

DEVELOPING AI FEEDBACK LITERACY AND CRITICAL EVALUATION SKILLS AMONG IELTS LEARNERS

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Abstract: This paper explores the development of AI feedback literacy among students preparing for IELTS. Rather than treating automatically generated suggestions as authoritative, it proposes a pedagogical approach in which learners compare feedback with assessment criteria, justify revisions, and independently verify improvements. The paper distinguishes feedback generation from feedback uptake and outlines a practical classroom protocol. The proposal is conceptual; its effectiveness remains to be evaluated empirically.

Keywords: AI literacy, feedback literacy, critical evaluation, IELTS preparation, learner autonomy, academic integrity

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools increasingly provide language learners with immediate comments on drafts, alternative formulations, and simulated conversations. Their availability, however, does not ensure that students can interpret or use the comments productively. For IELTS learners, this distinction matters: an automatically generated recommendation may improve surface accuracy while weakening the writer's intended meaning, or may sound persuasive without being aligned with the assessment criteria. The central educational problem is therefore not simply access to AI feedback but the learner's capacity to judge its relevance, reliability, and consequences.

This paper focuses on AI feedback literacy, understood here as the ability to interpret, question, select, and act upon AI-generated feedback while retaining responsibility for one's own work. Its specific aim is to outline a teachable procedure for IELTS Writing and Speaking preparation. Unlike a general discussion of AI tools or an integrated teaching-and-assessment model, the present proposal concentrates on a narrower learner competence: critical feedback uptake.

Feedback research provides a useful foundation. Hattie and Timperley [1] describe effective feedback in relation to learning goals, current performance, and the next steps needed for improvement. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick [2] connect formative feedback with self-regulated learning, emphasizing learners' active role in monitoring their progress. Carless and Boud [3] conceptualize student feedback literacy in terms of understanding feedback, making judgments, managing responses, and taking action. These perspectives suggest that receiving a comment and learning from it are not equivalent events.

AI introduces additional challenges. A fluent explanation can appear credible even when it is incomplete, generic, or inconsistent with the task. UNESCO [4] emphasizes human agency, transparency, and critical engagement in educational uses of generative AI. In IELTS preparation, these concerns translate into a practical requirement: students should not accept a suggested correction merely because a chatbot presents it confidently. They should ask whether the suggestion addresses the actual weakness, preserves their meaning, and is appropriate for the task and their level.

A classroom protocol can operationalize this competence through five actions. First, the student produces an original response without AI rewriting. Second, the student requests narrowly

defined feedback, such as whether the central argument is developed or whether the response is coherent. Third, the student checks each major suggestion against the relevant IELTS criterion and the original task. Fourth, the student records a decision - accept, adapt, or reject - together with a brief reason. Fifth, the student revises the response and explains what changed and why. The teacher reviews selected decisions, particularly those involving content, organization, and disputed scoring claims.

The protocol can be illustrated in Writing Task 2. Suppose a learner receives an AI suggestion to replace a clear but simple sentence with a highly elaborate one. Instead of copying the revision, the learner compares both versions for clarity, grammatical control, and relevance to the argument. A justified decision to retain the original sentence may demonstrate stronger evaluative judgment than uncritical adoption of sophisticated vocabulary. In another case, the learner may accept a suggestion to clarify the link between a claim and its supporting example, provided the revision genuinely improves coherence.

For Speaking, the same principle can be applied to AI-generated transcripts or comments after a practice response. A learner may receive advice to use more advanced vocabulary, yet the more pressing problem may be an unclear sequence of ideas. Students can listen to their own recording, identify the relevant feature, and select one manageable target for the next attempt. Importantly, automated judgments about pronunciation or estimated IELTS bands should be treated as provisional, not as official examiner assessments.

To make feedback decisions visible, teachers may use a concise revision log with four fields: the original excerpt or observed difficulty; the AI suggestion; the learner's decision and justification; and the outcome in a subsequent independent task. This log is not intended as additional bureaucratic work. Its purpose is to shift attention from the number of corrections received to the quality of decisions made. Periodic teacher sampling can identify recurring patterns, such as excessive reliance on paraphrasing, acceptance of unsupported band estimates, or failure to transfer feedback to a new task.

The proposed approach also has ethical implications. Learners should distinguish assistance with diagnosis and revision from submitting AI-generated answers as their own. Teachers need to establish clear rules for permitted use, avoid uploading sensitive personal information, and remind students that AI output can contain inaccuracies. These safeguards support academic integrity while preserving opportunities for independent practice.

The proposal has limitations. The five-action protocol is a conceptual teaching recommendation rather than a validated intervention. Its effectiveness may vary according to learners' proficiency, the clarity of teacher guidance, and the quality of AI output. Future research could compare learners' revision justifications before and after explicit feedback-literacy instruction, examine transfer to new IELTS tasks, and triangulate learner logs with teacher assessments. Such a design would test whether better judgment about feedback translates into measurable language development.

In conclusion, the educational value of AI in IELTS preparation depends partly on students' ability to evaluate the feedback it generates. Explicitly teaching learners to verify suggestions, justify their choices, and demonstrate improvement in independent work may strengthen autonomy and reduce uncritical dependence on automated systems. AI feedback literacy should therefore be considered a distinct learning objective, not an automatic by-product of using AI tools.

References

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