

Integrating AI into EFL Learning: ChatGPT's Impact on Writing Skills

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Abstract

This paper examines the growing influence of generative AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, on the writing abilities of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Using semi-structured interviews, the study uncovers how AI-generated feedback not only shapes learners' confidence and writing proficiency but also encourages critical thinking. However, it also reports the challenges that arise from relying too heavily on AI, particularly in relation to academic integrity. While the findings reveal clear advantages of immediate, personalized feedback in enhancing writing skills, they also highlight the risk of learners' critical thinking diminishing when AI is overused. Ultimately, this study adds to the ongoing research about incorporating AI tools with traditional language learning methods, offering valuable insights into the future of EFL education and the crucial role of technology in the classroom.

Keywords: Generative AI, EFL learners, Writing skills, AI-generated feedback, Academic integrity

1. Introduction

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has fundamentally reshaped learning environments, particularly in language acquisition, a field that has traditionally relied on human interaction, repetition, and immersive experiences (Huang et al., 2022; Kohnke et al., 2022). With the introduction of generative AI tools, language learning is being transformed by the ability of these technologies to offer personalized, real-time feedback and support for learners. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where learners face unique challenges in mastering the nuances of writing, tools such as ChatGPT have emerged as valuable resources for helping students overcome some of these hurdles (Thorp, 2023). Writing, which is

often one of the most challenging skills to develop for non-native speakers, can be significantly enhanced through the targeted and instantaneous feedback provided by these tools.

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT have gained widespread popularity due to their ability to mimic human conversation and provide highly contextualized feedback on various tasks (King & ChatGPT, 2023). These tools use advanced natural language processing algorithms to understand and generate human-like text, making them well-suited to assist EFL learners in improving their writing skills. Unlike traditional language learning methods, which often rely on delayed feedback from teachers or peers, AI tools offer instant corrections and suggestions, allowing learners to immediately see where they have made errors and how they can improve their writing (Rudolph et al., 2023). This swiftness is particularly important in language learning, where frequent practice and reinforcement are key to mastering new skills. For EFL learners, the challenges of writing in English go beyond simple grammar and syntax. Writing in a second language requires a deep understanding of linguistic structures, cultural nuances, and context-specific vocabulary. Learners must not only know how to construct sentences but also how to use language effectively to convey meaning in different contexts (Van Dis et al., 2023). This can be particularly difficult for non-native speakers, as they may not have the same intuitive grasp of idiomatic expressions, tone, or the subtleties of formal and informal writing. Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, offer the potential to bridge this gap by providing learners with real-time feedback that is tailored to their individual needs.

One of the primary advantages of AI tools in language learning is their ability to provide personalized feedback (Barrot, 2023). In traditional classroom settings, teachers may struggle to provide individualized attention to every student due to time constraints and large class sizes. As a result, many learners do not receive the immediate and targeted feedback they need to improve their writing. Generative AI tools, on the other hand, can offer detailed feedback to each learner, identifying specific errors in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, as well as providing suggestions for improving sentence structure, clarity, and coherence (Kohnke et al., 2023). This personalized feedback allows learners to focus on their individual areas of weakness and work on improving them in real-time.

Moreover, the feedback provided by generative AI tools is not limited to surface-level corrections. These tools are capable of offering more nuanced suggestions that can help learners

improve their writing at a deeper level. For example, ChatGPT can identify issues with tone, formality, and appropriateness in a learner's writing, helping them to adjust their language to suit different contexts. This is particularly important for EFL learners, who may struggle with the cultural and contextual aspects of language use. By offering feedback that goes beyond grammar and syntax, generative AI tools can help learners develop a more sophisticated understanding of how to use language effectively in different situations (Barrot, 2023).

Despite the many benefits of generative AI tools in language learning, there are also potential challenges associated with their use, particularly in terms of over-reliance on AI and its impact on learners' ability to develop critical thinking skills and maintain academic integrity. One of the key concerns is that learners may become too dependent on AI-generated feedback, using it as a crutch rather than developing the ability to independently assess and improve their writing (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022). While AI tools can provide valuable support, it is important for learners to also develop the skills to critically evaluate their own work and make improvements without relying solely on AI. Over-reliance on AI tools can lead to a form of passive learning, where students focus more on correcting errors that the AI identifies rather than understanding why those errors occurred in the first place (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023). In this scenario, learners may become proficient at making surface-level corrections but fail to develop the deeper linguistic skills necessary for mastering a second language. Critical thinking, which involves the ability to analyze and evaluate one's own work, is a key component of language learning. Without the development of these skills, learners may struggle to become truly proficient in writing.

Another challenge associated with the use of generative AI tools is the potential impact on academic integrity. As AI tools become more sophisticated, there is a growing concern that students may use these tools to generate entire essays or assignments without fully engaging in the learning process (Teng, 2023). While AI tools can be used to assist with writing, it is important that learners do not become overly reliant on them to the point where they are no longer developing their own writing skills (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022). This raises important questions about the ethical use of AI in education and how institutions can ensure that learners are using these tools in a way that supports, rather than undermines, their learning. Furthermore,

it is essential to provide learners with clear guidelines on the appropriate use of AI tools in academic settings. Educational institutions must develop policies that address the ethical implications of AI use, ensuring that students are aware of the boundaries between legitimate assistance and academic dishonesty. By fostering a culture of ethical AI use, institutions can help learners benefit from the advantages of AI tools while maintaining the integrity of their academic work.

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT offer significant potential for enhancing EFL learners' writing skills by providing personalized, real-time feedback that helps learners improve their grammar, syntax, and overall writing proficiency. These tools can serve as valuable resources in language learning, particularly for learners who may not have access to individualized feedback in traditional classroom settings. However, it is important to address the challenges associated with over-reliance on AI and ensure that learners are developing critical thinking skills and maintaining academic integrity. By integrating AI tools into language learning in a balanced and ethical way, educators can harness the power of AI to support learners in their journey to language proficiency.

This research aims to explore how generative AI tools impact EFL learners' writing skills by providing feedback that is both immediate and personalized. The study will also assess the potential challenges posed by over-reliance on AI, particularly in terms of learners' ability to develop critical thinking and maintain academic integrity.

RQ1: How do generative AI tools influence the writing skills of EFL learners?

RQ2: What are the benefits and limitations of using AI-generated feedback in language learning?

RQ3: What are the potential risks, including over-reliance on AI and concerns about academic integrity?

2. Literature Review

The adoption of generative AI tools in education has witnessed exponential growth in recent years, driven by advancements in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Tools like

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, utilize sophisticated machine learning algorithms to perform a wide range of functions, from answering students' questions to providing personalized tutoring in real-time Celik et al. (2022). These tools offer tailored support to learners, making education more accessible and adaptable to individual needs. This surge in AI usage, especially in education, is transforming how learners interact with educational content and instructors, offering a new paradigm for personalized learning experiences. In the context of language learning, particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, generative AI tools are gaining attention for their potential to enhance learning outcomes. Language acquisition is a complex process that requires constant feedback, repetition, and practice. Writing, one of the most challenging aspects of language learning, demands even more attention because it involves not only understanding grammar and vocabulary but also mastering coherence, fluency, and argumentation Kostka and Toncelli (2023). In traditional classroom settings, providing immediate feedback to every student can be difficult due to time constraints and large class sizes. This is where AI tools like ChatGPT come into play.

Generative AI tools offer immense potential to improve language learning outcomes by providing real-time, personalized feedback to students. AI-driven feedback is valuable because it can target specific areas of weakness for each learner Mahapatra (2024). For example, when a student submits a writing exercise, AI tools can instantly identify and correct grammatical errors, suggest alternative vocabulary, and offer recommendations to improve sentence structure and overall coherence Guo and Wang (2024). This type of immediate feedback is crucial in language learning because it allows students to learn from their mistakes right away, reinforcing the correct forms and rules before bad habits have a chance to solidify (Guo & Wang, 2024). The ability of AI tools to provide real-time feedback also helps mitigate one of the biggest challenges in traditional language education: the delay between when a student submits work and when they receive feedback. In many EFL classrooms, students may have to wait several days or even weeks to get feedback on their written assignments, by which time the learning moment may have passed, making it harder for students to retain corrections Allen and Mizumoto (2024). With generative AI, this delay is eliminated, allowing students to immediately see their mistakes

and make corrections in real-time. This can significantly enhance the learning process by reinforcing correct language usage through immediate practice.

In a study by Wu and Lee (2020), AI-generated feedback was found to be particularly beneficial in improving student performance in subjects like writing, where the need for timely feedback is crucial for progress. Their research showed that students who received AI-generated feedback were more likely to revise their work and make substantial improvements in their writing. This indicates that AI tools, when properly integrated into language learning environments, can motivate students to engage more deeply with their writing tasks and develop better writing skills.

Numerous studies have highlighted how AI can support language learning by offering timely feedback on key writing components such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. For EFL learners, these aspects are particularly challenging because they require not only the knowledge of English rules but also the ability to apply them in real-time communication. Zhang and Li (2021) conducted a study that demonstrated that EFL learners who used AI tools for writing tasks showed marked improvements in their writing abilities, especially in terms of fluency, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. This improvement was largely attributed to the fact that AI tools provided learners with immediate feedback, which helped them correct errors and reinforce correct usage. Fluency, in particular, is one of the most important aspects of writing that AI tools can help improve. Fluency refers to the ability to write smoothly and coherently without frequent pauses or interruptions. For non-native speakers, fluency can be difficult to achieve because they may struggle with finding the right words or constructing grammatically correct sentences. AI tools like ChatGPT can assist learners by providing suggestions for alternative words, improving sentence structure, and encouraging learners to write more fluidly. In addition to fluency, coherence is another area where AI tools can have a significant impact. Coherence refers to the logical flow of ideas in writing, ensuring that sentences and paragraphs are connected in a meaningful way. Many EFL learners struggle with coherence because they may not fully understand how to structure their writing to make it clear and easy to follow. AI tools can offer suggestions for organizing ideas more effectively, ensuring that the learner's writing is coherent and logically structured.

However, while AI-generated feedback is helpful for surface-level corrections, it often lacks the depth needed to address more complex writing issues, such as tone, style, and argumentation. Gao et al. (2020) argue that AI tools are limited in their ability to provide feedback on higher-level writing skills because they are primarily designed to correct grammatical errors and improve sentence structure. While this type of feedback is valuable, it does not fully address the deeper aspects of writing, such as developing a persuasive argument, maintaining a consistent tone, or effectively engaging the reader.

Despite the many advantages of AI tools in language learning, there are also potential downsides that must be considered. One of the most significant challenges is the risk of over-reliance on AI-generated feedback. While these tools provide valuable assistance in correcting mistakes, there is a concern that learners may become too dependent on them, leading to a reduction in critical thinking and self-regulation skills. Critical thinking is essential in writing because it allows learners to evaluate their own work, identify weaknesses, and make improvements. If learners become too reliant on AI tools to identify and correct mistakes, they may not develop the ability to self-edit and improve their writing on their own.

Lin et al. (2019) warn that heavy reliance on AI can lead to superficial learning, where learners focus more on correcting surface-level errors rather than understanding the underlying language rules. For example, a learner who uses AI to correct grammatical mistakes may not fully understand why the corrections are necessary, leading to a lack of deeper understanding of the language. This type of superficial learning can hinder long-term language development because learners are not fully engaging with the material and are not developing the critical thinking skills needed to become proficient writers. Moreover, over-reliance on AI tools can also lead to a decrease in self-regulation skills. Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and control one's own learning process, including setting goals, tracking progress, and making adjustments as needed. When learners rely too heavily on AI tools, they may become passive in the learning process, allowing the AI to do the work for them rather than actively engaging with the material. This can lead to a decrease in motivation and a lack of personal responsibility for learning, which can negatively impact long-term language development. Another challenge associated with the use of generative AI tools in education is the issue of academic integrity. As AI tools become more sophisticated, there is a growing concern that students may use these tools to generate

entire essays or assignments without fully engaging in the learning process. This raises important questions about plagiarism and the ethical use of technology in academic settings. In some cases, students may rely on AI tools to do the majority of their work, which can lead to a lack of original thought and creativity in their writing. Plagiarism is a serious issue in academic environments, and the use of AI tools can make it easier for students to engage in unethical practices. For example, a student could use an AI tool to generate an essay or a research paper and submit it as their own work without giving credit to the AI. This not only violates academic integrity policies but also undermines the learning process because the student is not actively engaging with the material.

To address these concerns, educational institutions must develop clear guidelines for the ethical use of AI tools in language learning. Teachers and administrators must ensure that students understand the boundaries between using AI tools for assistance and relying on them to do the work. Additionally, institutions must implement measures to detect and prevent plagiarism, such as using plagiarism detection software or requiring students to submit drafts of their work to demonstrate their writing process. The adoption of generative AI tools in education offers numerous advantages for language learning, particularly in providing personalized, real-time feedback that can significantly enhance EFL learners' writing skills. However, there are also potential challenges that must be addressed, including the risk of over-reliance on AI, a reduction in critical thinking and self-regulation skills, and concerns about academic integrity. While AI tools can be valuable resources in language learning, they should be used as supplements to traditional teaching methods, not as replacements. By integrating AI tools into the classroom in a balanced and ethical way, educators can help learners benefit from the advantages of AI while avoiding the potential pitfalls.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather detailed insights from EFL learners. The focus on qualitative methods allows for a deeper understanding of learners' experiences with generative AI tools, particularly in how these tools influence their writing skills and learning behaviours.

3.2 Participants

Participants will include EFL learners from various linguistic backgrounds who have used generative AI tools like ChatGPT for at least one year. By selecting learners with different proficiency levels and educational experiences, the study aims to capture a broad range of perspectives on the impact of AI on writing.

3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with participants to gather insights into how they perceive the use of generative AI tools in their writing process. The interviews will focus on topics such as confidence in writing, reliance on AI feedback, and any concerns about academic integrity. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis.

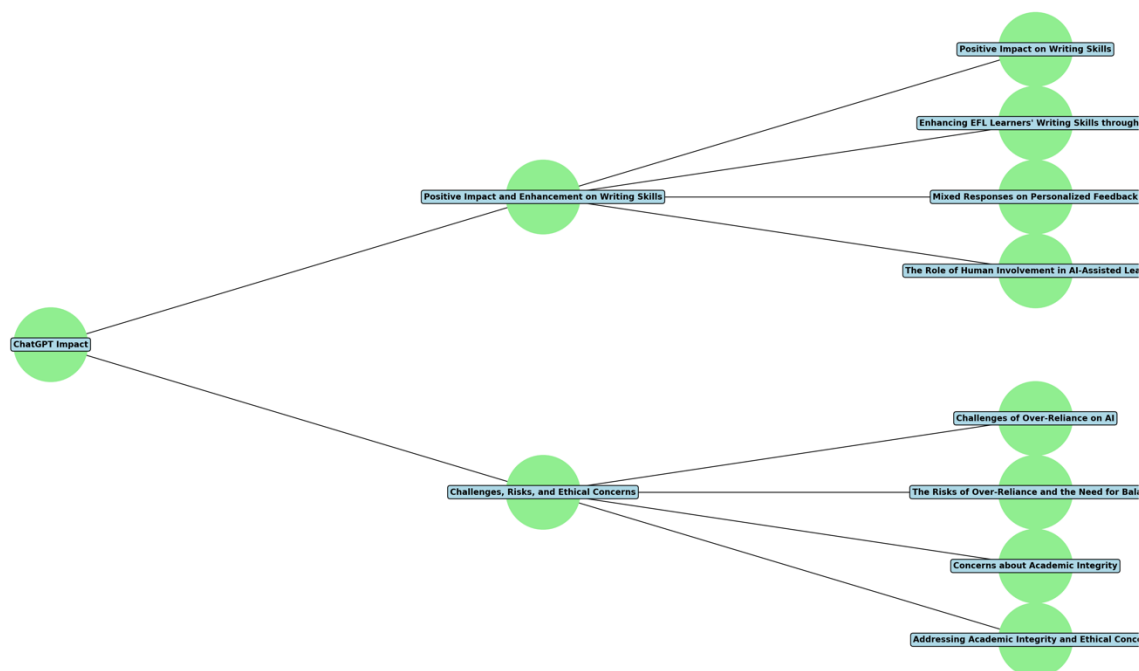
3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to identify key themes emerging from the interview data. These themes will be categorized based on the benefits and challenges of using AI tools, with a particular focus on how these tools influence learners' writing skills and critical thinking abilities.

4. Results

The impact of ChatGPT on writing skills is twofold, encompassing both positive enhancements and potential challenges. On one hand, AI has significantly contributed to improving writing skills, particularly for EFL learners, by providing personalized feedback and supporting human involvement in the learning process. On the other hand, there are growing concerns regarding over-reliance on AI, risks related to academic integrity, and ethical considerations (see Figure 1).

Mind Map: ChatGPT Impact with Positive and Challenging Aspects



4.1. Positive Impact and Enhancement on Writing Skills

4.1.1. Positive Impact on Writing Skills

Participants widely reported that using AI tools like ChatGPT improved their writing skills, particularly in grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. The immediate feedback provided by these tools allowed learners to correct their mistakes in real-time, leading to faster improvements in their writing abilities. One participant noted, “ChatGPT helps me catch errors that I wouldn’t notice on my own, especially with grammar.”

Further, students found ChatGPT incredibly useful for catching grammar mistakes in real-time, which helped them improve quickly and confidently. One student shared, “It corrects my sentences as I write, which makes me feel more sure of my writing.”

4.1.2. Challenges of Over-Reliance on AI

A significant concern raised by participants was the risk of becoming overly dependent on AI tools for corrections. Some learners admitted that they often rely on ChatGPT to edit their work rather than attempting to correct mistakes independently. This reliance, they fear, may hinder the development of critical thinking skills and self-editing abilities. As one interviewee shared,

“Sometimes I just let ChatGPT fix my sentences without trying to understand the mistakes I made.”

4.1.3. Academic Integrity Concerns

Participants also expressed concerns regarding academic integrity, particularly the temptation to use AI-generated content without proper attribution. Some learners admitted to using ChatGPT to generate entire paragraphs or ideas, raising ethical questions about authorship. “I sometimes worry about whether using ChatGPT too much might be considered cheating,” one participant confessed.

4.1.4. Personalized Feedback

While most participants appreciated the personalized feedback provided by AI, some expressed concerns that the feedback lacked the nuance that a human teacher could offer. Complex issues such as tone, style, and argument development were areas where AI tools fell short. “ChatGPT is great for grammar, but it doesn't really help with making my writing more persuasive,” remarked one learner.

4.2. Challenges, Risks, and Ethical Concerns

4.2.1. Enhancing EFL Learners' Writing Skills through AI

The results align with previous studies that suggest generative AI tools can significantly enhance learners' writing skills by providing immediate, targeted feedback. The convenience of receiving corrections in real-time allows learners to improve their writing on the spot, fostering greater confidence in their abilities. However, while AI excels in correcting surface-level errors, it is less effective at addressing more nuanced aspects of writing, such as rhetorical strategies and stylistic choices. “ChatGPT has made writing easier and quicker by giving me immediate feedback on my mistakes, but sometimes it gives too lengthy explanation that confuse me.”

4.2.2. The Risks of Over-Reliance and the Need for Balance

The study highlights the need for balance in using AI tools. Over-reliance on AI for corrections can stifle the development of critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills. Educators

must ensure that AI tools are used as supplements rather than replacements for traditional teaching methods. Encouraging students to reflect on the feedback provided by AI and to make independent revisions can help mitigate the risk of dependency. The supporting comment is “Sometimes I rely too much on ChatGPT to fix my writing, which makes me worry that I am not learning to improve on my own.”

4.2.3. Addressing Academic Integrity and Ethical Concerns

The findings also underscore the importance of addressing ethical concerns surrounding AI use. Clear guidelines must be established to help learners understand the boundaries of using AI-generated content. Institutions should focus on teaching students how to use AI ethically, ensuring that they can benefit from the technology without compromising academic integrity. A student particular said “I sometimes worry that using AI-generated content without fully understanding or acknowledging it might be considered cheating, so I try to limit how much I rely on it.”

4.2.4. The Role of Human Involvement in AI-Assisted Learning

While generative AI tools offer valuable support, human teachers remain essential for addressing more complex writing issues. Educators provide the critical thinking, contextual understanding, and empathy that AI tools currently lack. This study reinforces the idea that AI tools should be integrated into the classroom as complementary resources rather than as replacements for human instructors. A student remarked, “While AI helps with instant corrections, it can't replace the nuanced feedback and deeper insights I get from my teacher, especially when it comes to improving the overall quality of my writing.”

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate both the positive impacts and challenges associated with using AI tools like ChatGPT for enhancing the writing skills of EFL learners. On the positive side, the research highlights that AI tools offer immediate and personalized feedback, which significantly helps students improve their grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. This real-time support enhances learners' confidence and accelerates their writing development,

particularly when dealing with basic language errors. The accessibility and efficiency of AI-generated feedback also make these tools appealing in educational contexts where one-on-one human feedback may not always be available.

However, the study also indicates to key challenges. One of the main concerns is the potential over-reliance on AI tools, where learners may rely too heavily on AI to correct mistakes, thus neglecting the development of their own critical thinking and self-editing abilities. This risk underscores the need for a balanced approach, where AI is used as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods. Educators should encourage students to actively engage with the feedback they receive from AI, helping them understand and internalize corrections rather than passively accepting them.

Another significant concern raised in the study is related to academic integrity. Some participants expressed apprehension about using AI-generated content, worrying about the ethical boundaries of such assistance. This highlights the need for clear institutional guidelines that define how AI tools can be used ethically in academic settings. Providing students with a framework for the responsible use of AI can prevent misuse and ensure that learners can benefit from AI tools while maintaining the integrity of their work.

Lastly, the research reinforces the enduring importance of human involvement in learning, especially when addressing more complex writing issues like rhetorical strategies, tone, and argument development. While AI tools offer practical benefits for surface-level corrections, they currently fall short in areas that require deeper cognitive engagement and creativity. Human educators play a crucial role in guiding learners through these more nuanced aspects of writing, making them indispensable in a comprehensive language learning strategy. The integration of AI tools should thus be viewed as a complementary approach, where technology enhances but does not replace the irreplaceable human element in education.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that generative AI tools like ChatGPT can significantly enhance EFL learners' writing skills, particularly by providing immediate and personalized feedback. However, the risks of over-reliance on AI and concerns regarding academic integrity must be carefully managed. This study's reliance on a small sample of participants limits the

generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research means that the results are based on self-reported experiences, which may not fully capture the scope of AI's impact on writing skills. Future research should expand the participant pool to include learners from various educational backgrounds and proficiency levels. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to observe how continued use of AI tools affects learners' writing abilities over time. Moreover, future studies should explore the development of hybrid models that combine AI-generated feedback with human instruction. The findings suggest that AI tools have the potential to enhance language learning, but they must be integrated thoughtfully into educational systems. Educators should be trained to guide students in using AI effectively and ethically, ensuring that learners benefit from these tools while maintaining academic integrity.

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