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BRIDGING AI AND WRITING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON AI'S ROLE IN PROVIDING FEEDBACK FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS AT UIN RADEN INTAN LAMPUNG

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Abstract: The integration of AI writing tools into academic contexts has reshaped how EFL students produce and revise written work, yet the cognitive and emotional dimensions of these interactions remain insufficiently understood in Indonesian higher education. This study examined how English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung receive, verify, and use AI-generated feedback during academic writing, and how such engagement shapes their trust, emotional responses, writing autonomy, and ethical decision-making. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with six purposively sampled fourth-semester students, supplemented by documentary artefacts for triangulation. Data were analysed through theoretical thematic analysis guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Feedback Theory (Hattie et al., 2007). Five themes emerged. Students who maintained independent pre-writing drafts engaged more critically with AI feedback, while those who delegated early composition showed greater passivity. Trust in AI was domain-differentiated, favouring grammatical over content corrections. Emotional responses ranged from growth-oriented motivation to insecurity-induced disengagement, and a near-universal grammar retention failure pointed to a structural learning illusion defined here as the subjective sense of progress without durable knowledge acquisition. Ethical frameworks were self-formed in the absence of institutional guidance. The study argues that productive AI integration requires explicit workflow pedagogy, AI literacy instruction, and formal institutional policy.

Keywords: AI-generated feedback; EFL academic writing; student perception; Technology Acceptance Model; writing autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence writing tools have fundamentally altered how university students engage with academic writing. Applications such as Grammarly, QuillBot, and ChatGPT now provide immediate corrective and generative feedback on grammar, structure, and argumentation resources historically accessible only through instructor interaction (C. Meniado, 2023; Oseremi Onesi-Ozigagun et al., 2024). For EFL learners, these tools carry particular significance given persistent challenges with linguistic precision and academic register (Demneri, 2024; Quratulain et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, AI integration in academic writing proceeds in a policy vacuum. Universities have not established clear governance frameworks, and students receive inconsistent guidance from lecturers (Dogan et al., 2023). Many students first encountered AI tools through social media rather than formal instruction, developing habits centred on mechanical error correction rather than deeper writing development (Safitri & Kusumaningtyas, 2023). Research documents improvements in grammar and revision confidence (Mahapatra, 2024; Wilson & Roscoe, 2020),

but also concerns about over-reliance and loss of authorial voice (Boillos & Idoiaga, 2025; Xue, 2024). These concerns are theoretically grounded in two complementary frameworks. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) provides a lens for understanding how students' perceived usefulness and ease of use of AI tools shape their adoption behaviours and, by extension, how deeply they engage with AI-generated suggestions. Feedback Theory (Hattie et al., 2007), particularly its emphasis on the conditions under which feedback is internalised and acted upon, illuminates why not all AI feedback translates into lasting learning. Together, TAM and Feedback Theory frame this study's dual focus: the behavioural patterns of AI adoption and the cognitive-affective processes through which feedback is received or ignored.

Two research questions guided this study: (1) How do English Education students receive, verify, and use AI-generated feedback during academic writing, including strategies to adopt, modify, or reject suggestions? (2) How does engagement with AI-generated feedback shape students' trust, emotional responses, writing autonomy, and ethical decision-making? By locating these questions within the specific context of English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, a population destined to become future English teachers, the study generates locally situated evidence with implications for Indonesian EFL writing pedagogy.

This study makes three specific contributions that distinguish it from prior work. First, unlike previous studies that examined what students do with AI tools (Mahapatra, 2024; Safitri & Kusumaningtyas, 2023), this study foregrounds when AI is introduced in the writing workflow as the critical variable shaping uptake quality, a distinction that existing Indonesian EFL research has not yet drawn. Second, it introduces the concept of learning illusion defined as a pattern in which AI feedback produces a subjective sense of linguistic improvement without generating durable metalinguistic knowledge, consistent with Carless & Boud (2018) argument that surface uptake does not constitute genuine feedback literacy. This dynamic has not been fully captured in optimistic product-focused studies (Mahapatra, 2024; Wilson & Roscoe, 2020). Third, it documents dual affect defined as the simultaneous experience of insecurity and pride within a single AI feedback session as a nuanced emotional response that goes beyond the uniformly positive affective outcomes reported in comparable studies (Miranty & Widiati, 2021; Oseremi Onesi-Ozigagun et al., 2024). These two concepts draw on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012), which holds that feedback contexts mediating both competence threat and mastery experience can produce contradictory affective states simultaneously. Together, these contributions offer a more granular account of how AI feedback is lived, not merely used, by EFL student writers.

The present study addresses a gap that prior research has approached but not resolved: while studies have examined AI tool use in EFL writing (Mahapatra, 2024; Safitri & Kusumaningtyas, 2023; Xue, 2024), none have simultaneously examined workflow positioning, trust calibration, emotional mediation, and ethical reasoning within a single Indonesian EFL sample. This integrative approach is necessary because, as the findings show, these dimensions are not independent workflow habits shape trust, which shapes emotion, which shapes autonomy.

METHOD

A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, selected for its capacity to elicit the richness of participants' lived experiences with technology (Creswell, John W & Poth, 2022). The research was conducted at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, specifically within the English Essay Writing course offered to fourth-semester English Education students. The study's scope focused

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on how students cognitively and emotionally engage with AI-generated writing feedback, with the central research variable being student perception of AI feedback across dimensions of trust, uptake, emotion, autonomy, and ethics. Data collection instruments included a semi-structured interview protocol and documentary artefacts (AI chat screenshots and paired writing drafts). Data were analysed through Braun & Clarke (2021) theoretical thematic analysis procedure: familiarisation, code generation, theme development, review, definition, and write-up.

Six fourth-semester students enrolled in the English Essay Writing course at UIN Raden Intan Lampung participated. Purposive sampling using a maximum variation strategy captured diversity across AI usage intensity, tool preferences (Grammarly, QuillBot, ChatGPT, Gemini), and prior writing experience (Patton, 2007). Participants were recruited via a screening questionnaire after formal departmental permission was obtained. Inclusion required at least three AI-assisted writing feedback interactions within the preceding month. Table 1 presents participant profiles.

Table 1 Research Participant Profiles

Code	Date	Gender	AI Tools	Intensity	Duration	Quot.	Writing confidence & English Use*
P1	6 Apr 2026	Female	ChatGPT, Grammarly	Moderate	36 min	38	Relatively confident writer
P2	9 Apr 2026	Female	ChatGPT, Gemini	Moderate	26 min	41	Relied heavily on AI support
P3	10 Apr 2026	Male	ChatGPT, Grammarly	Light	27 min	43	Confident idea development
P4	9 Apr 2026	Female	ChatGPT, Gemini	Moderate	29 min	35	Insecure about grammar accuracy
P5	9 Apr 2026	Female	ChatGPT, Gemini	Moderate	29 min	30	Moderate writing confidence
P6	16 Apr 2026	Female	ChatGPT, Gemini, Grammarly	Light	20 min	40	Mixed independent writing confidence

Note. Intensity was determined based on participants' self-reported statements. Duration refers to the interview session length. Quotations indicates analytically significant quotes highlighted during analysis. The descriptions are interpretive and based on self-reported experiences and observed AI usage behaviors rather than standardized measurements*

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument, guided by twelve main questions covering writing process integration, uptake strategies, trust and verification, and perceived outcomes. Interviews lasted 20–36 minutes, conducted via Zoom in Bahasa Indonesia and audio recorded with consent. Documentary artefacts AI chat screenshots and paired writing drafts were gathered for triangulation. Data were analysed through theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) anchored in TAM (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) and Feedback Theory (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Of 188 initial codes generated in Atlas.ti, a four-filter triage produced 58 active codes across six group codes. Table 2 displays the code distribution. Trustworthiness was established through methodological triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and a structured audit trail.

Table 2 Code Document Distribution by Participant (Post Triage)

Code Group	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Total
GC 1 – Writing Process Integration	3	0	0	1	2	0	6

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GC 2 – Uptake Patterns & Selective Engagement	2	3	1	1	1	0	8
GC 3 – Rejection, Skepticism & AI Literacy	5	2	1	1	4	0	13
GC 4 – Trust, Verification & Epistemic Evaluation	3	3	0	2	2	2	12
GC 5 – Emotional & Psychological Response	5	1	4	2	2	4	18
GC 6 – Autonomy, Authorship & Ethical Positioning	5	4	3	2	3	2	19
Totals	**23**	**13**	**9**	**9**	**14**	**8**	**76**

Note. Values represent post-triage coded quotations per Code Group per participant. Grand total = 76.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 Themes and Representative Verbatim Quote

Theme	Source	Representative Verbatim Quote
Theme 1: Workflow	**P1**	*I started by noting down the main points I wanted to cover using my own words... After that, I asked ChatGPT to improve the phrasing, vocabulary, and grammar.*
Theme 1: Workflow	**P2**	*I find it hard to develop ideas on my own. Usually I start by asking the AI what the general structure should look like, and then I try to fill it in.*
Theme 2: Uptake	**P1**	*I delete sentences that sound too much like AI and replace them with my own. If a sentence uses vocabulary I haven't even learned yet, I won't use it.*
Theme 2: Uptake	**P2**	*Sometimes I just copy everything. I know I should read it more carefully, but if I'm tired, I just take it.*
Theme 3: Trust	**P1**	*I trust it much more for grammar and vocabulary. For arguments no, because AI doesn't have personal experience. It can't watch a video. It just guesses.*
Theme 4: Emotion	**P1**	*It motivates me to learn more. The feedback is helpful, and since I'm still in the learning process, I don't feel insecure. It's just part of learning.*
Theme 4: Emotion	**P4**	*Honestly I become more insecure... It turns out even AI is criticizing my writing, so I'd be like: forget it, I'm not going to continue.*
Theme 5: Authorship	**P1**	*Yes, because I only use it for grammar and vocabulary. The ideas are still mine.*

FINDINGS

Analysis produced two major findings across five interconnected themes. The highest concentration of coded evidence fell in Group Code 6 (Autonomy, Authorship, and Ethical Positioning; n=19) and Group Code 5 (Emotional and Psychological Response; n=18), together accounting for 48.7% of all quotations. This distribution signals that affective and identity-related variables carry greater empirical weight than the procedural mechanics of uptake.

Theme 1: Strategic Positioning of AI Within the Writing Process

How students temporally position AI in their writing workflow appeared to indicate the strongest observed pattern of uptake quality. Two contrasting patterns emerged: a draft-first approach, in which students completed independent brainstorming and initial composition before consulting AI, and an AI-first approach, in which AI was engaged at the outset to generate structural direction.

P1 and P3 consistently exemplified the draft-first pattern. P1 described her process in explicitly sequential terms, and artefact analysis confirmed that all AI submissions from this participant consisted of independently drafted sentences presented for refinement rather than content generation. P3 adopted the most structurally autonomous approach, constructing a mind

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map before any AI involvement and recording new grammar knowledge in a physical notebook the only participant to demonstrate this deliberate knowledge-transfer strategy.

> *"I started by noting down the main points I wanted to cover using my own words... After that, I asked ChatGPT to improve the phrasing, vocabulary, and grammar."* (P1)

P2, by contrast, consistently delegated pre-writing to AI, asking it to generate essay outlines before any independent writing. This pattern reflects cognitive dependency: outsourcing core intellectual work risks undermining the competencies writing instruction aims to develop (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

Theme 2: The Spectrum of Uptake from Critical Modification to Passive Acceptance

Uptake behaviours ranged across a spectrum rather than constituting a binary of use or refusal, revealing three distinct orientations: critical modification, selective uptake, and passive acceptance. The quality of uptake not merely the frequency of AI use determines whether AI functions as a genuine learning scaffold or a shortcut.

Critical modification was most clearly evidenced in P1 and P5. Both maintained explicit domain boundaries AI for surface accuracy, the writer for ideas and structure and consistently rewrote AI-suggested sentences to align with their own register. P5 composed initial drafts entirely by hand before consulting AI, describing unassisted writing as producing more natural output. This orientation reflects what Carless & Boud (2018) define as active uptake.

> *"I delete sentences that sound too much like AI and replace them with my own. If a sentence uses vocabulary I haven't even learned yet, I won't use it."* (P1)

P2 demonstrated passive acceptance through direct copy-paste without evaluation. A persistent 'knowing-doing gap' was identified: P2 acknowledged the limitations of wholesale copy-pasting yet maintained the behaviour under time pressure.

Theme 3: Differentiated Trust and Epistemic Calibration

All six participants expressed greater confidence in AI for grammatical correction than for content generation or factual accuracy, constructing a grammar-over-content trust hierarchy. This differentiation is epistemologically grounded: AI language models are demonstrably more reliable for rule-governed surface corrections than for context-dependent content or factual claims.

Hallucination experiences particularly fabricated academic citations served as significant trust-recalibrating events. P1 described a concrete behavioural shift: routinely requesting verifiable links or PDF sources before accepting any AI-provided citation. However, participants who had not yet encountered AI errors remained in conditions of unexamined confidence. P2 justified 80% trust on the grounds that AI operates on data from 'trusted sources' a overly simplified understanding that does not account for hallucination or training data limitations.

Theme 4: Emotional and Psychological Dimensions

AI feedback was experienced not as neutral information but as evaluative judgment, with participants' affective responses varying substantially according to their writing self-concept. P1 responded with consistent growth-oriented motivation, framing AI corrections as part of an ongoing developmental process. P3 presented the most emotionally complex case, describing the simultaneous experience of insecurity and pride from a single feedback session what this study terms dual affect.

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"When I get a lot of feedback, I write it down I keep a notebook. I go through it sentence by sentence. It is hard but I know I am improving." (P3)

P4's response was inversely productive: AI criticism confirmed rather than challenged her sense of inadequacy, producing disengagement. A structurally critical finding is the near-universal failure to retain grammar knowledge corrected by AI. Five of six participants acknowledged that rules highlighted in AI feedback were not durably retained beyond the immediate task what this analysis terms a 'learning illusion.' The sole exception was P3, whose notebook-based recording practice offers a concrete and replicable model for writing instructors.

Theme 5: Authorship, Writing Autonomy, and Ethical Positioning

The dominant cross-participant pattern anchored authorship claims exclusively in the origination of ideas rather than linguistic execution what this analysis terms 'authorship-as-idea-ownership.' While this framework preserves a degree of intellectual integrity relative to wholesale AI generation, it elides a critical insight: the act of finding words to express an idea is itself a cognitive process through which ideas are clarified (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Ethical frameworks were situational and pragmatic, calibrated to assessment stakes rather than principled academic integrity values: AI was acceptable for formative tasks but considered cheating in summative contexts. P2 acknowledged the highest functional reliance and self-assessed her independent writing skills as having deteriorated the most consequential negative learning outcome documented in the study. P3 and P5 maintained deliberately independence-preserving strategies, including advance preparation and handwritten drafting.

DISCUSSION

The five themes converge on a core finding: the quality of AI-assisted learning is determined not by tool access alone, but by a constellation of workflow habits, epistemic calibration, emotional orientation, and institutional context. This discussion situates each finding within the broader literature to clarify where the present study confirms, extends, or diverges from existing evidence.

The draft-first versus AI-first distinction was associated with meaningfully different uptake profiles, a finding that resonates with Flower & Hayes (1981) cognitive process theory of writing, which positions planning and drafting as distinct but interdependent cognitive stages. When students bypass independent planning, they may preserve surface output quality while forfeiting the intellectual work that drafting is specifically designed to cultivate. This is consistent with Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) concern that AI tools may enable cognitive outsourcing when students delegate core intellectual tasks before engaging with them independently. However, the present findings suggest a more nuanced picture than Kusumaningtyas et al. (2023), who reported that Indonesian students valued AI primarily for grammatical accuracy without examining how entry-point timing shaped the depth of engagement. Here, workflow positioning not tool preference appeared to be the stronger correlate of uptake quality, a distinction the existing Indonesian literature has not yet drawn clearly. These observations are based on participant self-report and interview data; causal claims are not warranted from a qualitative design of this scope.

The grammar-over-content trust hierarchy is broadly consistent with prior research. Xue (2024) found that students across multiple settings regarded AI feedback as more reliable for surface-level corrections than for rhetorical or argumentative guidance, and Miranty & Widiati (2021) reported the same pattern among Indonesian EFL students using Grammarly. What distinguishes the present finding is that this calibration was entirely self-constructed through lived

experience rather than formal AI literacy instruction. This contrasts with Mahapatra's (2024) intervention study, where students developed differentiated trust through guided reflection tasks built into the course. The implication is that while trust calibration does emerge organically, it remains fragile and inconsistent without pedagogical scaffolding particularly in cases like P2, whose 80% trust rating was grounded in a naïve assumption that AI draws exclusively from verified sources, a misconception that structured instruction could readily address.

The near-universal grammar retention failure what this study terms a learning illusion is perhaps the most practically consequential finding, and one that previous research has treated only partially. Wilson & Roscoe (2020) acknowledged that automated writing evaluation tools improve immediate revision quality but cautioned against assuming that surface improvement translates into durable learning. Carless & Boud (2018) are more direct, arguing that feedback literacy requires the capacity to internalise and transfer corrections across tasks a capacity that passive, accept-all AI use appears to undermine. The present data support this concern: five of six students acknowledged, through self-report, that they could not recall grammar rules corrected in previous AI sessions. It is important to acknowledge that this finding rests entirely on participants' retrospective self-assessments rather than on independent retention tests or longitudinal observation; future studies should incorporate more objective measures of knowledge retention. Nonetheless, the convergence of self-reported accounts across five independent participants strengthens the interpretive weight of this pattern. This finding invites scrutiny of Mahapatra's (2024) more optimistic conclusion that AI feedback produces measurable writing gains, suggesting that gains observed in product quality may mask the absence of genuine knowledge acquisition. P3's notebook-based practice stands as the sole counterexample and points to a concrete instructional lever that prior studies have not highlighted.

The emotional dimension of AI feedback engagement has received comparatively little attention in the literature, making Theme 4 one of the more original contributions of this study. Miranty & Widiati (2021) noted that EFL students generally responded positively to Grammarly feedback, citing reduced anxiety and increased confidence. Oseremi Onesi-Ozigagun et al. (2024) similarly emphasised motivational gains from AI-generated correction. The present study complicates this picture. While P1's growth-oriented response aligns with those findings, P4's disengagement triggered by the same type of critical AI feedback suggests that emotional response is not uniformly positive and appears to be mediated by individual writing self-concept. The concept of dual affect, grounded in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012), has no direct parallel in the existing literature and suggests that affective responses to AI feedback are more nuanced than prior studies have captured. These emotional patterns were reported by participants and reflect their subjective experience; observational methods would be needed to corroborate them independently.

On the ethical dimension, the situational and pragmatic framing students applied, AI is acceptable for everyday tasks but constitutes cheating in summative assessments echoes Boillos & Idoiaga (2025), who found that Spanish university students drew similar context-dependent distinctions in the absence of clear institutional policy. The present findings confirm that this pattern extends to Indonesian EFL contexts and underline Dogan et al. (2023) observation that the policy vacuum surrounding AI use in Indonesian higher education is not merely an administrative gap but a pedagogical one: students cannot construct principled ethical frameworks when normative standards are absent from the learning environment.

Taken together, the findings suggest that AI tools in EFL writing contexts may function along a spectrum from genuine scaffold to what Clark et al. (1998) term a cognitive prosthetic an

external device that substitutes for, rather than augments, internal cognitive processes. The concept of 'external codnitive support ' as used here draws on extended mind theory (Clark et al., 1998) and Vygotsky (1978) zone of proximal development: when AI handles the generative and evaluative functions that challenge learners to grow, it may remove the productive difficulty that learning requires. Whether AI functions as scaffold or prosthesis is not fixed by the technology itself but appears to be shaped by pedagogy, self-regulation, and institutional environment all of which are amenable to deliberate intervention.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung engage with AI-generated feedback in academic writing. The evidence reveals that writing outcomes are shaped not by access to AI tools, but by how students position those tools in their workflows whether they use AI to support thinking or to replace it. Students who preserved pre-writing independence engaged more critically, while those who delegated early composition showed greater passivity and, in one case, a self-reported decline in independent writing ability. Trust in AI was domain-specific and experientially calibrated, but fragile without direct encounters with AI error. Emotional responses diverged along self-efficacy lines, and a near-universal grammar retention failure points to a learning illusion that routine AI use tends to reinforce rather than resolve. Ethical decision-making was situational, reflecting the absence of formal institutional guidance rather than any principled framework.

The practical implications are concrete. Instructors should require demonstrable pre-writing stages, post-AI reflection tasks where students articulate grammar rules in their own words, and encourage note-taking practices modelled on P3's approach. Institutions urgently need formal AI use policies that distinguish between formative and summative contexts, alongside AI literacy curricula that build critical verification habits. This study is limited by its small purposive sample within a single institutional context; future research should pursue longitudinal and mixed-methods designs across broader Indonesian university settings.

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