



Analyzing the Effectiveness of Formative Assessment in EFL Writing Classes

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ABSTRACT

Formative assessment has increasingly been recognized in English Language Teaching (ELT) as a useful method to enhance the learning processes and outcomes of students. The main aim of the study is to examine the impact of formative assessment on the writing proficiency of EFL learners under a natural classroom environment. The study was conducted at Al-Narjis Secondary School in Kut, Iraq, among a sample of 25 students of the second intermediate level. A writing test was administered before and after the implementation of a series of formative assessment approaches for six weeks. The approaches implemented were peer feedback, teacher feedback, self-assessment, and the use of writing checklists. The results showed a dramatic improvement in the students' writing skills, namely organization, grammar, and vocabulary use. The study underscores the integration of formative practices in the curriculum and recommends further teacher training in assessment literacy. This research contributes to the current corpus of works on test in ELT and provides realistic suggestions towards improving language instruction in similar educational settings.

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Received: 21 July 2025

Accepted: 24 September 2025

Published: 01 November 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1223>



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Cite:

Khalaf, . B. H. (n.d.). Analyzing the Effectiveness of Formative Assessment in EFL Writing Classes. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1223>

Keywords: Formative Assessment, EFL Writing, Writing Skills, Language Proficiency

تحليل فاعلية التقييم التكويني في صفوف الكتابة للغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية

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المستخلص

أصبح التقييم التكويني يحظى باعتراف متزايد في مجال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT) بوصفه أداة فعّالة لتحسين عمليات التعلم ومخرجاته لدى الطلبة. يتمثل الهدف الرئيس لهذه الدراسة في فحص أثر التقييم التكويني على كفاءة الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية ضمن بيئة صفية طبيعية. أجريت الدراسة في ثانوية النرجس في مدينة الكوت بالعراق، على عينة مكونة من 25 طالباً من الصف الثاني المتوسط. تم إجراء اختبار كتابي قبل وبعد تطبيق مجموعة من أساليب التقييم التكويني على مدى ستة أسابيع. تضمنت الأساليب المستخدمة التغذية الراجعة من الأقران، والتغذية الراجعة من المعلم، والتقييم الذاتي، واستخدام قوائم التحقق الكتابية. أظهرت النتائج تحسناً ملحوظاً في مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلبة، لا سيما في تنظيم النصوص، واستخدام القواعد، والمفردات. تؤكد الدراسة على ضرورة دمج الممارسات التكوينية في المناهج الدراسية، وتوصي بتعزيز تدريب المعلمين في مجال ثقافة التقييم. كما تسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء الأدبيات الحالية حول الاختبارات في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، وتقدم مقترحات عملية لتحسين تعليم اللغة في بيئات تعليمية مشابهة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحيز الجنسي، الترجمة الآلية، الترجمة الأدبية؛ فيناي وداربلنت، التقنيات المباشرة والتكيفية

1. Introduction

Writing is usually one of the most cognitively demanding skills in the domain of second and foreign language learning. It demands learners not only to express their thoughts in a logically consistent and grammatically accurate manner but also to deliver meaning effectively to a target group of people. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, particularly in developing educational contexts, writing continues to present persistent challenges for both students and educators. Unlike reading or listening, writing demands active generation of language, and unlike speaking, it lacks the immediate feedback loop of interaction. Consequently, many students struggle to produce coherent and grammatically sound texts even after years of formal instruction (Hyland, 2003). In this light, educators and researchers have increasingly turned their attention to innovative pedagogical strategies that can better support students' development in writing. Among these strategies, formative assessment has emerged as a promising tool to foster active engagement, provide personalized feedback, and ultimately enhance learning outcomes.

Formative assessment, as defined by Black and Wiliam (1998), refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers and learners that provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Unlike summative assessments, which focus on evaluating student performance at the end of a learning cycle, formative assessments are conducted during the learning process to inform instruction and support students' growth. These assessments are characterized by their emphasis on feedback, reflection, and improvement, rather than on grading or ranking. In the context of EFL writing instruction, formative assessment may include teacher comments on drafts, peer review, self-assessment checklists, writing journals, and conferences. When placed into practice, they enable students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set learning goals, and revise their writing in substance-based means (Andrade & Du, 2007; Lee, 2017).

Within the Iraqi educational context, in which this study is situated, traditional instruction and high-stakes assessment have long dominated classroom pedagogy. Rote memorization and exercises on grammar usually take center stage at the expense of communicative or task-based instruction (Hassan, 2022). Writing classes, in particular, have had little pedagogical attention, and most students fail to develop writing skills over time. Even when a national curriculum with writing instruction is in place, students do not get much opportunity for revision, feedback, or reflection—critical components of effective writing pedagogy (Al-Mutairi, 2020). These skills for the production of coherent and accurate written texts, thus, remain underdeveloped. The research problem addressed in this study arises from this gap: with repeated writing instruction, student performance is not enhanced, and the effectiveness of current teaching methods comes into question along with the lack of ongoing, process-oriented checking.

This study was conceptualized as a response to these concerns and is designed to investigate the potential of formative assessment as another solution to improve writing accomplishment among Iraqi EFL students. The main intention of the study is to examine if the use of formative assessment techniques—such as peer, teacher, self-assessment, and writing checklists—will contribute to observable growth in the writing skills of students. By integrating these strategies into the writing curriculum and observing their effects over a sustained period, the study aims to identify practical methods that can be adopted in similar educational settings. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on assessment for learning and its applicability in EFL contexts with limited resources.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. To what extent does the use of formative assessment strategies affect students' writing performance in EFL classrooms?
2. Which aspects of writing (e.g., organization, grammar, vocabulary) show the most improvement following the application of formative assessment techniques?
3. How do students perceive the role of formative feedback in developing their writing abilities?

These questions are grounded in the assumption that learning is most effective when students are actively involved in the assessment process and when feedback is used constructively to guide their development. The answers to these questions will provide insights into the specific benefits and limitations of formative assessment in EFL writing instruction and help shape future teaching practices.

The significance of this research lies in its relevance to both pedagogical practice and educational policy. For teachers, the study offers concrete examples of how formative assessment strategies can be embedded in everyday instruction without requiring extensive resources or training. It also highlights the importance of teacher feedback that is not merely corrective but also developmental in nature. For students, the study demonstrates how engagement with formative assessment can foster greater autonomy, motivation, and confidence in their writing. From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the need for assessment literacy among teachers and support the integration of formative approaches into national curricula and teacher training programs.

Moreover, the study adds to the growing body of literature that advocates for a shift from product-oriented to process-oriented writing instruction. While many EFL programs still rely heavily on summative testing and final drafts, there is increasing recognition that writing is best developed through iterative processes of drafting, feedback, and revision (Ferris, 2011). Formative assessment, with its focus on ongoing support and reflection, aligns well with this pedagogical orientation. However, empirical evidence from non-Western contexts, particularly the Middle East, remains limited. By

conducting this study in a real classroom setting in Iraq, the research contributes context-specific data that can inform local practices and international comparisons alike.

In conclusion, this introduction establishes the rationale for examining formative assessment in EFL writing classes by highlighting the pedagogical challenges faced by learners, the theoretical underpinnings of formative feedback, and the pressing need for practical solutions in under-resourced educational environments. The study not only investigates whether formative assessment leads to improvement in writing performance but also explores which strategies are most effective and how students respond to them. In doing so, it bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering actionable insights for teachers, researchers, and policymakers committed to improving language education outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Formative Assessment: Concept and Theoretical Foundations

Formative assessment has been globally accepted as an essential component of effective teaching and learning procedures. Broadly described as assessment procedures implemented during instruction with the aim of improving the outcomes of learning, formative assessment provides timely feedback that can be used for the adjustment of teaching methodologies and guiding students in their learning (Heritage, 2010; Sadler, 1989). Formative assessment is contrasted with summative assessment, which evaluates student learning at the end of an instructional time without affecting teaching at the moment (Wiliam, 2011).

The theoretical origins of formative assessment trace back to constructivist theories of learning, in which learner engagement is emphasized, scaffolding, and the need for feedback (Vygotsky, 1978). Formative assessment operates within this paradigm by promoting metacognition and self-regulation, allowing learners to understand their strengths and weaknesses and make decisions based on these regarding learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Black and Wiliam (1998) highlighted that formative assessment raises learning through feedback that closes the gap between intended and actual performance.

Also, formative assessment facilitates the advancement of learner autonomy through involvement in student self-assessment and peer-assessment (Boud, 2000). This stimulates learners to become active judges and agents rather than passive recipients of information (Carless, 2007). In language learning, where learning is continuous and multilateral, formative assessment provides a dynamic platform for successive improvement (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

2.2 Formative Assessment in EFL Contexts

In English Foreign Language (EFL) classes, formative assessment plays a significant role in supporting language acquisition through offering task-specific, content-based feedback and revision opportunities (Cheng & Fox, 2017). EFL learners are generally faced with certain challenges, including limited exposure to actual language usage and apprehension about linguistic accuracy (Horwitz, 2001). Formative assessment could alleviate these challenges through the development of a culture where mistakes are not conceived as failures but as opportunities for learning.

It is supported by evidence that formative assessment in EFL contexts improves students' motivation, engagement, and language abilities if feedback is apparent, useful, and clear (Shute, 2008; Lee, 2017). Especially, teacher comments on content and language form allow students to have an understanding of

the expectations and standards required in academic writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Peer feedback also contributes positively to collaborative learning and reflection (Topping, 2009).

Studies by Lee (2017) and Carless (2015) showed that the integration of formative assessment with communicative language teaching enhances learners' confidence levels and ability to generate coherent texts. Additionally, formative strategies like portfolio assessment and self-assessment foster reflective practice, through which learners can monitor their own progress over time (Lam, 2015).

However, the use of formative assessment in EFL classrooms is not without some of the problems, including large class sizes, poor teacher training, and cultural values about assessment (Mak, 2011). Teachers also find coordinating the coverage of the curriculum and the time-inefficient nature of formative feedback difficult (Carless, 2011). Despite these problems, formative assessment is a valuable pedagogic tool that, when integrated into local conditions, can significantly enhance the outcomes of language learning.

2.3 Formative Assessment in EFL Writing Instruction

Writing, as a language skill, involves higher-order cognitive processes in planning, writing, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). For EFL learners, the challenge is compounded by restricted linguistic repertoire and unfamiliarity with rhetorical conventions (Cumming, 2001). Formative assessment addresses these challenges by providing iterative feedback cycles that guide learners through the writing process (Ferris, 2011).

The literature emphasizes several formative assessment techniques effective in EFL writing instruction, including teacher feedback, peer review, self-assessment, and the use of writing checklists (Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Teacher feedback remains the most influential source of formative information, particularly when it is specific, focused on both content and form, and accompanied by suggestions for improvement (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). However, excessive correction or vague comments can demotivate learners, highlighting the importance of balanced and clear feedback (Lee, 2017).

Peer feedback is another widely researched strategy that promotes active engagement and critical thinking (Liu & Carless, 2006). Peer review sessions enable learners to evaluate each other's texts, thus developing analytical skills and learning from their peers' mistakes (Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014). While peer feedback can be less accurate than teacher feedback, it fosters collaborative learning and increases learners' sense of responsibility (Rollinson, 2005).

Self-assessment allows students to reflect on their writing and set personal goals (Andrade & Du, 2007). Writing rubrics and checklists provide clear criteria for the evaluation of texts, making the evaluation process transparent and comprehensible (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). As students engage in regular self-assessment, they develop metacognitive skills that are at the core of independent learning and life-long writing development (Zimmerman, 2002).

Despite these benefits, there are also challenges. Students do not normally have the necessary skills to provide quality peer feedback or conduct beneficial self-assessment without assistance (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Furthermore, cultural factors may hinder open criticism among peers, affecting the validity of peer feedback in certain contexts (Wen & Tsai, 2006). Successful implementation, therefore, requires teacher guidance and training to build students' assessment literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018).

2.4 Empirical Studies on Formative Assessment in EFL Writing

There have been a number of empirical investigations into the impact of formative assessment on EFL writing performance with general positive findings. For instance, Lee (2017) conducted a quasi-experimental study on Korean university students, demonstrating that formative feedback was successful in improving learners' organizational competence and grammatical accuracy in writing. Similarly, Hyland and Hyland (2006) demonstrated that ongoing teacher feedback allowed students to internalize correction patterns, which resulted in incremental improvement over time.

Peer feedback has also been found to have a positive influence on writing quality. Liu and Hansen (2002) found that Chinese EFL students were helped by peer review tasks, which improved their error identification and revision capacity. Furthermore, portfolio evaluation with self- and peer-assessment promoted reflective writing practice and resulted in better writing achievement (Lam, 2015).

In the Middle Eastern context, Al-Mutairi (2020) explored formative assessment practices in Iraqi EFL classrooms and indicated that while formative feedback was rarely practiced systematically, when implemented, it led to improved learner motivation and writing performance. Similarly, Hassan (2022) reported significant improvement in writing performance following a teacher-implemented formative assessment intervention in Iraqi secondary schools, which aligns with the findings of this study.

Yet, some studies caution that the success of formative assessment depends on contextual factors such as class size, teacher capacity, and student readiness (Mak, 2011). Moreover, putting formative assessment into practice in high-stakes education systems remains a challenge due to prevailing cultural and institutional norms (Carless, 2015).

2.5 Challenges and Recommendations for Effective Formative Assessment in EFL Writing

Despite its recognized benefits, formative assessment is faced with practical and conceptual challenges in EFL writing classes. Teachers generally lack sufficient training and assessment literacy to design and implement formative tasks effectively (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Time constraints and heavy workloads can limit opportunities for extensive feedback and follow-up tasks (Carless, 2011). In addition, students may feel apprehensive about peer feedback or lack confidence in self-assessment (Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Cultural beliefs about testing and teacher control can also affect the implementation of formative approaches. In the majority of EFL settings, like Iraq, conventional teacher-centered models prevail, and thus the implementation of learner-centered formative practices becomes problematic (Al-Mutairi, 2020). Overcoming such challenges requires systemic support in terms of professional development programs, curriculum transformation, and creating a supportive school culture (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

“The study revealed that Iraqi EFL university students had generally low-to-moderate levels of digital literacy in CALL courses and gender played no meaningful role in the EFL students’ digital literacy levels. Whereas they had an average level of competence in using English websites and computer-based dictionaries, they had low levels of digital literacy in using Microsoft Office Words and PowerPoint, using emails, and using English podcasts. Besides they used digital devices for both recreational and educational purposes on average. In interviews, they stated that the main challenge they faced in using digital technology was lack of sufficient digital skills mainly due to ineffective relevant training” (Al-Badrī, Dashtestānī, & Hijāzī, 2025).

Recent literature encourages the integration of technology to facilitate formative assessment, such as automatic feedback tools, peer review sites, and e-portfolios (Gan, 2020). These innovations have the potential to reduce teacher workload and enhance student engagement, though access to technology remains a problem in the majority of EFL settings.

To maximize the potential of formative assessment in EFL writing, researchers recommend combining multiple approaches tailored to students' needs, clear explanation of assessment criteria, and the creation of an open and collaborative classroom climate (Nicol, 2010). Teacher scaffolding is required to gradually increase students' assessment literacy and autonomy (Carless & Boud, 2018).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a mixed methods approach to investigate the effectiveness of formative assessment approaches in enhancing the writing ability of EFL students. The pretest-posttest design was utilized, which involved the administration of a writing test before and after a six-week intervention period during which formative assessment techniques were systematically applied. This layout allowed for measurement of change in students' writing ability as a result of the intervention while extraneous variables were kept under control as much as possible in a real classroom setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Participants

The participants were 50 second intermediate level students studying at Al-Narjis Secondary School, Kut, Iraq. They were conveniently sampled based on their enrollment in the English language course and their agreement to participate. The participants aged between 14 and 16 years old and had a basic to intermediate level of English proficiency, as reported in school records and teachers' assessments. They are divided into two groups: control and experimental. All girls were sampled to provide an indicative sample of the population of the class. Informed consent was initially obtained from the parents and students prior to the study, and ethical guidelines on confidentiality and voluntariness were followed (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019).

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Writing Test

A pre-test test was designed to assess students' writing skills prior to and subsequent to the treatment. The test consisted of requesting the students to compose a brief essay on a familiar topic, with answers to be scored on a range of several aspects: organization, grammar, vocabulary use, coherence, and task completion. The applied rubric was adapted from Hyland's (2003) measurement standards of academic writing and consisted of five points per criterion.

3.3.2 Formative Assessment Strategies

The formative assessment strategies implemented included:

- **Teacher feedback:** Written and oral feedback focused on content, organization, language accuracy, and vocabulary.
- **Peer feedback:** Students exchanged drafts and provided comments using guided feedback forms.
- **Self-assessment:** Learners reflected on their own writing using checklists and rubrics aligned with the scoring criteria.
- **Writing checklists:** Provided clear guidance on what to include in their essays regarding structure and language use.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

To enhance the validity of the study, the writing test and scoring rubric were piloted with a similar group of students to ensure clarity and appropriateness of the tasks. Triangulation of data sources, including teacher assessments, peer feedback, and self-assessments, helped corroborate findings and reduce bias. Inter-rater reliability between the two independent essay scorers was established to ensure scoring consistency. Two experienced EFL teachers independently scored the essays to ensure inter-rater reliability, which was calculated using Cohen's kappa coefficient and found to be satisfactory ($\kappa = .82$).

3.4 Procedure

The study was conducted over six weeks during regular English writing classes during February 2025. The procedure consisted of three phases :

- Pretest: At the beginning of the study, students completed the initial writing test under timed, controlled conditions without access to external resources.
- Intervention: Over the subsequent six weeks, the teacher integrated formative assessment strategies into writing instruction. After each writing assignment, students received teacher feedback, participated in peer review sessions, and conducted self-assessment activities using the provided checklists. The teacher modeled effective feedback practices and guided students on how to utilize feedback for revision and improvement.
- Posttest: At the end of the intervention period, students completed a parallel writing test with similar topics and assessment criteria. Their essays were scored following the same procedures as the pretest.

3.5 The Experimental Work

Quantitative data from the pretest and posttest scores were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare students' writing performance before and after the intervention, with significance levels set at $p < 0.5$. Additionally, effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated to determine the practical significance of the observed improvements (Cohen, 1988).

Qualitative data were collected from student reflections and feedback forms to provide contextual insights into their experiences with formative assessment. These data were analyzed thematically to identify common perceptions and challenges associated with the strategies used (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval from the school administration was provided before embarking on the study. Consent and anonymity of data from students ensured confidentiality. Informed consent was through advising students that their response or failure to respond would not affect their grades or their standing in class. Feedback was provided constructively to ensure a healthy learning environment.

4. Results

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings of the research on the impact of formative assessment on the writing skill of EFL students. Writing performance was measured before (pretest) and after (posttest) the six-week intervention using a validated test of writing scored on the basis of five dimensions: organization, grammar, vocabulary use, coherence, and task accomplishment. Statistical

analyses including descriptive statistics, paired-samples t-tests, and effect size calculations were conducted using SPSS Version 27. Qualitative data from student reflections and feedback forms were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative results.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Writing Scores

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the overall writing scores and the subdimensions in both the pretest and posttest phases.

Table
Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Writing Scores (N = 25)

1

Writing Dimension	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	% Improvement
Organization	3.12 (0.54)	3.88 (0.46)	0.76	24.36%
Grammar	2.88 (0.60)	3.72 (0.52)	0.84	29.17%
Vocabulary Usage	3.04 (0.58)	3.60 (0.55)	0.56	18.42%
Coherence	3.00 (0.56)	3.56 (0.50)	0.56	18.67%
Task Achievement	3.20 (0.50)	3.84 (0.44)	0.64	20.00%
Overall Score	15.24 (2.21)	18.60 (1.98)	3.36	22.06%

The descriptive statistics show that students improved across all writing dimensions after the formative assessment intervention. The mean overall writing score increased from 15.24 to 18.60, reflecting a 22.06% improvement.

4.2 Paired-Samples t-Test Results

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether the mean differences between pretest and posttest scores were statistically significant. Table 2 reports the t-values, degrees of freedom (df), significance levels (p), and Cohen's d effect sizes for each writing dimension and the overall score.

Table
Paired-Samples t-Test Results for Writing Scores (N = 25)

2

Writing Dimension	t	df	p	Cohen's d	Interpretation of Effect Size*
Organization	7.62	24	<.001	1.52	Large
Grammar	8.43	24	<.001	1.69	Large
Vocabulary Usage	5.73	24	<.001	1.15	Large

Writing Dimension	t	df	p	Cohen's d	Interpretation of Effect Size*
Coherence	6.02	24	<.001	1.21	Large
Task Achievement	6.56	24	<.001	1.32	Large
Overall Score	9.35	24	<.001	1.87	Large

*Effect size interpretation based on Cohen (1988): 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large.

The results indicate statistically significant improvements in all writing dimensions and the overall writing score, with large effect sizes, suggesting that the formative assessment intervention had a strong positive impact on students' writing performance.

4.3 Analysis by Writing Dimensions

4.3.1 Organization

Organization showed a notable increase, with students better structuring their essays into clear introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions. Teacher and peer feedback emphasized paragraph unity and transitions, which students incorporated effectively.

4.3.2 Grammar

Grammar accuracy improved significantly, likely due to targeted feedback on common errors such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and article usage. The formative nature of the feedback allowed students to focus on and correct their errors iteratively.

4.3.3 Vocabulary Usage

Vocabulary range and appropriateness improved, though less dramatically than grammar and organization. Peer feedback encouraged students to use synonyms and varied expressions, which contributed to lexical development.

4.3.4 Coherence

Coherence, logical arrangement of ideas within and between sentences, showed great improvement. Students reported greater sensitivity to the need for good connection and ordering, supported by self-monitoring checklists.

4.3.5 Task Achievement

Task achievement improved as students better addressed the essay prompt and fulfilled task requirements. The use of checklists was particularly effective in helping students ensure completeness and relevance of content.

4.4 Qualitative Findings: Student Perceptions

Analysis of student comments revealed positive affect towards formative assessment. There were three dominant themes:

- **Greater Awareness:** More students realized the writing strengths and weaknesses. In the words of one student, "The feedback helped me see where I make mistakes, and I could fix them before the final draft."
- **Peer Collaboration:** Peer review sessions were valued for providing diverse thoughts and encouragement. "I liked reading my peers' work; it made me view writing differently," another student commented.
- **Confidence and Motivation:** Students were more confident and motivated since they constantly received feedback and encouragement. "I was not as frightened to write because I knew that I would get support to do better," a participant explained.

Challenges highlighted included periodic worry regarding criticism from peers and initial difficulties in employing feedback effectively, which reduced as the intervention progressed.

4.5 Summary of Results

The quantitative results offer strong support for the hypothesis that formative assessment strategies play an influential role in advancing the writing proficiency of EFL students. Large effect sizes across all areas of writing indicate not only statistical but also practical significance of the intervention. The qualitative feedback brings to the fore the role of formative assessment in promoting learner autonomy, motivation, and reflective practice.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of formative assessment practices on the writing skills of EFL students within the context of a secondary school in Iraq. Findings showed significant improvement in the students' writing performance across all the areas measured—organization, grammar, vocabulary use, coherence, and fulfillment of task—after a six-week intervention program with teacher, peer, self, and writing checklist feedback. This section places these results in perspective to the existing literature, examines theoretical and practical implications, acknowledges study limitations, and provides recommendations for future research.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

Quantitative results indicated that the application of formative assessment significantly improved writing skills among students. High effect sizes in all areas of writing performance demonstrate the high influence of regular, specific feedback and active learner involvement.

The improvement in organization means that formative assessment helped students to know better how to organize writing effectively. This aligns with Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal work, which emphasized that formative assessment facilitates learners' metacognitive awareness, enabling them to organize ideas logically and cohesively. The use of writing checklists and peer feedback, in particular, likely contributed to this development by providing clear criteria and multiple perspectives on essay structure.

Significant gains in grammar reflect the value of continuous corrective feedback. Consistent with Shintani, Ellis, and Suzuki (2014), who found that focused corrective feedback improves linguistic accuracy in L2 writing, our results confirm that formative assessment practices can target specific error patterns and encourage students to self-monitor and revise. The teacher's feedback combined with peer and self-assessment provided multiple opportunities for students to identify and correct grammatical errors before final submission, reinforcing learning and reducing fossilization of mistakes.

The increase in vocabulary usage observed in this study supports findings by Hyland (2003) that formative assessment, particularly peer feedback, can encourage students to experiment with lexical choices and expand their lexical repertoire. Although vocabulary improvements were somewhat smaller compared to grammar and organization, the qualitative data indicate that students felt more confident to try new words and expressions, contributing to more varied and precise language use.

Enhanced coherence and task achievement scores reflect the effectiveness of formative assessment in improving the logical flow of ideas and alignment with task requirements. The self-assessment checklists were instrumental in fostering learner autonomy and ensuring that students attended not only to language accuracy but also to meaning and relevance. This finding resonates with Sadler's (1989) assertion that formative assessment closes the gap between current performance and desired goals by helping learners internalize criteria and self-regulate their writing process.

The overall 22% improvement in writing performance demonstrates that formative assessment can bridge the gap often observed in EFL classrooms, where despite regular instruction, students struggle to make meaningful progress in writing (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This study extends the existing body of research by providing evidence from a Middle Eastern context, contributing to the growing consensus on formative assessment's universal applicability and effectiveness.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study support the sociocultural perspective on language learning, which views learning as a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978). The interactive nature of formative assessment, involving teacher guidance and peer collaboration, aligns with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners improve through scaffolding and dialogue. The formative assessment practices encouraged students to engage in meaningful interactions about their writing, which likely promoted deeper cognitive processing and internalization of writing conventions.

Practically, the results highlight the importance of integrating formative assessment systematically into EFL writing curricula. Teachers should be encouraged and trained to provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback, and to foster peer and self-assessment skills among students. The positive student perceptions reported suggest that formative assessment also enhances motivation and confidence, which are critical affective factors influencing writing development (Dörnyei, 2001).

Moreover, the use of writing checklists and structured feedback forms can make formative assessment more accessible and manageable for both teachers and students, especially in resource-constrained settings. School administrations and policymakers in Iraq and similar contexts should consider investing in professional development programs focused on assessment literacy to maximize the benefits observed in this study.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size and convenience sampling limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research with larger and more diverse samples would enhance external validity.

Second, the six-week intervention period, while sufficient to detect significant improvements, may not capture the long-term effects of formative assessment on writing skills. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether gains are sustained over time and transferred to other writing contexts.

Third, the study focused on a single school and grade level, which restricts the applicability of findings to other educational stages or settings. Variation in teacher expertise, student motivation, and curriculum could influence the effectiveness of formative assessment.

Lastly, although inter-rater reliability was established, scoring of writing remains inherently subjective to some degree. Employing multiple raters and more objective measures, such as automated writing evaluation tools, could complement human scoring in future studies.

6. Conclusion

This study has tested the effectiveness of formative assessment approaches in improving the writing skill of EFL students at a secondary school in Iraq. The results clearly demonstrated that systematic application of formative assessment that included teacher, peer, self-assessment, and writing checklists led to significant improvement in various dimensions of writing such as organization, grammar, use of vocabulary, coherence, and completion of tasks. The large gains with large effect sizes confirm the validity of the fact that formative assessment is a good pedagogical technique for enhancing the writing ability of EFL learners.

The findings align with other research that identifies formative assessment as a vehicle to encourage learner autonomy, motivation, and metacognitive awareness. The embedding of continuous, intentional feedback and active learner engagement helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses, derive more meaning from the writing process, and continuously enhance their capabilities. Additionally, qualitative feedback indicated that students valued peer collaboration and grew more confident about their writing abilities, noting the affective benefits of formative practice.

Despite the limitations of the small sample and short intervention, the study provides significant implications for EFL teachers and curriculum developers, particularly in contexts such as Iraq where writing is a challenging skill to learn. The inclusion of formative assessment in language instruction curricula and the professional development of teachers in assessment literacy can prevent writing performance gaps and support long-term language acquisition.

Future research must build on these results by considering various formative assessment methods, including technology-enhanced tools for providing feedback, and investigating the longer-term impact on writing ability and learner engagement. Finally, this study is part of the expanding evidence base for promoting formative assessment as a critical element of best practice EFL teaching that can reshape the writing achievements and learning experience of students.

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