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EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT AI-GENERATED FEEDBACK ON IMPROVING L2 WRITING: COMPARING PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER AND AI FEEDBACK

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Abstract

EFL students often confront problems regarding organisation, content, linguistic accuracy and objectivity. Traditionally, teacher feedback helps them to address some of these problems. However, teachers handling large classes have constraints on workload and time to correct the students' written works. This prevents effective feedback from teachers to students. Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based feedback can solve some of the more complex problems. It offers scalability, speed and objectivity. However, AI feedback may not understand individual needs and sometimes provides misinformation or flawed feedback. Thus, both teacher feedback and AI feedback have advantages and disadvantages. This study aimed to compare perceptions of the Saudi EFL students on teacher and AI feedback in improving L2 writing. This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perception of AI-generated feedback compared to teacher feedback on their L2 writing. The research combined quantitative survey data with qualitative responses to provide a comprehensive understanding of student preferences and attitudes toward different feedback sources. For the survey, the study recruited 50 undergraduate students from a large public university in Saudi Arabia, who were attending English language courses. For interviews, 15 students were selected from them. Quantitative data were analysed statistically, and qualitative data were analysed thematically.

The findings and discussions of this study lead to the conclusion that AI feedback and teacher feedback provide different benefits in enhancing the L2 writing ability of EFL students. There is a mutual compensation effect between the two feedback types regarding their shortcomings in addressing the concerns of students about their L2 writing abilities. Therefore, a hybrid approach, judiciously combining both types of feedback, can be advantageous for addressing most concerns of students about their L2 writing capabilities.

Keywords: EFL students, L2 writing, AI feedback. Teacher feedback

Introduction

Teacher feedback has traditionally been regarded as central to L2 writing pedagogy, valued for its contextual sensitivity, dialogic nature, and ability to address both linguistic accuracy and communicative intent. According to Ferris (2010), corrective feedback should facilitate the acquisition of the specific linguistic features of L2 and improve the overall effectiveness of the written texts. Truscott (1996) argued that grammar correction in L2 should be discontinued due to it not being helpful, ineffective and having harmful consequences.

However, teacher feedback is often constrained by workload, time limitations, and variability in consistency (Lee, 2017). In contrast, AI-generated feedback offers scalability, speed, and objectivity, yet it may lack the nuanced understanding of learners' individual needs, cultural contexts, and affective dimensions of learning. A medium effect for automated writing tools was reported by Fleckenstein, Liebenow, and Meyer (2023), while no difference between AI and teacher feedback was observed by Escalante, Pack, and Barrett (2023). According to Mekheimer (2025), Generative AI-assisted feedback improved writing skills and supported the writing process.

These distinctions raise critical questions about the relative effectiveness and learner reception of AI versus teacher feedback in L2 writing development.

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have increasingly reshaped educational practices, particularly in the domain of language learning and assessment. AI-driven feedback systems, such as automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools, now provide learners with immediate, individualised, and data-informed responses to their writing. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, who often encounter persistent challenges in mastering second language (L2) writing, these tools promise enhanced opportunities for practice and improvement outside the classroom. Despite their growing prevalence, the pedagogical implications of AI feedback remain contested, particularly in comparison with the long-established role of teacher feedback.

Learners' perceptions of feedback are particularly significant, as they influence not only the uptake of corrective input but also broader attitudes toward writing and technology-mediated learning. While prior studies have examined the effectiveness of AWE tools in improving writing accuracy and fluency, fewer have systematically explored how EFL students perceive AI-generated feedback in relation to teacher feedback. In the studies of Yu and Xie (2025), AI-assisted feedback performed better than teacher feedback quantitatively and qualitatively with respect to comprehensiveness and accuracy. Makwana (2025) observed AI-powered feedback to be comparable to teacher-led feedback in several writing aspects. The author advocated that further research is required on issues like accuracy and ethical transparency. In another comparison, Henderson, et al. (2025) found that students valued the feedback from GenAI due to its ease of access, timeliness, volume, understandability and that it was perceived to be less risky than seeking feedback from teachers. However, students were anxious about GenAI's reliability as well as contextual and disciplinary expertise. Understanding these perceptions is essential for evaluating the pedagogical viability of AI integration in language classrooms and for designing feedback practices that are both effective and learner-centred.

This study, therefore, investigates EFL students' perceptions of AI-generated feedback compared with teacher feedback in the context of L2 writing. By examining learners' evaluations of trustworthiness,

usefulness, and applicability, the research seeks to illuminate the strengths and limitations of both feedback sources. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates about the role of AI in language education and offers insights for balancing technological innovation with human-centred pedagogy.

Literature Review

Use of an AI tool (Grammarly) reduced grammatical and lexical errors, but not word counts and vocabulary types, compared to not using the AI tool in the case of EFL college students. The students expressed a positive attitude towards AI-assisted feedback in EFL writing, but expressed caution in their reliability and over-reliance on the tool (Mun, 2024).

There was no significant difference between AI-feedback and teacher-feedback in a study by Alnemrat, Aldamen, Almashour, Al-Deaibes, and AlSharefeen (2025) involving 60 undergraduate students in Jordan. In this quasi-experimental pretest–post-test study, participants were stratified into two ACTFL proficiency levels (Intermediate-Low and Advanced-Low) and assigned to either an AI feedback group or a teacher feedback group. All students completed an argumentative writing task, received feedback according to their group assignment, and revised their essays accordingly. Writing performance was evaluated using an analytic rubric, with inter-rater reliability established on a stratified 30% subsample to ensure the validity of the scoring process. Pre- and post-test scores were then analysed to assess gains in performance.

In a study by Zeevy-Solovey (2024) comparing AI, teacher and peer feedback, the students preferred to receive teacher WCF and a combination of teacher and ChatGPT WCF (written corrective feedback) and compared the relative proportion of specific writing components for each feedback type. In a comparison of Generative AI feedback with a hybrid feedback (AI and instructor) (Zhang, Aubrey, Huang, & Chiu, 2025), the writing skills of Chinese EFL students improved with AI feedback on grammar and sentence variety, but with limited contribution to their critical thinking and organisation. The hybrid approach significantly improved organisation, critical thinking, and sentence variety. Participants in the hybrid feedback group also reported higher motivation and more favourable perceptions of feedback. Taken together, these findings indicate that while GenAI feedback supports the development of foundational writing skills, hybrid feedback proves more effective for cultivating advanced academic competencies. The findings obtained by Zou, Guo, Wang, and Liu (2024) revealed greater student engagement and higher accuracy in their revisions in the case of teacher feedback. Although teacher feedback was very effective in helping students address language and content-related issues, students showed a strong tendency to integrate organisational feedback more successfully when it was provided by ChatGPT. Along with a general preference for teacher feedback, students acknowledged the distinctive strengths of ChatGPT for organisational improvements. These results suggest that ChatGPT feedback holds promise as a complementary resource to traditional teacher feedback. The results obtained by Perdana, Bungai, and Ilham (2025) showed the superiority of AI for unity, content development, grammar, mechanics and response speed. Both AI and teachers were equally effective in coherence, personalisation ability, and aligning with learning goals. Both types of feedback were equally effective in vocabulary and feedback reception. Thus, a balanced approach of technology and human elements is best to provide adequate writing skills to EFL students.

A randomised controlled trial was conducted by Khojasteh, Soori, and Javed (2025) with 88 intermediate-level EFL students. They were assigned to one of three feedback groups: (1) teacher e-

feedback, (2) AI-generated feedback using tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly, and (3) a hybrid approach combining both feedback types. Writing proficiency was measured using IELTS writing tasks and the Oxford Placement Test administered before and after the intervention. Significant differences emerged across the groups, with the hybrid feedback group demonstrating the greatest improvements, particularly in task achievement, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. AI-generated feedback was most effective in enhancing lexical resources. Qualitative reflections reinforced these findings, as participants in the hybrid group reported increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and appreciation for the balanced, dual-source feedback. Overall, the results highlight the pedagogical value of integrating human and AI feedback to strengthen EFL writing instruction.

In a quasi-experimental study by Navío-Inglés, Mora, O'Connor-Jiménez, and González (2025), the control group received teacher feedback exclusively, while the experimental group received a combination of teacher and AI-generated feedback. Following the intervention, participants' views on the feedback and their preparedness to assess writing were examined. Findings indicated that the experimental group reported more positive perceptions and greater confidence in their ability to teach and evaluate writing. While both groups recognised the need to strengthen their linguistic knowledge and assessment strategies and emphasised the central role of teacher-led feedback, participants in the experimental group also advocated for the inclusion of AI tools. These results underscore the importance of enhancing linguistic and assessment training in teacher education, while highlighting the openness of pre-service teachers to generative AI as a complementary resource in feedback provision.

From a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured interviews with 13 students and 10 teachers, Cai and Yu (2025) observed that students appreciated Gen AI for reducing writing difficulty and enhancing efficiency, though it may also produce logical flaws and misinformation. Sharing similar perceptions, teachers stressed that its effectiveness depended on the language level of students. Some teachers suggested traditional writing to build basic writing skills. For students, AI was easy to interact with, but some dialogical challenges were also noticed. The need for clear prompts was stressed by both students and teachers. For this, an AI-interaction literacy needs to be taught to them. Over-reliance was a possible outcome with the ease of use of AI. Thus, regarding the role of AI, students valued efficiency, and teachers valued the ability of the AI.

On the other hand, in a Saudi study by Aljasser (2025), the students perceived instructor feedback as more useful, although ChatGPT feedback was immediate and accessible. In another study by Abdi Tabari, Kushki, and Wang (2025), although both groups improved in accuracy, teacher feedback was more effective in error reduction and greater lexical variations. AI feedback was better at reducing syntax complexity. Thus, the roles of the two feedback types are complementary.

In a scoping review of 51 papers, Crosthwaite and Sun (2025) found that most studies examined improvements in writing quality resulting from GenAI-generated feedback, as well as students' and teachers' perceptions of such feedback. Researchers employed diverse methods, including revision analysis, pre- and post-tests of writing quality, and quantitative surveys. Findings highlight gains in writing quality and skills, alongside mixed perceptions and varied patterns of feedback uptake and revision behaviour, particularly when comparing AI with human feedback.

Thus, for L2 writing, although AI feedback has certain advantages, it cannot fully replace human

feedback. Therefore, many researchers suggest a hybrid approach combining both AI and human feedback in an appropriate way. This study has also found different effects of AI and teacher feedback on L2 writing.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students’ perception of AI-generated feedback compared to teacher feedback on their L2 writing. The research combined quantitative survey data with qualitative responses to provide a comprehensive understanding of student preferences and attitudes toward different feedback sources.

Participants

The study recruited 50 undergraduate students from a large public university in Saudi Arabia. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 50)*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	26	52.0
	Female	24	48.0
English Proficiency Level	Intermediate	18	36.0
	Upper-Intermediate	32	64.0
Academic Year	Second Year	15	30.0
	Third Year	22	44.0
	Fourth Year	13	26.0

All participants were enrolled in English language courses as part of their degree requirements and had prior experience receiving feedback from both their instructors and AI-powered writing tools during their coursework. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different academic disciplines and English proficiency levels.

Instruments

Data collection involved two primary instruments. First, a structured questionnaire was developed to measure students' perceptions of feedback quality across four dimensions: content, organisation, grammar, and mechanics. The questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and included 24 items specifically designed to compare AI-generated feedback with teacher feedback (12 items per feedback type). The instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.87 for AI feedback items and 0.84 for teacher feedback items.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 12 participants to gather in-depth qualitative data regarding their experiences and preferences. The interview protocol included open-ended questions about the perceived strengths and limitations of each feedback type.

Procedures

The study was conducted over one academic semester. Participants submitted identical writing

assignments through both an AI-powered feedback platform and to their course instructors. After receiving feedback from both sources on 2 assignments, participants completed the perception questionnaire. Subsequently, 15 participants were randomly selected for follow-up interviews lasting approximately 20-30 minutes each. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to determine statistically significant differences between perceptions of AI and teacher feedback across different writing dimensions. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's institutional review board before data collection. All participants provided informed consent, and their responses remained anonymous and confidential. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured that their decision to participate or withdraw would not affect their academic standing.

Results

Descriptive Statistics for Feedback Perceptions

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for students' perceptions of AI-generated and teacher feedback across the four writing dimensions examined in this study.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of AI and Teacher Feedback by Writing Dimension (N = 50)*

Writing Dimension	Feedback Type	M	SD	Min	Max
Content	AI	4.32	0.68	2.67	5.00
	Teacher	3.54	0.81	1.67	5.00
Organisation	AI	4.18	0.72	2.33	5.00
	Teacher	3.48	0.79	2.00	5.00
Grammar	AI	3.21	0.85	1.33	4.67
	Teacher	4.26	0.64	2.67	5.00
Mechanics	AI	3.08	0.91	1.00	4.33
	Teacher	4.14	0.71	2.33	5.00

Note. Scores range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions.

Comparative Analysis of Feedback Preferences

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine whether significant differences existed between

students' perceptions of AI and teacher feedback across the four writing dimensions. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Paired Sample t-Test Results Comparing AI and Teacher Feedback Perceptions (N = 50)

Writing Dimension	Mean Difference	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Content	0.78	0.74	7.45	49	< .001*	1.05
Organisation	0.70	0.69	7.17	49	< .001*	1.01
Grammar	-1.05	0.82	-9.05	49	< .001*	1.28
Mechanics	-1.06	0.88	-8.52	49	< .001*	1.20

Note. Positive mean differences indicate a preference for AI feedback; negative mean differences indicate a preference for teacher feedback. *p < .05

The results revealed statistically significant differences between AI and teacher feedback perceptions across all four dimensions. Students demonstrated significantly higher preferences for AI feedback on content ($t(49) = 7.45, p < .001, d = 1.05$) and organisation ($t(49) = 7.17, p < .001, d = 1.01$), with large effect sizes. Conversely, teacher feedback was rated significantly higher for grammar ($t(49) = -9.05, p < .001, d = 1.28$) and mechanics ($t(49) = -8.52, p < .001, d = 1.20$), also with large effect sizes.

Distribution of Feedback Preferences

Table 4 displays the distribution of students' overall preferences when asked to indicate which feedback source they found more helpful for each writing dimension.

Table 4 Distribution of Students' Feedback Source Preferences by Writing Dimension (N = 50)

Writing Dimension	Prefer AI Feedback	Prefer Teacher Feedback	No Preference
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Content	38 (76.0)	8 (16.0)	4 (8.0)
Organisation	35 (70.0)	10 (20.0)	5 (10.0)
Grammar	7 (14.0)	39 (78.0)	4 (8.0)
Mechanics	9 (18.0)	36 (72.0)	5 (10.0)

The distribution of preferences aligned with the statistical findings. A substantial majority of students (76.0%) preferred AI feedback for content-related issues, while 78.0% preferred teacher feedback for grammar instruction.

Qualitative Findings: Reasons for Preferring AI Feedback on Content and Organisation

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed three primary themes explaining students' preference for AI feedback on content and organisation. Table 5 summarises these themes and their frequencies.

Table 5 Themes Identified for Preference of AI Feedback on Content and Organisation (n = 15)

Theme	Description	Frequency	% of Participants
Example-rich explanations	AI provided concrete examples demonstrating improvements	14	93.3
Comprehensive detail	AI offered thorough, in-depth feedback on	12	80.0

Theme	Description	Frequency	% of Participants
	ideas and structure		
Immediacy and iterative revision	Instant feedback enabled multiple revision cycles	11	73.3

The most prevalent theme was the appreciation for example-rich explanations provided by AI tools. Participants consistently reported that AI feedback included concrete illustrations of how to implement suggested changes. One participant noted: "The AI doesn't just tell me my paragraph lacks coherence, it shows me exactly how to fix it with different options." Another student explained that receiving multiple examples helped them understand abstract concepts in practical terms, stating that they could see "before and after versions" of their sentences, which made the feedback actionable.

Students also valued the comprehensive detail in AI feedback on higher-order concerns. Participants described how AI tools would address thesis development, argument structure, and logical flow with explanations that teachers often did not have time to provide in written feedback. The immediacy of AI feedback was another significant factor, enabling students to revise and resubmit multiple times without waiting for instructor availability.

Qualitative Findings: Reasons for Preferring Teacher Feedback on Grammar and Mechanics

Three themes emerged from the analysis of students' preferences for teacher feedback on grammatical and mechanical aspects of writing, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 *Themes Identified for Preference of Teacher Feedback on Grammar and Mechanics (n = 15)*

Theme	Description	Frequency	% of Participants
Interactive negotiation	Face-to-face dialogue allowed clarification and follow-up questions	15	100.0
L1-informed explanations	Teachers addressed Arabic-English interference patterns	13	86.7
Affective support	Personal encouragement enhanced motivation and confidence	10	66.7

All interviewed participants (100%) emphasised the value of interactive negotiation during face-to-face feedback sessions. Students described how classroom discussions allowed them to ask follow-up questions, seek clarification, and verify their understanding in real time. One participant explained: "When I don't understand why my grammar is wrong, I can ask my teacher to explain again in a different way until I get it."

The second major theme concerned teachers' ability to provide L1-informed explanations. Participants appreciated that teachers familiar with Arabic could anticipate common interference errors and address their root causes. One student noted: "My teacher knows why we make certain mistakes because of Arabic, so she explains the difference between how Arabic and English work."

Finally, students valued the affective support embedded in teacher feedback interactions. The motivational dimension of face-to-face feedback, including encouragement and personalised attention,

enhanced students' confidence in addressing their grammatical weaknesses.

Summary of Results

Table 7 provides an integrated summary of the key findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Table 7: *Summary of Key Findings*

Feedback Aspect	Preferred Source	Key Reasons
Content	AI Feedback	Detailed explanations with concrete examples; comprehensive coverage of ideas
Organisation	AI Feedback	Example-rich guidance on structure; immediate availability for iterative revision
Grammar	Teacher Feedback	Interactive negotiation and clarification; L1-informed explanations
Mechanics	Teacher Feedback	Face-to-face dialogue, affective support and encouragement

The findings demonstrate that EFL students in this context perceive AI and teacher feedback as complementary resources, with each offering distinct advantages for different aspects of the writing process.

Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

This study found that students prefer AI feedback for content and organisation, and teacher feedback for grammar and mechanics in L2 writing. This indicates the need for a hybrid approach to enhance the L2 writing skills of EFL students. The review of the literature showed that more researchers endorse the hybrid method than either approach alone. Of the 12 papers examined, six supported the hybrid approach. These include Zeevey-Solovey (2024), Zhang et al. (2025), Zou et al. (2024), Perdana, Bungai and Ilham (2025), Khojasteh, Soori and Javed (2025), and Navio-Ingles et al. (2025). According to the students, AI provided in-depth feedback with specific examples to show how the improvements can be made. Instant feedback facilitated multiple revisions. According to Mun (2024), AI feedback helped to reduce grammatical and lexical errors. On the other hand, direct interaction with the teacher facilitated face-to-face interaction to clarify doubts, addressed Arabic- English interference patterns and improved motivation and confidence. In this context, it was found that students preferred direct feedback more than indirect feedback (Alshahrani & Storch, 2014; Alshahrani & Storch, 2025). In the studies of Zeevy-Solovey (2025), the preference was either for teacher feedback or hybrid feedback, and not AI feedback alone.

The hybrid approach is necessary due to the problems of reliability and over-reliance on AI feedback (Mun, 2024). According to Zhang et al. (2025), AI feedback improved writing skills on grammar and sentence variety, but not critical thinking or organisation. Zou et al. (2024) noted that teacher feedback led to greater student engagement and higher accuracy in their revisions. It was also very effective in helping students address language and content-related issues. However, students showed a strong

tendency to integrate organisational feedback more successfully when it was provided by ChatGPT. Along with a general preference for teacher feedback, students acknowledged the distinctive strengths of ChatGPT for organisational improvements, thus supporting hybrid approaches. According to Perdana, Bungai and Ilham (2025), AI feedback can improve unity, content development, grammar, mechanics and response speed. However, it was only equal to teacher feedback with respect to coherence, personalisation ability, alignment with learning goals, vocabulary and feedback reception. In the studies of Khojasteh, Soori and Javed (2025), while AI feedback was better for improving lexical sources, the hybrid approach was useful for task achievement, coherence, grammatical accuracy, increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and increased their appreciation for the hybrid approach. The hybrid approach led to more positive perceptions and greater confidence in their ability to teach and evaluate writing (Navio-Ingles et al., 2025). While AI feedback may reduce writing difficulty and improve efficiency, it may produce logical flaws and misinformation, its effectiveness depending on the language proficiency level of students.

Some findings reported either no difference between the two types of feedback (Alnemrat et al., 2025) or that the teacher feedback was better (Aljasser, 2025). These findings may be due to contextual or methodological differences in their studies. While the former used undergraduate students of different levels of English proficiency, the latter used students from the highly traditional Saudi society.

Conclusion

The above findings and discussions lead to the conclusion that AI feedback and teacher feedback provide different benefits in enhancing the L2 writing ability of EFL students. There is a mutual compensation effect between the two feedback types regarding their shortcomings in addressing the concerns of students about their L2 writing abilities. Therefore, a hybrid approach, judiciously combining both types of feedback, can be advantageous for addressing most concerns of students about their L2 writing capabilities.

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