

RESEARCH ARTICLE**The Effectiveness of ChatGPT in Developing English Writing Skills among University Students: A Conceptual Review**

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Abstract:

The emergence of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced significant changes in the field of English language education. Among the most prominent technologies is ChatGPT, a generative AI-based conversational system capable of producing, revising, explaining, and evaluating written language. Its rapid adoption among university students has generated considerable interest in its potential to support English writing development. This conceptual review examines the effectiveness of ChatGPT in developing English writing skills among university students, with particular attention to grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, coherence, cohesion, organization, academic style, revision, feedback, learner autonomy, and writing confidence. The paper critically examines the pedagogical opportunities and challenges associated with integrating ChatGPT into university-level English writing instruction. The review argues that ChatGPT can function as an accessible writing assistant by providing immediate feedback, generating examples, supporting brainstorming, facilitating revision, and enabling repeated writing practice. It can also encourage learner autonomy by allowing students to obtain individualized assistance beyond classroom hours. However, the effectiveness of ChatGPT depends heavily on how it is used. Excessive dependence on AI-generated text may reduce students' independent writing practice, critical thinking, creativity, and ownership of academic work. Concerns related to academic integrity, plagiarism, inaccurate information, fabricated references, privacy, bias, and unequal access further complicate its educational application. The paper proposes a human-AI collaborative model in which students remain responsible for generating ideas, drafting, evaluating AI suggestions, revising their work, and producing the final text, while teachers provide pedagogical guidance and assessment. The paper concludes that ChatGPT should not be viewed primarily as a replacement for writing instruction but as a supplementary pedagogical tool that can strengthen the writing process when integrated critically, ethically, and purposefully.

Keywords: ChatGPT, generative AI, English writing, university students, EFL learners, academic writing, AI-assisted writing, learner autonomy, English language education

1. Introduction

English writing is an essential academic and professional skill for university students. In higher education, students are expected to communicate ideas through essays, reports, assignments, research papers, project documentation, examinations, presentations, emails, and other forms of academic and professional writing. For students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), developing effective writing skills can be particularly challenging. Difficulties may occur in grammar, vocabulary, sentence formation, paragraph development, coherence, cohesion, organization, academic style, punctuation, and appropriate use of sources.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Traditional English writing instruction generally involves teacher explanations, model texts, writing exercises, peer review, teacher correction, and revision. These approaches remain valuable, but several challenges affect their implementation. University teachers often work with large groups of students and have limited time to provide detailed individual feedback. Students may also have different proficiency levels and learning needs. Consequently, opportunities for personalized writing support can be restricted.

The development of generative Artificial Intelligence has introduced a new dimension to writing education. ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, can generate human-like responses to natural-language prompts and can perform a variety of text-related tasks. Students can use it to brainstorm ideas, develop outlines, obtain explanations of grammatical structures, identify possible improvements, generate examples, summarize information, and receive feedback on their writing.

The emergence of ChatGPT has generated both enthusiasm and concern in higher education. Supporters emphasize its potential to democratize access to writing assistance and provide immediate individualized support. Critics, however, argue that unrestricted use may encourage students to outsource writing tasks to AI systems. This raises questions about whether students are actually developing writing competence or simply obtaining well-formed texts.

The central issue is therefore not whether ChatGPT can produce good English, because current generative AI systems can often produce linguistically sophisticated text. The more important educational question is whether interaction with ChatGPT can help university students **develop their own English writing ability**.

This conceptual review addresses this question by examining the potential effectiveness of ChatGPT across different dimensions of English writing and by considering the conditions necessary for responsible and pedagogically meaningful use.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 English Writing as a Process

Writing is not simply the production of grammatically correct sentences. Effective academic writing involves a complex process of planning, organizing, drafting, revising, editing, and reflecting.

A process-oriented approach generally recognizes several stages:

1. Idea generation
2. Planning
3. Organization
4. Drafting
5. Feedback
6. Revision
7. Editing
8. Final production

This model is particularly relevant to the use of ChatGPT. AI can potentially provide support at several stages, but the learner should remain actively involved in the process.

For example, ChatGPT may help a student generate possible ideas for an essay, but the student should evaluate those ideas and decide which are relevant. Similarly, ChatGPT may suggest changes to a draft, but the student

RESEARCH ARTICLE

should understand the reasons for accepting or rejecting those suggestions.

Thus, the educational value of ChatGPT depends less on its ability to generate text and more on its ability to facilitate a meaningful writing process.

3. ChatGPT and English Writing Development

ChatGPT can potentially support multiple dimensions of English writing. These include grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, paragraph development, coherence, cohesion, academic style, and revision.

3.1 Development of Grammatical Accuracy

Grammar is a major challenge for many EFL university students. Common problems include subject-verb agreement, tense selection, articles, prepositions, sentence fragments, word order, and complex sentence construction.

ChatGPT can provide immediate explanations of grammatical errors. A student can submit a sentence and ask the system to identify the problem and explain the relevant rule.

For example, a student may write:

“The students was interested in learning English.”

ChatGPT can identify the subject-verb agreement problem and explain why “were” is appropriate.

The pedagogical value lies not simply in receiving the corrected sentence but in understanding the grammatical principle. Students can then be encouraged to produce additional examples independently.

ChatGPT can also create grammar exercises based on specific weaknesses. A student struggling with articles can request targeted practice involving “a,” “an,” and “the.” A student having difficulty with verb tenses can request contextual exercises.

However, students should not blindly accept every grammatical recommendation. AI-generated explanations can occasionally be incomplete or contextually inappropriate. Teacher supervision remains important, particularly for advanced grammatical issues.

4. Vocabulary Development through ChatGPT

Academic writing requires a wide and appropriate vocabulary. University students often struggle to select words that are precise, formal, contextually appropriate, and suitable for academic communication.

ChatGPT can support vocabulary development in several ways.

Students can ask the system to:

- provide synonyms;
- explain word meanings;
- identify antonyms;
- provide example sentences;
- explain collocations;
- distinguish formal and informal vocabulary;
- suggest discipline-specific vocabulary;
- create vocabulary exercises.

For example, a student writing about environmental sustainability may request vocabulary associated with climate change, renewable energy, conservation, and sustainable development.

ChatGPT can also help learners understand differences between similar words. This can be particularly useful because direct translation from the first language may produce inappropriate word choices. However, vocabulary development requires more than collecting synonyms. Students need to understand

RESEARCH ARTICLE

meaning, register, collocation, context, and usage. Therefore, AI-generated vocabulary should be examined within authentic contexts.

5. Sentence Construction and Complexity

University writing frequently requires students to move beyond simple sentences and construct clear and logically connected complex sentences.

ChatGPT can provide examples of sentence transformation and sentence combination.

A student may provide two simple sentences and ask for academically appropriate ways to combine them. The AI can demonstrate different structures using conjunctions, relative clauses, participial phrases, or other grammatical resources.

This can help learners observe how experienced writers construct sentences.

ChatGPT can also explain why one sentence is more concise or formal than another.

However, students should avoid adopting unnecessarily complex sentences simply because they appear more academic. Effective writing requires clarity, precision, and appropriateness rather than complexity for its own sake.

6. Development of Paragraph Writing

A well-developed paragraph generally contains a clear central idea, supporting information, explanation, examples, and appropriate transitions.

Many university students experience difficulty developing paragraphs beyond a few disconnected sentences. ChatGPT can help students understand paragraph structure by generating model paragraphs based on specific topics. Students can then analyse the organization of the model and compare it with their own writing.

A productive activity could involve:

Topic sentence → Supporting point → Evidence/example → Explanation → Concluding/linking sentence

Students can ask ChatGPT to identify whether their paragraph contains these components.

However, the student should write the paragraph rather than simply copying an AI-generated version.

7. Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence refers to the logical organization and meaningful connection of ideas, while cohesion concerns linguistic devices that connect sentences and paragraphs.

Students may produce grammatically correct sentences but still struggle to create a coherent argument.

ChatGPT can provide feedback on:

- logical sequence;
- transitions;
- repeated ideas;
- paragraph organization;
- linking expressions;
- unclear references;
- unnecessary sentences.

Students can ask questions such as:

“Does the argument in this paragraph progress logically?”

or

“Identify places where transitions between ideas could be improved.”

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Such interaction can encourage students to think about writing as communication rather than merely grammar correction.

8. Academic Writing Style

University students are expected to use appropriate academic language. Academic writing typically requires clarity, objectivity, precision, formal vocabulary, appropriate hedging, and logical argumentation. ChatGPT can demonstrate differences between informal and academic expressions.

For example, a student may ask the system to explain how conversational language can be revised for an academic context.

This may help learners develop awareness of register.

However, academic style should not be reduced to replacing simple words with difficult vocabulary. Students need to understand the communicative purpose of academic writing, evidence-based argumentation, appropriate citation, and disciplinary conventions.

9. ChatGPT as a Writing Feedback Tool

Feedback is one of the most significant areas in which ChatGPT can support writing development. Traditional teacher feedback can be detailed and pedagogically valuable, but teachers often face time constraints. ChatGPT can provide immediate formative feedback that students can use during the drafting process.

Possible feedback categories include:

- grammar;
- vocabulary;
- sentence structure;
- organization;
- coherence;
- cohesion;
- clarity;
- academic tone;
- punctuation.

The immediate nature of AI feedback allows students to engage in repeated revision.

A possible cycle is:

Draft → AI feedback → Student evaluation → Revision → Teacher feedback → Final draft

This model is preferable to:

AI generation → Submission

because the former requires active student engagement.

10. ChatGPT and the Revision Process

Revision is central to effective writing. However, many students treat writing as a one-stage activity in which they produce a draft and submit it.

ChatGPT can encourage iterative revision.

Students can ask the system to identify areas requiring improvement and then revise their work independently.

They can compare their original and revised versions and reflect on the changes.

Teachers can also design activities where students maintain a revision record:

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Original	AI Suggestion	Student Decision Reason
Original sentence	Suggested revision	Accepted/rejected Explanation
Original paragraph	Organization suggestion	Modified Reason
Such activities make students responsible for evaluating AI output.		

11. Privacy and Ethical Issues

Students may unknowingly enter personal information, unpublished academic work, institutional documents, or sensitive research data into AI systems.

Universities should therefore educate students about responsible data use.

Ethical AI literacy should include awareness of:

- privacy;
- data protection;
- authorship;
- intellectual property;
- bias;
- transparency;
- academic integrity.

These issues are becoming increasingly important as AI becomes integrated into education.

12. Teacher's Role in ChatGPT-Assisted Writing

The emergence of ChatGPT does not make English teachers unnecessary. Instead, it changes the nature of their role.

Teachers can become:

- facilitators of AI-supported learning;
- designers of writing activities;
- evaluators of AI-generated content;
- providers of personalized guidance;
- instructors of AI literacy;
- mentors in academic integrity.

Teachers should help students understand when AI assistance is useful and when independent writing is necessary.

For example, an effective classroom task may require students to submit:

1. their initial draft;
2. selected ChatGPT feedback;
3. their evaluation of that feedback;
4. revised writing;
5. a short reflection.

This approach makes AI use visible and educationally meaningful.

13. A Human-AI Collaborative Model for English Writing

This conceptual review proposes a **Human-AI Collaborative Writing Model**.

Stage 1: Idea Generation

The student identifies the topic and generates initial ideas independently.

Stage 2: Planning

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The student develops a thesis statement and outline.

Stage 3: Drafting

The student writes the first draft without allowing AI to generate the entire text.

Stage 4: AI-Assisted Feedback

ChatGPT is used to identify possible language and organizational problems.

Stage 5: Critical Evaluation

The student evaluates each AI recommendation.

Stage 6: Revision

The student revises the text independently.

Stage 7: Teacher Review

The teacher provides pedagogical and content-related feedback.

Stage 8: Reflection

The student explains what was learned and how the writing improved.

This model preserves student ownership while exploiting the strengths of AI.

14. Pedagogical Implications

The integration of ChatGPT has several implications for university English education.

First, writing instruction should move from a product-only approach toward a process-oriented approach. Assessment should consider planning, drafting, revision, and reflection.

Second, teachers need professional development in generative AI. Understanding how AI works, what it can and cannot do, and how students may misuse it is increasingly important.

Third, universities should develop AI literacy. Students need to understand prompting, verification, bias, privacy, academic integrity, and responsible use.

Fourth, assessment methods may need to evolve. Traditional take-home writing tasks can be particularly vulnerable to AI-generated responses. Institutions may increasingly combine written assignments with oral presentations, reflective statements, in-class writing, process portfolios, and individualized discussions.

15. Research Gap

Although interest in ChatGPT and language education has grown rapidly, several research gaps remain.

First, much of the existing discussion focuses on perceptions and potential rather than long-term improvement in students' independent writing competence.

Second, there is a need for more longitudinal research examining whether repeated ChatGPT use leads to measurable improvements in writing after AI assistance is removed.

Third, more research is required across different proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds.

Fourth, the distinction between AI-assisted writing and AI-generated writing requires greater conceptual clarity.

Fifth, research should investigate which specific forms of ChatGPT interaction produce the greatest learning benefits.

For example, asking ChatGPT to generate an essay may produce a high-quality text but limited learning, whereas asking it to identify errors in a student's own draft may provide greater developmental value.

16. Conceptual Propositions

Based on the review, the following propositions are suggested:

Proposition 1: ChatGPT-assisted feedback can contribute positively to the development of grammatical

RESEARCH ARTICLE

accuracy when learners actively evaluate and apply the feedback.

Proposition 2: ChatGPT can support vocabulary development by providing contextualized explanations, examples, and practice activities.

Proposition 3: ChatGPT-supported revision can improve students' awareness of coherence, cohesion, organization, and academic style.

Proposition 4: Guided use of ChatGPT can strengthen learner autonomy by increasing access to individualized writing support.

Proposition 5: Unrestricted dependence on ChatGPT may reduce opportunities for independent writing practice.

Proposition 6: Teacher guidance moderates the relationship between ChatGPT use and writing development.

Proposition 7: AI literacy and critical evaluation skills are necessary conditions for effective ChatGPT-supported writing.

Proposition 8: Human-AI collaborative writing is educationally more sustainable than complete AI-generated writing.

17. Recommendations

Based on the conceptual analysis, the following recommendations are proposed.

For Students

Students should:

- develop their own ideas before using ChatGPT;
- use AI primarily for learning and feedback;
- verify AI-generated information;
- avoid submitting AI-generated text as original work;
- maintain records of substantial AI assistance;
- develop independent writing ability alongside AI skills.

For Teachers

Teachers should:

- integrate ChatGPT into process-based writing activities;
- teach students how to evaluate AI responses;
- develop AI-supported revision tasks;
- provide clear instructions concerning acceptable AI use;
- assess students' writing processes as well as final products;
- combine AI feedback with teacher and peer feedback.

For Universities

Universities should:

- develop institutional AI policies;
- provide faculty training;
- promote AI literacy;
- protect student privacy;
- review assessment practices;
- encourage responsible and ethical use of generative AI.

18. Conclusion

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ChatGPT has introduced a significant new dimension to English writing education at the university level. Its ability to generate text, provide explanations, suggest revisions, offer examples, and interact with learners creates considerable potential for supporting EFL students. The technology can assist learners with grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, paragraph development, coherence, cohesion, academic style, revision, and self-directed practice. It can provide immediate feedback and make individualized writing support more accessible. However, the effectiveness of ChatGPT cannot be judged solely by the quality of the texts it generates. The central educational concern is whether students become better writers through interaction with the technology. This distinction is crucial. If students use ChatGPT simply to generate complete assignments, the technology may reduce learning and undermine academic integrity. If students use it to brainstorm, question, revise, evaluate, and reflect, it can become a powerful learning resource. Therefore, the most appropriate approach is neither unrestricted adoption nor complete prohibition. A **human-AI collaborative model** provides a more balanced pathway. Students should remain responsible for ideas, arguments, drafting, decision-making, and final writing. ChatGPT should function as an assistant that provides additional feedback and practice opportunities, while teachers remain responsible for pedagogical guidance, assessment, ethical instruction, and authentic human interaction.

The future of English writing education is therefore unlikely to be defined by a choice between teachers and AI. Instead, it will increasingly involve purposeful collaboration between learners, teachers, and intelligent technologies. The key challenge for universities is to ensure that AI strengthens rather than replaces the cognitive, creative, communicative, and reflective processes that constitute genuine writing development. When used critically, ethically, and pedagogically, ChatGPT has the potential to move English writing instruction toward a more personalized, interactive, iterative, and learner-centred model. Its greatest value is not in writing **for** students, but in helping students learn how to write **better for themselves**.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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