DIAJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran
https://journal.yp3a.org/index.php/DIAJAR
e-ISSN 2810-0417 | p-ISSN 2810-0786
Vol. 5 No. 1 (Januari 2026) 353-360
DOI: 10.54259/diajar.v5i1.7051

Students' Trust in AI Feedback and Its Effect on Critical Reading In EFL

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Informasi Artikel
Submitted: 22-11-2025
Accepted: 06-01-2026
Published: 15-01-2026

Keywords:
AI-generated Feedback
Students' Trust
Critical Reading
EFL Context
Quantitative Study

Abstract

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has increased, particularly through AI-generated feedback to support reading activities. However, research on students' trust in AI feedback and its relationship with critical reading ability remains limited. This study investigates EFL students' trust in AI-generated feedback and examines its relationship with critical reading performance. Using a quantitative correlational design, the study involved 17 undergraduate EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, Indonesia. Data were collected through a five-item Likert-scale questionnaire measuring trust in AI feedback and a five-item critical reading test. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation analysis were applied. The results show that students demonstrated a moderate level of trust in AI-generated feedback (M = 3.40 per item) and moderate to relatively high critical reading performance (M = 3.35 out of 5). The correlation analysis revealed a positive but weak relationship between trust in AI feedback and critical reading performance (ρ = 0.28, p = .27), indicating no statistically significant correlation. These findings suggest that although students generally trust AI-generated feedback, such trust alone does not significantly enhance critical reading ability, highlighting the importance of integrating AI feedback with teacher guidance in EFL reading instruction.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has reshaped educational practices, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts. AI technologies are increasingly integrated into language instruction through adaptive learning systems, automated feedback, and generative tools such as ChatGPT, offering personalized assistance and immediate responses to learners' needs [1], [2], [3]. In EFL reading instruction, AI is commonly used to support comprehension, simplify complex texts, provide vocabulary explanations, and facilitate students' engagement with academic reading materials [4], [5]. Studies indicate that AI-assisted instruction can enhance reading outcomes when it is pedagogically aligned and mediated by teachers [6], [7]. In the Indonesian EFL context, students generally perceive AI as a helpful and motivating learning tool, although concerns related to overreliance and superficial understanding persist [8].

One of the most widely adopted applications of AI in language learning is AI-generated feedback. AI feedback systems provide instant, consistent, and scalable responses that assist learners in identifying errors, clarifying meaning, and improving comprehension strategies [9], [10]. In reading instruction, AI feedback is frequently used to support comprehension questions, text summarization, and reflection on reading strategies [11], [12]. A recent scoping review by [4] highlights the increasing use of ChatGPT-based tools to support EFL reading comprehension across educational levels. From teachers' perspectives, AI feedback is viewed as a complementary instructional tool that offers alternative explanations and

practice opportunities, although pedagogical control and ethical considerations remain essential [13]. Importantly, the effectiveness of AI feedback is not solely determined by its technological capacity but also by learners' perceptions and engagement, particularly regarding the transparency and explainability of the feedback provided [14], [15], [16].

Trust is a critical factor influencing students' engagement with AI-generated feedback. Trust in educational technology refers to learners' beliefs regarding the reliability, accuracy, transparency, and pedagogical value of technological systems [14], [17]. In AI-supported learning environments, trust shapes whether students accept, question, or critically evaluate AI feedback [15], [18]. While trust is generally considered positive, in the context of critical reading it represents a complex, potentially paradoxical dynamic: a high level of uncritical trust in AI may contradict the inherently skeptical stance required of critical readers, who are expected to question, evaluate, and infer rather than accept information at face value [19], [20]. Research suggests that excessive trust may lead to uncritical acceptance of AI outputs, whereas low trust may cause students to disregard potentially useful feedback [16], [21]. In higher education, students' trust in AI is influenced by perceived usefulness, prior experience, digital literacy, and the explainability of feedback [16], [21]. However, empirical studies examining students' trust in AI feedback within EFL reading instruction remain limited, particularly in relation to higher-order reading skills.

Critical reading is a core competence in EFL learning, involving the ability to analyze, evaluate, infer, and question textual meanings rather than merely extracting literal information [22], [23]. It is closely linked to critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills, which are essential for academic literacy [24], [25]. Although various instructional approaches have been shown to enhance critical reading in EFL contexts [26], [27], [28], reading instruction in Indonesia often emphasizes surface-level comprehension, limiting opportunities for evaluative and reflective reading [29]. While AI has demonstrated potential to support reading comprehension, its role in fostering critical reading remains debated [30], [31].

Despite the growing body of literature on AI in EFL education, several research gaps remain. Previous studies have predominantly examined students' perceptions or general learning outcomes, with limited attention to the role of trust in AI-generated feedback [8], [32]. Moreover, empirical research on AI feedback has largely focused on writing skills, whereas studies investigating its role in developing critical reading ability are still scarce [9], [33]. Importantly, few studies have examined how students interpret, evaluate, and negotiate AI feedback during reading tasks, particularly in contexts where critical literacy development is challenging [13], [18]. These limitations, together with the need to understand the nuanced interplay between trust and critical reading, underscore the urgency for focused research on this topic, especially using recent insights from 2024–2025 studies.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine EFL students' trust in AI-generated feedback and its relationship with critical reading performance in an academic reading context. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the level of students' trust in AI feedback during reading activities, to examine whether students' trust in AI feedback is associated with their critical reading ability, and to explore how students perceive and utilize AI feedback in supporting the development of critical reading skills. Based on these objectives, the study addresses the extent of EFL students' trust in AI-generated feedback, the nature of the relationship between trust in AI feedback and critical reading performance, and students' perceptions of using AI feedback as part of their critical reading practices.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between EFL students' trust in AI-generated feedback and their critical reading ability. This design was selected to identify the degree and direction of association between two variables without experimental manipulation, which is appropriate for small-scale educational research [34], [35]. In this study, students' trust in AI feedback was treated as the independent variable, while critical reading ability was the dependent variable. The design allows for examining whether variations in trust in AI feedback are associated with differences in students' critical reading performance, as suggested in prior studies on AI-supported learning environments [17], [18].

2.2 Participants

The participants consisted of 17 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in an English reading course at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, Indonesia. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, as they had prior experience using AI-generated feedback during reading activities. While the small sample

size (n = 17) represents a limitation for generalizability in quantitative correlational research, it is considered adequate for exploratory studies aimed at identifying preliminary trends and relationships [34]. All participants had engaged in AI-assisted reading tasks, including receiving feedback on comprehension questions, summaries, and interpretative responses, making them suitable for examining trust in AI feedback within an EFL reading context.

2.3 Research Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection: a trust in AI feedback questionnaire and a critical reading test. The trust in AI feedback questionnaire was designed to measure students' perceptions of AI-generated feedback during reading instruction. The items were adapted from established frameworks on trust in AI and educational technologies, focusing on perceived reliability, accuracy, usefulness, transparency, and willingness to rely on AI feedback [14], [18], [21]. The questionnaire consisted of five Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To ensure content validity, the items were reviewed by three EFL experts for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness to the reading context, while internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87, indicating acceptable reliability.

The critical reading test was developed to assess students' higher-order reading skills, including analysis, inference, evaluation, and interpretation of academic texts. The test items were aligned with critical reading indicators commonly used in EFL studies, such as identifying implicit meanings, evaluating arguments, recognizing author stance, and making justified interpretations [22], [23], [24]. The test consisted of five items in the form of multiple-choice and short-answer questions based on an academic reading passage, a format widely applied in EFL critical reading research [26], [36]. Students were instructed to use AI tools such as ChatGPT to complete specific tasks, for example: analyzing potential bias in the author's argument, summarizing the text with critical commentary, and proposing alternative interpretations, which allowed researchers to observe how students integrated AI feedback into critical reading practices.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in two sequential stages. First, students participated in AI-assisted reading activities and subsequently completed the trust in AI feedback questionnaire. Participants were informed about the research purpose and assured that their responses would be used solely for academic research. The questionnaire was administered online to ensure efficiency and consistency. Second, students completed the critical reading test after the questionnaire to minimize potential influence on trust perceptions. The test was administered within a controlled time frame, and the reading tasks required students to demonstrate critical engagement with the text rather than literal comprehension, as recommended in critical reading research [27], [37].

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize students' trust in AI feedback and critical reading performance, including mean, median, standard deviation, and score distribution derived from Likert-scale questionnaire responses and dichotomously scored reading test data [19]. To examine the relationship between students' trust in AI feedback and critical reading ability, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was applied. The questionnaire responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, while the critical reading test items were scored dichotomously (1 = correct, 0 = incorrect), and total reading scores were obtained by summing correct responses. Spearman's correlation was selected due to the small sample size (n = 17) and the ordinal nature of the data, without assuming normal distribution [34], [35]. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level ($p < .05$).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The participants in this study were 17 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in an English reading course at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, Indonesia. All participants were at the same academic level and had prior experience using AI tools in learning activities, particularly AI-generated feedback during reading tasks. This homogeneous background ensured comparability of responses and reading performance across participants.

Students' trust in AI-generated feedback was measured using a five-item Likert-scale questionnaire with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize students' responses across all questionnaire items.

Table 1. Individual Scores and Descriptive Statistics of Trust in AI Feedback

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Total
P1	4	3	3	3	3	16
P2	4	4	4	4	4	20
P3	3	4	4	4	4	19
P4	4	5	5	4	5	23
P5	3	3	3	3	4	16
P6	3	4	3	3	5	18
P7	4	5	4	5	4	22
P8	3	3	2	2	4	14
P9	1	1	1	1	4	8
P10	4	4	5	4	5	22
P11	1	1	1	1	1	5
P12	4	4	4	4	4	20
P13	1	2	2	3	3	11
P14	3	3	3	3	3	15
P15	5	5	5	5	5	25
P16	3	4	4	3	4	18
P17	4	4	1	4	4	17
Mean	3,18	3,47	3,18	3,29	3,88	
Median	3	4	3	3	4	
Mode	4	4	4	3	4	
Std. deviation	1,19	1,23	1,38	1,16	0,99	
Range	4	4	4	4	4	

The results show that the mean scores for trust items ranged from 3.18 to 3.88. Item T5 recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.88), while Items T1 and T3 showed the lowest mean scores (M = 3.18). Median values ranged between 3 and 4, and the most frequent response across items was "agree." Standard deviation values (0.99–1.38) indicate moderate variability in students' trust toward AI-generated feedback. Item T5 likely reflects a dimension of trust related to reliability and perceived usefulness of AI in providing clear, immediate feedback. Its higher score suggests that students feel confident in AI's technical performance or consistency. In contrast, lower scores on T1 and T3 may indicate skepticism toward certain aspects of AI's interpretative or evaluative capabilities, hinting at an awareness that AI feedback may not fully replace human judgment.

To obtain an overall measure of trust, total trust scores were calculated by summing the five items for each participant. The overall mean trust score was M = 17.00, equivalent to an average of 3.40 per item, indicating a moderate level of trust. Individual scores ranged from 5 to 25, reflecting variation in students' acceptance of AI-generated feedback.

Students' critical reading ability was assessed using a five-item test with dichotomous scoring (1 = correct, 0 = incorrect). Descriptive statistics were calculated for each item to examine students' performance across higher-order reading skills.

Table 2. Individual Scores and Descriptive Statistics of the Critical Reading Test

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Total
P1	0	1	0	1	0	2
P2	1	1	1	1	1	5
P3	1	0	1	1	0	3
P4	0	1	0	0	0	1
P5	1	1	1	0	1	4
P6	1	1	1	1	1	5
P7	1	1	1	1	1	5
P8	1	1	1	1	1	5
P9	0	1	0	0	0	1

P10	1	1	1	1	1	5
P11	1	0	0	0	0	1
P12	1	1	1	1	1	5
P13	1	1	1	0	0	3
P14	1	1	1	1	1	5
P15	0	0	1	1	1	3
P16	1	1	0	1	0	3
P17	1	1	0	0	0	2
Mean	0,8	0,8	0,6	0,6	0,5	
Median	1	1	1	1	1	
Mode	1	1	1	1	1	
Std. Deviation	0,4	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,5	
Range	1	1	1	1	1	

The mean scores for individual test items ranged from 0.50 to 0.80, indicating that students correctly answered between 50% and 80% of the items. Items T1 and T2 yielded the highest mean scores, while Item T5 recorded the lowest mean score. Median and mode values across items were predominantly 1, suggesting that most students answered the majority of items correctly. The lower mean score on Item T5 may reflect the increased cognitive demand of evaluative and inferential tasks, requiring deeper engagement beyond surface comprehension. This aligns with the possibility of overreliance on AI feedback: students may accept AI suggestions for simpler tasks (reflected in higher trust scores) but fail to critically process complex reading questions independently.

Total critical reading scores were calculated by summing correct responses across all five items. The overall mean score was M = 3.35 out of 5, indicating moderate to relatively high critical reading performance. Scores ranged from 1 to 5, showing differences in students' critical reading ability. Spearman's rank correlation analysis revealed a positive but weak correlation between trust in AI feedback and critical reading performance ($\rho = 0.28$, $p = .27$), suggesting that higher trust in AI feedback does not automatically translate into stronger critical reading skills.

3.2 Discussion

The results indicate that EFL students demonstrated a moderate level of trust in AI-generated feedback. This finding suggests that students generally perceived AI feedback as useful and supportive during reading activities, particularly in terms of practicality and accessibility. These results are consistent with previous studies reporting that perceived usefulness and reliability play a central role in shaping students' trust in AI-supported learning systems [14], [18], [21].

Despite this moderate level of trust, students' critical reading performance remained moderate. While many students answered comprehension-based and analytical questions correctly, performance varied across items, with Item T5 being the most challenging. This suggests that higher-order skills such as evaluation and interpretation are not easily facilitated by AI alone. The findings support the theory of overreliance: students may accept AI outputs uncritically for simpler tasks (high trust scores) but do not necessarily develop deeper critical processing, leading to moderate or inconsistent performance on more demanding items [20], [31].

The correlation analysis confirmed a positive but weak relationship between trust and critical reading performance, not statistically significant. This indicates that while trust in AI is important, it cannot replace reflective thinking or pedagogical scaffolding, echoing prior research suggesting that uncritical reliance on AI can limit deeper engagement with texts [31].

The Teacher's Role in Human-AI Collaboration

These findings highlight the critical role of teachers in mediating AI-supported reading instruction. AI feedback provides immediate and consistent support, but teachers are essential for guiding students to interpret, question, and critically apply AI outputs. Human-AI collaboration ensures that learners do not over-rely on automated suggestions and instead engage in reflective analysis. Prior studies emphasize that teacher-mediated feedback scaffolds evaluative and interpretative reading skills in EFL contexts [15], [38]. A collaborative approach, where AI aids in generating ideas or summaries and teachers guide critical evaluation, may offer the most effective pathway for enhancing students' critical reading abilities.

Overall, this study contributes to understanding AI use in EFL reading instruction by showing that trust in AI alone does not guarantee improved critical reading. Critical reading development requires pedagogical scaffolding, reflective engagement, and guided interaction with AI-generated feedback. These insights underline the importance of designing AI-assisted learning experiences that balance automated support with active teacher guidance.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated undergraduate EFL students' trust in AI-generated feedback and its relationship with their critical reading performance in an EFL reading context. The findings indicate that students generally demonstrated a moderate level of trust in AI-generated feedback when it was used to support reading activities. At the same time, students achieved moderate to relatively high scores on the critical reading test, suggesting that AI-assisted feedback can function as a helpful learning support. However, variations in both trust levels and reading performance were observed among students, indicating that individual differences remain an important factor in AI-supported learning environments.

The correlational analysis showed that the relationship between students' trust in AI-generated feedback and their critical reading performance was positive but weak and statistically non-significant. This result suggests that although students who trusted AI feedback slightly more tended to achieve higher reading scores, trust alone was not a strong predictor of critical reading achievement. Therefore, higher confidence in AI-generated feedback does not necessarily translate into improved higher-order reading skills, particularly those involving analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of texts.

These findings lead to the conclusion that trust in AI-generated feedback, by itself, is insufficient to substantially enhance students' critical reading ability. While AI feedback offers immediate, consistent, and structured responses that may support comprehension, the development of critical reading skills requires active cognitive engagement, reflection, and guided learning processes. Without pedagogical scaffolding, students may rely on AI feedback in a surface-level manner rather than engaging critically with reading texts and feedback content.

From a practical perspective, this study implies that AI-generated feedback should be integrated as a complementary instructional tool rather than a substitute for teacher feedback in EFL reading instruction. Teachers are encouraged to guide students in critically evaluating AI-generated feedback and to design reading activities that promote higher-order thinking and reflection. In addition, incorporating AI literacy into EFL classrooms may help students develop responsible and critical use of AI tools. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, apply mixed-method designs, and further explore how different forms of AI feedback influence the development of critical reading skills over time.

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