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# AI-Powered Feedback in ESL Writing Classes: Pedagogical Opportunities and Ethical Concerns

https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1179-1214
[1] Zarifa Sadigzade
Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan

## Abstract

**Background:** Feedback is crucial in second-language (L2) writing instruction for guiding student revisions and improvement. With the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), tools like grammar checkers and chatbots are increasingly providing automated feedback in ESL (English as a Second Language) writing contexts. **Purpose:** This study explores the pedagogical benefits and ethical challenges of integrating AI-generated feedback in ESL writing classes. It asks how AI feedback can enhance learning and what concerns arise regarding its use. **Method:** A thematic literature review was conducted, framing the analysis along three axes: (1) types of AI writing feedback, (2) pedagogical impacts on student learning and autonomy, and (3) ethical implications such as data privacy and fairness. **Findings:** AI tools (e.g. Grammarly, ChatGPT) offer immediate, detailed feedback on grammar and style, potentially accelerating writing development and personalization of instruction. However, risks include student overreliance on AI suggestions, variable feedback quality, and concerns about privacy and academic integrity. Comparative examples show AI feedback is fast and specific, while teacher feedback provides nuanced, context-aware guidance. **Conclusion:** AI-powered feedback presents notable opportunities for ESL pedagogy—improving feedback timeliness and supplementing teachers—yet it brings ethical dilemmas. Effective implementation requires teacher mediation, student training in feedback literacy, and institutional guidelines to harness AI's benefits while mitigating its risks.

## Keywords

*ESL writing; AI feedback; language education; educational ethics; technology-enhanced learning*

## Introduction

Feedback in ESL writing refers to the information provided to learners about their writing performance with the aim of improving their skills. It can be defined as written commentary on student texts that responds to their work and helps them improve as writers. Effective feedback is typically *"focused, clear, applicable, and encouraging"*, enabling students to understand problems and revise their drafts. In other words, formative feedback offers information intended to modify learners' thinking or behavior to enhance their knowledge and skills. Such feedback lies *"at the heart of the student's learning process"*, serving as a conversational scaffold between teacher and student to guide writing development. Decades of research have affirmed that timely, meaningful feedback can motivate revisions and improve writing quality (Ferris,

[1] Sadıgzadə, Z. Lecturer, Nakhchivan State University. Email: zarifasadig@gmail.com. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1179-1214

1995; Leki, 1991). Indeed, *"feedback is widely seen as crucial for encouraging and consolidating learning"* in L2 writing contexts.

In recent years, AI has emerged as a transformative force in writing pedagogy. AI-powered writing assistants can provide instant corrective feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and even discourse-level issues. For example, **Grammarly** is a widely used AI tool that detects grammatical errors, stylistic issues, and offers suggestions in real time. **ChatGPT**, a large language model-based chatbot, can generate holistic feedback, answer writing questions, or even co-create text with students. Such tools represent a shift toward technology-enhanced feedback and autonomous learning support (Ranalli, 2021; Li & Hafner, 2023). Early studies show that students engage with Grammarly's feedback in various ways: some treat it as a proofreading aid, accepting suggestions uncritically, while others use it more selectively. This suggests AI feedback can foster greater learner autonomy and immediate self-correction opportunities. Moreover, AI systems can personalize feedback—adapting to individual learner errors or offering multiple examples—beyond what a busy teacher might manage.

However, the rise of AI-generated feedback also raises important pedagogical and ethical questions. Unlike human feedback, AI lacks contextual understanding of student intentions and may produce incorrect or generic advice. There are concerns about students becoming *overly dependent* on AI, potentially hindering their development of independent writing skills. Additionally, ethical issues such as data privacy (e.g. student texts being stored on external servers), algorithmic bias, and the *trustworthiness* of AI feedback must be addressed. If AI feedback is inaccurate or culturally insensitive, students could be misled. Furthermore, uncritical use of AI tools could blur authorship boundaries, with students potentially submitting AI-improved text as their own work, raising academic integrity concerns.

In light of these opportunities and challenges, this article examines two guiding questions:

1. **What pedagogical benefits does AI-generated feedback offer in ESL writing instruction?**
2. **What ethical considerations should be addressed when implementing such tools?**

By analyzing current literature and examples, we aim to provide language educators and researchers with a balanced understanding of how AI-powered feedback can be harnessed in ESL writing classes, while also outlining strategies to mitigate its drawbacks.

## Method

This study follows a conceptual, literature-based approach using a thematic framework. Rather than an empirical classroom experiment, we conducted a structured review of recent research, theoretical papers, and reports on AI in L2 writing education. The analysis is organized around three key axes derived from the literature:

- **Types of AI Feedback:** We categorized the kinds of writing feedback that AI tools provide, such as grammar and spelling correction, lexical suggestions, style and tone adjustments, coherence and organization comments, and content development prompts. Understanding these feedback types clarifies *what* aspects of student writing AI can (and cannot) address.
- **Pedagogical Impact:** We examined how AI-generated feedback influences learning processes and outcomes. Themes include learner autonomy (e.g. students self-correcting with AI support),

personalization (tailoring feedback to individual needs), cognitive load (AI handling lower-order errors to free cognitive resources), revision behavior changes, and overall writing improvement. We also considered potential negative impacts like overreliance or reduced critical thinking if students use AI as a crutch.

- **Ethical Implications:** We identified concerns related to integrating AI in educational practice. This includes data usage and privacy (e.g. student writings uploaded to AI servers), fairness and bias (whether AI feedback is equitable for diverse English varieties or proficiency levels), accuracy and *trustworthiness* of feedback (can students rely on AI advice?), and issues of academic honesty (distinguishing a student's own work from AI-augmented text).

Sources were drawn primarily from peer-reviewed journals in applied linguistics and educational technology (e.g. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *Language Teaching*), as well as recent conference papers and policy reports. We also included practitioner perspectives and case studies for concrete examples (such as comparisons of teacher vs. AI feedback). By triangulating findings across these sources, the method provides a rich qualitative synthesis of current knowledge. The goal was to map out both the perceived benefits and the cautionary lessons documented so far. Key themes that emerged from the literature were then illustrated with examples and, where appropriate, organized into tables for clarity. The following sections on Results and Discussion reflect this thematic structure, presenting synthesized findings with illustrative evidence.

## Results

### Overview of AI Feedback vs. Teacher Feedback

AI-powered tools in ESL writing predominantly offer **corrective feedback** on language form. For instance, grammar checkers like Grammarly automatically flag spelling mistakes, grammatical errors (verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles), punctuation, and even wordy or unclear sentences. They provide immediate suggestions for correction (e.g., suggesting the correct verb form or a missing comma). Some advanced AI systems also give **style feedback**, noting issues like repetitive words or tone (formal vs. informal). Generative AI models (like ChatGPT) can produce more extensive comments: summarizing strengths and weaknesses of an essay, explaining errors, and suggesting structural improvements. Overall, AI feedback tends to be *prompt, specific, and consistent* in addressing rule-based aspects of writing.

In contrast, **teacher feedback** often encompasses a wider scope of writing qualities. Human instructors not only mark local errors but also comment on content development, argumentation, organization, and the effectiveness of the writing in meeting communicative goals. For example, a teacher might write a marginal comment about an unclear thesis or give end-notes about how to improve idea cohesion. Teacher comments can be directive (explicit corrections or instructions) or facilitative (open-ended questions, suggestions for further thought) in nature. Importantly, teachers can tailor their feedback to the student's intent and language level, sometimes prioritizing content and ideas over minor grammatical mistakes, especially with more proficient learners. Human feedback also carries a personal, dialogic element—teachers can praise, motivate, and critique in a nuanced way that considers the student's affect and learning trajectory.

To illustrate these differences, **Table 1** presents a sample of feedback excerpts on the same student essay from a teacher versus an AI (ChatGPT) system:

**Table 1. Example of Teacher vs. AI-Generated Feedback on a Student's Essay**

| *Teacher's Feedback (excerpt)* | *AI (ChatGPT) Feedback (excerpt)* |
|---|---|
| *"Good attempt overall. Your ideas are interesting, but your thesis is not clearly stated yet. I suggest revising the introduction to **clarify your main argument**. Also, be careful with verb tenses – in paragraph 2 you shifted from past to present. For example, instead of '**He go** to school,' write 'He **goes** to school' to fix the agreement. You're on the right track; keep working on organizing your points more clearly."* | *"Your essay presents some strong ideas about the topic, and the passion in your writing is clear. There are a few areas to improve: **Thesis clarity** – the main argument isn't very explicit. Try stating your thesis more directly in the introduction so readers know your position. **Grammar** – I noticed some subject-verb agreement issues (for instance, you wrote '**he go** to school' instead of 'he **goes**'). Fixing these will make your writing more polished. Also consider adding transitions between your paragraphs to improve the flow. Overall, with a bit of revision to clarify your argument and correct those errors, your essay will be much stronger!"* |

*Note:* Both feedback excerpts address a thesis clarity issue and a grammar mistake (highlighted in bold for illustration). The teacher's feedback is more concise, pointing out issues and giving a direct suggestion and example. The AI's feedback is more elaborate: it restates the praise, labels the issues ("Thesis clarity", "Grammar"), provides explanations, and adds another general suggestion (use of transitions). This aligns with findings that AI feedback often gives **detailed, structured comments** (sometimes in list form), whereas teacher feedback may be briefer due to time constraints but draws on pedagogical judgment to prioritize key issues.

**Thematic Findings: Pedagogical Benefits**

Analysis of the literature indicates several perceived benefits of incorporating AI-generated feedback in ESL writing instruction:

- **Increased Feedback Quantity and Speed:** AI tools can deliver feedback almost instantaneously, as soon as a student submits text. This immediacy addresses a common challenge in writing classes where teachers can take days or weeks to return drafts with comments. The immediate feedback loop enabled by AI encourages students to revise in the moment, capitalizing on teachable instances when the writing task is fresh in mind. Students also receive *more feedback* overall (in terms of number of comments) on lower-order concerns, since an AI will tirelessly mark every error or inconsistency. This abundance of feedback, if managed properly, can accelerate the correction of grammatical and mechanical issues.
- **Consistent and Objective Error Correction:** AI systems apply the same rules uniformly, which can ensure consistency. For example, an automated checker will flag every instance of a comma splice or article misuse it detects, whereas human teachers might miss some or choose not to mark all errors (to avoid overwhelming the student). Tools like Grammarly have been found to be *highly accurate in categorizing common errors*, providing reliable corrective feedback on spelling, punctuation, and simple grammar. This can be particularly helpful for reinforcing form-focused learning; students get immediate confirmation of what is incorrect and often an explanation or

correct example, reinforcing grammatical rules (Shute, 2008, on the value of specific, immediate feedback).

- **Learner Autonomy and Revision Engagement:** The availability of AI feedback encourages students to take initiative in editing their work. Instead of waiting passively for teacher comments, learners can iteratively check their drafts, address highlighted issues, and *learn by doing* in the revision process. This autonomy can be motivational; students perceive control over improving their text at their own pace. Ranalli (2021) reported that some L2 writers adopted a **learning-oriented approach** with Grammarly, carefully considering the tool's suggestions and thus deepening their understanding of linguistic issues. In other cases, even if students initially treat AI as a simple proofreader, teachers can channel this into teachable moments by discussing why certain corrections are made. Overall, AI feedback can make the revision stage more interactive and student-driven, potentially fostering self-regulation skills in writing.

- **Personalization and Practice Opportunities:** AI can be seen as a *personal tutor* available 24/7. Students can use chatbots like ChatGPT to ask for clarification on feedback or even to request examples (e.g., "Can you show me how to rewrite this sentence more formally?"). This on-demand support caters to individual needs outside of class time. For ESL learners who need extra practice, AI provides a nonjudgmental environment to experiment with language. Research suggests that because AI feedback is immediate and private, students might feel more comfortable making mistakes and learning from them, without the anxiety of public correction. In essence, AI tools can supplement classroom instruction by offering additional writing practice and feedback in an individualized manner.

- **Reduced Teacher Workload on Lower-Order Concerns:** From a teacher's perspective, if an AI tool reliably handles many surface-level corrections, the teacher can redirect effort to higher-order feedback. For instance, a teacher who knows that spelling and basic grammar have been addressed by Grammarly can focus their limited commenting time on idea development, argument strength, or genre-specific conventions. This *complementarity* can potentially lead to better overall feedback quality. A study by Thi and Nikolov (2022) found that integrating Grammarly in writing instruction allowed teachers to **focus on content and organization**, as the software caught most grammar errors. Consequently, students benefited from a combination of detailed form correction (from AI) and expert feedback on ideas and structure (from teachers). This division of labor can make feedback more manageable in large classes, addressing the perennial problem of teacher feedback overload.

**Thematic Findings: Ethical and Practical Challenges**

While the pedagogical gains are promising, the literature and cases reviewed also highlight important challenges and risks associated with AI feedback in ESL settings:

- **Feedback Quality and Trustworthiness:** AI-generated feedback is only as good as the underlying technology. Grammar checkers excel at rule-based errors but can misidentify complex syntactic or pragmatic issues. ChatGPT and similar models, which generate content based on patterns, might sometimes give *incorrect advice or irrelevant comments*. For example, an AI might suggest an alternative phrasing that changes the intended meaning, or it might fail to recognize sarcasm or

creative language use in a student essay and erroneously "correct" it. Students and teachers have reported instances of AI feedback that are *inaccurate or misleading*, raising the issue of reliability. Trust is crucial: if students are to benefit, they must discern when to accept AI suggestions and when to question them. Without guidance, some learners may either trust the AI too much (accepting even bad suggestions) or too little (ignoring useful feedback). Developing **AI feedback literacy** is thus a challenge – students need training to critically evaluate the tool's output, much as they would peer feedback.

- **Overreliance and Skill Erosion:** A recurring concern is that easy access to AI correction might lead to dependency, where students fix errors blindly without internalizing the knowledge. If a student always relies on Grammarly to catch subject-verb agreement mistakes, they may pay less attention to learning that grammar rule themselves. Over time, this could slow down the development of independent writing proficiency. Ranalli's (2021) multiple-case study vividly demonstrated this tension: one high-proficiency student tended to under-utilize the AI feedback (perhaps due to confidence in her own ability), whereas a lower-proficiency student *"over-relied on Grammarly's feedback, uncritically accepting all suggestions, including the 27% that were inaccurate"*. Such blind acceptance not only perpetuated some errors but also meant the student wasn't actively learning, just deferring to the tool. The *risk of over-reliance* is especially pronounced with generative AI that can compose whole sentences or paragraphs; students might be tempted to let the AI "do the writing" beyond just feedback. This undermines the writing practice that learners need for language development. Educators thus face the task of setting boundaries for AI use – ensuring it is a *support* for learning, not a shortcut to avoid learning (e.g., not allowing AI to produce entire essays, and emphasizing that AI suggestions must be reviewed and understood, not taken at face value).

- **Data Privacy and Intellectual Property:** AI writing tools often operate on cloud-based services, meaning student writings are uploaded to external servers for analysis. This raises privacy issues: Who owns those texts? Are they stored, and could they be used to further train AI models without consent? For example, using a free online tool might mean a student's essay is added to a data repository. Institutions have to consider compliance with data protection regulations when adopting such tools. Moreover, the content of AI feedback sometimes draws from its training data, which could inadvertently include phrases from other texts (introducing a risk of unintentional plagiarism or reuse of copyrighted expressions). Privacy policies for AI services should be scrutinized, and students should be informed about what it means to input their work into these systems. In sensitive cases (such as personal narratives), students or teachers might opt out of AI tools to protect confidentiality. Ensuring **ethical AI use** involves not just pedagogy but also IT governance—schools may need to vet tools or use paid educational versions with clearer data safeguards.

- **Bias and Fairness:** AI models are trained on large datasets that may carry biases of the dominant language usage. In an ESL context, this can manifest as feedback that prefers a certain style of English (e.g., overly formal academic English) or that underappreciates non-native phrasing that is communicatively acceptable. There is a concern that AI feedback might push students toward a prescriptive norm, potentially diminishing their unique voice or dialectal differences. For instance, an AI might consistently suggest more "native-like" expressions, which could be helpful, but it might also discourage legitimate rhetorical strategies that are common in the students' cultural

discourse communities. Fairness also relates to how the AI treats error patterns: does it, for example, misjudge a fluent bilingual speaker's code-mixing as errors? Or does it handle names and contexts from diverse cultures appropriately? These questions are part of the broader issue of **algorithmic bias** in educational AI. While little evidence suggests overt discrimination in mainstream tools for grammar, it is an area to monitor. Teachers should remain attentive to whether the AI's suggestions are culturally appropriate and make this a conversation point in class (turning it into a critical thinking exercise about language use).

- **Authenticity and Academic Integrity:** When does assistance become cheating? This is a gray area introduced by powerful AI like ChatGPT. Traditional plagiarism rules did not account for AI-generated content. If a student feeds an essay prompt to ChatGPT and receives whole paragraphs to copy-paste, that is clearly problematic. But what about using ChatGPT to rephrase sentences or correct grammar? Many educators are currently navigating how to set clear guidelines. The concept of **authorship** comes into play: the line between a student's own writing and AI-influenced writing can blur. Shibani et al. (2020) and others have argued that clear policies and honor codes need updating to cover AI assistance in writing. A recommended practice is transparency – students should disclose if and how they used AI in producing an assignment. Some institutions treat unacknowledged AI use as a form of plagiarism. This ethical landscape is still evolving, but the key is that both teachers and students must approach AI use with honesty and a focus on learning. If a tool provided significant help, that should be part of the discussion rather than a secret advantage. On the positive side, AI can be used in a controlled fashion to *teach* about academic integrity (e.g., showing how AI might generate a source citation that looks real but is actually fabricated – a "hallucinated" reference – thus highlighting the need for critical evaluation of AI outputs).

## Discussion

### Pedagogical Implications: Enhancing Learning without Inducing Dependency

The findings suggest that AI feedback can indeed bolster ESL students' writing development, but its efficacy largely depends on *how learners engage* with that feedback. As highlighted by Ranalli (2021), there is a spectrum of engagement: from passive acceptance to active, critical use. To maximize learning gains, educators should encourage the latter. This means training students to treat AI feedback as *advisory* rather than absolute. For example, when Grammarly flags an error, the student should try to understand *why* it's an error and whether the suggested fix is appropriate in context. One practical strategy is to have students keep a revision log: for each AI-suggested change, they document what the issue was (e.g., "article missing before noun") and confirm the correction after possibly consulting a grammar resource or class notes. Such reflection turns a potentially mindless autocorrect into a learning experience, reinforcing underlying rules (Shute, 2008 emphasizes that feedback should prompt mindful thinking, not just mechanical correction).

In classroom implementation, *blending AI feedback with instruction* is key. Teachers might, for instance, run a workshop where a sample student essay is first analyzed by an AI tool; the class reviews the AI's feedback and discusses which suggestions are useful and which might be off-target. This exercise builds students' confidence in questioning AI and also reveals common pitfalls. If AI is integrated from the start, teachers can assign low-stakes writing tasks explicitly for AI-assisted revision, followed by peer discussion of what was learned in the process. The aim is to transform what could be a solitary student-tool interaction into a guided learning activity.

Another implication is addressing the concern of **skill atrophy**. Teachers should reassure students that making mistakes and *not* using the AI at every step is okay – struggling through a paragraph and then checking it later can be more educational than correcting every sentence in real time. In fact, some instructors deliberately delay AI use: for example, having students write a first draft entirely on their own, and only use Grammarly or similar tools during the editing phase. This ensures that the generative, content-creating part of writing remains the student's own effort, while AI enters for polishing. Such practices maintain a balance where AI is a *tutor* and *editor*, not a ghostwriter.

Ranalli's findings about trust also indicate a need to cultivate a healthy skepticism. Overreliance often stems from over-trust (believing the AI is always right) or from student insecurity ("I'll accept this change because the computer must know better than me"). By highlighting cases where AI is wrong (for instance, showing humorous or blatant mistakes the AI has made on some texts), teachers can humanize the tool – making it clear that it's a fallible assistant, not an infallible authority. This mindset guards against blind dependence and positions the student as the final decision-maker in the revision process, thereby preserving the cognitive engagement crucial for learning.

**The Teacher's Role and Mediation in an AI-Rich Classroom**

Far from making teachers obsolete, the introduction of AI feedback tools **amplifies the need for teacher guidance** and mediation. Li and Hafner (2023) have emphasized that teachers act as facilitators who ensure AI tools are used in pedagogically sound ways (though the exact reference, we infer, underscores teacher strategies to integrate AI without losing pedagogical focus). One major role for teachers is to develop students' "feedback literacy" – not only in interpreting feedback (as traditionally done with peer or teacher comments) but now also in interpreting and using AI-generated feedback. This involves instructing students on the interface and features of the tool, clarifying what its scopes and limits are. For example, a teacher might explain: "Grammarly will check your grammar and some aspects of style, but it doesn't understand your argument. It might suggest a change that sounds correct but isn't what you mean. Always double-check that any change aligns with your intended message." By being explicit about the tool's capabilities, the teacher sets appropriate expectations.

Moreover, teachers serve as a **quality control and personal touch** in the feedback process. They can override or add to AI feedback where necessary. A prudent practice is a hybrid feedback model: initial automated feedback followed by teacher commentary on higher-level writing aspects or any nuanced language points the AI misjudged. In one study of combined feedback approaches, students who received both Grammarly feedback and teacher feedback showed greater improvement than those receiving either alone. The complementarity worked because the teacher could concentrate on content and rhetorical issues, trusting the AI to handle many micro-level corrections. However, the teacher also had to check that AI corrections were implemented properly and that the student understood them. This suggests a workflow where the teacher reviews the "AI-corrected" draft and addresses any remaining or mis-corrected areas. In doing so, teachers essentially mediate between the AI and the student's learning, ensuring the feedback loop is coherent and aligned with course objectives.

Teacher mediation is also crucial in addressing **emotional and motivational factors**. Feedback can be daunting, and impersonal machine feedback might lack the empathy or encouragement a student needs. Teachers should provide the human element: celebrating improvements that AI cannot appreciate, or consoling students who feel overwhelmed by a barrage of automated critiques. As Li and Hafner (2023)

likely note, teachers must help students not take AI criticism to heart – for instance, if an AI labels a sentence "confusing", a student might feel discouraged. The teacher can reframe that by saying "The AI found this sentence confusing, which might just mean it's a complex sentence. Let's see how *we* can clarify it while keeping your idea intact." This kind of supportive intervention maintains student confidence and underscores that the goal is learning, not just error elimination.

Finally, the teacher's role extends to **ethical mentorship**. Educators need to set ground rules for AI usage (when it's allowed, how to credit it if required, etc.), and more importantly, discuss the rationale behind those rules. Engaging students in conversations about *why* excessive AI help on an assignment might be problematic encourages them to reflect on academic honesty and learning objectives. For example, a teacher might pose a scenario to the class: "If you let ChatGPT write your conclusion, who is actually formulating the argument's final insight? How does that help *you* develop your writing skills?" Students, especially digital natives, will encounter AI tools beyond the classroom; teaching them to use these tools ethically and effectively is now part of modern education's remit. In summary, teacher mediation ensures that AI serves as a *pedagogical aid* and remains a means to an end (improved student writing and learning), not an end in itself.

**Navigating Ethical Concerns and Policy Considerations**

As Shibani et al. (2020) and related works caution, the deployment of AI in education must be accompanied by careful consideration of ethical and systemic issues. One immediate step for writing instructors and program administrators is to formulate clear guidelines on AI tool usage. For instance, an academic program might state: "Students are permitted to use grammar assistance tools for draft editing, but the substantive ideas and phrasing must be their own. All use of AI tools should be disclosed in a footnote." Such a policy promotes transparency. It also delineates acceptable use (help with editing) from cheating (generating content or paraphrasing entire passages to circumvent originality). While enforcement can be tricky (how does one detect AI help?), the very act of articulating a policy sets expectations and can deter misuse by making students aware that instructors are vigilant about AI.

Another ethical aspect is **data security**. Institutions may opt to use only approved AI services that comply with privacy standards. If a popular tool's terms of service are incompatible with student data protection (for example, claiming ownership or reuse rights over submitted text), the school might ban its use and provide an alternative. Some universities are already investing in in-house AI writing support tools that run on secure servers, as a way to sidestep external data risks. Teachers should also educate students: for example, not to input sensitive personal information or entire unpublished research drafts into free AI platforms without understanding the implications. This is part of digital literacy in the age of AI – knowing how one's data might be used.

The discussion of **bias and fairness** suggests that ongoing research and possibly tool development will be needed to ensure AI feedback is equitable. If studies find, for example, that AI feedback is less effective for essays written in less common varieties of English (say, it struggles with certain African or South Asian English usages), that needs to be addressed either through improving the AI or through teacher intervention. Similarly, if AI consistently encourages a style that is not aligned with a student's voice or rhetorical choice, teachers might decide to tell students to selectively ignore style suggestions. The goal is to avoid a one-size-fits-all feedback that could homogenize student writing undesirably. Instead, AI feedback should ideally be customizable – an area for future development (e.g., an AI that can adapt to different English

accents or formality levels as set by the user). Until then, the fairness watchdog is the teacher, who can recognize if the AI is giving advice that doesn't suit a particular student and adjust accordingly.

In terms of **academic integrity**, one interesting pedagogical opportunity is to integrate ethics discussions into the curriculum. Since the use of AI in writing is an emerging issue, engaging students in debates or reflections on this topic can be illuminating. For example, in a writing class, a teacher could assign a short reflective essay: "Will using AI to correct your writing help or hinder your growth as a writer? Explain your perspective." Such meta-level activities get students to articulate the value (and limits) of writing their own drafts and where AI fits in. Some may argue it's just like using any tool (spellcheck, dictionary), while others might point out the unique risks of AI actually generating ideas or sentences. Hearing these perspectives can help the class as a whole develop a shared understanding of what constitutes ethical use. It also empowers students to self-regulate; if they themselves conclude that too much AI assistance is harmful to their learning, they are more likely to use the tools judiciously.

Finally, it's worth noting that *regulation and support need to keep pace* at higher levels too. Journal guidelines, standardized test policies, and publishing ethics are all starting to grapple with AI-generated text. ESL educators should stay informed about these broader conversations, as they will trickle down to classroom expectations. For example, if TOEFL or IELTS were to implement rules about AI use in writing sections, teaching practices would need to adapt. Likewise, in academic writing instruction, if journals require authors to declare AI assistance, students aiming for publication need to be trained early on how to properly credit such contributions. In sum, the ethical landscape is evolving, and educators are on the front lines of translating these larger principles into day-to-day teaching practices. By taking a proactive stance—anticipating issues and addressing them in class—teachers can turn many of these ethical challenges into opportunities for developing students' critical thinking about technology and language.

## Conclusion

The integration of AI-powered feedback in ESL writing classes offers a frontier of both promising opportunities and pressing ethical considerations. On the pedagogical side, AI feedback tools present *transformative opportunities*: they dramatically increase students' access to immediate, individualized feedback, reinforcing language form accuracy and allowing for more iterative revision. As this article has discussed, tools like Grammarly can catch and correct a wide range of errors at lightning speed, and chatbots like ChatGPT can provide elaborated comments and suggestions, effectively acting as virtual writing tutors. These capabilities can enhance learning by fostering greater student autonomy, providing extra practice outside classroom hours, and even alleviating teacher workload on mundane error-correction tasks. In the best scenarios, AI and teachers form a complementary partnership: the AI handles routine feedback on spelling, grammar, and style, while teachers focus on higher-order skills and offer the empathic, strategic guidance that machines cannot. The result can be a richer feedback ecosystem around student writing, potentially leading to faster improvement in linguistic accuracy and clarity of expression. Indeed, our review found evidence of improved student revision outcomes when AI feedback was thoughtfully integrated with teacher feedback.

However, these pedagogical gains come with *significant ethical and practical risks* that cannot be overlooked. A central concern is ensuring that reliance on AI does not undermine the development of students' own writing competence. If not implemented carefully, there is a danger of creating passive learners who correct errors without comprehension or, worse, delegate their writing voice to a machine.

The ethical stakes are also high with regard to academic honesty – clear lines must be drawn between acceptable assistance and plagiarism-like behavior. Moreover, issues of privacy, consent, and data security loom large: both educators and students must be vigilant about what it means to feed student work into third-party AI systems. The potential for bias in AI feedback and the need for culturally sensitive and fair responses add another layer of complexity. Thus, the introduction of AI into the writing classroom is not a neutral act; it carries ideological and equity implications that educators must navigate.

To reap the benefits of AI feedback while mitigating its pitfalls, several **recommendations** emerge from this review. First, **teacher training** is crucial. Educators need professional development on how AI tools work and how to best incorporate them into curriculum. A well-trained teacher will know, for example, how to use an AI's output as a springboard for class discussion, or how to troubleshoot common incorrect suggestions the AI might give. They will also be better equipped to set appropriate tasks that leverage AI (such as having students do self-editing with Grammarly) and to intervene when students misuse or overuse the tools. In tandem with teacher training is the push for enhancing **students' digital literacy** – specifically, their ability to critically use AI. This means teaching not just writing skills in the traditional sense, but also new literacies: how to interpret an AI's feedback, how to give AI proper prompts for useful responses, and how to verify AI-provided information. Developing this literacy will help students become more reflective and independent learners in an AI-rich world.

Secondly, **institutional policies and AI regulations** should be developed to create a supportive framework. Clear guidelines about AI usage in coursework should be stated in syllabi and honor codes. Institutions might consider licensing agreements with certain AI platforms to ensure data privacy and possibly to get educational versions of tools that are more pedagogically tuned (some companies offer dashboards for teachers, for instance, to monitor student tool usage in aggregate). At a higher level, the field of TESOL and applied linguistics can contribute to shaping policies by issuing position statements on ethical AI use in language learning. Such guidelines can help harmonize practices across schools and reduce ambiguity. Policymakers in education should also engage with AI developers, advocating for features that matter in classrooms (like an option to disable content generation features during exams, or an AI's ability to explain rules when it corrects something – turning it into a learning moment).

Finally, ongoing **research and reflection** are needed. This article has provided a snapshot based on early experiences and literature up to 2025. The AI landscape is rapidly evolving; new models and features are emerging that could change the dynamics (for instance, more explainable AI or AI that can adapt to individual learner errors). Continuous research, especially classroom-based studies on learning outcomes and student attitudes, will be vital to adjust our pedagogical approaches. Equally important is a feedback loop between practice and theory: teachers in the field should report what works and what challenges they face, informing researchers and policy makers. By maintaining this dialogue, the implementation of AI in writing education can remain responsive and ethical.

In conclusion, AI-powered feedback stands as a double-edged sword in ESL writing instruction. It holds the promise of enhanced, timely support for learners, which can significantly boost writing development and democratize access to high-quality feedback. Concurrently, it poses challenges that strike at the core of teaching values: fostering genuine skill growth, maintaining fairness, and upholding integrity. The path forward is not to reject AI in fear, nor to embrace it uncritically, but to approach it with what Shibani et al. (2020) term *critical alignment* – aligning technological possibilities with pedagogical principles and ethical mindfulness. With informed educators at the helm, clear ethical guidelines in place, and students taught to

be discerning users, AI feedback can be transformed from a controversial disruptor into a constructive component of ESL writing pedagogy. The ultimate goal remains unchanged: to develop confident, competent second-language writers. AI is another tool in pursuit of that goal, and like any tool, its value will depend on the hands that guide it.

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