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DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING SKILLS THROUGH GUIDED PEER FEEDBACK IN EFL INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

Developing argumentative writing skills is an important component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in higher education. However, students may experience difficulties in formulating clear claims, supporting arguments with relevant evidence, organizing ideas coherently, and revising their texts effectively. This article examines the methodological potential of guided peer feedback as an approach to developing university students' argumentative writing skills. The study adopts a focused narrative review of relevant scholarly literature and employs critical analysis, comparative analysis, thematic synthesis, and methodological modelling. Previous research indicates that peer feedback can contribute to writing development, particularly when learners receive explicit assessment criteria, structured instructions, appropriate training, and opportunities to revise their texts. Based on the synthesis of these findings, the article proposes a five-stage methodological model comprising diagnostic assessment, initial drafting, guided peer feedback, text revision, and reflective self-assessment. A preliminary assessment rubric covering thesis clarity, quality of argumentation, logical organization, treatment of counterarguments, and linguistic accuracy is also presented. The proposed model offers a practical framework for integrating peer feedback into EFL writing instruction. Nevertheless, its effectiveness in the local higher education context requires further empirical investigation through a controlled classroom study.

Keywords: EFL instruction, argumentative writing, peer feedback, academic writing, formative assessment, writing revision, self-assessment, methodological model.

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Introduction

In the context of globalization and expanding international academic cooperation, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become an essential competence in higher education. In particular, students need to be able to express their viewpoints, justify claims, evaluate alternative perspectives, and formulate logically supported conclusions. These abilities are closely associated with argumentative writing, which plays an important role in academic communication.

Argumentative writing requires learners to develop and communicate a position on a particular issue, support that position with relevant evidence, acknowledge alternative viewpoints, and draw an appropriate conclusion. It therefore involves more than grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge. Students must also develop the ability to organize ideas logically, select relevant examples, establish relationships between claims and evidence, and consider the expectations of their intended readers. Consequently, effective instruction in argumentative writing should address both the quality of the final text and the processes through which that text is created and improved.

Feedback is widely recognized as an important component of second-language writing instruction. Hyland and Hyland examined different forms of feedback in second-language writing, including teacher comments, peer responses, and computer-mediated feedback. Their review highlights the central role of feedback in process-oriented writing instruction while also drawing attention to the difficulties associated with ensuring that feedback contributes meaningfully to learners' development.

Peer feedback is particularly relevant because it requires students to engage actively with written texts rather than remain passive recipients of teacher corrections. When students review their classmates' work, they must identify strengths and weaknesses, interpret assessment criteria, and formulate suggestions for improvement. This process may also encourage them to reconsider the structure and clarity of their own writing.

Evidence supporting the educational potential of peer feedback is provided by Vuogan and Li (2023), whose meta-analysis synthesized 26 empirical studies on second-language writing. The authors reported a significant positive overall effect of peer feedback on writing performance (d = 0.73, 95% confidence interval [0.54, 0.92]). Their findings also indicated stronger effects on revisions than on new compositions and greater effects on content than on linguistic aspects such as vocabulary and

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grammar. These results suggest that peer feedback can make a meaningful contribution to writing development, although its effects may vary according to the task, instructional conditions, and type of feedback provided.

Further evidence is offered by Wei and Liu, who systematically reviewed 60 studies published between 2014 and 2024. Their review identified cognitive, behavioural, affective, social, and metacognitive benefits associated with peer feedback in academic writing. At the same time, the authors identified challenges related to feedback providers, recipients, and the learning environment. In particular, students may have difficulty providing constructive comments, lack confidence in evaluating their peers' work, or experience interpersonal concerns when offering criticism.

Research on online peer feedback also emphasizes the importance of instructional support. Liang et al. in a systematic review of 24 empirical studies in higher education, identified structured guidance, learner training, a formative assessment orientation, and multiple opportunities for revision as important principles for implementing online peer feedback effectively. Although their review specifically addressed online feedback, these principles are also relevant to classroom-based peer review.

The relationship between peer feedback and other forms of feedback has also attracted scholarly attention. Liu investigated peer and machine feedback in the revision of argumentative essays written by Chinese university EFL learners. The findings indicated that peer feedback primarily addressed content-related issues, whereas machine feedback focused more on non-content errors. This distinction suggests that different feedback sources may serve complementary functions in writing instruction.

More recent research by Lira Lorca et al. examined structured formative peer feedback and self-assessment among secondary-school students learning English as a foreign language. Their intervention study found improvements in argumentative writing quality in both feedback groups, while the peer-feedback group outperformed the control groups in the post-test. Follow-up results suggested that learning was best maintained in the self-assessment group. Although this study involved school students rather than university learners, it provides further support for examining peer feedback and self-assessment as related components of writing instruction.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the potential value of peer feedback while highlighting the need for clear methodological procedures. Simply asking students to exchange essays and identify errors does not necessarily result in meaningful learning.

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Students need explicit criteria, practical guidance, opportunities to discuss suggestions, and sufficient time to revise their writing.

Accordingly, the methodological problem addressed in this article concerns the design of a structured approach that connects feedback provision, feedback interpretation, text revision, and reflective assessment within a coherent instructional sequence.

The aim of the study is to develop a theoretically grounded methodological model for improving university students' argumentative writing skills through guided peer feedback in EFL instruction. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the methodological foundations of argumentative writing and peer feedback in EFL instruction.
2. To synthesize relevant research findings concerning the benefits and challenges of peer feedback.
3. To design a staged instructional model integrating peer feedback, text revision, and reflective self-assessment.
4. To propose assessment criteria and practical classroom activities for implementing the model.

The following research questions guide the analysis:

1. What pedagogical opportunities does guided peer feedback offer for developing argumentative writing skills?
2. What methodological conditions are necessary for implementing peer feedback effectively?
3. What criteria can be used to assess changes in the quality of students' argumentative writing?

The practical significance of the study lies in the proposed instructional model, assessment rubric, and feedback activities, which can be adapted for university-level EFL writing courses.

Methods

Research design

This study adopts a theoretical and methodological research design based on a focused narrative review of scholarly literature and the development of an instructional model. It does not report a new classroom experiment or original student-performance data.

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Instead, the proposed model is derived from the synthesis of published research and methodological reasoning.

The selected literature addresses peer feedback, second-language writing, formative assessment, revision processes, academic writing, and argumentative text production. Particular attention was given to studies that examine the effects of peer feedback, the challenges encountered during implementation, and the instructional conditions associated with productive feedback practices.

The analysis incorporated the work of Hyland and Hyland, Vuogan and Li, Wei and Liu, Liang et al., Liu, and Lira Lorca et al. These publications provide complementary perspectives on feedback in second-language writing, academic writing development, technology-mediated feedback, and the relationship between peer feedback and self-assessment.

The literature was selected purposively according to its relevance to the research questions and its contribution to understanding the pedagogical and methodological dimensions of feedback. The present article is not intended to constitute a fully systematic literature review because the search and screening process was not conducted according to a documented systematic-review protocol.

Research methods Four analytical methods were employed.

Critical literature analysis. This method was used to identify the principal benefits, limitations, and implementation requirements associated with peer feedback in second-language writing instruction.

Comparative analysis. Findings from the selected studies were compared with respect to feedback sources, writing outcomes, revision practices, assessment procedures, and learner-related challenges.

Thematic synthesis. Recurring methodological principles were grouped into four main categories: the clarification of assessment criteria, preparation of feedback providers, organization of constructive feedback, and integration of feedback into subsequent revision and reflection.

Methodological modelling. The findings from the literature were used to design a five-stage instructional model. The model specifies the learning objectives, sequence of classroom activities, responsibilities of participants, assessment criteria, and expected instructional outcomes.

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The central analytical principle was that peer feedback should be evaluated not merely by whether students exchange comments, but by whether the process supports meaningful improvement in the content, organization, argumentation, and linguistic quality of written texts.

Analytical framework

The proposed model was developed around three interconnected dimensions of writing instruction.

The first dimension concerns the quality of the written product, including thesis clarity, the relevance of supporting evidence, logical organization, treatment of counterarguments, and linguistic accuracy.

The second dimension concerns the feedback process, including the ability to identify textual strengths and weaknesses, formulate specific suggestions, and provide explanations supported by assessment criteria.

The third-dimension concerns learner reflection and revision, including the ability to interpret feedback critically, decide which suggestions to adopt, make appropriate changes, and assess progress between drafts.

Integrating these dimensions provides a basis for treating argumentative writing as both a communicative product and a developmental process.

Results

Pedagogical potential of peer feedback in argumentative writing

The synthesis of the selected literature indicates that guided peer feedback can support argumentative writing development through several interconnected mechanisms.

First, peer feedback encourages students to consider their writing from the reader's perspective. When reviewing another student's essay, learners may recognize unclear claims, unsupported arguments, or weak transitions that they would not readily identify in their own texts. This experience can help them become more aware of the expectations associated with effective academic argumentation.

Second, peer feedback can strengthen students' understanding of assessment criteria. By applying criteria to actual texts, learners gain opportunities to distinguish between a clearly formulated thesis and a vague statement, between relevant evidence and unsupported opinion, and between logically connected paragraphs and disconnected ideas.

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Third, peer feedback can create opportunities for purposeful revision. Vuogan and Li found that peer feedback had greater effects on revisions than on new compositions. This finding supports the inclusion of a distinct revision stage in the proposed model rather than treating feedback as the final activity of a writing lesson.

Fourth, the process may contribute to learner autonomy. Students who participate regularly in reviewing and revising texts can develop a greater understanding of their writing strengths and weaknesses and become more capable of making informed decisions about their own work.

Nevertheless, the literature also identifies several limitations. Students may focus excessively on grammar and spelling while overlooking the quality of argumentation. They may provide vague comments, hesitate to criticize classmates, or accept suggestions without evaluating their accuracy. In addition, some learners may be reluctant to revise their texts or may not understand how a particular comment should be translated into a practical improvement.

These limitations indicate that peer feedback should be taught as a specific academic skill. Students require explicit instructions, structured assessment criteria, appropriate language for giving comments, and opportunities to discuss and revise the feedback they receive.

Table 1 summarizes the principal methodological implications of the selected studies.

Table 1. Research-based implications for implementing peer feedback

Study	Main contribution	Methodological implication
Hyland and Hyland (2006)	Reviews different forms of feedback in second-language writing instruction.	Peer feedback should complement rather than automatically replace teacher feedback.
Vuogan and Li (2023)	Meta-analysis of 26 empirical studies indicates a positive overall effect on L2 writing.	Revision should be an explicit component of feedback-based instruction.
Wei and Liu (2024)	Systematic review identifies cognitive, behavioural, affective, social, and metacognitive benefits, alongside implementation challenges.	Feedback providers need preparation, clear criteria, and structured procedures.
Liang et al. (2025)	Systematic review of 24 studies on online peer feedback in higher education.	Guided feedback, learner training, formative assessment, and repeated revision are important design principles.
Liu (2021)	Examines peer and machine feedback in university students' argumentative essay revisions.	Content-related and language-related feedback may serve complementary functions.
Lira Lorca et al. (2026)	Examines structured peer feedback and self-assessment in secondary-school EFL argumentative writing.	Peer feedback should be considered alongside reflective self-assessment, while accounting for differences between educational contexts.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the selected literature.

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A five-stage methodological model

Based on the literature synthesis, this article proposes a five-stage model for developing argumentative writing skills through guided peer feedback. The model integrates diagnostic assessment, initial drafting, structured peer review, text revision, and reflective self-assessment.

Stage 1. Diagnostic assessment and familiarization with criteria

At the initial stage, students independently write an argumentative text on a topic appropriate to their language proficiency and academic experience. The purpose is to establish a baseline for subsequent assessment.

The teacher introduces the key features of an argumentative essay, including the identification of an issue, formulation of a thesis, presentation of supporting arguments, consideration of alternative viewpoints, and development of a conclusion. Students are also introduced to the assessment rubric and the principles of constructive feedback. The teacher explains the difference between criticizing a person and evaluating a particular feature of a written text.

For example, a comment such as "You are not good at argumentation" should be replaced with a text-focused observation such as "The second argument would be more convincing if it were supported by a relevant example."

Model essays can be used to demonstrate effective thesis statements, coherent paragraph development, appropriate supporting evidence, and common weaknesses in argumentative writing.

Expected outcome: students understand the basic structure of argumentative writing and the criteria they will use when evaluating their own and their peers' texts.

Stage 2. Production of the initial draft

At this stage, students produce the first draft of an argumentative essay based on a teacher-selected topic.

For example: *"Should university students be required to attend all lectures?"*

This topic provides opportunities to express different viewpoints, formulate a position, develop supporting arguments, consider possible objections, and draw a conclusion.

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Students should be encouraged to plan their arguments before drafting. A simple planning framework may include the following elements:

- The issue to be discussed.
- The writer's main position or thesis.
- Two or three supporting arguments.
- A possible counterargument and response.
- The principal conclusion.

Once the first draft has been completed, students exchange texts with their assigned partners. The teacher checks that students understand the task and can apply the assessment criteria before the review process begins. **Expected outcome:** students produce an initial argumentative text that can be reviewed and improved through structured feedback.

Stage 3. Guided peer feedback

Guided peer feedback is the central component of the proposed model. Students review their partners' essays using a common rubric and a structured feedback sheet. The review process follows four steps:

1. Identify a specific strength in the text.
2. Locate an unclear, insufficiently supported, or logically weak point.
3. Ask a relevant question or explain why the identified issue may affect the reader's understanding.
4. Offer a practical suggestion for improvement.

For example, a general comment such as "Your essay is unclear" provides little guidance. A more constructive alternative is: *"Your main position is clear, but the second argument needs a specific example to make it more convincing."*

The second comment identifies both an effective feature and a particular area for improvement. It also gives the writer a concrete direction for revision.

Students should be encouraged to distinguish between **higher-order concerns** and **lower-order concerns**. Higher-order concerns include the clarity of the thesis, relevance of evidence, logical organization, and adequacy of counterarguments. Lower-order concerns include grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

For developing writers, higher-order concerns should generally be addressed before detailed language editing. However, significant language problems that prevent the reader from understanding an argument should also be identified. The teacher

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monitors the process and provides additional guidance when students encounter difficulties or propose inaccurate corrections.

Expected outcome: students learn to evaluate written arguments systematically and provide specific, constructive, criteria-based comments.

Stage 4. Revision of the argumentative text

After receiving peer feedback, students examine the comments and decide which changes would improve their essays. They are not required to accept every suggestion automatically. Instead, they should evaluate whether each recommendation is relevant, accurate, and consistent with their intended argument.

During revision, students consider the following questions: Is the thesis statement clear and consistently maintained? Is each major argument supported by relevant evidence or an appropriate example? Have alternative viewpoints been acknowledged and addressed? Are the relationships between paragraphs logical and explicit? Does the conclusion follow from the arguments presented? Are vocabulary and grammatical structures appropriate for the intended meaning?

Students then prepare a revised draft. Where necessary, the teacher intervenes to clarify misunderstandings, correct inaccurate language advice, or address substantial weaknesses in argumentation.

An effective revision process should make the relationship between feedback and textual change visible. Students may briefly record the comments they accepted, modified, or rejected and explain their decision.

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