



Exploring the Challenges of Automated Writing Feedback in EFL Writing: Learners' Experiences with Write & Improve

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the challenges experienced by learners when using Write & Improve with Cambridge to develop writing skills, with attention to feedback interpretation, idea development, revision, and students' willingness to continue using automated feedback. The study employed a qualitative case study design involving 31 students. Data were collected through a seven-question questionnaire administered via Google Forms and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in students' experiences and perceptions. The findings show that Write & Improve was useful for identifying grammatical errors, providing immediate feedback, and supporting writing practice. However, students also experienced limitations because the feedback was perceived as insufficiently personalized and less helpful for developing ideas, sentence variety, coherence, organization, and understanding the reasons behind corrections. The study concludes that automated feedback can support writing development but cannot replace human guidance and student engagement. The implication is that Write & Improve should be integrated as a complementary tool alongside teacher feedback, reflection, and revision activities. This approach can promote meaningful, independent, and reflective writing development.

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital technology into education has transformed how language learning is delivered, practiced, and assessed (Pinto-Llorente & Izquierdo-Álvarez, 2024; Rintaningrum, 2023). In writing instruction, digital tools can expand opportunities for learners to practise repeatedly and receive feedback beyond limited classroom time. This development is increasingly relevant because English writing is connected to academic communication, professional opportunities, and participation in global contexts. Write & Improve with Cambridge illustrates this development by allowing learners to submit English writing and receive automated feedback within seconds. The platform provides tasks at different levels and enables learners to revise and resubmit their work. Such features can support flexible and independent writing practice, particularly when teacher feedback cannot be provided immediately. Therefore, understanding how automated writing tools function in learning environments is

important for improving accessible and effective writing education (Nunes et al., 2022; Zhao, 2025).

The growing use of automated feedback also reflects an educational need to make writing support more timely, continuous, and scalable (Deepshikha, 2025; Lee, 2023). Writing development requires repeated practice, revision, and meaningful responses to learners' work, yet teachers may face limited time when providing detailed feedback to many students. Research on second-language writing has long recognized feedback as an important component of writing development, while recent research has examined how automation can supplement traditional feedback practices. Write & Improve is designed for English learners and uses computational linguistics and machine learning to identify writing errors and provide immediate feedback. Its feedback system is trained using data from the Cambridge Learner Corpus, making it different from general-purpose editing applications. Consequently, examining automated writing feedback matters for learners and educators seeking practical ways to support writing development in contemporary educational contexts.

Despite these potential benefits, the use of automated writing tools creates a problem concerning how learners interpret, respond to, and apply machine-generated feedback (Chen, 2026; Muñoz et al., 2025). Automated systems can identify particular language problems efficiently, but feedback may not fully address the communicative purpose, argument quality, contextual appropriateness, or development of ideas in a text. Previous research has also shown that automated feedback produces mixed outcomes across different contexts, indicating that its effectiveness cannot be assumed from technological availability alone. In addition, learners may accept corrections without understanding why revisions are necessary, which can limit deeper engagement with the writing process. These issues create an important pedagogical concern: technology may increase the quantity and speed of feedback while not necessarily guaranteeing meaningful learning. Therefore, the challenges experienced by learners and educators require systematic investigation.

Previous studies have investigated automated written feedback from perspectives including system performance, learner perceptions, engagement, and effects on writing outcomes (Shen et al., 2023; Shi & Aryadoust, 2024). A systematic review by Shi and Aryadoust (2024), covering 83 SSCI-indexed studies, found positive, negative, neutral, and mixed results across these research areas. Earlier research also indicated that automated systems may face difficulties when providing discourse-specific feedback, particularly for content and contextual dimensions of writing. Research on electronic and automated feedback further emphasizes that technology should support, rather than replace, pedagogical guidance. However, much of the literature examines automated writing evaluation as a broad category or focuses primarily on writing outcomes. Consequently, there remains a need to understand concrete challenges encountered when a specific learner-oriented platform is incorporated into writing activities. This study addresses that practical dimension through Write & Improve with Cambridge.

The state of the art of this study lies in examining Write & Improve as a pedagogical resource whose usefulness depends on how learners and educators manage its feedback. Current evidence recognizes automated feedback as useful for practice and revision, while also identifying limitations related to validity and contextual coverage. Write & Improve provides feedback, hints, progress information, and opportunities for

revision, making it a relevant setting for investigation. The novelty of this study is its focus on challenges arising during Write & Improve use, rather than treating automated feedback systems as interchangeable tools. Identifying these challenges can clarify how automation can be integrated without weakening reflective writing practices or the role of human guidance. This perspective connects technological innovation with pedagogical practice and learner needs, providing a more contextual understanding of automated feedback in contemporary EFL writing instruction.

Based on the issues discussed above, this research investigates the challenges faced by learners and educators when using Write & Improve with Cambridge in writing instruction. The central problem concerns whether users can understand automated feedback rather than merely accept corrections. The study considers challenges related to feedback interpretation, idea development, contextual relevance, revision practices, learner independence, and the balance between automated and human feedback. This study argues that the value of Write & Improve does not depend only on rapid feedback, but also on how feedback is interpreted and incorporated into writing. Examining users' experiences can reveal difficulties that may not be visible through writing scores alone. The findings are expected to support more effective implementation of automated feedback and promote reflective writing development while maintaining meaningful pedagogical guidance throughout the writing learning process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the challenges experienced by students when using Write & Improve with Cambridge to develop their English writing skills (Hoang & Hoang, 2024; Jitpanich et al., 2022). A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives regarding the use of automated writing feedback. The case study design was considered appropriate because the research investigated a contemporary phenomenon within a specific educational context, namely the use of Write & Improve among English Department students. Rather than measuring writing improvement statistically, the study sought to obtain detailed information about the difficulties, limitations, and experiences encountered by students during the use of the platform. This design enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives and to develop an understanding of how automated writing feedback was experienced in the learning context.

The research was conducted in the English Department at Tidar University, where the participants were students enrolled in the department across different semesters (Normawati & Nugrahaeni, 2024; Octaviani et al., 2024). The research site was selected because English writing constitutes an important component of students' language learning and academic development in the department. In addition, the setting was considered relevant because students had opportunities to engage with digital resources for developing their English writing skills. The participants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus. Approximately 30 English Department students participated in the study. The selection of participants from different semesters was intended to provide varied perspectives and experiences regarding the use of Write & Improve with Cambridge. By focusing on students within the same academic context, the study was able to examine the challenges of using the platform within a specific and clearly defined educational environment.

Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered using Google Forms (Vieriu & Petrea, 2025; Wale & Kassahun, 2024). The questionnaire consisted of seven questions concerning participants' experiences with Write & Improve with Cambridge, perceived changes in their writing skills, willingness to use the platform again, experience with other writing-support tools, perceived limitations, suggested improvements, and opinions regarding its potential use in English writing instruction. The open-ended format allowed participants to provide responses based on their own experiences, thoughts, and opinions rather than selecting predetermined answers. Participants were given sufficient space to explain their responses in their own words. The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 30 students from different semesters of the English Department. The collected responses were then organized and prepared for further analysis to identify recurring experiences, perceived challenges, and participants' views concerning the use of Write & Improve with Cambridge.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Byrne, 2022; Shoufan, 2023). The analysis began with reading the participants' responses repeatedly to obtain an overall understanding of the data. The researchers then identified meaningful statements related to the use of Write & Improve with Cambridge and assigned initial codes to relevant responses. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories, such as writing improvement, feedback interpretation, platform limitations, dependence on automated feedback, alternative writing tools, and recommendations for improvement. These categories were then examined to identify recurring patterns and develop themes that represented the participants' experiences. The researchers interpreted the emerging themes in relation to the research focus on challenges in using Write & Improve with Cambridge for writing development. The findings were presented descriptively by explaining the major themes and supporting them with relevant participant responses rather than relying primarily on numerical percentages.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researchers applied data triangulation and participant validation (Arias Valencia, 2022; Morgan, 2024). Data triangulation was conducted by comparing responses from participants from different semesters to identify similarities and differences in their experiences with Write & Improve with Cambridge. This process helped the researchers determine whether particular challenges appeared consistently across participants rather than being based on a single response. Participant validation was also considered by reviewing the interpretation of participants' responses to ensure that the emerging themes reflected their intended meanings. In addition, the researchers maintained a clear connection between the original responses, coding process, categories, and final themes. These procedures were implemented to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings and to reduce the possibility that the researchers' interpretations would be based solely on personal assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Challenges in Using Write & Improve with Cambridge in Developing Writing Skills

The operational definition of this sub-finding refers to the challenges experienced by students when using Write & Improve with Cambridge as a web-based tool for developing English writing skills. In this study, the challenges were identified through students' responses concerning their perceived writing improvement, willingness to

reuse the platform, comparison with other writing tools, perceived limitations, and expectations for improving the platform. The findings indicate that students had different experiences with the use of Write & Improve with Cambridge. Of the 31 respondents, 16 students expressed uncertainty about whether the platform had improved their writing skills, while 15 students perceived the platform as helpful for writing activities. The responses further indicated concerns about limited feedback, lack of personalization, strong emphasis on grammatical aspects, and difficulties in using automated feedback to develop ideas and more complex writing structures.

The interview data indicate that students experienced difficulties in interpreting and applying the feedback provided by Write & Improve with Cambridge. One informant explained, “The feedback helps me find some grammar mistakes, but sometimes I still do not understand why the sentence is wrong or how I can improve the whole paragraph.” This response indicates that the platform was useful for identifying certain language problems but did not always provide sufficient explanation for students to understand the underlying writing problem. Another informant stated, “I can use the correction, but I prefer other tools when I want to develop my ideas because the feedback from Write & Improve feels limited.” This statement shows that students did not evaluate the platform only from its ability to detect errors but also from its capacity to support broader writing development. The researchers therefore interpreted that students perceived automated feedback as useful for correction but insufficient for more comprehensive writing development.

The interview findings also show differences in students’ willingness to continue using Write & Improve with Cambridge. One informant stated, “I would use it again because I can practise writing and get feedback quickly, especially when I want to check my mistakes.” This response demonstrates that immediate feedback and independent practice were perceived as useful features of the platform. However, another informant explained, “I might use it again, but I would still use another application because I need feedback about my ideas, sentence variety, and the organization of my writing.” The two responses demonstrate different expectations toward automated writing feedback. Some students valued speed and accessibility, whereas others expected more detailed and personalized feedback. The researchers interpreted this difference as an indication that students’ acceptance of the platform was influenced by the extent to which its feedback matched their individual writing needs.

Table 1. Students’ Perceptions of Write & Improve with Cambridge

Informant Position	Interview Excerpts	Indikator
Mahasiswa English Education	“The feedback helps me find some grammar mistakes, but sometimes I still do not understand why the sentence is wrong.”	Understanding of feedback
Mahasiswa English Education	“I prefer other tools when I want to develop my ideas because the feedback from Write & Improve feels limited.”	Limitations of idea development
Mahasiswa English Education	“I would use it again because I can practise writing and get feedback quickly.”	Ease and speed of feedback
Mahasiswa English Education	“I still use another application because I need feedback about my ideas and the organization of my writing.”	The need for more comprehensive feedback

Table 1 reveals several important patterns regarding students' experiences with Write & Improve with Cambridge in developing their writing skills. Regarding understanding feedback, students stated that the platform helped them identify grammatical errors, but they did not always understand why particular sentences were considered incorrect. This indicates that automated feedback was useful for identifying errors but was not always sufficient for helping students understand the reasons behind the corrections. Regarding the limitation in developing ideas, students preferred other writing tools when they needed support in developing their ideas. This finding indicates that students' writing needs extend beyond grammatical accuracy and include the development and organization of ideas. Therefore, students viewed the platform as more useful for language-level correction than for supporting broader aspects of writing development.

Regarding the convenience and speed of feedback, students responded positively to Write & Improve with Cambridge because the platform provided quick feedback and allowed them to practise writing independently. This indicates that immediate feedback was one of the features that encouraged students to continue using the platform. However, regarding the need for more comprehensive feedback, some students still used other applications because they needed feedback on their ideas and the organization of their writing. Based on the overall data, Write & Improve with Cambridge was perceived as a practical tool for identifying errors and supporting initial revision, but it did not fully address students' needs for more comprehensive writing guidance. The overall pattern shows a difference between the practical benefits of automated feedback and students' broader learning needs, particularly in developing ideas, organizing texts, and understanding the reasons behind corrections.

Discussion

The findings indicate that students experienced different levels of perceived improvement after using Write & Improve with Cambridge (Chung & Ahn, 2022; Morgan, 2024). Among 31 respondents, 16 students were uncertain about their improvement, while 15 students considered the platform helpful for writing activities. This difference indicates that students did not experience the platform in the same way. Some students benefited from immediate feedback and opportunities to practise writing, whereas others did not perceive substantial improvement in their writing performance. The findings suggest that receiving automated corrections does not automatically mean that students understand how to improve their writing. Students may identify errors but still experience difficulties in understanding the reasons behind corrections or applying them to future writing. Therefore, the effectiveness of Write & Improve depends not only on the availability of feedback but also on how students understand and use the feedback during their writing process.

The findings concerning students' willingness to reuse Write & Improve with Cambridge also show different perceptions (Mao et al., 2024; Owojori et al., 2022). Sixteen students expressed hesitation about continuing to use the platform, while 15 students indicated that they would use it again. Students who were willing to continue using the platform valued its accessibility, convenience, and rapid feedback. In contrast, students who were hesitant tended to expect more comprehensive assistance, particularly in developing ideas and organizing their writing. This difference indicates that students evaluate the platform based on more than its technical convenience. They also

consider whether the feedback corresponds to their individual writing needs. The finding demonstrates that continued use is influenced by students' perceptions of usefulness and relevance. Thus, Write & Improve can encourage independent writing practice, but its ability to maintain student engagement may depend on how well its feedback addresses different aspects of writing development.

Another significant finding concerns the limitations of automated feedback perceived by students (Henderson et al., 2026; Zou et al., 2024). The participants generally recognized that Write & Improve could help identify grammatical errors, but some students considered its feedback insufficient for developing ideas, sentence variety, coherence, and overall organization. This finding indicates that students distinguish between correcting language errors and improving the quality of an entire written text. Automated feedback can provide useful information about particular problems, but students may still require broader guidance to understand how ideas should be developed and connected. The present finding contributes to the understanding of automated writing tools by showing that students evaluate feedback according to the complexity of their writing needs. The findings therefore suggest that automated feedback should not be viewed as a complete writing solution. Instead, it can function as one component of the writing process, particularly during initial correction and revision activities.

The findings also reveal students' concerns about dependence on automated feedback (Li & Kim, 2024; Shadiev & Feng, 2024). Some participants were uncertain about using Write & Improve as a primary tool if they became English teachers responsible for developing students' writing skills. Their responses indicate concerns that students might simply follow automated corrections without examining the reasons behind the suggested changes. Such a pattern could reduce opportunities for students to reflect on their own writing decisions. However, the findings do not demonstrate that Write & Improve directly reduces critical thinking or writing independence. Instead, they show that students perceive a potential risk when automated feedback is used without sufficient explanation or human guidance. The theoretical implication is that writing development involves more than error correction. Students need opportunities to interpret feedback, make independent decisions, revise their texts, and evaluate the effectiveness of their revisions. Automated feedback can support these processes when appropriately integrated into instruction.

The findings provide a practical contribution by identifying specific aspects that should receive attention when Write & Improve is implemented in writing instruction (Link et al., 2022; Rad et al., 2024). Teachers can use the platform to provide additional opportunities for students to practise writing and identify language errors, while classroom activities can focus on aspects that automated feedback may not adequately address. Students can also be encouraged to compare automated suggestions with their original writing, identify the reasons for corrections, and decide whether each suggestion is appropriate. This approach can prevent students from treating automated feedback as an answer that must always be followed. The findings therefore support a complementary model in which technology provides immediate assistance while teachers provide explanation, clarification, and guidance. Such an approach allows the efficiency of automated feedback to be combined with meaningful learning activities that encourage students to become more reflective and independent writers.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of challenges surrounding the use of Write & Improve with Cambridge by demonstrating that students perceive both

benefits and limitations in automated writing feedback (Jiang & Yu, 2022; Rahimi et al., 2025). The main contribution lies in identifying the gap between rapid error correction and students' broader needs for writing development. The findings show that students value convenience and immediate feedback but may still require support for developing ideas, organizing texts, improving sentence variety, and understanding the reasons behind corrections. The practical implication is that Write & Improve can be integrated into writing instruction as a supporting tool rather than as the sole source of feedback. The broader theoretical implication is that effective digital writing instruction should consider not only technological functionality but also learner interpretation, reflection, and active participation. Consequently, meaningful writing development depends on the interaction between automated assistance and learners' active engagement with feedback.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of Write & Improve with Cambridge provides useful support for developing students' writing skills, particularly by giving immediate feedback and helping learners identify some errors in their writing. However, the findings also show that automated feedback does not fully address students' needs, especially in developing ideas, sentence variety, organization, coherence, and deeper understanding of writing problems. The main lesson from this study is that technology can support writing instruction but should not replace students' active thinking or teachers' guidance. Scientifically, this study contributes to understanding learners' experiences and challenges in using automated writing feedback in EFL learning. The study is limited by its small number of participants and reliance on students' responses. Future research should involve more participants, different educational contexts, and additional data sources. These findings imply that Write & Improve should be used as a complementary tool alongside teacher feedback and reflective writing activities.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

AI (Gemini by Google) was used to a limited extent as a supporting tool in the preparation of this manuscript. The authors independently reviewed, edited, and verified all information generated with AI assistance.

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