

Exploring EFL Learners' Experiences with Automated and AI-Based Feedback Tools in Writing Classrooms

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the experience of EFL students in using automated and artificial intelligence (AI)-based feedback tools in writing learning. This study used a qualitative approach with phenomenological design. The research participants consisted of 15 EFL students who had experience using AI tools in learning to write and were selected through purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and written reflections, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results show four main themes, namely (1) the experience of obtaining quick and accessible feedback, (2) increasing confidence in writing, (3) the process of assessing the reliability of AI-generated feedback, and (4) the use of AI feedback to revise writing. The findings show that AI not only helps students improve the linguistic aspects of writing, but also increases learning independence, confidence, and involvement in the revision process. In addition, students demonstrate the ability to evaluate the quality and relevance of the feedback provided by AI before using it in the revision process. Reviewed through Feedback Literacy Theory, students' experiences reflect the four main dimensions of feedback literacy, namely appreciating feedback, managing affect, making judgments, and taking action. This study concludes that AI can be an effective support tool in writing learning if used critically and reflectively. These findings confirm the importance of developing feedback literacy in line with the integration of AI technology in EFL writing learning. Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI-based feedback, EFL writing, feedback literacy, learner experiences.

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Introduction

In the practice of writing learning in EFL classes, the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-based technology as a feedback provider is increasingly part of the student learning experience. Tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and other AI applications are now actively being used by students to improve their writing independently. At the hands-on experience level, students not only receive linguistic corrections such as grammar and vocabulary, but also input related to the organization of ideas and content quality. Studies show that AI-generated feedback is able to provide feedback instantly and repeatedly, allowing students to revise more frequently compared to traditional feedback systems (Mekheimer, 2025). In this context, the student experience becomes an important starting point for understanding how AI is actually used in the real practice of writing learning.

Moreover, the experience does not merely procedural aspect, but also encompasses students' cognitive and affective responses in response to the feedback generated by AI. Some studies have found that students feel an increase in confidence when using AI because they can correct mistakes independently without social pressure from teachers

or peers (Mekheimer, 2025; Shen et al., 2023). However, on the other hand, there is also a tendency to be dependent on AI, where students prefer to accept AI suggestions without doing critical reflection (Triwibowo & Polim, 2025).

In the context of comparisons with human feedback, a number of studies have examined the difference between AI-generated feedback and teacher feedback. The results show that although AI excels in providing linguistic correction quickly and consistently, feedback from teachers is still considered superior in providing an in-depth understanding of the content and structure of writing (Alnemrat et al., 2025; Tran, 2025). In addition, the combination of AI feedback and teacher feedback has been proven to provide more optimal results in improving the quality of student writing (Asadi et al., 2025). This indicates that AI does not completely replace the role of teachers, but rather functions as a support tool in the writing learning process.

In terms of impact, the use of AI-based feedback has been proven to contribute to the improvement of writing skills of EFL students. Several studies show that the use of AI can improve aspects of grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and overall writing quality (Fathimatuzahro & Rizkiyah, 2025; Song & Song, 2023). In addition, AI also plays a role in increasing student involvement in the revision process and strengthening their literacy feedback (Rad et al., 2023). However, this impact is not always absolutely positive. In some cases, excessive use of AI can actually reduce students' critical thinking skills because they tend to receive feedback without in-depth evaluation (Triwibowo & Polim, 2025). Thus, it is essential to investigate how AI affects not only the results of writing, but also the students' cognitive process.

Additionally, the efficacy of AI-based feedback is also affected by multiple factors, including students' language proficiency levels, digital competence, and the frequency of technology use. Evidence shows that students with higher language competence demonstrate a greater ability to make critical use of AI feedback compared to low-competence students (Mekheimer, 2025). Conversely, digital literacy also plays essential factor in determining the extent to which students can use AI effectively (Setiawan & Alkhowarizmi, 2025). Furthermore, the learning environment, including teachers' instruction and the type of assignment provided, also affects students' experiences in using AI (Guo et al., 2024).

To gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences in receiving feedback mediated by artificial intelligence (AI), this study uses the Feedback Literacy Theory proposed by Carless and Boud (2018). Feedback literacy refers to the ability of learners to understand, evaluate, and utilize feedback to support the improvement of their learning process. This theory consists of four main dimensions, namely appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action. In the context of AI-based feedback, the four dimensions provide a relevant conceptual framework for understanding how students interpret, evaluate, and utilize the feedback generated by AI during the writing process.

However, this development also poses various challenges, both from a pedagogical and ethical perspective. One of the main issues is the potential for misuse of AI in the writing process, which can lead to plagiarism or a decline in academic integrity. In addition, excessive reliance on AI can also hinder the development of authentic writing skills (Guo et al., 2024). Therefore, a deeper understanding of how AI is used by students in the real context of learning is needed, not only in terms of outcomes, but also in terms of their experiences and perceptions.

Based on a review of the existing literature, it can be found that most of the previous research focused on the effectiveness of AI in improving writing skills or comparing AI with teacher feedback. However, there are still limitations to research that exploratively

examines students' experiences in depth using AI-based feedback, particularly in the context of EFL classrooms. In addition, aspects of how students interpret these experiences and how they affect their learning behavior are still not widely researched (Elmotri et al., 2025; Mun, 2024). Thus, there is a need to conduct more contextual and student-experience-oriented research.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological design to explore the experience of EFL students in using automated and AI-based feedback tools in writing classes. A qualitative approach was used because this study focused on the experiences, perceptions, and meanings built by participants towards the use of AI in writing learning (Creswell, John W.; Creswell, 2018).

The research participants are EFL students who have used AI-based tools in learning writing. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were considered to have experience relevant to the focus of the research (Patton, 2015). The number of participants in this study was 15 students.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and written reflections. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain in-depth data on the experiences, perceptions, benefits, and challenges of using AI-based feedback in the writing process (Kvale, Steinar; Brinkmann, 2009). Written reflections are used to support and strengthen the data of interview results related to student experience while using AI tools in learning writing. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2016). The analysis is carried out through several stages, namely reading the data repeatedly, coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes, and interpreting patterns that emerge from the research data.

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses data triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was done by comparing the data from interviews and written reflections, while member checking was done by asking participants to re-examine the results of the data interpretation to match their experiences (Lincoln, Yvonna S.; Guba, 1985). The study also pays attention to research ethics by maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities and ensuring that all participation is voluntary.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of interview data and written reflections from 15 EFL students resulted in four main themes describing their experiences in using automated and artificial intelligence (AI)-based feedback tools in writing learning. The four themes include: (1) the experience of immediate availability of feedback, (2) increasing confidence in writing, (3) the process of assessing the reliability of AI-generated feedback, and (4) the use of AI feedback in revising writing.

1. Experiencing immediate and Accessible Feedback

The first theme shows that most participants consider speed and ease of access to be the main advantages of using Grammarly and ChatGPT. Students feel that they can get feedback at any time without having to wait for a lecturer to check their assignments.

P2 explains: *"Usually, if you wait for the lecturer's comment, it takes a few days. If you use Grammarly, the errors are immediately visible and can be corrected immediately."*

P5 states: *"I often do night tasks. ChatGPT helps because I can ask questions at any time without having to wait for the next meeting."*

P8 reveals: *"What I like the most is that I can check the writing many times. After it was fixed, I checked again and usually there is still something that can be improved."*

P11 says: *"The revision process is faster because I don't always depend on other people."*

P14 adds: *"It feels like there's always a source of feedback whenever it's needed."*

These findings show that college students appreciate the speed and flexibility offered by AI-based tools. The availability of direct feedback makes them more active in revising and more independent in the writing process. More than just providing quick corrections, AI is perceived by participants as a source of help that is always available during the writing process.

Some participants described that they can get help whenever needed, including outside of lecture hours. This condition makes them not always dependent on lecturers or friends when facing difficulties in writing. In addition, the availability of direct feedback also encourages students to revise repeatedly. Students do not only do one check, but tend to return to review their writing after receiving feedback. This shows that AI plays a role not only as a correction tool, but also as a companion that supports the revision process in an ongoing manner.

Based on the participants' experience, they describe AI as a source of help that is always available during the writing process. The existence of AI gives a sense that they don't have to wait for help from lecturers to overcome the difficulties that arise. For some participants, this experience created a feeling of more independence and more control over their learning process.

These findings are in line with Koltovskaia's (2020) research which shows that automated feedback can improve students' learning independence. These results also support the findings of (Ranalli & Ranalli, 2018) who stated that students tend to appreciate the opportunity to make revisions repeatedly through the help of technology. In addition, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) explain that timely feedback can improve the effectiveness of the revision process. When viewed through the perspective of Feedback Literacy Theory (Carless & Boud, 2018), these findings reflect the dimension of appreciating feedback. Students show that they understand the value and benefits of feedback as a means to improve the quality of their writing. In other words, AI helps students realize the importance of feedback in the writing learning process.

The findings of this study show that the main value of AI for students lies not only in its ability to correct language errors, but also in its ability to provide learning support that is always available. The availability of direct feedback allows students to be more actively involved in the revision process and take greater responsibility for the development of their writing skills. Thus, AI can be seen as a tool that has the potential to strengthen learning independence in the context of EFL writing learning.

2. Increased Confidence in Writing

The second theme is related to increasing students' confidence when writing in English. Most participants stated that the presence of AI helped them reduce the fear of making mistakes.

P3 states: *"Before using Grammarly, I was often worried about misgrammar. Now it's still wrong sometimes, but I'm more confident because I can check it first."*

P6 explains: *"I feel calmer when collecting tasks because they have been checked first." P9 says: "Sometimes I am embarrassed if my writing is wrong. With AI, I can fix it before anyone else reads it."*

P12 reveals: *"ChatGPT makes the writing process feel less stressful because there's always help when it's needed."*

P15 adds: *"Now I write more often because I'm not so afraid of making mistakes."*

The findings show that AI not only helps with the technical aspects of writing, but also has a positive impact on students' emotional state during the writing process. These findings also show that the use of AI provides a sense of security for students during the writing process. Many participants feel more at ease having the opportunity to check and correct errors before assignments are collected. Thus, they are no longer too worried about the possibility of making mistakes in their writing. Interestingly, the confidence that arises is not only due to the reduction of language errors, but also because students feel that they have greater control over the quality of their writing. The opportunity to check independently makes them more courageous to write and more comfortable expressing ideas in English.

The experience of using AI is also interpreted as a form of emotional support during the writing process. Some college students describe feeling more at ease because they have the opportunity to check and correct mistakes before assignments are collected. Thus, AI not only helps improve writing, but it also helps reduce the concerns that often arise when writing in English.

These findings support the research of Dikli and Bleyle (2014) who found that automatic feedback can reduce anxiety in writing. These results are also in line with the research of Mohammed and Khalid (2025) which shows that the use of AI can increase students' confidence in producing English writing. In addition, Victor & Hyland (2022) stated that personalized and direct feedback can increase student engagement in the learning process. In Feedback Literacy Theory, these findings relate to the dimension of managing affect. Students show a positive emotional response to the feedback provided by AI. They feel more confident, more comfortable, and more motivated to write. Therefore, AI can be seen as a tool that not only supports the development of writing skills, but also helps create a more positive learning experience.

These findings indicate that the emotional aspect is an important part of the student experience using AI. Increased confidence seems to encourage students to be more actively involved in writing activities and less afraid of making mistakes. In other words, the benefits of AI are not only related to improving the quality of writing, but also to the creation of psychological conditions that support the language learning process.

3. Assessing the Reliability of AI-Generated Feedback

While most college students responded positively to the use of AI, they also realized that not all feedback given can be taken for granted. Many participants admitted that they had found suggestions that were not suitable or different from the input from the lecturer. P1 explains: *"Sometimes Grammarly would tell me to change certain sentences, but I think the original version was more appropriate."*

P4 says: *"There was a suggestion from ChatGPT that was different from what the lecturer taught, so I was confused."*

P7 states: *"I don't always immediately follow the corrections given. If it feels strange, I usually ignore it."*

P10 reveals: *"If I doubt his advice, I usually check again from another source."*

P13 adds: *"AI does help, but for the content of the writing, I still trust the input from the lecturer."*

These findings show that students are not completely dependent on AI, but rather evaluate the feedback they receive. Although AI is thought to help the writing process, participants do not view AI as always correct source. Instead, they tend to compare the advice provided by AI with their own understanding, input from lecturers, and other learning resources before deciding to use the feedback. These findings also show that students are aware of the limitations of AI-generated feedback. In some situations, they

feel that the advice given is not in accordance with the context of the writing or different from the lecturer's expectations. Therefore, AI is seen more as a supporting source than a substitute for the role of lecturers in the writing learning process.

Interestingly, the experience of using AI is not always colored by full acceptance. Students show a negotiation process when dealing with feedback provided by AI. In some situations, they feel the need to reconsider the advice given before deciding to use it. This shows that the experience of using AI involves an active process of reflection and judgment.

These findings support the research of Ranalli and Yamashita (2022) who showed that students sometimes experience confusion when AI feedback is inconsistent with teacher feedback. These results are also in line with Holmes et al. (2019) who highlighted the issue of accuracy and pedagogical validity of AI-based feedback. In addition, Stevenson and Phakiti (2014) explain that automated systems are often more effective in correcting linguistic aspects than content and argumentation aspects. In the perspective of Feedback Literacy Theory, these findings reflect the dimension of making judgments. Students demonstrate the ability to evaluate the quality and relevance of feedback before deciding to use it. This shows that effective use of AI requires critical thinking skills and not just accepting all the recommendations given.

These findings also show the potential for reliance on AI if students do not have the ability to critically evaluate feedback. Although most participants showed a selective attitude towards AI-provided suggestions, the ease of access to feedback could potentially encourage students to accept recommendations directly without making adequate considerations. Therefore, the ability to assess the quality and relevance of feedback is an important factor in ensuring that AI is used as a means of supporting learning, not as a substitute for students' critical thinking processes.

4. Utilizing AI Feedback to Revise Writing

The final theme describes how students use AI feedback to improve their writing. Most participants used AI not only to correct grammatical errors, but also to improve vocabulary choices, sentence structure, and organization of ideas.

P5 explains: "Usually I use Grammarly to improve grammar and make sentences clearer."

P8 states: "ChatGPT helps when I'm having trouble choosing the right vocabulary."

P11 reveals: "After getting input from AI, I often rewrite parts of the paragraph."

P14 says: "Sometimes AI makes me realize that the ideas I'm writing aren't well organized."

P15 adds: "Now I rarely collect the first draft. I usually revise it several times after getting feedback."

These findings show that AI plays a role as a revision support tool that helps students improve the quality of their writing gradually. Participants' experiences show that the use of AI in the revision process is not just limited to correcting grammatical errors. Students also take advantage of the feedback provided to reconsider vocabulary choices, sentence clarity, and the arrangement of ideas in their writing. In addition to helping improve the technical aspects of writing, AI also encourages students to revise more reflectively. Some participants showed a tendency to revisit the entire piece of writing after receiving feedback, so the revision process focused not only on the errors, but also on the overall quality of the writing.

In addition to helping to correct technical errors, AI also encourages students to thoroughly review the quality of their writing. The repeated revision process shows that students are not only focused on correcting errors, but also on improving the clarity, regularity of ideas, and effectiveness of communication in their writing. Thus, AI has the

potential to be a means that supports the development of writing skills in a sustainable manner.

For some participants, revisions are no longer seen as the final stage that is done once before the assignment collection. The presence of AI encourages them to see revision as an ongoing process. Students repeatedly review their writing and make various adjustments based on the feedback received. This experience shows a change in the way students view the writing and revision process.

These findings are in line with the research of Song and Song (2023) which shows that the use of AI can improve the quality of student writing, especially in the aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and coherence. These results also support the research of Rad et al. (2023) who found that AI can increase student engagement in the revision process. In addition, Fathimatuzahro and Rizkiyah (2025) stated that AI makes a positive contribution to various aspects of EFL students' writing skills. In Feedback Literacy Theory, these findings are related to the dimension of taking action. Students not only receive feedback, but also use it to make real improvements to their writing. This shows that AI can support a more reflective and sustainable revision process.

Overall, the results show that EFL students view AI-based feedback tools as a useful learning resource in the writing process. Students appreciate the speed and ease of access to feedback, feel more confident in writing, are able to critically evaluate the quality of feedback, and use the feedback to improve their writing. When reviewed through Feedback Literacy Theory (Carless & Boud, 2018), the four themes found reflect the four main dimensions of feedback literacy, namely appreciating feedback, managing affect, making judgments, and taking action.

Although the experiences shown by the participants tended to be positive, the results of this study also showed several things that need to be considered in the use of AI-based feedback in writing learning. While most participants demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate AI-provided suggestions, the ease and speed of access to feedback have the potential to encourage some students to rely too heavily on automated recommendations. This shows that the educational benefits of AI depend not only on the availability of technology, but also on the ability of students to reflect, evaluate, and make informed decisions using the feedback received.

Therefore, the effectiveness of AI in writing learning is not only determined by the capabilities of the technology itself, but also by the ability of students to understand, evaluate, and utilize feedback critically and productively. These findings confirm the importance of developing feedback literacy in line with the integration of AI technology in learning to write English as a foreign language (EFL).

Conclusion

This study aims to explore the experience of EFL students in using automated and artificial intelligence (AI)-based feedback tools in writing learning. The results show that students generally view AI as a source of useful feedback and support their writing learning process. The four main themes that emerged from the participants' experiences included the experience of obtaining quick and accessible feedback, increasing confidence in writing, the process of assessing the reliability of AI-generated feedback, and the use of AI feedback to revise writing.

The research findings show that AI not only serves as a tool for correcting language errors, but also as a source of learning support that helps students become more independent in the writing process. The presence of feedback available quickly and continuously allows students to revise more actively, increase confidence, and encourage greater involvement in the writing improvement process. At the same time, students also

demonstrate the ability to evaluate the quality and relevance of the feedback provided by AI before using it in revisions. When reviewed through Feedback Literacy Theory, the findings of this study reflect the four main dimensions of feedback literacy, namely appreciating feedback, managing affect, making judgments, and taking action.

The results show that students' experience in using AI is not only related to receiving feedback, but also involves the process of actively understanding, evaluating, and utilizing feedback to improve the quality of their writing. However, the study also shows that the benefits of AI in writing learning cannot be separated from students' ability to use the technology critically. The ease of obtaining instant feedback has the potential to cause dependency if students accept the suggestions given without conducting adequate evaluation.

Therefore, the development of feedback literacy needs to be an important concern in the integration of AI technology into writing learning. Pedagogically, the findings of this study indicate that AI should be positioned as a learning support tool that complements, not replaces, the role of lecturers in providing feedback. AI integration accompanied by proper guidance can help students utilize feedback more reflectively, critically, and productively. Further research could explore the experiences of students with different levels of language proficiency or examine the use of different types of AI tools in the context of more diverse writing learning.

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