that Japanese universities should consider alternatives to using "native checkers" as proofreaders for graduate theses and dissertations. At least three options are available. One, universities could hire only certified professional editors. Two, they could rely on corrective software available through the Internet. Three, they could hire and train "native checkers" to better fit the needs of each department.

Hiring certified professional editors sounds ideal but has several limitations. First, the number of actually certified professional editors is small. If all colleges and universities made this a requirement it would result in rising costs. Second, such a demand would impact the turn-around time for checking papers (Saller 2009). In general, clients seek out "native checkers" because they are cheaper and can return a text more quickly as this is usually part-time work. Third, following the Kabara and Lai (2015) logic, colleges would have to seek out only those professionals who could match as an expert in each specific field because no editor is an expert in all fields. This would narrow the pool of available checkers. In sum, this alternative seems untenable due to the costs, an increase in demand that would affect the completion of such checking, and the difficulty of finding enough editors to match each of the specific fields.

While corrective software has improved since 2015, the Conference on College Composition and Communication has advised teachers and instructors not to rely on digital technologies to assess student papers

because "writing and reading reflected a human activity" (CCCC 2004, 2023). While improvements and reliance on such technology have increased, human reasoning continues to play an important role in checking papers. For example, Vojak *et al.* (2011) critically compared these two forms of services, and while both had their strengths and weaknesses, the non-automated services were better at providing valuable assessment because they included the human element. In 2022, Mohsen conducted a meta-analysis of 14 studies and found that both automated and non-automated approaches improved the fluency and accuracy of the writing skills of ESL students, but the latter was more effective as they included human reasoning.

The only viable option is for each department to hire and train qualified "native checkers" to check theses and dissertations according to their specific needs. First, each department should establish guidelines as to what they expect from students in writing a thesis or dissertation, including what type of discourse is acceptable and the form the thesis statement or hypothesis should take in the text. Second, the department would ensure that the "native checkers" are familiar with their role as a proofreader and that they follow the guidelines in making a check. Third, if called upon, such checkers (acting as "external readers") could help to locate and refine a thesis statement or hypothesis while validating this element of the text rest with the supervisor. The final section of this paper will describe how this approach to using "native checkers" was implemented in the Graduate School of Law starting in 2012.

5. Employing "Native Checkers" in the GSL

5.1 The GSL Context

In terms of context, the situation in the GSL matches that described by Kabara and Lai (2015) in that our department recruits international students (mostly from Southeast Asia) who are not fluent in English and have little experience in writing in English (much less a research paper). Such students need a lot of support and assistance, especially when it comes to writing such a high-stakes document such as a thesis. To help improve the quality of such papers, the GSL often hired "native checkers" to mitigate and correct language deficiencies in such graduate work. Originally, the department hired freelance proofreaders without any guidelines or clear expectations, and the focus of such checking was only on basic prescriptive elements.

Before 2012, the discourse in many GSL student theses and dissertations was largely indecipherable. For example, out of 25 theses checked in 2011, the "native checkers" found that the discourse was clear in only 2 of the final works (one was exploratory and one was persuasive), while the remainder appeared as some type of secondary report (Lege 2022). There were numerous reasons for the disarray: 1) no real guidelines; 2) no coordination between the writing courses; 3) no faculty consensus as to what a thesis should be; 4) weak student research skills, little if any writing experience, and language issues as well as; 5) inconsistency in the checking of the final work.

After 2012, the GSL program endeavored to seek out freelance proofreaders that would conform to the ethical standards (such as avoiding paid ghostwriting) and faculty expectations regarding a quality graduate thesis, which included help in clarifying the discourse; that is, assisting with the language elements in the thesis statement or hypothesis (as needed). From this position, a departmental academic writing team was formed to develop comprehensive guidelines and then hired and trained these people to help with mitigating student work. This section explains the reasons and describes the results of employing "native checkers" in this way while also providing a voice from such an individual.

Since the field of law has numerous approaches to writing (legal versus academic) as well as in conducting research (doctrinal, comparative, and non-doctrinal) the need for comprehensive guidelines is crucial as both faculty and students have confused the genres. In addition, scholarship constraints, student language proficiency, and limited exposure to writing instruction had restricted what students could produce. Thus, in 2012, the GSL established an academic writing team that wrote comprehensive guidelines, constructed a writing instructional path for students, and hired and trained sufficiently qualified "native checkers" (*i.e.* those with Master's degrees) to assist with final mitigation.

The faculty-approved guidelines, made available to the students on the GSL website, included the main elements of style, organization, and elaboration that the department expected of such work for the completion of such advanced research (See the Graduate School of Law, Writing Guidelines available at the following site (https://www.law.na goya-u.ac.jp/_userdata/writing-guide.pdf.)). The point is that these guidelines reflect a mutual point of understanding between the expectations of the faculty, the needs of the students, and the requisite tool to help "checkers" complete their job. Without such guidelines students were at a loss as to how to design and write such work, faculty was frustrated, and much of the editing was reduced to prescriptive correction and guesswork. To repeat, the guidelines cover the essential elements of the rules of language, the structuring and organization of a thesis, and do not focus on the rules of reasoning.

The academic writing team also designed a four-step instructional path that revolved around these guidelines (Lege and Green 2018). First, students enter a diagnostic stage upon matriculating in the program. Second, students proceed through three integrated writing courses (for credit) that occur over a year and a half, which include a lab section to develop research and writing skills. These courses guide students on the rules of language and reasoning, peer review, and how to write a thesis statement or hypothesis While the academic team encourages students to include a thesis statement or hypothesis (depending on their discourse), this has not always been feasible due to the numerous constraints mentioned

above as well as the discretion of the supervisor. Third, as students complete their first draft, we assign them a "writing mentor" who works with them over one month to assist in clarifying their discourse. For those with additional needs, the program offers a specialized writing class taught by one of the "checkers." The fourth step involves the role of the "external readers" in the mitigation and evaluation of the final work.

To facilitate this final step, the academic writing team works with several different "native checkers" (up to five per year) to assist with the mitigation of student work. The search for such individuals includes the requirement that they have a Master's degree in a related field in the liberal arts, have written a thesis or journal article, and have at least ten years of experience either teaching writing or in the freelance area of checking graduate work, or are accredited from one of the respected editing associations. In addition, they must be willing to align their skills with the requirements of the guidelines. To clarify, such individuals were qualified because they had earned a Master's thesis (not necessarily in law) and had some experience in teaching writing. Essentially, then, these "native checkers" should have had some experience in working with rules of language and reasoning. The next step was to fit their skills to our needs.

While such "checkers" are trained primarily to mitigate according to the guidelines, they are not restricted to this role. As "readers," in general, the academic team expects educated and experienced individuals to be able to critically assess the direction and logic of such work. Though they cannot make substantive corrections, they can evaluate, question, and recommend changes that might assist not just with language fluency in a paper but the language of the "thesis statement." Upon completion of their "check," the reader will return the thesis to the academic team leader along with a rubric that scores and evaluates the student's work, which includes statements about the clarity of the discourse. As an example, Mr. Davanzo can shed some perspective on his role in this program.

5.2 The Voice of a "Native Checker"

As emphasized previously, the qualifications, training, and experience of a copyeditor are vital in improving the quality of research writing. One of our more experienced checkers is Mr. Chris Davanzo. He was raised in the Washington DC area and studied Sociology at the University of Maryland, obtained a teaching license, and became a high school social studies teacher. In 2001, he came to Japan, earned a Master's degree in English Language Teaching, and began instructing in the area of academic writing at several universities. As such, he should have received sufficient "guidance" in both the rules of language and reasoning. With such knowledge and experience, there was no reason to assume that such a "checker" would lack the basic skills of critical thinking to proofread a paper for language deficiencies while also uncovering weaknesses in the discourse.

In 2014, Mr. Davanzo joined our program at the Nagoya University Graduate School of Law and began teaching a special academic writing course for students who needed the most help improving their writing skills. At the same time, he served as a copyeditor of students' theses and dissertations after receiving training and instruction in the Graduate School of Law Guidelines. Over the years, Mr. Davanzo and Dr. Lege have collaborated in designing the content of the special academic writing course and developed the efficacy of the copyediting process. The following section will describe Mr. Davanzo's role in the external reading process of thesis papers, and how such mitigation by copyeditors improves the quality of students' research writing.

As a proofreader/copyeditor, I focus on improving students' thesis papers on a variety of levels in accordance with the Graduate School of Law Guidelines written by Dr. Lege and with support from the main faculty. One could think of the copyediting process as simultaneously taking place at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, this would include individual words, phrases, and sentences, while at the macro level, I may address matters of clarity, logical progression, accurate articulation, readability, and sentence structure. Examples at the micro level that contribute to a lack of clarity in the discourse are

poor or incorrect word choice, awkward syntax, a lack of hedging (overstating one's position), unclear references, confusing sentence structure, and a host of other issues. A large part of my role at the micro level is suggesting new words and phrases, and making other recommendations, to remedy these various problems in the discourse.

At the macro level, I address individual paragraphs, multi-paragraph sections, whole chapters, and even the entire thesis paper. The external assists writers by providing feedback on a wide range of important issues and concerns. Here, I play an important role in providing feedback and guideposts so that authors can edit their papers and put forth a much more coherent, comprehensible, and quality thesis paper. In addition, as an "external reader," I will correct format errors and direct students to refer to the Guidelines for detailed explanations and examples. Format errors encompass correct layout, use of quotations, punctuation specifics, citation particulars, the correct numbering of headings and subheadings, and a wide range of other instances.

In general, I try to take a holistic overview of what the paper is attempting to put forth, evaluating how the writer is organizing and articulating their ideas and research, and offer useful suggestions on issues of lack of clarity, coherence, logic, readability and other such problems as well as improving the degree of coherency in the discourse. As a result of such training, I feel that in my role I contribute to the overall improvement of research writing and the final product of a graduate thesis.

Once a "check" is completed, all the "readers" return the theses and dissertations to Dr. Lege accompanied by an evaluative matrix that provides comments on these two levels of writing along with statements regarding whether or not the direction of the work is clear. While I may assume that a thesis statement should be present, it is the job of the faculty supervisor (acting as substantive editor) to ensure it is. My role is not to alter, but to advise on, or strengthen the substance of the author's thesis statement (if present). As a trained and qualified "external reader," however, I feel that I can make the author's discourse clearer, more organized, and more coherent.

If there is a problem, I can provide the writer with clarification questions and other feedback so the writer can regroup and reorganize their ideas, ideally with the help of their supervisor. From this, the student would be expected to edit the thesis statement into something more coherent so that the final faculty committee can deem it to be worthy of the degree expectations. The approach that I would take can be illustrated from the extrapolated example provided in the Kabara and Lai (2015) paper, which was from the abstract of a student thesis:

"Nearly 80% of the informal workers are voluntarily engaged in informal employment; only 22.74% are forced to enter informal labor market, and informal labor market is not a low-end market without entry barriers" (Kabara and Lai 2015: 328).

While Kabara and Lai (2015) assumed that this was an argument or thesis statement, there is no indication that the author intended for this to be the case. The student may simply have written this as a factual statement. Kabara and Lai presumed this was the potential argument and simply applied a few transitions to guess at the writer's intent, which is only one way to actually attack the problem (Norton 2009: 92-107). Also, while they did not ascertain the intent of the writer, they did show that with this limited form of "guidance," a thesis statement might be emerging from within the meaning of the text, which is helpful to some extent.

If this had been a GSL thesis, and I was simply engaged in the mitigation approach, then I might have written a statement to the student that no thesis statement was apparent within the abstract (and I might have mentioned other language issues related to this sentence such as a question with the percentage, the passive voice, and the repetitive word usage). If I had decided to take on more of a role of intervention, I might have posed a few suggestive questions to the writer: Do you intend for this sentence to be your thesis statement? If so, could you possibly add the phrase "This thesis argues that…" and could you clarify the percentages, reduce the repetitive

language, and establish the relationship between your main variables? *While I might use such questions as part of an intervention to help the writer with an emerging thesis statement, it is incumbent on the student to "fix" and confirm it with the supervisor.*

Essentially, then, Mr. Davanzo has been trained to intervene or mitigate based on his skills to assess such work. Even if Mr. Davanzo had restricted his role to mitigation, then this would not have diminished his role in improving other areas of the paper. He has contributed to improving the overall quality of the text. If the issue of concern is restricted to the "argument," then this mainly rests with the faculty supervisor (acting as main editor) to ensure that some semblance of a statement is within the text. If present, then Mr. Davanzo could help improve the quality of an argument as needed. Thus, if properly trained and working within the confines of what is expected of a paper, the role of such individuals can assist in improving the quality of research papers while providing valuable insight into the evaluation of the discourse.

5.3　Data from the Graduate School of Law

Before 2012, the discourse or direction of many theses or dissertations in the GSL was unclear, though a few appeared as some form of an expository report. After instituting a new approach to writing, we asked external readers to evaluate and comment on how they understood the discourse in student work. As Table 1 below shows, in 2012, out of 22 submitted theses and dissertations, the discourse was unclear in 73% of the work and the remainder was just secondary reports. The readers in that year found only 1 exploratory thesis of a more sophisticated type expected at the graduate level. Few if any had a clear thesis statement much less an argument.

Many reasons contributed to this problem in 2012, including a misunderstanding of the nature of writing a thesis in law, institutional demands, faulty expectations among faculty, and student recruitment. In general, in the field of law, there is disagreement as to what is acceptable in terms of what constitutes a thesis or dissertation (Morris 2011). In

addition, scholarship demands place enormous pressure on both faculty and students to complete their work within two years, which defines the status of their visa as well. Many faculty held on to a misconception that because students may speak English, they can write at the graduate level. In reality, based on our internal surveys, students enter the program having written little or nothing of an advanced research paper (in English or their language).

Table 1　Evaluation of Theses and Dissertations in GSL, 2012-2023

Year/(No. of theses)	Unsure	Report	Exploratory	Referential	Persuade
2012 (n=22)	16 (73%)	5 (23%)	1 (4%)	0	0
2013 (n=18)	9 (50%)	5 (28%)	3 (17%)	0	1 (6%)
2014 (n=33)	12 (37%)	9 (28%)	7 (23%)	1 (3%)	3 (9%)
2015 (n=25)	7 (28%)	9 (36%)	6 (24%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)
2016 (n=25)	3 (12%)	10 (40%)	9 (36%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)
2017 (n=27)	3 (12%)	12 (45%)	11 (41%)	1 (4%)	0
2018 (n=19)	3 (16%)	7 (37%)	6 (32%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)
2019 (n=18)	2 (11%)	8 (44%)	4 (22%)	2 (11%)	3 (16%)
2020 (n=20)	0	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)
2021 (n=18)	1 (5%)	6 (33%)	5 (28%)	1 (5%)	5 (28%)
2022 (n=21)	1 (4.7%)	6 (29%)	6 (29%)	2 (8%)	6 (29%)
2023 (n=15)	1 (6.6%)	5 (33%)	3 (20%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)

Our approach to academic writing has endeavored to offset some of these disadvantages that restrict the performance of student work, while also seeking to raise the standards for such research expression. The use of "native checkers" as readers has been crucial to helping the GSL to evaluate the effects of the program while improving the overall quality of student theses. As Table 1 clearly shows, over the last decade, the percentage of theses that the readers rated as unclear dropped from 74% in 2012 to less than 7% in 2023. Furthermore, these readers found that the quality of such work improved as students shifted away from expository writing to more sophisticated levels of academic discourse. In 2012, the readers could only find one out of twenty-two papers (4%) expressing such discourse whereas by 2023 fourteen out of fifteen submissions (93%) were found to have attempted higher levels of such expression that included any form of thesis statement or hypothesis. While the external readers were not solely responsible for such improvements, their comments, feedback, and evaluations assisted in contributing to the overall quality of such research writing and in many cases helped to locate and mitigate on a thesis statement when necessary.

6. Conclusion

In general, our position is the opposite of Kabara and Lai (2015) because we accept the open and necessary aspect of social interaction that occurs between people when engaging in the improvement of a written text. Since nearly all academic writing textbooks recommend writers to ask "others" (family, friends, peers, or teacher) to read and advise on ways to improve a text (Beuningen *et al.* 2011), we see no reason that "native checkers" cannot undertake such a role as well. In general, all such advice is welcome and could potentially help to improve the quality of a text.

However, we also understand that Japanese universities want to ensure a higher quality of check for such a high-stakes endeavor as a graduate thesis or dissertation. This partially explains why such institutions hire (or should be hiring) those "native checkers" with Master's degrees to assist in mitigating language-related issues for those ESL students writing such

a text in English. Since such individuals still play a vital role in such a checking service. While there may be problems with the checking service industry, "native checkers," in this context, can still play a role in helping to improve the quality of research papers in Japan.

In this regard, our paper addresses the suggestion Kabara and Lai (2015) made in their article that Japanese universities needed an alternative to "native checkers" because such people supposedly lacked the ability to improve an argument, and therefore, could not improve the quality of research papers. We found this line of reasoning spurious and the conclusion too drastic given the lack of evidence. We briefly examined their premises, discussed and explained the role of "native checkers" in the context of Japanese hiring practices, and described the way such individuals can and do contribute to improving the quality of an argument and research papers as a whole.

As an "alternative," the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University has strengthened the relationship between guidance and intervention by developing a program that recognizes the positive interactive relationship between writing and editing and the role that "native checkers" can play in improving the quality of research papers. Since editing is a process that involves several stages of prescriptive and substantive checking, each department should establish its own guidelines as to what should be expected of student writing and how such work is to be checked. If the roles are clear and they follow the departmental guidelines, then qualified, experienced, and trained "native checkers" can play an important role in improving the quality of graduate theses or research papers. While such roles may restrict substantive intervention by a "native checker," this in no way implies that such people lack the ability to either locate or improve an argument in a paper.

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Authors' Contribution

Lege, R. Paul: conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing
Davanzo, C.: formal analysis, writing

高等教育におけるライティングサポート

－ネイティブチェッカーの役割－

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───＜要　旨＞────────────────

　　本稿の目的は、研究論文の質を向上させるために"ネイティブチェッカー"をいかに活用できるかについて、事例をもとに検討することである。Kabara and Lai（2015）は、ネイティブチェッカーは論文の議論を改善する能力を欠いており、ネイティブチェッカーを向上させることができないので、大学はネイティブチェッカーに取って代わるものを求めるべきであるとした。本稿筆者はこの結論を性急な一般化によるあまりに思い切った勧告であると考える。そこで本稿では、Kabara and Lai（2015）の提案の問題点を簡単に検討し、そのようなチェッカーが研究論文の質の向上に貢献できる方法を提示する。これは、Kabara and Lai（2015）が残る課題とした「代替オプション」に相当する。具体的には、名古屋大学大学院法学研究科が、こうした人材をどのようにして効果的に採用し、学位論文の質を向上させているかを示す例と担当者の口述記録を提供する。

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