



Artificial Intelligence as a Source of Feedback in L2 Writing Classrooms: Best Practices and Pedagogical Strategies

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Abstract

Writing proficiency is a key element of academic success for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, but it presents ongoing challenges that demand innovative pedagogical solutions. The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has created unprecedented opportunities for enhancing writing instruction through automated feedback systems. This article brings together theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and pedagogical best practices to examine how AI tools can serve as effective sources of feedback in second language (L2) writing classrooms. Drawing on cognitive, sociocultural, and contrastive rhetoric theories of writing, the article explores the nature of L2 writing difficulties, the critical role of feedback in writing development, and the strengths and limitations of AI-generated feedback. A systematic review of recent empirical studies reveals that AI-powered feedback systems are consistently effective in enhancing micro-level writing skills, particularly grammatical accuracy and lexical diversity. However, limitations remain in addressing macro-level writing concerns, and hybrid feedback models that combine AI with teacher input appear to yield the most comprehensive benefits. The article presents evidence-based recommendations for teachers and students, including strategies for scaffolding AI use, developing feedback literacy, designing effective prompts, and integrating AI feedback with teacher and peer feedback. It also addresses ethical considerations and practical concerns to ensure effective use of AI tools. It concludes with implications for pedagogy and directions for future research. This article argues that the thoughtful integration of AI feedback with teacher feedback, grounded in pedagogical principles and human judgment, can significantly enhance L2 writing instruction.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, feedback, L2 writing, automated feedback, pedagogical strategies

1. Introduction

Writing proficiency is essential for academic success and overall language competence in ESL and EFL contexts. Writing serves not merely as a means of demonstrating knowledge but as a fundamental skill through which learners articulate ideas, construct arguments, and engage critically with different texts and ideas. Hyland (2019) states that writing is an integral skill in English language education because it enables learners to express thoughts, argue positions, and interact with various written materials in meaningful ways. However, this skill remains one of the

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most challenging areas for L2 learners, as it requires the coordination of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and rhetorical awareness in ways that many students find overwhelming.

The complexity of L2 writing has been thoroughly examined. Flower and Hayes's (1981) cognitive process theory conceptualized writing as a recursive set of cognitive processes—planning, translating, and reviewing—guided by a monitoring process. For L2 writers, these cognitive demands are compounded by the additional burden of operating in a language that is not their own. Research has consistently shown that L2 writing differs significantly from L1 writing in fluency, accuracy, quality, and structure (Silva, 1993). Common difficulties include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, problems with sentence structure, and challenges in developing coherent arguments (Raimes, 1991). These difficulties are further compounded by cultural and educational differences that may influence students' writing styles and expectations.

One of the most critical forms of support for L2 writing development is feedback—the information provided to learners about their writing performance that can guide improvement and facilitate learning. However, providing effective feedback presents considerable challenges for teachers because it requires substantial time and effort (Wang & Han, 2022). Teachers face heavy workloads, limited time, and large class sizes that constrain their ability to provide detailed, individualized feedback to every student.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new possibilities for addressing these challenges. AI-powered tools, ranging from grammar checkers and Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems to generative AI platforms like ChatGPT, offer the potential to provide immediate, personalized feedback suitable for large numbers of students. For example, ChatGPT can provide instant feedback on language, content, and organisation (Barrot, 2023; Mizumoto & Eguchi, 2023). With effective prompts, it can function as an EFL teacher, providing real-time feedback, reducing teacher workload, and addressing individual student needs.

Despite their potential benefits, AI tools raise important pedagogical and ethical questions. Over-reliance on AI feedback, for instance, may prevent students from developing independent editing and revision skills (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022). The quality of AI feedback can also vary depending on the specificity of prompts and the nature of the writing task, and AI tools may lack the contextual sensitivity that human teachers provide. Moreover, students' AI literacy—their ability to formulate effective prompts and critically evaluate AI-generated suggestions—greatly affects how useful they find the feedback.

This article aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on technology in language education by exploring how AI tools can be used effectively as sources of feedback in L2 writing classrooms. It has four main objectives: to examine the theories that shape our understanding of L2 writing and feedback; to identify the common writing challenges that ESL and EFL students face and explore how AI tools can help; to discuss effective pedagogical strategies for using AI feedback to support student learning; and to offer practical recommendations for teachers and students on incorporating AI feedback into writing instruction.

2. Theoretical Foundations of L2 Writing

Understanding how L2 writers compose texts requires examining the theoretical frameworks that have shaped the field. Three major theoretical models have influenced L2 writing research and pedagogy: the Cognitive Model, the Sociocultural Model, and the Contrastive Rhetoric Model. Each offers different views on the nature of L2 writing and the role of feedback in supporting learner development.

The Cognitive Model, rooted in the foundational work of Flower and Hayes (1981), has been particularly influential in understanding the mental processes underlying writing. This model conceptualizes writing as a recursive set of cognitive processes, planning, translating, and reviewing, guided by a monitoring process that coordinates these activities. According to this model, writing is understood as a problem-solving activity in which writers must simultaneously manage multiple cognitive demands, such as generating ideas, organising content, and attending to linguistic accuracy. For L2 writers, these demands are much greater than for L1 writers because they must attend to linguistic accuracy and manage macro-level concerns such as organisation, argumentation, and audience awareness (Silva, 1993). This model provides a valuable framework for understanding why L2 writing is so challenging and for identifying the types of support, such as feedback, that can help reduce cognitive load and facilitate writing development. AI feedback tools, by providing immediate assistance with micro-level concerns such as grammar and vocabulary. This can free up cognitive resources for more complex writing tasks. As a result, students can focus more attention on content development and rhetorical effectiveness.

The Sociocultural Model, grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978), emphasises the social and contextual dimensions of learning and development. From this perspective, writing is understood as a socially mediated activity in which learning occurs through interaction with others (e.g., teachers, peers, or technological tools). Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that learners can perform tasks with guidance that they cannot do independently. The ZPD is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Feedback from teachers, peers, or AI tools can act as a scaffolding to support learners within their ZPD. These tools can offer appropriate support and guidance to students. However, the sociocultural model emphasizes that social interaction and human guidance are still essential. Therefore, AI tools should complement, not replace, human feedback.

The Contrastive Rhetoric Model, introduced by Kaplan (1966), focuses on how a writer's first language and culture influence their writing in a second language. Kaplan argued that each language and culture has its own way of organizing paragraphs, with English being largely linear, deductive, and direct. This view has helped teachers and researchers understand why L2 writers from different backgrounds may face challenges with organization, paragraph development, or argumentation in English academic writing. Although the model has been criticised for treating culture as fixed and oversimplifying rhetorical patterns, it is still useful because it draws attention to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds that shape L2 writing. For AI feedback tools, this means

they should be designed with cultural and linguistic diversity in mind. Feedback that respects the writing traditions of learners' first languages may support L2 writing development more effectively than generic feedback based on a single standard of good writing.

Together, these three theoretical models offer complementary frameworks for understanding L2 writing and the role of feedback in supporting learner development. The cognitive model highlights the mental processes involved in writing and the potential of AI to reduce cognitive load. The sociocultural model emphasizes the social nature of learning and the importance of human guidance. The contrastive rhetoric model draws attention to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds that shape L2 writing practices. These frameworks provide a solid foundation for exploring how AI feedback tools can be effectively integrated into L2 writing classrooms.

3. The Nature and Importance of Feedback in L2 Writing

Feedback is widely recognized as a key component of effective L2 writing instruction. It connects assessment and teaching by guiding learners towards their goals. In second language writing, feedback can be defined as input from a reader to help a writer improve their written text (Keh, 1990). It includes comments, questions, and error corrections on students' work, ranging from praise for good ideas to grammar corrections (Mack, 2009). Its main purpose is to provide information about both the form and content of writing, encouraging students to develop and consolidate their learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b).

Feedback has two main components: error correction (corrective feedback), which focuses on grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Ellis, 2005), and written commentary, which addresses form, content, and organization (Goldstein, 2004). Together, they provide essential input for second language learning. Through feedback, students can identify problems in their writing and become more aware of form, content, and organization. Research shows that written corrective feedback, in particular, helps students learn by drawing their attention to errors (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). It reinforces what students already know and helps them learn new structures and vocabulary. Hyland and Hyland (2006a) note that written feedback is a major source of input for students, with significant potential to improve their writing skills.

Despite its importance, providing effective feedback is challenging for teachers. Heavy workloads, limited time, and large class sizes are some factors that impede teachers to give detailed, individualized feedback to every student (Wang & Han, 2022). Although both students and teachers see feedback as essential (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 2002; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a; Mack, 2009), these practical constraints have led to a search for alternative approaches. AI-powered tools now offer new possibilities by providing immediate, personalized, and adaptable feedback that can support student writing development.

4. Second Language Writing Difficulties

Research has consistently documented several challenges that EFL/ESL students face in writing. These difficulties are not only linguistic but also cognitive, affective, and contextual. Understanding these challenges is essential for teachers seeking to integrate AI tools as a means of providing feedback.

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The most immediate challenge for L2 writers is linguistic accuracy. Common difficulties include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, problems with sentence structure, and issues with punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (Raimes, 1991; Silva, 1993). Studies show that L2 writing differs from L1 writing in fluency, accuracy, quality, and structure (Silva, 1993). In the Libyan EFL context, students struggle with basic writing skills, limited vocabulary, and insufficient resources. Specific problems appear in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammatical structures (Albosaifi, 2023).

Beyond linguistic accuracy, L2 writers face challenges in organizing their ideas and developing coherent arguments. Writing requires linguistic knowledge and cognitive skills to organize and express ideas clearly (Flower & Hayes, 1981). These difficulties become more pronounced when students produce extended academic texts. Research shows that university EFL students struggle to write effective topic sentences, concluding sentences, and supporting details with appropriate examples and reasons (Alkhboli, 2024).

Affective factors also play a role in L2 writing difficulties. Many L2 writers experience writing anxiety, low self-efficacy, and lack of confidence. These feelings can create a cycle: anxiety harms writing performance, which increases anxiety and lowers motivation. The educational context adds further barriers, such as limited exposure to academic English, insufficient feedback, and poor technological infrastructure (Ferris, 2009; Hyland, 2009). Research also highlights the impact of limited resources, large classes, and insufficient practice on students' writing development (Atteia, 2025).

Research shows that L2 writing difficulties are multifaceted. They include linguistic issues with grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics; cognitive and organizational challenges in structuring ideas and arguments; and affective problems like anxiety and low confidence. In some EFL contexts, these difficulties are compounded by limited resources, large classes, and insufficient practice (Albosaifi, 2023; Alkhboli, 2024; Atteia, 2025). These interconnected challenges highlight the need for effective feedback that addresses multiple aspects of writing. AI-powered tools may offer valuable support, as the next section explores.

5. AI as a Tool for Providing Writing Feedback

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence has opened new possibilities for addressing the challenges of providing effective feedback in L2 writing instruction. AI-powered tools, ranging from grammar checkers and Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems to generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT, offer the potential to provide immediate, personalized, and adaptable feedback to L2 writers. These technologies, based on natural language processing and machine learning, can enhance multiple aspects of writing, such as accuracy, fluency, organisation, and coherence. The following sections review the types of AI tools available, their effectiveness, student engagement with them, and the limitations that shape their use in teaching.

5.1 Types of AI Feedback Tools

A range of AI-powered tools has emerged to support L2 writing instruction. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems use natural language processing to evaluate written texts and identify linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organization. Generative AI

platforms like ChatGPT represent a more recent development. They are known for their human-like conversations and ability to generate content (Li, 2024). These tools can provide feedback on language, content, and organization (Cengiz et al, 2025). Grammar checkers such as Grammarly check texts, identify errors, and offer corrections (Elsherif, 2025). Each tool offers different benefits: AWE systems typically focus on linguistic accuracy, while generative AI platforms can address both micro and macro-level writing concerns (Yan & Zhang, 2024).

5.2 Effectiveness of AI-Generated Feedback

Research has shown that AI-powered feedback systems can improve L2 writing skills. Ekizoğlu and Demir (2025) found that high school EFL students who received AI feedback showed significantly greater improvement in writing performance than those who received traditional teacher feedback, with gains in grammar, vocabulary, and coherence. Similarly, Gökçe and Yavuz (2024) found that university students valued ChatGPT's practicality and adaptability, though they noted occasional inconsistencies. Comparative studies have also examined different feedback approaches. Tabari et al. (2025) compared teacher e-feedback, AI feedback, and a hybrid model. The hybrid group showed the most improvement, particularly in task achievement, coherence, and grammatical accuracy, while AI feedback was most effective for vocabulary. These findings suggest that AI feedback is useful for surface-level improvements, but hybrid approaches combining AI and human feedback offer the most comprehensive benefits (Tabari et al., 2025).

5.3 Student Engagement with AI Feedback

Understanding student engagement with AI feedback is important for optimizing its use. Cengiz et al (2025) found that EFL writers accepted most content and language feedback, but engagement with organization feedback was mixed. Students were more likely to accept language-related feedback, often incorporating ChatGPT's revisions directly. However, they faced challenges with feedback length, advanced language, and misunderstandings. Yan and Zhang (2024) found that behavioral engagement with ChatGPT depended on students' language proficiency and technological skills, and that many students struggled to regulate their learning effectively. The study also found that ChatGPT created an engaging but demanding and time-consuming learning environment. These findings highlight both the potential and limitations of AI feedback.

5.4 Limitations and Challenges of AI Feedback

Despite its promise, AI feedback tools have significant limitations. Scholars have raised concerns about over-reliance, which may reduce critical thinking and independent writing skills (Cengiz et al, 2025). The quality of AI feedback depends on the specificity of prompts and the nature of the writing task. AI tools may lack the contextual awareness that human teachers provide, and their feedback can be inconsistent or inaccurate (Li, 2024). In the Libyan EFL context, Elsherif (2025) found that student-teachers viewed Grammarly positively, noting improvements in grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. However, they also expressed concerns about over-reliance, limited features, and the need for teacher feedback. Technical issues, subscription costs, and language complexities were also identified as challenges. These findings highlight the importance of using AI tools to supplement, not replace, teacher instruction and student effort.

5.5 Comparing Teacher Feedback and AI Feedback

Research has also shown differences between teacher and AI feedback. A comparative analysis of instructor feedback and ChatGPT feedback in an EAP context found that instructors used more epistemic strategies, were more assertive, and used dialogic delivery more often, while ChatGPT's feedback was mostly monologic (Tabari et al., 2025). Teacher feedback is characterized by contextual sensitivity, thoughtful judgment, and the ability to address content and form together, based on the student's progress and needs (Ferris, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a). However, it is time-consuming and limited by workload constraints (Wang & Han, 2022). AI feedback offers immediacy, consistency, and comprehensiveness (Cengiz et al, 2025; Yan & Zhang, 2024), but it may lack contextual sensitivity and fail to recognize individual needs (Li, 2024). Students value both sources for different reasons. They see teacher feedback as more supportive and helpful for developing writing skills, and they value AI feedback for its speed and convenience (Cengiz et al, 2025). These complementary strengths have led researchers to advocate for hybrid models. Research suggests that AI feedback works best for surface-level issues, while teacher feedback focuses on higher-order concerns like content, argumentation, and rhetorical effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2026). These findings highlight the need for practical frameworks to help teachers integrate AI feedback tools into their teaching. The next section addresses this need through evidence-based best practices.

6. Best Practices for Using AI as a Feedback Tool

Based on the previous sections, this section presents practical, evidence-based best practices for using AI feedback tools in L2 writing classrooms. The practices are organized into four areas: strategies for teachers, practices for students, integration with teacher and peer feedback, and ethical considerations.

6.1 Strategies for Teachers

Teachers play a key role in guiding students' use of AI feedback tools. Research suggests several effective strategies. First, teachers should have a clear plan that explains why and how AI will be used, the specific writing skills it aims to develop, and how this technology can supplement their own feedback (Zhang et al., 2026). Second, teachers should show students how to write effective prompts. This means teachers should teach them to specify what kind of feedback they need, how much detail they want, and which aspects of writing they need AI feedback to focus on. Research shows that prompts designed for EFL learners produce feedback that is easier to understand and more helpful (Barrot, 2023). Third, teachers should demonstrate how to use AI tools by projecting their own writing, generating feedback, and thinking aloud as they decide which suggestions to accept. This models critical thinking and thoughtful use of AI (Lu et al., 2026). Fourth, teachers should help students develop feedback literacy, the ability to evaluate and use feedback effectively. Research shows that AI-supported feedback practices can improve students' ability to appreciate feedback, manage their emotions, and take action (Lu et al., 2026).

6.2 Practices for Students

Students also have responsibilities when using AI feedback tools. Research suggests several helpful practices. First, students should learn to write clear prompts. Good prompts include

information about their proficiency level, what they want feedback on, the purpose of their writing, and any specific concerns (Barrot, 2023). Second, students should think critically about AI feedback. They should ask: Does this suggestion improve my writing? Does it match what I want to say? Does it fit the type of writing I am doing? (Cengiz et al, 2025). Third, students should see AI feedback as a way to learn, not just a way to fix mistakes. Research shows that students who reflect on AI feedback become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses (Yan & Zhang, 2024). Fourth, students should use AI feedback as a starting point for revision. They should make meaningful changes based on suggestions and their own judgment, and then reflect on what they have learned. This reflection helps them internalize feedback and become better writers (Lu et al., 2026).

6.3 Integrating AI, Teacher, and Peer Feedback

Research consistently shows that combining AI, teacher, and peer feedback works best. Several strategies can help with this integration. First, the order of feedback matters. An effective sequence is: students revise on their own, then get peer feedback, then AI feedback, then teacher feedback. Each round builds on the previous one, and each source contributes something different (Tabari et al., 2025). Second, students benefit from comparing feedback from different sources. This helps them understand the strengths and weaknesses of each and develop their own judgment about what is useful (Cengiz et al, 2025). Third, teachers remain essential because they provide the context, the personal connection, and the expert judgment that AI cannot offer. Teachers should use AI as a tool, not as a replacement for their own feedback (Zhang et al., 2026). Fourth, teachers should focus on higher-order concerns like content, argumentation, and organization, while AI handles surface-level issues like grammar and spelling. This ensures that each feedback source is used to its full potential.

6.4 Ethical and Practical Concerns

Using AI feedback tools raises important ethical and practical issues. First, clear rules should be set about when and how AI can be used. Students need to understand expectations for original work, the role of AI, and the consequences of misuse (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022). Second, teachers should emphasize using AI to improve students' writing skills, not as a shortcut for completing writing tasks. To prevent over-reliance, students can be asked to document their revisions, explain their decisions, and reflect on what they learned (Cengiz et al, 2025). Third, teachers should evaluate the AI tools they use and discuss their limitations with students. AI can contain biases that may disadvantage some learners (Darvin, 2025). Fourth, teachers should be open with students about how AI tools are being used, what they can and cannot do, and what is expected. This builds trust and encourages responsible use (Akgun & Greenhow 2022).

The best practices outlined in this section demonstrate that AI feedback tools can be valuable in L2 writing instruction when used thoughtfully and strategically. Their effectiveness depends on clear pedagogical planning, explicit teaching of prompt engineering and feedback literacy, careful integration with teacher and peer feedback, and attention to ethical concerns. As AI technology continues to evolve, teachers and researchers should continue to explore how these tools can best

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support student writing development while preserving the essential human dimensions of teaching and learning.

7. Conclusion

This article has explored the integration of Artificial Intelligence as a source of feedback in second language writing classrooms. It combined theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and pedagogical best practices to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI feedback tools can be used effectively.

Several key conclusions emerge from this discussion. AI feedback tools can enhance L2 writing instruction, especially in addressing surface-level issues like grammar and vocabulary. However, their effectiveness depends on how teachers integrate them into their teaching. Teachers play an essential role in guiding students, teaching them how to write effective prompts, and helping them develop feedback literacy. The best results come from hybrid approaches that combine AI feedback with teacher and peer feedback. AI can handle error corrections, while teachers focus on higher-order concerns such as content, argumentation, and organization.

As AI technology continues to develop, its role in language education will likely grow. However, the success of AI integration depends not on the technology itself but on the pedagogical skill of teachers who use it. By maintaining a student-centered approach, balancing technology with human interaction, and fostering students' writing and thinking skills, teachers can use AI effectively while preserving the human dimensions of education. With thoughtful implementation, AI feedback tools can enhance L2 writing instruction and help students become more confident and independent writers.

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