

TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND STUDENTS' WRITING COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Writing competence remains one of the most persistent challenges facing English Language education in Nigerian secondary schools, yet the routine assessment practices through which teachers might address this challenge remain under-examined in private school contexts. This study investigated teachers' assessment practices – formative, peer, and self-assessment – as correlates of students' writing competence in English Language among senior secondary school students in private secondary schools in Anambra State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational survey design was adopted. The population comprised 24,267 Senior Secondary 2 English Language students in the 917 government-approved private secondary schools across the six education zones of Anambra State, from which a sample of 394 students was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula and proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Teacher Assessment Practices Rating Scale (TAPRS, $\alpha = .85$) and the Students' Writing Competence Rating Scale (SWCRS, $\alpha = .94$), achieving a 98.2% return rate. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to answer the research questions and test of significance of Pearson to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level. Findings

revealed a high positive and significant relationship between formative assessment practices and writing competence ($r = .60$, $p < .05$), a very low but significant positive relationship for peer assessment practices ($r = .14$, $p < .05$), and a high positive and significant relationship for self-assessment practices ($r = .70$, $p < .05$), which emerged as the strongest individual correlate of writing competence. The study concluded that teachers' assessment practices, particularly self-assessment and formative assessment, are important correlates of students' writing competence, and recommended that English Language teachers systematically integrate structured formative and self-assessment procedures into writing instruction.

Keywords: *Teachers' Assessment Practices, Formative Assessment, Feedback, Summative Assessment, Writing Competence*

Introduction

Writing competence is widely recognised as one of the most important language outcomes in contemporary education because it serves as the primary medium through which learners communicate ideas, demonstrate understanding, and participate in academic discourse. Beyond the classroom, effective writing is increasingly required in professional, social, and digital environments, making it an essential skill for lifelong learning and participation in knowledge-based societies. Writing competence refers to the ability to produce coherent, grammatically accurate, and purposeful written texts that effectively communicate meaning to intended audiences, involving planning, drafting, revising, and monitoring (Rahimi & Zhang, 2022).

Despite its importance, writing competence remains a persistent challenge for many learners. Studies continue to report weaknesses in students' ability to develop ideas adequately, organise texts coherently, apply appropriate vocabulary, and maintain grammatical accuracy (Goshu & Gebremariam, 2024; Rahimi & Zhang, 2022). The challenge is particularly evident in English as a Second Language contexts, where learners must develop writing skills while simultaneously acquiring proficiency in the target language. Adebayo et al. (2024a) reported that many students experience difficulty expressing ideas coherently in written form, while Alli and Aika (2024) found that writing achievement remains below expected proficiency levels among many learners. Within the Nigerian educational system, private secondary schools constitute an important context for students' academic and language development, and in Anambra State, where English Language remains the principal medium of instruction and assessment, competence in writing is particularly important for students' educational advancement.

Assessment occupies a central position in language instruction because it serves not only as a mechanism for measuring learning outcomes but also as a pedagogical tool for guiding learning

and improving performance. Within contemporary writing pedagogy, assessment is no longer viewed solely as a summative process of assigning grades; rather, it is increasingly conceptualised as an integral component of instruction that shapes learners' writing behaviours, engagement patterns, revision practices, and self-regulatory capacities. Effective assessment practices provide students with information about their strengths and weaknesses, create opportunities for reflection and revision, and facilitate the development of metacognitive awareness necessary for writing improvement. Consequently, differences in assessment practices may partially explain variations in students' writing competence across educational settings.

Assessment represents a systematic process of gathering, interpreting, and utilising evidence about student learning to make informed educational decisions and support continued development. Contemporary assessment theory conceptualises assessment as an integral component of the teaching-learning process that serves diagnostic, formative, and summative purposes (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020), and recognises it as simultaneously a measurement tool, a pedagogical intervention, and a communication mechanism (Bennett, 2021). Its foundations rest on principles of validity, reliability, fairness, and consequential validity. Validity refers to the degree to which assessment procedures measure what they purport to measure and support appropriate inferences about student capabilities (Kane, 2022); in writing assessment it extends to whether practices produce beneficial rather than detrimental effects on learning and motivation (Bachman & Palmer, 2021). Assessment for learning provides ongoing feedback that enables teachers and students to adjust their practices, assessment of learning evaluates achievement at predetermined intervals, and assessment as learning positions students as active agents who develop self-regulatory capabilities (Yan & Brown, 2021).

Assessment is also never culturally neutral, since evaluation practices reflect particular value systems that may advantage some students over others (Shepard, 2019). This is particularly crucial in multilingual contexts such as Nigerian secondary schools, where students are assessed in English as a second language, potentially confounding the measurement of actual competence with English language proficiency (Omolehin & Mokolobate, 2021). Effective feedback provides students with specific, actionable information about their performance and clear guidance for improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2022); however, teachers often struggle to provide feedback that is specific, timely, and genuinely useful, with common challenges including feedback that is too general or arrives too late to support revision (Winstone et al., 2022). For this study, assessment is understood as a systematic process of collecting, interpreting, and using evidence about students' performance to inform instruction, provide feedback, and make evaluative decisions, encompassing formative, peer, and self-assessment practices.

Teachers' assessment practices constitute the strategies, procedures, and activities that educators employ to gather evidence about student learning, interpret that evidence meaningfully, and use it

to support continued student development and inform instructional decision-making. They encompass not only formal testing but also informal observation and student-involved assessment (Heritage, 2021), and extend to the full cycle of planning, implementation, scoring, interpretation, feedback provision, and utilisation of results (McMillan, 2020). Formative assessment practices are ongoing procedures conducted during instruction to provide immediate feedback that enables teachers and students to adjust their strategies (Black & Wiliam, 2021); they include questioning techniques, classroom discussions, and written feedback on drafts that guides revision (Gotwals & Birmingham, 2021). By contrast, summative assessment practices evaluate cumulative learning at the conclusion of instructional units and serve accountability purposes (Taras, 2019), though well-designed summative assessments can also provide valuable learning opportunities (Harlen, 2022). Rahimi and Zhang (2022) contend that formative assessment promotes deeper engagement with writing tasks by encouraging learners to reflect on their performance and revise their written texts, while Goshu and Gebremariam (2024) found that teacher–student writing conferences, a prominent form of formative assessment, significantly improved learners’ organisation, vocabulary use, and writing mechanics.

Closely related to formative assessment is peer assessment, which has emerged as a significant pedagogical strategy within process-oriented approaches to writing instruction. Peer assessment involves learners evaluating and providing feedback on one another’s written texts using predetermined criteria. Beyond its evaluative function, it promotes collaborative learning, critical reading, audience awareness, and reflective engagement with writing (Zhao, 2025). Through reviewing peers’ work, learners are exposed to alternative writing strategies and develop greater sensitivity to textual features that contribute to effective communication (Zhang & Hyland, 2022). When systematically implemented with clear rubrics and appropriate scaffolding, it enhances learning both for those providing and those receiving feedback (Li et al., 2020; Panadero & Alqassab, 2019). Nevertheless, its effectiveness depends largely on the quality of implementation, learners’ feedback literacy, and the instructional support provided by teachers.

Another assessment practice that has gained prominence in contemporary writing pedagogy is self-assessment. Rooted in theories of self-regulated learning, self-assessment encourages learners to evaluate their own writing against established criteria, identify areas requiring improvement, and assume greater responsibility for their learning. Through self-assessment, learners develop metacognitive awareness, self-monitoring abilities, and reflective capacities that are essential for effective writing development (Andrade, 2019). Zhang and Zou (2024) and Rahimi and Zhang (2022) emphasised that self-regulatory strategies supported by teacher guidance enhance learners’ autonomy and language-learning outcomes. Students who are not encouraged to evaluate and regulate their own writing processes may experience difficulties identifying weaknesses in their written work, thereby limiting continuous improvement in writing competence.

Implementing these practices requires substantial assessment literacy on the part of teachers, including an understanding of assessment purposes and methods, the ability to design valid assessments, and the capacity to interpret results and provide effective feedback, yet research documents gaps in teachers' assessment literacy arising from inadequate pre-service preparation and limited in-service professional development (DeLuca et al., 2021; Xu & Brown, 2023). In Nigeria, assessment practices are further shaped by examination-oriented cultures, large classes that constrain individualised assessment, limited resources, and cultural communication patterns that affect feedback (Onyemerekeya, 2020). Practices involving frequent formative feedback, clear criteria, student involvement, and systematic use of assessment data to inform instruction correlate positively with improved achievement (Kingston & Nash, 2021), although the quality of implementation, rather than the mere use of a particular method, proves decisive (Andersson & Palm, 2020).

The persistent concern over students' writing competence has stimulated diverse pedagogical interventions, ranging from assessment-driven mechanisms such as formative evaluation, teacher feedback, and self-assessment routines to collaborative and socio-culturally mediated instructional strategies (Adebayo et al., 2024b; Rahimi & Zhang, 2022). However, existing literature appears to examine isolated instructional strategies without adequately considering how teachers' routine, everyday assessment practices, as naturally occurring instructional conditions, relate to students' writing competence, particularly within private secondary school contexts in developing nations. The present study addresses this gap by examining formative, peer, and self-assessment practices as correlates of students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Writing competence is a fundamental objective of English Language education because it enables learners to communicate ideas effectively, demonstrate academic understanding, and participate meaningfully in academic discourse. In Nigeria, where English functions as both the official language and the principal medium of instruction, competence in writing is particularly important for academic success and educational progression. Despite the recognised importance of writing competence and the sustained efforts devoted to improving English Language instruction, concerns regarding students' writing proficiency continue to attract scholarly and educational attention.

There is growing concern that many secondary school students continue to experience difficulties in written communication despite years of formal exposure to English Language instruction. Common challenges include inadequate development of ideas, poor organisation of written texts, inappropriate vocabulary use, grammatical inaccuracies, and weaknesses in writing mechanics.

These deficiencies often limit students' ability to communicate effectively, construct coherent arguments, and demonstrate knowledge through written expression, thereby constraining their overall academic performance.

Although existing studies have examined writing interventions, feedback strategies, and technology-supported writing instruction, much of the literature has focused on specific instructional techniques or experimental treatments rather than teachers' routine assessment practices as naturally occurring educational conditions associated with students' writing competence. Within private secondary schools in Anambra State, empirical evidence addressing how formative, peer, and self-assessment practices relate to students' writing competence appears scarce. It was this need that motivated the present study, which sought to investigate teachers' assessment practices as correlates of students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' assessment practices as correlates of students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between formative assessment practices and students' writing competence;
2. examine the relationship between peer assessment practices and students' writing competence; and
3. ascertain the relationship between self-assessment practices and students' writing competence.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between formative assessment practices and students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship between peer assessment practices and students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What is the relationship between self-assessment practices and students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses, relating to English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State, were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between formative assessment practices and students' writing competence.
2. There is no significant relationship between peer assessment practices and students' writing competence.
3. There is no significant relationship between self-assessment practices and students' writing competence.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivist Learning Theory (Bruner, 1961)

Bruner (1961) proposed that learners actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive it, emphasising discovery learning, scaffolding, and the structuring of learning experiences so that learners can build on prior understanding. Constructivist theory asserts that students learn best when they engage actively in exploring, reflecting, evaluating, and reorganising their ideas, with teachers functioning as facilitators who design tasks that promote inquiry and self-direction.

The theory is relevant to the present study because it explains how teachers' assessment practices foster active learning and knowledge construction during writing instruction. Formative assessment encourages learners to engage actively with feedback, revise written texts, and construct deeper understanding of writing conventions, rather than passively absorbing corrections. Peer assessment provides opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and collaborative meaning-making consistent with constructivist principles, while self-assessment most explicitly embodies Bruner's emphasis on learner responsibility, promoting reflection, self-monitoring, and gradual internalisation of writing standards. The theory therefore provides a suitable framework for explaining how formative, peer, and self-assessment practices may relate to students' writing competence.

Research Method

The study adopted a correlational survey research design, considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the nature and degree of relationship between teachers' assessment practices and students' writing competence as they naturally occur in private secondary schools, without manipulation of the variables. The study was conducted in Anambra State, South-East Nigeria, an area selected because of persistent concerns, reflected in WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports,

regarding students' grammatical expression, paragraph development, organisation of ideas, and writing mechanics. The population comprised 24,267 Senior Secondary 2 English Language students in the 917 government-approved private secondary schools across the six education zones of Anambra State (Aguata, Awka, Nnewi, Ogidi, Onitsha, and Otuocha) for the 2025/2026 academic session. The Taro Yamane formula was applied to determine a sample of 279 schools and a corresponding student sample of 394, both selected through proportionate stratified random sampling across the six zones.

Data were collected using two instruments: the Teacher Assessment Practices Rating Scale (TAPRS) and the Students' Writing Competence Rating Scale (SWCRS). The TAPRS contained 30 items across three 10-item clusters measuring formative, peer, and self-assessment practices respectively, while the SWCRS contained 40 items measuring students' writing competence. Both were structured on a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree, weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Face and content validity were established by three experts from the Departments of English Language, Measurement and Evaluation, and Educational Foundations at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, whose recommendations were incorporated into the final instruments. A trial test administered to 20 English Language students in private secondary schools in neighbouring Enugu State, chosen for its similarity to Anambra State, yielded Cronbach Alpha coefficients of .85 for the TAPRS and .94 for the SWCRS, both adequate for the study. The researcher, assisted by five trained research assistants who were practising secondary school teachers, administered 394 copies of the instruments directly to respondents; 387 copies were properly completed and retrieved, giving a return rate of 98.2%.

Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, interpreted using Nworgu's (2015) guideline whereby coefficients of ± 0.00 – 0.19 indicate a very low relationship, ± 0.20 – 0.39 a low relationship, ± 0.40 – 0.59 a moderate relationship, ± 0.60 – 0.79 a high relationship, and ± 0.80 and above a very high relationship. The three null hypotheses were tested using the test of significance of Pearson's r at the 0.05 level, with the null hypothesis rejected where the obtained p -value was equal to or less than 0.05. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What is the relationship between formative assessment practices and students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Pearson's Correlation and Test of Significance between Formative Assessment Practices and Students' Writing Competence (N=387)

Variables	1	2	p-value	Remark
1. Formative Assessment Practices	1.00	0.60	.000	High Positive; Significant
2. Students' Writing Competence	0.60	1.00		

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026

Table 1 shows that the correlation between formative assessment practices and students' writing competence yielded $r = 0.60$, $p = .000$, indicating a high, positive, and statistically significant relationship. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between peer assessment practices and students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation and Test of Significance between Peer Assessment Practices and Students' Writing Competence (N=387)

Variables	1	2	p-value	Remark
1. Peer Assessment Practices	1.00	0.14	.003	Very Low Positive; Significant
2. Students' Writing Competence	0.14	1.00		

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026

Table 2 shows that the correlation between peer assessment practices and students' writing competence yielded $r = 0.14$, $p = .003$, indicating a very low but statistically significant positive relationship. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between self-assessment practices and students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation and Test of Significance between Self-Assessment Practices and Students' Writing Competence (N=387)

Variables	1	2	p-value	Remark
1. Self-Assessment Practices	1.00	0.70	.000	High Positive; Significant
2. Students' Writing Competence	0.70	1.00		

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026

Table 3 shows that the correlation between self-assessment practices and students' writing competence yielded $r = 0.70$, $p = .000$, the strongest relationship among the three assessment practices examined, and statistically significant. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Summary of Findings

Findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. Formative assessment practices had a high, positive, and significant relationship with students' writing competence in English Language in private secondary schools in Anambra State ($r = .60$, $p < .05$).
2. Peer assessment practices had a very low but significant positive relationship with students' writing competence ($r = .14$, $p < .05$).
3. Self-assessment practices had a high, positive, and significant relationship with students' writing competence ($r = .70$, $p < .05$), the strongest of the three.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data on formative assessment practices revealed a high, positive, and significant relationship with students' writing competence in private secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding is consistent with Mahmoodi et al. (2023), who found that formative assessment significantly improved writing performance among EFL learners, and with Goshu and Gebremariam (2024), who found that teacher–student writing conferences significantly improved learners' organisation, vocabulary use, and writing mechanics. The likely explanation is that formative assessment creates sustained opportunities for feedback, reflection, and revision throughout the writing process: when teachers consistently monitor students' writing progress, provide timely corrective feedback, and adjust instruction to address identified weaknesses, students gain a clearer understanding of their errors and the strategies needed for improvement.

Analysis of data on peer assessment practices revealed a very low but significant positive relationship with writing competence. This finding partly aligns with and partly diverges from prior work: while Iwuanyanwu et al. (2021) and Oladele and Ogunleye (2022) reported stronger, significant improvements in writing outcomes attributable to peer assessment, Huisman et al. (2019) cautioned that its effectiveness depends substantially on the quality of rubrics, training, and implementation. The very low magnitude found here may reflect that peer assessment, as practised in many private secondary schools in Anambra State, is not yet systematically implemented with the structured criteria and guided protocols necessary to produce strong effects; nonetheless, its statistical significance confirms that even modest exposure to peer assessment yields measurable, if limited, gains in writing competence.

Analysis of data on self-assessment practices revealed the strongest relationship with writing competence. This finding is consistent with Zhang and Zhang (2022), who found that rubric-guided self-assessment promoted sustained gains in writing performance, with Ratminingsih et al. (2018), who found that self-assessment positively affected writing competence among junior secondary students, and with Ezema et al. (2023), who found that self-assessment produced the strongest improvements in writing competence among secondary school students in Enugu State. The likely explanation is that self-assessment directly engages students in the metacognitive processes most closely linked to writing improvement: when students evaluate their own work against established criteria, they develop deeper awareness of quality indicators such as organisation, vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy, and are encouraged to take deliberate corrective action during revision. Self-assessment also fosters learner autonomy by shifting responsibility for writing improvement from teacher to student, promoting more sustained, self-directed engagement with writing tasks than externally imposed assessment alone.

Considered together, the findings show that all three dimensions of teachers' assessment practices examined in this study are positively and significantly related to students' writing competence, though the strength of these relationships varies considerably. Self-assessment practices demonstrated the strongest relationship, followed by formative assessment practices, with peer assessment practices showing the weakest, though still significant, relationship. This pattern suggests that assessment practices which place primary responsibility for evaluation and reflection directly in students' hands, whether through self-assessment or through the sustained feedback cycles of formative assessment, are more powerfully associated with writing competence than assessment practices that depend on the mediating judgment of classmates. The comparatively modest magnitude of the peer assessment relationship is consistent with the broader literature's recognition that peer assessment is highly sensitive to implementation quality: where students lack adequate assessment literacy or where cultural norms discourage frank evaluation of classmates' work, its potential benefits may not be fully realised. These findings collectively affirm that

teachers' assessment practices, and particularly the more student-centred forms of formative and self-assessment, constitute an important and modifiable correlate of writing competence in the private secondary school context of Anambra State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that teachers' assessment practices are important, positive correlates of students' writing competence in private secondary schools in Anambra State, with self-assessment practices having the strongest relationship, followed by formative assessment practices, and peer assessment practices having a smaller but still significant relationship. Writing competence in this context is therefore most powerfully supported when students are actively and reflectively involved in evaluating their own writing, and when teachers sustain ongoing, feedback-rich formative assessment throughout the writing process, rather than relying primarily on summative or peer-mediated evaluation alone.

Recommendations

1. English Language teachers should consistently implement formative assessment practices in their writing classrooms, including regular provision of specific, actionable feedback on student drafts and writing conferences, given the high positive and significant relationship formative assessment demonstrated with writing competence.
2. English Language teachers should integrate self-assessment systematically into writing instruction by providing students with clearly defined rubrics and criteria for evaluating their own written work, and should train students in reflective self-evaluation, given that self-assessment demonstrated the strongest relationship with writing competence.
3. Peer assessment practices should be more deliberately structured, with explicit training in peer feedback procedures and well-designed rubrics, so that peer assessment can more fully contribute to writing competence development.
4. School administrators should organise regular in-service training and workshops for English Language teachers on assessment literacy and the practical implementation of formative and self-assessment strategies in writing instruction.
5. Curriculum planners and educational policymakers should develop clear guidelines that position formative, self-, and peer assessment as core components of English Language writing instruction in secondary schools, rather than supplementary activities.

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