



*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*  
Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 302-322, June 2025  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.6.14>  
Received Apr 20, 2025; Revised May 18, 2025; Accepted Jun 30, 2025

# Peer-Driven Progress: The Effectiveness of Peer Feedback on EFL Learners' Writing Performance In Saudi Higher Education

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**Abstract.** This study addresses the critical need for effective instructional strategies to enhance English writing skills among Saudi university learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Specifically, the study explored the effectiveness of peer feedback (PFB) in improving the writing performance of EFL learners at a Saudi Arabian university. It examined the impact of PFB on the narrative essay writing of 28 Saudi EFL students before and after PFB sessions and analyzed the aspects of writing that were influenced the most by PFB. Additionally, insights and perceptions of PFB were gathered from 85 Saudi university EFL students who participated in the PFB sessions. Results indicate that writing performance significantly improved following the PFB sessions, particularly in lexical resource use and overall task achievement. The survey data also suggest that Saudi EFL university students held positive attitudes towards PFB, recognizing its role in enhancing their writing through critical self-reflection. However, findings suggest that students did not perceive PFB as an effective tool for broader language skill improvement. These findings provide valuable insights into PFB's role in Saudi higher education, its nuanced dynamics, and its potential in writing skills development while offering practical implications for educators.

**Keywords:** EFL writing development; EFL writing proficiency; higher education; peer feedback; Saudi Arabia

## 1. Introduction

Writing in English can be challenging for English language learners, and while providing effective feedback can be beneficial to learners, it can also be laborious for instructors. Peer feedback (PFB) is a promising approach for helping language learners improve their writing skills and has considerable advantages over instructor feedback. Research conducted on PFB shows that it not only

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enhances students' writing performance but also promotes reading development, critical thinking, learner autonomy, confidence, motivation, and cognitive function (Bijami et al., 2013; Cui & Schunn, 2024; Cui et al., 2021; Ekahitanond, 2013; Latifi et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023; Panadero & Alqassab, 2019).

Globally, PFB is recognized as a powerful tool for enhancing writing performance in various educational contexts. Jin et al. (2022) found that student engagement in feedback, measured through cognitive, affective, behavioral dimensions, improved the writing skills of postgraduate students. Similarly, Banihashem et al. (2024) highlighted PFB's role in fostering deeper cognitive engagement in argumentative essay writing among graduate students.

It has also been shown to positively affect English as a foreign language (EFL) college students' lexical quality and linguistic cohesion (Sun et al., 2023). Even in online learning environments, PFB can enhance EFL students' writing through mutual scaffolding (Alyafaei & Mudhsh, 2023). Together, these studies illustrate PFB's effectiveness in writing instruction by fostering critical thinking, linguistic development, and active learner engagement.

Despite its potential benefits for EFL learners, there is a lack of empirical studies measuring PFB's effectiveness among university-level Saudi students and their perceptions of it. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating how PFB affected the English writing performance of Saudi university students in various aspects of writing in a narrative essay-writing assignment. The study also measured Saudi university students' attitudes toward PFB as an activity, strategy, and learning experience. The results of this study contribute to the literature on PFB and EFL writing and provide practical implications for English language educators and learners at Saudi universities.

Accordingly, the current study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does PFB improve Saudi university students' English writing performance?
2. What specific improvements in writing performance are improved by PFB among Saudi EFL university students?
3. How do Saudi university students perceive the effectiveness of PFB in developing their English writing skills?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Writing in Saudi EFL Classrooms**

Learning EFL in Saudi Arabia presents distinct challenges for writing development, despite sustained policy support for English-language instruction, which aims to advance global engagement in various fields while safeguarding national identity (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). However, classroom assessments still privilege rote reproduction of set essays, encouraging students to memorize content merely to pass exams rather than to use English communicatively (Alseghayer, 2014; Darandari & Murphy, 2013; Elyas & Picard, 2010).

In response, many universities have established first-year intensive English programs to prepare students for English-Medium Instruction (EMI) aimed at enhancing students' English proficiency (Liton, 2013; Al-Shehri, 2017). Despite these initiatives, instructors often revert to Arabic, resulting in mixed-medium classrooms that hinder students' adjustment to EMI and their full engagement with course content (Elyas & Al-Hoorie, 2024).

Empirical evidence further illustrates these difficulties in writing. Limited proficiency often prompts students to memorize fixed structures rather than develop their own writing (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Researchers also observed that students struggle with organization, commit frequent mechanical errors (e.g., spelling, capitalization, and punctuation), and have trouble linking ideas (Alharbi, 2018; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016)

Although recent curricular developments in writing instruction in the Saudi context show a shift toward a communicative approach that emphasizes critical thinking and learner autonomy (Aloairdhi & Alhojailan, 2024). Nevertheless, many challenges persist, including a limited focus on writing skills and students' continued reliance on memorization based on their prior experience in school, resulting in modest gains in writing proficiency.

## **2.2 Peer Feedback**

PFB is the “reciprocal process whereby learners provide information on one or more aspect(s) of the work or performance of other equal-status students” (Latifi et al., 2023, p. 656). Research indicates that PFB offers considerable advantages over instructor feedback in enhancing EFL learners' writing proficiency. Cui et al. (2021) compared the effects of PFB and teacher feedback on EFL learners' writing development and found that while both PFB and teacher feedback improved writing competence and self-efficacy, PFB uniquely enhanced students' autonomous motivation, suggesting its potential to improve both writing skills and motivation.

Yusuf et al. (2019) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Kuala Lumpur on cooperative learning's impact on 9th-grade students' writing performance. Through jigsaw activities, students worked in mixed-ability teams, switching roles and providing immediate feedback. This approach has considerably improved EFL students' writing skills. Similarly, PFB has cognitive benefits, helping learners regulate behaviors and attitudes, and domain-specific knowledge. Increased interaction fosters metacognitive reflection, “thinking about thinking,” and strengthens knowledge regulation (Basaffar & Bukhari, 2023; Ekahitanond, 2013).

PFB has also demonstrated affective benefits for EFL learners. Yastibaş and Yastibaş (2015) documented writing anxiety among Turkish EFL students and explored the impact of PFB in writing classes. Using a mixed-method approach, they found that PFB improved students' attitudes toward writing, enhanced confidence and collaboration, and reduced stress and fear. These findings

underscore PFB's potential to create positive learning experiences in EFL writing.

Furthermore, students have reported that PFB promoted social interaction, enhanced their understanding of the writing process, fostered the development of emotional strategies, supported critical thinking, and facilitated social and intellectual growth through collaboration (Kuyyogsuy, 2019). Moreover, PFB's advantages extend beyond traditional classrooms to online platforms. Cao et al. (2022) analyzed 37 studies on PFB and instructor feedback in EFL student writing (from 2012 to 2022) and found that online PFB may offer even greater benefits than face-to-face interactions, demonstrating its versatility.

### **2.3 PFB in Saudi EFL Classrooms**

Research in Saudi Arabia has examined the impact of instructor feedback on EFL writing. Studies reveal that instructor feedback positively affects grammatical and lexical accuracy (Al-Hazzani & Altalhab, 2018) and enhances overall writing skills (Alharbi, 2016). Furthermore, students appreciated and valued their instructors' feedback (Albogami, 2020). Nonetheless, these studies focus on teacher-provided feedback rather than PFB, which is the focus of this study.

Despite limited research on PFB in Saudi EFL classrooms, evidence suggests that it can be a valuable tool. Almarshedi (2022) observed a noteworthy level of linguistic awareness among Saudi learners, regardless of having typically low grammatical competence. Linguistic awareness is the conscious understanding of language and its structure, including sounds, words, grammar, and meaning. It improves language analysis and sensitivity to nuances in different contexts. Saudi EFL learners likely develop linguistic awareness with extensive exposure to English in school.

This heightened linguistic awareness enables them to assess sentence structure and provide constructive feedback. Given large class sizes, PFB can also help manage instructional workload (Alshammari, 2020). Nonetheless, teacher-centered approaches, prevalent in the Saudi context, may hinder PFB's effectiveness, as instructors may be reluctant to allow students to manage feedback, while students may lack confidence in peers' input.

Attitudes toward PFB have been examined in several studies. Alhomaïdan (2016) investigated the attitudes and beliefs of intermediate college-level Arabic-speaking learners of English toward PFB activities in essay writing. A questionnaire was distributed to 40 male first-year students to elicit their attitudes, opinions, and suggestions on PFB activities. The data revealed that most students had a positive view of the PFB activities and considered them useful, leading to an improvement in their second language (L2) proficiency.

However, the results also showed that some students did not incorporate all their peers' comments when revising their essays. The author suggested that this was due to a lack of trust in their peers' ability to provide accurate feedback.

Nevertheless, the study concluded that most ESL Arabic-speaking students perceived PFB as valuable and helpful in enhancing their writing skills.

Moreover, some studies suggest that gender may influence the effectiveness of PFB. Saba (2015) examined gendered responses to peer authority among Saudi students in an intensive writing course. The results revealed that female Saudi students were more accepting of their peers as authoritative figures than their male counterparts. Additionally, the findings indicated that, irrespective of gender, all participants valued their instructors' feedback over that of their peers. Hence, this study aimed to explore the effectiveness of PFB in enhancing various features of English writing among female Saudi university students.

Examining attitudes toward PFB in Saudi Arabia is crucial for several reasons. First, it provides insights into the effectiveness of PFB activities in enhancing language proficiency and writing skills among Arabic-speaking college-level EFL students. This understanding helps educators tailor strategies to diverse linguistic and cultural settings. Second, exploring female students' perceptions of PFB reveals social dynamics and authority structures within the educational environment, informing the development of inclusive feedback practices. By addressing students' perceptions and concerns, educators can optimize PFB implementation, facilitating meaningful peer interactions and fostering a supportive learning environment.

Additionally, identifying students' perceptions of PFB, its effectiveness in improving writing and language skills, and concerns regarding implementation have practical implications for educators seeking to optimize PFB in their teaching. By addressing these factors, educators can better facilitate meaningful peer interactions and foster a supportive feedback environment that benefits all students. Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding PFB in educational settings and has the potential to inform the design of pedagogical interventions aimed at improving students' writing skills and language proficiency.

The literature on PFB and EFL writing highlights both challenges and opportunities. Saudi students often face difficulties with English writing; yet, PFB has shown considerable promise. Research demonstrates that PFB can yield cognitive, effective, and motivational benefits in various EFL contexts, suggesting its potential efficacy. Furthermore, Saudi learners' linguistic awareness may facilitate engagement in PFB activities. Therefore, implementing PFB in Saudi EFL classrooms requires a nuanced approach considering cultural context, gender dynamics, and existing pedagogical practices while leveraging its benefits for enhancing writing skills and learner engagement.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

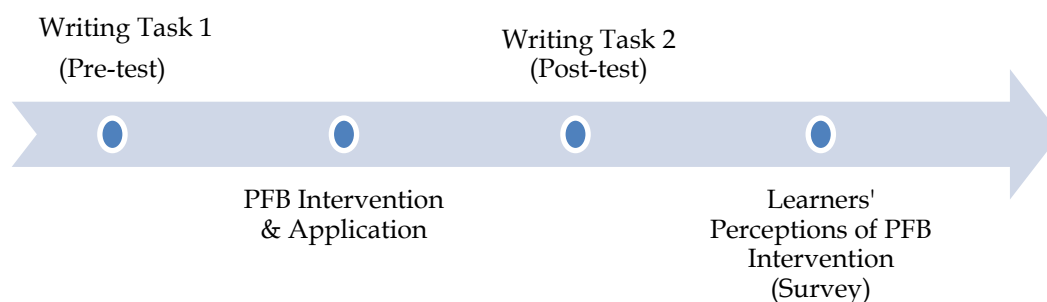
This study employed a mixed quantitative approach to assess the impact of PFB on the overall writing performance of Saudi university students enrolled in first-year EFL pre-intermediate and intermediate courses, and to explore their

perceptions of PFB's effectiveness. The investigation consisted of two distinct phases to address the research questions.

**Phase 1: Quasi-Experimental Design.** A one-group quasi-experimental (single-subject/group) design to determine the effect of the PFB intervention on writing performance (Creswell, 2015). Twenty-eight participants completed an initial narrative essay (Task 1) as a pre-test to establish baseline writing proficiency. They then received structured PFB from classmates (1.5–2 hours) guided by a checklist, focusing on task achievement, grammatical range and accuracy, lexical resources, organization, and mechanics. In the following session, participants completed a comparable essay (Task 2). The difference between Task 1 and Task 2 scores served as the measure of PFB impact (RQ1 and RQ2).

**Phase 2: Cross-Sectional Survey.** A survey design was used to capture students' perceptions of PFB (RQ3). The 28 participants from Phase 1, plus 57 additional first-year EFL students who had undergone the same PFB procedures in their regular classes, completed a 17-item online questionnaire (total N = 85). The larger sample ensured that attitudinal data reflected a broader cohort exposed to the intervention.

Integrating the quasi-experimental results (Phase 1) with the broader attitudinal evidence (Phase 2) enabled the researchers to (a) quantify changes in writing performance attributable to PFB and (b) gauge students' perceptions of the strategy's usefulness across a larger population. Figure 1 summarizes the two-phase design.



**Figure 1: Phases of the study**

### 3.2 Materials

**Writing task.** The writing task consisted of a prompt instructing the students to write a short narrative describing a journey or travel experience. The researchers administered the writing task twice, once before (Task 1, pre-test) and once after the PFB intervention (Task 2, post-test), using a standardized rubric with five criteria: task achievement, grammatical range and accuracy, lexical resources, organization, and mechanics, each scored out of 5 (total 20). To ensure inter-rater reliability, the two researchers independently assessed each task and resolved discrepancies through discussion to reach a consensus score. Additionally, to ensure inter-rater reliability, each researcher assessed each writing task based on

rubric criteria and then compared their scores. In the event of discrepancies between the raters' scores, the researchers engaged in a discussion until a consensus was reached regarding the final score.

**Survey development and validation.** A questionnaire was developed to explore students' perceptions of PFB (RQ3), consisting of 15 substantive items and 2 demographic items (which included students' level and confirmation that they had completed both tasks and the PFB, and were not a part of the results or analysis). An electronic survey was conducted to gather students' perceptions of the application of PFB during the writing process. The 15 substantive items were designed based on a review of literature on PFB and writing pedagogy (Liu & Hansen Edwards, 2018) and aligned with the PFB intervention's constructs: PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience. The questionnaire was divided into three subsections:

- a. PFB as a strategy (items A1-A4), assessing the effectiveness of PFB in supporting students' writing process.
- b. PFB as an activity (items B5- B12), evaluating the practical utility of PFB materials and peer discussions, with items mapped to the rubric criteria.
- c. PFB as an experience (items C13-C15), gauging perceptions of PFB's impact on focus, L2 writing skills, and critical thinking in a higher education context.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in EFL pedagogy and psychometrics, who confirmed item clarity and alignment with the study's constructs. A pilot test was conducted with 10 EFL students (not included in the final sample) to assess item comprehension and response clarity. Feedback from the pilot test led to minor revisions, including rephrasing two items to improve clarity.

For construct validity, the items were designed to align with the theoretical constructions of PFB (strategy, activity, experience) as defined in the literature (Hyland, 2006). While exploration factor analysis was not conducted due to sample size constraints, the expert review and theoretical alignment support the questionnaire's construct validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for the 15 items, yielding a high internal consistency of  $\alpha = .965$ , indicating a reliable instrument.

### 3.3 Participants

The quasi-experimental group (phase 1) consisted of a convenience sample of 28 female EFL learners enrolled in English university-level courses at the intermediate and pre-intermediate levels. This sample size was deemed sufficient for detecting changes in writing performance within a single-group quasi-experimental design, based on previous studies in similar EFL and sociolinguistic contexts (Miao et al., 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

For the survey (phase 2), the sample was expanded to 85 female participants, including the 28 from phase 1 and 57 additional students at the same course

levels who had experienced the PFB intervention. This larger, randomly selected sample enhanced the generalizability of attitudinal findings and allowed for a more nuanced understanding of students' attitudes toward PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience. Participant recruitment followed approval from the institution's ethical review committee, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Writing Task Data Analysis

Phase 1 analyzed five key areas of writing tasks 1 and 2 (pre- and post-tests) according to the following rubric criteria: task achievement (TA), grammatical range and accuracy (GR), lexical resources (LX), organization (ORG), and mechanics (MCH), each scored out of 4 (total score of 20).

To determine the appropriate statistical analysis method, the normality of difference scores (Posttest – Pretest) was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test due to the relatively small sample size ( $N = 28$ ). The test results given in Table 1 indicate that the normality assumption was violated for TA ( $p = .000$ ), GR ( $p = .002$ ), and ORG ( $p = .014$ ). Lexical resources ( $p = .090$ ), mechanics ( $p = .073$ ), and total score ( $p = .073$ ) were closer to normality, but still marginal in distribution. This decision respects the data's distributional characteristics and ensures valid inference.

**Table 1: Shapiro-Wilk test for normality of difference scores**

	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig. (p-value)
TA_Difference	.597	28	.000
GR_Difference	.865	28	.002
LX_Difference	.936	28	.090
ORG_Difference	.904	28	.014
MCH_Difference	.933	28	.073
Total_Difference	.933	28	.073

Based on these results, the nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to assess significant differences in students' writing performance before and after PFB. Pre-test scores established a baseline for participants' writing ability, while post-test scores reflected the impact of the PFB intervention. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test addressed RQ1 and RQ2. Descriptive statistics are summarized below in Table 2, and the Wilcoxon results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the writing task pre- and post-test scores**

Criterion		Mean	N	SD	SE
Task Achievement	Pre-test	3.277	28	0.621	0.117
	Post-test	3.946	28	0.157	0.03
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Pre-test	2.813	28	0.76	0.144
	Post-test	3.196	28	0.843	0.159
Lexical Resources	Pre-test	3.054	28	0.718	0.136
	Post-test	3.857	28	0.267	0.051
Organization	Pre-test	3.429	28	0.68	0.128
	Post-test	3.83	28	0.431	0.081
Mechanics	Pre-test	2.518	28	0.757	0.143
	Post-test	2.884	28	0.525	0.099
Total Score	Pre-test	15.09	28	3.031	0.573
	Post-test	17.714	28	1.415	0.267

Note: N = number of students; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of peer feedback on EFL writing performance across six components. The results, as shown in Table 3, indicate statistically significant improvements in all areas: Task Achievement ( $Z = -4.556$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .86$ ), Grammar ( $Z = -4.445$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .84$ ), Lexical Resource ( $Z = -4.071$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .77$ ), Organization ( $Z = -2.967$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $r = .56$ ), Mechanics ( $Z = -3.159$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $r = .60$ ), and Total Writing Score ( $Z = -4.627$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .87$ ). Overall, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results summarized in Table 3 reveal statistically significant improvements across all criteria and the total score ( $p < .01$  in all cases). These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of PFB in enhancing specific writing dimensions as well as overall performance.

**Table 3: Wilcoxon signed-rank writing task scores**

Variable	Z-value	p-value	Effect Size (r)	Interpretation
Task Achievement	-4.556	<0.000	0.86	Very large effect
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	-4.445	<0.000	0.84	Very large effect
Lexical Resources	-4.071	<0.000	0.77	Large effect
Organization	-2.967	0.003	0.56	Moderate to large effect
Mechanics (MCH)	-3.159	0.002	0.60	Large effect
Total Score	-4.627	<0.000	0.87	Very large effect

#### 4.2 Survey Data Analysis

The survey questions aimed to gauge participants' perspectives on PFB using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree." The scale was used to measure the level of agreement or disagreement with various statements regarding learners' experiences in providing feedback to their peers, as well as receiving it and applying it to their own writing. To ensure the reliability of the instrument and that the questions effectively measured the same underlying construct, the

internal consistency of the survey items was calculated with Cronbach's alpha using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v21). The results of the SPSS analysis revealed that the survey items were highly reliable and consistent, with an alpha value of .96 (Table 4), thus making it a reliable tool for this study.

**Table 4: Reliability and scale statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Mean	Variance	SD	N
.965	15	58.45	268.82	16.40	85

Note: SD = standard error mean, N = number of respondents.

To analyze the results of the survey responses, the meaning of each item was compared against the weighted average of all items (3.76). The weighted average was calculated by dividing the sum of all the means (56.39) by the total number of items (15). The descriptive analysis included the number of respondents per statement and the percentage. According to the data analysis presented in Table 5, students' perceptions were categorized as high or low based on whether they exceeded the calculated weighted average (3.76). The results showed that most respondents strongly believed that PFB strategies provided them with the *opportunity to learn from peers* (M = 3.89) and *strengthen their individual work* (M = 3.78).

Additionally, respondents perceived that the PFB activity helped them *focus on the writing prompts* (M = 3.81), *review and revise for clarity of ideas* (M = 3.81), *expand their vocabulary range* (M = 3.84), and was *beneficial for reviewing and correcting spelling errors* (M = 3.84). Moreover, students felt that the PFB checklist was *helpful in developing their writing drafts* (M = 3.87) and *critically reviewing their own work* (M = 3.80).

On the other hand, the results indicated that participants did not fully recognize the importance of some PFB activities as a learning tool. For example, respondents showed a low perception of the role of *PFB in developing language skills through constructive criticism* (M = 3.69) and *in providing valuable experience for self-learning* (M = 3.53). Additionally, they reported a low perception of PFB's effectiveness in *reviewing and revising off-topic content* (M = 3.72), *reorganizing writing drafts* (M = 3.71), *reviewing grammatical structures* (M = 3.75), *reviewing the use of time expressions and connectives* (M = 3.73), and *focusing on the criteria of the writing rubric* (M = 3.61).

**Table 5: Responses to students' perceptions of peer feedback**

Statements	M	SD	Decision
A1. PFB provides me with the opportunity to learn from peers who are at my level.	3.89	1.32	High Perception
A2. PFB strengthens my own work.	3.78	1.29	High Perception
A3. Peer feedback in the form of constructive criticism helps in developing language skills.	3.69	1.37	Low Perception
A4. PFB was a valuable experience for my own learning.	3.53	1.27	Low Perception
B1. It helped me to focus on writing prompts.	3.81	1.17	High Perception
B2. It helped me review/revise the off-topic content.	3.72	1.31	Low Perception
B3. It helped me reorganize my writing draft.	3.71	1.27	Low Perception
B4. It helped me review/revise the grammatical structures.	3.75	1.29	Low Perception
B5. It helped me review/revise for the clarity of ideas.	3.81	1.18	High Perception
B6. It helped me review/revise the time expressions and connectives.	3.73	1.21	Low Perception
B7. It helped me expand the range of my vocabulary.	3.84	1.33	High Perception
B8. It was beneficial in reviewing/correcting spelling errors.	3.85	1.30	High Perception
C1. The PFB checklist helped me focus on the criteria of the writing rubric.	3.61	1.31	Low Perception
C2. The PFB checklist helped me develop my own writing draft.	3.87	1.34	High Perception
C3. The PFB checklist helped me review my own work critically.	3.80	1.36	High Perception

*Note:* M = mean, SD = standard deviation. Decision - weighted average =  $56.39/15 = 3.76$ .

The results in Table 6 present the analysis of survey items under three computed variables (corresponding to three subsections of the survey) to measure Saudi

students' perceptions of the PFB intervention and its application as a strategy, an activity, and an experience. The average response, represented by a mean score of 3.724 (SD = 1.202) for Variable 1, indicates the overall perspective of PFB applied as a strategy in class. The distribution of scores was negatively skewed (skewness = -1.039), suggesting that most respondents tended to provide lower scores. A kurtosis of .284 indicates a distribution with tails relatively close to a normal distribution.

The mean score for the second variable (PFB as an activity) was 3.776 (SD = 1.118), reflecting students' perspectives on the PFB activity. Similar to the first variable, the distribution was negatively skewed (skewness = -1.100), suggesting a concentration of scores toward the lower end. A kurtosis of .739 indicates a distribution with slightly heavier tails than a normal distribution. Respondents provided a mean score of 3.761 (SD = 1.213) for Variable 3, reflecting their PFB experience. Negative skewness (skewness = -1.030) suggests a leftward skew, indicating a tendency for lower scores. However, a kurtosis of .158 suggests tails similar to a normal distribution.

**Table 6: PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience**

Variable				Statistic	Std. Error
PFB as a Strategy	M			3.724	.130
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		3.464	
			Upper Bound	3.983	
	5% Trimmed Mean			3.804	
	Median			4.000	
	Variance			1.445	
	Std. Deviation			1.202	
	Minimum			1.00	
	Maximum			5.00	
	Range			4.00	
	Interquartile Range			1.75	
	Skewness			-1.039	.261
	Kurtosis			.284	.517
	PFB as an Activity	Mean			3.776
95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound		3.535	
			Upper Bound	4.018	
5% Trimmed Mean				3.863	
Median				4.000	
Variance				1.250	
Std. Deviation				1.118	
Minimum				1.00	
Maximum				5.00	
Range				4.00	
Interquartile Range				1.44	
Skewness				-1.100	.261
Kurtosis				.739	.517
PFB as an Experience		Mean			3.761
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		3.499	
			Upper Bound	4.023	
	5% Trimmed Mean			3.845	

Median	4.000	
Variance	1.473	
Std. Deviation	1.213	
Minimum	1.00	
Maximum	5.00	
Range	4.00	
Interquartile Range	1.67	
Skewness	-1.030	.261
Kurtosis	.158	.517

The correlation coefficient between the three study dimensions (i.e., PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience) was examined to determine whether participants' views on one aspect of PFB were consistent with their views on the other two dimensions, thus revealing the potential response pattern in how students perceived and integrated PFB into their writing practices. Given the negative skewness (Table 6), Spearman's rho was used to explore the correlations between the variables. The Spearman's rho results showed a strong positive correlation between all three PFB dimensions (PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience), indicating cohesiveness and consistency in students' perceptions.

In Table 7, the respective *correlation coefficient* values ( $r_s = .810, .756, .733$ ), indicated a statistically significant positive correlation ( $p \leq .001$ ) between the variables. These strong positive Spearman's correlations suggest that respondents who ranked one aspect of PFB higher also tended to rank the other aspects higher.

**Table 7: Spearman's correlation for PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience**

Spearman's rho		PFB as a Strategy	PFB as an Activity	PFB as an Experience
PFB as a Strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.810**	.733**
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.000	.000
PFB as an Activity	Correlation Coefficient	.810**	1.000	.756**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.000		.000
PFB as an Experience	Correlation Coefficient	.733**	.756**	1.000
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	85	85	85

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

These findings suggest a consistent and robust pattern in students' perspectives regarding PFB. Statistical analyses revealed significant positive correlations among students' perceptions of PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience. This indicates a coherent and favorable association in students' perceptions, indicating that those who view one dimension of PFB positively are likely to hold positive views across the other dimensions.

## 5. Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of PFB in enhancing the English writing performance of pre-intermediate and intermediate EFL learners at a Saudi

university. In response to the first research question—whether PFB improves students' writing proficiency—the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test indicated statistically significant gains in writing performance following the PFB intervention. Total writing scores were improved significantly from pre-test to post-test ( $Z = -4.627$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a large effect size ( $r = .87$ ), suggesting both statistical and practical significance. These findings align with existing research that underscores the efficacy of structured peer engagement in improving EFL writing skills (Bijami et al., 2013; Kuyyogsuy, 2019).

Face-to-face peer interaction emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool in this study, with peer exchange offering students opportunities to reflect critically on both their own and others' writing. Within the Saudi academic context, where educational authority and social dynamics influence classroom interaction, such structured collaboration may enhance learner responsiveness and motivation (Al-Samiri, 2021). While gender-specific analysis was beyond the scope of this study, previous research suggests that Saudi female learners may be particularly receptive to peer and teacher feedback due to sociocultural norms (Saba, 2015).

Research question 2 focused on the specific components of writing most affected by PFB. Statistically significant improvements were observed across all five rubric categories: task achievement ( $Z = -4.556$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .86$ ), grammar ( $Z = -4.445$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .84$ ), lexical resource ( $Z = -4.071$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .77$ ), organization ( $Z = -2.967$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $r = .56$ ), and mechanics ( $Z = -3.159$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $r = .60$ ). The most pronounced gains were noted in task achievement, grammar, and lexical resources, indicating that students became better at addressing writing prompts and using varied vocabulary after engaging in peer review.

These findings align closely with students' self-reported perceptions in the survey, where many indicated that PFB helped them focus on writing prompts, expand their vocabulary, and critically review their own writing. The structured PFB checklist used in this study likely played a critical role in guiding students to attend to specific aspects of writing, particularly benefiting less proficient learners (Cui et al., 2021; Wang, 2014).

Overall, the results suggest that PFB serves as an effective instructional tool when implemented in a structured, collaborative format. The researchers propose that not only did students benefit from receiving peer insights, but also from critically analyzing the works of others. This emphasizes that the reciprocal PFB dynamic encourages students' self-reflection and improves their ability to detect linguistic errors, thus making the act of providing feedback as valuable as receiving it (Gorham et al., 2023). Consequently, PFB in EFL settings can foster both linguistic development and reflective thinking, especially when supported by scaffolds that focus students' attention on concrete writing features.

Survey data were analyzed to answer the third research question regarding Saudi university students' perceptions of PFB as a strategy, activity, and experience. The analysis revealed Saudi EFL learners' nuanced perceptions of the effectiveness of PFB in improving their writing skills. Most respondents had

an overall positive perception of PFB strategies, especially regarding opportunities for peer learning. For instance, participants strongly acknowledged the vital role of engaging in PFB activities in helping them learn from peers and enhance their writing. This is in line with Zhao's (2018) study, which showed that the process of PFB and the negotiations that occurred during revisions refined participants' writing skills.

Similarly, Prompan and Piamsai (2024) examined the impact of PFB on EFL writing in Taiwan and found that learners utilized PFB as a valuable learning tool. By reviewing their peers' writing, they were able to enhance their own drafts, as it improved their metacognitive skills and self-regulation, and made them more aware of their writing strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it is evident that learners gain insights not merely from the feedback they receive but also from the opportunity to engage with and learn from their peers' work.

Furthermore, the survey results indicated that students highly value PFB for helping them focus on the task requirements stated in the writing prompts. This suggests that PFB can act as a task-alignment mechanism. In other words, peer comments appear to sharpen writers' awareness of what counts in an assignment and thus position PFB as a form of "assessment for learning" (Carless, 2006). Results also revealed that PFB offered more than simply error-correction support as it promoted critical reflection on students' work.

This mirrors Lu et al.' (2021) experimental evidence, which showed that PFB outperformed an individual revision checklist, as peers were able to evaluate writing performance, identify issues, and suggest solutions. Other studies have shown that PFB is as influential as instructors' feedback, with the added benefit of increasing learner autonomy (Cui et al., 2021), underscoring its potential to guide the editing and revising of EFL writing.

Conversely, certain aspects of PFB were perceived less positively in the survey. Participants expressed uncertainty about PFB's capacity to develop their language skills and did not view it as a valuable experience for self-learning. This could be due to the variability in proficiency levels. Despite the participants in this study being enrolled in either a pre-intermediate or intermediate-level English course, their proficiency levels varied widely. This disparity would pose challenges for less proficient learners in both effectively delivering, receiving, and implementing feedback, as it is only effective if students can understand and apply it (Li & Herbert, 2023). Language learners with lower proficiency and less developed writing skills may not benefit as much from PFB (Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Therefore, while PFB received mixed perceptions, its impact relied on students' ability to comprehend and utilize it. Cultural factors likely compound this proficiency effect. In Saudi classrooms, teacher-centered norms, high power-distance expectations, and concerns about face-saving can make learners skeptical of peer authority and hesitant to critique their classmates' work (Saba, 2015; Alhomaidan, 2016). Under such conditions, students may equate "expert"

feedback with teacher credentials and, as Alkhalaf and Alhojailan (2024) note, discount peer comments that lack institutional authority.

Similarly, survey respondents demonstrated less favorable perceptions of PFB's role in facilitating the revision and refinement of writing drafts (including content organization, grammatical structures, and linguistic features). These lower ratings suggest potential challenges the students might have faced in effectively addressing these or effectively engaging in the PFB process (Wu et al., 2021). This is a particular concern for students who might not have had access to a thorough PFB discussion or meaningful exchange of feedback, lacked peer collaboration or trust during the process, or undervalued their peers' constructive criticism (Carless, 2012). In collectivist contexts such as Saudi Arabia, maintaining group cohesion can outweigh blunt critique, resulting in polite but vague comments that writers struggle to implement (Hofstede, 1986; Carless, 2006).

Moreover, L2 learners have varying levels of engagement depending on their role, as they tend to be more engaged when providing feedback and less engaged when receiving it (Yan & Tang, 2023), a dynamic that may further dilute uptake. There is also evidence that learners tend to ignore implementing changes in areas where they disagree with the feedback (Li & Herbert, 2023). Therefore, our findings indicate that the impact of PFB hinges on two intersecting conditions: learners' ability to interpret feedback and institutional-cultural readiness for peer-mediated learning. Future research should focus on addressing both skill-based and socio-cultural barriers, so researchers can better harness PFB's documented strengths while mitigating the reservations uncovered in this study.

## **6. Implications**

The implications of this study are significant for educational practitioners and researchers as they highlight positive trends in students' perceptions of PFB strategies, activities, and experiences. These findings emphasize the potential of incorporating PFB methodologies into writing pedagogy, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience. Educators, language teachers, and practitioners can utilize the insights from this study to tailor instructional strategies that increase opportunities for peer interaction and PFB. Additionally, this study contributes to the broader discussion on the effectiveness of PFB, providing a foundation for researchers to explore the dynamics of peer-assisted learning in diverse educational contexts. This, in turn, can inform instructional practices and advance the application of PFB research.

Furthermore, the study suggests that the positive trends identified in students' perceptions of PFB strategies may have broader implications beyond a specific language. The findings imply that incorporating PFB methodologies into writing pedagogy can benefit students across different linguistic and cultural contexts. This is evidenced by the students' enhanced reflective practices and focus on the technical aspects of writing, which increased learners' sense of autonomy.

However, instructors must consider students' varying proficiency levels, as learners with lower proficiency may struggle to effectively give and apply feedback. Additionally, in mixed-ability classrooms, proficiency disparities can be a disadvantage for some students, hindering the overall learning experience. These findings have broad applicability across different languages and educational settings, providing valuable opportunities for educators and researchers to enhance pedagogical practices.

## **7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While this study provides strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of PFB in developing Saudi EFL learners' writing skills, it is vital to consider its limitations. First, the quasi-experimental phase relied on a single intact class (N = 28) drawn from one Saudi university. Although a within-subjects design reduces between-participant variance, the modest sample size restricts statistical power and limits the extent to which results can be extrapolated to other cohorts.

Second, all participants in both the experimental phase and the perception survey were female. Gender homogeneity reflects the single-sex admission policy of the institution but precludes conclusions about male or mixed-gender populations. Third, the absence of a control or comparison group means that improvements cannot be attributed exclusively to the PFB intervention; maturation or concurrent instruction may also have contributed. Additionally, external factors, such as individual differences in writing skills, learning styles, personal characteristics, and prior knowledge, may have influenced the results, affecting participants' sense of engagement in giving and receiving feedback (e.g., Yan & Tang, 2023).

To address these constraints, future studies should (a) recruit larger samples across multiple institutions, (b) include male and mixed-gender cohorts to examine potential gender effects, (c) employ true experimental or matched-control designs—ideally with random assignment—to isolate the unique impact of PFB on writing development, and (d) incorporate qualitative methods to explore learners' trust (or lack thereof) in PFB's efficacy in language development. Longitudinal follow-ups and multi-task assessments would further clarify the durability and scope of PFB benefits.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study investigated the impact of PFB on the writing performance of university-level EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed a significant positive effect of PFB on EFL learners' overall writing skills, as evidenced by improved writing task performance from pre- to post-test. Additionally, survey results revealed that students benefited from PFB, enhancing their learning experiences. Peer collaboration helped students strengthen their work and enhance components of their writing, including task achievement, grammatical accuracy, lexical resources, organization, and mechanics.

Furthermore, exposure to diverse lexical structures during the peer-review process contributed to improvement in their lexical resources. This suggests that

learners benefited from receiving feedback and from critically analyzing their peers' work, reinforcing the multifaceted impact of PFB on writing proficiency. Nevertheless, the survey results also revealed that learners did not perceive PFB as valuable for developing their language skills, suggesting a need for further exploration of PFB applications, interventions, and methods for delivering constructive feedback. The study's findings underscore the importance of training students in effective feedback practices—both in providing and receiving feedback—where educators can play a crucial role.

## 9. Acknowledgment

This work was funded by the University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, under grant No. UJ-23-SHR-5. The authors, therefore, acknowledge with thanks the University of Jeddah for its technical and financial support.

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