

The Impact of Peer Feedback on Writing Anxiety and Performance: EFL Students at Wolkite University in Focus

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Abstract

Writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) often presents significant challenges for learners, particularly in managing writing anxiety and maintaining writing performance. This study investigates the effects of peer feedback on reducing writing anxiety and improving writing performance among EFL students in higher education. A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 78 third-year EFL students at Wolkite University. Participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group ($n = 39$), which received peer feedback, or a control group ($n = 39$), which received only teacher feedback. Data were collected using IELTS writing tasks, a standardized writing anxiety questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings revealed that the experimental group experienced a statistically significant reduction in writing anxiety, along with a marked improvement in writing performance compared to the control group. Qualitative data from interviews corroborated these results, indicating that peer feedback increased learners' confidence, encouraged critical self-reflection, and reduced stress during writing tasks. These findings suggest that peer feedback is an effective pedagogical strategy for addressing both the cognitive and affective challenges of EFL writing. Implications for instructional practice and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: EFL students, education, peer feedback, education quality, writing anxiety

1. Introduction

The increasing global use of English as a medium of instruction and international communication has heightened the demand for strong academic writing skills among non-native English speakers. In particular, learners in EFL contexts where English is not the dominant language encounter significant challenges in developing the academic writing proficiency necessary for success in higher education and future careers. Academic writing in such settings requires more than a basic grasp of grammar and vocabulary; it demands the ability to convey ideas with clarity, coherence, and logical organization (Hao & Razali, 2022; Jin et al., 2024; Rasool et al., 2024; Soleimani & Modirkhamene, 2020; Suryani et al., 2019; Tran & Pham, 2023; Trang & Anh, 2022; Wihastyanang et al., 2020; Yuk & Yunus, 2021).

Among the many challenges EFL learners face, writing anxiety has emerged as a critical affective barrier to writing development and academic performance. Writing anxiety commonly defined as the apprehension, discomfort, or fear associated with writing tasks (Alamri et al., 2021; Paramarti et al., 2023) can arise from various factors, including fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence in language ability, and pressure stemming from academic expectations (Alfarwan, 2022; Astrid, 2023; Lei, 2017; Weng & Xue, 2023). These issues are particularly acute in linguistically constrained environments, where limited exposure to English often leads to avoidance behaviors, reduced motivation, and diminished writing quality (Irawati et al., 2022; Muthukrishnan et al., 2025; Nawaz, 2021).

In response to these challenges, educators and researchers have increasingly explored pedagogical interventions that address both the cognitive and emotional aspects of writing. One such strategy is peer feedback, in which students evaluate and provide constructive input on each other's writing. Rooted in social constructivist theory, peer feedback fosters collaborative learning, enhances engagement with the writing process, and cultivates critical thinking skills (Cui et al., 2022; Hao & Razali, 2022; Kafryawan et al., 2021; Motallebzadeh et al., 2020; Trang, 2022). Although numerous studies have demonstrated that peer feedback can improve writing in terms of organization, coherence, and clarity (Elfiyanto & Fukazawa, 2021; Jin et al., 2024; Min, 2016; Sabti et al., 2019; Stephens et al., 2023), its emotional impact, particularly its influence on writing anxiety has received comparatively less scholarly attention (Huisman et al., 2018; Lew & Tang, 2017; Trang & Anh, 2022; Vijayaratnam et al., 2025).

Moreover, much of the existing research has been conducted in Western or English-dominant educational contexts, which often differ substantially from EFL environments such as Ethiopia in terms of linguistic exposure, peer interaction norms, and instructional practices (Jin et al., 2024; Lei, 2017; Trang & Anh, 2022). As a result, findings from these contexts may not be directly applicable to learners in

underrepresented regions. In addition, prior studies have largely focused on measurable academic outcomes, often overlooking students' emotional experiences and the sociocultural factors that influence the effectiveness of peer feedback (Cui et al., 2021; Elfiyanto & Fukazawa, 2021; Lew & Tang, 2017).

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the impact of peer feedback on both writing performance and writing anxiety among EFL students at Wolkite University, Ethiopia. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study explores not only measurable improvements in students' writing skills but also the emotional responses and contextual factors that influence their experiences with peer feedback.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive study within the Ethiopian higher education context to examine the dual cognitive and affective effects of peer feedback among university-level EFL learners. By offering context-specific insights, the study contributes meaningfully to the broader academic discourse on EFL writing instruction. It highlights the importance of adopting pedagogical practices that promote both linguistic competence and emotional well-being. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing inclusive, supportive learning environments that foster improved academic performance and psychological resilience among students. Accordingly, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Does the application of peer feedback impact the writing performance of EFL students in higher education?
2. Does the application of peer feedback affect the writing anxiety of EFL students in higher education?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Effect of Peer Feedback on Writing Performance

- A. **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no statistically significant difference in writing performance between EFL students who receive peer feedback and those who receive only teacher feedback.
- B. **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** EFL students who receive peer feedback will demonstrate significantly higher writing performance than those who receive only teacher feedback.

Hypothesis 2: Effect of Peer Feedback on Writing Anxiety

- C. **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no statistically significant difference in writing anxiety between EFL students who receive peer feedback and those who receive only teacher feedback.
- D. **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** EFL students who receive peer feedback will experience significantly lower levels of writing anxiety compared to those who receive only teacher feedback.

2. Methodology

Design of the Study

The researchers adapted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, wherein quantitative data were collected and analyzed in the first phase to identify patterns and relationships. This was followed by qualitative data collection to provide deeper insight and explanation of the quantitative results. The quantitative component utilized pre-test and post-test measures to assess changes over time within each group and to compare outcomes between the experimental and control groups. Complementing this, the qualitative component employed semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into students' perceptions of peer feedback and its psychological impact. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data through methodological triangulation enhanced the credibility, validity, and richness of the study's findings.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

The participants were **78 third-year undergraduate EFL students** enrolled in an Advanced Writing I course at Wolkite University during the 2023 academic year. All participants had comparable English language proficiency, as determined by their academic records and IELTS scores. This study employed a **quasi-experimental design** with **pre-existing groups**, rather than random assignment at the individual level. Participants were drawn from two intact classes with comparable academic backgrounds. One class ($n = 39$) was designated as the experimental group, which received peer feedback, while the other class ($n = 39$) served as the control group and received only teacher feedback. Although random assignment of individuals was not used consistent with quasi-experimental methodology care was taken to ensure that the two groups were similar in key demographic and academic characteristics to minimize selection bias and support the validity of comparisons.

Instruments

Questionnaire

To assess students' writing anxiety, a **validated questionnaire adapted from Cheng (2004)** was employed. It comprised **29 Likert-scale items** (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) grouped into three dimensions: **cognitive anxiety (Items 1–10)**, **somatic anxiety (Items 11–20)**, and **avoidance behavior (Items 21–29)**. Following expert validation, one item was removed for relevance, resulting in 28 items. The tool was administered before and after the intervention to both groups.

Writing Performance Test

To assess students' writing performance, an adapted version of the academic IELTS writing test (Read, 2022) was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test. The test comprised two tasks: Task 1 required students to write a descriptive report of approximately 150 words based on a set of data within 20 minutes, while Task 2 involved composing an argumentative essay of at least 250 words within 40 minutes. Writing performance was evaluated using the official IELTS band descriptors, which assess task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy. Scores were assigned on a scale from 0 to 9. To ensure scoring reliability, two independent raters evaluated each writing sample, and the average of their scores was used as the final result. These results were then interpreted in alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to provide a standardized understanding of students' writing proficiency (Athiwarakun et al., 2018).

Interview

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with eight participants from the experimental group. This interview format enabled the researchers to explore participants' perspectives in depth while ensuring consistency across a predetermined set of themes (Ruslin et al., 2022). The interviews focused on learners' experiences with peer feedback and its perceived impact on writing anxiety and performance. Three guiding questions specifically addressed the role of peer review in reducing stress and enhancing confidence. Each interview lasted between 10 and 14 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Prior to the main study, the research instruments were validated by two experts, both PhD holders in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Jimma University. These experts had 28 and 30 years of experience, respectively, teaching EFL students at various public universities in Ethiopia. Their evaluations focused on assessing the content and face validity of the questionnaire items, IELTS writing tasks, and interview questions.

Based on the feedback provided, revisions were made to improve the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire. Of the original 29 items, one was removed. Specifically, the item "*My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition*" was deemed unrelated to the study's focus on peer feedback and its impact on writing anxiety. As a result, data were collected using the remaining 28 validated items. Constructive suggestions were likewise applied to refine the IELTS writing tasks and interview questions, making them more comprehensible and appropriate for participants.

To ensure the reliability of the instruments and the consistency of their administration, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.889—indicating a high level of reliability. Similarly, the reliability of the IELTS writing assessment was confirmed through inter-rater reliability analysis. Cohen's Kappa was calculated to determine the level of agreement between two independent raters, resulting in a value of $\kappa = 0.824$, which reflects substantial agreement.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative interview data, all interviews were conducted in person and audio-recorded using a smartphone. The reliability of the qualitative data was further strengthened through independent coding by the researchers and triangulation of themes, ensuring consistency in identifying and interpreting emerging patterns.

Procedures

During the pre-test phase, both the experimental and control groups completed the Writing Anxiety Scale and a baseline writing task to assess their initial levels of writing anxiety and performance.

The treatment phase lasted eight weeks and consisted of sixteen sessions, conducted twice weekly on Mondays and Wednesdays. Each session included structured writing activities. To begin, students read articles selected by the researchers on topics related to language learning and instruction. Following the reading, they composed argumentative essays on a variety of subjects. Before the writing activity, teachers reviewed the structure and conventions of argumentative essay writing. In the subsequent session, students received their initial drafts, which had been evaluated using a customized peer review checklist. The checklist was designed to assess key aspects of writing, including organization, coherence, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and formatting. After receiving feedback, students revised their drafts and submitted the final versions one week later.

Students in the experimental group were trained to use the peer review checklist to provide constructive feedback. After each writing task, they participated in structured peer feedback sessions. Working in pairs, students evaluated whether introductions clearly presented the topic and concluded with a focused thesis statement. They also analyzed sample argumentative essays to identify genre-specific features, appropriate vocabulary, grammar usage, and punctuation errors.

Throughout the peer review process, students engaged in the full writing cycle—planning, drafting, reviewing, and revising. Pair discussions focused on suggested revisions and clarifications, fostering active participation and a clear understanding of the feedback process. During the second training session, students repeated the activity in pairs: while one student reviewed the draft using the checklist, the other revised the essay based on the feedback provided.

Students took responsibility for reviewing their peers' work using the trained checklist and revising their own drafts accordingly. The revised drafts were then submitted to the researchers, who provided additional written comments. These comments were discussed in

small groups, although no further revisions were made at this stage. These group discussions promoted collaborative learning and deeper engagement with the feedback. Final drafts were submitted the following week for teacher evaluation.

In contrast, the control group received only teacher feedback. After submitting their initial drafts, students received written comments from the teacher based on the same checklist used with the experimental group. They then revised their work according to this feedback and submitted their final versions the following week for evaluation.

Each session concluded with the completion of a writing task. Teachers provided written feedback, and students submitted revised essays in the next session for final review. Both groups completed eight identical essay tasks throughout the intervention period. However, the primary distinction between the two groups lay in the source of feedback: the experimental group received peer feedback, while the control group received only teacher feedback.

At the conclusion of the treatment phase, both groups completed the Writing Anxiety Scale again and completed a final writing task to assess post-treatment changes in writing anxiety and performance. Additionally, a subset of students from the experimental group participated in follow-up interviews to explore their experiences with peer feedback and its perceived effects on their writing confidence and anxiety.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and paired-sample t-tests were used to compare pre- and post-intervention scores within and between groups. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. To find trends pertaining to students' intellectual and emotional reactions to peer criticism, interview transcripts were coded inductively. In order to identify, analyze, and report recurrent themes in the data, thematic coding was used. This method made it possible to record academic results as well as emotional factors (such as decreased anxiety and boosted confidence). The study's mixed-methods triangulation approach was then strengthened by mapping the derived themes against the quantitative findings to evaluate alignment.

3. Findings

Research question 1: *Does the use of peer feedback affect the writing performance of EFL students in higher education?*

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the groups' writing performance pre-test and post-test results

	Test	N	\bar{X}	SD	Mean difference	t-value	sig.
Control group	Pre-test	39	1.61	.641	0.12	0.42	0.37
	Post-test	39	1.65	.657			
Experimental group	Pre-test	39	1.60	.636	1.26	5.18	0.00
	Post-test	39	3.63	.843			

Table 1 shows that the control group's writing performance improved slightly from a mean of 1.61 to 1.65, with a mean difference of 0.12, which was not statistically significant ($t = 0.42, p = 0.37$). In contrast, the experimental group's mean score increased significantly from 1.60 to 3.63, yielding a mean difference of 1.26 ($t = 5.18, p = 0.00$). This indicates a strong positive impact of the intervention on the experimental group's writing performance.

Table 2. Paired sample t-test results for experimental group's writing performance

Test	N	\bar{X}	SD	T	Df	sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	39	1.60	.636	-1.131	13	.009
Post-test	39	3.63	.843			

Table 2 shows the paired-sample t-test results for the experimental group's writing performance. The mean score increased significantly from 1.60 ($SD = 0.636$) in the pre-test to 3.63 ($SD = 0.843$) in the post-test. The difference was statistically significant ($t = -1.131, p = 0.009$), indicating a meaningful improvement in writing performance following the intervention. The negative t-value reflects that post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores, confirming the intervention's effectiveness.

Table 3. Results of the Paired Sample T-test for the writing proficiency of the Control Group

Test	N	\bar{X}	SD	T	Df	sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	39	1.61	.641	1.201	13	.217
Post-test	39	1.64	.657			

Table 3 presents the paired sample t-test results for the control group's writing proficiency. The mean score showed a slight increase from 1.61 ($SD = 0.641$) in the pre-test to 1.64 ($SD = 0.657$) in the post-test. However, this difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.201, p = 0.217$), indicating that the control group's writing proficiency did not improve meaningfully over the period.

Research question 2: *Does the application of peer feedback affect the writing anxiety of EFL students in higher education?*

Table 4. Paired sample t-test results for control group's writing anxiety

Tests	N	\bar{X}	SD	T	P
Pre-test	39	64.75	2.250	8.52	.135
Post-test	39	62.94	1.301		

*p<0.05

Table 4 showed a slight decrease in the control group's mean writing anxiety score from 64.75 (pre-test) to 62.94 (post-test), with a mean difference of 1.81. The standard deviation also declined from 2.250 to 1.301, indicating reduced score variability. However, the paired sample t-test result ($t = 8.52$, $p = .135$) indicated that the change was not statistically significant, as the p-value exceeded the 0.05 threshold.

Table 5. Results of the paired sample t-test for the writing anxiety of the experimental group

Tests	N	\bar{X}	SD	T	p
Pre-test	39	63.38	2.072		
Post-test	39	51.61	1.211	7.03	.000

*p<0.05

The experimental group's mean writing anxiety score significantly decreased from 63.38 in the pre-test to 51.61 in the post-test, showing a notable reduction of 11.77 points. The standard deviation also dropped from 2.072 to 1.211, indicating increased consistency in scores. The paired sample t-test result ($t = 7.03$, $p = .000$) confirmed that this reduction was statistically significant, as the p-value was well below the 0.05 threshold.

Interview Results

This section presents the qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews, which aimed to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of peer feedback on writing anxiety and performance.

The analysis sought to understand how peer feedback influenced the emotional and cognitive aspects of EFL students' writing experiences, particularly focusing on anxiety reduction, confidence building, and performance improvement.

The majority of interviewees reported a noticeable decrease in writing anxiety and a boost in confidence following their engagement in peer feedback activities. Three interviewees (e.g., S2, S4, and S8) highlighted that collaborative feedback sessions reduced social apprehension and increased their willingness to take academic risks. S3 stated that providing and receiving feedback improved his ability to organize ideas, while S7 noted that peer feedback motivated him to actively improve his writing and reduced his anxiety levels.

S6 particularly emphasized the role of peer feedback in enhancing self-awareness and linguistic development:

"Since our teacher introduced peer feedback, I've become more self-aware in writing. Learning from peers has been more impactful than from teachers, helping me improve my language skills and reduce writing anxiety through supportive, collaborative feedback."

In line with this, S1 commented on the value of collaborative learning:

"Peer feedback helped us learn from each other. I learned how to organize ideas and write coherently from my classmates. Then, I got good grades in the writing course. Hence, teachers should train students to use peer feedback in writing classes."

Similarly, S5 noted improvements in self-assessment and autonomy, while S8 shared his satisfaction with the peer feedback approach:

"I am truly satisfied with the use of peer feedback in our writing classes, as it fosters a supportive and collaborative environment. It has made writing tasks less stressful and helped me enhance my writing skills, confidence, and critical thinking."

S4 echoed this sentiment, highlighting the interactive nature of the feedback sessions:

"We engaged in a supportive, collaborative environment through peer feedback, which reduced stress, improved our writing and confidence, and encouraged appreciation of diverse perspectives, making learning more meaningful."

Other interviewees (S2 and S6) also mentioned improvements in higher-order thinking, confidence, and control over grammatical and vocabulary use as outcomes of peer feedback engagement.

Overall, the findings ensure that peer feedback fostered a dynamic and collaborative classroom atmosphere that supported both cognitive development and affective well-being. The opportunity to engage with peers appeared to facilitate not only better writing outcomes but also enhanced motivation, metacognition, and classroom interaction.

Despite the overall positive responses, a few concerns were raised. S5 observed reluctance among some students to offer substantial feedback, and S7 noted that certain peer comments were superficial or inattentive. S1 also remarked on a lack of peer feedback competence:

"Peer feedback was ineffective as students lacked commenting skills and preferred receiving over giving feedback. They showed limited awareness of collaborative learning, which may hinder mutual growth. Consequently, high-achieving students might be negatively affected by this imbalance in engagement."

These remarks underscore the importance of preparing students to engage meaningfully in peer review processes. Without adequate training, the effectiveness of peer feedback may be diminished, and learners may not fully benefit from the collaborative learning

potential it offers.

Therefore, the interview data revealed that peer feedback was widely perceived as a valuable strategy for improving writing performance and reducing anxiety among EFL students. While some limitations related to peer feedback quality and participation were noted, the overall findings support its use as a pedagogical tool that enhances learner autonomy, social interaction, and emotional resilience in academic writing contexts.

4. Discussion

The Impacts of Peer Feedback on EFL Students' Writing Performance

This study examined the impact of peer feedback on the writing performance of EFL students in higher education. The primary objective was to evaluate whether incorporating peer feedback strategies into writing instruction could enhance student performance within a collaborative learning environment.

The results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's writing performance, with mean scores rising from 1.60 (pre-test) to 3.63 (post-test), $t = -1.131$, $p = 0.009$. In contrast, the control group, which received only teacher feedback, showed a marginal and statistically non-significant improvement (1.61 to 1.65), $t = 1.201$, $p = 0.217$. These findings underscore the pedagogical value of peer feedback in improving EFL students' writing outcomes.

Improved performance in the experimental group is likely attributable to increased cognitive engagement during peer review activities. Students took on active roles in the evaluation process: reading, assessing, and providing constructive comments on peers' drafts, which deepened their understanding of key writing elements such as organization, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary. The opportunity to give and receive specific, actionable feedback offered clear revision pathways, resulting in higher-quality writing.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews further supported the quantitative findings. Students reported enhanced motivation, improved self-editing skills, and greater clarity regarding academic writing expectations. Many described peer feedback sessions as empowering, citing increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and heightened autonomy. The collaborative environment also encouraged mutual learning and a stronger sense of responsibility in the writing process.

These outcomes align with existing research highlighting the benefits of peer feedback in EFL writing contexts. Previous studies (e.g., Astrid et al., 2019; Khalil, 2018; Lei, 2017; Hao & Razali, 2022; Weng et al., 2023; Wijaya, 2024) have emphasized its role in promoting critical thinking, self-regulation, and collaborative learning.

While no unexpected results emerged, the slight improvement in the control group suggests that traditional instruction may yield minimal gains, reinforcing the added value of interactive, student-centered approaches.

The Impacts of Peer Feedback on EFL Students' Writing Anxiety

This study investigated the impact of peer feedback on reducing writing anxiety among EFL students in higher education. While much of the existing literature emphasizes the cognitive benefits of peer review, this research focused on its affective dimension, specifically, its potential to alleviate writing-related anxiety in academic contexts.

The findings revealed a statistically significant reduction in writing anxiety among students who participated in peer feedback activities. The experimental group's mean anxiety score decreased from 63.38 (pre-test) to 51.61 (post-test), $t = 7.03$, $p = 0.000$. In contrast, the control group, which did not engage in peer feedback, showed no significant change (pre-test $M = 64.75$; post-test $M = 62.94$), $t = 8.52$, $p = 0.135$. These results suggest that peer feedback functions not only as a cognitive support strategy but also as an effective intervention for managing the emotional challenges associated with academic writing.

The reduction in anxiety among the experimental group appears to stem from the emotionally supportive and collaborative nature of peer feedback. Students reported feeling less judged and more reassured when receiving comments from peers rather than teachers. This reciprocal process allowed them to normalize their writing struggles, build self-efficacy, and shift from anxiety to a greater sense of competence. The interactive and empathetic nature of peer assessment reduced the evaluative pressure often tied to teacher feedback and fostered a safe, learner-centered environment.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews further reinforced these results. Students consistently described peer feedback as empowering and motivating. Many reported feeling greater control over their writing, reduced isolation, and increased willingness to take academic risks. The respectful tone and mutual understanding that characterized peer interactions were repeatedly cited as key factors in reducing anxiety and increasing engagement.

These findings align with previous research highlighting the affective and social benefits of peer feedback in EFL writing instruction. Studies by Carless and Boud (2018), Schillings et al. (2020), Wu and Schunn (2021), and Yastibas and Yastibas (2015) emphasize that peer dialogue fosters emotional safety, self-regulation, and academic resilience. Additional research (Cui et al., 2021; Zabihi et al., 2020; Patra et al., 2022) supports the view that peer feedback promotes confidence, intrinsic motivation, and emotional well-being.

Several mechanisms may explain the anxiety reduction observed. First, peer feedback introduced a more egalitarian, collaborative model in place of hierarchical teacher evaluations. Second, receiving critique from peers facing similar challenges fostered empathy and normalized struggle. Third, the iterative nature of feedback and revision reduced the pressure of producing flawless first drafts, encouraging experimentation and growth.

These findings support the integration of peer feedback into EFL writing pedagogy. When implemented with clear guidance and training, it can not only improve writing quality but also serve as a powerful tool for reducing anxiety, fostering autonomy, and cultivating a positive academic experience (Alfarwan, 2022; Kadmiry, 2022; Damanik, 2022; Sabti, 2019; Motallebzadeh et al., 2020; Wahyuni et al., 2019).

Although no major unexpected outcomes emerged, the slight, statistically insignificant anxiety reduction in the control group may reflect minimal affective benefits of standard instruction further reinforcing the value of structured, peer-based approaches.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of peer feedback on writing performance and writing anxiety among EFL students in higher education. Positioned at the intersection of cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning, the research explored whether structured peer interaction could enhance writing skills while reducing the anxiety associated with academic writing.

Quantitative findings revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group's writing performance, with mean scores increasing from 1.60 to 3.63. Additionally, students who received peer feedback experienced a notable decrease in writing anxiety, as their mean scores dropped from 63.38 to 51.61. In contrast, the control group, which received only teacher feedback, showed no statistically significant changes in either domain. These outcomes were further supported by qualitative data, where students reported increased confidence, motivation, and self-regulation, as well as a more supportive and collaborative classroom atmosphere.

The results underscore the dual benefits of peer feedback in EFL writing instruction. Beyond fostering writing proficiency, peer interaction contributed to reduced evaluative stress, enhanced emotional resilience, and greater learner autonomy. This supports affective-cognitive models of second language acquisition, affirming that peer feedback is both an academic and emotional support tool.

Pedagogically, the study advocates for the integration of structured peer feedback into EFL writing curricula. With appropriate scaffolding, clear assessment criteria, and a classroom culture of mutual respect, peer review can create inclusive, low-anxiety learning environments. Such environments not only promote deeper engagement with the writing process but also empower students to take intellectual risks, build competence, and gain confidence in their academic work.

However, the study is subject to certain limitations. The research was conducted within a single institutional context, and the intervention was relatively short-term. As such, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Furthermore, variables such as learner differences, prior experience with peer review, and specific classroom dynamics were not fully controlled, which may have influenced the outcomes.

Future studies should consider exploring the long-term impact of peer feedback across various educational settings and learner populations. Investigating factors such as language proficiency, personality traits, and the use of digital platforms in peer review could provide deeper insights. Larger-scale research involving more diverse samples would enhance the reliability and applicability of results.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical support for peer feedback as an effective pedagogical strategy in EFL writing instruction. It demonstrates that peer review not only enhances writing performance but also reduces writing-related anxiety, contributing to more emotionally secure and academically enriching learning environments. As such, peer feedback should be recognized as a vital component of EFL pedagogy in higher education.

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Authors' Contributions

Esayas Teshome Taddese supervised the overall research process and verified the validity of the research instruments. Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa designed the research instruments, conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed the data, and prepared the abstract, quantitative results, discussion, conclusions, references, and thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

Habtamu Adem Yasin and Anteneh Kebede contributed to data collection and assisted with proofreading. Wakgari Deressa Agemso carried out the final proofreading and provided editorial support.

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Competing Interests

The authors affirm that there are no financial or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the outcomes or interpretations presented in this study.

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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