

EFL Students' Evaluation and Use of Generative AI Feedback in Academic Writing: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used to support academic writing, yet less is known about how EFL students evaluate and respond to AI feedback. This qualitative study investigates how Chinese EFL undergraduates perceive the usefulness of AI feedback and how they evaluate and respond to AI suggestions in academic writing. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with 12 EFL undergraduates at a public university in China and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results suggested that students find AI feedback helpful in providing instant linguistic help, enhancing clarity and organization, and getting available help when revising a writing. Perceived usefulness was conditional though. Students were also wary of feedback when it was related to content, argumentation or contextual meaning. The students indicated that they would compare these suggestions with their original intentions, evaluate their relevance and accuracy, verify any questionable advice, and selectively adopt, modify, reject, or disregard them. The findings also indicated that the usefulness of feedback does not automatically lead students to adopt it; rather, students' own evaluative judgment plays a central role in AI. This study further suggests that feedback literacy remains a valid framework for understanding how students utilize feedback from AI, though assessing the reliability and contextual appropriateness of such feedback becomes particularly crucial in an AI context. These findings highlight the necessity of fostering students' ability to use AI critically and wisely as a source of supplementary feedback.

Keywords: AI feedback, EFL Undergraduates, Academic Writing, Feedback Literacy

Introduction

In the realm of higher education, generative artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a widespread instructional aid for academic writing. Tools such as ChatGPT offer immediate suggestions regarding grammar, vocabulary, discourse structure, and content. This helps lower the barriers to academic writing for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and creates opportunities for autonomous revision. Consequently, an increasing number of

studies are focusing on how AI supports L2 writing. However, the availability of AI feedback does not necessarily mean that students will accept or implement the suggestions they receive.

Students recognize the importance of AI feedback, especially its immediacy, its accessibility, and its ability to offer numerous suggestions (Zhang & Murad, 2026). Nevertheless, the AI feedback perceived is not only based on how much feedback there is. It has been shown that students tend to have divergent views on AI feedback as opposed to the feedback given by teachers. For instance, Aljasser (2025) found that while EFL learners appreciated the immediacy and accessibility of ChatGPT, they considered teacher feedback to be more valuable. Similarly, Han and Wang (2026) reported that Chinese university students learning English found teacher feedback more useful and easier to use, even though they viewed ChatGPT feedback as more comprehensive. Students reject or accept AI suggestions and compare, question, verify, modify, or reject the AI suggestions during the writing and revision processes. These results also indicate that learners are actively involved in assessing the usefulness of AI feedback. These results highlight a significant phenomenon regarding the use of AI feedback in student writing: students can see the benefits of using AI feedback and make decisions about whether to accept and apply specific feedback.

AI feedback does not always align with the learner's intended meaning. A suggestion may be grammatically accurate but change the writer's original meaning, or it may appear reasonable while overlooking the rhetorical purpose of a paragraph. This is important because students cannot rely solely on the apparent quality of an AI response. They also need to consider whether the feedback is relevant to their writing, accurate, and appropriate for their purpose and context. Thus, the studies have highlighted the significance of the learner agency and critical involvement in AI feedback. In a study by Moorhouse et al. (2025) it was observed that L2 writers tend to feel empowered by AI, but fail to be critical enough whenever they evaluate AI information. It is also noted that students' active interaction with the feedback from ChatGPT is essential, as pointed out by Zhan and Yan (2025). Additionally, Zhang and Saeed (2026) indicated that EFL learners from China asked questions of, directly challenged, and rejected some of the AI's feedback. Overall, these findings indicate that the question to be addressed is not just whether AI feedback is useful, but when and how to use it.

While recent research has provided valuable evidence regarding the effectiveness of AI feedback and learners' perceptions, several aspects of students' decision-making processes remain insufficiently explored. Although recent qualitative studies have begun to examine learners' engagement and agency in AI feedback, less attention has been given to how students themselves explain why particular AI suggestions are considered useful or unsuitable and how they decide whether to accept, modify, verify, reject, or ignore them. Moreover, the relationship between perceived usefulness and students' subsequent responses to AI feedback remains underexplored. Understanding these experiences is crucial, as effective AI feedback requires learners to exercise their own judgment. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach to examine how Chinese EFL undergraduates evaluate and utilize AI feedback in academic writing. The study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides qualitative evidence of Chinese EFL undergraduates' perceptions and decision-making processes regarding AI feedback. Second, it connects perceived usefulness with students' evaluative responses rather than treating usefulness and feedback uptake as

equivalent. Third, it applies the feedback literacy perspective to an AI-supported writing context, with particular attention to the reliability and contextual appropriateness of AI feedback. Through semi-structured interviews, this study focuses on students' perceptions and actual experiences. This study aims to address the following two questions:

RQ1: How do EFL students perceive the usefulness of generative AI feedback in academic writing?

RQ2: How do EFL students evaluate and respond to generative AI feedback in academic writing?

Literature Review

AI Feedback in EFL Academic Writing

AI has rapidly become a significant tool in L2 writing, capable of generating explanations, offering revision suggestions, identifying linguistic issues, and engaging in interactive dialogue with learners. These features expand the use of the automated feedback to more of a writing support than an error correction tool. AI feedback supports L2 writing in various ways. For instance, Mekheimer (2025) found that generative AI feedback from Grammarly helped enhance EFL learners' writing proficiency, improve revision practices, and boost writing quality. Similarly, Lu and Zeng (2025) examined the use of model texts generated by AI as a feedback resource, highlighting its potential to support L2 writing revisions. Ding et al. (2026) investigated the application of ChatGPT feedback across different aspects of L2 writing and considered the role of learner engagement in determining feedback effectiveness. These studies demonstrate that AI feedback can provide valuable support throughout the writing process. Nevertheless, the worth of AI feedback could not be estimated only based on the linguistic accuracy or its effects on writing scores. Feedback is only considered to be educational in the event that learners interpret, analyze, and apply it. This issue is particularly critical in EFL writing, where students possess varying levels of language proficiency and may not always be able to judge the appropriateness of AI suggestions. Consequently, recent research has shifted focus toward how learners interact with and respond to such feedback.

EFL Students' Perceptions of the Utility of AI Feedback

AI feedback is very attractive due to the fact that it is immediate, accessible and available at will. These features assist in overcoming the shortcomings of teachers feedback, especially the problem of feedback delays and lack of time to have one-on-one tutoring. Nevertheless, recent studies indicate that students do not necessarily view AI feedback as superior to teacher feedback. Aljasser (2025) explored EFL students' perceptions of teacher feedback versus ChatGPT feedback; the findings revealed that while students valued the immediacy and accessibility of ChatGPT feedback, they generally considered teacher feedback to be more useful. This finding suggests that the perception of utility is multidimensional. Students might appreciate AI feedback due to its convenience and linguistic assistance, but they might see teacher feedback as more useful in handling complex, or contextually, sensitive problems.

ChatGPT can generate detailed explanations, alternative phrasings, and suggestions for optimizing article structure. Some of the suggestions given to the students may seem repetitive, too general or contradict their initial purpose. The differences in focus and style between ChatGPT and teacher feedback are also emphasized in recent studies that compare the feedback offered by ChatGPT and teacher feedback (Zuo et al., 2025). This, in turn, makes the judgments of usefulness by students, which consider various factors such as clarity,

relevance, accuracy, accessibility and how compatible the feedback is with their writing objectives.

Students' Evaluation of and Reactions to AI Feedback

Although students may perceive feedback as useful, this does not necessarily mean they will accept or adopt it. Learners act as active participants who interpret the feedback they receive. Zhan and Yan (2025) examined student interactions with ChatGPT feedback and emphasized the importance of feedback literacy in the context of AI. The study noted that the interaction process goes beyond the simple application of AI suggestions; learners must also comprehend the feedback, assess its quality, and decide how to respond. Similarly, Zhang and Saeed (2026) investigated interactions between Chinese EFL graduate students and AI. It demonstrated that AI suggestions are not mindlessly accepted by the students. Instead, they doubt some of the feedback, change recommendations, turn down unsuitable suggestions and consult other sources to check facts. The findings reveal that interacting with AI feedback involves behavioral, cognitive, and emotional activities. Students primarily use AI to refine their language rather than to generate substantive academic content. Other studies indicate that the extent of student engagement with AI feedback is influenced by both individual and contextual factors. Yeung et al. (2025) discovered that behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement of university students with AI feedback is influenced by the processes of their writing, their previous experiences, and personal considerations. This suggests that the same piece of AI feedback can elicit different reactions from different learners. Therefore, student reactions to AI feedback should not be viewed simply as a matter of acceptance or rejection. Students may choose to accept, modify, question, verify, or ignore suggestions based on their own assessment of the suggestions' relevance and reliability. Gaining a deep understanding of these processes is crucial for exploring how AI functions as a writing aid.

Research Gaps

Recent studies have examined AI feedback from several perspectives. Some studies have focused on writing performance and revision outcomes (Mekheimer, 2025; Ding et al., 2026), while others have compared AI feedback with teacher feedback (Aljasser, 2025; Han & Wang, 2026). Recent qualitative studies have also examined students' engagement, agency, and feedback literacy in AI-supported writing (Moorhouse et al., 2025; Zhang & Saeed, 2026). These studies provide valuable evidence about the effectiveness and perceived value of AI feedback. However, they provide relatively limited insight into how students themselves explain why particular AI suggestions are useful or unsuitable and how they make decisions about individual suggestions.

Moreover, although recent qualitative studies have begun to examine learners' engagement, agency, and feedback literacy in AI feedback, less attention has been given to the decision-making processes through which students evaluate individual AI suggestions and determine whether to accept, modify, verify, reject, or ignore them. Furthermore, the relationship between students' perceptions of AI feedback utility and their subsequent responses to that feedback remains insufficiently explored. Students may perceive AI feedback as useful while still rejecting particular suggestions because they are inaccurate, irrelevant, or inconsistent with their intended meaning.

Addressing these issues requires attention to students' own accounts of how they interpret and evaluate AI feedback in specific writing situations. Therefore, this study employs semi-structured interviews with Chinese EFL undergraduates to explore both their perceptions of the usefulness of AI feedback and the evaluative processes underlying their responses to it.

Feedback Literacy

This study is guided by the concept of feedback literacy. Feedback literacy is the skill of a learner to interpret, critique and use feedback to facilitate both immediate learning and subsequent performance. Carless and Boud (2018) propose that feedback literacy encompasses students' abilities to understand the value of feedback, make judgments about it, manage emotions, and take action based on it. Feedback literacy is particularly crucial in the context of AI applications in academic writing. As opposed to teacher feedback, AI feedback can be created on-the-fly and at scale. Nevertheless, the presence of the feedback does not ensure that students comprehend it and use it in the right way. Students must judge whether AI feedback are accurate, relevant, and clear, and whether they align with their intended meaning. Consequently, the value of AI feedback depends on students' ability to make informed decisions regarding the feedback they receive. Zhang and Saeed (2026) found that Chinese EFL graduate students evaluate AI feedback, modifying or rejecting inappropriate suggestions and sometimes using external resources. This demonstrates that learners need to exercise judgment when interacting with AI feedback. Likewise, according to a study conducted by Moorhouse et al. (2025), L2 writers feel that AI empowers them, but are frequently unaware of the shortcomings of the technology. These findings underscore the importance of learners exercising critical thinking and evaluative skills when using AI for academic writing.

In this study, feedback literacy provides a theoretical framework for understanding students' perceptions of and responses to AI feedback. Students' perceptions of feedback utility are linked to their ability to recognize the value and relevance of the feedback. Their evaluation and actual use of the feedback are manifested through processes such as interpreting, verifying, adopting, modifying, rejecting, or ignoring AI feedback. Feedback literacy can be used to interpret why students are different when presented with similar AI feedback. This framework is well in line with the two research questions and provides a logical viewpoint to understand the real experiences of the students.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is a qualitative research study to examine the perception, evaluation and response of Chinese undergraduate EFL students towards AI feedback in academic writing. The qualitative approach aims to gain insight into students' perspectives, interpretations, and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to ensure a consistent focus across participants while allowing for sufficient flexibility. The study centers on Research Question 1 - students' views on the usefulness of AI feedback, and Research Question 2 - how students evaluate and respond to such feedback.

Participants

The study participants consisted of 12 EFL undergraduates from a public university in China, recruited via purposive sampling. They had previous experience in using AI tools to get

feedback on their academic writing, which guaranteed them the ability to make concrete and appropriate descriptions of the phenomenon they were studying. The participants varied in their academic writing experience and frequency of AI usage - a diversity that is significant, as students' evaluations of and responses to AI feedback often depend on their prior experience, writing needs, and confidence in assessing AI suggestions. Prior to the interviews, the researchers explained the study's purpose to the participants and confirmed their willingness to participate.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. The interviews were face-to-face and about 30-minutes long, each done in Chinese. The protocol used in the interview had 12 main questions that were set in three sections and each section had four questions. Questions 1-4 addressed the general experience of the participants using AI tools in writing academic papers, including the common pattern of use and the general attitudes towards AI feedback. The next four questions (5-8) asked the participants about their perceptions of the usefulness of AI feedback, namely, how it influences language expression, clarity, essay structure, and other facets of academic writing. Questions 9 through 12 examined how participants evaluated and responded to AI feedback - including assessments of accuracy, relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness - as well as the actions taken when they agreed or disagreed with the AI suggestions. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the researchers used follow-up or probing questions when the response given by a participant was too short or vague. This approach ensured consistency across interviews while allowing the researchers to delve deeper into the participants' personal experiences. With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. As the interviews were conducted in Chinese, the transcripts were subsequently translated into English for data analysis and report writing.

Interview Protocol

Based on two research questions and the concept of feedback literacy, the interview protocol covers three key areas: participants' overall experience using AI feedback, their perceptions of its utility, and how they evaluate and respond to the AI suggestions. Addressing Research Question 1, the interviews aim to examine students' perceptions regarding the usefulness of AI feedback, focusing on linguistic accuracy, clarity, relevance, ease of use, and the support provided for academic writing. Addressing Research Question 2, the interviews explore how students evaluate and respond to AI feedback, including actions such as accepting, modifying, verifying, questioning, rejecting, or ignoring the suggestions. Prior to data collection, the research team reviewed the interview questions to ensure they were clear, relevant, and aligned with the research questions. A small-scale pilot interview was undertaken where necessary to detect some problems like ambiguous language or bad sequence of questions and some slight changes could be made.

Data Analysis

This study employed the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) to analyze the interview data. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts. Second, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful segments related to students' perceptions, evaluations, and reactions regarding AI feedback. Third, codes in question were classified into possible themes. These

themes were then compared with the coded extracts and the entire data set to set them correctly to the statements of the participants. Lastly, the themes were identified, labeled and structured according to the research questions. The deductive and inductive coding were used in the analysis process; the feedback literacy framework offered conceptual lenses in terms of judgment, evaluation, and action, and other codes were created inductively depending on the statements of participants. Special consideration was given to similarities between various participants. The analysis was done on the perceptions and experiences as reported by the participants; the participants reported acceptance or usage of AI feedback was not considered as independent confirmation of their actual revision behaviors.

Results

Through a thematic analysis of interview data, the study identifies how Chinese undergraduate EFL students perceive and respond to AI feedback in academic writing. The findings are presented around two research questions: Section 4.1 explores students' views on the usefulness of AI feedback, while Section 4.2 analyzes how they evaluate and respond to it.

Students' Views on the Usefulness of AI Feedback

Students perceived AI feedback as beneficial for supporting academic writing. However, their views were not entirely positive. Four main themes emerged from the interviews: immediate linguistic support; assistance in enhancing clarity and organizational structure; ease of use and convenience; and limitations regarding contextual and content-related feedback.

Immediate Linguistic Support

The first mentioned advantage was the immediate assistance with the language-related problems. The respondents explained their use of AI to detect grammatical mistakes, expand their vocabulary, alter sentence constructions, and come up with different phrases. They particularly valued the ability to receive instant suggestions during the writing and revision processes. As Student 3 described, "I can ask ChatGPT as soon as I have a grammatical problem, and it identifies my mistake and proposes another means of saying it, without having to wait a teacher to respond." This points to the fact that participants mainly considered AI as an easy-to-use linguistic support. The tool was not applied to substitute their writing but instead, to help them to detect and correct language problems that they had observed. There were also participants who reported that AI explanations were beneficial since they regularly provided a better explanation than just giving a fixed sentence. Other students liked to ask why a certain expression was unsuitable and demanded other options to express the same meaning.

Assistance in Clarity and Organization

Students believed that AI feedback helped improve the clarity and organization of their writing. Some students claimed to have used AI to determine ambiguous sentences, redundancy of ideas, or paragraph structure. For instance, Student 8 explained, "Sometimes I know a paragraph isn't very clear, but I don't exactly know where the problem lies. ChatGPT can point out the unclear parts and offer suggestions." This proves that AI was not applied by the participants to address the issue of superficial linguistic error correction only. It was also perceived in ways by some students as a reader or an added feedback mechanism and the students used it as a means of self-reflection on how they articulated their thoughts.

Nevertheless, participants were more likely to take a more safe stance in the case of argument-building AI feedback. Although they mostly agreed that AI recommendations were useful in locating possible problems, they did not necessarily find them appropriate to implement them directly.

Accessibility and Convenience

Students appreciated the fact that AI feedback was readily available and reusable - qualities that were particularly important when completing assignments outside of class. According to Student 12, "the greatest benefit is that it provides assistance whenever I need it. When I have a problem working at night, I can contact ChatGPT at any time." In its turn, this has prompted respondents to equate usefulness with the quality of the feedback as well as with the accessibility of the tool. The use of AI allowed students to seek further clarifications and alternative recommendations without the time limits that are normally related to classroom responses.

Limitations of AI Feedback

Another aspect raised by participants was the shortcomings of AI feedback. Other students said that the feedback might be too generic, redundant or not applicable to what they intended. Some other people indicated that AI was not always able to understand the context of their arguments. According to Student 1, "there are times when it has the right grammar but the sentence does not sound like what I had in mind. When I would have used it as it was, my initial message would be distorted." It shows that the participants made a distinction between various kinds of AI feedback; they were more inclined to consider language-related feedback as more useful in the future, whereas suggestions related to content and argumentation needed more personal consideration.

In summary, the findings regarding Research Question 1 indicate that Chinese EFL undergraduates perceived AI feedback as useful due to its immediacy and ease of use, as well as its support for linguistic expression, clarity, and organization. Nevertheless, this usefulness was considered conditional; subjects were less willing to use AI in the situation when the feedback was more complex in its arguments, more sensitive to the context, or when it was necessary to gain more insight into the topic.

Students' Evaluation of and Responses to AI Feedback

Learners do not blindly accept AI suggestions; they consider the recommendations and make a decision on what to do. Analysis revealed four themes: judging the relevance and accuracy of the feedback, verifying questionable suggestions, selectively accepting or modifying feedback, and rejecting unsuitable suggestions.

Judging the Relevance and Accuracy of Feedback

Students have also indicated matching AI suggestions and their initial intentions. They questioned whether the recommendations were grammatically correct, even related to the subject and conformed to the meaning that they wanted to convey. As Student 3 described, "I do not simply repeat whatever ChatGPT suggests I do but first analyze my original sentences, to determine whether it affects my meaning." This indicates that students view themselves as active decision-makers; they exercise judgment during the process of using AI feedback.

Interestingly, students seemed to be able to differentiate between linguistic and contextual correctness.

Verifying Questionable Suggestions

Students also indicated that they verify AI feedback when they have doubts about its accuracy. Confirmation was especially widespread when there were recommendations of an academic vocabulary, facts or complicated linguistic selections. According to Student 9, “when unsure about the accuracy of a suggestion, I use Google or a dictionary to find out the correctness of the suggestion. I have even compared the suggestion with scholarly articles.” This demonstrates an awareness among students that AI feedback may be inaccurate; consequently, verification is a key component of their reported feedback practices. It also happened that some students compared AI feedback to the former feedback by teachers. Whenever inconsistencies occurred, they were more likely to examine the given problem more thoroughly instead of accepting the AI proposal at once.

Selective Acceptance and Modification

Students have mentioned that they often accept some of the suggestions and change others. Direct acceptance was more prevalent with the simple grammatical or lexical suggestions. Student 8 elaborated, “when ChatGPT corrects a grammatical mistake, and I accept the correction, I will borrow it. However, I will sometimes do some additional tweaking to make it sound more like my writing style.” Student 4 said, “I tend to steal the best bits but not wholesale copying. I may change some words or rearrange the sentence.” This indicates that students view AI feedback as a resource that allowed them to integrate AI suggestions with their own knowledge and writing intentions. This discrimination was especially apparent where students believed that AI sentences were too formal, too complicated or did not match their personal writing styles.

Rejecting and Ignoring Unsuitable Feedback

Students described instances where they rejected or ignored AI feedback - specifically when they deemed the suggestions inaccurate, irrelevant, too generic, or misaligned with their intended arguments. To illustrate, Student 6 said, “I have noticed that sometimes I can know that my original sentence is correct, but ChatGPT still recommends editing. In case I think that my sentence is more appropriate to the situation, I use the original sentence.” This proves that the perceived utility does not necessarily turn into the actual use; students may admit the AI potential value yet dismiss certain recommendations.

Responding to Different Types of Feedback

Recommendations on language were much easier to consider and would more readily be implemented. Conversely, recommendations made on content and argumentation had to be more prudent deliberations. Student 11 explained, “I can usually make quick decisions about grammar issues. But if ChatGPT comments on my arguments, I need to think it through myself, because those represent my own views and stance.” The students did not consider AI as a single source of feedback; they rated the feedback variably based on the type of writing problem and the degree of judgment needed.

Overall, the results concerning Research Question 2 imply that students actively and selectively interacted with the feedback of AI. They evaluated suggestions in terms of

accuracy, relevance, clarity and fit of context before making a decision on how to act. Their reactions were diverse in nature being adoption, modification, verification, questioning, rejection and ignoring of AI suggestions. As a result, the adoption of AI feedback by the students was more of a selective process than passive.

Discussion

These results demonstrate that students value AI feedback as a resourceful and convenient tool to use in academic writing. It is useful because it can help us to find instant linguistic assistance, improve clarity of expression and structure of the essay. This is in line with a more recent study that demonstrates that EFL students appreciate the immediacy and accessibility of AI-generated feedback (Aljasser, 2025; Mekheimer, 2025). Nevertheless, the findings also show that students do not perceive AI feedback as equally effective to tackle all sorts of writing problems. They are more accepting of recommendations in grammar, vocabulary, clarity of the sentence, and the organization of the essay but more skeptical about the advice in more complicated argumentation, content, and contextual details. AI lacks the contextual information to be able to make such accurate judgments in all instances. This validates the results of Zhang and Saeed (2026) who found that Chinese EFL students use AI to polish linguistic content but are more cautious of suggestions that are related to content. Therefore, AI feedback can be used only depending on the specifics of the writing problem and the judgmental tasks that the learner will have to perform. These findings confirm the existence of a less black and white picture: AI utility depends on its relevance, accuracy, and situational appropriateness of the recommendations offered. This reading assists in understanding the reasons why students have positive attitudes towards AI, but do not directly follow its feedback.

Although the students find AI feedback beneficial, they do not take all their recommendations at face value. Instead, they place the recommendations against their original text, and they determine the extent to which the recommendations are in tandem with their writing purposes and they can either adopt, amend or reject them. This demonstrates that perceiving feedback as useful is merely one stage in the feedback process. These findings extend previous research indicating that learners engage in behavioral, cognitive, and emotional interactions when encountering feedback (Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Yeung, 2025; Zhan & Yan, 2025). The research also confirms that AI feedback is responded through judgment processes by students. The possibility of creating very specific and convincing explanations and recommendations by AI can make students confuse linguistic fluency or elaborate elaboration with accuracy. Hence, the habit of doubting recommendations and then implementing them is an essential method that students employ to have control over AI data. Students can feel that some feedback can be useful but still decide to adjust or disregard certain suggestions in this feedback. Usefulness is to be taken as a matter of judgment of the learner. Students' writing purposes, prior knowledge, and interpretations of the suggestions all influence how they perceive the actionability of the feedback.

In this research students reflected on whether the feedback conformed to their writing objectives, challenged those suggestions that seemed wrong or ambiguous, checked on dubious advice and discarded or revamped those suggestions. This shows that there is an interactive process of judgment and interpretation in the use of feedback. These findings corroborate the results of Zhan and Yan (2025), highlighting the significance of student

engagement with AI feedback for their feedback literacy. The findings of Zhang and Saeed (2026) are also similar; they found that the Chinese learners of English doubt and disregard some AI recommendations and request external information when it is needed. Students were more willing to take suggestions on language than content or argumentation. It suggests that in AI feedback encompasses how to utilize feedback and when to exercise additional judgment. Thus, the findings underscore the importance of literacy in AI feedback, emphasizing that students must evaluate not only the nature of the suggestions but also their reliability and suitability for their specific writing contexts.

The results indicate that students position themselves as decision-makers regarding the use of AI feedback in their writing. This shift in role is evident in their reported practices of comparing, verifying, modifying, accepting, and rejecting AI suggestions. This finding aligns with Moorhouse et al. (2025), who noted that AI tools can empower L2 writers with a sense of autonomy, while also raising concerns about potential deficiencies in critical thinking skills. Although students may feel autonomous due to the immediate and comprehensive assistance AI provides, the effective use of AI still requires the exercise of judgment. It is not so difficult to assess the proposals regarding grammar or vocabulary as compared to issues regarding argumentation or content; in the latter case, the students need to take into account the purpose of the text and the context in general. Thus, learner autonomy entails more than just the freedom to accept or reject AI feedback; it involves making informed decisions regarding how and to what extent the feedback is utilized, or whether it should be used at all.

The results showed that feedback literacy is a reasonable framework to comprehend how students respond to AI feedback. Student experiences reflect several established elements of feedback literacy, including recognizing the value of feedback, making judgments, and taking action (Molloy et al., 2020). Another type of evaluation challenge brought by AI is the fact that, in the context of AI feedback, students need to balance reliability of the AI recommendations with the appropriateness of the latter to the context. Consequently, the source of the feedback becomes an integral part of the evaluative process; students must consider the utility of a suggestion and its accuracy and suitability for the writing task. This demonstrates that existing perspectives on feedback literacy can be effectively adapted to AI feedback environments, where students are required to interpret feedback, assess its relevance and reliability, and determine the necessity of taking action. The research also provides a learner-based viewpoint on the existing studies on AI feedback. Overall, the results situate AI as a helping resource, which is only useful with a critical attitude - its applicability is in the immediacy, accessibility, and varieties of support it can provide, whereas the limitations demand the critical attitude of students.

Conclusion

This study explores the perceptions, assessment, and reactions of Chinese EFL undergraduates to AI feedback in academic writing. The results show that the students perceive AI feedback as helpful, especially in the context of language-related factors of academic writing. Students value its immediacy, ease of use, and ability to offer suggestions on grammar, vocabulary, clarity, and structure. Nevertheless, they do not consider all AI feedback as equally valuable; feedback about linguistic forms is generally more readily comprehended and used, and feedback about content, argumentation, and contextual meaning need more care. In turn, the AI feedback utility is viewed as contingent. It is also

demonstrated in the results that students compare AI suggestions to their original texts, verify the accuracy and relevance, verify uncertain information, modify suggestions and discard feedback that do not match the intended meaning. This demonstrates that perceived usefulness does not automatically lead to the acceptance of feedback; instead, students exercise their own judgment to decide whether and how to use AI suggestions. In summary, this study highlights the importance of learner judgment in the context of AI feedback. The students need to evaluate the quality of the feedback, whether it relates to their writing objectives, and make a knowledgeable decision on whether to accept, edit, verify or discard.

The findings offer both theoretical and pedagogical implications for the use of AI feedback in EFL academic writing. This study confirms that feedback literacy is crucial for understanding how students interact with AI feedback. It indicates that students are not passive listeners of AI recommendations but proactively read, analyze, fact-check, change, accept or disbelieve them. This implies that feedback literacy continues to play a crucial role in AI. Students should not only assess the usefulness of the feedback but also its accuracy, reliability, relevance and consistency with his or her writing intentions. Thus, in the context of AI, the concept of feedback literacy extends to evaluating the source of the feedback and its contextual appropriateness. Furthermore, EFL writing instruction should teach students how to critically evaluate and utilize AI suggestions. Teachers may offer clear instructions to assist students in verifying the correctness of AI feedback, juxtaposing suggestions with the original plans of writing, reliably verifying the information sources, and differentiating between language and content feedback. The educators are to promote the idea of agency in writing choices and not to accept AI recommendations as the ultimate and definitive solutions. Therefore, the role of AI is to provide an additional source of feedback, and teachers are critical in directing students in their judgement and assisting in more complicated decisions about content and rhetoric. Such a pedagogical strategy would assist the students to use AI feedback more carefully and judiciously in their academic writing.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it is based on interview evidence, i.e. the results are based on the perceptions and experiences of students. Second, the researchers used a purposive sample of EFL undergraduates in a particular learning environment; therefore, the findings cannot be applied to all EFL students or the tertiary education environment. Students with different educational backgrounds, English proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds might evaluate and respond to AI feedback differently. Moreover, the research concentrates on the experiences of students on AI feedback in the academic writing, but does not analyze the development in the writing performance and compare real revisions (pre and post AI feedback). Lastly, because AI tools are undergoing swift changes, the capabilities of the models, interface design, and feedback quality may have an impact on the way students will use these tools. Hence, the results are to be understood in the framework of the technological and educational setting, within which the research was being performed.

These limitations can be overcome in future studies in a number of ways. First, scholars would be able to triangulate the data obtained in interviews with the real writing samples, revisions, screen records, or logs of AI interactions of students. Second, prospective research might consider the students with different levels of proficiency and educational backgrounds. Moreover, research could explore how students respond to different types of AI feedback - such as suggestions concerning grammar, vocabulary, discourse structure, argumentative

logic, and content - to gain deeper insight into how the nature of feedback influences students' evaluation and decision-making processes. Finally, future studies could investigate whether explicit instruction on AI and feedback literacy helps students make more informed decisions when utilizing AI feedback.

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