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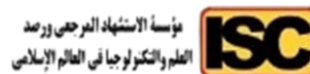
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The Impact of Peer-centred Feedback on Academic Essay Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Third-Year English Students at Imam Al-Kadhum College

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Abstract:

Students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL) in college must know how to write academic essays. However, despite several years of formal English education, several Iraqi EFL students still find it difficult to develop effective academic essay writing capabilities (AEWC). This is, largely, due to pedagogical, linguistic, and contextual limitations. As such, the present study examined the impact of peer-centred feedback (PCF) on the AEWC of third-year EFL students from the English Department of the Imam Al-Kadhum College in Baghdad, Iraq.

A total of 120 students were equally divided into two groups, namely, an experimental group (60 students) and a control group (60 students). Over a two-month period, the experimental group received structured PCF on their academic essays, while the control group received traditional teacher-centred feedback (TCF). A mixed-methods approach, which

combined quantitative data, derived from the pre- and post-intervention techniques, and qualitative data, derived from the distributed questionnaires and various semi-structured interviews, was used.

The post-intervention test scores indicated that the experimental group performed better than the control group. Therefore, structured PCF positively impacted the students' AEWC. Apart from that, the data collected from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews indicated that the students perceived PCF as highly motivating, helpful, and collaborative, which improved their confidence, awareness of mistakes in their essays, and their learner autonomy.

Therefore, the findings of the present study empirically indicate the importance of using PCF in an Iraqi EFL settings, as well as the practical implications of using PCF in academic essay writing (AEW) courses for Iraqi EFL students.

Keywords: Academic essay writing, EFL students, mixed-methods research, peer-centred feedback

1.1 Introduction:

English as a foreign language (EFL) students find academic essay writing (AEW) to be one of the most difficult capabilities to master, especially in higher education settings, where advanced literacy and academic discourse competency are necessary for success (Hyland, 2019). As such, many of the EFL students in Iraqi colleges struggle to write coherent, well-structured, and linguistically articulate academic articles. This is mainly because of their lack of exposure to academic English, poor writing practices, and over-reliance on teacher-centred feedback (TCF) (Al-Khasawneh, 2010).

Peer-centred feedback (PCF), a learner-centred technique that also raises student participation levels in the writing process, has become more popular in recent years. According to the socio-constructivist learning theory that Vygotsky postulated in 1978, PCF enables students to evaluate and criticize their peers' work actively. It also encourages self-regulation, critical thinking, and learner autonomy (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Apart from that peer interaction and mutual critique improves a learner's abilities to detect errors, modify their papers effectively, and internalise the rules of academic writing (Min, 2006; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

As such, the present study examined the impact of PCF on the academic essay writing capabilities (AEWC) of third-year EFL students from the Imam Al-Kadhumi College in Baghdad, Iraq. A mixed-methods approach was used to examine the quantitative impacts of PCF on the students' AEWC and the students' qualitative perceptions of using PCF in the AEW process.

1.2 Problem Statement:

Despite several years of formal English education, several Iraqi EFL students still find it difficult to develop effective AEWC. As such, most of their academic essays are riddled with illogical sentence structures and grammatical inaccuracies, as well as poor vocabulary and argument development (Jabur, 2017). This is, largely, due to the use of a conventional feedback structure, where the teacher is the only source of assessment. Therefore, students who are subjected to this structure frequently passively receive their teacher's feedback, without actively participating in the revision process. As such, they fail to comprehend the rationale behind their teacher's feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Peer-centred feedback (PCF), on the other hand, more actively involves students in the revision process. However, its use in Iraqi colleges remains limited. Furthermore, only a handful of studies have examined how PCF impacts students' AEWC and how Iraqi students perceive PCF. Therefore, the present study sought to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of using PCF in a hitherto underexplored setting.

1.3 Research Aims:

The present study aimed to examine how PCF improves the AEWC of third-year Iraqi EFL students from the Imam Al-Kadhumi College. Its specific objectives were to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of using PCF to improve students' AEWC.
2. Explore students' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of PCF in the classroom.
3. Compare the impact of PCF and TCF on the quality of students' academic essays.

1.4 Research Questions:

The present study was governed by the following research questions:

1. Does PCF significantly improve students' AEW?
2. What are the students' perceptions of PCF and its use in AEW process?
3. How does PCF compare with TCF in terms of their impacts on the quality of students' academic essays?

1.5 Research Significance:

The present study contributes to the growing body of research by advocating for the inclusion of more peer-centred feedback during the AEW process in an EFL context. It, specifically, provides contextual evidence of the effectiveness of using PCF to improve the AEW of Iraqi EFL students.

By focusing on a lesser-examined population, the present study addresses a scarcity of localised investigations into alternative feedback practices. Therefore, its findings will help shape pedagogical practices in Iraqi EFL classrooms, assist in the development of a curriculum that encourages learner autonomy, and offer practical techniques with which to use PCF in AEW courses.

Apart from that, by using a mixed-methods approach, the present study provides thorough knowledge of both the measurable impacts of PCF and the subjective experiences of the students who participate in the AEW process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

1.6 Research Limitations and Delimitations:

As the present study only involved third-year Iraqi EFL students from the Imam Al-Kadhumi College, its findings cannot be generalised to other academic institutions or levels.

Moreover, it only focused on AEW and neglected other genres, such as reports and thoughts. Apart from this, the duration and complexity of the PCF-related training and implementation were constrained by the length of the academic semester. Participation in the study was also totally voluntary. Therefore, the level of motivation of the students may have varied from one person to another. Furthermore, as the present study only compared TCF and PCF, it excluded other formats, such as self-assessment or automated feedback.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms:

- **Peer-centred Feedback (PCF)** is feedback given by students to their peers that often takes the form of written suggestions or comments provided to their peers to enhance the content, structure, language, and style of their peers' academic essays (Rollinson, 2005).
- **Academic Essay Writing (AEW)** is a form of writing that is formal and is generally used at institutions of higher education, such as universities and colleges. It entails the use of structured arguments, arguments based on the evidence, and conformity to academic formats and rules (Jordan, 1999).
- **Writing capabilities** are a general quality of a student's written work. It is commonly assessed based on, for example, coherence, grammar, vocabulary, task fulfilment, and organisation.

- **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)** refers to contexts where English is learnt and taught in countries where English is a second language.
- **A Mixed-Methods Approach** is a research technique that combines qualitative techniques, such as interviews or open-ended responses, and quantitative techniques, such as surveys and test scores, to give researchers a better understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Introduction:

This session reviews some of the important theoretical and empirical studies on AEWC of EFL students, the concept and pedagogical basis of PCF, and its effect on the AEWC of students. It also aims to place the present study within the context of existing knowledge, addressing the research gaps that the study intends to fill.

2.2 Academic Essay Writing (AEW) Courses for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students:

English as a foreign language (EFL) students find AEW to be one of the most demanding competencies to develop, particularly in higher education contexts, where higher levels of literacy and academic discourse competency are required in order to be successful. Apart from language proficiency and vocabulary, AEW calls for critical thinking, discourse structures, and being able to make rational arguments (Hyland, 2019). However, despite several years of formal English education, several Iraqi EFL students still struggle to develop effective AEWC. This is a result of a lack of exposure to actual academic literature, a lack of argument practice, and an over-reliance on translation.

According to Jordan (1999), AEW requires a knowledge of genre-specific standards, rhetorical frameworks, and language skills. As such, this makes it even more difficult for students, who are not adequately trained in academic discourse techniques, to master. Furthermore, given that the AEW courses offered by Iraqi colleges are often TCF and product-centered, it might be hindering the students' improvement in their own AEWC (Hammadi, 2019).

2.3 Feedback in Academic Essay Writing (AEW) Courses:

Feedback is an essential component of AEW courses as it facilitates revisions and increases learning. As such, in the past, most EFL courses used TCF to provide students with feedback. However, although it facilitates error identification and offers corrective advice, it encourages students to learn passively and does not necessarily improve their AEWC (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Apart from that, as TCF concentrates on superficial problems, such as grammar and spelling, it frequently overlooks higher-order issues, such as coherence, content development, and structure (Lee, 2008). As such, students do not always comprehend or respond to the feedback provided, particularly if the feedback is unclear or excessively harsh (Ferris, 2003).

2.4 Theoretical Foundations of Peer-centred Feedback (PCF):

The socio-constructivist learning theory that Vygotsky posited in 1978, which stresses the importance of social interactions for cognitive growth, is the foundation of PCF. It states that students may benefit from cooperative involvement with their peers. It also views learning as a socially mediated process.

According to Liu and Hansen (2002), PCF encourages students to actively participate in the revision process. This not only promotes critical thinking and learner autonomy, but self-regulation as well. Apart from that, by reading and assessing each other's essays, students may develop the metacognitive abilities required for AEW, as well as increase their awareness of writing standards.

2.5 Empirical Studies on the Use of Peer-centred Feedback (PCF) in Academic Essay Writing (AEW) Courses for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students:

Several studies have examined the impact of using PCF in AEW courses for EFL students. Min (2006) found that PCF significantly improved the revision strategies and overall AEW quality of Taiwanese university students. Lundstrom and Baker (2009), similarly, discovered that students who gave feedback benefited as much as, or even more than, the students who received it. Therefore, the act of evaluating a peer's work may improve a student's analytical skills.

Apart from that, Rollinson (2005) highlighted that PCF is both cognitively and socially beneficial. More specifically, cognitively, it helps students internalise language and content structures, while, socially, it decreases anxiety and builds a sense of community in a classroom.

Zhu (2001), on the other hand, noted that students may lack the language proficiency or confidence to provide their peers with effective PCF (Zhu, 2001). Apart from that, cultural barriers, especially when students are uncomfortable critiquing their peers due to the hierarchy of the classroom, may pose another challenge (Nelson & Carson, 1998). Therefore, these challenges underscore the need for proper training and frameworks for the PCF processes.

2.6 Peer-centred Feedback (PCF) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Courses for Arabic Speakers:

Peer-centred feedback (PCF) is an emerging pedagogical strategy for EFL courses in Arab-speaking countries, such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Al-Khasawneh (2010) found that Jordanian university students benefitted from PCF when they were trained to give and receive comments. Mahmoud (2012), however, reported that Saudi students often reject their peers' feedback due to a lack of confidence in their peers and a preference for TCF.

In the context of EFL in Iraq, the amount of available literature remains limited. Hammadi (2019) noted that AEW courses in Iraq remains largely TCF-based, with minimal use of PCF or collaborative approaches. Apart from that, to date, only a handful of studies have empirically examined how PCF may impact the AEW of Iraqi EFL students, or how these students perceive PCF in a local educational setting. Therefore, this lack of research was the compelling rationale behind the present study.

2.7 Advantages and Challenges of Peer-centred Feedback (PCF):

Peer-centred feedback (PCF) promotes active learning and learner autonomy (Liu & Hansen, 2002). It also enables students to develop critical reading and analytical skills (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Apart from that, it has been found to not only improve the quality of a student's academic essay, through multiple drafts and revisions (Min, 2006), but decrease their dependence on TCF and increase peer collaboration as well (Rollinson, 2005).

However, it has also been noted that students may lack the experience required to provide their peers with constructive feedback (Zhu, 2001). It is also believed that inadequate training may result in the provision of superficial or inaccurate feedback (Topping, 2009). Furthermore, cultural norms may also inhibit open criticism of one's peers (Nelson & Carson, 1998). Therefore, students must be provided training in feedback strategies, modelling, and rubrics to maximise the benefits of PCF (Min, 2006; Topping, 2009).

2.8 Gaps in the Literature:

Although there is extensive research on the use of PCF in AEW courses for EFL students in an international context, studies in an Iraqi context are scarce, with most extant studies either focusing on TCF or general writing difficulties. As such, not many studies have examined the use of PCF. Furthermore, only a handful of studies have used a mixed-methods approach to explore both the effectiveness of PCF and students' perceptions of PCF in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, these gaps underscore the importance and originality of the present study.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Introduction:

This session describes the design and methodology of the present study. It outlines the research methodology, participants, setting, instruments, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques utilized. It also provides the rationale behind the use of a mixed-methods approach, emphasizing the benefits of integrating quantitative and qualitative data to understand better students' AEW development and their perceptions towards PCF.

3.2 Research Design:

The present study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It is, in particular, appropriate for educational research, as measurable results, such as test scores, need to be interpreted in tandem with the students' experience and thoughts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). It also supports data triangulation, which supports the validity of the current study's findings; in addition, it provides richer information on how and why PCF affects students' AEW (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The quantitative component was a quasi-experimental design with a control group, consisting of students receiving TCF, and an experimental group, consisting of students receiving PCF. Meanwhile, the qualitative part included semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire, with which to explore in-depth the perception and reflections of the students.

Table 1. The Experimental Design (Abbot & McKinny, 2013)

Group	Test	Treatment	Post-intervention test
Experimental	Pre-intervention	PCF	Post-intervention
Control	Pre-intervention	TCF	Post-intervention

3.3 Participants:

The participants of the present study comprised 120 third-year Iraqi EFL undergraduate students enrolled at the Imam Al-Kadhum College. They were purposely selected and equally divided into two groups. More specifically, 60 participants were part of the experimental group that received structured PCF, and the remaining 60 participants were part of the control group that received traditional TCF.

In order to be included in the present study, the participants had to be students who had completed at least one AEW course. They also had to have regular attendance and a willingness to participate. Both male and female students, with similar academic backgrounds, were included to ensure consistency. However, students were ineligible to participate if they had been absent for more than two sessions, or were unfamiliar with PCF processes.

3.4 Research Setting:

The present study was conducted during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year at the Imam Al-Kadhum College. The participants were enrolled in the morning session of the Department of English.

The proposed intervention, which was a part of the AEW course for EFL students, was delivered over a two-month period. All the instructional sessions and essay writing tasks were personally conducted by the researcher to ensure that the course's contents were delivered in a consistent manner and to minimise instructional bias. The course consisted of lecture-based instructions, guided AEW sessions, PCF or TCF sessions, and essay revision in a regular classroom setting at the college.

3.5 Research Instruments and Materials:

Several tools were implemented to gather the quantitative and qualitative data.

3.5.1 Academic Essay Writing (AEW) Tasks:

The participants were asked to write two argumentative essays, pre- and post-intervention, on the topics that had been chosen from the official syllabus. These essays were used to test the AEW improvements experienced by the participants in terms of organisation, coherence, and use of academic language.

3.5.2 Teacher-centred Feedback (TCF) Assessment Rubric:

Two trained raters scored each essay on a 9-point scale in order to provide inter-rater reliability. An analytic scoring rubric, based on the criteria of Writing Task 2 of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (British Council, 2020), was used to assess the

students' argumentative essays. It tested task achievement, coherence, cohesion, lexical resources, grammatical range, and grammatical accuracy.

3.5.3 Peer-centred Feedback (PCF) Forms:

The participants were provided with structured PCF forms to guide their assessment of their peers' argumentative essays. It took into account clarity, the structure of the idea organisation, supporting evidence, grammar, and vocabulary.

3.5.4 Questionnaire:

A questionnaire, comprising a Likert-scale and open-ended items, was distributed to the experimental group post-intervention. The questions examined their attitudes towards and experiences with PCF.

3.5.5 Semi-Structured Interviews:

A total of 10 participants from the experimental group participated in the semi-structured interviews. The questions examined their experiences, challenges, and views on the PCF process.

3.6 Procedures:

The intervention spanned a two-month period. A structured instructional session and feedback session cycle was followed each week. This included AEW instructions, essay drafting, PCF or TCF, and essay revision.

3.6.1 Pre-intervention:

All the participants completed one argumentative essay in a timed, classroom condition pre-intervention. This served as the pre-intervention test and provided a baseline of their AEW.

3.6.2 Feedback Intervention (Two-Month Pedagogical Strategy):

Over a two-month period, the participants were required to complete one AEW task per week. All the participants were taught how to write academic essays, with a focus on structure, thesis statement, coherence, evidence, and language accuracy.

After writing drafts of their essays, a feedback form was used to engage the experimental group in structured PCF, where they discussed and exchanged comments in pairs or small groups. They then revised their essays based on their peers' suggestions.

The control group, on the other hand, submitted their essays to their teacher and received individualised written feedback. They then revised their essays based on the teacher's feedback. All the participants submitted both original and revised essays each week for documentation and analysis.

3.6.3 Post-intervention Test:

At the end of the two-month intervention, the participants were required to complete one final argumentative essay under the same conditions as the pre-intervention test. These essays were assessed using the same rubric to examine their progress.

3.6.4 Qualitative Data Collection:

The experimental group completed a questionnaire post-intervention that gauged their PCF experience. A total of 10 participants participated in the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in Arabic, then recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for thematic analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis:

3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis:

Paired-sample *t*-tests were used to analyse within-group differences between the pre- and post-intervention test scores. Meanwhile, independent-sample *t*-tests were used to compare improvements between the experimental and control groups. The statistical analyses were conducted using IBM® Statistical Product and Service Solutions® (SPSS) version 26, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis:

A thematic analysis was used to examine the participants' responses during the semi-structured interviews and to the open-ended questionnaire (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The responses were coded and categorised to identify major themes and patterns in the participants' perceptions. Apart from that, data triangulation was used to corroborate the findings across both data types, thereby increasing the credibility of the findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations:

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. The participants participated in the present study voluntarily, and with the right to withdraw at any stage. Apart from that, throughout the present study, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained. Lastly, ethical approval was also obtained from the English Department of the Imam Al-Kadhum College.

4. Results and Findings:

4.2 Quantitative Findings:

4.2.1 Pre-intervention Test Score Comparison:

Table 4.1 The Pre-intervention Test *T*-values of the Experimental and Control Groups' Academic Essay Writing Capabilities (AEWC)

Group	N	X	S	df	Computed <i>T</i> -value	Tabulated <i>T</i> -value	Level of Significance
Exp.	60	5.13	0.84	118	0.29	1.98	0.05
Cont.	60	5.07	0.89				

As seen in Table 4.1, the mean score (*X*) of the experimental group was 5.13, while that of the control group was 5.07, with standard deviations (*S*) of 0.84 and 0.89, respectively. The degrees of freedom (*df*) was 118. The computed *T*-value and tabulated *T*-value were 0.29 and 1.98, respectively, with a level of significance of 0.05.

As the computed *T*-value (0.29) was much lower than the tabulated *T*-value (1.98), the difference between the *X* of the two groups was not statistically significant, at 0.05. Therefore, pre-intervention, both groups started with a comparable level of AEWC. This indicates the fairness of the experimental conditions. Therefore, any subsequent differences in the post-

intervention test scores can be entirely attributed to the PCF intervention rather than initial differences in AEWC.

4.2.2 Post-intervention Test Scores Comparison:

Table 4.2 The Post-intervention Test *T*-values of the Experimental and Control Groups' Academic Essay Writing Capabilities (AEWC)

Group	N	X	S	df	Computed <i>T</i> -value	Tabulated <i>T</i> -value	Level of Significance
Exp.	60	6.93	0.67	118	7.14	1.98	0.05
Cont.	60	5.66	0.71				

As seen in Table 4.2, the *X* of the experimental group was 6.93, while that of the control group was 5.66, with *S* of 0.67 and 0.71, respectively, and *df* of 118. The computed *T*-value and tabulated *T*-value were 7.14 and 1.98, respectively, with a level of significance of 0.05.

As the computed *T*-value (7.14) was much higher than the tabulated *T*-value (1.98), the difference between the *X* of the two groups was statistically significant, at 0.05. Therefore, post-intervention, the AEWC of the experimental group was significantly better than that of the control group. As such, PCF has a positive impact on students' AEWC.

4.2.3 Within-Group Comparison: Pre- vs. Post-intervention Tests:

Table 4.3 The Pre- vs. Post-intervention Results of the Experimental Group

Group	N	X	S	Df	Computed <i>T</i> -value	Tabulated <i>T</i> -value	Level of Significance
Pre-intervention	60	5.13	0.84	59	-12.10	2.00	0.05
Post-intervention	60	6.93	0.67				

Table 4.4 The Pre- vs. Post-intervention Results of the Control Group

Group	N	X	S	Df	Computed <i>T</i> -value	Tabulated <i>T</i> -value	Level of Significance
Pre-intervention	60	5.07	0.89	59	-4.08	2.00	0.05
Post-intervention	60	5.66	0.71				

As seen in Table 4.3, the computed *T*-value (-12.10) of the experimental group was higher than its tabulated *T*-value (2.00). Therefore, the AEWC of the experimental group significantly improved post-PCF-intervention ($p < 0.001$).

As seen in Table 4.4, the computed *T*-value (-4.08) of the control group was also higher than its tabulated *T*-value (2.00). However, although the AEWC of the control group significantly improved post-PCF-intervention ($p < 0.001$), it was smaller than that of the experimental group.

Therefore, although the AEWK of both groups improved over the two-month intervention period, the improvements experienced by the experimental group was significantly more. As such, the results of the within-group analysis indicate that PCF can be used to effectively improve the AEWK of EFL students.

4.3 Qualitative Findings:

4.3.1 Questionnaire-based Participant Perceptions (N=60)

Table 4.5 The Perceptions of the Participants, as Drawn from the Questionnaire

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) helped me notice mistakes in my essays.	86.7	10.0	3.3
I prefer receiving comments from my peers rather than my teacher.	73.3	20.0	6.7
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) improved my confidence in my AEWK.	76.7	16.7	6.6
I found my peers' comments useful and constructive.	83.3	13.3	3.4
I would like to continue using PCF in future AEW tasks.	80.0	13.3	6.7
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) encouraged me to revise and improve my AEWK.	81.7	15.0	3.3
Providing my peers with feedback helped me reflect on my own AEWK.	78.3	16.7	5.0
I felt more motivated to write after receiving feedback from my peers.	75.0	18.3	6.7
I believe that PCF should be an essential part of AEW courses.	82.0	14.0	4.0
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) helped me understand my peers better.	79.0	15.0	6.0

As seen in Table 4.5, the participants valued receiving PCF. This was because it enabled them to identify mistakes in their essays, build confidence, and learn collaboratively.

4.3.2 Semi-structured Interview-based Participant Perceptions (N=60):

The participants reported that, post-PCF-intervention, they noticed mistakes that they had previously overlooked in their essays. They also reported that their AEWK had improved in terms of organisation, clarity, and vocabulary. Apart from that, they reported feeling more confident and motivated to write academic essays. This was, largely, because PCF encouraged them to revise and reflect on their essays. They also reported that reviewing their peers' essays

helped them reflect on their own AEW. Lastly, they indicated that they had a preference for PCF as they liked the diversity of perspectives and collaborating with their peers.

As the results of the semi-structured interviews support the findings of the quantitative research, this suggests that PCF is collaborative, reflective, and motivational. It also had a significantly positive effect on AEW and the attitudes of the participants. More specifically, the AEW of the experimental group was improved significantly as indicated by the post-intervention test scores. However, that of the control group improved only moderately. Apart from that, the perception of the participants was positive in terms of improved confidence and learner autonomy. Therefore, having PCF in Iraqi EFL classes is an effective pedagogical strategy by which to develop linguistic development, collaboration, and learner autonomy.

4.4 Conclusion:

The results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses present strong evidence that PCF had a significant and positive effect on the AEW of the Iraqi EFL students in the third year. The experimental group (the group that received structured PCF) showed a significant increase in their post-intervention test scores when compared to the control group. Moreover, the within-group comparison showed that the experimental group profited significantly more over the two-month intervention period than the control group, whose gains were only modest.

Apart from that, the participants' questionnaire responses indicated generally positive perceptions towards PCF as a useful and confidence-building pedagogical strategy. Moreover, numerous participants said that PCF helped them recognise and address mistakes in their essays. Many of them also stated that they would like to continue participating in PCF-based activities in the future.

These findings collectively suggest that PCF will help establish a more thought-provoking and cooperative learning environment that will also help enhance the AEW of the students. Therefore, the inclusion of PCF in AEW courses for Iraqi EFL students is an effective pedagogical strategy with which to promote learner autonomy and language development.

4.5 Recommendations:

A review of the findings of the present study provided the following recommendations. Firstly, peer-centred feedback (PCF) should be formally included in AEW courses with EFL students, as it will enhance their AEW and critical thinking skills. However, students should first be trained on how to give constructive feedback respectfully, for the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness and the quality of their interactions with their peers. This could be achieved through workshops or mini-lessons focused on feedback strategies. Secondly, a culture of positive feedback should be promoted in classrooms. This could be achieved by generating an atmosphere of mutual support and respect, thereby boosting the confidence of students and reducing the anxiety regarding peer evaluation. Thirdly, students should be given a clear and concise rubric to follow when evaluating. This would not only ensure the uniformity of their evaluations but also their objectivity. Lastly, a hybrid approach (the use of both TCF and PCF) should be adopted to support student writers comprehensively.

In the future, researchers may investigate the effect of PCF in different educational settings, such as secondary schools and private schools. Its effect in an environment with different proficiency levels may also be studied, to enhance the generalisability of the present study's results.

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Declaration of Competing Interest:

The researcher declares that there are no known financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Pre- and Post-intervention Test Prompts

- **Pre-intervention Test Prompt:**

Write an academic essay discussing the advantages and disadvantages of online education.

- **Post-intervention Test Prompt:**

Write an academic essay on the impact of social media on university students' academic essay writing capabilities (AEWC).

Appendix B: Peer-centred Feedback (PCF) Form

Aspect Evaluated	Comments	Suggestions for Improvement
Thesis statement clarity		
Organisation and structure		
Grammar and mechanics		
Use of academic language		

Appendix C: Questionnaire Sample:

Instructions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

4.3.1 Students' Perceptions from the Questionnaire (Experimental Group, n=60)

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) helped me notice mistakes in my essays.	86.7%	10%	3.3%
I prefer receiving comments from my peers rather than my teacher.	73.3%	20%	6.7%
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) improved my confidence in writing.	76.7%	16.7%	6.6%
I found my peers' comments useful and constructive.	83.3%	13.3%	3.4%
I would like to continue using PCF in future writing tasks.	80%	13.3%	6.7%
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) encouraged me to revise and improve my essay.	81.7%	15%	3.3%
Providing my peers with feedback helped me reflect on my own writing.	78.3%	16.7%	5%
I felt more motivated to write after receiving feedback from my peers.	75%	18.3%	6.7%
I believe that PCF should be an essential part of writing classes.	82%	14%	4%
Peer-centred feedback (PCF) helped me understand my peers better.	79%	15%	6%

Appendix D: Interview Questions:

Instructions: The following semi-structured interview questions were used to gather the participants' perceptions of PCF and its impact on their AEWC.

1. Can you describe your overall experience with receiving PCF on your AEW tasks?
2. How did PCF help you identify strengths and weaknesses in your own AEWC?
3. Which aspects of your AEWC improved the most after receiving PCF?
4. Did you find it easier to understand and correct your AEW mistakes with PCF or TCF? Why or why not?
5. How did providing feedback to your classmates impact your own AEWC?
6. Would you like to continue participating in PCF sessions in the future? Why or why not?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the PCF process in the classroom?

Notes:

- Each interview took approximately 15–20 minutes.
- The interviews were conducted individually, in a quiet environment, to ensure privacy.
- The responses were audio-recorded, with consent, and later transcribed for analysis.