

## Formative Assessment in Scaffolded Learning: Enhancing Students' Autonomy in Written Communication Skills

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### Abstract

Students' autonomy in written communication is a key component of 21st-century learning, enabling learners to express ideas effectively and take responsibility for their learning. However, many students still face difficulties in writing, particularly in organizing ideas and developing independence. Therefore, integrating formative assessment within a scaffolded learning framework is considered a promising approach to address these challenges. This study aims to investigate the role of formative assessment in scaffolded learning in enhancing students' autonomy in written communication skills. This study employed a mixed-method design involving 22 second-semester students of the Buddhist Communication Science Department. The instruments included a writing test, a learner autonomy questionnaire, and interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using a paired sample t-test, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively. The results showed a significant improvement in students' writing performance, with the mean score increasing from 50.5 (pre-test) to 73 (post-test). Students' autonomy scores also improved from 3.4 to 4.6, with statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ). In conclusion, formative assessment within scaffolded learning effectively enhances students' writing competence and autonomy. This study implies that English lecturers should integrate formative assessment into scaffolded instruction to promote students' independence and improve written communication skills.

**Keywords:** Scaffolded learning; Formative assessment; Writing autonomy; Written communication skills

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## INTRODUCTION

English communication skills have become essential in the globalization era (Jaya, 2025), particularly in academic and professional contexts where written communication plays a crucial role. Writing, as one of the productive language skills, enables learners to express ideas, construct arguments, and communicate meaning effectively (Esperanzate, 2025). However, writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners due to its complexity, which involves cognitive, linguistic, and metacognitive processes (Riwayatiningsih et al., 2025). In higher education contexts, students are often required not only to produce grammatically correct texts but also to demonstrate coherence, critical thinking, and clarity of ideas, which many learners still struggle to achieve (Alsaria & Alsaria, 2024). Therefore, addressing the challenges in EFL writing requires well-designed instructional approaches that can effectively support students in developing both their writing competence and higher-order thinking skills.

One of the key issues in writing instruction is the lack of students' autonomy in managing their own learning process. Learner autonomy refers to students' ability to take control of their learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating their progress (Marzuki et al., 2023). In writing contexts, low autonomy is often reflected in students' dependence on teachers, difficulty in generating and organizing ideas, limited self-revision skills, and lack of confidence in expressing their thoughts (Taufiqulloh et al., 2024). Recent studies have shown that autonomous learners tend to achieve better academic performance and demonstrate higher engagement in writing tasks (Anggraeni et al., 2025). However, developing autonomy in writing is not an automatic process and requires structured pedagogical support (Sun & Zhang, 2023). Thus, promoting students' autonomy in writing necessitates structured instructional approaches that can guide learners toward independence while enhancing their engagement and responsibility in the learning process.

Scaffolded learning has been widely recognized as an effective instructional approach to support students' gradual development of skills and independence (Elyza et al., 2025). Rooted in Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory, scaffolding provides temporary support that is gradually withdrawn as learners become more competent (Sawaki et al., 2024). In writing instruction, scaffolding can be implemented through modeling, guided practice, and step-by-step assistance (Nguyen & Truong, 2024), which helps students move from dependence to independence. Previous research indicates that scaffolded instruction can enhance students' writing performance and metacognitive awareness (Nourazar et al., 2022). Nevertheless, scaffolding alone may not be sufficient without an effective assessment strategy that continuously monitors students' progress.

Formative assessment plays a crucial role in supporting learning by providing continuous feedback that helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses and regulate their learning strategies (Morris et al., 2021). In writing instruction, formative assessment allows students to revise their work, improve the quality of their writing, and develop self-regulated learning skills (Yujie Zhong, 2021). Moreover, formative assessment has been found to enhance students' autonomy by encouraging self-assessment, peer feedback, and reflective practices (Wisniewski et al., 2020). Despite its potential, previous studies tend to examine formative assessment and scaffolding separately, with limited attention to how their integration can simultaneously foster writing skills and learner autonomy.

Although a number of studies have explored scaffolded learning or formative assessment independently, there is still a lack of empirical research that specifically investigates the integration of formative assessment within scaffolded learning to enhance students' autonomy in written communication skills, particularly in the context of Indonesian higher education. Furthermore, many previous studies focus primarily on writing performance outcomes, with less emphasis on students' autonomy as a learning outcome. This gap highlights the need for research that not only examines writing improvement but also investigates how instructional and assessment strategies can foster students' independence in learning.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the role of formative assessment within a scaffolded learning framework in enhancing students' autonomy in written communication skills. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: How does formative assessment within a scaffolded learning framework influence students' written communication skills, writing autonomy, and their perceptions toward the learning process? This study is expected to contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the integration of formative assessment and scaffolded learning, as well as offering pedagogical insights for English lecturers in designing more effective writing instruction that promotes both skill development and learner autonomy.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design with an embedded quasi-experimental approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to comprehensively examine the role of formative assessment within a scaffolded learning framework in enhancing students' autonomy in written communication skills. The quantitative component used a one-group pre-test post-test design to measure changes in students' writing performance and autonomy before and after the treatment, while the qualitative component was embedded to explore students' perceptions through interviews. The independent variable of this study was formative assessment within scaffolded learning, while the dependent variables were students' written communication skills and learning autonomy. This design was selected to provide both statistical evidence of improvement and in-depth understanding of students' learning experiences.

### Research Participants

The participants of this study were 22 second-semester undergraduate students (10 males and 12 females), aged between 18–21 years, from the Buddhist Communication Science Department at Jinarakkhita Buddhist College of Lampung, Indonesia. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as they were enrolled in a writing course and had relatively similar academic backgrounds. In terms of English proficiency, the students were categorized at a lower-intermediate level based on their previous academic performance and initial writing assessment. The study was conducted in a regular classroom setting from February 20th to April 20th, 2024. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

### Instruments and Data Collection

To collect the data, this study employed a writing test, a learner autonomy questionnaire, and interviews. The writing test required students to produce an analytical exposition text within 90 minutes and was assessed using (Heaton, 1988) rubric, which includes five dimensions: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Each dimension was scored on a scale of 1–5 with different weight distributions. To ensure scoring reliability, two independent raters assessed the writing, and the final score was obtained by averaging both scores. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using correlation analysis, indicating a high level of agreement. The learner autonomy questionnaire consisted of 32 items measured using a 5-point Likert scale and covered dimensions such as self-regulation, responsibility, motivation, and self-evaluation. The questionnaire was translated into Indonesian for clarity, and the validity test showed that all items were valid (sig. < 0.05), with a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of 0.834, indicating acceptable internal consistency. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions of the implementation, focusing on their experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits.

The data collection procedure was conducted in three stages. First, in the pre-test stage, students completed the writing test and autonomy questionnaire before the treatment. Second, during the treatment stage, students were exposed to formative assessment within scaffolded learning, including guided writing activities, peer feedback, teacher feedback, and gradual withdrawal of support. Third, in the post-test stage, students completed the same writing test and questionnaire after the treatment, followed by interviews.

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 27, including descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), normality testing, paired sample t-test to examine significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores. The level of significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved transcription, coding, categorization into themes, and interpretation. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was conducted by comparing qualitative findings with quantitative results. Furthermore, content validity was established through expert judgment with a validity index of 0.82, while reliability testing yielded a coefficient of 0.90, indicating that the instruments used in this study were valid and reliable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This study aimed to examine the role of formative assessment within scaffolded learning in enhancing students' written communication skills and learning autonomy. Overall, the results indicate that students showed improvement in both writing performance and autonomy after the implementation of the treatment. The quantitative findings show that students' writing scores improved from a mean of 50.5 in the pre-test to 73 in the post-test, indicating a substantial increase. As a result, there was a 22,5% improvement. The end result was as follows.

Table 1. The Students' Writing Improvement

|                       | Mean    | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-----------------------|---------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair1 Writing_Pretest | 50.5000 | 22 | 4.01182        | .89707          |
| Writing_Posttest      | 73.0000 | 22 | 8.95956        | 2.00342         |

The paired sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ( $t = 7.569$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that the intervention was associated with improved writing performance. The t-test was used to determine whether the improvement was significant or not. The end result was as follows:

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

| Table 2. Paired-Samples Test |          |               |           |                                           |          |       |                |       |
|------------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------|----------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Paired Differences           |          |               |           | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | t        | df    | Sig.(2-tailed) |       |
|                              | Mean     | Std.Deviation | Std.Error | Lower                                     |          |       |                | Upper |
| Pair1 Posttest-Pretest       | 22.50000 | 7.62199       | 1.70433   | 9.33280                                   | 16.46720 | 7.569 | 21             | .000  |

The researcher compared t-value to t-table using the table above. The t-value in this case was 7.569, while the t-table was 2.079. If  $t\text{-value} > t\text{-table}$ , the current study's result was significant. This could imply that formative assessments in scaffolded learning could significantly enhance students' written communication skills than conventional strategy. Besides that, the table above shows a significant difference in the students' writing pretest and posttest scores. According to the Paired Sample T-Test, the treatment had a significant impact on the students' scores, as indicated by the sig. (2-tailed) value of .000. In terms of writing aspects, the greatest improvement was observed in language use, followed by organization and content. This indicates that structured guidance and feedback may particularly support students in developing grammatical accuracy and clarity of expression.



Futhermore, students' autonomy in writing also showed notable improvement, with the mean score increasing from 3.4 to 4.6. There was an improvement of 1.2. Here was the result:

Table 3. The Improvement of Students' Autonomy in Written Communication

|                    | Mean   | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------|--------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1<br>Posttest | 4.6094 | 22 | .31557         | .05579          |
| Pretest            | 3.4484 | 22 | .68973         | .12193          |

Whether the improvement was significant or not, it was tested by using t – test. Here was the result:

Table 4. Paired Samples Test

|                               | Paired Differences |               |           |                                           |         |       | t  | df   | Sig.(2-tailed) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------|---------|-------|----|------|----------------|
|                               | Mean               | Std.Deviation | Std.Error | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |         |       |    |      |                |
|                               |                    |               |           | Lower                                     | Upper   |       |    |      |                |
| Pair1<br>Posttest-<br>Pretest | 1.16094            | .90827        | .16056    | .83347                                    | 1.48840 | 7.230 | 21 | .000 |                |

The paired sample t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant ( $t = 7.230$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings suggest that the integration of formative assessment and scaffolded learning is associated with increased student independence in managing their writing process. Overall, the results indicate that students not only improved their writing skills but also became more capable of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that formative assessment within scaffolded learning is associated with improvements in both students' written communication skills and learning autonomy. These results align with previous research suggesting that continuous feedback and structured support play a significant role in enhancing students' learning outcomes and self-regulation (Wisniewski et al., 2020). The improvement in writing performance can be explained by the role of formative assessment in providing timely and specific feedback (Morris et al., 2021). Through iterative feedback, students are able to identify weaknesses, revise their work, and improve the quality of their writing (Susilowaty et al., 2025). This finding is consistent with studies showing that feedback-driven learning enhances writing development and metacognitive awareness (Panadero et al., 2019; Teng & Zhang, 2020).

Another explanation for the improvement in students' writing performance lies in the interactive nature of scaffolded learning combined with formative assessment. During the learning process, students were not only passive recipients of teacher instruction but also active participants who continuously revised and refined their writing based on feedback and guided support (Hsing-I Lin, 2023). This iterative process may have encouraged deeper cognitive engagement and helped students internalize writing strategies more effectively (Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024). According to (Phuong, 2023), formative feedback becomes more meaningful when students actively use feedback to improve subsequent performance rather than merely receiving evaluative comments. Similarly, recent studies have emphasized that scaffolded writing instruction promotes

gradual mastery because students receive support appropriate to their current level of competence before progressing toward more independent performance (Xiao, 2024). Therefore, the integration of feedback and scaffolding appears to create a supportive environment that facilitates both writing improvement and learner independence.

Furthermore, the integration of scaffolded learning contributes to students' gradual development of independence. The use of structured guidance followed by fading support allows students to move from dependence to autonomy (Suwastini et al., 2021). This supports socio-constructivist perspectives, which emphasize that learning occurs through guided interaction before becoming internalized (Sabil et al., 2021). The finding that autonomy improved significantly suggests that scaffolded learning, when combined with formative assessment, can effectively foster self-regulated learning behaviors. Another important finding is that the strongest improvement occurred in language use. This may indicate that formative feedback is particularly effective in addressing grammatical and linguistic aspects of writing. It also suggests that scaffolded instruction helps students focus on specific writing components systematically, rather than attempting to improve all aspects simultaneously.

In terms of learner autonomy, the results indicate that students became more active in evaluating their own work and taking responsibility for their learning. This supports previous findings that formative assessment strategies such as self-assessment and peer feedback can promote autonomy and reflective learning (Taufiquilloh et al., 2024). The findings also suggest that formative assessment within scaffolded learning may contribute to the development of self-regulated learning behaviors. Students who receive continuous feedback and opportunities for self-reflection tend to become more aware of their strengths, weaknesses, and learning progress (Anggraeni et al., 2025). This awareness is closely related to metacognitive development, which is considered an important component of learner autonomy (Li et al., 2023). In EFL writing contexts, metacognitive awareness enables students to plan writing strategies, monitor their performance, and evaluate their own writing outcomes more independently. This finding supports the work of (Li et al., 2025), who argue that writing autonomy develops when students are actively involved in monitoring and regulating their learning processes. Furthermore, the implementation of peer feedback and self-assessment activities in scaffolded learning may strengthen collaborative learning and increase students' confidence in expressing ideas in writing.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating assessment and instruction rather than treating them as separate components in writing classrooms. In many EFL contexts, assessment is still predominantly summative and product-oriented, focusing mainly on final scores rather than the learning process itself (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). However, this study indicates that formative assessment integrated into scaffolded learning can transform assessment into a learning tool that continuously supports students' development. Through guided practice, constructive feedback, and gradual withdrawal of support, students may become more confident and independent writers. Therefore, English lecturers should consider designing writing instruction that emphasizes process-oriented learning, reflective practices, and continuous interaction between teachers and students.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to one academic program, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study did not include a control group, making it difficult to compare the effectiveness of the intervention with other instructional approaches. Third, the duration of the treatment was relatively short, which may not fully capture the long-term impact of the intervention.

Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, include comparison groups, and explore longer intervention periods. In addition, further studies

may investigate the use of digital formative assessment tools and their impact on students' writing autonomy. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research by demonstrating that the integration of formative assessment and scaffolded learning can support both writing development and learner autonomy. These findings highlight the importance of combining instructional support and continuous assessment in creating more effective and student centered writing instruction.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the role of formative assessment within a scaffolded learning framework in enhancing students' written communication skills and learning autonomy. The findings indicate that the implementation of formative assessment in scaffolded learning significantly improves students' writing performance, as reflected in the increase of mean scores from pre-test to post-test. In addition, students' autonomy in writing also improved significantly, indicating that continuous feedback and gradual support effectively promote independent learning. Furthermore, the findings suggest that formative assessment within scaffolded learning not only enhances students' ability to organize and express ideas in writing but also fosters their capacity to monitor and evaluate their own learning processes. These results confirm that the integration of instructional support and ongoing assessment plays an important role in developing both writing competence and learner autonomy. Pedagogically, this study implies that writing instruction should integrate formative assessment strategies within scaffolded learning to provide structured guidance and meaningful feedback. However, this study is limited by the small sample size and the absence of a control group, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. First, English lecturers are encouraged to integrate formative assessment systematically within scaffolded learning to support students' writing development and autonomy. The use of structured guidance followed by gradual withdrawal of support (fading strategy) should be accompanied by continuous and constructive feedback. Second, formative assessment practices should include self-assessment and peer assessment to enhance students' metacognitive awareness and responsibility for their learning. Clear rubrics and reflective activities are recommended to support this process. Third, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples and to include a control group in order to strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Further studies may also explore the long-term impact of formative assessment within scaffolded learning and examine the role of digital tools in supporting students' autonomy in writing.

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and did not involve autonomous data analysis or interpretation. All content has been carefully reviewed, revised, and validated by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

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