

Students' Voices on the Implementation of Gen-AI Feedback in EFL Writing Classroom

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Abstract. The proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction has sparked considerable scholarly interest, yet the subjective experiences and voices of learners who engage with AI-generated feedback remain insufficiently explored within the extant literature. This qualitative study investigates students' voices concerning the implementation of Gen-AI feedback in an EFL writing classroom, specifically examining their perceptions, patterns of engagement, development of feedback literacy, and the inherent tensions between learner autonomy and technological dependency. Adopting a qualitative research design, data were collected through four focus group discussions involving 30 purposively selected undergraduate students enrolled in an EFL writing course at a private university in Surakarta. Thematic analysis of the transcribed discussions, conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, yielded five interrelated themes: perceived usefulness of Gen-AI feedback, patterns of feedback engagement, development of feedback literacy, tension between autonomy and dependency, and emotional and ethical responses. The findings reveal that students perceived Gen-AI feedback as highly useful for enhancing writing quality, revision efficiency, and idea generation; however, they did not passively accept all AI-generated suggestions but

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rather demonstrated selective engagement, critically evaluating feedback based on its relevance to higher-order writing concerns, including content and organization. Additionally, participants reported developing feedback literacy over time, evidenced by increased awareness of their writing weaknesses and improved capacity to interpret and strategically utilize AI feedback. Nevertheless, uneven development across participants indicated that feedback literacy does not emerge automatically through mere exposure to Gen-AI tools. A critical tension also emerged between learner autonomy and dependency, with several students expressing over-reliance on AI for revision tasks. Emotional and ethical responses included heightened confidence alongside scepticism regarding AI accuracy and concerns pertaining to academic integrity. The findings suggest that the pedagogical effectiveness of Gen-AI feedback is not determined solely by its technological affordances but is significantly mediated by learners' engagement, critical awareness, and feedback literacy. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that understanding students' voices is crucial for developing context-sensitive and pedagogically sound AI integration strategies, with implications for educators and curriculum designers seeking to implement Gen-AI feedback in effective, ethical, and learner-centred ways.

Keywords: Generative AI feedback, EFL writing, students' voices, feedback literacy, learner autonomy

Introduction

Despite the rapid proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) in educational settings, significant concerns have emerged regarding its ethical implications, potential for academic dishonesty, and the risk of diminishing students' critical thinking and autonomous learning capacities. Debates persist among educators and policymakers about whether Gen-AI tools should be embraced as transformative pedagogical resources or restricted due to their potential to undermine authentic learning and assessment practices. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) has fundamentally reshaped educational practices, particularly in the domain of second and foreign language writing. In recent years, AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT and other automated writing assistants have gained increasing prominence as sources of immediate, personalized, and scalable feedback. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where learners often face constraints in accessing timely and individualized feedback, Gen-AI has been positioned as a transformative pedagogical resource. Empirical studies have demonstrated that AI-assisted feedback can enhance students' writing performance, learning outcomes, increase revision frequency, and improve overall text quality (Mekheimer, 2025; Polakova & Ivenz, 2024; Setiawan & Alkhowarizmi, 2025; Tran, 2025).

Among these transformative potentials, the integration of Gen-AI into writing classrooms has introduced a host of pedagogical challenges that educators are currently grappling with. Questions regarding the appropriate balance between AI assistance and independent writing practice, the potential homogenization of student writing styles, and the erosion of authentic voice and creativity have become pressing concerns in contemporary writing pedagogy. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of Gen-AI tools has outpaced the development of institutional

policies and pedagogical frameworks, leaving many writing instructors uncertain about how to effectively and ethically incorporate these technologies into their teaching practices. Beyond its functional benefits, Gen-AI has also introduced a paradigm shift in how feedback is conceptualized and enacted. Unlike traditional teacher-centered approaches, AI-generated feedback enables learners to engage in iterative, dialogic, and self-regulated writing processes. Emerging research suggests that students actively employ Gen-AI tools for idea generation, linguistic refinement, and problem-solving, thereby reshaping their engagement with writing tasks and feedback practices (Cengiz et al., 2025; Yang & Lin, 2025). Furthermore, AI-mediated environments have been found to foster learners' feedback literacy, supporting their ability to interpret and utilize feedback more autonomously (Liu et al., 2026).

Despite these promising developments, the integration of Gen-AI into EFL classrooms remains pedagogically complex and theoretically underexplored. The prevailing research has been predominantly effectiveness-oriented, focusing on quantifiable outcomes like test scores or revision counts. While valuable, this body of work frequently overlooks the nuanced, subjective experiences of learners, the core of how and why feedback is effective. Recent studies hint at a more complex picture, with students reporting not only increased self-efficacy but also anxieties concerning over-reliance, diminished critical thinking, and potential erosion of learner autonomy (Almusharraf et al., 2025; Damayanti & Sumedi, 2025). This suggests that the pedagogical value of Gen-AI feedback is not an inherent feature of the technology but is co-constructed through learners' perceptions, interpretation, and negotiation.

Crucially, there remains a lack of in-depth, process-oriented research that positions students not merely as subjects, but as active agents and meaning-makers in the AI-mediated feedback process. By relying heavily on surveys and experimental designs, the field has captured "what" students think or "how much" they improve, but often misses the "how" and "why" of their engagement. We know little about the cognitive and affective processes that underlie a student's decision to accept, reject, or transform an AI suggestion.

In response to these identified gaps, the present study foregrounds students' voices by critically examining their lived experiences, perceptions, and evaluative judgments concerning the implementation of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) feedback within an EFL writing classroom. Moving beyond a predominantly outcome-oriented paradigm, this study seeks to offer a more nuanced, process-oriented, and experiential understanding of AI-mediated feedback from the learners' perspective. More specifically, the study aims, first, to investigate students' perceptions regarding the pedagogical usefulness and applicability of Gen-AI feedback throughout their writing processes. Second, it seeks to analyze the forms of engagement, interpretative strategies, and critical evaluative practices students employ when interacting with AI-generated feedback and suggestions. Third, the study endeavors to explore the extent to which learners develop, or fail to develop, feedback literacy through sustained interaction with Gen-AI tools. Finally, it aims to examine the emerging tension between the promotion of learner autonomy and the potential risk of technological dependency within AI-assisted writing environments.

By adopting this learner-centered approach, this study contributes to the literature in three significant ways. First, it offers a rich, qualitative account of how students navigate the affordances and constraints of AI feedback, thereby informing the design of more effective pedagogical practices. Second, it extends the concept of feedback literacy into the AI-mediated context, highlighting that this competence is not an automatic byproduct of technology use. Finally, by amplifying students' voices, this study provides critical insights for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers seeking to implement Gen-AI feedback in an effective, ethical, and pedagogically sound manner.

Literature Review

Generative AI in EFL Writing Pedagogy

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) into EFL writing instruction has sparked significant scholarly interest, yet the empirical landscape is marked by both promise and unresolved tensions. Proponents highlight Gen-AI's capacity to provide immediate, personalized, and scalable feedback, addressing long-standing pedagogical challenges of limited teacher time and delayed response (Kang & Kim, 2026). Tools like ChatGPT offer real-time scaffolding for brainstorming, rhetorical modeling, and iterative drafting, aligning with process-oriented writing pedagogies (Lu & Zeng, 2026).

However, a critical tension pervades the literature: does Gen-AI genuinely enhance learning, or does it cultivate a problematic dependency? Studies consistently demonstrate that AI feedback can improve linguistic accuracy and revision frequency (Kang & Kim, 2026; Park, 2026). Yet, this very efficiency raises concerns about "cognitive offloading", where learners bypass essential cognitive engagement by uncritically accepting AI suggestions (Huang et al., 2026; Teng & Huang, 2026). This tension is not merely academic; it fundamentally shapes the pedagogical debate. Some scholars advocate for Gen-AI as a "cognitive partner" that fosters self-regulated learning (Mekheimer, 2025), while others caution that it risks producing "metacognitive laziness" and diminishing learner ownership of the writing process (Teng & Huang, 2026). This unresolved debate underscores that the pedagogical value of Gen-AI is not an inherent feature of the technology but is co-constructed through learners' perceptions, engagement, and critical awareness.

AI-Generated Feedback and Student Engagement

A central focus of recent research is how students engage with AI-generated feedback compared to human feedback. This line of inquiry reveals significant contradictions. Several studies suggest that students find AI feedback highly useful for lower-order concerns like grammar and vocabulary, often accepting these suggestions without question (Huang et al., 2026). However, a more nuanced picture emerges regarding higher-order feedback on content and organization.

Comparative studies have yielded contradictory findings. For instance, some research indicates that GPT feedback tends to comment more on content and organization than teachers do (Huang et al., 2026), yet students demonstrate significantly lower overall engagement with GPT feedback, particularly in affective and behavioral dimensions. Students often perceive teacher feedback as more personal, motivating, and trustworthy, while AI feedback is valued for

its speed and accessibility but criticized for being less emotionally engaging (Aljasser, 2025; Helm & Hesse, 2026; Park, 2026).

This contradiction is crucial: Gen-AI may provide sophisticated feedback on higher-order concerns, but students may not engage with it as deeply as they do with human feedback. This suggests that the mere provision of feedback is insufficient; its effectiveness depends on how learners perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to it. Furthermore, studies reveal that students' engagement is highly selective and context-dependent, shaped by their language proficiency, prior experience with AI, and the pedagogical framing of AI use (Kang & Kim, 2026; Teng & Huang, 2026). This finding underscores the need to examine not only the presence of feedback but also the quality and nature of student engagement with it

Feedback Literacy in AI-Mediated Environment

The concept of feedback literacy, the ability to understand, interpret, and act upon feedback effectively, has gained prominence as a critical mediator of AI feedback effectiveness. Emerging research suggests that Gen-AI can facilitate the development of feedback literacy by providing opportunities for iterative, self-directed engagement with feedback (Almusharraf et al., 2025). Students report developing increased awareness of their writing weaknesses and becoming more strategic in their use of AI tools over time (Mekheimer, 2025).

However, the literature reveals a critical unresolved debate: does feedback literacy develop automatically through exposure to AI, or does it require explicit pedagogical scaffolding? Some studies suggest that interaction with AI alone can promote metacognitive awareness and strategic learning (Kang & Kim, 2026). Yet, other findings demonstrate that feedback literacy does not emerge uniformly. Students who received structured guidance on how to critically evaluate AI feedback developed greater literacy than those who used the tool independently (Ma et al., 2026). This contradiction implies that without adequate pedagogical intervention, students may struggle to move beyond surface-level acceptance of AI feedback, limiting their developmental potential. The development of feedback literacy thus appears to be contingent on instructional design rather than an automatic byproduct of technology use (Zhang et al., 2026).

The Tension Between Learner Autonomy and Technological Dependency

The most possible profound tension in the literature concerns the impact of Gen-AI on learner autonomy. This debate is often framed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs that drive intrinsic motivation (Lu & Zeng, 2026; Wang et al., 2025). The findings are starkly contradictory.

On one hand, Gen-AI is portrayed as an empowering tool that can enhance learner autonomy. Studies show that AI can support proactive autonomy by enabling learner-initiated conversations and self-directed topic exploration, as well as reactive autonomy through structured prompts and guided practice (Teng & Huang, 2026; Tran, 2025). Some learners report that AI feedback increases their sense of control and self-efficacy, fostering greater independence in the writing process (Kang & Kim, 2026).

On the other hand, a substantial body of research warns of over-reliance and diminished autonomy. Students frequently express concerns about becoming too dependent on AI, feeling "unable to do it alone" without AI assistance (Polakova & Ivenz, 2024). This creates a paradox: the tool designed to empower learners may inadvertently undermine their self-regulatory capacity. This tension is not resolved but rather amplified in the literature. Recent scholarship has introduced the concept of "collaborative autonomy", the capacity to engage productively with AI while maintaining critical awareness and personal agency (Ding et al., 2025; Teng & Huang, 2026). Yet, the conditions under which collaborative autonomy develops, and the pedagogical strategies required to foster it, remain empirically underexplored. The field is currently grappling with the question of whether AI tools ultimately scaffold or supplant learner autonomy.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) on Students' Perceptions of Gen-AI Feedback

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), initially proposed by Davis (1989), has become the most frequently used framework for understanding user acceptance of AI technologies in educational contexts (Xue et al., 2026). TAM posits that Perceived Usefulness (PU), the belief that a tool will enhance performance, and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) are primary determinants of technology acceptance, with PU consistently demonstrating stronger predictive power for behavioral intentions (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). In the context of EFL writing, recent studies confirm that students who perceive Gen-AI feedback as useful for improving writing quality and easy to access are more likely to adopt and continue using these tools (Anwer, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2026). A comprehensive meta-analysis synthesizing 27 studies with over 12,000 participants revealed that TAM relationships in AIED exhibit large and significant positive correlations, while also confirming that PU consistently predicts behavioral intentions more strongly than PEOU across diverse educational contexts (Xue et al., 2026).

However, contemporary research has significantly extended and challenged the traditional TAM framework. A fundamental perceptual divergence has been documented between students and teachers in non-Western EFL contexts (Mekheimer, 2025). Research conducted at an Egyptian university found that students perceived ChatGPT as more useful than teachers did, whereas teachers considered it easier to use but less aligned with pedagogical practices. Qualitative findings attribute this divergence to contrasting roles: students functioned as "pragmatic users" prioritizing efficiency, while teachers acted as "pedagogical guardians" concerned with maintaining learning integrity. Despite these differences, both groups shared concerns regarding academic integrity and the potential for student deskilling (Mekheimer, 2025). This student-teacher perceptual divide has direct implications for classroom implementation, suggesting that alignment between stakeholder perspectives is essential for effective Gen-AI integration.

Another major tension concerns the affective dimension of technology acceptance. Recent studies challenge TAM's cognitive emphasis by demonstrating the significant role of emotions in shaping students' perceptions of AI tools (Zhang & Lin, 2026), which investigated longitudinal study of Chinese EFL learners

revealing fluctuating positive and negative emotions during AI-mediated courses, with positive emotions negatively correlating with negative ones. Furthermore, an extended TAM framework showed that technology self-efficacy increases perceived enjoyment while reducing technology anxiety, both of which indirectly influence behavioral intentions (Shan et al., 2026). These findings suggest that traditional TAM inadequately captures the emotional complexity underlying students' experiences with AI-mediated learning.

Mixed findings on AI dependency represent another unresolved issue in TAM-based research. Some studies suggest that students engage cautiously with AI by treating its outputs as preliminary drafts rather than final products (Li & Ji, 2026), whereas others highlight concerns that excessive reliance on AI may weaken learners' intrinsic problem-solving abilities (Mekheimer, 2025; Shan et al., 2026). Research on trust in ChatGPT further indicates that trust predicts students' perceptions of improved writing quality and their intention to continue using the tool (Anwer, 2025). Moreover, (Khoso et al., 2025) distinguished between Functionality Trust and Human-like Trust, finding that the former more strongly predicts continued usage intentions. These findings suggest that AI dependency is shaped not only by technological affordances but also by pedagogical guidance, institutional regulation, and learners' self-regulatory capacities. Consequently, further investigation is needed to understand how students negotiate dependence and autonomy in AI-mediated writing environments.

Finally, Xue et al. (2026) identified significant cultural moderation effects within TAM relationships, demonstrating that dimensions such as Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, and Individualism shape students' adoption of Gen-AI tools differently across contexts. Such findings underscore the need for culturally responsive applications of TAM rather than universalized assumptions. Collectively, these unresolved tensions indicate that TAM alone cannot fully account for the complexity of students' experiences with Gen-AI feedback, as affective, ethical, and cultural dimensions also play a critical role. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining students' lived experiences and perceptions of Gen-AI feedback within an EFL writing context.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a particular emphasis on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to explore students' voices regarding the implementation of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) feedback in EFL writing classrooms. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By prioritizing rich, descriptive data, this design facilitated a nuanced understanding of how students interpreted and engaged with AI-generated feedback within authentic learning contexts.

The participants comprised 30 undergraduate students enrolled in an EFL writing course at a private university in Surakarta. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their enrollment in the course and prior experience using ChatGPT for academic writing tasks (Patton, 2015). To ensure adequate familiarity with Gen-AI feedback, participants were required to have used

ChatGPT at least three times during the current semester. Recruitment was conducted through a screening questionnaire distributed to 78 students, assessing their frequency of AI use, writing-related applications, and technological comfort. Of these, 30 students met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to identify information-rich participants capable of providing meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2025).

Data were collected through four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with each group comprising seven to eight participants. The number of FGDs was determined by data saturation, which was achieved after the fourth session when no new themes emerged from the discussions (Guest et al., 2020). Each group was intentionally composed to include participants with varying levels of writing proficiency and Gen-AI experience to foster diverse perspectives and dynamic interaction. Furthermore, the FGDs were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, the participants' native language, to facilitate ease of expression and ensure that participants could articulate their experiences without linguistic constraints. All sessions were conducted in a quiet classroom on the university campus and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Each session was audio-recorded with participants' informed consent to ensure accuracy in data capture. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities, and group seating was arranged in a circular configuration to promote equal participation and natural conversation flow.

The FGDs followed a semi-structured format, guided by open-ended questions designed to prompt reflection and discussion. The interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical frameworks guiding this study (TAM, SDT, and feedback literacy) and was pilot-tested with three students who were not part of the main study to ensure clarity and appropriateness. Examples of focus group questions included:

1. *"Can you describe your overall experience using ChatGPT or other Gen-AI tools for your writing assignments?"*
2. *"In what ways do you find AI-generated feedback helpful or unhelpful for improving your writing?"*
3. *"Can you give an example of a time when you accepted or rejected an AI suggestion? What influenced your decision?"*
4. *"How do you feel when you receive AI feedback compared to feedback from your lecturer?"*
5. *"Do you ever feel that you rely too much on AI for your writing? Why or why not?"*
6. *"What concerns, if any, do you have about using AI tools for your academic writing?"*

The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into emerging topics and follow participants' leads while maintaining focus on the research objectives.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved a recursive process of: (1) data familiarization through repeated listening to audio recordings and transcription, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. All FGDs were transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia and

subsequently translated into English for analysis. The translation process was conducted by the lead researcher and verified by a second bilingual researcher to ensure accuracy.

A hybrid coding approach was employed, integrating both deductive and inductive strategies. Deductive coding was informed by established theoretical constructs including perceived usefulness, feedback engagement, feedback literacy, learner autonomy, and AI dependency. At the same time, inductive coding allowed new themes to emerge organically from the data, including emotional responses such as trust or frustration, strategic use of AI tools, instances of resistance or skepticism, and ethical concerns. To enhance analytical rigor, all data were managed and coded using NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software.

To ensure analytical rigor and coding reliability, two independent coders systematically analyzed 25% of the transcribed data using a shared coding framework derived from the study's theoretical constructs. Inter-coder reliability, measured through Cohen's Kappa, yielded a score of 0.84, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, leading to refinement of the final coding framework. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review summaries of the findings, while peer debriefing sessions with qualitative research and EFL pedagogy experts provided critical feedback on emerging interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2025). In addition, a comprehensive audit trail documenting research procedures, coding processes, analytical decisions, and supporting data was maintained to ensure transparency and confirmability throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several strategies were employed in accordance with established qualitative research criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants were invited to review and validate summaries of the findings, as well as through prolonged engagement during the data collection process (the researcher spent two weeks familiarizing with the participants' classroom environment prior to data collection). Transferability was also addressed by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting all research procedures and decisions, with an external reviewer (the second coder) verifying the consistency of the analysis process. Confirmability was supported by practicing reflexivity, with the researcher critically reflecting on potential biases through a reflective journal, and by triangulating data across the four focus group discussions to ensure consistency and depth of interpretation.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process in accordance with the institutional research ethics guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The consent form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the procedures involved, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality. Measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, including the use of pseudonyms in all reports and secure storage of data in a password-protected computer. Audio recordings were deleted after transcription

and verification. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty, thereby safeguarding their autonomy and well-being.

Findings and Discussion

This study investigated students' voices on the implementation of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) feedback in an EFL writing classroom. Drawing on focus group discussions with 30 purposively selected participants, the data were analysed thematically following (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis yielded five interrelated themes: perceived usefulness of Gen-AI feedback, patterns of feedback engagement, development of feedback literacy, tensions between autonomy and dependency, and emotional and ethical responses. These themes collectively illustrate the complexity of students' experiences with AI-mediated feedback which can be seen in table 1 as follows.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Representative Excerpts

Theme	Description	Representative Excerpt
Perceived Usefulness	AI enhances writing quality, revision, and idea generation	"I can immediately see my mistakes and fix them."
Feedback Engagement	Selective acceptance of feedback based on type	"For grammar I accept it, but for ideas I think first."
Feedback Literacy	development of understanding and strategic use of feedback	"Now I try to understand why it is wrong."
Autonomy vs Dependency	Tension between independent learning and reliance on AI	"Sometimes I depend too much on ChatGPT."
Emotional & Ethical Responses	Mixed feelings and concerns about AI use	"I'm worried if using ChatGPT too much is cheating."

Table 1 presents a synthesized overview of the key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of students' responses regarding the implementation of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) feedback in the EFL writing classroom. Table 1 provides a concise yet comprehensive representation of the analytical findings by integrating three essential components which include the identified themes, their conceptual descriptions, and representative verbatim excerpts drawn from the participants' statements.

The following figure presents an NVivo-style word cloud illustrating the most frequently occurring terms in students' responses, thereby providing a visual overview of their key experiences and perceptions of Gen-AI feedback in the EFL writing classroom.

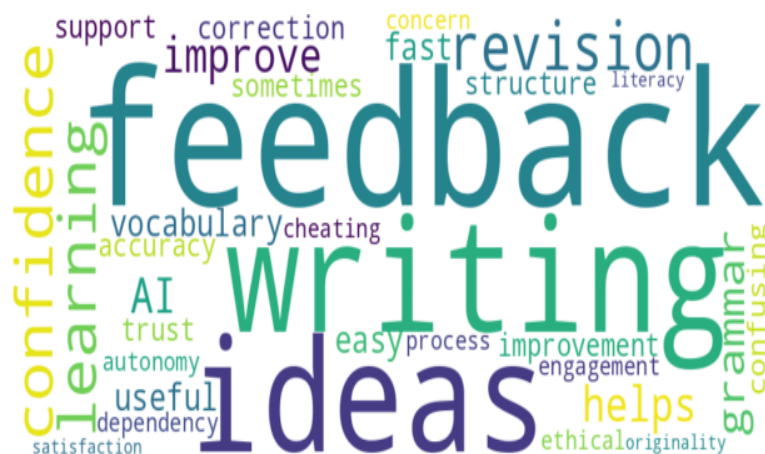


Figure 1. Word Frequency

Figure 1 visually represents the most salient lexical patterns in students' responses regarding the use of Gen-AI feedback in EFL writing, highlighting the prominence of key terms such as feedback, writing, ideas, and revision. The dominance of the word feedback indicates that students primarily frame their experiences around the role of AI as a feedback provider, reinforcing its central function in the writing process. Similarly, the frequent occurrence of writing and ideas suggests that learners associate Gen-AI not only with linguistic correction but also with idea generation and content development. Words such as grammar, vocabulary, improve, and structure further reflect students' focus on language accuracy and overall text quality, aligning with their perceived benefits of AI-assisted revision. At the same time, the presence of terms like confidence, trust, and confusing reveals the affective dimension of their experiences, indicating both positive emotional responses and underlying uncertainties toward AI-generated feedback. Additionally, words such as autonomy, dependency, and ethical point to deeper concerns about reliance on AI and academic integrity. Overall, the word cloud encapsulates the multifaceted nature of students' engagement with Gen-AI feedback, integrating cognitive, linguistic, and emotional dimensions into a single visual representation.

Perceived Usefulness of Gen-AI Feedback

Participants consistently reported that Gen-AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, played a significant role in enhancing their writing processes. Students emphasized the immediacy and accessibility of AI-generated feedback, which enabled them to revise their work more efficiently and independently. Many participants highlighted improvements in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, aligning with previous findings that AI-assisted feedback enhances writing quality (Mekheimer, 2025; Polakova & Ivenz, 2024).

One participant noted:

"When I use ChatGPT, I can immediately see my mistakes and fix them. It's faster than waiting for lecturer feedback." (Participant 7)

Another student added:

"It helps me generate ideas when I don't know how to start my essay." (Participant 12)

These responses suggest that students perceive Gen-AI not only as a corrective tool but also as a generative resource that supports idea development and drafting.

Patterns of Feedback Engagement

Despite recognizing its usefulness, students did not passively accept all AI-generated feedback. Instead, they demonstrated selective engagement, particularly distinguishing between lower-order and higher-order concerns. While grammatical corrections were often accepted without hesitation, feedback related to content and organization was more critically evaluated. This finding corroborates earlier studies indicating that learners engage differently with various types of feedback (Cengiz et al., 2025). For instance, one participant stated:

"If it's about grammar, I usually accept it directly. But for ideas, I think first if it matches my topic." (Participant 3)

Another explained:

"Sometimes I don't fully trust the explanation, so I check it again with Google or my notes." (Participant 15)

These excerpts demonstrate that students actively negotiate AI feedback, reflecting their role as agents rather than passive recipients in the revision process.

Development of Feedback Literacy

A further theme emerging from the data is the development of students' feedback literacy. Participants reported becoming more aware of their writing weaknesses and more strategic in utilizing AI tools over time. This aligns with research suggesting that AI can facilitate learners' ability to interpret and apply feedback effectively (Liu et al., 2026).

One participant reflected:

"At first, I just copied the correction, but now I try to understand why it is wrong." (Participant 9)

Another noted:

"I learned how to ask better questions to get better feedback from ChatGPT." (Participant 21)

These findings indicate that interaction with Gen-AI can promote metacognitive awareness and strategic learning, although such development varies across individuals.

Tension Between Autonomy and Dependency

The data also reveal a tension between increased learner autonomy and emerging dependency on AI tools. While some students described Gen-AI as empowering their independent learning, others expressed concern about over-reliance. This duality reflects ongoing debates in the literature regarding the impact of AI on learner agency (Almusharraf et al., 2025).

A participant admitted:

"Sometimes I depend too much on ChatGPT, especially when revising. I feel like I cannot do it alone." (Participant 18)

Conversely, another participant stated:

"I use it only to check my writing, not to do everything. I still want to think by myself." (Participant 5)

These contrasting perspectives suggest that the role of Gen-AI in fostering or hindering autonomy is mediated by learners' self-regulation and proficiency levels.

Emotional and Ethical Responses

The final theme concerns students' emotional and ethical responses to Gen-AI use. Participants reported mixed emotions, ranging from confidence and satisfaction to uncertainty and skepticism. While many students felt more confident due to the support provided by AI feedback, others questioned its reliability and accuracy, echoing concerns reported in previous studies (Damayanti & Sumedi, 2025; J. Wang & Guo, 2025).

One student expressed:

"I feel more confident because I know my writing is already checked."
(Participant 11)

However, another raised concerns:

"Sometimes I'm not sure if the answer is correct, so I feel confused."
(Participant 24)

Ethical concerns were also evident, particularly regarding academic integrity:

"I'm worried if using ChatGPT too much is considered cheating."
(Participant 27)

These findings highlight the importance of establishing clear guidelines and fostering critical awareness in the use of Gen-AI tools in academic contexts.

Discussion

The present study set out to explore students' voices on the implementation of Gen-AI feedback in EFL writing classrooms. The findings reveal a complex and multifaceted interaction between learners and AI-generated feedback, which can be meaningfully interpreted through existing theoretical and empirical frameworks in second language writing, feedback studies, and educational technology.

The empirical observation that learners regarded generative AI feedback as markedly beneficial demonstrates robust congruence with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which asserts that perceived utility constitutes a primary determinant of technology adoption among users. Participants in this study emphasized immediacy, accessibility, and support for idea generation, suggesting that Gen-AI enhances both lower-order and higher-order writing processes. This is consistent with recent research demonstrating that AI-generated feedback improves writing quality, particularly in linguistic accuracy and organizational development (Hu & Gong, 2025; Núñez & Larreta-Azelain, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Moreover, the perceived usefulness of Gen-AI feedback reflects its role as a form of scaffolded learning, consistent with sociocultural theory, where tools mediate learners' cognitive development. In this sense, Gen-AI functions not merely as a feedback provider but as a cognitive partner that supports learners during the writing process.

The finding that students selectively engage with AI-generated feedback highlights the importance of learner agency in feedback processes. Rather than passively accepting suggestions, students demonstrated evaluative judgment, particularly when dealing with higher-order concerns. This supports the notion that feedback is not inherently effective unless it is actively processed and internalized by learners. This pattern aligns with recent studies indicating that students interact differently with AI feedback depending on the type of feedback and their own cognitive resources. It also resonates with emerging perspectives in feedback research that conceptualize learners as active participants rather than passive

recipients (Su et al., 2024; Teng & Huang, 2026; Y. Zhang & Liu, 2026). Furthermore, the observed development of feedback literacy among participants reinforces the growing recognition of feedback literacy as a key competence in AI-mediated learning environments. Students in this study reported increased awareness of their writing weaknesses and improved ability to interpret feedback over time.

This finding is strongly supported by recent research demonstrating that Gen-AI can facilitate the development of feedback literacy, particularly by enabling iterative and self-directed engagement with feedback (Liu et al., 2026; Meng et al., 2025; Y. Zhang & Liu, 2026). However, the uneven development across participants suggests that feedback literacy does not emerge automatically through exposure to AI tools.

The other most critical finding of this study is the tension between learner autonomy and dependency. While Gen-AI empowered some students to work independently, others reported over-reliance, particularly when revising their writing. This duality reflects broader concerns in the literature regarding the potential of AI to both support and undermine learner agency. Recent studies have similarly identified over-reliance as a key limitation of AI feedback, particularly when students use it uncritically (Asadi et al., 2025). This phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of self-regulated learning theory, where effective learning depends on learners' ability to monitor and control their cognitive processes. When students rely excessively on AI, they may bypass essential cognitive engagement.

The emotional and ethical responses identified in this study highlight the affective dimension of AI integration in education. Students expressed increased confidence and satisfaction, but also uncertainty and skepticism regarding the reliability of AI-generated feedback. These mixed emotions are consistent with recent findings that learners' trust in AI is shaped by both perceived accuracy and prior experiences (Abdelhalim et al., 2025). Ethical concerns, particularly related to academic integrity, further underscore the complexity of AI use in writing classrooms. As Gen-AI tools blur the boundaries between assistance and authorship, students may struggle to determine acceptable usage practices. This aligns with broader discussions in the literature emphasizing the need for AI literacy and ethical awareness in educational contexts.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that Gen-AI feedback is not a neutral technological intervention but a pedagogically mediated tool whose effectiveness depends on learners' perceptions, engagement, and critical awareness. While Gen-AI offers significant affordances for enhancing EFL writing, its impact is shaped by complex interactions between cognitive, affective, and contextual factors. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that understanding students' voices is crucial for developing context-sensitive and pedagogically sound AI integration strategies. It moves beyond effectiveness-based paradigms and highlights the importance of learner-centered perspectives in AI-enhanced language education.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore students' voices on the implementation of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) feedback in EFL writing classrooms. Drawing on qualitative data from focus group discussions, the findings reveal that students' experiences with Gen-AI feedback are multifaceted, encompassing cognitive, affective, and ethical dimensions. Overall, Gen-AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, were perceived as highly useful in enhancing writing quality, facilitating revision processes, and supporting idea generation. These findings reinforce the growing recognition of AI as a transformative resource in language education. At the same time, the study highlights that the effectiveness of Gen-AI feedback is not solely determined by its technological capabilities, but is significantly mediated by learners' engagement, feedback literacy, and critical awareness. Students demonstrated selective interaction with AI-generated feedback, indicating their active role in evaluating and negotiating its relevance. Furthermore, while some learners developed greater autonomy and strategic competence, others exhibited tendencies toward over-reliance, revealing a critical tension between empowerment and dependency.

The findings also underscore the importance of addressing the emotional and ethical dimensions of AI use. Students expressed both increased confidence and lingering uncertainty, particularly regarding the accuracy of AI feedback and the boundaries of acceptable academic use. These concerns point to the necessity of fostering not only technical proficiency but also ethical awareness and responsible engagement with AI tools. In light of these findings, this study contributes to the field by foregrounding students' voices as central to understanding the pedagogical implications of Gen-AI feedback. It moves beyond outcome-based perspectives and emphasizes the need for a learner-centered approach in integrating AI into writing instruction.

Pedagogically, the study suggests that educators should not treat Gen-AI as a replacement for human feedback, but rather as a complementary tool that requires careful scaffolding. Instruction should focus on developing students' feedback literacy, critical thinking, and self-regulated learning skills to ensure that AI is used effectively and responsibly. Additionally, clear institutional guidelines are needed to address ethical concerns and support appropriate use of AI in academic writing. In conclusion, while Gen-AI holds substantial potential to enhance EFL writing instruction, its successful implementation depends on the interplay between technology, pedagogy, and learner agency. Future research is encouraged to further investigate long-term impacts, explore diverse educational contexts, and examine how different instructional designs can optimize the integration of AI-mediated feedback in language learning.

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