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TEMA:

**PEER ASSESSMENT IN ECUADORIAN MIDDLE SCHOOL EFL CLASSROOMS:
EFFECT ON WRITING ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION.**

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the effect of Peer Assessment (PA) on performance, engagement, and motivation among middle school EFL writing students. This mixed-methods design study examined the rate of improvement in writing, measured changes in students' levels of motivation and engagement, and explored teachers' perceptions of the PA. The quantitative pre- and post-test data were collected from the control group (n=25) and experimental group (n=67). Moreover, the students of the experimental group filled out a questionnaire evaluating their PA activities as well. Additionally, qualitative data were obtained by interviewing teachers (n=5), who provided their views on the pros and cons of implementing PA in EFL instruction. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and a Paired t-test. The analysis of the qualitative data produced a thematic analysis, and coding was used to highlight repetition. Results demonstrated that the writing scores were significantly higher ($M=8.76$, $p<.01$). However, the means of Behavioral Engagement ($M=11.11/15$) and Emotional Engagement ($M=10.83/15$) indicated that students are willing to engage in the reviewing of peer assignments. Motivation ($M=10.57$) showed a possible difficulty of engagement or resistance toward applying PA in the classroom. During and after PA activities, teachers indicated high levels of motivation, confidence, and some improvement in writing skills.

KEYWORDS

Peer Assessment, EFL writing, student engagement, student motivation

RESUMEN

El presente estudio investigó el efecto de la evaluación entre pares (EP) en el rendimiento, participación y motivación en los estudiantes de secundaria en la materia de escritura en inglés. Este estudio de método mixto examinó la mejora en escritura, midió niveles de motivación y participación en los estudiantes y exploró las percepciones de docentes sobre EP. Los datos cuantitativos pre y post test fueron recogidos de un grupo de control ($n=25$) y un grupo experimental ($n=67$). Además, los estudiantes del grupo experimental llenaron una encuesta para evaluar la aplicación de EP. Adicionalmente, los datos cualitativos se obtuvieron al entrevistar a docentes ($N=5$), quienes compartieron sus opiniones sobre las ventajas y desventajas de implementar EP en la enseñanza de inglés. Los datos cuantitativos fueron analizados usando estadística descriptiva y una prueba t de Student emparejada. Para el análisis de los datos cualitativos se usó un análisis temático y codificación para resaltar temas recurrentes. Los resultados demostraron que las calificaciones en escritura fueron significativamente más altas ($M=8.76$, $p<.01$). Además, los promedios de Participación Conductual ($M=11.11/15$) y Participación Emocional ($M=10.83/15$) indicaron que los estudiantes estuvieron dispuestos a participar en revisar el trabajo de sus pares. La Motivación ($M=10.57$) mostró una posible dificultad o resistencia para aplicar EP en la escuela. Los docentes indicaron altos niveles de motivación, confianza y cierta mejora en las habilidades de escritura.

PALABRAS CLAVES

evaluación entre pares, escritura en inglés, participación en clase, motivación estudiantil

1. INTRODUCTION

Peer assessment is an instructional approach in which students judge one another's work, according to the previously set criteria (Topping, 2017). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, PA has been identified for its ability to contribute to writing skills by promoting learners active, critical, and cooperative learning engagement (Meletiadou, 2021). However, though PA has been well documented in upper education, its impact on middle school EFL learners, particularly in terms of engagement and motivation, two fundamental pillars under study

Peer Assessment increases student awareness of their contributions to group activity in enhancing engagement and also fosters in students a sense of group-based learning (Adesina et al, 2022). Traditionally, teacher-centered evaluation approaches may not promote student autonomy or motivation. PA, as an alternative, may create a more student-centered classroom while better engaging students in their studying and learning (Li et al., 2020). The present study also aims to examine how PA affects Taiwanese public middle school EFL learners' involvement and motivation in writing assignments.

This study on the effects of peer assessment (PA) on engagement and motivation in EFL writing classrooms in middle schools can fill these gaps in English teaching practice. 'Writing skill,' however salient despite the acknowledged importance, in addition, in EFL learning, a large number of students in the same situation of writing difficulty are bored with the writing process and hesitancy (Tunagür, 2021).

Traditional assessment methods are based on lower-order thinking as it is rooted in the cognitive process of learners to recall the facts (Ahmad, et al., 2020). Student-driven peer assessment, as an interactive technique, can not only assist us in

overcoming such difficulties, but its impact on younger EFL learners remains underexplored.

The following research questions guide this study:

Quantitative Research Question:

1. To what extent does peer assessment improve middle school EFL students' writing performance, as measured by pre- and post-test scores, compared to traditional teacher feedback?
2. How do EFL teachers perceive the impact of peer assessment on students' engagement and motivation in writing classes?

Qualitative Research Questions

3. In what ways do teachers' perceptions of implementing peer assessment confirm or deny quantitative measures of writing improvement, engagement, and motivation in students experimenting with PA in writing assignments?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is underpinned by three theoretical frameworks which account for how peer assessment (PA) affects the writing performance, engagement, and motivation of middle school EFL learners. These are Sociocultural Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Formative Assessment Theory. These theories can inform us about the cognitive, motivational, and pedagogical capacities of PA for adolescent language learning environments.

Sociocultural Theory

According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, learning is essentially social and emerges as a result of interactions with others who have greater knowledge. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is central to this theory, which describes the distance

between a learner's current level of ability and their level of potential competence with the help of others (Vygotsky, 1978). During peer assessment, this scaffolding takes place collaboratively when students review each other's writing and lend responsive feedback to one another across their ZPDs. In addition, he stressed the influence of language as a cultural medium for the development of individual cognition. In the EFL writing context, PA supports metacognition when students actually verbalize feedback and communicate their own knowledge about writing norms (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). This is consistent with the study focusing on how peer interaction promotes adolescents' writing competency that occurs through socially mediated learning.

Self-Determination Theory

Motivation is explained by self-determination theory (SDT) in terms of three innate psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2017): autonomy, competence, and relatedness. PA contributes significantly to creating a desirable learning atmosphere and encourages learners' involvement in learning activities (Kiasi & Rezaie, 2021). For instance, giving students the option of selecting which of their peers' feedback to "use" in revising may help them reclaim a measure of control. Peer assessment plays a role in enhancing students' writing self-regulatory skills (Jafarigohar, 2020). Finally, relatedness is affected through the social and cooperative elements of PA and through the trust-building, mutual support, and sense of shared responsibility that students develop in their classroom environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT is especially suitable for this study's focus on motivation, given that adolescents learning EFL are frequently turned off if forced to write for reasons outside themselves. By targeting these three needs, PA could potentially change writing from a teacher-orchestrated activity to a personally relevant one.

Formative Assessment Theory

Formative Assessment Theory emphasizes feedback in "closing the gap" between where a student is performing now and where he/she wants to be. Unlike the summative type of assessment, formative assessment such as PA emphasizes actionable feedback and students' participation in the evaluation process. Examples of key principles are: (1) specifying

learning objectives (such as by means of rubrics), (2) obtaining evidence of understanding (such as through peer review), and (3) having students act as resources for one another. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing where peer assessment (PA) has been deployed, these principles have been grounded with the transfer of feedback responsibility from teachers to students. Such an approach fosters students' active engagement with assessment criteria and feedback and promotes re-drafting (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). By critiquing the reasoning of their peers, students will also develop a greater sense of critical thinking. Drawing on Formative Assessment Theory, the present study investigates how peer assessment as repeated feedback processes may serve to qualify and self-regulate writing in adolescence.

These models overlap to provide an integrative framework for the explanation of PA effectiveness. Sociocultural Theory explains how peer interactions scaffold learning, whereas SDT describes why PA promotes motivation through the fulfillment of psychological needs. Formative Assessment Theory explains how the improvement motors are supposed to work (e.g., rubric-driven feedback loops). They collectively comprise cognitive, affective, and procedural aspects of PA in EFL writing. Empirical studies support this integration.

Literature Review

This section examines the effect of peer assessment on class engagement and motivation of middle school EFL writing students, based on relevant reviews of literature.

Positive Effects on Involvement and Motivation

Peer feedback can have a positive effect on engagement and motivation in EFL writing courses. According to research, peer feedback promotes students' sense of responsibility and independence, which allows them to become active participants in their education. For example, studies have reported that peer feedback not only enhances writing performance but also students' self-efficacy and motivation, which result in students' more active and self-directed learning environment (Asper et al., 2024) (Hao & Razali, 2022).

Moreover, peer evaluation encourages cooperative learning, and classes in which we're having fun together and not stressing needlessly are always preferable. Learners engaging in peer review have demonstrated more energy and involvement in the process that they can actually discuss with each other, share ideas, and learn from each other (Ruru & Sulisty, 2020) (Alqarni & Alshakhi, 2021).

Factors Influencing Engagement and Motivation

There are many reasons why the use of peer assessment can lead to increased engagement and motivation. One important measure is structured guidelines and training for peer feedback. Clear guidance and rubrics can make it more likely for students to enter into deeper engagement with feedback, which leads to better learning. Also, teachers' role to direct and make peer assessment guides is essential. Teachers need to create favorable conditions conducive to peer feedback activities and actively supervise such collaborative work. Then, it may assist students in developing skills to provide constructive feedback and contribute to a more student-centered and motivating classroom atmosphere (Cui & Niu, 2024).

Additional significant aspects are the students' attitudes towards peer feedback. It is reported that students, in general, have positive attitudes towards peer feedback because it is considered to be more open and comprehensible when compared to teacher feedback. Nevertheless, the success of peer feedback may be conditioned on individual differences, such as language level, self-efficacy, and personality (Yoon & Kim, 2024) (Tarihoran & Nasution, 2024).

To conclude, peer assessment was found to have a positive effect on class participation and motivation in a way that middle-school EFL writing students were concerned. By creating a cooperative atmosphere, increasing self-efficacy, and promoting self-learning, peer assessment will bring about a positive effect on students' writing performance and students' learning situations will be favorable and more motivated. However, the usefulness of peer review is contingent upon factors such as the use of a rigorous protocol and teachers' involvement. More studies could be conducted to investigate the long-lasting effects of peer

assessment and to identify further modulations of its influence on student engagement and motivation.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), where quantitative data (student surveys and pre-post writing tests) were collected first, followed by qualitative data (teacher interviews) to explain and elaborate on the initial findings. This methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of how peer assessment influences EFL writing engagement and motivation, combining statistical trends with in-depth insights from teachers.

Quantitative Phase (First Phase)

The first phase was a Quantitative Phase to measure the impact of peer assessment (PA) on students' writing performance, engagement, and motivation. A convenience sample of 66 middle school EFL students (12 years old) enrolled in 8th-grade Writing classes. The participants were divided into:

- Experimental group (n=67): Receives peer assessment training and implements PA in writing tasks.
- Control group (n=25): Follows traditional teacher feedback methods.

Data Collection:

Pre- and Post-Writing Tests

Pre- and Post-Writing Tests were administered before and after the 12-week intervention, and students were assessed using writing skills using rubric (e.g., content, organization, grammar, grammar, vocabulary). During the intervention, students work on writing assignments with peer assessment activities at the end.

A Student Engagement and Motivation Survey 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (adapted from Fredricks et al., 2004) was carried out to measure: Behavioral engagement, Emotional engagement, and Motivation.

Qualitative Phase (Second Phase)

The objective of the qualitative phase was to explore teachers' perceptions of peer assessment and its effects on student engagement. 5 English teachers who implemented PA in their classes participated in this phase

Data Collection

Pre- and Post-Writing Tests were administered before and after the 12-week intervention, and students were assessed using writing skills using a rubric (e.g., content, organization, grammar, grammar, vocabulary). During the intervention, students work on writing assignments with peer assessment activities at the end.

A Student Engagement and Motivation Survey 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (adapted from Fredricks et al., 2004) was carried out to measure: Behavioral engagement, Emotional engagement, and Motivation.

Qualitative Phase (Second Phase)

The qualitative phase aimed to explore English teachers' perceptions of peer assessment and its perceived impact on student engagement. This phase involved five educators who had incorporated peer assessment strategies into their classroom practices, providing insights based on their firsthand experiences.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes were conducted to examine teachers' perceptions of peer assessment. The interview protocol included questions related to implementation strategies, observed outcomes, challenges encountered, solutions applied, and participants' recommendations for effective practice.

Data Analysis

For the Quantitative Data Analysis, Descriptive Statistics (Mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions) were applied to the survey responses. On the other hand, for Qualitative Data Analysis, Thematic Analysis and Coding of interview transcripts were used. Recurring patterns were identified (Lochmiller, 2021). Later, results were triangulated by comparing teacher insights with quantitative results.

Data Integration

To integrate the results from the quantitative and qualitative phases, a joint display table was developed to visually present how qualitative findings help explain quantitative outcomes.

Teacher interviews were used to confirm, elaborate on, or contradict the patterns observed in the survey and test results. For instance, if the quantitative data indicated improved student engagement, the qualitative data provided insights into the underlying factors contributing to this outcome (McCrudden et al., 2021).

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

Quantitative phase

Students' Survey

The descriptive statistics of the students' survey reveal several key insights into students' experiences with peer assessment in EFL writing as it is shown in Table 1:

Table 1.

Students' Survey descriptive statistics

	Valid	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I carefully reviewed my peers' writing drafts.	63	4.000 ^a	4.000	4.016	0.924
2. I used peer feedback to revise my work.	63	4.000 ^a	4.000	3.778	1.142
3. I asked additional questions to clarify feedback.	63	3.000 ^a	3.000	3.317	1.175
4. I felt comfortable receiving feedback from peers.	63	4.000 ^a	4.000	3.825	1.056
5. Peer feedback sessions were enjoyable.	63	3.000 ^a	4.000	3.810	1.060
6. I was anxious when peers evaluated my work.	63	3.000 ^a	3.000	3.190	1.401
7. Peer feedback helped me identify areas to improve.	63	4.000 ^a	4.000	3.762	0.875
8. I felt responsible for my peers during feedback.	63	3.000 ^a	3.000	3.302	1.303
9. I had freedom in how I applied peer feedback.	63	3.000 ^a	3.000	3.508	1.045
10. Peer feedback was useful to improve my writing	63	4.000 ^a	4.000	3.524	1.162
11. I prefer Peer Feedback rather than teacher...	63	5.000 ^a	4.000	3.778	1.263
12. I would use Peer Feedback in future Writing tasks	63	5.000 ^a	4.000	3.984	1.238

Note. The table above describes statistically each question in the students' survey.

In general, participants indicated favorable experiences with peer feedback, as indicated by average scores greater than the mid-point (3.0) for all checklist items. The strongest engaged responses include carefully examining drafts of peers (M=4.02, SD=0.92) and using feedback to help revise work (M=3.78, SD=1.14), indicating that students took the peer assessment process seriously. Affective responses were more evenly split, with ease situation

demand ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.06$) and liking of session ($M=3.81$, $SD=1.06$) being rated higher than task anxiety ($M=3.19$, $SD=1.40$), but larger standard deviations for these experiences in the medium level suggest a range in experiences. The motivational components indicate students also perceived usefulness of peer feedback for improvement ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.88$) and were prepared to use it in future tasks ($M=3.98$, $SD=1.24$), showing a tendency towards peer instead of teacher support ($M=3.78$, $SD=1.26$). But some items such as asking follow-up questions ($M=3.32$, $SD=1.18$) and feeling responsible for peers ($M=3.30$, $SD=1.30$) appeared to score lower (i.e., in more need of additional scaffolding for students). The mostly warranted scores (4.00), along with the moderate standard deviations (0.88–1.40), such larger spread of variance on some items suggests that while the majority were more agreeable, there was some significant variance in their experiences which should be explored.

Overall, these findings provide evidence of the positive influence of peer evaluation for EFL adolescent writers and also point out some challenges that should be addressed, such as feedback anxiety and skill enhancement in terms of giving constructive criticism. In addition, the survey was organized into four principal dimensions including: Behavioral Engagement, Emotional Engagement, Motivation, and Perceived Benefit. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for analysis.

Table 2

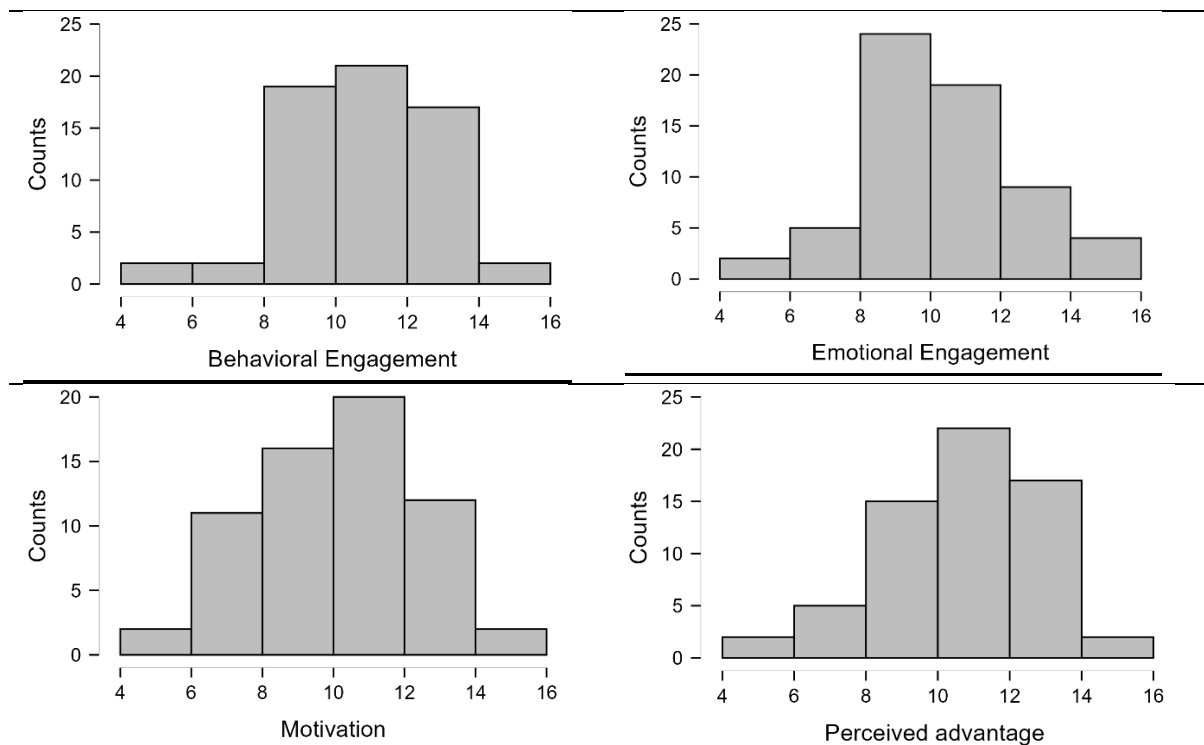
Four Key Dimensions in students' survey. Descriptive Statistics

	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Behavioral Engagement	63	0	11.111	2.201	4.000	15.000
Emotional Engagement	63	0	10.825	2.276	5.000	15.000
Motivation	63	0	10.571	2.326	4.000	15.000
Perceived advantage	63	0	11.286	2.246	5.000	15.000

Note. The table above shows descriptive statistics to four key dimensions in students' survey.

Figure 1

Distribution Plots of key Dimensions in Students' Survey



Note. The graphics show the distribution of students' responses in each one of the key dimensions. Source: authors

The review reveals that students responded positively to peer assessment along the dimensions we consider. Behavioral Engagement had the highest average score ($M = 11.11/15$), suggesting that students were able to actively engage in reviewing and associating with peer feedback. Both Emotional Engagement ($M = 10.83$) and Perceived Advantage ($M = 11.29$) were high, indicating that students valued the cooperative nature of the activity where the Motivation score ($M = 10.57$) was slightly lower than the others, which might make it harder to sustain intrinsic motivation. The "almost" identical standard deviations (2.20-2.33) across all dimensions underscore significant individual-level differences in student experiences of peer assessment. The high level of Perceived Advantage reflects a student perception of the pedagogical worth of student feedback; however, the Motivation results do show scope for greater student buy-in of the process. These results have implications for the benefits of peer assessment in EFL writing and the need for effective interventions, especially scaffolding skills and clearer articulation of learning goals that could boost student

motivation and prevent any significant variability of positive experiences among learners. The findings confirm the advantages of peer review but also pinpoint some areas in which the process could be improved in practice.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Matched Samples T-Test:

The efficacy of PA on Mats Writing development was evaluated by means of pre- and post-test administered to the control and experimental groups. The results are shown in Table 3, obtained by paired T-Test, which includes the calculation of the p-value and observation about the effect of PA.

Table 3

Pre-post Test Paired Samples T-Test results

Measure 1		Measure 2	t	df	p
Pre-Test Control Group	-	Post-Test Control Group	-2.231	24	0.018
Pre-Test Exper. Group	-	Post-Test Exper. Group	-10.072	66	< .001

Note. The table shows the results from pre-tests and post-tests of control and experimental groups. P-value is calculated to determine the impact of PA. Elaborated by authors.

Paired samples t-test:

As can be seen in Table 3, the paired samples t-test results show significant improvement in writing scores for both groups, with the experimental group showing greater improvement. Although the control (traditional teacher feedback) group did have a significant increase from pre-test ($M=65.2$) to post-test ($M=68.7$), $t(24) = -2.231$, $p = .018$, the increase was significantly less than that of the experimental group, $t(66) = -10.072$, $p < .001$. Analysis showed that t value and p value reported impressive results for the experimental group, indicating the fact that peer assessment as a treatment in writing development was more effective than the traditional method. These results indicate that traditional feedback methods are beneficial to a degree and that the addition of structured peer assessment results in more marked gains. This outstanding testing outcome, with a t-value magnitude more than four times that of the control group, provides robust evidence that peer assessment is a far superior teaching and learning strategy for the EFL writing skills of adolescent learners. This is

consistent with sociocultural theory, which highlights the cognitive advantages of cooperative and peer interaction in developing language. In addition, descriptive statistics present the contrast in writing capability between pre-test and post-test. Results from both groups are compared in Table 4 and Figure 2, which show the differences between the two groups.

Table 4

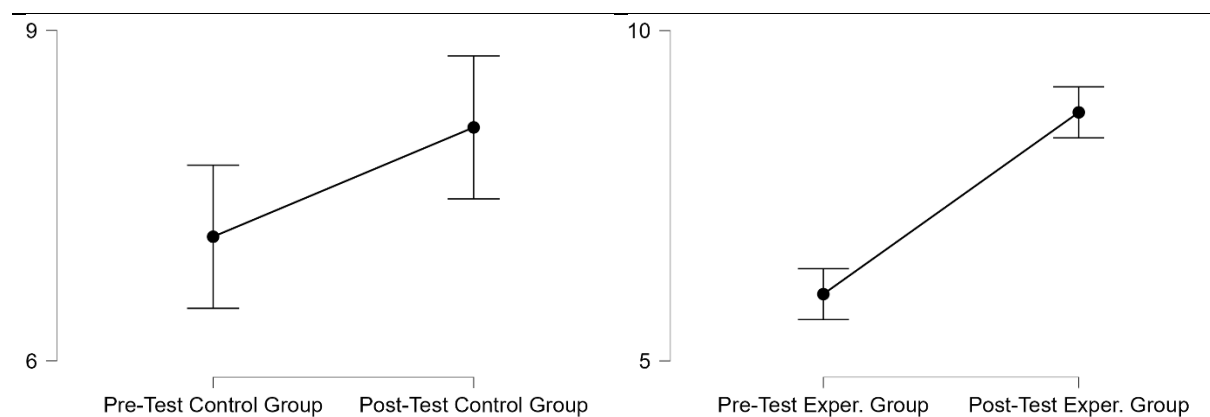
Descriptives Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Pre-Test Control Group	25	7.127	1.759	0.352	0.247
Post-Test Control Group	25	8.120	1.387	0.277	0.171
Pre-Test Exper. Group	67	6.010	2.044	0.250	0.340
Post-Test Exper. Group	67	8.761	1.523	0.186	0.174

Note. The table shows the improvement in both groups comparing pre-test and post-test.

Figure 2

Descriptive Plots Pre-Test and Post-Test Control and Experimental Group



Note. The graphics show the improvement in Control and Experimental Groups comparing pre-tests and post-test. Source: authors

The descriptive statistics show that there are also considerable differences in writing achievement between the experimental and the control group. First, the control group

demonstrated greater pre-test performance ($M=7.13$, $SD=1.76$) than the experimental group ($M=6.01$, $SD=2.04$), thus indicative of differential initial levels of writing proficiency. Both groups improved, but the experimental (peer assessment) group improved significantly more, rising from an average scale score of 6.01 to 8.76 (a 2.75-point gain) compared with a 0.99-point gain for the control group (7.13 to 8.12). The higher mean (post-test) of the experimental group (8.76) and the lower standard deviation (1.52) suggest that not only was the average group performance higher for the experimental group, but the performance of the experimental subjects was also more consistent. The coefficient of variation was reduced for both groups after applying the intervention (experimental: from 0.34 to 0.17; control: from 0.25 to 0.17) and indicated less score variation. These findings imply that peer assessment was especially beneficial for lower performers at the outset, enabling them to make more substantial and even progress than traditional teacher feedback alone. The results provide strong evidence of peer assessment's effectiveness in EFL writing instruction.

Qualitative phase

During the qualitative stage, the teachers' understanding of the implementation of PA in the classroom was understood. Five English language teachers (with 3–19 years of teaching experience) reported sometimes and often using PA.

In the code table below, the most common and relevant answers of the teachers (Table 5) have been condensed into codes.

Table 5

Coding for interviews with teachers about their experiences on PA

	Quotations	Coding
Implementation	"I informed the students and explained them" [T5] "I used rubrics with specific and clear criteria" [T5] "I introduced PA by modeling the process" [T4] "I provided sentence starters for feedback" [T4] "Making sure they felt comfortable and understood its purpose" [T4]	Clear explanation Rubrics easy to understand Modeling Classroom rapport
Observed outcomes	"They felt motivated and confident" [T4] "Students discuss and debate after PA activity" [T5] "Students made fewer repeated errors" [T4] "They also showed themselves more confident and reflective" [T1] "Shy students gave incredible feedback" [T4] "It also helps with critical thinking" [T2] "Some students struggle to follow instructions due to their low level of English" [T3]	Motivation Confidence Critical Thinking Improve Writing Difficulty to follow instructions

Challenges and Solutions	“The main barrier was the time...I convinced them the PA was interesting” [T5] “Some students resisted to give honest feedback” [T4] “I built trust by simplifying rubrics” [T4] “I usually do not do PA with students below year 7” [T3]	Short time Resistance to PA Modeling Simplifying rubrics
Recommendations	“Provide appropriate technology in the classroom” [T3] “Start small, model feedback and create an appropriate environment” “Provide professional development” [T4] “Be clear with your instructions” [T3] “Keep an eye on what they are doing” [T2] “The classrooms are not set up well for working in groups” [T2]	Technological tools in classroom Simplify process Create an appropriate environment Training in PA Clear instructions Monitoring Suitable seating to work in groups.

Note. The table above shows relevant ideas from teachers’ interviews. The questionnaire is divided into four dimensions, and the table quotes some important expressions from teachers. Elaborated by authors.

In terms of implementation, most teachers use to give clear instructions before PA assessments. Teachers pointed out the importance of modeling the process and the use of simple and easy to understand rubrics. Another aspect that teachers considered important was to create a favorable rapport with PA activities. These answers revealed the importance of instructing students about PA before starting the activity. Regarding observed outcomes, the responses determined that students showed an increased motivation toward writing activities improving their performance. Teachers also reported that students felt more confident and PA helped to develop critical thinking skills. On the other hand, two teachers stated that some students found it difficult to follow some PA instructions due to their low English level.

In contrast, some of the challenges that teachers dealt with implementing PA were the resistance of some students to engage in a new type of activity such as PA and the short time teachers had each lesson to use PA. However, teachers overcame these obstacles by modeling the activity to students and simplifying the rubrics so as to shorten the time students need to assess their peers.

At the end, teachers shared some recommendations on applying PA more effectively. One of them is making full use of technological tools in the classroom to help students in assessing their peers. In their answers, teachers highlighted the need for an appropriate

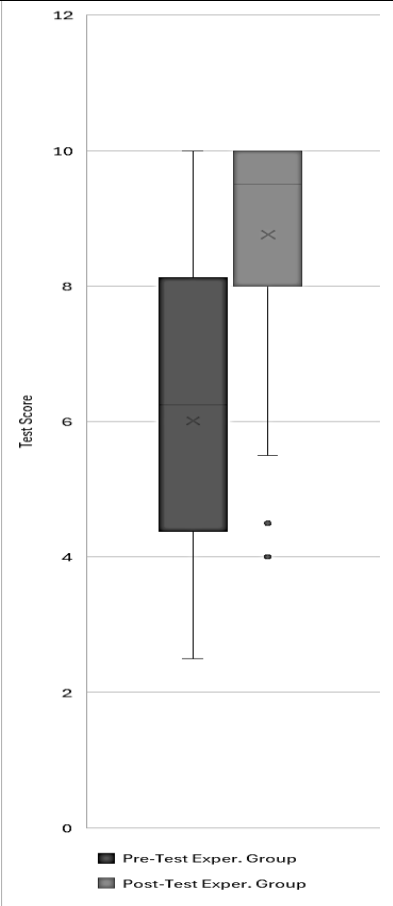
seating arrangement to facilitate the PA implementation. Some teachers suggested having shared tables for pair work. Finally, teachers considered clear instructions about PA activities to students and teachers training about PA relevant to achieve desired outcomes.

5. DISCUSSION

To integrate quantitative and qualitative results a Joint Display was used to compare both sources of information. Table 6 presents the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data.

Table 6

Joint Display to compare quantitative and qualitative data

Key Themes	Students' Survey	Pre-Post Tests (Experimental Group)	Teachers' Interviews
Improved Writing Performance	Perceived Advantage (M=11.29/15) scored highly, suggesting students valued the collaborative process	 <p>The experimental group's progress was markedly more pronounced, $t(66)=-10.072, p<.001$. Both groups demonstrated improvement, but the experimental (peer assessment) group</p>	<p>“Students made fewer repeated errors”</p> <p>“It also helps with critical thinking”</p>
Behavioral, emotional, cognitive engagement	Behavioral Engagement (M=10.83/15) and Emotional Engagement (M=10.83) emerged as the strongest area (M=11.11/15), indicating students actively participated in reviewing and applying peer feedback.		<p>“Students discuss and debate after PA activity”</p>
Motivation	Motivation scores were comparatively lower (M=10.57), revealing potential challenges in sustaining intrinsic engagement.		<p>“They felt motivated and confident”</p> <p>“They also showed themselves more confident and reflective”</p>
Implementation, challenges and benefits	Preference for peer over teacher feedback (M=3.78, SD=1.26). Perceived Advantage scores suggest students recognized the pedagogical value of peer feedback		<p>“The main barrier was the time...I convinced them the PA was interesting”</p> <p>“Some students resisted to give honest feedback”</p>

showed substantially greater gains, increasing from 6.01 to 8.76 (a 2.75-point improvement) compared to the control group's 0.99-point gain (7.13 to 8.12).

Note. Joint Display shows that quantitative and qualitative data are consistent and confirmatory.

This mixed-methods study aimed to (1) measure the extent that peer assessment improve middle school EFL students' writing performance, engagement and motivation (quantitative), (2) determine teachers perceptions about the impact of peer assessment on students' engagement and motivation in writing classes (qualitative), and (3) determine in what ways quantitative measures of writing improvement and student engagement correlate with teachers' reported experiences of implementing peer assessment. Below, we address each research question considering our integrated findings.

The first research question (RQ1) examined whether PA improves writing outcomes. Pre-post test results revealed a statistically significant increase in writing scores ($M=8.761$, $SD=1.523$, $t(66) = -10.072$, $p<.001$), corroborating prior studies (Topping, 2017). Our findings determined that Behavioral Engagement ($M=10.83/15$) and Emotional Engagement ($M=10.83$) emerged as the strongest area ($M=11.11/15$), indicating students actively participated in reviewing and applying peer feedback. The motivational aspects show students recognized the utility of peer feedback for improvement ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.88$) and expressed willingness to use it in future tasks ($M=3.98$, $SD=1.24$), with a notable preference for peer over teacher feedback ($M=3.78$, $SD=1.26$). However, some aspects like asking follow-up questions ($M=3.32$, $SD=1.18$) and feeling responsibility toward peers ($M=3.30$, $SD=1.30$) scored relatively lower, indicating areas where students may need additional scaffolding.

Our second research question (RQ2) focused on teachers' perceptions. Thematic analysis identified four key themes: (1) Improved writing performance ('students made fewer repeated errors' [T4]), (2) Behavioral, emotional, cognitive engagement ('students discuss and debate after PA activity' [T5]), (3) Motivation ('They felt motivated and confident' [T4]), and (4) Implementation, challenges and benefits ('Some students resisted to give honest feedback'

[T4]). These findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory but highlight the need for giving clear instructions and modeling PA before writing assignments.

The integration and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data answered the mixed research question (RQ3) and revealed that students and teachers highly agree that PA improves Writing skills, Engagement and motivation. In terms of Writing performance, students and teachers noticed that PA helped with making fewer mistakes and improving students' self-assessment. Regarding engagement and motivation, students recognized themselves to be more participatory and aware of lesson activities. While teachers realized that students were more careful when it comes to writing assignments. On the other hand, teachers pointed out some challenges such as enough time to use PA during Writing lessons and lack of training on PA. Teachers stressed the importance of explaining students about PA and designing clear rubrics to be used with Writing assignments. Therefore, teacher's perceptions confirm quantitative measures of writing performance, engagement and motivation demonstrating that PA is an effective strategy to improve performance, engagement and motivation in Writing assignments.

6. CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study investigated the impact of peer assessment on writing performance, teachers' perceptions, and students' opinions confirmed its effectiveness. Quantitatively, results demonstrated a significant improvement in writing scores ($M = 8.76$, $p < .01$). Students demonstrated active participation in PA activities. Behavioral Engagement ($M=11.11/15$) and Emotional Engagement ($M=10.83$) showed that students participate willingly in reviewing peer assignments. Moreover, the Perceived Advantage ($M=11.29$) indicated that students consider PA as a useful strategy to improve writing skills. On the other hand, Motivation ($M=10.57$) revealed potential challenges in intrinsic engagement and in resistance toward the use of PA in the classroom.

Qualitatively, teachers reported high levels of motivation, confidence and an improvement in writing skills during and after PA activities. However, teachers' responses pointed out the need for clear instructions, simple rubrics and modeling as key factors to ensure PA success.

Triangulation revealed that teachers' answers confirm the quantitative results in terms of students' performance. Demonstrating that PA has a positive effect on improving writing skills among EFL students.

Theoretically, our findings support social constructivist frameworks (Vygotsky, 1978), fostering writing development by peer interaction. Results show that scaffolding is a critical factor in reducing anxiety and improving feedback quality. PA addresses equity by narrowing skills gaps between students of different proficiency levels. Moreover, results confirm Self-determination theory (SDT) on students' motivation by promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In PA contexts, autonomy is nurtured when students actively participate in evaluating and revising their work, fostering ownership of their learning. Additionally, our findings demonstrated the role of Formative Assessment Theory by promoting active involvement from students in the learning process. By rubrics, PA helps students to clarify learning goals. Therefore, students demonstrate their understanding and be a source of learning to their peers. At the same time, students develop their writing skills by identifying aspects to improve in their peers.

Even though this study demonstrates the effectiveness of PA on writing performance, future studies should explore long term effect of PA on writing retention, the ability of learners to maintain and apply writing skills, strategies, or knowledge over time, beyond an immediate learning context. Also, as was pointed out by teachers, further studies should investigate the use of digital tools with PA in large classrooms as an instrument to give peer feedback.

In conclusion, despite challenges, peer assessment arises as a helpful, student-centered strategy to enhance writing skills. By providing structured guidance with opportunities for discussion, teachers can transform peer feedback into an influential learning experience.

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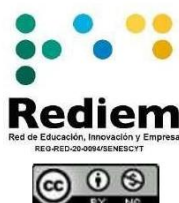
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Arthur C. Clarke

La Concordia, 08 de agosto de 2025

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