

PERSONALIZED FEEDBACK-BASED COACHING TO ENHANCE ENGLISH WRITING COMPETITION READINESS

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Abstract

English writing competitions require contestants to exhibit not only language correctness but also genre understanding, critical thinking, and good organization. Although feedback has been widely recognized as an effective strategy for improving writing skills, studies focusing on personalized feedback in writing competition coaching remain limited. This study seeks to evaluate how personalized feedback-based coaching aids students' writing development during iterative competition preparation. This qualitative Action Research involved two undergraduate students participating in four writing practices representing the competition format. Each session followed the stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Data were collected from participants' writing drafts, coaches' feedback, observation notes, and reflective records, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that personalized feedback promoted continuous improvement throughout the coaching process. Initial feedback emphasized grammar, organization, and genre awareness, while subsequent feedback focused on higher-order writing skills, including idea development, coherence, narrative quality, and writing style. Furthermore, each participant demonstrated a unique pattern of improvement, highlighting the importance of individualized coaching in addressing specific learning needs. The study concludes that personalized feedback-based coaching effectively supports writing competition readiness by encouraging continuous reflection, targeted revision, and progressive writing development. These findings provide practical implications for educators and coaches preparing students for English writing competitions.

Keywords : Personalized feedback; writing coaching; writing competition; writing development; Action Research

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most challenging productive skills in English language learning because it requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, organization, and creativity into coherent written texts. In higher education, writing proficiency is increasingly important as students are expected to communicate ideas effectively in academic and professional contexts. Therefore, developing students' writing competence has become a major objective in English language teaching (Hyland, 2016; Graham, 2019).

Beyond classroom instruction, writing competence is also essential in English writing competitions. Unlike regular writing assignments, competitions require participants to produce well-organized and original essays within a limited time while fulfilling specific genre requirements. Participants are expected not only to demonstrate grammatical accuracy but also to present creative ideas, logical organization, and effective communication. Consequently, preparing students for writing competitions requires intensive coaching that extends beyond conventional classroom instruction (British Council, 2023).

Among various instructional strategies, feedback has consistently been recognized as an important factor in improving writing quality. Effective feedback enables learners to recognize weaknesses, revise their work, and gradually develop greater independence as writers (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). More importantly, personalized feedback allows teachers to provide targeted guidance based on each learner's strengths and weaknesses rather than applying identical corrections to all students. Such individualized support encourages continuous reflection and more meaningful revision throughout the writing process (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Although various studies have been conducted to explore written corrective feedback in English writing courses, research into personalized feedback inside writing competition coaching remains limited. Most previous study has focused on increasing classroom writing performance, but competition coaching comprises repetitive writing practice, personalized mentoring, and ongoing reflection to prepare participants for authentic competitive contexts. This context requires a coaching approach that adapts feedback according to each participant's writing development rather than relying solely on general instructional practices.

To address this gap, the present study implemented an Action Research approach to examine the use of personalized feedback during an English writing competition coaching program involving four writing practices representing descriptive and narrative essays. Through iterative coaching, reflection, and revision, this study aims to investigate how personalized feedback supports participants' writing development and enhances their readiness for English writing competitions. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for educators and coaches in designing more effective writing competition preparation programs.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative Action Research design following the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which consists of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Action Research was selected because it allows researchers to improve instructional practices while documenting participants' writing development throughout the coaching process. The study focused on implementing personalized feedback to enhance students' readiness for an English writing competition.

The participants were two undergraduate students selected to represent their institution in an English writing competition. Two English lecturers with experience in academic writing instruction and competition coaching served as coaches and evaluators. Both coaches independently reviewed each participant's writing and collaboratively discussed the feedback before delivering personalized suggestions for improvement.

The coaching program consisted of four iterative writing sessions designed to simulate the actual English writing competition. The writing tasks represented the competition genres, including two descriptive essays and two narrative essays. Each participant completed all writing tasks individually using Google Docs, enabling both coaches to monitor the writing process in real time while maintaining the authenticity of the competition setting.

Each writing session followed the official competition guidelines. Participants were required to complete an essay within 60 minutes, and the length of each essay could not exceed 3,750 characters, as specified in the competition guidebook. During the writing session, participants worked independently without receiving any assistance or corrective feedback from the coaches. Personalized feedback was provided only after each writing task had been completed to ensure that the coaching process reflected authentic competition conditions.

The coaching followed the four stages of Action Research. During the planning stage, the coaches selected the writing topic, prepared the assessment rubric, and determined the instructional focus for each session. Participants finished the given writing assignment alone under the specified competition criteria during the acting phase. In the observing stage, both coaches independently evaluated the essays based on six aspects: content, organization,

vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and genre appropriateness. Finally, during the reflecting stage, the coaches discussed each participant's strengths and areas for improvement before providing personalized feedback, which became the basis for subsequent coaching sessions.

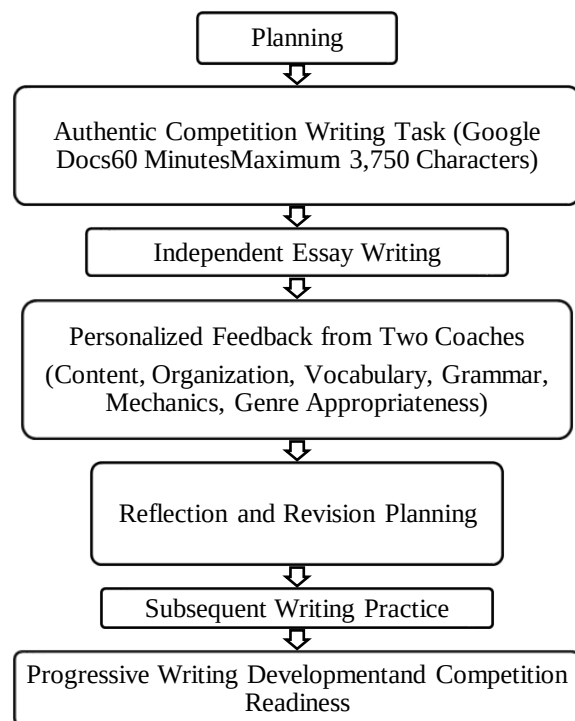


Figure 1. Personalized Feedback-Based Coaching Framework

Data were collected from multiple sources, including participants' writing drafts, written feedback provided by the two coaches, observation notes recorded during the coaching sessions, and reflective coaching records. Collecting data from these sources enabled triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' writing development throughout the coaching process.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis involved familiarizing with the data, coding recurring feedback patterns, identifying emerging themes, reviewing and refining the themes, and interpreting participants' writing development across the four coaching sessions. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the two

coaches compared their evaluations and reached agreement through discussion before the feedback was delivered to the participants.

This study examined students' writing development throughout four iterative coaching sessions conducted in an authentic competition setting. Across the coaching program, both participants demonstrated progressive improvement in various aspects of writing. The findings show that participants gradually strengthened their writing performance, beginning with fundamental language accuracy and organization before advancing to higher-order writing skills, including idea development, coherence, narrative quality, and audience engagement.

The first coaching session functioned as a diagnostic stage to identify participants' initial writing performance in a descriptive essay task. Overall, both participants were able to generate relevant ideas and respond appropriately to the assigned topic. However, several weaknesses were identified in relation to grammar, organization, genre awareness, and sentence construction.

Participant A demonstrated adequate background knowledge and logical sequencing of ideas. Nevertheless, the essay tended to explain information rather than provide vivid descriptions, indicating limited awareness of descriptive writing conventions. In addition, repetitive expressions, lengthy paragraphs, and grammatical inaccuracies reduced the overall effectiveness of the essay. Participant B produced a creative and engaging essay with vivid descriptions. However, several descriptions lacked factual accuracy and occasionally became overly speculative. The coaches also identified problems related to grammatical consistency, sentence structure, and paragraph organization.

3. Results

The first writing session revealed that both participants possessed sufficient ideas but required improvement in organizing information, applying appropriate genre conventions, and maintaining language accuracy. These findings served as the basis for planning subsequent coaching sessions.

Table 1. Initial Writing Performance

Writing Aspect	Participant A	Participant B
Content	Relevant ideas	Creative ideas
Organization	Generally logical but lengthy paragraphs	Several organizational inconsistencies
Grammar	Frequent grammatical errors	Grammatical inconsistency
Genre Awareness	Limited descriptive characteristics	Occasionally overly imaginative
Main Coaching Focus	Organization and genre	Grammar and factual accuracy

Following the first coaching session, both participants demonstrated noticeable improvement in organizing ideas and responding more appropriately to the writing task. Compared with the initial writing, fewer grammatical errors were observed, while paragraph organization became clearer and more systematic.

Participant A presented more balanced explanations and demonstrated improved control of paragraph structure. Although several grammatical inaccuracies remained, the participant showed better awareness of descriptive writing

characteristics. Participant B also demonstrated improvement by presenting more factual explanations supported by clearer descriptions. The writing became more organized, although further refinement of vocabulary choice and sentence accuracy was still required. The findings indicate that participants began applying the personalized feedback received during the previous coaching session, resulting in improved writing quality across several assessment aspects.

Table 2. Writing Development after Session Two

Writing Aspect	Observed Improvement
Grammar	Fewer language errors
Organization	Better paragraph structure
Content	More relevant and balanced ideas
Genre Awareness	Better alignment with descriptive writing
Remaining Needs	Vocabulary refinement and language accuracy

The third coaching session required participants to write a narrative essay, allowing them to apply previously developed writing skills in a different genre. Both participants successfully organized events chronologically and demonstrated greater confidence in developing their narratives. Compared with the previous descriptive essays, the participants produced more coherent stories with clearer sequencing of events. Basic grammatical problems became less dominant, allowing the coaching process to focus on strengthening narrative elements such as transitions, emotional engagement, and story development.

Although both participants demonstrated considerable improvement, the narratives could still be enhanced through richer descriptions, smoother transitions between events, and stronger

climactic development. These findings suggest that participants had begun to move beyond language accuracy toward producing more engaging and meaningful narratives.

Table 3. Narrative Writing Development

Writing Aspect	Observed Development
Organization	Clear chronological sequence
Grammar	Improved language accuracy
Coherence	Better connection between events
Narrative Quality	More engaging storytelling
Remaining Needs	Emotional detail and transitions

The fourth coaching session demonstrated participants' most developed writing performance throughout the coaching program. Both participants successfully produced coherent narratives with clear organization, appropriate language use, and meaningful storylines.

Participant A developed a narrative with a clear moral message and logical progression of events. Compared with previous sessions, the writing demonstrated greater coherence and improved sentence structure. The remaining feedback primarily concerned enriching descriptive details, strengthening transitions, and enhancing emotional engagement rather than correcting fundamental language problems. Similarly, Participant B presented a well-developed narrative integrating technology and intercultural communication within a coherent storyline. The participant demonstrated stronger control of organization and idea development than in previous sessions. Feedback mainly emphasized stylistic refinement, sentence variety, and minor grammatical corrections.

The fourth session indicates that both participants had substantially improved their writing performance. Rather than addressing fundamental writing problems, coaching at this stage focused on refining higher-order writing skills to maximize writing quality under authentic competition conditions.

Table 4. Final Writing Performance

Writing Aspect	Evidence of Development
Content	More developed and meaningful ideas
Organization	Logical and coherent structure
Grammar	Minor errors only
Coherence	Smooth flow between paragraphs
Style	Greater audience engagement
Coaching Focus	Refinement and polishing

Across the four coaching sessions, both participants demonstrated progressive development in their writing performance. Improvements were observed not only in language accuracy but also in organization, genre awareness, idea development, coherence, and narrative quality. As participants became more proficient, the coaching process naturally shifted from correcting fundamental writing issues toward refining higher-order writing skills.

4. Discussion

The present study investigated how personalized feedback-based coaching supported students' writing development during preparation for an English writing competition. The findings demonstrated that both participants showed progressive improvement throughout the four coaching sessions. Their development was evident not only in linguistic accuracy but also in organization, genre awareness, coherence, and overall writing quality. These findings

suggest that continuous coaching combined with personalized feedback can effectively facilitate students' writing development in an authentic competition setting.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the progressive improvement of students' writing across successive coaching sessions. During the initial stage, participants encountered difficulties related to grammar, organization, and genre awareness. As the coaching progressed, these fundamental issues gradually decreased, allowing participants to focus on more complex aspects of writing, such as idea development, coherence, and narrative quality. This finding is consistent with Hyland and Hyland (2019), who argue that feedback is most effective when it supports learners in identifying weaknesses and applying revisions to subsequent writing tasks. Similarly, Graham (2019) emphasizes that writing development is a gradual process requiring repeated practice, reflection, and meaningful instructional support.

Another important finding concerns the role of personalized feedback in supporting individual learning needs. Rather than providing identical comments to both participants, the coaches tailored their feedback according to each participant's writing performance after every coaching session. As participants improved, the nature of the feedback also adapted to address newly emerging needs. For example, once grammatical accuracy and paragraph organization became more stable, coaching shifted toward strengthening idea development, audience engagement, and stylistic refinement. This adaptive process reflects the principle of learner-centered feedback proposed by Carless and Boud (2018), who argue that effective feedback should enable learners to interpret, apply, and utilize comments to improve future performance rather than merely correcting current errors. Therefore, personalized feedback in this study functioned as a continuous

instructional support that responded to participants' evolving writing needs.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of iterative coaching in developing writing competence. Unlike one-time writing instruction, the four coaching sessions provided participants with repeated opportunities to write, receive individualized feedback, reflect on their performance, and apply the feedback to subsequent writing tasks. This continuous cycle allowed participants to monitor their own progress and gradually develop greater confidence in expressing ideas through writing. Such findings support the Action Research framework proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), in which planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are implemented cyclically to improve educational practice. In the present study, each coaching session informed the planning of the next session, making the coaching process responsive to participants' actual learning progress.

Another noteworthy finding is the contribution of the authentic competition setting to participants' writing development. Throughout the coaching program, participants completed each writing task individually using Google Docs within the official competition constraints, including a 60-minute time limit and a maximum length of 3,750 characters. These conditions enabled participants to experience writing situations that closely resembled the actual competition. Authentic learning environments encourage learners to apply their knowledge and skills in realistic contexts, thereby strengthening both competence and confidence (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Consequently, participants were not only improving their writing quality but were also developing familiarity with the time pressure and technical requirements of competitive writing.

The findings of this study extend previous research on written feedback by

demonstrating its implementation in a competition coaching context rather than a conventional classroom setting. Previous studies have predominantly examined the effectiveness of written corrective feedback in improving classroom writing performance (Ferris, 2023; Lee, 2020). In contrast, the present study highlights that personalized feedback can also function as an effective coaching strategy for preparing students to perform in authentic writing competitions. The findings suggest that effective competition coaching requires continuous diagnosis of students' writing performance, individualized guidance, and iterative opportunities for practice and reflection. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies not only in confirming the value of personalized feedback but also in illustrating how such feedback can be integrated into a structured coaching process that promotes sustained writing development.

In general, this study indicates that writing development is a gradual and iterative process supported by continuous coaching, individualized feedback, and authentic writing practice. As participants became more proficient, coaching naturally shifted from addressing basic writing problems toward refining higher-order writing skills, demonstrating that effective coaching should remain adaptive to learners' developmental needs. These findings provide practical implications for English lecturers, writing instructors, and competition coaches seeking to design coaching programs that foster progressive writing development while preparing students for authentic competitive environments.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it involved only two participants because the coaching program focused exclusively on students who had successfully passed the institution's internal selection process and were officially selected to represent the institution in the English writing competition. As a result, the

findings should be interpreted within the context of competition coaching rather than generalized to all EFL learners. In addition, the study was conducted over four coaching sessions within a relatively short preparation period. Future research may involve a larger number of participants, longer coaching periods, and different competition contexts to provide a broader understanding of personalized feedback-based coaching and students' writing development.

5. Conclusion

This Action Research examined the implementation of personalized feedback-based coaching in preparing two students for an English writing competition. The findings demonstrated that iterative coaching, supported by personalized feedback, facilitated students' progressive writing development across four coaching sessions conducted in an authentic competition setting. Participants showed improvement in multiple aspects of writing, including grammatical accuracy, organization, genre awareness, idea development, coherence, and overall writing quality. These findings indicate that continuous writing practice accompanied by individualized feedback enables students to gradually strengthen their writing competence and become better prepared for competitive writing tasks.

This study contributes to the field of English writing pedagogy by illustrating how personalized feedback can be systematically integrated into a coaching program for competition preparation. Rather than functioning merely as corrective feedback, personalized feedback served as continuous instructional support that guided students' writing development according to their individual learning needs.

Although this study involved only two participants, it offers practical implications

for English lecturers, writing instructors, and competition coaches. Designing coaching programs that combine iterative writing practice, authentic competition tasks, and personalized feedback may help students develop greater confidence and writing competence before participating in English writing competitions. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants, diverse competition contexts, and additional writing genres to further examine the effectiveness of personalized feedback-based coaching in supporting students' writing development.

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