

Tertiary Students' Perceptions of an ESL Writing Course Using a Reflective Critical Approach

Noriah Ismail, Ira Syakira Sukiman, Susanna Bithiah Varma
Raja Ravi Varma, Nur Sherina Zainal Abidin, Rozhafiezam
Rosdi, Mohamad Fakhru Aiman Zulkiflee

Universiti Teknologi MARA Johor, Malaysia

Email: noriah135@uitm.edu.my, irasyaqira@uitm.edu.my, susannavarma@uitm.edu.my,
nursherina@uitm.edu.my, rozhafiezam@uitm.edu.my, fakhrulaiman@uitm.edu.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v15-i3/28839>

Published Online: 05 September 2026

Abstract

This study explores tertiary students' perceptions of the effectiveness of an ESL Academic Writing course that employs a reflective critical approach in its instruction. The course aims to improve students' academic writing skills by promoting self-awareness, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Key instructional techniques include the use of self-reflective online journals, peer feedback activities, and critical academic writing checklists. Self-reflective journals encourage students to evaluate their own writing processes and progress, while peer feedback allows students to engage critically with peers' written work. The academic writing checklists provide structured guidance to support the development of coherent and well-organized academic essays. A survey questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was administered to 76 undergraduate students enrolled in a four-month ESL Academic Writing course. The questionnaire measured students' perception on the use of the reflective critical approach in writing expository essay writing skill, including perceived improvements in editing and proofreading. The findings indicate that the students perceived the approach as effective, particularly in producing improved academic essays. Overall, the study suggests that integrating reflective practices, peer feedback, and structured writing techniques can enhance the effectiveness of ESL academic writing instruction at the tertiary level.

Keywords: ESL Academic Writing, Reflective Critical Approach, Self-Reflective Journals, Peer Feedback, Academic Essays, Tertiary Education

Introduction

Academic writing remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners at the tertiary level. University students are expected to produce well-structured, coherent, and critical academic texts; however, many ESL learners struggle with idea development, organization, language accuracy, and confidence in expressing arguments in English (Hyland, 2019). As a result, ESL academic writing courses play a crucial role in supporting students' academic success and their ability to meet institutional expectations.

In recent years, reflective and critical approaches to writing instruction have gained increasing attention in ESL pedagogy. Reflection allows learners to become more aware of their writing processes, strengths, and weaknesses, thereby promoting metacognitive development and learner autonomy (Farrell, 2018). When combined with critical pedagogy, reflective practices encourage students to engage more deeply with academic texts, question assumptions, and develop reasoned arguments (Brookfield, 2017). Such approaches move beyond product-oriented writing instruction and emphasize writing as a recursive and socially situated process.

Instructional techniques such as self-reflective journals, peer feedback, and academic writing checklists have been widely recognized as effective tools in ESL writing classrooms. Self-reflective journals enable learners to monitor their progress and evaluate their learning experiences (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Peer feedback promotes collaborative learning and helps students develop critical reading and revision skills (Ruegg, 2015). Meanwhile, academic writing checklists provide structured guidance that supports students in organizing ideas and meeting academic conventions (Wingate, 2012).

Despite growing interest in reflective critical approaches, there is a need for more empirical research examining students' perceptions of such instructional practices, particularly within ESL academic writing courses. Understanding students' perspectives can provide valuable insights into course effectiveness and inform pedagogical improvements. Therefore, this study investigates tertiary students' perceptions of the effectiveness of an ESL Academic Writing course that adopts a reflective critical approach in its instruction.

Significance of the Study and Contribution to the Field

This study is significant as it provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of a reflective critical approach in ESL academic writing instruction at the tertiary level. While ESL writing courses have traditionally focused on linguistic accuracy and structural conventions, this study highlights the pedagogical value of integrating reflective practices, peer feedback, and structured writing tools to support deeper learning. By examining students' perceptions before and after the course, the study offers insight into how such instructional strategies influence learners' confidence, self-awareness, and perceived writing competence.

The findings are particularly important for ESL educators and curriculum designers, as they demonstrate that reflective online journals and peer feedback activities can foster greater learner autonomy and critical engagement with the writing process. The use of academic writing checklists further contributes to effective scaffolding, enabling students to produce more coherent and well-organized academic texts. These results suggest that combining reflective and collaborative elements with explicit guidance can enhance both affective and cognitive dimensions of writing development.

In terms of contribution to the field, this study addresses a gap in ESL academic writing research by focusing on students' perceptions of a reflective critical instructional approach within a sustained, semester-long course. The pre- and post-course design strengthens existing literature by providing comparative evidence of perceptual shifts related to writing confidence, editing skills, and overall course effectiveness. Additionally, the study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for learner-centered and process-oriented

approaches in ESL writing pedagogy. By demonstrating the positive impact of reflective and collaborative strategies, this research offers a practical and theoretically informed model that can be adapted in similar tertiary ESL contexts, thereby informing future instructional practices and research in academic writing development.

Literature Review

Reflective Critical Approaches in Writing Instruction

Reflective approaches in ESL writing promote learner autonomy and deeper engagement with writing tasks. Farrell (2018) argues that reflective journals help students identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing and foster self-directed improvement. Reflective writing also encourages students to connect personal learning experiences with academic standards, leading to greater awareness of rhetorical expectations in academic contexts (Hyland, 2019). Integrating reflection with critical thinking strategies further enhances learners' ability to analyze academic texts, formulate arguments, and engage with disciplinary conventions (Brookfield, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in social cognitive theory and reflective practice theory, both of which inform effective ESL academic writing instruction. Social cognitive theory posits that learning occurs through interaction between cognitive processes and social contexts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In academic writing, this means learners construct knowledge through internal reflection and external engagement with peers and instructors. Complementing this, Schön's (1983) reflective practice theory emphasizes the value of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, enabling learners to critically evaluate their writing processes and outcomes. Together, these frameworks support instructional strategies that foreground metacognition, self-regulation, and social interaction.

Peer Feedback and Collaborative Learning

Peer feedback has been widely studied as a catalyst for developing academic writing skills. Ruegg (2015) found that peer response activities increase student engagement, improve revision quality, and support the development of critical evaluation skills. Peer feedback encourages collaborative knowledge construction, aligning with social cognitive theory by positioning learners as active participants in reciprocal learning (Bruffee, 1999). Similarly, Wang and Wen (2019) reported that structured peer review sessions in ESL classrooms can significantly improve students' grammatical accuracy and organizational coherence in writing.

Checklists and Writing Support Tools

Writing checklists are instrumental in guiding novice writers through the complex demands of academic writing. Wingate (2012) emphasizes that checklists help demystify academic writing by breaking tasks into manageable components, such as thesis clarity, paragraph unity, and citation conventions. In a study of ESL undergraduates, Cho and Reich (2018) found that students using checklists produced essays with better structure and logical flow compared to those without structured support.

Empirical Evidence on ESL Writing Interventions

Several empirical studies have documented positive outcomes from instructional interventions similar to those in the present study. For instance, Hyland and Hyland (2019)

reported that blended instructional strategies, combining reflection, peer feedback, and structured tools, resulted in significant gains in students' confidence and writing proficiency. Likewise, Lee (2020) found that ESL students who participated in reflective writing activities exhibited higher levels of metacognitive awareness and produced more coherent academic essays.

Recent research has continued to highlight the effectiveness of reflective practices and peer-based instructional strategies in enhancing ESL and EFL academic writing. A growing body of empirical studies suggests that reflective journaling and peer feedback not only improve students' writing performance but also strengthen their metacognitive awareness and feedback literacy. These findings reinforce the pedagogical value of reflective critical approaches in tertiary writing courses.

Several studies have examined how reflective journals support learners' engagement with feedback and revision. A 2023 study demonstrated that reflective journaling enables students to critically evaluate peer feedback and apply it more effectively during revision, leading to improved coherence and argument development in L2 writing. The findings indicate that reflection serves as a mediating tool between feedback reception and writing improvement, fostering deeper cognitive and metacognitive processing. Similarly, recent research on reflective writing has shown that structured reflection activities significantly enhance students' critical thinking abilities, which are closely linked to academic writing competence. Peer feedback has also been increasingly explored through the lens of feedback literacy. A 2024 study published in *Assessing Writing* found that engaging students in peer feedback activities improved their ability to interpret, evaluate, and use feedback constructively. This development of feedback literacy empowers learners to become more autonomous and critical writers. Complementing this, a large-scale validation study in 2025 emphasized that effective peer assessment requires not only technical skills but also affective and cognitive dispositions, such as openness to critique and responsibility toward peers' learning.

The integration of digital platforms has further expanded opportunities for peer interaction. A 2025 study investigating peer feedback-based blogging revealed that online peer engagement positively influenced students' academic writing performance and attitudes toward writing. The study reported improvements in organization, language accuracy, and confidence, highlighting the potential of technology-mediated peer feedback in ESL contexts. Collectively, these recent studies provide strong empirical support for the integration of reflective journaling, peer feedback, and feedback literacy development in ESL academic writing instruction. They underscore the relevance of reflective critical approaches in fostering confident, autonomous, and proficient academic writers at the tertiary level. Together, the literature supports the effectiveness of reflective critical approaches, peer feedback, and structured writing tools in enhancing ESL academic writing. These findings provide a strong pedagogical basis for investigating students' perceptions of an ESL writing course that integrates these strategies.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to examine tertiary students' perceptions of the effectiveness of an ESL Academic Writing course that employs a reflective critical approach. The focus of the study was to identify changes in students' perceptions

before and after completing the course, particularly in relation to confidence, perceived writing improvement, and overall course effectiveness.

The participants consisted of 76 undergraduate students enrolled in a four-month ESL Academic Writing course at a tertiary institution. The course requires the students to write expository essays on academic topics. In this research, convenience sampling was used, as all students registered for the course during the study period were invited to participate. Ethical considerations were observed, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation.

The instructional intervention integrated reflective critical teaching strategies, including self-reflective online journals, peer feedback activities, and critical academic writing checklists. Students maintained online reflective journals to evaluate their writing processes, challenges, and progress. Peer feedback sessions promoted collaborative learning and critical engagement, while academic writing checklists provided structured guidance for producing coherent five-paragraph essays.

To collect empirical data, a survey questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was administered. Methodological rigor was maintained by addressing both instrument validity and reliability prior to final deployment. First, content validity was established by aligning items with three core theoretical dimensions: reflective practice, peer feedback, and writing confidence. The initial draft was subsequently reviewed by ESL writing experts to verify conceptual accuracy, item wording, and face validity. Following expert consultation, a pilot study was conducted with a small student sample to identify ambiguous language and ensure overall readability.

To confirm the internal consistency of the survey instrument, Cronbach's alpha α coefficients were computed for the complete questionnaire and its constituent subscales. The overall scale yielded a reliable coefficient of $\alpha = 0.82$, reflecting strong internal consistency across items. Furthermore, individual subscales measuring reflective practice, peer feedback, and writing confidence were evaluated independently to ensure each construct consistently captured its intended dimension. Together, these validation and reliability procedures ensured that the survey served as a psychometrically sound tool for data collection.

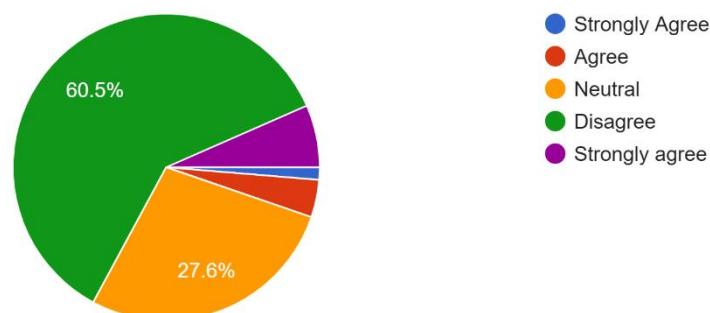
The Main Findings and Analysis

The findings from the pre and post students' perception survey indicated the students' favorable views towards the ESL Academic Writing Course which employs reflective critical approach in its writing instruction particularly in terms of its effectiveness in enhancing their expository essay writing skill.

Able to Write A Good Thesis Statement

Before this course I am able to write a good thesis statement

76 responses

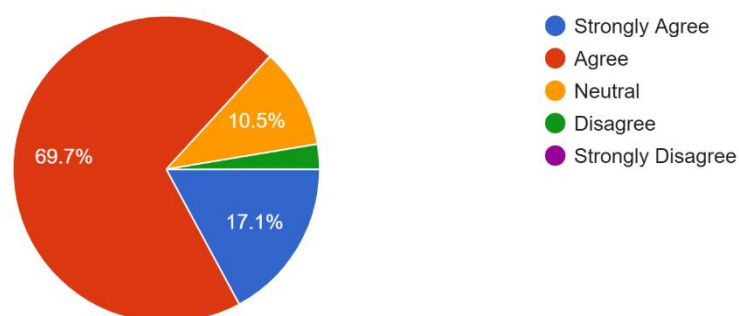


The pie chart shows student responses to the statement: "Before this course I am able to write a good thesis statement", based on 76 responses. A significant majority, 60.5%, disagreed with the statement, suggesting that most students felt underprepared in crafting a good thesis statement prior to taking the course. Additionally, 27.6% were neutral, indicating uncertainty or lack of confidence in their abilities. Only small percentages agreed (about 5%) or strongly agreed (around 4%), and an even smaller portion (about 1–2%) strongly disagreed.

This result highlights a clear gap in students' pre-existing academic writing skills, particularly in formulating thesis statements, which may underline the importance and necessity of the course. Would you like to relate this chart to student progress or course effectiveness post-course?

After this course I am able to write a good thesis statement

76 responses

*Comparative Insight*

The second chart shows students' self-assessed ability to write a good thesis statement after completing the course, based on the same 76 responses. The results indicate a significant improvement:

- **69.7%** of students now **agree** that they can write a good thesis statement.

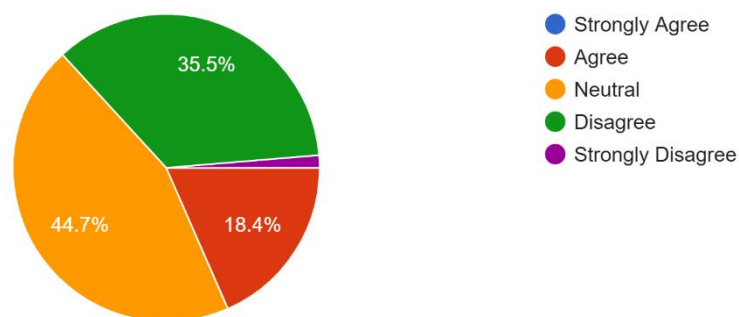
- **17.1% strongly agree**, reinforcing the positive impact of the course.
- Only **10.5% remain neutral**, and a very small percentage (**2.6%**) still **disagree**.
- Importantly, **no one strongly disagrees**, in contrast to the pre-course results.

Before the course, 60.5% disagreed with being able to write a good thesis statement, while after the course, 86.8% (agree + strongly agree) reported confidence in their ability. This shift highlights the course's effectiveness in improving academic writing skills, particularly in teaching how to construct thesis statements, a foundational element of academic essays.

Able to Form a Good Topic Sentence

Before this course I am able to form a good topic sentence

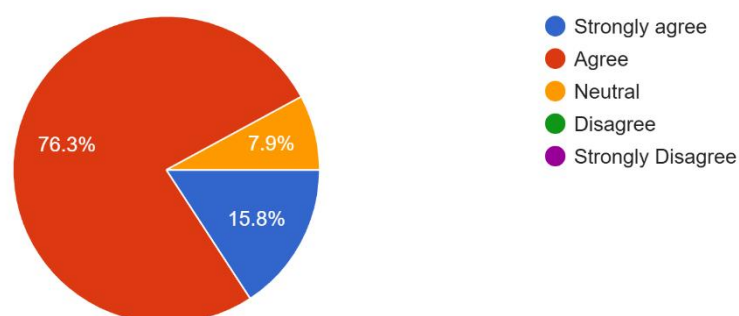
76 responses



The pie chart titled "*Before this course I am able to form a good topic sentence*" presents data from 76 respondents. The largest portion (44.7%) responded *Neutral*, indicating uncertainty or lack of confidence in their ability to form a good topic sentence prior to the course. This is followed by 35.5% who *Disagreed*, suggesting that over a third of participants acknowledged a weakness in this skill. Meanwhile, 18.4% *Agreed* they could form a good topic sentence, while a very small percentage *Strongly Disagreed* (purple) and virtually none *Strongly Agreed* (blue), highlighting a general trend of low pre-course confidence in this fundamental writing skill.

After this course I am able to form a good topic sentence

76 responses



Comparison Insight:

The second pie chart, which reflects student responses *after* the course, reveals a substantial improvement in their confidence in forming a good topic sentence. A dominant **76.3%** of the 76 respondents now **agree**, and **15.8%** even **strongly agree** with the statement. Only **7.9%** remain neutral, and no students selected "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree."

- **Before the course**, only **18.4%** agreed or strongly agreed, while **35.5%** disagreed and **44.7%** were neutral.
- **After the course**, agreement (including strong agreement) jumped to **92.1%**, showing a dramatic gain in student confidence and perceived ability.

This clear shift suggests the course was highly effective in improving students' understanding and skills related to writing strong topic sentences. The data supports the value of instructional interventions aimed at foundational writing skills.

Several previous studies have reported that ESL learners often demonstrate low confidence and limited competence in writing effective topic sentences prior to explicit instruction. For instance, Rahmat, Arepin, and Rahman (2020) found that Malaysian undergraduates frequently struggled to produce clear topic sentences, as many lacked an understanding of paragraph unity and coherence. Their study revealed that students were often uncertain about how topic sentences should guide supporting ideas, mirroring the high percentage of neutral and negative responses observed in the present study's pre-course findings.

Similarly, Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) reported that ESL university students commonly exhibited weaknesses in foundational academic writing skills, including topic sentence construction. Their participants expressed low confidence before targeted instruction but showed notable improvement after structured writing interventions. This pattern aligns with the sharp increase in agreement observed in the post-course data of the current study, where over 90% of students perceived improvement.

More recently, Al-Hazmi and Schofield (2021) demonstrated that explicit teaching of paragraph structure combined with reflective writing activities significantly improved students' ability to write effective topic sentences. Their findings indicated that students' confidence increased alongside their actual writing performance, supporting the view that confidence and skill development are closely linked when instructional scaffolding is provided.

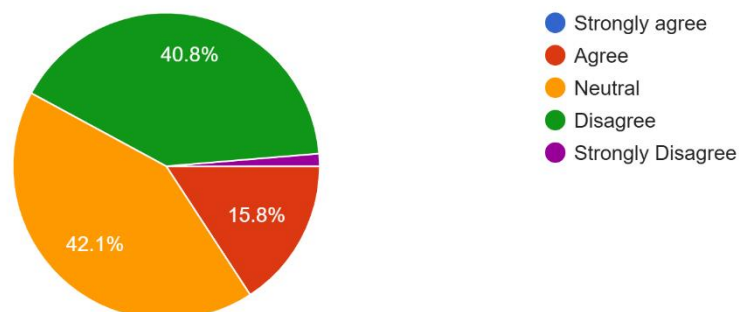
In addition, Yunus, Ang, and Hashim (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of learner-centered and reflective approaches in ESL academic writing courses. Their study showed that students initially lacked confidence in organizing paragraphs, but post-intervention results revealed improved clarity in topic sentences and stronger paragraph coherence. These findings closely parallel the dramatic post-course gains reported in the current study.

Collectively, these studies support the present findings by demonstrating that targeted instructional interventions, particularly those emphasizing structure, reflection, and practice, can significantly enhance ESL students' confidence and ability in writing effective topic sentences at the tertiary level.

Able to Write Good Supporting Details

Before this course I am able to write good supporting details

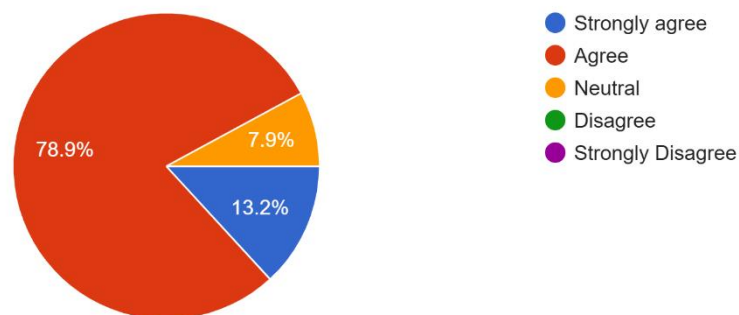
76 responses



The pie chart shows students' self-assessment of their ability to write good supporting details before taking the course, based on 76 responses. A majority of respondents either disagreed (40.8%) or were neutral (42.1%) about having this skill beforehand. Only 15.8% agreed, while very few strongly agreed or strongly disagreed (both segments are minimal, with the latter in purple barely visible). This indicates that most students either lacked confidence or were uncertain about their ability to write strong supporting details before the course began, highlighting a clear need for instructional support in this area.

After this course I am able to write good supporting details

76 responses

*Comparison Insight*

The second chart shows a significant shift in students' confidence after completing the course. A large majority (78.9%) now *agree* that they are able to write good supporting details, and an additional 13.2% *strongly agree*. Only a small fraction remain neutral (7.9%), and no respondents reported disagreement or strong disagreement.

Before the course, 82.9% of students either felt neutral or lacked confidence (disagree/strongly disagree) about their ability to write good supporting details. After the course, 92.1% felt confident (agree/strongly agree), indicating a clear positive impact of the course on this specific writing skill. The shift in students' confidence before and after the

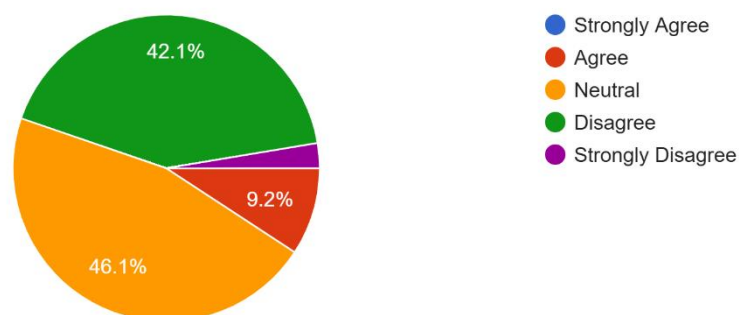
course, moving from 40.8% disagreement to 92.1% agreement regarding their ability to write good supporting details, demonstrates the effectiveness of incorporating a reflective and critical approach to essay writing instruction. Reflective critical writing encourages learners to engage in metacognitive practices, allowing them to assess, question, and refine their ideas and supporting evidence more effectively. According to Moon (2004), reflective writing fosters deeper learning by helping students internalize the process of constructing arguments, thus enhancing their ability to support claims with relevant and coherent details. Similarly, Brookfield (2017) emphasizes that critical reflection enables students to evaluate the assumptions underlying their arguments, leading to more persuasive and academically rigorous writing.

In practice, this approach requires learners to actively evaluate their own writing processes, consider feedback, and apply theoretical frameworks to improve clarity and coherence. The data supports this pedagogical strategy, as students moved from uncertainty or lack of confidence to a strong belief in their ability to craft detailed, supportive content, an outcome aligned with Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle, which reinforces learning through experience, evaluation, analysis, and action planning. Hence, the increase in self-reported competence likely stems from the course's emphasis on iterative writing, peer review, and self-assessment, all key elements of a reflective critical pedagogy.

Good at Editing

Before this course I am good at editing my essay

76 responses



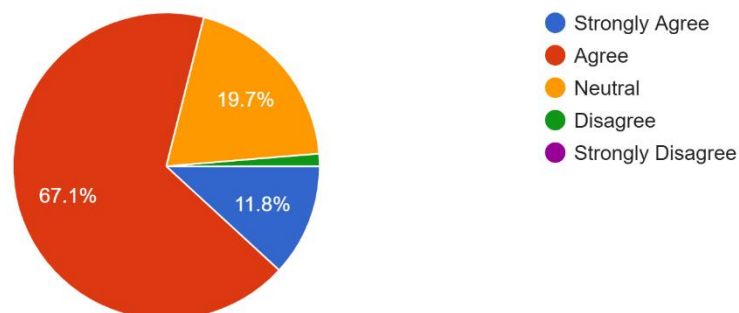
This chart shows students' **self-evaluation of their essay editing skills before the course**. A large portion, **46.1%**, selected *Neutral*, and **42.1%** actually *disagreed* that they were good at editing their essays. Only **9.2%** *agreed*, while very few indicated either *Strongly Agree* or *Strongly Disagree*. This suggests that most students either lacked confidence or awareness of how to critically revise their work before receiving formal instruction.

This insight aligns well with the pedagogical value of the reflective critical approach, which directly targets skills like self-evaluation, structural revision, and critical judgment. According to Moon (2004), editing is most effective when embedded in reflective cycles, where students learn to assess their own arguments, coherence, and tone through structured feedback and revision practices. Reflection transforms editing from a superficial check into a strategic, cognitive process. Brookfield (2017) further emphasizes that when learners are taught to question their assumptions and writing choices critically, they become more autonomous and

proficient editors of their own work. In sum, the chart indicates a clear need for instructional support in self-editing, one that was likely addressed through reflective frameworks emphasizing peer review, metacognition, and iterative drafting.

After this course I am good at editing my essay

76 responses



Comparison Insight

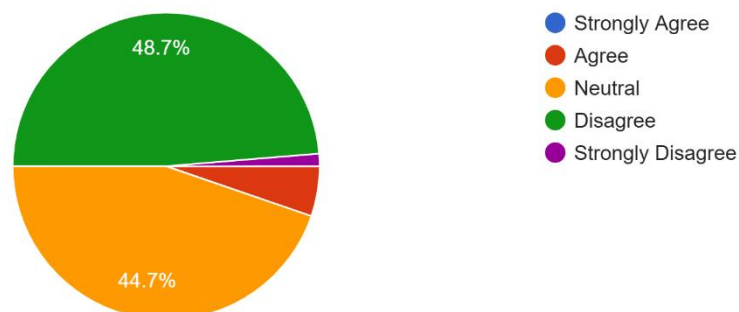
The post-course chart reveals a major improvement in students' confidence in **editing their essays**. A strong majority, **67.1% agreed** and **11.8% strongly agreed**—that they are now good at editing their own work. This contrasts sharply with the pre-course data, where **only 9.2% agreed**, and **42.1% actually disagreed**. Neutral responses also declined from **46.1% to 19.7%**, reflecting a significant shift from uncertainty to confidence.

This transformation further reinforces the value of the reflective critical approach embedded in the course. Editing is not merely a mechanical process of correcting errors but a reflective practice of evaluating clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness, skills fostered by encouraging students to revisit and critically analyze their drafts. According to Moon (2004), learners become better editors when they engage in cycles of reflection that help them assess their own ideas, structure, and language use. Brookfield (2017) supports this by highlighting how reflection builds the intellectual autonomy needed to identify flaws and make purposeful revisions. The data suggests that the course not only built editing skills but also changed students' mindset, from passive recipients of feedback to active, reflective revisers. This outcome aligns well with the goals of learner-centered, reflective pedagogy.

Good at Proofreading

Before this course I am good at proofreading my essay

76 responses

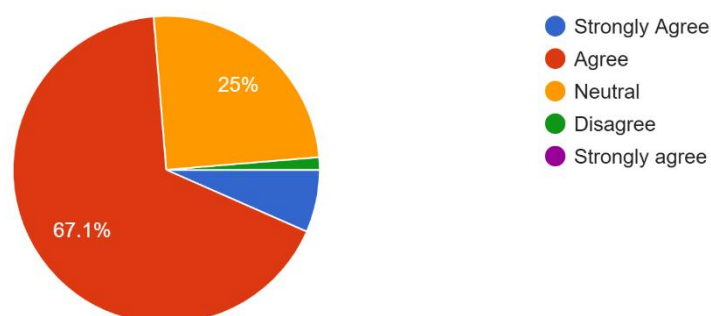


This chart presents students' self-assessment of proofreading skills before the course. Almost half (48.7%) *disagreed* with the statement, while 44.7% remained *neutral*. Only a small percentage *agreed* or *strongly disagreed*, and none *strongly agreed*. This distribution suggests a general lack of confidence or uncertainty in proofreading ability among students at the outset of the course.

The fact that over 93% of students either doubted or were unsure about their proofreading skills emphasizes the need for instruction that goes beyond grammar-checking to include critical reflection on clarity, coherence, and correctness. The reflective critical approach provides exactly this, helping students to engage more deeply with their writing. By encouraging students to look back on their drafts with a critical eye, question language choices, and assess sentence-level precision, reflective pedagogy transforms proofreading into a process of conscious quality control (Moon, 2004). Brookfield (2017) also highlights how critical reflection trains students to recognize patterns in their own errors, which is essential for improving both technical accuracy and overall writing quality. Thus, the pre-course data signals not just a gap in technical skill, but a lack of self-awareness in writing, a key area addressed by reflective learning models.

After this course I am good at proofreading my essay

76 responses



Comparison Insight

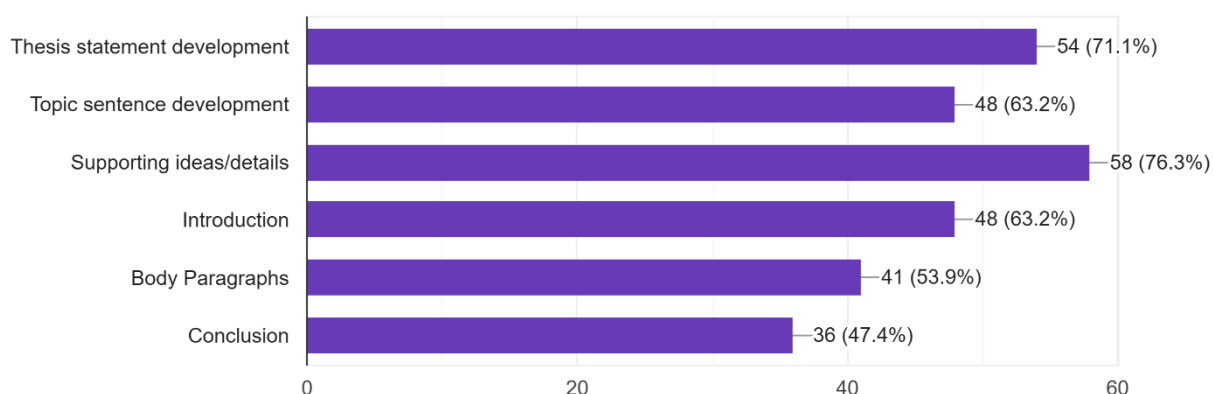
The post-course chart shows a dramatic improvement in students' confidence in proofreading their essays. A combined 78.9% of respondents now *agree* (67.1%) or *strongly agree* (11.8%) that they are good at proofreading. In contrast to the pre-course chart, where 48.7% disagreed and 44.7% were neutral, this represents a profound shift in both skill and self-perception.

This positive change reflects the success of the reflective critical approach, which empowers students to take ownership of the proofreading process through metacognitive strategies. Rather than relying solely on external correction, students learn to apply self-questioning, pattern recognition, and analytical reading to their own writing (Moon, 2004). These strategies not only improve technical accuracy but also enhance fluency and clarity by enabling learners to revise thoughtfully. Brookfield (2017) emphasizes that reflective learners are more likely to develop editing habits that are sustainable and independent, precisely what this chart outcome suggests. This outcome confirms that proofreading, when taught as an intentional and reflective practice, significantly enhances students' writing competence and confidence.

Aspects of Expository Essay Writing Students Have Managed To Improve After The Course

The aspects of expository essay writing I have managed to improve after this course are

76 responses



This bar chart highlights specific areas of expository essay writing that students reported improving most after the course, based on 76 responses. The leading areas of improvement were:

- **Supporting ideas/details** (76.3%)
- **Thesis statement development** (71.1%)
- **Topic sentence development** and **Introduction** (both 63.2%)
- **Body paragraphs** (53.9%)
- **Conclusion** (47.4%)

The data suggests that the course was particularly effective in improving core structural and analytical components of expository writing, namely thesis formulation and the use of supporting details. These are foundational to developing coherent and persuasive essays and

directly align with the reflective critical approach, which emphasizes structured thinking, evidence-based reasoning, and clarity of argument (Moon, 2004).

The relatively lower percentages in areas like *conclusion writing* and *body paragraph construction* may indicate that while students improved their ability to plan and initiate essays, they still find synthesis and development across paragraphs more challenging. This observation is supported by Brookfield's (2017) argument that deeper reflection and iteration are often needed to strengthen synthesis and cohesion across an essay's structure.

Ultimately, this data confirms that the course's reflective pedagogy helped students gain more control over their essay components, particularly those involving argument development and detail selection, which are often the most cognitively demanding.

Conclusion

This study sets out to explore tertiary students' perceptions of the effectiveness of a Reflective Critical ESL Academic Writing course, with particular attention to key academic writing skills such as thesis statement formulation, topic sentence development, supporting details, editing, and proofreading. Overall, the findings from the pre- and post-course surveys clearly indicate a substantial positive shift in students' confidence and perceived competence across all examined areas, demonstrating the effectiveness of the course's pedagogical approach.

Prior to the course, the majority of students reported low confidence or uncertainty in their academic writing abilities, especially in foundational skills such as writing thesis statements, developing topic sentences, and providing adequate supporting details. Similar patterns of uncertainty and lack of confidence were evident in editing and proofreading skills, suggesting that students initially viewed writing revision as a limited or superficial process. These findings highlight a clear gap in students' pre-existing academic writing preparedness at the tertiary level.

Following the completion of the course, however, the data revealed marked improvements in students' self-perceptions. High levels of agreement and strong agreement across all post-course measures indicate that students felt significantly more capable of constructing coherent essays, supporting arguments effectively, and engaging critically with their own writing through editing and proofreading. The sharp decline in neutral and negative responses further suggests that the reflective critical approach helped students move from uncertainty to confidence and autonomy.

Importantly, these improvements can be attributed to the course's emphasis on reflective practices, peer feedback, and structured guidance through writing checklists. By engaging students in iterative reflection, critical evaluation, and collaborative learning, the course transformed writing from a product-oriented task into a meaningful learning process Ismail, Soo, & Ismail, (2018), Ismail, N. (2022), Ismail, et al. (2024). In conclusion, the findings affirm that integrating reflective and critical pedagogical strategies in ESL academic writing instruction can significantly enhance students' writing competence, confidence, and self-awareness, making such approaches highly valuable for tertiary-level ESL contexts.

References

- Al-Hazmi, S., & Schofield, P. (2021). Teaching paragraph structure to improve ESL students' academic writing skills. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 12(2), 245–254. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1202.10>
- Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1999). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge* (2nd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Chen, Y., & Zhang, L. J. (2023). Student engagement with peer feedback and reflective journaling in L2 writing revision. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 62, 100992. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2023.100992>
- Cho, Y., & Reich, J. (2018). Using writing checklists to support academic writing development. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 35, 12–24.
- Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL learners' writing skills: Problems, factors and suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 81–92.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2018). *Reflective practice for language teachers*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hyland, K. (2019). *Second language writing* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2019). *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ismail, N., Soo, K. Y., & Ismail, N. (2018). *Reexamining academic reading skills of unemployed graduates through the English Language E-Training (ELET) Module*. *Insight Journal (IJ)*, 1(1), 11–22.
- Ismail, N., Mohd Ariff Albakri, I. S., Soo, K. Y., Elias@Alias, S., Ratan Singh, D. S., Abu, R., & Wan Mohd, W. N. H. (2024). A case study on the use of Dynamic E-IAW program module for learning ESL writing. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(5), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i5/20850>
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford University Press.
- Lee, J. (2020). Reflective writing and metacognition in ESL academic writing: A longitudinal study. *TESOL Quarterly*, 54(4), 890–912.
- Li, H., & Han, Y. (2024). Effects of peer feedback on EFL students' writing feedback literacy. *Assessing Writing*, 59, 100706. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2024.100706>
- Mahmoudi, S., & Alavi, S. M. (2025). Exploring the impact of peer feedback-based blogging on EFL learners' academic writing performance. *Arab World English Journal*, 16(1), 45–62.
- Moon, J. A. (2004). *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*. Routledge Falmer.
- Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 199–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070600572090>
- Rahmat, N. H., Arepin, M., & Rahman, S. A. (2020). Analyzing ESL learners' difficulties in writing academic paragraphs. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(3), 589–602. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v10-i3/7065>
- Ruegg, R. (2015). The relative effects of peer and teacher feedback on improvement in EFL students' writing. *Linguistics and Education*, 29, 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2014.12.001>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Wang, L., & Wen, Q. (2019). Peer review in ESL writing classrooms: Effects on accuracy and organization. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 44, 100–112.

- Wang, X., Yu, S., & Liu, Q. (2025). Validating a writing feedback literacy scale in peer assessment contexts. *Language Testing in Asia*, 15(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-025-00405-5>
- Wingate, U. (2012). Using academic literacies and genre-based models for academic writing instruction: A “literacy” journey. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(1), 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2011.11.006>
- Yunus, M. M., Ang, W. S., & Hashim, H. (2022). Enhancing ESL academic writing through reflective and learner-centered approaches. *Arab World English Journal*, 13(1), 356–370. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no1.23>
- Zhao, R., & Xu, J. (2025). The effects of reflective writing on EFL learners’ critical thinking development. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12, 143. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05643-9>