

Role of Peer and Self-Assessment Practices for Enhancing Critical Writing in EFL High School

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of peer and self – assessment practices on high school students' critical writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. A quasi-experimental design with two groups was employed with the intervention lasting six weeks. The participants were 60 students of the eleventh grade from a private high school in Medan. Peer and self-assessment using analytic rubrics were implemented in the experimental group, while the conventional teacher feedback was applied in the control group. The students' writing performance was measured through pretest and posttest. In addition, qualitative data were collected using open-ended questionnaires to explore the students' perception in implementing peer and self-assessment. The findings revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group especially in the aspect of argument development and critical reflection, compared to the control group. The findings also indicated the students' awareness of writing and confidence increase after the implementation of peer and self-assessment in the experimental group. Overall, peer and self-assessment encouraged active engagement in the writing process and supported the development of critical thinking skills. It can be concluded that peer and self-assessment are effective in enhancing critical writing among high school EFL students.

Keywords: critical writing; EFL students; high school; formative assessment; self-assessment; peer assessment

Introduction

Writing represents complex cognitive skills as it reflects how well students can think critically, communicate ideas effectively, and engage with complex information (Anggraeny & Khongput, 2022; Herawati, Margana, & Triastuti, 2022).

Among various genres in the context of secondary level, especially in English as a Foreign Language classroom, critical writing including argumentative, analytical and hortatory exposition takes on special significance. Engaging students in critical writing fosters higher-order thinking, enabling them to systematically analyse, evaluate, and synthesize information, which in turn enhances their ability to construct coherent arguments and deepens their learning outcomes (Golden, 2023). In addition, the ability to write critically enables learners to demonstrate advanced language proficiency and academic competence, (Javanmiri & Bdaiwi, 2021) which are essential for success in tertiary education and scholarly communication. Practically, critical writing also fosters lifelong learning. As the ability to express ideas logically and persuasively is fundamental in modern communication, writing prepares students to engage with complex issue beyond academic contexts (Deveci, 2019). However, teaching critical or argumentative writing in EFL high school classrooms remains challenging because many students struggle to develop higher order thinking skills, organize evidence, and present counterarguments effectively (Mallahi, 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

In recent years, Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches, such as peer and self-assessment, have gained increasing attention as effective tools to improve students' writing performance. Peer assessment allows students to analyze and comment on their peers' texts based on established criteria, while self-assessment fosters reflection and metacognitive awareness about one's own writing (Ebrahimi, Izadpanah, & Namaziandost, 2021). From an academic perspective, these assessment practices foster self-regulated learning, enhance metacognitive awareness, and improve the overall quality of written performance (Hoang, Phan, & Le, 2023; Aslanoğlu, 2022; Riznanda, 2024). Conventional assessment often focuses on surface level corrections such as grammar and spelling, rather than developing argument development and critical thinking (Woo & Choi, 2021). In this case, peer assessment and self-assessment encourage engagement and collaboration in the evaluation process. In practical terms, this change enables teachers to handle large classes more effectively, fosters collaborative learning and develops self-writing that allows critically assess their own works and their peers. In Indonesian high schools setting, where English is taught as a foreign language, incorporating peer and self-assessment can serve as a student-centered approach to enhance critical writing results (Sudarmaji & Bunga Lifanie, 2020).

Empirical studies have investigated the impact of peer and self-assessment on writing performance. Many studies have shown that such formative assessment increase learner engagement, self-regulation and writing quality. For example, a meta-analysis by Huisman, Saab, van den Broek, and van Driell (2018) in higher education contexts revealed that formative peer feedback notably enhanced students' academic writing by improving their critical evaluation of content and structure. Likewise, Hoang, Phan and Le (2023) found that incorporating analytical rubrics into peer and self-assessment activities resulted in clear improvements in EFL learners' writing proficiency, coherence, and accuracy within in a Vietnamese setting. In addition, Yu and Lee (2016) highlighted that peer assessment not only supports linguistic growth but also fosters metacognitive awareness, allowing learners to internalize assessment standards and use them autonomously. Overall, these results indicate that peer and self-assessment serve as effective strategies for developing critical writing skills.

While peer and self-assessment have been examined, some significant gaps still exist. First, most prior research has examined general writing improvement (e.g., narrative or descriptive writing) rather than critical or argumentative writing, which requires a higher level of reasoning and evidence-based argumentation (Lam, 2016; Yu, 2023). Second, inconsistencies exist regarding the effectiveness of these assessment methods across proficiency levels. While some studies highlight positive outcomes, others report mixed or negligible effects due to students' limited feedback literacy or lack of confidence (Yu & Lee, 2016; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Carless & Boud, 2018). Third, only limited number of studies have integrated both peer and self-assessment as complementary practices within a single pedagogical model in high school contexts (Hoang, Phan, & Le, 2023; Huisman et al., 2018). This gap indicates a need for research to investigate how peer and self-assessment can be integrated into secondary-level EFL writing instruction.

Addressing this gap, the present study introduces a novel instructional approach by integrating peer and self-assessment practices into EFL high school writing instruction with a specific emphasis on critical writing skills. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent do peer and self-assessment improve students' critical writing performance?

2. What aspects of critical writing are most affected by the integration of peer and self - assessment?
3. How do students perceive the implementation of peer and self-assessment in their writing classes?

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to: (1) examine the effect of peer and self-assessment on EFL high school students' critical writing performance; (2) investigate specific aspects of critical writing which affected most; and (3) explore students' perception of engaging in peer and self-assessment. The research was conducted in a private senior high school in Medan, Indonesia where English writing instruction is typically product-oriented, thereby providing an ideal context for investigating the potential of process-oriented, participatory assessment models. The units of analysis include students' essays, their feedback and responses throughout the assessment cycles.

This study is organized as follows. The section outlines the methodology, encompassing the research design, participants, instruments, data collection methods and analysis techniques. The findings section details the outcome regarding the impact of peer and self-assessment on students' critical writing skills. The discussion analyzes the results related to prior research and theoretical models. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the main findings and highlights the main implications for future studies.

Research Methodology

This study conducted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to investigate the effect of peer and self-assessment practices on students' critical writing performance. This design was selected because it allows examination of instructional effects in authentic classroom settings where random assignment is not feasible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study compared two instructional approaches between conventional teacher assessment and combined peer and self-assessment in senior high school classrooms.

The study was conducted at a private senior high school in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, namely SMA Gajah Mada Medan during the 2024/2025 academic year. The target population comprised all eleventh-grade students enrolled in English writing classes. Purposive cluster sampling was applied since it

allowed the inclusion of naturally formed groups that shared similar curricular backgrounds and English proficiency levels (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The sample consisted of two classes, each comprising 30 students. One class was assigned as the experimental group, whereas the others as the control group. The primary data were students' written essays and their corresponding assessment practices.

Data collection was carried out over six weeks and consisted of three stages namely pretest, implementation, and posttest. During the pretest, the students completed critical writing assignment. The essays were assessed with analytic rubric form Hyland (2019), encompass argumentation, structure, evidence, cohesion and critical analysis. During the implementation, the experimental group took part in peer and self-assessment activities following each draft. Participant were instructed to evaluate classmates' work using rubrics. The exchanges of feedback were supervised to maintain uniformity with suitable criteria (Carless& Boud,2018). In contrast, the control group were only received the teacher feedback without peer or self-assessment involvement. Furthermore, a survey to measure students' attitudes. Furthermore, a survey gauged student's view on peer and self-assessment using five-point Likert Scale.

The research instruments consisted of writing tests, a student perception questionnaire and the critical writing rubric. The rubric evaluated students' writing proficiency based on five criteria namely argumentation, organization, evidence, coherence, and critical reflection. The reliability was tested using Cronbach's α ($\alpha = 0.89$), indicating high reliability. The perception questionnaire measured the students' attitudes toward peer and self-assessment through five-point Likert scale.

The quantitative data from the pretest and posttest were analyzed by using SPSS 25. Writing performance was assessed using analytic rubric adapted from Hyland (2019). Descriptive statistics were used to report the mean scores and standard deviations. An independent samples t-test was used to determine the significant differences in critical writing performances. Additionally, effect sizes (Cohen's d) were used to measure the intervention effect. The questionnaires data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to explore students' perceptions on the peer and self-assessment process.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section examines the effect of peer and self-assessment on the students' critical writing skills in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context at a private senior high school in Medan, Indonesia. The analysis integrates quantitative and qualitative data to present the statistical results and students' perceptions.

The participants consisted of sixty eleventh- grade students enrolled in English writing courses during the 2024/2025 academic year. Two classes were chosen as the experimental and control groups. The experimental group with 30 students participated in peer and self-assessment, while the control group implemented conventional teacher's feedback. None of the participants had prior experience with peer and self-assessment practices. In the pretest session, students from both groups composed 300 words in critical essay then was evaluated by using a rubric adapted from Hyland (2019). This rubric assessed five aspects namely argument development, use of evidence, organization, coherence, and critical reflection. Following the pretest, the experimental group implemented peer and self-assessment while control group only implemented teachers' feedback only. During the posttest, both groups wrote another essay on a similar topic.

Quantitative Findings

Based on pretest results, an independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' writing scores across argument development, evidence use, and coherence, as measured by an analytic rubric, adapted from Hyland. After the intervention, posttest results revealed a statistically significant difference in writing performance between the two groups. However, the improvement was significantly higher for the experimental group. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and t-test results for experimental and control groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results for Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Mean Gain	t- value	p- value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Experimental	30	66.00 (6.10)	82.00 (5.35)	+16.00	11.45	< .001	2.08 (large)
Control	30	68.00 (6.20)	74.00 (5.90)	+6.00	4.12	< .001	0.75 (medium)
Between- group diff.	60	—	—	—	5.96	< .001	1.53 (large)

As shown in Table 1, both groups showed improvement from pretest to posttest, but the experimental group had much bigger gain. The experimental group's mean score went up from 66.00 to 82.00 which is an average increase of 16.00 points. The improvement was statistically significant ($t = 11.45$, $p < .001$) and had a large effect size ($d = 2.08$). On the other hand, the control group's average score improved from 68.00 to 74.00 which is an average increase of 6.00 points. It was also significant ($t = 4.12$, $p < .001$), though with a moderate effect size ($d = 0.75$). Further independent-samples t-test comparing the posttest scores found a significant difference between the two groups ($t(58) = 5.96$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.53$). It indicates that students in the experimental group significantly improved rather than those in the control group.

Table 2. Post Test Mean Scores of Critical Writing Aspects in Experimental and Control Groups (Post-Test)

Critical Writing Aspect	Experimental Group (n=30)	Control Group (n=30)
Argument Development	87.6	70.2
Critical Reflection	86.8	69.8
Use of Evidence	84.9	71.4
Organization	83.7	78.6
Coherence	82.5	74.1

In addition, the aspects of critical writing that were most affected by the implementation of peer and self-assessment were argument development (87,6), critical reflection (86,8) and use of evidence (84,9). The students became better in formulating their ideas systematically, focused thesis statements, and refining language accuracy. The following aspects were organization and coherence across paragraphs. Meanwhile the control group were mostly improved in organization (78.6), however showing minimal improvement in critical reasoning (69.8) and argument development (70.2).

The results indicate that the use of peer and self-assessment enables students to apply writing aspect. This finding is consistent with Huisman, Saab, van Driel, and van den Broek (2018), who reported that formative peer feedback significantly improved academic writing performance across higher education contexts. This

finding aligns with Topping (1998), who found that peer assessment fosters writing skill through collaborative evaluation and feedback processes. Overall, these studies highlight the effectiveness of peer and self-assessment into writing curricula to get better academic results.

The reliability of the writing rubric was verified, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 which signifies internal consistency among the scoring categories. This level of reliability suggests that rubric accurately measure the multifaceted aspects of critical writing (Hyland, 2019). Additionally, the validity was established through the triangulation to confirm that observed gains from authentic learning progress.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings came from students' written and open-ended questionnaire answers after they participated in the implementation. The analysis employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to find out common ideas in students' perception of the peer and self-assessment process. Three main themes emerged (1) the awareness of writing quality, (2) confidence and motivation, (3) feedback literacy skills. These themes revealed how students began to understand and apply the assessment methods so that helped their critical writing skills improve. The findings suggest that peer and self-assessment not only improved writing skill but also changed students' attitudes toward writing.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of Peer and Self-Assessment

Theme	Description	Example Student Comments	Frequency (%)	Dominant Aspect
1. Awareness of Writing Quality	Students became more aware of the qualities of good writing and critical argumentation through evaluating their peers' work.	"After reviewing my friend's essay, I realized how strong evidence and transitions make arguments clearer."	83%	Cognitive and metacognitive awareness
2. Confidence and Motivation	Students felt more confident and motivated to revise their essays and share their writing.	"I used to be afraid of being judged, but peer feedback made me realize I can improve with others' help."	77%	Affective engagement
3. Feedback Literacy	Students developed the ability to give and interpret constructive comments using rubrics.	"Before, I only focus on grammar, but now I comment on ideas, logic, and examples."	70%	Evaluative judgment and rubric use

Awareness of Writing Quality

The most prominent theme, reported by 83% of participants focused on students' understanding of what makes writing effective. Students frequently noted that reviewing and evaluating peer assessment helped them identify key elements of good writing, such as clear argument structure, logical flow (coherence), and strong use of evidence. This process encouraged them to apply the same criteria when revising their own work. As a student wrote:

"Reading my friend's essay made me understand how to write a good argument. Then I could fix my own writing."

Their cognitive skills changed from passive learning to active evaluation deepened students' engagement with texts, aligning with Andrade and Du (2007), who emphasize that self-assessment builds awareness of quality standards and fosters learner responsibility. Similarly, Oscarson (2009) found that reflecting on writing leads to lasting improvements in EFL settings. In this study, students described how assessing others' work sharpened their ability to know their own mistakes.

Confidence and Motivation

Many students reported observing peer assessment made them like a team work. By participating in feedback exchanges, students felt more confident to take participated in learning, reducing reliance on teacher input. A student expressed that giving feedback to others and checking my own work made me feel like I could really improve my writing skills.

This theme suggests that the practices shifted students' attitudes, increasing cognitive engagement and confidence. As a result, students became more motivated to revise and experiment with their writing. These findings match what Yu (2023) found, where peer feedback helps learners feel more capable and motivated in their writing by sharing the responsibility of learning.

Growth in Feedback Skills

The third theme highlighted students' development of feedback literacy, including the ability to provide comments and interpret feedback effectively. Through repeated peer and self-assessment implementation, students learned to articulate strengths and weaknesses in writing, fostering a collaborative learning environment. One student remarked that at first do not know how to give good feedback, but then he's able to point out what's missing and suggest fixes. Hence, this growth not only improved their critical thinking but also encouraged them.

Overall, the findings indicate that peer and self-assessment practices significantly enhanced students' critical writing skills by promoting active learning, self-awareness, and collaborative engagement. These outcomes suggest that integrating such methods into EFL high school curricula can lead to more effective and sustainable writing development.

Among the three themes, awareness of writing quality was the most dominant because it integrates both cognitive and metacognitive processes. While confidence and feedback literacy contributed to affective and behavioral engagement, awareness directly impacted the quality of students' argumentation and reasoning in writing. It suggests that critical writing competence begins with awareness of writing quality for developing higher-order thinking in EFL learners.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the impact of peer and self-assessment improved eleventh-grade EFL students' critical writing performance compared with conventional teacher feedback in a senior high school context in Medan, Indonesia. The study contributed empirical evidence from a secondary-level, and explored both outcome measures (pretest–posttest writing scores) and process indicators (students' perceptions). In summary, the experimental group increased from a pretest mean of 66 to a posttest mean of 82, whereas the control group increased from 68 to 74. The improvement in the first group was much bigger on average; they gained 16 points compared to 6 points for the other group and tests showed that the difference was significant. Therefore, quantitative results from pre- and post-implementation of writing assessments showed a significant improvement in critical writing performance, with statistical tests confirming a large effect size (e.g., Cohen's $d > 0.8$).

Based on qualitative analysis that revealed three dominant themes namely awareness of writing quality, confidence and motivation and feedback literacy. Notably, the awareness of writing quality was the dominant theme. It suggests that cognitive shifts such as recognizing quality criteria through peer evaluation serve as a foundation for other benefits. Students' reflections revealed how assessing peers' work helped them internalize standards like coherence and use of evidence which they then applied to their own revisions.

The growth in feedback skills shows how peer assessment works. Students learned to give and get helpful advice, creating a friendly classroom. It did not only

make their own writing better but also helped them learn from each other through talks. In short, these results suggest that adding peer and self-assessment in English classes can connect learning skills by using them, making writing lessons more focused on students and more useful.

When comparing the results with previous studies, several observations appeared. First, the improvements in the experimental group show that using peer and self-assessment can really help students write better. It aligns with Huisman et al. (2018) that peer feedback improves academic writing in different contexts. The pattern in this study is similar, especially in areas like building stronger arguments and organizing ideas. Likewise, Hoang, Phan, and Le (2023) found that analytical rubrics used in peer and self-assessment helped students improve their EFL writing. In this study, the rubric helped students more focused comments and make clearer revisions. Topping's (2018) idea that peer assessment encourages students to think critically and collaborate was also supported, as students explained that reviewing their peers' arguments and evidence helped them improve their own writing.

The qualitative findings also show that students developed better metacognitive awareness. The questionnaire responses showed that when students assess their own work, they learn to identify what is important and gain more control over how they improve. Students began to pay attention to some aspects of writing, such as clarity of ideas, instead of only fixing small language errors. It supports Carless and Boud's (2018) point that students need support in using feedback effectively. In addition, students felt more confident and motivated and less anxious about teacher judgment.

Overall, the results mostly aligned with previous research, but some differences also appeared. The control group also showed an improvement, that teacher feedback still helps students, especially in organization and coherence. However, the experimental group gained much more, especially in developing argument and critical reflection. It aligns with Hyland's (2019) view that academic writing requires good language skills and strong reasoning. Teacher feedback supports language, while peer and self-assessment help build reasoning skills.

Many students mentioned that peer assessment helped them notice strengths more easily. Second, peer assessment encouraged deeper thinking about their own writing. When students judged another person's argument, they had to explain their reasoning, which helped them apply the same strategies to their own drafts. It

reflects Topping's (2018) idea that peer assessment is a powerful learning tool, and the results show it works well even in high school. Third, the feedback and revision made students more focused.

In conclusion, this study shows that when peer and self-assessment are implemented with clear rubrics and teacher support, they can significantly improve high school students' critical writing. They also help students think more about their learning and become more confident. These findings support previous research and add new evidence showing that assessment can work well in secondary EFL writing classes. One of the most important results was that students became more aware of their writing quality, which is a key first step before improving more advanced writing skills. The study highlights the importance of assessment in writing classes and the need to provide clear guidance to ensure successful implementation.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigated how peer and self-assessment impacted high school students' critical writing skills in an English as a foreign language (EFL) class in Indonesia. It used a quasi-experiment, with pretest and posttest. The objective was to examine if peer and self-assessment could improve students' critical writing. The results showed that students who implemented peer and self-assessment activities got higher score on the posttest than those who only got feedback from teachers. It suggests that peer and self-assessment can really help improve writing skills and build critical thinking in EFL classes.

The findings indicate that the students in the experimental group who engaged in peer and self-assessment showed a substantial improvement in writing performance with mean scores increasing from 66 to 82, while the group with only teacher feedback went from 68 to 74. It adds prove that peer and self-assessment practices contribute for writing skills. These results match other studies that found giving feedback to peers in a helpful way improves writing quality and helps students learn to manage their own learning.

From the students' perception, three main themes came up. The most important was becoming aware of writing quality, meaning students got better at judging their own and others' writing carefully. It also showed that through peer feedback, students felt more responsible and in control of their learning, which supports the idea that peer assessment helps students become more independent

and share knowledge together. From the perception of teaching, the findings show that letting students check each other's work and their own can work well instead of just relying on teachers showed better results. These methods get students more involved, make them think about their work, and take responsibility, which helps them learn better. For EFL teachers, this means it's key to use helpful assessment often in writing classes. Teaching students how to give good feedback and use scoring guides right can make them feel more confidence and reduce unfair judging. In addition, it should be checked that the tasks match what students need to learn and easier to understand.

In conclusion the study provide the evidence that integrating peer and self-assessment can greatly improve EFL students' critical writing, build awareness of their own thinking, and increase their independence as learners. It highlights that peer and self-assessment not only for evaluative tools but as a teaching way that turns students from passive receivers of feedback into active drivers of their learning. By using this assessment, teachers can help the students to think critically, reflect on their work, and manage themselves, ready for the academic and communication needs of today's world.

To ensure the effective implementation of peer and self assessment, teachers should begin with brief training sessions on giving constructive feedback using clear rubrics. Students should be guided to identify both strengths and areas for growth, not just their errors. Initial peer pairing may involve learners with comparable proficiency levels before gradually introducing heterogeneous groupings. Set aside class time for discussions after feedback to talk about what they learned. Monitor progress with simple journals where students note their improvements. When implemented consistently, peer and self-assessment not only enhance student engagement but also reduce teachers' assessment workload, particularly in large classroom settings.

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