



EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PEER SCAFFOLDING IN THE THREE STAGES OF ESSAY WRITING

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Abstract: This study examines peer scaffolding in the process of writing academic essays by EFL university students in three stages: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, with 150 students completing a structured questionnaire and 20 students participating in in-depth interviews. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the findings from the questionnaire suggest that peer scaffolding is perceived as a valuable tool for enhancing academic writing skills. In the pre-writing phase, students highlighted the benefits of peer collaboration for generating idea, clarifying writing prompts, and enhancing vocabulary and grammar. During the while-writing phase, peer support contributed to improving essay structure and vocabulary, although challenges with time management were noted. In the post-writing phase, peer feedback was crucial for refining drafts, correcting language errors, and fostering self-editing. Data from the interviews further support these findings, revealing that students value peer scaffolding not only for its cognitive benefits but also for its emotional and motivational support. This study's findings provide suggestions related to the roles of peer scaffolding in promoting cognitive, emotional, and social development in EFL students' academic writing.

Keywords. Peer scaffolding, Academic writing, EFL students, Sociocultural Theory

1. Introduction

Academic writing is a vital skill in education, essential for developing critical thinking, logical structuring, and coherent expression, which are key for academic and professional success (Aljuaid, 2024). However, EFL students face significant challenges in achieving coherence, which affects the quality of their writing (RahmtAllah, 2020). Academic writing also requires structured approaches to analyze and articulate complex ideas. In the shift towards learner-centered education, social interaction has become a critical component in learning, especially in academic writing. Vygotsky's (1978) theory suggests that learning happens

through interaction within the ZPD, where learners receive support from more knowledgeable individuals (Poehner & Lantolf, 2024). This foundation has led to the adoption of collaborative learning in academic writing, which was traditionally viewed as an individual activity (Nguyen & Truong, 2024).

Peer scaffolding, where students support each other in the writing process, has emerged as a prominent model. Charinkam and Yawiloeng (2024) highlight that peer engagement improves writing quality and fosters the development of ideas. Rafata et al. (2025) found that peer scaffolding helps generate ideas, refine arguments, and construct more coherent narratives. Hlatshwayo (2024) shows that peer review allows students to improve their own work while contributing to others' ideas, creating a synergistic effect within the writing community. Given its potential, peer scaffolding is gaining recognition as an effective collaborative learning strategy, particularly in the three stages of academic writing: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. This study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of peer scaffolding across these stages and answer the research question:

RQ 1: What are the EFL university students' perceptions of peer scaffolding in the three stages of writing academic essays?

RQ 2: How do their perceptions of peer scaffolding differ in the three stages of essay writing?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Characteristics of the Academic Essay Writing Process and Collaborative Learning

Academic writing is a fundamental skill for EFL university students, especially at the tertiary level, as it enables them to engage in scholarly communication and knowledge production. To succeed, students must not only produce well-structured essays but also manage the entire writing process effectively—from planning to revising. The academic writing process typically unfolds in three stages. In the pre-writing stage, students engage in brainstorming and outlining, activating prior knowledge and reducing writing anxiety (Sadikovna & Ulug'bekovna, 2024). In the while-writing stage, they draft coherent texts using rhetorical strategies and improve their work through peer feedback (Payaprom & Payaprom, 2025). The post-writing stage involves revision for clarity and structure, encouraging metacognitive growth and deeper engagement (Trang & Barrot, 2024). However, many students still struggle with clarity, cohesion, and organization.

To address these challenges, peer scaffolding, rooted in Vygotsky's SCT, offers a socially interactive solution that supports learners through shared meaning-making. Within this context, collaborative writing (CW) has gained prominence. Defined as "single-text, multiple-authors" (Ede & Lunsford, 1990), CW allows students to co-construct content, negotiate

meaning, and share ownership of the writing process (Storch, 2013). Research has shown CW enhances creativity, communication, and confidence (Teng, 2024), while integrating diverse cognitive styles and cultural perspectives. Thus, combining structured writing instruction with peer scaffolding and collaborative practices may offer a more effective path to academic writing success.

2.2. Sociocultural Theory and Related Concepts in Language Education Research

This study uses SCT to emphasize the role of peer interaction in developing academic writing skills. SCT suggests that cognitive development occurs through social interaction (inter-psychologically) before being internalized (intra-psychologically) (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, peer scaffolding helps students construct knowledge collaboratively, with the ZPD illustrating the range between what learners can do alone and with peer support (Vygotsky, 1978; Wei, 2024). Mediation, which uses cultural tools like language to aid learning, encourages deeper processing through guided dialogue (Panhwar et al., 2025). Scaffolding refers to temporary support gradually removed as learners gain independence (Morady Moghaddam & Parsaiyan, 2024). In writing instruction, scaffolding includes feedback and structured tasks that foster self-regulation (Panhwar et al., 2025).

Grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT), peer scaffolding involves social interaction that supports the development of academic writing, including collaborative engagement in vocabulary, grammar, and writing fluency (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024). Structured group activities and peer feedback sessions deepen academic literacy and critical evaluation skills (Zohrevandi, Ahmadi, & Khalaji, 2024). Peer scaffolding also enhances motivation and transforms writing from solitary to collaborative (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024). However, challenges such as proficiency gaps and misinformation can arise, requiring teacher facilitation (Dang et al., 2024). Ultimately, peer scaffolding fosters autonomous, critically engaged academic writers. It transforms writing into a socially-driven, reflective process, aligning with ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

This study applies SCT by structuring peer scaffolding across three writing stages. First, it raises learners' awareness of collaboration roles at each stage-idea generation (pre-writing), argument organization (while-writing), and feedback (post-writing). Second, it promotes shared academic responsibility, positioning students as both learners and co-constructors of knowledge. Third, it fosters interactive environments that support critical thinking and creativity (Wei et al., 2024). In essence, the framework aligns SCT with writing pedagogy, empowering students to become reflective and socially engaged academic writers.

2.3. Previous Studies and Gaps in Literature

Previous studies have affirmed the benefits in supporting idea generation, organizing arguments, giving feedback, and fostering metacognition (Axrorova, 2025). These studies show

how peer collaboration enhances cognitive engagement, writing quality, and critical reflection. However, most existing research tends to isolate peer scaffolding in only one or two writing stages—typically pre-writing or post-writing—without addressing how it functions holistically throughout the entire academic writing process. This fragmented approach limits understanding of how peer support operates as a continuous scaffold across writing phases. Furthermore, prior research has often emphasized instructional strategies or writing outcomes, with limited focus on learners’ own perceptions, experiences, and emotional engagement with peer scaffolding.

Few studies have systematically investigated how students understand, evaluate, and internalize peer support throughout all stages of academic writing. The study by Chairinkam and Yawiloeng (2024) revealed positive student perceptions regarding the supportive role of peer scaffolding in academic writing. It found that both expert and novice learners were capable of assisting their peers, although the frequency of support varied. Peer scaffolding was also shown to encourage better paragraph writing and boost self-confidence. Similarly, Tinggie et al. (2023) shared the view that peer scaffolding serves as an effective support strategy for writing skills, particularly through interactive and collaborative writing processes. Notably, Axrorova’s (2025) research highlighted the role of scaffolding in teaching writing to EFL learners, emphasizing peer scaffolding as a key strategy in collaborative writing, peer feedback, and the enhancement of writing proficiency. Furthermore, the study indicated that peer scaffolding contributes to improved confidence, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and writing fluency, helping to bridge the gap between learners’ current abilities and higher levels of writing competence.

While some studies acknowledge student attitudes toward peer collaboration, they remain narrow in scope and overlook nuanced socio-cognitive dimensions. To address these gaps, the current study explores EFL students’ perceptions of peer scaffolding across pre-, while-, and post-writing phases, examining how learners experience and interpret peer support cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform pedagogical strategies that integrate peer scaffolding more meaningfully across the full writing cycle.

3. Methodology

The current study employed a mixed-method approach to explore EFL students’ perceptions of peer scaffolding in academic writing across the pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing stages. Mixed-methods designs are a robust approach in educational research, blending quantitative and qualitative techniques to offer comprehensive insights into complex phenomena (Creswell, 2024). Specifically, the study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, allowing for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both types of data, thus enhancing the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. This approach was chosen for

two main reasons. First, it enables the comparison and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring objectivity and higher reliability (Hollstein, 2024). Second, it allows for the exploration of both the breadth and depth of EFL students' perceptions of peer scaffolding, with quantitative data revealing trends and qualitative data providing deeper insights into students' experiences (Creswell, 2024).

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted with 150 third-year EFL students enrolled in an advanced academic writing course at a university in Vietnam. The course focused on genre-based academic writing and encouraged peer collaboration across three stages: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. The majority (66%) of participants were aged 20 old, while 34% were 21. Most participants were female (92.7%), with only 7.3% being male. Regarding language proficiency, 25.3% were at the B1 level, 72.7% at B2, and 2% at C1. In addition to the questionnaire for collecting quantitative data, the study included in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected students based on their active participation in peer scaffolding activities. Twenty students were randomly selected from EFL classes; all were third-year English majors at a university in Vietnam. These students had participated in an eight-week academic essay writing course delivered through in-person instruction. During this course, they were guided on how to engage writing essays. The class activities included discussions in which peers provided support, and interacted with each other. Collecting qualitative data from these students is expected to contribute significantly to the reliability and validity of the selected participants, as they have had practical experience with the learning process and peer scaffolding at each stage of academic writing.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The study collected data from 150 third-year EFL students using a structured questionnaire grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) to explore students' perceptions of peer scaffolding in academic writing across three stages: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. The questionnaire had two main sections: demographic information and students' views on emotional, cognitive, and strategic peer support, measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The first section was designed to survey students' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, year of study, academic level, and frequency of participation in academic writing classes in the first section. The second section consists of 13 items related to EFL students' perceptions of peer scaffolding in each stage of academic writing. The items in the questionnaire were designed following from the outlook of SCT, with clear connections to key concepts such as the ZPD and mediation. The pre-writing items reflect cognitive and emotional support, as learners receive peer mediation to better understand writing requirements, generate ideas, and identify appropriate language structures. The while-writing and post-writing items represent strategic support and collaborative mediation, where

peer interaction helps reinforce vocabulary, structure essays, manage time, self-edit, and recognize errors to enhance skills within the learners' ZPD. After expert review and a pilot test for reliability, the finalized questionnaire was distributed and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential techniques. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 students selected based on their active participation in peer-interaction tasks. These interviews aimed to explore in depth students' reflections on peer scaffolding. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes (open coding), searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Themes were cross-checked to ensure consistency and alignment with SCT constructs. Both data sets were integrated for triangulation to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

4. Findings and Discussion

The Cronbach's Alpha value of the questionnaire reached 0.938, indicating a high level of reliability for the questionnaire, suggesting that the collected data are consistent and dependable for further analysis. The responses were coded as: Strongly disagree = 1 Disagree = 2 No opinion = 3 Agree = 4 Strongly agree = 5

4.1. EFL Students' Perceptions of Peer Scaffolding in the Three Stages of Essay Writing

To examine the general perception of university students regarding peer scaffolding in academic English essay writing, a one-sample test was conducted. Statistics for the cluster on *"University Students' Perceptions of Peer Scaffolding in Academic English Essay Writing"* were analyzed. Table 1 presents a statistical analysis of this data. This group comprises nine questions (Questions 1 to 13) from the distributed questionnaire, focusing on various dimensions of student perceptions.

Table 1. One-Sample Statistics for cluster

ONE-SAMPLE STATISTICS			
	Total	Mean	SD
Mean Score Q1-Q13	150	4.199	0.451

The average score for cluster one is 4.199. This high mean score indicates that students perceived peer scaffolding positively as a valuable resource in developing their academic writing skills. The standard deviation of 0.451 shows a relatively low level of variability, suggesting a consistent level of agreement among students about the benefits of peer scaffolding in their learning process.

Table 2. Mean Scores of EFL Students' Perceptions on Peer Scaffolding

No	Statement	Min	Max	Mean (M)	SD
PRE-WRITING					
1	When I discuss pre-writing activities with peer(s) before writing an academic essay, I understand the instructions of the writing task more clearly.	1	5	4.29	0.66
2	When I discuss with peer(s), I understand how to make an outline for the given essay requirement before starting to write.	2	5	4.25	0.61
3	When I brainstorm for the writing activity with peer(s), I can generate more ideas for my essay.	1	5	4.43	0.73
4	When discussing ways to express ideas for writing activities with peer(s), I find it easier to know the language structures to use in the essay.	2	5	4.07	0.79
Mean Score of the Cluster on EFL Students' Perceptions on Peer Scaffolding in Pre-writing Stage				4.26	0.70
WHILE-WRITING					
5	When I work with peer(s) during the while-writing process, I learn more vocabulary related to the writing topic.	1	5	4.31	0.71
6	When I write an essay with peer(s), I understand how to present and structure different types of essays.	2	5	4.07	0.74
7	When I write with peer(s), I understand how to manage time for the essay writing activity more effectively.	1	5	3.83	0.94
8	When I write with peer(s), I gradually become familiar with learning writing skills in each stage to produce the best essay.	1	5	4.00	0.92
9	When I write, I understand the writing through the opinions and suggestions from peer(s).	1	5	4.15	0.87
Mean Score of the Cluster on EFL Students' Perceptions on Peer				4.07	0.84

Scaffolding in the While-writing Stage					
POST-WRITING					
10	When I complete an essay draft, the feedback and corrections from peer(s) on the draft help to improve the next draft of the essay.	1	5	4.30	0.70
11	When I complete the writing with peers, I learn the editing process and avoid errors in grammar, vocabulary, etc., in the essay.	1	5	4.32	0.67
12	When I receive feedback from peer(s) on the essay, I can self-edit and improve the quality of the essay writing.	1	5	4.42	0.63
13	When I receive comments and corrections, I realize my own mistakes in the writing and gain better experience for future writing.	1	5	4.42	0.64
Mean Score of the Cluster on EFL Students' Perceptions on Peer Scaffolding in the post-writing Stage				4.37	0.66
Mean Score (Q1-Q13)				4.19	0.45

The results from Table 2 show significant differences in participants' perceptions across the three stages. The **post-writing** stage had the highest **Mean** (4.37), indicating that respondents perceived the most benefit from peer feedback and revisions after completing their essays. In contrast, the **while-writing** stage had the lowest **Mean** (4.07), suggesting that they felt less supported during the writing process. Additionally, the **post-writing** stage exhibited the lowest **SD** (0.66), indicating more consistent perceptions among students, while the **while-writing** stage had the highest **SD** (0.84), reflecting greater variability in students' experiences. In addition, the results in Table 2 indicate a high overall agreement among students on the effectiveness of peer scaffolding in academic essay writing ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.45$). Students rated Pre-Writing activities such as brainstorming as most beneficial (Q3: $M = 4.43$), particularly for idea generation. In the Post-Writing stage, feedback from peers was also highly valued, helping learners improve their drafts and identify writing errors (Q12 & Q13: $M = 4.42$). While peer support during While-Writing was generally positive, it was perceived as less effective in time management (Q7: $M = 3.83$). Overall, most participants recognized that peer scaffolding enhances their understanding of task requirements, vocabulary, structure, and self-editing. These findings suggest that students perceive the most cognitive and collaborative gains from

peer interaction during Pre- and Post-Writing phases, reinforcing the social learning dimension of writing development.

4.2. EFL Students' Perceptions of Peer Scaffolding in Each Stage of Essay Writing

4.2.1 EFL Students' Perceptions of Peer Scaffolding in Pre-writing Stage

The findings from both the questionnaire (Table 2) and interviews highlight that students hold highly positive perceptions of peer scaffolding during the pre-writing stage of academic essay writing. Quantitatively, peer brainstorming was rated the most beneficial activity (Q3: $M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.73$), followed closely by enhanced task comprehension and outlining support (Q1 & Q2). Qualitatively, students emphasized that peer interaction stimulates creativity, helps overcome "idea block," and clarifies writing prompts. This is reinforced by interview responses, such as student 3 saying, *"With the support of peers, I could generate more ideas and select which ones to include in my writing,"* and Student 16 noting, *"Everyone contributed their own ideas, and then we chose the best one to use."*

Several participants also reported that peer scaffolding helped them overcome the challenge of being stuck for ideas, as Student 5 explained that *"At the beginning, I often get stuck with ideas when writing"* and added that *"Discussing with classmates helps clarify both the prompt and potential ideas."*

"At the beginning, I often get stuck with ideas when writing" and "Discussing with classmates helps clarify both the prompt and potential ideas." Beyond academic support, students highlighted emotional benefits of peer scaffolding. Student 4 commented, *"I usually feel stressed, but interacting with others makes the atmosphere more relaxed and comfortable,"* underscoring the role of collaboration in reducing stress and boosting learning motivation.

Additionally, peer collaboration was credited with improving vocabulary knowledge and grammatical accuracy—two foundational elements in academic writing. Student 19 explained, *"Each of us has a different vocabulary range. If one person doesn't know a word, another person might help,"* while student 20 emphasized, *"Interaction helps me gain stronger grammar and vocabulary for a more vivid essay."*

Collectively, the data suggest that peer scaffolding in the pre-writing phase not only supports idea generation and language development but also enhances motivation and confidence, laying a strong foundation for the subsequent writing stages.

4.2.2 EFL Students' Perceptions of Peer Scaffolding in the While-Writing Stage

Data from Table 2 and interviews show that students held clear perceptions of the benefits of peer scaffolding during the while-writing stage. Quantitatively, students highly valued peer support in expanding academic vocabulary (Q5: $M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.71$) and understanding essay

structure (Q6: $M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.74$). However, support for time management received a lower score (Q7: $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.94$), indicating ongoing challenges in collaborative pacing.

Interview responses added qualitative depth: Student 1 shared, *“Writing essays with classmates encourages me to keep going when I lose focus,”* while student 4 noted, *“Peer support helps me stay on track.”* These reflections highlight peer scaffolding as a behavioral regulation tool that sustains writing motivation and direction. Students also emphasized peers’ roles in grammar correction, vocabulary development, and content organization. For instance, student 5 stated, *“We can provide vocabulary for each other,”* student 7 recalled, *“My peer suggested suitable noun phrases,”* and student 10 shared, *“We checked grammar and coherence together.”* Regarding content structure, student 12 concluded, *“We agreed on the ideas, and the essay became more complete.”*

Overall, students viewed peer scaffolding during the while-writing stage as comprehensive support—enhancing motivation, language mechanics, and idea organization to improve essay quality and academic writing competence.

4.2.3. EFL Students’ Perceptions of Peer Scaffolding in the Post-writing Stage

Data from Table 2 and student interviews indicate that learners reported very positive perceptions of peer scaffolding during the post-writing stage. Questions such as Q12 and Q13 received high mean scores ($M = 4.42$), affirming that feedback from peers helps students self-edit and identify mistakes in their writing. Qualitative findings further support this, with students emphasizing that *“gathering good ideas and grammar and organizing them into a coherent framework”* (student 6) or *“expanding vocabulary and grammar”* (student 4) after completing a draft, which shows that this stage is not merely about proofreading but about enriching academic language.

Several students stressed the value of collaborative editing to improve coherence and avoid redundancy: *“It helps avoid grammar mistakes, repetitive words, and checks whether the organization of ideas is logical”* (student 14). They also saw peer scaffolding as an opportunity to learn how to revise: *“We sat down together to correct and study how to revise grammar structures to make the essay more complete”* (student 15). On the content side, student 1 shared: *“Once we agree on which idea to use, the essay becomes better and more interesting”*, highlighting the importance of academic discussion in refining written work.

Overall, the perceptions of EFL students across the three stages of writing are consistently aligned with a high and significant evaluation of peer scaffolding in academic writing. In the pre-writing stage, peer support stands out in terms of language-related aspects for writing, such as idea brainstorming, vocabulary and structure provision, and task clarification, with relatively high ratings for these features. This indicates that the pre-writing stage is crucial for preparing vocabulary, ideas, and understanding the essay requirements through social interaction among symmetrical peers. The while-writing stage stands out for expanding the preparations made in

the previous stage to create the first draft. Many students evaluate this stage positively for the expansion of ideas, increased vocabulary, and ongoing feedback compared to the pre-writing stage, as the writing process allows for a deeper perspective when approaching the topic with a writing mindset, which is different from the preparatory phase. This is particularly important when there is peer support and peer scaffolding strategies during the while-writing stage. The post-writing stage occurs after students complete their first draft. This stage involves comments, suggestions, and objective evaluation of each other's work. Unlike the previous two stages, the post-writing phase has a finished product where students apply the knowledge and information from the previous stages into their writing. Therefore, this is the stage where peers contribute feedback, helping each other revise the draft to produce the final version.

In summary, students perceive peer scaffolding in the post-writing stage as a comprehensive tool for improving content, enhancing language use, and fostering self-editing skills—ultimately leading to higher-quality academic writing quality. Interview data from 20 university students revealed that peer scaffolding is perceived as a valuable learning strategy that supports not only writing skills but also emotional, cognitive, and collaborative growth. In the pre-writing stage, peers helped generate ideas, clarify prompts, and enhance vocabulary and grammar. During while-writing, peer support maintained motivation, guided content organization, and improved first drafts. In the post-writing stage, students emphasized the importance of peer feedback for refining ideas, correcting language, and developing self-editing skills. Overall, peer scaffolding was seen as essential across all stages, fostering academic competence and a supportive learning environment in EFL writing.

4.3. Discussion

The present study highlights that EFL university students view peer scaffolding as an essential tool for enhancing their academic writing skills, promoting motivation, and providing emotional support throughout the writing process. In line with previous research, students recognized the value of peer interactions for improving not only the technical aspects of writing but also their emotional engagement and cognitive development (Axrorova, 2025). Peer scaffolding was seen as a powerful support system for overcoming challenges, particularly cognitive blocks and anxiety, which are common in academic writing. This finding is consistent with studies that emphasize how collaborative activities such as brainstorming can stimulate creativity and foster a supportive environment for students (Storch, 2005; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024). Students in this study appreciated the exchange of vocabulary and language structures, which helped strengthen their academic language skills. These interactions not only improved writing quality but also supported critical thinking, as students learned to evaluate and refine their ideas with the help of peers. This aligns with SCT, where peer interactions are fundamental to cognitive growth, as students move beyond their current capabilities with the

help of others (Axrorova, 2025). Thus, peer scaffolding was seen as a multifaceted tool, supporting both the cognitive and affective dimensions of academic writing.

The students' perceptions of peer scaffolding varied across the three stages of essay writing, with each stage offering distinct benefits and challenges. In the pre-writing phase, peer scaffolding was highly valued, particularly for idea generation, task clarification, and brainstorming. As reflected in the quantitative data (Q3: $M = 4.43$), students found brainstorming with peers especially beneficial for overcoming idea blocks and organizing their thoughts. This stage was viewed as crucial for setting the foundation of the writing task, as peer interactions helped students clarify writing prompts and generate creative ideas. The emotional support from peers also played a key role in reducing writing anxiety, and foster confidence which is consistent with previous studies (Axrorova, 2025). Students appreciated the collaborative nature of this stage, as it fostered a relaxed and motivating environment, which is in line with Vygotsky's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), where social interactions serve as a scaffold for cognitive development.

In the while-writing stage, peer scaffolding continued to support students, particularly in terms of vocabulary enhancement, essay structure, and motivation. However, students faced challenges in time management (Q7: $M = 3.83$), as peer feedback and idea development sometimes disrupted the writing process. While peer support helped students maintain focus and sustain motivation, time management issues suggested that this stage requires more structured coordination. This finding aligns with Chairinkam and Yawiloeng (2024) who also found that while peer scaffolding is effective in maintaining engagement, managing time during collaborative writing remains a challenge. Nonetheless, students appreciated peer feedback for refining content and shaping their drafts (Tinggie et al., 2023), highlighting the importance of collaboration in improving the organization and clarity of their writing.

The post-writing stage was seen as crucial for refining drafts and improving the technical aspects of writing through peer feedback. The high ratings for peer feedback (Q12–13: $M = 4.42$) indicate that students valued this stage for its role in enhancing grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing quality. Peer scaffolding in this stage not only provided technical corrections but also promoted metacognitive development, as students reflected on their writing and applied feedback to improve their drafts. This finding supports the work of Chairinkam and Yawiloeng (2024) and Tinggie et al. (2023), who emphasized that peer feedback fosters critical thinking and reflection. Moreover, students appreciated the opportunity for self-editing, which contributed to their growth as autonomous writers, consistent with the goals of Vygotsky's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

In conclusion, peer scaffolding was perceived as most beneficial in the pre-writing and post-writing stages. During the pre-writing stage, peer interactions helped with idea generation and task clarification, while in the post-writing stage, peer feedback was crucial for refining

drafts and improving technical writing skills. The while-writing stage, although valuable for maintaining motivation and providing feedback, was challenged by time management issues. These findings align with previous studies (e.g., Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024; Axrorova, 2025) and suggest that while peer scaffolding enhances writing skills, further attention is needed to optimize the collaborative process, particularly during the writing phase.

5. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

The findings from this study provide an understanding of how EFL university students perceive peer scaffolding during the academic essay writing process. Students consistently recognized the value of peer support in enhancing not only their writing skills but also their emotional and cognitive development. Across all stages of the writing process—pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing—peer scaffolding was seen as crucial in fostering motivation, improving vocabulary, refining writing structure, and increasing self-confidence.

In the pre-writing stage of academic essay writing, peer brainstorming and idea generation were especially valued, helping students overcome cognitive blocks and organize their thoughts. In the while-writing stage, peer feedback played a key role in sustaining motivation and guiding the writing process, although time management remained a challenge. In the post-writing stage, peer feedback was instrumental in refining drafts, improving language accuracy, and enhancing overall writing quality.

Psychologically, peer scaffolding contributed to a positive learning environment, reducing stress and boosting students' confidence. Cognitively, peer interaction facilitated critical thinking and self-reflection, aligning with Vygotsky's ZPD, where students advanced their skills through social interaction.

The study also offers several recommendations for teachers, curriculum design, student support, and future research. Firstly, the study emphasizes the need for instructors to integrate peer scaffolding across all stages of academic writing. This approach should not be limited to isolated activities like brainstorming or feedback sessions but should be embedded as a continuous support system throughout the writing process. Teachers can structure collaborative learning opportunities that allow students to engage in meaningful peer interactions, from generating ideas in the pre-writing stage to refining drafts in the post-writing phase.

For student support, the emotional benefits of peer scaffolding cannot be overstated. Educators should actively promote peer collaboration as a means to reduce writing anxiety and enhance motivation. Establishing peer support networks and peer mentoring programs can further empower students, especially those who may feel isolated or overwhelmed by the academic writing process. Additionally, providing opportunities for students to work with

peers of similar proficiency levels can create a more comfortable and emotionally supportive learning environment, enhancing their overall academic experience.

For future research, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on peer scaffolding, but further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of peer scaffolding on writing development. Future studies could focus on the impact of peer scaffolding in diverse cultural contexts and examine how different group dynamics (e.g., gender, proficiency levels) influence the effectiveness of peer support. Additionally, examining how peer scaffolding influences other aspects of academic literacy, such as reading comprehension and research skills, would offer valuable insights into the broader applications of peer-assisted learning in higher education.

While the present study provides valuable insights into EFL university students' perceptions of peer scaffolding in academic writing, it is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to a specific group of third-year students from a single university in Vietnam, which may not be representative of all EFL students. The findings, therefore, may not be generalizable to other contexts or educational systems. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from both the questionnaire and interviews, which could be influenced by response bias or participants' subjective perceptions.

In conclusion, peer scaffolding serves as a multifaceted pedagogical tool that not only enhances technical writing proficiency but also contributes significantly to students' emotional and cognitive development in EFL contexts. By integrating peer scaffolding throughout the entire writing process, educators can create a more holistic and engaging learning environment that empowers students to become more effective, autonomous, and confident writers.

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