



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING SELF-CHECK IN ESSAY WRITING: STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of the effectiveness of self-check as a writing strategy in academic essay courses at the University in North Sumatra. Using a qualitative descriptive study design, data was collected from 33 undergraduate students through class observation, analysis of essay draft documents, and structured questionnaires. The findings showed that the majority of students (81.8%) found self-check beneficial for improving structural organization, grammatical accuracy, and writing clarity. Nevertheless, neutral responses were prevalent regarding understanding checklist criteria (66.7%), and some students (24.2%) continued to have difficulty revising their essays after the self-check process, underscoring the need for explicit instructor scaffolding and modeling. Perceptions of time efficiency vary widely, suggesting that self-check can initially impose cognitive demands on novice learners. Overall, the results show that self-check not only improves technical writing competence but also fosters learners' metacognitive awareness and autonomy. These findings highlight the important role of structured tutoring, peer demonstration, and step-by-step instructional practice in maximizing the pedagogical benefits of self-check in writing teaching.

Keywords: Self-Check, Essay Writing, Students Perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

In the English foreign language (EFL) context, writing occupies a central position as a medium for learners to pour ideas, design reasoning, and transmit meaning (Călinescu, 2024). Practice in writing classes not only focuses on linguistic aspects, but also on how meaning is constructed in a structured way (Utami, 2022; Hyland, K. 2019). One of the challenges faced is that this cognitive barrier is increasingly evident when university-level students are required to produce good academic essays (Toba et al., 2019). Based on the theory of cognitive processes in writing, essay preparation is a complicated mental activity that is highly dependent on the performance of working memory (Flower & Hayes, 1981), because it must go through the planning, translating and reviewing stages. This cognitive impact triggers writing anxiety, so their focus is distracted from the substance of the argument and causes the final draft of the essay to be suboptimal.

The self-check strategy has a significant contribution as a mediation instrument that connects student involvement with their writing process in an effort to help their anxiety. This self-check provides operational instructions through a guided check sheet that supports students in recognizing draft errors independently and making revisions on an ongoing basis. The



theoretical foundation of this metacognitive-based strategy is rooted in the theory of self-regulation learning (SRL), a concept that focuses on students' awareness to monitor, test, and redirect the apparatus of thinking and personal academic performance (Burner, 2007). Thus, self-check functions effectively as a means of cognitive balancing that assists students in completing essay writing.

Various previous studies in the field of EFL confirm that students' self-check plays a crucial role in improving their writing accuracy, engagement, and learning autonomy, where the effectiveness is largely determined by the operational clarity of the instrument and the affective sensitivity of students when processing these strategies psychologically (Bhuana & Fauziah, 2021). However, the majority of the global literature so far is still dominated by a positivistic-quantitative approach that focuses on the results or final score of the writing (product-oriented), thus ignoring the dimensions of students' internal cognitive processes during the implementation of the strategy (Evmenova et al., 2024).

This empirical gap is increasingly evident in the context of universities in Indonesia, which is traditionally still attached to a teacher-centered feedback culture, leaving a scarcity of data on students' readiness to self-regulate independently (Lee, 2008). Therefore, the novelty of this research is here to bridge this gap by comprehensively exploring students' multidimensional perceptions through four interlocking indicators: cognitive usability, procedural clarity, real challenges, and the subjective contribution of self-checks to their academic essay writing competence.

By examining self-check as part of cognitively mediated and regulated instruction, this study offers a tripartite contribution to the English language education landscape. Theoretically, this study expands the discourse of self-assessment by repositioning self-check as a cognitive scaffolding that manages the learner's mental load, rather than just a conventional linguistic correction tool (Sweller, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). Pedagogically, this study provides an empirical portrait of how EFL students integrate self-regulation in a real writing classroom ecosystem. Finally, practically, these findings produce applicative implications for educators in designing clearer, more adaptive, and effective self-evaluation guidelines to foster student learning autonomy in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study applies a Qualitative Descriptive Study design which aims to provide a comprehensive, straight, and in-depth picture of students' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of self-check strategies in writing academic essays (Creswell, 1994). The QDS approach was chosen because it has the ability to maintain the authenticity and complexity of phenomena occurring in the context of natural class inquiry, without imposing rigid theoretical interpretations or experimental manipulations. To strengthen the validity of the qualitative findings, this study integrates mixed-method triangulation by incorporating descriptive statistics from closed-ended questionnaire data to support, expand, and validate the depth of qualitative narrative analysis obtained.

The subjects in this study involved 33 undergraduate students in the English language education group at one of the universities in Medan City. The sample selection was carried out using purposive sampling techniques with the inclusion criteria that students are taking Academic Essay Writing courses, have practical experience in completing essay draft assignments, and have received explicit instruction and structured modelling regarding the self-



check procedure using a checklist that is integrated into the class curriculum. All participants were involved on a voluntary basis and their identities were kept anonymous to meet academic research ethics, where the informed consent procedure is signed by the participant before the data collection process begins.

In order to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques from three main data sources which include class observation, document analysis, and combination questionnaires. The researcher acts as a non-participant observer to systematically document class activities during the revision phase of the essay draft run with a focus on students' participation patterns, time management, and affective reactions when executing the self-check checklist. Meanwhile, document analysis was carried out on students' written artifacts in the form of initial drafts and final versions of revised drafts to track the frequency, type of linguistic or structural changes, and alignment of revisions with rubric criteria. As complementary data, a combination questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms consisting of a closed questionnaire containing 5 3-point Likert scale questions to map general trends, as well as several open-ended questionnaires containing written reflective questions to capture students' internal narratives, complaints, and challenges in detail.

The data collection procedure is designed chronologically and systematically which begins from the phase of preparing the initial draft of academic essays by students. Before the main intervention is carried out, the class goes through a peer review phase first as part of the regular learning process. Furthermore, a self-check intervention was implemented in which students were instructed to independently evaluate their essay drafts using structured rubrics that included aspects of the thesis, paragraph organization, word choice, and grammar under the direct observation of the researcher. As soon as the final draft of the essay is collected, a combination questionnaire is distributed to students to be filled out anonymously to ensure the objectivity of the response to the strategies they have implemented.

The data that has been collected is then managed using an integrated analysis approach that combines Qualitative Content Analysis with Descriptive Statistics. Quantitative data obtained from the 10 Likert scale items were processed using simple descriptive statistics to calculate frequency and percentage values to provide initial structural evidence of students' perception tendencies. Meanwhile, textual qualitative data sourced from observational field notes, essay drafts, and written responses from open-ended questionnaires were analyzed using thematic coding methods according to Saldaña (2014). This process goes through three interactive stages starting from data reduction to select relevant meaning units, presenting data into a categorization matrix based on four focus dimensions (usability, procedural clarity, challenges, and autonomy), to drawing conclusions and verifying to confirm the findings with the theory of self-regulated learning.

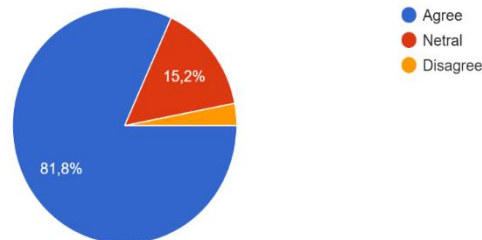
FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the results of a structured questionnaire given to 33 students. The questionnaire is designed to assess students' perceptions of self-examination in five key dimensions of the writing process. The percentage of responses is calculated for each item to identify patterns of agreement, neutrality, and disagreement.

Perceived Benefits of Self-Check in Essay Writing

The first questionnaire item presents data related to the effectiveness of using self-Check to help them in the essay writing process.

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Picture 1. Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of Self-Check in Essay Writing

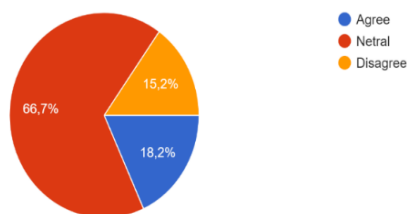
The results showed that 81.8% of students voted Agreed, 15.2% voted Neutral, and only 3.0% voted Disagree. This strong level of agreement shows that the majority of students consider self-check to be an effective tool for identifying grammatical errors, organizing ideas, and systematically revising content. The minimal resistance reflected in the 3.0% disagreement rate indicates widespread positive acceptance of self-check as an instructional strategy. These findings suggest that self-checks help students become more aware of errors in their writing before getting corrections from teachers or friends. In addition, self-checks also help students improve grammar, word choice, and organization of ideas in essays.

These quantitative findings were reinforced by the results of open-ended responses. Participant 1 stated that: *“The biggest benefit of self-checking is that it makes you more aware of mistakes in your own writing before they are corrected by others.”* You can change the grammar, the choice of words, the order of the paragraphs.” In addition, Participant 2 also said that: *“with self-check, there is a pause for more focused re-reading. It feels like being given the opportunity to be honest with yourself before others judge.”* The statement shows that self-check helps increase writing awareness and encourages students to revise independently before submitting their writing.

Difficulties in Completing a Self-Check

The second data shows that students do not have difficulty using self-checks.

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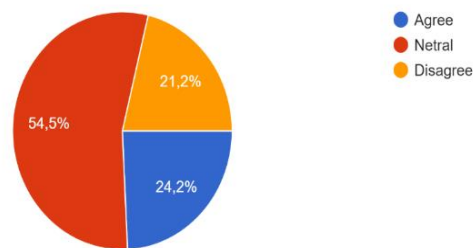
Picture 2. Students' Difficulties in Completing the Self-Check Process

The data show that, 66.7% of respondents chose Neutral, 15.2% chose Agree (indicates difficulty), and 18.2% chose Disagree (indicates no difficulty). The dominance of neutral responses suggests that many students may not have developed full clarity regarding checklist criteria, or may be unsure about how to implement self-check measures systematically. The dominance of neutral answers suggests that some students still do not fully understand how to use checklists effectively. Some students also experience confusion in understanding the standards on the checklist and feel tired when they have to reread their writing repeatedly. This finding is supported by Participant 2 who said that: *“sometimes you are also confused, for example in the checklist is your sentence effective? So what is the standard?”* Participant 3 also stated that: *“the difficulty is sometimes lazy to read the point that must be adjusted to the essay made.”*

Difficulties in Writing Continued After Self-Check

The third item examines the difficulty of students to improve and improve their essays after completing the self-check process.

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Picture 3 Students' Difficulties in Revising Essays after Self-Check

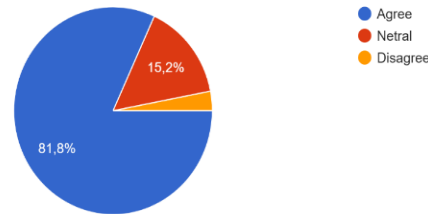
The findings revealed that 24.2% of students voted Agree, indicating a constant struggle with revisions, while 39.4% voted Neutral and 36.4% voted Disagree. The 24.2% who reported ongoing difficulties represented an important subgroup of learners for whom self-check alone was not sufficient as a revision strategy. These students may have lower overall writing proficiency or may require direct teacher feedback or structured peer help in addition to self-check to make effective revisions.

This data shows that self-check has not fully helped all students in making revisions effectively. Some students still have difficulty seeing their own shortcomings objectively. Participant 1 said that: *“Sometimes I feel like my writing is right because I've read it too often, so it's a bit hard to see it from the point of view of other readers.”* However, some students feel that self-checking helps the revision process to be more directed. Participant 3 stated that: *“so it is more directed which part to revise and improve.”* This suggests that self-checks are beneficial for some students, although others still need additional help from teachers or peers.

Self-Check as a Tool to Improve Writing Effectiveness

The fourth questionnaire item discusses the effectiveness of self-check in improving overall essay writing.

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Picture 4. Self-Check as a Tool for Improving Writing Effectiveness

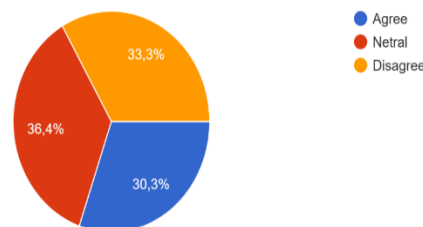
Reflecting the results of Item 1, 81.8% of students agreed that self-check contributed positively to the effectiveness of their writing, with 15.2% voting Neutral and 3.0% voting Disagree. This consistency across Points 1 and 4 reinforces the finding that students broadly perceive self-check as a constructive metacognitive tool that promotes writing awareness, self-direction, and compositional independence.

These results show that self-checks not only help students find minor errors such as grammar and typo, but also help them pay attention to the overall content of the writing. Participant 1 stated that: *"now I pay more attention to the overall content of the writing, such as the flow of ideas and the clarity of each paragraph."* In addition, Participant 2 also said that: *"the revision is more systematic in order, from checking the contents first, then to grammar, then to spelling."* The statement shows that self-check helps students revise more systematically and improve the quality of their writing.

Sufficient Time for Self-Check Completion

The fifth item explores whether students feel they have enough time to conduct a thorough self-check.

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Picture 5. Students' Perceptions of Time Allocation for Completing Self-Check

Responses were specifically distributed: 30.3% agreed, 36.4% voted Neutral, and 33.3% disagreed. These differences in responses suggest that students' experiences of the time demands during self-examination vary widely. Some students may find this checklist comprehensive but time-consuming, while others can complete it efficiently within the allotted class time. These findings suggest that the self-check process requires additional time, especially



for students who have to reread their writing repeatedly to ensure conformity with the checklist. Participant 2 stated that: *"Especially if I'm tired of writing, I feel like I want to finish right away..."* Participant 3 also said that: *"It must be read repeatedly so that it is appropriate and appropriate. That's why sometimes it takes a while..."* The statement suggests that while self-checking provides benefits in writing revision, the process can also increase cognitive load and require good time management.

Overall, the results of the study show that self-check has a positive impact on the writing process of students. Most students feel that self-check helps to increase awareness of writing errors, make revisions more systematic, and increase independence in writing. However, some students still have difficulty understanding the checklist, maintaining focus during revision, and managing time in the self-check process. Therefore, the use of self-checks should be accompanied by teacher direction, examples of using checklists, and step-by-step exercises so that students can use these strategies more effectively.

The findings of this study collectively confirm that self-check is considered a beneficial instructional strategy by the majority of undergraduate EFL students. The high proportion of agreement observed in Items 1 and 4 (81.8%) provides strong evidence that students value self-examination as a means to focus their attention on structural organization, grammatical accuracy, and writing clarity. This is consistent with Wright et al. (2019), who argue that self-assessment systematically promotes writing autonomy and critical self-awareness in learners. However, the sizable proportion of neutral responses recorded in Items 2 (66.7%) and 3 (24.2%) highlight areas where instructional practice may need improvement. Students' uncertainty about checklist criteria and the difficulty of continuous revision after self-check suggest that procedural clarity and explicit modeling are important prerequisites for effective self-assessment implementation. These findings corroborate Kitjaroonchai et al. (2022), who show that learners need structured scaffolding, concrete examples, and guided practice before they can independently apply self-assessment tools with confidence.

Mixed responses regarding time efficiency (Point 5) reinforce the opinion of Cer (2019) that metacognitive strategies can impose additional cognitive demands when first introduced, especially for beginner learners. However, in line with Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulated learning model, repeated and sustained engagement with metacognitive tools is expected to progressively reduce cognitive load, increase strategic efficiency, and strengthen students' overall self-regulation of writing over time.

In addition, the data show that the effectiveness of self-check is not solely determined by the instrument itself, but is significantly mediated by the quality of the instructional context in which it is embedded. Students who reported having access to clear guidance, work examples, and consistent instructor support showed a more positive perception of self-check reinforcing the central role of scaffolding in the implementation of effective self-check. Teachers can increase these benefits by integrating structured pre-assessment workshops, peer modeling activities, and phased instructional assignments that progressively reduce teacher-led scaffolding as students develop greater metacognitive proficiency.

Finally, the findings suggest that self-check contributes not only to the development of technical writing skills but also to the cultivation of learners' broader metacognitive capacity. Through systematic self-reflection, students develop their ability to diagnose writing weaknesses, set learning goals, and monitor their progress independently core competencies associated with autonomous and lifelong learning (Othman et al., 2021). Future research should



investigate the longitudinal effects of the implementation of self-check , with particular attention to how perceptions of usability and time efficiency develop as students gain experience with the self- check process at different proficiency levels.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the perception of undergraduate EFL students about self-check as a strategy to improve academic essay writing. These findings suggest that self-check is widely considered an effective instructional tool, especially with respect to improving structural organization, grammatical accuracy, and writing clarity, while fostering learners' autonomy and metacognitive awareness. The high level of perceived usability reported by 81.8% of participants underscores the pedagogical value of integrating self-assessment practices into writing teaching.

Nevertheless, these findings also highlight important areas for instructional improvement. Substantial neutral responses regarding the understanding of checklist criteria and the ongoing difficulties experienced by some learners in revising their work after self-check suggest that the effectiveness of the tool depends on the quality of the instructional scaffolding provided. Students who do not have clear procedural guidance or access to work examples tend to derive limited benefits from separate self-check.

Regarding time demands, mixed perceptions recorded among participants suggest that self-check may initially impose an increased cognitive burden on novice writers; However, in accordance with the theory of self-regulation, this burden is expected to be substantially reduced with sustained and structured practice over time. In conclusion, the successful implementation of self-check in academic writing instruction requires a comprehensive pedagogical approach that incorporates explicit modelling, gradual scaffolding, and opportunities for guided practice. When embedded in a supportive instructional framework, self-check has a strong potential to improve writing effectiveness and to foster the metacognitive skills necessary for lifelong self-learning. Future research is recommended to examine the longitudinal development of self-check competencies at different levels of learner proficiency and academic writing contexts.

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