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La retroalimentación entre pares en el desarrollo de habilidades de escritura en EFL y ESL: una revisión sistemática

Peer Feedback in the Development of EFL and ESL Writing Skills: A Systematic Review

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RESUMEN

La escritura constituye una competencia esencial en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) y como segunda lengua (ESL); sin embargo, su desarrollo requiere la integración de organización textual, coherencia y cohesión, precisión gramatical y uso adecuado del vocabulario. El objetivo de esta revisión sistemática fue sintetizar la evidencia empírica reciente sobre la implementación de la retroalimentación entre pares en el desarrollo de habilidades de escritura en contextos EFL y ESL, con especial atención a las modalidades de implementación, los componentes de escritura reportados y las condiciones pedagógicas asociadas con resultados favorables. Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo, con diseño documental y retrospectivo, siguiendo las directrices PRISMA. La búsqueda consideró Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar y ResearchGate, e incluyó estudios empíricos publicados en inglés entre 2020 y 2025. De 850 registros identificados, se eliminaron 150 duplicados; posteriormente, 700 registros fueron examinados, 50 textos completos fueron evaluados y 30 estudios fueron incluidos en la síntesis cualitativa. Los estudios se organizaron en cinco categorías de implementación: revisión estructurada o guiada; retroalimentación mediada por el docente o combinada con otras fuentes; modalidades digitales o híbridas; actividades dialógicas, colaborativas o reflexivas; e implementaciones sostenidas o adaptadas al contexto. La organización y estructura textual constituyeron el componente reportado con mayor frecuencia, seguido de la gramática y precisión lingüística, el vocabulario y la coherencia y cohesión. La síntesis también mostró que la capacitación previa, las rúbricas claras, la mediación docente, el diálogo respetuoso y las oportunidades de revisión favorecieron condiciones más propicias para el aprovechamiento de la retroalimentación. Se concluye que la retroalimentación entre pares constituye una estrategia formativa complementaria con potencial para apoyar el desarrollo de la escritura, la autonomía, la reflexión y la participación cuando se integra de manera sistemática y guiada en el proceso de escritura.

Keywords:

Peer feedback
Second language writing
English as a foreign language
Feedback literacy
Peer assessment

ABSTRACT

Writing is an essential competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) education; however, its development requires learners to integrate text organization, coherence and cohesion, grammatical accuracy, and appropriate vocabulary use. This systematic review aimed to synthesize recent empirical evidence on the implementation of peer feedback in writing development in EFL and ESL contexts, with particular attention to implementation modalities, reported writing components, and pedagogical conditions associated with favorable outcomes. A qualitative approach with a documentary and retrospective design was adopted following the PRISMA guidelines. Searches considered Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate and included empirical studies published in English between 2020 and 2025. Of

850 records identified, 150 duplicates were removed; subsequently, 700 records were screened, 50 full-text reports were assessed, and 30 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis. The studies were organized into five implementation categories: structured or guided review; teacher-mediated or combined feedback; digital or blended modalities; dialogic, collaborative, or reflective activities; and sustained or context-adapted implementations. Organization and text structure were the most frequently reported writing components, followed by grammar and linguistic accuracy, vocabulary use, and coherence and cohesion. The synthesis also indicated that prior training, clear rubrics, teacher mediation, respectful dialogue, and opportunities for revision provided more favorable conditions for the use of peer feedback. The review concludes that peer feedback is a complementary formative strategy with potential to support writing development, learner autonomy, reflection, and participation when it is systematically and explicitly integrated into the writing process.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Writing is an essential productive skill because it enables learners to organize ideas, communicate knowledge, and participate in academic, professional, and social contexts. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) education, writing requires the coordination of grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, text organization, genre conventions, communicative purpose, and awareness of readers' expectations (Hyland, 2022). Furthermore, writing is a recursive process involving planning, translating ideas into text, reviewing, and revising. Consequently, learning to write requires opportunities for learners to examine their texts, identify difficulties, evaluate alternatives, and make informed decisions during revision.

Within this process, peer feedback has gained increasing pedagogical relevance because it positions learners as both writers and evaluators. When reviewing a peer's text, students are required to interpret criteria, identify strengths and weaknesses, formulate suggestions, and consider how those observations may inform their own writing. Such processes can contribute to feedback literacy, learner autonomy, reflection, and engagement with writing (Carless & Boud, 2018). However, receiving comments does not automatically result in learning. The usefulness of peer feedback may depend on reviewer preparation, the clarity of assessment criteria, learners' confidence and trust, teacher mediation, and the availability of opportunities to revise texts based on the feedback received.

Recent empirical studies have examined peer feedback across diverse educational contexts and modalities, including face-to-face, digital, anonymous, dialogic, teacher-mediated, and artificial-intelligence-supported environments. This diversity provides multiple possibilities for writing instruction but also complicates the interpretation of findings because studies differ considerably in educational level, language proficiency, writing tasks, duration, instruments, and writing components assessed. Previous reviews have reported cognitive, affective, social, behavioral, and metacognitive benefits, while also identifying challenges related to the reliability of peer comments, students' reluctance to criticize classmates, unequal participation, and preferences for teacher feedback (Wei & Liu, 2024).

Although previous reviews have contributed substantially to understanding peer feedback, recent empirical evidence continues to be dispersed across different educational contexts, implementation modalities, and dimensions of writing. In particular, the evidence requires further synthesis regarding how peer feedback has been implemented in recent EFL and ESL writing research, which writing components have been most frequently examined, and which pedagogical conditions have been reported as supporting more productive feedback processes. Addressing these aspects can provide a more differentiated understanding of peer feedback beyond the simple presence or absence of comments.

Therefore, the objective of this systematic review was to synthesize empirical evidence published between 2020 and 2025 on peer feedback in EFL and ESL writing contexts. Specifically, the review sought to answer three questions: (1) What forms of peer feedback implementation have been reported in recent empirical studies of EFL and ESL writing? (2) Which writing components have been examined in relation to peer feedback? and (3) What pedagogical conditions and challenges have been reported in the implementation of peer feedback?

The synthesis aims to provide evidence-informed guidance for teachers, researchers, and curriculum designers interested in incorporating peer feedback into writing instruction through structured, formative, and pedagogically supported processes.

Development

Peer Feedback as a Learning Process

Peer feedback is a formative process in which students evaluate their peers' work using explicit or implicit criteria and communicate observations intended to support improvement. In writing instruction, this process commonly involves reading drafts, identifying strengths and difficulties, formulating suggestions, discussing possible alternatives, and subsequently making decisions as the author. Its pedagogical value therefore extends beyond the reception of comments because students may also learn by evaluating texts, comparing different ways of expressing ideas, recognizing characteristics of effective writing, and justifying their judgments (Topping, 2009).

From the perspective of feedback literacy, learners need to recognize characteristics of quality work, interpret feedback, manage their responses to comments, and transform information into actions that contribute to improvement (Carless & Boud, 2018). Accordingly, peer feedback should be understood as a process involving providing, receiving, interpreting, discussing, and applying feedback rather than as an isolated exchange of comments. The learning potential of this process depends on whether students have clear criteria, adequate preparation, opportunities to discuss feedback, and sufficient time to revise their texts.

Modalities, Structure, and Writing Components

Peer feedback can be provided orally, in writing, digitally, synchronously, or asynchronously. Oral feedback allows immediate clarification and negotiation of meaning, whereas written feedback provides a permanent record that can be revisited during revision. Digital environments may facilitate asynchronous interaction, document sharing, tracking of changes, and the integration of feedback from different sources. However, technological mediation does not necessarily guarantee higher-quality feedback; its usefulness depends on instructional design, student preparation, assessment criteria, and appropriate pedagogical support (Gao et al., 2024).

According to the degree of instructional support, peer feedback activities may be structured, semi-structured, or relatively open-ended. Structured activities may incorporate rubrics, checklists, guiding questions, examples, models, or comment templates. These resources can reduce ambiguity and direct students' attention toward relevant aspects of the writing task. In contrast, less structured activities may result in brief, general, or predominantly surface-level comments, particularly when students have limited experience evaluating peer writing.

Peer comments may also focus on global or local dimensions of writing. Global feedback addresses organization, coherence, argumentation, development of ideas, and relationships among sections of a text, whereas local feedback focuses on grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and sentence-level construction. Both dimensions are relevant; however, excessive attention to linguistic errors may limit students' ability to recognize problems affecting the overall communicative purpose and clarity of a text.

For the purposes of this review, four writing components were considered: organization and text structure, coherence and cohesion, grammar and linguistic accuracy, and vocabulary use. Organization and text structure refer to the logical sequencing of ideas, paragraph development, unity, and relationships among the introduction, development, and conclusion. Coherence refers to the comprehensible progression and interpretation of ideas, whereas cohesion concerns the linguistic resources used to connect sentences and paragraphs. Grammar and linguistic accuracy include sentence structure, agreement, verb forms, articles, prepositions, word order, and mechanics. Vocabulary use encompasses lexical variety, accuracy, appropriateness, collocation, and lexical choice according to communicative purpose, register, and genre.

Implementation Conditions and Background

The pedagogical value of peer feedback depends not only on the existence of peer comments but also on the conditions under which the activity is implemented. Prior preparation may include the analysis of model texts, identification of useful and ineffective comments, practice in the use of respectful evaluative language, and differentiation between global and local writing problems. Such preparation can help students understand the criteria used to evaluate texts and increase the specificity and relevance of their comments.

Teacher mediation also remains important. Teachers can introduce the activity, model the evaluation process, organize peer interaction, monitor students' exchanges, clarify criteria, and intervene when peer comments are inaccurate or contradictory. This role does not necessarily replace peer judgment; rather, it can provide a framework within which students progressively develop the ability to evaluate and use feedback independently.

Timing is another relevant condition. Peer feedback is more directly connected to writing development when it occurs between drafting and final submission and when learners have an opportunity to consider, accept, adapt, or reject suggestions during revision. Consequently, the value of peer feedback should not

be assessed solely according to the number of comments produced, but according to their relevance, accuracy, interpretation, and subsequent incorporation into revised versions.

Recent reviews have reported benefits of peer feedback while also identifying important implementation challenges. These include inaccurate peer comments, students' reluctance to criticize classmates, limited confidence in peers' abilities, unequal participation, and difficulties interpreting contradictory suggestions (Wei & Liu, 2024). Other reviews emphasize the importance of training, rubrics, formative processes, asynchronous interaction, multiple feedback sources, and opportunities for revision (Gao et al., 2024). These findings support the need to examine not only whether peer feedback is used but also how it is structured and supported in writing instruction.

MATERIALES Y MÉTODOS

A qualitative approach with a documentary, retrospective, and systematic-review design was adopted. The process followed PRISMA guidelines to organize the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion phases (Page et al., 2021). The review was guided by a general question concerning the effectiveness of peer feedback for developing writing skills and by two specific questions related to implementation modalities and reported writing components.

The search was conducted in Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. The terms peer feedback, peer review, peer assessment, writing skills, EFL writing, ESL writing, organization, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary were combined using the AND and OR operators. Inclusion criteria were: empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025; texts in English; research directly related to peer feedback and EFL, ESL, or L2 writing; participants in secondary or higher education; and qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs. Non-empirical publications, research unrelated to writing, studies outside the defined period, and documents with insufficient information for extraction were excluded. The original record did not preserve the exact search dates or the number of results by platform, so those data were not reconstructed.

During identification, 850 records were retrieved. After removing 150 duplicates, 700 titles and abstracts were screened and 650 records were excluded. Fifty full texts were assessed; 20 were excluded because 10 did not focus on peer feedback in writing, five were not empirical studies, and five fell outside the selected period. Consequently, 30 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis.

The main technique was document analysis, and the data collection instrument was an extraction matrix. For each study, authorship, year, educational context, participants, objective, design, instruments, feedback modality, findings, and recommendations were recorded. An inclusion and exclusion checklist was also used during screening. The studies were repeatedly reviewed to compare their methodological and pedagogical characteristics.

The analysis combined descriptive aggregation and thematic synthesis. First, each study was classified according to its main implementation modality. Then, mentions related to organization and text structure, coherence and cohesion, grammar and linguistic accuracy, and vocabulary were counted. Because a study could address more than one component, the frequencies of these outcomes were not mutually exclusive categories. Finally, quantitative patterns were integrated with qualitative themes concerning training, teacher mediation, technology, revision, autonomy, motivation, and implementation difficulties. The review did not apply a formal risk-of-bias tool; therefore, the interpretation focused on descriptive trends rather than estimating a pooled effect.

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram for the study selection process

Identification	Records identified through databases and search environments (n= 850)	Duplicate records removed (n= 150)
Screening	Records screened by title and abstract (n= 700)	Records excluded (n= 650)
Eligibility	Full text reports assessed for eligibility (n= 50)	Full text reports excluded (n= 20) Not focused on peer feedback in writing (n= 10) Not empirical (n= 5) Outside the selected period (n= 5)
Included	Studies included in the qualitative synthesis (n= 30)	

Note. The diagram was constructed from the screening counts reported in the supplied research project.
The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 framework. A total of 850 records were identified. After the removal of 150 duplicates, 700 records were screened by title and abstract. Of these, 650 were excluded because they did not meet the eligibility criteria. Fifty full-text reports were assessed, of which 20 were excluded for the following reasons: lack of focus on peer feedback in writing (n = 10), non-empirical design (n = 5), and publication outside the defined period (n = 5). Thirty studies were finally included in the qualitative synthesis.

RESULTADOS

The 30 included studies showed a substantial concentration in higher education and university EFL or L2 contexts. IELTS preparation courses, university extension programs, and experiences with lower-proficiency students were also identified. The designs were diverse and included experimental and quasi-experimental studies, mixed-methods research, case studies, correlational analyses, and comparisons of feedback sources or modalities.
The first question made it possible to organize the interventions into five main categories. Structured or guided review was the most frequent modality, with nine studies (30.0%). These studies used checklists, rubrics, models, training, guiding questions, or workshops to improve the specificity and usefulness of comments. Teacher-mediated feedback or feedback combined with other sources accounted for six studies (20.0%) and highlighted the teacher's role in verifying comments, correcting inaccurate information, and helping students interpret suggestions.
Online, digital, or blended modalities appeared in five studies (16.7%) and used shared documents, web platforms, asynchronous communication, or blended environments. Another five studies (16.7%) prioritized dialogue, collaboration, reflection, or active reviewer participation. Finally, five studies (16.7%) analyzed sustained or context-adapted implementations for specific purposes, such as academic writing, business letters, technology workshops, and tracking the incorporation of comments.

Table 1: Categories of Peer Feedback Implementation

Main category	f	%	Classified studies
Structured or guided review	9	30.0	Checklists, rubrics, models, reviewer training, and guiding questions
Teacher-mediated or combined feedback	6	20.0	Teacher feedback combined with peer assessment and learning-oriented assessment
Online, digital, or blended modality	5	16.7	Online platforms, shared documents, and asynchronous or blended feedback
Dialogic, collaborative, or reflective activities	5	16.7	Dialogue, reflection, collaboration, and feedback literacy
Sustained or context-adapted implementation	5	16.7	Sustained implementation and context-specific writing tasks

Note. Each study was assigned to one principal implementation category according to the dominant pedagogical modality described in the study.

The categories are mutually exclusive for this descriptive classification and represent the distribution of studies rather than comparative estimates of effectiveness.
The distribution indicates that structured or guided peer review was the most frequently reported modality (30.0%), followed by teacher-mediated or combined feedback (20.0%). Online, digital, or blended modalities, dialogic, collaborative, or reflective activities, and sustained or context-adapted implementations each accounted for 16.7% of the studies. This pattern suggests that recent research has emphasized structured and supported peer feedback processes, particularly those incorporating explicit criteria, training, teacher mediation, and opportunities for revision. These frequencies describe the distribution of research attention and should not be interpreted as comparative evidence of effectiveness across modalities.

Table 2: Writing Components Reported in the Included Studies

Component	f	%	Representative evidence
Organization and text structure	12	40.0	Peer-feedback studies reporting organization and text structure
Grammar and linguistic accuracy	10	33.3	Peer-feedback studies reporting grammar and linguistic accuracy
Vocabulary use	7	23.3	Peer-feedback studies reporting vocabulary use
Coherence and cohesion	5	16.7	Peer-feedback studies reporting coherence and cohesion

Note. Frequencies represent the number of included studies reporting each writing component. Categories are not mutually exclusive because a single study could examine more than one component. Percentages therefore refer to the 30 included studies and should not be interpreted as effect estimates.

Grammar and linguistic accuracy appeared in 10 studies (33.3%). Results included greater identification of errors, revision of sentence structures, correction of grammatical forms, and attention to mechanics. However, the quality of these observations depended on language proficiency and available support. Studies with teacher mediation or training provided better conditions for avoiding incomplete or inaccurate corrections.

Vocabulary use was addressed in seven studies (23.3%). Feedback helped identify repetitions, vague expressions, and inappropriate lexical choices, while also exposing students to alternatives used by their peers. Nevertheless, gains were less consistent and appeared to require sustained practice and explicit criteria. Coherence and cohesion were specifically examined in five studies (16.7%). Comments helped identify abrupt transitions, unclear references, and insufficient connections between ideas, although these components were often integrated into broader measures of organization or text quality.

In addition to linguistic components, the synthesis identified effects related to motivation, confidence, autonomy, critical thinking, feedback literacy, and self-regulation. Challenges were also recorded: distrust of peers' ability, anxiety when evaluating, reluctance to criticize, comment overload, unequal participation, and difficulty interpreting contradictory observations. Overall, the findings indicated that feedback was more useful when it included training, explicit criteria, respectful dialogue, teacher supervision, and time for revision.

DISCUSIÓN

The findings show that peer feedback can support writing development, but its effectiveness depends less on the mere presence of comments than on the pedagogical structure that organizes the process. The predominance of guided review confirms that students need visible criteria, examples, and practice before evaluating others. Ahmad et al. (2025) reported that training and checklists can improve the specificity, accuracy, and revision orientation of peer comments. This trend is consistent with Carless and Boud (2018), who argue that feedback literacy involves recognizing quality and acting on received information.

Teacher mediation was also relevant, especially for linguistic aspects. Sun and Wang (2025) observed that teacher intervention promoted more accurate revisions when peer comments contained errors. Ghaneiarani et al. (2024) also reported benefits from learning-oriented assessment integrating rubrics, reflection, and different feedback sources. These findings suggest that peer feedback should not be presented as a substitute for teacher feedback. Its greatest potential lies in a complementary relationship: students develop judgment and autonomy, while the teacher ensures appropriate conditions, models criteria, and prevents incorrect corrections from becoming established.

Digital tools expanded the time, traceability, and forms of interaction available to learners. Awada and Diab (2023) reported advantages of online review over face-to-face review for argumentative tasks. Hassani et al. (2023) found more favorable results in asynchronous environments. Guo et al. (2024) showed that artificial-intelligence support can improve comment quality and writing ability. Guo et al. (2025) examined its contribution to feedback literacy. However, technology does not automatically produce quality. Lam (2021) emphasized the importance of platform design, whereas Tran and Ma (2024) highlighted training and self-regulation. Zheng (2025) likewise underscored the connection between peer comments and subsequent revision.

Regarding the components, organization was the most frequently reported outcome, but this frequency should not be interpreted as a larger effect size. Many instruments assessed organization as part of an overall score, while coherence and cohesion were integrated into broader categories. Grammar also showed favorable results, although with a greater risk of inaccurate comments. For vocabulary, findings were positive but less consistent, suggesting that feedback can increase lexical awareness without replacing explicit instruction and prolonged exposure.

The results are consistent with previous reviews. Wei and Liu (2024) identified cognitive, affective, and social benefits along with reliability and participation problems. Gao et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of training and structured online peer-feedback practices. Liang et al. (2025) also emphasized rubrics, formative approaches, and the combination of feedback sources. Dhillon et al. (2026) reported more consistent effects on higher-order writing skills than on grammar and mechanics. The present review complements these works by focusing on recent empirical studies and differentiating four writing components.

Limitations include the restriction to publications in English between 2020 and 2025, the diversity of designs and instruments, the absence of a meta-analysis, and the lack of a formal risk-of-bias assessment. In addition, the search record did not preserve the exact dates or results by platform, which reduces the reproducibility of the identification phase. For these reasons, the frequencies represent descriptive trends and do not allow a uniform causal claim or the establishment of a single effect applicable to all EFL and ESL contexts.

CONCLUSIÓN

The systematic review led to the conclusion that peer feedback is a useful complementary strategy for writing development in EFL and ESL contexts when it is deliberately integrated into drafting and revision phases. The interventions were organized into five categories: structured or guided review, teacher-mediated or combined feedback, digital or blended modalities, dialogic and reflective activities, and sustained or context-adapted implementations.

Organization and text structure were the most frequently reported components, followed by grammar and linguistic accuracy, vocabulary, and coherence and cohesion. However, frequency of occurrence does not necessarily correspond to a larger effect magnitude, since the studies used different criteria and instruments. The most favorable results were associated with prior training, clear rubrics, examples, respectful language, teacher supervision, and genuine opportunities for rewriting.

In addition to changes in writing, the strategy supported autonomy, reflection, critical thinking, participation, and feedback literacy. At the same time, its implementation may be limited by inaccurate comments, lack of trust, reluctance to evaluate peers, anxiety, and preference for the teacher. Therefore, it is recommended that the strategy be introduced gradually, that students be taught to distinguish global and local aspects, that multiple sources of feedback be combined, and that the process be supported without removing student responsibility.

Future research should use more diverse samples, longer interventions, differentiated measures for each writing component, and follow-up assessments. Rigorous comparisons are also needed among face-to-face, asynchronous, anonymous, teacher-mediated, and artificial-intelligence-assisted modalities, together with systematic reviews that fully document their protocols and assess the methodological quality of included studies.

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