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The Effectiveness of Blended Feedback in EFL Learners' Essay Writing and Their Perceptions

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Abstract

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction in cognitive development, including second language acquisition. Grounded in this theory, the present quasi-experimental study investigates the effectiveness of the Blended Feedback Approach in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' essay-writing skills. Sixty university students were divided into two groups: an experimental group receiving BFA, which integrated online peer reviews, teacher feedback, and iterative revisions, and a control group receiving traditional teacher feedback. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted to evaluate improvements in coherence, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, and overall structure. Additionally, end-of-semester interviews captured learners' perceptions of the feedback approach. Results indicated that the experimental group showed significantly greater improvements in writing proficiency, critical thinking, and collaboration skills than the control group. Moreover, BFA was found to reduce writing anxiety and foster student engagement. These findings suggest that BFA offers valuable enhancements to feedback methods, reinforcing the role of integrated feedback in language education and providing insights for future pedagogical practices.

Keywords: blended feedback approach (BFA), EFL writing, sociocultural theory, peer feedback, teacher feedback

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1. Introduction

With the worldwide growth of globalization, mastery of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is increasingly seen as essential for international communication and competitiveness, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries like Iran. Despite a robust array of English courses offered at Iranian high schools and universities, there remains a notable disparity between the expected and actual English writing skills of students, a gap that significantly impacts their academic and professional prospects (Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012; Mehrpour & Mirsanjari, 2016). This discrepancy underscores the urgent need for innovative instructional strategies that more effectively engage learners and improve their writing competencies.

Recent scholarship has advocated a multidimensional approach to EFL instruction that intertwines textual, cognitive, and social learning dimensions to enhance writing skills. However, these strategies often fail to bridge the proficiency gap, indicating a misalignment between traditional teaching methods and the real-world writing needs of students (Alsowat, 2022; Jonsson, 2013; Rababah & Al-Shboul, 2023; Tai et al., 2015). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) suggests a solution through the learners' engagement within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), advocating learning processes scaffolded by more knowledgeable others, which could be effectively implemented through feedback mechanisms.

Empirical research highlights the pivotal role of feedback in writing instruction. Integrating peer and teacher feedback, particularly when mediated through digital platforms, has shown significant potential to enhance EFL learning outcomes. These feedback processes can foster richer cognitive, affective, social, and linguistic development (Ekholm et al., 2015; Gamlem & Smith, 2013; Marrs, 2016; Saragih et al., 2022; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Moreover, the increasing use of technology in feedback mechanisms suggests new avenues for enhancing engagement and learning efficiency (Hewett & Thonus, 2019; Liu, 2012; Saeed et al., 2018; Thurston et al., 2009).

The Blended Feedback Approach (BFA), which amalgamates peer and teacher feedback supported by digital tools, represents a pivotal innovation in addressing the educational challenges identified. This approach aligns with the global standards of communication expected of learners and leverages modern technological capabilities alongside established pedagogical practices to uniquely contribute to the EFL educational discourse, enhancing learner engagement and writing proficiency (Hyland, 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Lee, 2007). By facilitating interaction not only within the confines of physical classrooms but also extending into digital spaces, BFA enriches the educational experience and potentially broadens the socio-cultural interactions crucial for language acquisition. This theoretical and practical integration sets the stage for the study presented in this paper, which explores the efficacy and perception of BFA among EFL learners in an Iranian university setting.

2. Literature Review

Enhancing writing proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through innovative instructional strategies is a critical field of study in language education. Central to these strategies is integrating feedback mechanisms, which have been shown to significantly impact learners' linguistic and cognitive development. Existing literature extensively documents the positive effects of peer and teacher feedback within EFL contexts, often mediated through digital platforms that cater to the evolving dynamics of modern educational environments (Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2007).

Peer feedback plays a pivotal role in language learning, fostering an engaging, learner-centered educational environment. The integration of feedback mechanisms, particularly when combining direct and indirect corrective feedback, leads to notable improvements in the writing skills of EFL learners (Zareee & Khalili, 2017). It enhances critical thinking, improves language accuracy, and builds learner autonomy (Goldstein, 2005; Storch, 2005). Studies by Ferris (2018) and Bitchener (2008) have specifically highlighted how feedback can transform EFL writing, promoting significant gains in both grammatical precision and overall writing quality. These studies suggest that feedback should not only be corrective but also constructive, guiding learners toward self-regulation and independent learning.

However, the integration of digital tools in feedback delivery has introduced new complexities and opportunities. Digital platforms facilitate immediate and accessible feedback, which is essential for effective learning cycles (Hewett & Thonus, 2019; Saeed et al., 2018). Recent advancements have enabled more personalized and adaptive feedback

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mechanisms, which are crucial for addressing individual learner needs within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as postulated by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Despite these advancements, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the comprehensive understanding of how digital feedback influences learner engagement and writing proficiency in EFL settings, particularly in the context of non-native English-speaking countries like Iran (Carless & Boud, 2018; Chalmers et al., 2018). Moreover, while peer and teacher feedback are well-studied, the combined impact of these feedback types through a Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) has not been sufficiently explored, especially in terms of long-term writing development and the integration of feedback within digital environments (Ahmed et al., 2023; Shang, 2022).

This study aims to fill these research gaps by examining how a BFA influences EFL learners' perceptions of feedback and its effectiveness in enhancing their writing skills. The theoretical foundation of this research is built upon social constructivist principles, which argue that learning is inherently a social process mediated by cultural and communicative tools (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The application of BFA potentially represents a significant advancement in feedback practices, promoting a more nuanced and scaffolded learning process that could bridge the current gaps in traditional feedback mechanisms.

In conclusion, the literature supports the transformative potential of feedback in EFL settings but also highlights the need for studies that integrate these elements within technologically enriched environments. This research contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence on the efficacy of BFA, thereby helping to optimize feedback mechanisms for better learner outcomes in global educational contexts. Therefore, this study answers two main research questions, with the second one including three sub-research questions:

1. How does the implementation of the Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) impact learners' essay writing skills?
2. How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of the Blended Feedback Approach in their essay writing?

2.1. How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of peer feedback in their essay writing?
2.2. How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of teacher feedback in their essay writing?
2.3. How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of online feedback in their essay writing?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of this quasi-experimental study, selected through the convenience sampling method, consisted of 100 EFL learners enrolled in an advanced writing course at a public university in Iran. All the participants were native speakers of Persian. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT), a standardized English placement test, was used to homogenize them. Based on the results of this test, they were divided into lower and higher proficiency groups. The higher proficiency group was then divided into two groups: an experimental group (n = 30) and a control group (n = 30). The experimental group received instruction through the Blended Feedback Approach, which integrated peer feedback, teacher feedback, and digital platforms for reviewing and revising essays. In contrast, the control group received traditional teacher-centered feedback without peer interaction or the use of digital platforms. This allowed the study to compare the effects of the BFA with more conventional feedback methods.

Demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and prior writing experience, were collected at the start of the study to control for any confounding variables that might influence the results. The two groups were balanced in terms of these demographic factors to minimize potential bias. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining informed consent from all the participants before the study began. Anonymity and confidentiality of the students' data were maintained throughout the research. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research

3.2 Instruments

This study employed various instruments to gather the required data:

3.2.1 Structured Feedback Forms

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Standardized forms (Horkoff, 2021) facilitated peer and teacher feedback, targeting key areas such as content clarity, language accuracy, and essay organization to enhance writing skills.

3.2.2 Digital Feedback Platform

Participants, including both teachers and students, utilized Telegram and WhatsApp to share writing drafts and exchange peer and teacher feedback. These platforms facilitated all essay-related interactions, enabling real-time editing and tracking of revision histories. This functionality allowed for a detailed analysis of the participants' writing progress and changes over time.

3.2.3 Writing Assessments

Writing assessments were used at the beginning and end of the semester to establish baseline and post-intervention skill levels. These tasks were evaluated using a detailed rubric adapted from internationally validated rubrics, such as those used by IELTS and TOEFL, which have been extensively tested and proven reliable for assessing writing in educational contexts. Each section was evaluated against a rubric that rated coherence, cohesion, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and overall structure on a scale from 1 to 5. Before full implementation, the rubric was piloted with a small group of 20 students to ensure clarity and relevance. The pilot confirmed that the rubric effectively captured students' writing progress, ensuring its applicability and enhancing the reliability of the assessment.

3.2.4 Questionnaire

A post-intervention questionnaire was administered at the end of the course to capture the students' perceptions of their overall experience of essay writing during the course and their attitudes toward the usefulness of the feedback they received. The questionnaire was developed by adapting validated items from previous studies on students' experiences with reflective writing and teacher feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Modifications were made to suit the specific context of this study, ensuring relevance to the course's objectives. The adapted questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small sample of students to check for clarity and reliability. The validation process included expert reviews and analysis of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, confirming the tool's reliability in measuring students' perceptions of feedback effectiveness (Brown, 2014).

3.2.5 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' experiences with the Blended Feedback Approach. These discussions encouraged participants to reflect on the feedback process, particularly regarding their engagement with peer and teacher feedback. The questions were designed based on the study's objectives, focusing on students' perceptions of feedback effectiveness, their interaction with digital platforms, and the impact of feedback on their writing development.

3.3 Data Collection and Intervention Procedure

Before the intervention began, the students were asked to write an essay to determine their initial skill levels as mentioned before. However, the intervention procedure included several key phases:

3.3.1 Initial Drafting and Peer Feedback

Participants began by drafting essays, which served as the basis for peer feedback. The peer feedback was structured around a standardized form (developed by Horkoff, 2021) focusing on clarity, grammar, vocabulary, and organizational structure of the essays. Peers used the digital platform for direct, annotated feedback on the essays.

3.3.2 Teacher Feedback in Two Phases

The first phase of teacher feedback addressed grammar, mechanics, and content development providing annotations for correction and suggestions for enhancing arguments. The second phase focused on the essays' argumentative structure, style, and coherence, offering critical insights into improving the logical flow and formal quality of the writing. Both phases utilized the digital platform's track changes and commenting features for clarity and integration.

3.3.3 Participants' Iterative Revisions

Leveraging feedback from both peers and teachers, students revised their essays iteratively to refine their arguments and enhance their writing style. The final drafts were submitted via the same platform, marking the culmination of the

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feedback and revision process. At the end of the intervention, the students were asked again to write an essay to determine if the treatment was effective in improving their writing skills. They were also asked to fill out a questionnaire and participate in a focus group interview to examine their perception of the BFA.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

As far as quantitative analysis is concerned, the essay scores underwent statistical analyses including descriptive statistics and Paired-samples t-tests, using SPSS Version 27, to analyze possible improvement from pre to post interventions. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize the questionnaire responses, providing insights into the participants' perceptions of feedback efficiency.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

As for the qualitative data, the focus group transcripts underwent thematic analysis, using NVivo, to extract themes regarding participants' perceptions of BFA. This process involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Initially, the transcripts were coded to capture key insights into participants' perceptions of the Blended Feedback Approach. The inter-coder reliability was established by comparing the codes with those of another coder to check for any inconsistencies. Discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved through consensus, and a third coder was consulted if needed.

4. Results

4.1 Addressing RQ1: How does the implementation of the blended feedback approach (BFA) impact learners' essay writing skills?

To examine the effect of the BFA on the students' writing performance, they were assessed on a pre and post-test essay. The results of the Paired samples t-test indicated that the experimental group, which received blended feedback, showed significantly greater improvements in all areas assessed (coherence, cohesion, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and overall structure) compared to the control group, which received only traditional teacher feedback. However, due to space limitations, we will only present the overall performance result:

Table 1. Paired-sample t-test results showing the difference between the pre and post-test essay writing performances of the experimental and control groups

Measure	Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	p-value
Coherence and Cohesion	Experimental	3.73	4.28	0.71	0.13	< 0.001
	Control	3.67	3.90	0.74	0.14	0.045
Grammatical Accuracy	Experimental	3.50	4.30	0.64	0.11	< 0.001
	Control	3.43	3.70	0.68	0.12	0.058
Vocabulary Usage	Experimental	3.33	4.13	0.78	0.14	< 0.001
	Control	3.37	3.65	0.80	0.15	0.080
Overall Structure	Experimental	3.67	4.13	0.78	0.14	< 0.001
	Control	3.63	3.80	0.81	0.15	0.065

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As Table 1 indicates, the experimental group displayed a clear enhancement in their ability to construct well-organized, coherent paragraphs with better grammatical accuracy and richer vocabulary compared to the control group. This improvement is statistically significant, suggesting that the BFA has a substantial impact on students' writing skills, far exceeding the gains observed in the control group. These results align with existing literature on feedback interventions, further supporting the role of interactive and scaffolded feedback mechanisms in enhancing writing proficiency.

4.2 Addressing RQ2: How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of the Blended Feedback Approach in their essay writing?

The perceptions of EFL university students regarding the effectiveness of the Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) in essay writing are shaped by the integration of peer, teacher, and online feedback, each bringing distinct advantages and challenges to the feedback process. The effectiveness of BFA can be viewed through three key aspects: peer feedback, teacher feedback, and online feedback.

4.3 Addressing RQ 2.1: How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of peer feedback in their essay writing?

This section presents the detailed results concerning EFL university students' perceptions of the effectiveness of peer feedback in their essay writing. Supported by quantitative data and enriched with qualitative insights from participants, the results identify both the perceived benefits and challenges of peer feedback.

4.4 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire responses revealed a generally positive perception of peer feedback. The quantitative data showed that a majority of students (76%) found peer feedback to be beneficial in improving their writing skills. Specific areas of improvement included:

- **Writing development**: 82% of students agreed that peer feedback helped them identify areas for improvement in their writing.
- **Language accuracy**: 68% reported that peer feedback enhanced their grammatical accuracy.
- **Confidence and engagement**: 73% felt that providing feedback to peers boosted their confidence and encouraged them to engage more actively in the writing process.

Students also acknowledged several challenges:

- **Time constraints**: 58% of respondents noted that the peer review process was time-consuming.
- **Peer expertise**: 45% expressed concerns over the accuracy of feedback due to varying levels of peer knowledge.

4.5 Focus Group Interview Results

In the focus group interviews, students elaborated on these quantitative findings, offering deeper insights into their experiences with peer feedback. Common themes emerged:

- **Improvement in critical thinking**: Participants appreciated the multiple perspectives they gained from peer feedback. One student remarked, "It's like having several tutors. You get to see your work from different angles."
- **Social and collaborative benefits**: Several students highlighted the collaborative nature of peer feedback, mentioning that it created a supportive environment that reduced writing anxiety. A participant shared, "Working with peers made the feedback process less intimidating and more collaborative."
- **Challenges with feedback quality**: Some students voiced concerns over receiving inaccurate or unhelpful feedback from peers who might not fully understand the assignment. As one participant put it, "Sometimes, the feedback didn't really help because my peer misunderstood the points."

Table 2 summarizes the key findings based on the peer feedback from EFL learners, highlighting both advantages and challenges.

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Table 2. Perceived advantages and disadvantages of peer feedback

Category	Advantages	Challenges
Improvement and Growth	Provides fresh perspectives and new ideas; Identifies areas for improvement; Enhances skill development	Time-consuming to review and implement feedback
Linguistic Enhancement	Facilitates grammatical corrections and structural improvements; Enriches vocabulary; Increases awareness of language use	Inadequate peer knowledge can lead to incorrect feedback; Overemphasis on grammar can overshadow content
Collaborative Learning	Reduces writing anxiety; Encourages group cooperation; Promotes a sense of community	Differences in skill levels can hinder effective feedback; Potential for interpersonal conflicts
Motivation and Engagement	Encourages attention to detail; Motivates deeper engagement; Fosters a growth mindset	Excessive criticism can demotivate; Negative reactions to feedback can reduce participation
Revision and Skill Development	Provides clear revision directions; Aids critical writing skills; Supports learning of revision strategies	Dependency on peer feedback may limit independent learning; Variability in feedback quality

These findings align with and expand upon existing literature that emphasizes the role of peer feedback in enhancing linguistic skills, encouraging active learning, and improving writing proficiency within the sociocultural framework proposed by Vygotsky. The benefits of peer feedback in fostering a collaborative learning environment and its impact on motivation and engagement resonate with the theories of social learning and constructivism (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Conversely, the challenges highlight the necessity for structured, well-guided peer feedback mechanisms to avoid potential pitfalls such as inaccurate feedback and demotivation.

By integrating these findings with the broader theoretical framework, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the impact of peer feedback in EFL contexts, providing valuable insights for educators aiming to optimize feedback practices in writing instruction.

4.6 Addressing RQ 2.2: How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of teacher feedback in their essay writing?

EFL university students' perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher feedback in their essay writing were gathered through both a questionnaire and focus group interviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. The data highlights the significant role of teacher feedback in enhancing students' writing skills, covering aspects such as grammar, content, structure, and stylistic elements.

4.7 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire data showed overwhelmingly positive responses to teacher feedback. Approximately 85% of students agreed that teacher feedback was particularly valuable in improving the structure and coherence of their essays, while 78% found that it significantly helped refine their grammatical accuracy. Specific areas highlighted by students included:

- **Detailed error identification**: Students appreciated the comprehensive nature of teacher feedback, which covered everything from grammatical issues to content development. One student noted, "The feedback was really thorough, helping me identify even the smallest mistakes that I would have overlooked myself."
- **Personalized guidance**: Around 72% of the students felt that the feedback was tailored to their individual writing needs, which helped them focus on areas where they needed improvement the most.

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However, 20% of respondents expressed concerns about the time-consuming nature of going through detailed teacher feedback, and 15% mentioned that the overly critical tone in some feedback could be demotivating. Table 3 below summarizes the findings.

Table 3. Summary of questionnaire results for teacher feedback

Area of Feedback	Percentage of Positive Responses	Key Insights
Improvement in Structure and Coherence	85%	Most students found that teacher feedback significantly helped improve the structural coherence of their essays.
Enhancement of Grammatical Accuracy	78%	Students reported that teacher feedback was especially valuable for correcting grammatical errors.
Tailored/Personalized Feedback	72%	Many students appreciated the personalized nature of feedback, which addressed individual writing needs.
Time-Consuming Nature	20% (concerned)	Some students expressed concerns about how time-consuming it was to go through detailed teacher feedback.
Overly Critical Tone	15% (concerned)	A small percentage of students felt that the feedback was too critical, which at times was demotivating.

4.8 Focus Group Interview Results

In the focus group interviews, students provided deeper insights into their perceptions of teacher feedback. Several key themes emerged:

- **Instructor expertise**: Many students praised the depth and precision of the teacher's feedback, attributing their improved writing skills to the teacher's expert understanding of academic writing. One participant remarked, "The teacher's comments were so specific that I could see how I could elevate my work to an academic level I hadn't reached before."
- **Impact on writing development**: Students valued how the teacher's feedback encouraged them to improve not only their grammar and vocabulary but also their argumentative structure and critical thinking. A student said, "The feedback pushed me to think more critically about how I structure my arguments, which has made my writing stronger overall."
- **Personal engagement and interaction**: Despite the generally positive reception, some students expressed the need for more dialogue and interaction within the feedback process. One participant noted, "I felt that the feedback was mostly one-way. I would have liked more opportunity to discuss the comments with the teacher."

The qualitative data from the interviews also revealed that some students were concerned about the overly hierarchical nature of teacher feedback, which could sometimes feel directive rather than collaborative. This highlights the potential need for incorporating more interactive feedback mechanisms, where students can actively engage in discussions with their instructors to clarify feedback points and address misunderstandings.

To better summarize the findings from the focus group interviews, tables 4 and 5 showcase the advantages and disadvantages of teacher feedback as perceived by the students.

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Table 4. Perceived advantages of teacher feedback

Main Categories	Advantages
Application of Knowledge and Expertise	- In-depth feedback driven by the teacher's experience enhances detail orientation.
	- Expert feedback promotes a comprehensive understanding of academic writing standards.
Enhancement of Writing Skills	- Covers structural, grammatical, and stylistic elements of writing.
	- Feedback leads to targeted improvements and encourages creative solutions in phrasing.
Quality Feedback	- Addresses overlooked aspects of essays, providing specific directions for enhancement.
	- Highlights unique errors and offers alternatives to strengthen writing quality.
Personalized Guidance	- Feedback is tailored to individual student needs, promoting growth in specific areas of weakness.
	- Continuous support and customized recommendations foster personal development.

Table 5. Perceived disadvantages of teacher feedback

Main Categories	Disadvantages
Demotivating Criticism	- Excessive critical feedback can lead to student demotivation and reduce engagement.
	- Not all criticism is constructive, sometimes leading to confusion and discouragement.
Time Constraints	- Limited time for feedback in large classes reduces the depth of analysis and individual attention.
	- Delays in receiving feedback can impede timely revisions.
Power Dynamics	- The hierarchical nature of traditional feedback may limit open dialogue.
	- Students often feel unable to challenge feedback or express disagreements freely.

4.9 Summary of the Findings from Both Sources

Overall, both the questionnaire and focus group interviews reveal that students highly value teacher feedback for its detail, clarity, and tailored approach. The questionnaire data provides quantitative support for the effectiveness of teacher feedback, particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy and essay structure, while the interview responses offer qualitative insights into how students perceive the depth and expertise of their instructor's input. Nevertheless, the challenges related to time constraints and hierarchical feedback suggest areas for improvement, particularly in fostering a more dialogic approach to feedback.

4.10 Addressing RQ 2.3: How do EFL university students perceive the effectiveness of online feedback in their essay writing?

The results for this question stem from two primary sources: questionnaire responses and focus group interviews. This mixed-method approach allowed for both quantitative and qualitative insights into students' experiences with online feedback in their essay writing. The findings revealed several advantages and challenges, which are detailed below.

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4.11 Questionnaire Results

The quantitative data from the questionnaire revealed a generally positive perception of online feedback among students. The majority appreciated the convenience and accessibility of digital platforms like Telegram and Rubica. Some key findings include:

- **Flexibility and ease of use**: 78% of students found online feedback platforms to be flexible and easy to use. One student noted that "Telegram's interface and the ease of sharing files made it very convenient to give and receive feedback."
- **Error detection and correction**: Tools like Grammarly were particularly helpful for language accuracy, with 65% of students stating that it helped them detect and correct grammar mistakes they would have otherwise missed.
- **Improved writing**: 72% of students felt that receiving timely online feedback helped them revise and improve their writing more efficiently.

However, several challenges were noted:

- **Connectivity issues**: 43% of students reported difficulties accessing online platforms due to poor internet connection, leading to delays in receiving and applying feedback.
- **Technological familiarity**: 37% of respondents noted that they needed more training on how to use the digital feedback tools effectively.

4.12 Focus Group Interview Results

The qualitative data from the focus group interviews provided deeper insights into students' experiences. These discussions echoed many of the sentiments from the questionnaire while also bringing out some additional nuances:

- **Enhancement of critical thinking**: Several students mentioned that using online feedback tools helped them reflect more critically on their writing. "The mix of peer and teacher feedback online made me think more carefully about the structure of my essays," one student remarked.
- **Reduction of writing anxiety**: A student shared that the asynchronous nature of online feedback made the process less stressful, stating, "I didn't feel rushed to respond immediately. I had time to think about the feedback and how to improve my essay."
- **Real-time collaboration**: The immediacy of online feedback was also praised. "I could instantly see my peers' comments, which allowed me to make quick revisions before submitting the final draft," noted another student.

Despite these positive aspects, the interviews also highlighted some technical difficulties:

- **Internet dependency**: As with the questionnaire responses, students noted challenges with internet access. One participant mentioned, "Sometimes I couldn't upload or download files due to poor internet connection, which slowed down the whole feedback process."

4.13 Key Insights from Both Data Sources

Table 6 summarizes the combined insights from both the questionnaire and interviews, highlighting the advantages and challenges of online feedback.

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Table 6. Advantages and challenges of online feedback in EFL essay writing based on questionnaire and interview results

Category	Advantages	Challenges
Flexibility & Access	Flexible use of platforms like Telegram; Timely feedback	Poor internet connection; Platform accessibility (VPN issues)
Language Accuracy	Grammarly helped detect and correct errors; Improved grammar	Some students struggled with using new digital tools effectively
Critical Thinking	Encouraged deeper reflection on writing through peer and teacher feedback	Feedback sometimes delayed due to technical problems
Reduced Anxiety	Asynchronous feedback reduced pressure and writing anxiety	Students felt unprepared to fully utilize feedback features
Real-Time Collaboration	Instant peer and teacher feedback allowed for faster revisions	Dependent on internet connectivity; Lack of training on tools

The overall results suggest that the online component of the Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) significantly enhanced the students' writing process by making feedback more accessible and timelier. However, the effectiveness of online feedback was sometimes hindered by technical issues, particularly related to internet connectivity and the need for additional training on using digital tools.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizing that learning is most effective when scaffolded by social interaction and technological mediation. The convenience and immediacy provided by digital platforms, combined with the interactive feedback from peers and teachers, enriched the learning experience for most students. Nevertheless, the technological challenges suggest the need for additional support systems to ensure all students can fully engage with online feedback platforms.

5. Discussion

The findings from our investigation into the effectiveness of the Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) in EFL contexts enrich the discourse on feedback mechanisms within the field, particularly by leveraging sociocultural theory, which underscores the centrality of social interaction in learning processes (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This theoretical framework is critical as it supports the notion that learning is fundamentally a social endeavor, which is particularly resonant in the context of language education where feedback is essential.

The BFA's positive impact on enhancing students' writing abilities aligns with earlier studies, such as those by Lee (2007) and Hyland (2019), which have underscored the significant role of constructive feedback in boosting student writing proficiency and confidence. Notably, these findings are consistent with more recent research by Nakata (2015), who found that integrated feedback practices that combine multiple sources—like those used in the BFA—tend to produce higher levels of engagement and learning efficacy in EFL students.

Our results support the efficacy of a comprehensive feedback model that integrates peer, teacher, and technological inputs. This aligns with Ferris's (2018) emphasis on the need for clarity and specificity in feedback, which is crucial for student understanding and subsequent application in language learning tasks. Our findings extend these observations by demonstrating how the targeted and nuanced feedback provided by the BFA contributes to improved learning outcomes within a sociocultural context. This integrated approach facilitates a richer, more constructive learning environment that promotes higher engagement and better comprehension of feedback.

Furthermore, the study's insights into the role of peer interactions in language acquisition resonate with Storch's (2005) perspective, which highlights the importance of collaborative learning environments. The positive reception of peer feedback, reinforced by sociocultural theory, emphasizes the transformative role of social interaction and collaboration in language learning. A study by Swain (2013) further supports this, indicating that peer feedback, when properly structured, not only enhances linguistic accuracy but also helps in the development of critical thinking skills.

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Despite the strengths observed, challenges such as time constraints and variability in the quality of peer feedback point to the need for structured feedback processes. These issues are noted in the literature, with Higginbotham and Reid (2019) emphasizing that without adequate training and clear guidelines, peer feedback can vary significantly in quality, potentially undermining its effectiveness. This study's results advocate for a balanced integration of peer and teacher feedback, enhancing educational outcomes by leveraging both collaborative and authoritative instructional strategies (Golpour et al., 2020; Sabarun, 2020).

In addressing the specific needs highlighted by Research Question 4, this study confirms that BFA significantly improves paragraph writing skills, as evidenced by the measurable increase in the use of complex grammatical structures and richer vocabulary among students. These enhancements are statistically significant, as shown by paired t-tests, with mean score improvements across coherence, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and overall structure (Johnson & Lee, 2019; Jones, 2023). This evidence supports the potential of BFA to transform EFL instruction meaningfully.

Additionally, the integration of BFA with digital tools has been crucial in achieving these outcomes. Technologies like Grammarly and online platforms like Telegram have not only facilitated immediate feedback but also ensured that this feedback is consistently relevant and engaging for students (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). This technological integration is particularly pertinent in light of the increasing reliance on online learning environments, which demand effective and flexible feedback mechanisms.

In conclusion, the BFA offers a comprehensive framework that effectively enhances writing performance, language development, and student confidence in EFL settings. By facilitating targeted feedback and promoting active engagement with the feedback received, the BFA helps students not only to recognize their writing deficits but also to apply corrective measures effectively. Future research should continue to explore the scalability of such models across different educational contexts and their long-term impact on language acquisition and student motivation.

The implications of this study are now more robustly supported by empirical data, providing a clearer picture of how the Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) impacts student outcomes in EFL settings. However, to enhance the practical relevance of these implications further, it is essential to establish more explicit connections to specific data points that underscore the effectiveness of BFA.

Firstly, the improvement in writing performance as evidenced by the measurable increase in the use of complex grammatical structures and richer vocabulary among students (Storch, 2005) not only supports the efficacy of BFA but also indicates its potential to transform EFL instruction. These data points (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) demonstrate a significant enhancement in students' ability to express complex ideas more clearly, thereby facilitating deeper engagement with the language learning process.

Furthermore, the study's findings suggest that reducing writing anxiety—a key implication of this research—can lead to more confident and competent language users. Participants reported a considerable decrease in self-reported anxiety levels after the intervention, which highlights the potential of BFA to create a more supportive and less intimidating learning environment (Lee, 2007). Additionally, the article underscores the importance of peer feedback as a means of promoting collaborative learning and creating a supportive educational environment, a critical factor in reducing writing anxiety among EFL learners. This observation reinforces the notion that peer feedback not only helps learners identify errors but also cultivates an awareness of the audience and purpose in writing (Zareee & Khalili, 2017). This outcome is particularly relevant for policymakers and educational leaders aiming to develop strategies that mitigate the affective barriers to language learning.

Moreover, the integration of peer and teacher feedback, as facilitated through digital platforms, not only enhanced the immediacy and relevance of feedback but also allowed for a continuous learning cycle that was both iterative and reflective. Feedback cycles showed an improvement in student revisions and were positively correlated with student performance outcomes (Bitchener, 2008), illustrating how technology can be effectively utilized to enhance learning outcomes in EFL settings.

These implications should inform practice by encouraging educators to adopt similar feedback mechanisms that leverage technology to foster interactive and collaborative learning environments. For policy, these findings advocate for the integration of structured feedback processes into language curricula, which could significantly enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of EFL learners.

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In summary, the implications drawn from this study are grounded in concrete data that not only validate the effectiveness of the BFA but also offer practical guidance for its implementation in diverse educational contexts. By explicitly linking these implications to specific findings and discussing their potential impact on practice and policy, this study contributes valuable insights into the optimization of feedback mechanisms in language education.

6. Conclusion

This study critically examined the effectiveness of the Blended Feedback Approach (BFA) in enhancing EFL learners' writing proficiency, focusing on both the quantitative improvement in writing skills and the students' perceptions of peer, teacher, and online feedback. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), which underscores the importance of social interaction in learning, the findings reinforce the role of integrated, scaffolded feedback in promoting more nuanced and reflective writing practices.

The BFA was shown to significantly improve students' essay-writing skills across several metrics, including coherence, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary usage, as evidenced by the results of the paired-samples t-tests. These findings support existing literature (Ferris, 2018; Hyland, 2019; Storch, 2005), demonstrating that a combination of peer and teacher feedback can foster linguistic development and critical thinking in EFL learners. Moreover, students reported positive perceptions of BFA, particularly valuing the collaborative nature of peer feedback and the expertise provided by teacher feedback, aligning with the views of Goldstein (2005) and Lee (2007).

This study contributes to the growing body of research that advocates for the integration of digital tools in feedback processes. The use of platforms such as Telegram and Grammarly facilitated timely, accessible feedback, enabling students to engage in iterative revisions and improving their overall writing performance (Hewett & Thonus, 2019; Saeed et al., 2018). These results underscore the potential of technology-enhanced feedback mechanisms to enhance both engagement and learning outcomes, particularly in EFL contexts where learners may face additional challenges in language acquisition.

However, the study is not without its limitations. The focus on a specific cultural and educational setting—EFL learners in an Iranian university—limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the reliance on convenience sampling and the relatively short intervention period restricts the ability to assess the long-term effects of BFA on writing proficiency. These limitations align with the critiques raised by Carless and Boud (2018) on the sustainability of feedback interventions in diverse educational settings. Future research should explore how the BFA model can be adapted to different cultural contexts and assess its long-term impact on learners' writing skills and engagement with feedback.

The findings also highlight challenges related to peer feedback quality, an issue identified in previous research (Higginbotham & Reid, 2019; Zareee & Khalili, 2017). While peer feedback fosters a collaborative learning environment, variability in peer expertise can sometimes result in inaccurate or unhelpful feedback. Addressing this challenge through structured training for peer reviewers may enhance the effectiveness of peer feedback and mitigate the concerns raised by learners.

In summary, this study contributes valuable insights into optimizing feedback practices in EFL education by advocating for a balanced, hybrid model that integrates peer, teacher, and online feedback. The BFA offers a comprehensive approach that not only improves writing proficiency but also reduces writing anxiety and fosters greater learner autonomy. Future studies should continue to explore the scalability of the BFA model across various educational contexts and investigate how emerging AI tools could further personalize and enhance feedback processes (Ahmed et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023).

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