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EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF CHATGPT AS AN AUTOMATED SCORING AND FEEDBACK TOOL ON ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE IN THE MEKONG DELTA

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Abstract

In the digital era, ChatGPT has attracted considerable attention to English teaching and learning. A quasi-experimental study was conducted to investigate the effects of using ChatGPT as an automated scoring and feedback tool on 12 English-major students' writing essays in the autonomous learning process at a university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, over ten weeks. Quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-assignments were examined on four components of IELTS writing task 2, including task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammar range and accuracy. Additionally, qualitative data were from semi-structured interviews with 8 voluntary students. The findings of the pre- and post-assignments indicated that the participants' writing ability was improved after the ChatGPT intervention. The qualitative results revealed that students felt more confident in writing essays than before. They believed that ChatGPT could become a useful assistant instrument for students in practicing writing skills autonomously if and only if they knew how to use it effectively. However, they had many difficulties with complex vocabulary and structures, and inaccurate ideas from ChatGPT.

Keywords: Automated feedback, ChatGPT, English writing skills, learner autonomy.

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KIỂM TRA NHỮNG ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA CHATGPT NHƯ LÀ MỘT CÔNG CỤ CHẤM ĐIỂM TỰ ĐỘNG VÀ NHẬN XÉT SẢN PHẨM BÀI VIẾT CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH Ở ĐỒNG BẰNG SÔNG CỬU LONG

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Tóm tắt

Trong thời đại kỹ thuật số, ChatGPT đã thu hút được sự chú ý đáng kể trong dạy và học tiếng Anh. Một nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm được thực hiện nhằm đánh giá những tác động của việc dùng ChatGPT như là một công cụ chấm điểm tự động và nhận xét các bài luận tiếng Anh của 12 sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh trong quá trình tự học tại một trường đại học ở Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long, Việt Nam, trong 10 tuần. Dữ liệu định lượng được thu thập qua các bài luận tiếng Anh trước và sau khi can thiệp, đánh giá theo bốn tiêu chí của bài viết thứ 2 theo dạng thức bài thi IELTS gồm mức độ trả lời đúng và đầy đủ yêu cầu đề bài, tính mạch lạc và sự liên kết giữa các ý, vốn từ vựng và cách sử dụng từ, sự phong phú và chính xác về cấu trúc ngữ pháp. Bên cạnh đó, dữ liệu định tính thu được từ những cuộc phỏng vấn 8 sinh viên với các câu hỏi mở. Kết quả từ các bài luận trước và sau thực nghiệm cho thấy khả năng viết tiếng Anh của sinh viên có cải thiện sau khi dùng ChatGPT can thiệp. Kết quả định tính cho thấy sinh viên tự tin hơn khi viết luận bằng tiếng Anh so với trước khi tham gia thực nghiệm. Các sinh viên này tin rằng ChatGPT có thể trở thành một công cụ hỗ trợ việc tự học kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh hữu hiệu khi và chỉ khi họ biết cách sử dụng nó hiệu quả. Tuy nhiên, sinh viên cũng gặp những khó khăn khi ChatGPT cung cấp những từ vựng và cấu trúc phức tạp, và ý tưởng chưa chính xác.

Từ khóa: *ChatGPT, nhận xét tự động, kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh, tự học.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in language education, particularly with the emergence of chat generative pretrained transformer (ChatGPT), has sparked interest among a number of researchers and educators. Several prior studies in this field have highlighted the significance of ChatGPT in English teaching, learning, and assessment around the world (e.g., Meniado, 2023). Specifically, some research related to applying ChatGPT for English-major students in higher education to improve their writing skills has been considered around the globe (Abdi et al., 2024; Al-Sofi, 2024; Kurt & Kurt, 2024; Sultan et al., 2025) and in Vietnam as well (Tran & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen, 2024; Lai & Trinh, 2025). However, most of the research was conducted in the classroom or integrated into the English education under teachers' instruction, and limited research in this field has explored the role of ChatGPT in concrete settings in English writing (Özçelik & Ekşi, 2024).

At Dong Thap University in the Mekong Delta, Southern Vietnam, the majority of students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages came from other areas in the South to the central region of Vietnam and had relatively low English proficiency (Le, 2019). To date, a few studies have been conducted to enhance the writing skills of English-major students (e.g., Do, 2014; Le et al., 2025). It has been noted that no research related to ChatGPT for students to apply in writing has been conducted at Dong Thap University before Vo's study (2025) for TESOL postgraduate students. Moreover, the present student-researchers have studied ChatGPT autonomously and found its advantages in marking essays and giving comments on them. They would like their major mates to apply this approach in practicing English writing skills outside the classes. Hence, the present study aimed at assessing the effects of ChatGPT as an automated scoring and feedback tool for students majoring in English to practice their writing skills autonomously. To obtain this aim, two research questions were raised: (1) *What are the effects of ChatGPT as an automated scoring and feedback tool on English majors' writing essays?* (2) *What are students' perspectives on using ChatGPT in their writing performance autonomously?*

2. Literature review

2.1. Writing and Its Problems in Learning English as a Foreign Language

Writing plays a crucial role in acquiring English proficiency, as it is a productive skill (Le et al., 2025). It requires learners to share their thoughts, opinions, and controversies with others in a logical form. Moreover, it is not only a skill in language learning, but also the learners' ability to apply grammar, words, and syntax in appropriate settings (Anjani, 2025; Hidayatun, 2021). Ampa and Quraisy (2018) indicated five elements of English writing skills, such as structure, vocabulary, content, organization, and mechanics, for EFL learners to use in their writing performance. However, integrating those components into academic writing productions challenges language learners. Do (2014) conducted a study and indicated that English majors at Dong Thap University faced difficulties with the use of English vocabulary and the content when writing essays. In a study by Le (2019), many participants in the interviews admitted that they met a number of problems when practicing writing skills autonomously because they had no one to give feedback or assess their writing performance. Furthermore, Le et al. (2025) explored the impacts of utilizing reading online newspapers and magazines for TESOL majors to improve their writing skills and learner autonomy abilities. Yet, it is necessary to investigate other ways to support learners who can be able to enhance their writing skills autonomously, especially in the AI technology nowadays.

2.2. ChatGPT Used in Learning English at Higher Education

ChatGPT, an AI-powered large language model developed by OpenAI (available at <https://chat.openai.com>) in 2022, was available in various versions, including ChatGPT-3,

ChatGPT-3.5, ChatGPT-4, and ChatGPT-5 at the time this article was written. Accordingly, ChatGPT is classified as a type of language model known as Generative Pre-trained Transformers (GPT) (Fui-Hoon Nah et al., 2023). GPT category falls under the broader classification of Large Language Models, which utilize deep learning techniques to train on vast datasets (Cascella et al., 2023). According to Dönmez et al. (2023), this tool is recognized as a beneficial instrument for tasks in Natural Language Processing. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2023) contribute to the academic discourse by asserting that ChatGPT is specifically designed and optimized for conversational applications, delivering human-like responses by effectively utilizing its extensive knowledge base. It connects computers or other digital devices to support the creation of text in a natural, open-ended, and human-written style in diverse topics through a chatbot (Uyar & Büyükahıska, 2025; Zhai, 2022).

According to Rajendran and Yunus (2021), both teachers and students need to equip themselves with their own technological abilities to achieve lifelong learning in the digital era. Over the past three years, the emergence of this tool has had a significant impact on language education, particularly in the field of English. To date, numerous studies on the application of ChatGPT in teaching and learning English, encompassing four skills, vocabulary, and grammar, have been conducted on the world, examining the perceptions and practices of EFL teachers and students, and revealing both its merits and limitations. For instance, Hong (2023) conducted a study to explain the structures, duties, and some popular misconceptions of ChatGPT. Additionally, Hong (2023) indicated that ChatGPT would bring more chances for teachers as well as universities to foster second or foreign languages in teaching, assessment, and research fields. According to Kohnke et al. (2023), ChatGPT can help teachers and students in teaching and learning languages, especially for new users, since it can go from starter to advanced levels. In Vietnam, Ho (2024) conducted a study with 120 Vietnamese-speaking students at a university in Da Nang, central Vietnam, who used ChatGPT in learning English. She found that although ChatGPT helped students with vocabulary, translation, grammar correction, and paraphrasing, they still needed teachers' instructions.

On applying this tool to writing skills in teaching and learning languages in higher education, studies related to this field have risen and developed. The educators around the world found that ChatGPT brought many benefits to EFL students, namely developing their writing skills and productions, and learner autonomy (e.g., Cung et al., 2025; Lai & Trinh, 2025; Le et al., 2023; Khampusaen, 2025; Tseng & Lin, 2024; Yuan et al., 2024). Yet, they met some drawbacks of overdependence on ChatGPT, the accuracy of information provided from ChatGPT, decreasing their creativity, personal and ethical affairs (Le et al., 2023; Cung et al., 2025), plagiarism, and less critical thinking (Yuan et al., 2024).

In conclusion, ChatGPT has been applied in education in general, and in teaching and learning languages in particular. Besides, it has been utilized in English writing skills in many contexts all over the world.

2.3. ChatGPT Used as an Automated Scoring and Feedback Tool in Self-practicing English Writing Essays

Learner autonomy has played a vital role in learning languages for a long time via a number of prior studies (e.g., Benson, 2006; Chowdhury, 2021; Dang, 2012; Holec, 1981; Le, 2019; Pham & Le, 2024; Tuan, 2021). Scholars have defined the term 'learner autonomy' as learners' responsibility, willingness, and self-regulation for their study. Besides, students should be able to engage in social interactions to develop their autonomy (Little, 2007; Oxford, 2003). Additionally, Le (2019) emphasized learners' lifelong learning abilities, and Muhammad (2020) focused on using social media to enhance EFL students' autonomy. Furthermore, with the development of ChatGPT, some researchers have explored the potential

of this tool on EFL self-study from both teachers' and students' views (e.g., Agustini, 2023; Belabcir, 2024; Du & Alm, 2024; Nguyen & Doan, 2025; Sujannah et al., 2025; Van Horn, 2024).

To date, researchers and educators have been concerned about utilizing ChatGPT as an automated grading instrument or a feedback provider in teaching and learning writing skills. Deepshikha (2025) synthesized and analyzed 77 main articles from 2018 to 2025 about using AI-powered marking and feedback schemes. Deepshikha (2025) reviewed that AI technology brought many assets in the processes of automating assessment, giving scores, and offering personalized feedback. For instance, Mizumoto and Masaki (2023) conducted a study to examine the Automated Essay Scoring using ChatGPT-3 to score 12,100 essays of Non-Native Written English autonomously. They found that ChatGPT gave results that were reliable as well as accurate. Based on those results, ChatGPT was suggested as a potential evaluation and feedback tool for writing skills. Besides, Xiao and Zhi (2023) carried out qualitative research to explore five English-language students' perceptions and experiences about the potential of ChatGPT-3.5 in improving their English language performance at an international English-medium university in China. The findings showed that three of the five informants appreciated ChatGPT as an interactive tutor and learning tool, which gave quick, logical feedback, corrections, and support at any time related to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) writing learning. Furthermore, they suggest that ChatGPT should help guide students' learning with technology and promote their lifelong learning skills, such as autonomous learning and assessment ability.

In the same vein, Liew and Tan (2025) conducted a study to explore the capability of Large Language Models, typically GPT-3.5, with 20 IELTS randomly selected essays from a dataset, in Automated Essay Grading, and then compared with human evaluation. The results indicated that those models obtained an incredibly important agreement with human assessors in Automated Essay Scoring, and their feedback on essays in Automated Essay Evaluation aligned with people's comments. Although the findings of this research provided ChatGPT-3.5's crucial potential in imitating human assessments, its capability to analyze other complex components of a writing production, namely creation, critical thinking, and coherence, was not concrete.

2.4. Research Gap and Current Study

As aforementioned, past research has identified the merits and challenges of ChatGPT when it has been applied in their real English classes in tertiary education, especially in teaching and learning writing skills. However, most teachers applied ChatGPT as an assistant tool in the classrooms. Few studies have been conducted to use ChatGPT as an automated scoring and feedback instrument for English majors to practice writing English essays autonomously outside of the classes. Addressing this gap, it is necessary to conduct more research in this aspect, especially in local contexts, to enrich the literature review in this field. Hence, this study focuses on English-major students using ChatGPT as an automated marking and feedback tool to practice writing skills outside the classroom without teachers' instructions or control to fill this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Since it was unable to choose random sampling in this case, a quasi-experimental research design was developed for the present study (Creswell & Creswell, 2025). Twelve participants from Dong Thap University (2024-2025 academic year) were sophomores, including two males and ten females, and their ages ranged from 19 to 20. Ten of them were

from the English Teacher Education major, and two were from the Business English major. After the ChatGPT intervention time, eight of them participated in the semi-structured interview voluntarily. All they have learned EFL since they were in primary school. Yet, their English-writing skills were weaker than those of their classmates. It is noted that they have not attended any AI-ChatGPT training course before. The present study included a pre-assignment (an English writing essay), which was delivered to participants to collect the primary data; the ChatGPT-3.5 intervention was utilized to score and give feedback to students' essays in ten weeks; a post-assignment (an English writing essay) and an interview about ChatGPT effects were conducted after the tenth week.

3.2. ChatGPT Intervention

The ChatGPT-3.5 intervention was conducted in 10 weeks of the academic year 2024-2025. ChatGPT-3.5 was used because it was a free version for users and suitable for them at that time. Two third-year students - co-researchers - found ten writing topics related to the titles in Mindsets - student book 2 (the official textbook in Language skill subject No.4 at DThU), namely The news and media, Travel and transport, Business and work, The natural environment, Education systems, and Festival and traditions, which were delivered to the participants to write outside of the classrooms each week. In addition, the first core student-researcher created some prompts, which he had run a pilot and revised many times before, as follows:

I am a student who is practicing academic writing with IELTS writing task 2. This is the essay I just wrote. Let's play a role as a professional IELTS examiner. Let's help me score and give feedback to my essay, like the following:

i) Read and suggest modes to correct my essay about grammar, word choice, and expression, while retaining the main ideas and academic writing style.

ii) Assess my essay according to four criteria for examining an IELTS writing task 2, including:

- Task Response: levels of my essay's responses to the requirements of the task,

- Coherence and Cohesion: parts of my essay fit together naturally and reasonably, and have unity.

- Lexical Resource: using a range of vocabulary, flexibility, and precision within the scope of the task.

- Grammatical range and accuracy: a range of structures within the scope of the task is used with full flexibility and control.

iii) Show clearly:

- Strengths: parts of my essay I wrote well,

- Need to improve: weak or wrong parts,

- Scores of each criterion and the band overall of my essay.

iv) Give concrete, improving suggestions to me, including:


- Structures or vocabulary I need to practice more,

- Strategies for developing clearer and suitable ideas,

- Suggestions for some modes to write introductions, bodies, and conclusions more effectively.

v) *Finally, instruct me with an individualized plan of practicing writing skills based on my strengths and weaknesses so that I can improve my academic writing skills according to IELTS criteria.*

The following is my essay:

- *Question of IELTS writing task 2: [ paste essay here]*

Those prompts with clear instructions were provided for the informants. After they had written their essays in 40 minutes and sent them to ChatGPT with prompts, it offered them marks, feedback, and suggestions for their final products to self-improve. They considered ChatGPT's suggestions and then corrected their work. Besides, the first student-researcher observed and supported 6 students while his co-author instructed the rest in progress. The research intervention was considered and sponsored by their supervisor.

3.3. Research Instruments

3.3.1. Pre- and Post-assignments

Pre- and post-assignments of writing skill were utilized to examine English majors' writing essays before and after applying ChatGPT-3.5 as an automated scoring and feedback instrument in their practice of writing skill outside the classroom. They received the topics for the pre-assignment and post-assignment from the major researcher and wrote each in 40 minutes outside of the classes. After completing their essays, they sent them to ChatGPT's chatbot with prompts as mentioned above, and it gave scores for each part according to the IELTS writing criteria and advice.

3.3.2. Interview

After the intervention, 8 of 12 students participated voluntarily to take part in the semi-structured interview. The interview questions were established in two main areas:

a. Opinions about the Effects of ChatGPT as an Automated Scoring and Feedback Tool

- How do you perceive the role of ChatGPT in supporting your autonomous writing practice over the ten-week intervention?
- During the intervention phase, did you actively ask detailed questions to ChatGPT or just follow the host's basic suggestions?
- Which functions of ChatGPT did you like most? Why?
- Which difficulties did you meet when using ChatGPT to support your writing skills?
- Has ChatGPT ever provided inaccurate or misleading information? If yes, please describe.

b. Major Reflections on English Writing Skills and Learner Autonomy Ability

- Overall, did ChatGPT help you become more confident and positive in practicing English writing skills autonomously after finishing the intervention? Why? Or why not?
- How do you perceive the impact of ChatGPT on your task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical accuracy?
- Have you applied what you learnt from ChatGPT's feedback to your writing essays without the help of this tool?
- Has ChatGPT ever given suggestions that made you reduce your critical thinking?

- How did ChatGPT affect your learner autonomy ability in writing?

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The first data collection instrument consists of a pre-writing and a post-writing assignment used to assess students' writing achievement. Both allowed a clear and reliable comparison of the participants' writing productions at the beginning and the end of the experiment. The pre-assignment was done before the ChatGPT intervention utilized in the current study. After that, the post-assignment was carried out after the intervention. The writing performance of each student was scored by ChatGPT according to the IELTS Writing Task 2 criteria rubric, with four areas, as mentioned earlier, and sent to the core researcher. Next, the software SPSS version 26 was used to analyze statistics and the t-tests to examine the effects of the intervention, comparing pre-assignment scores and those of the post-assignment (Cronk, 2018; Hair et al., 2019; Stockemer, 2019).

The second tool is a set of ten interview questions designed based on the literature in this study. After data collection, the analysis was conducted to assess the effects of utilizing ChatGPT as an automated grading and feedback instrument on English-major students' writing essays and their perceptions of using it. Moreover, the results from interviews with eight students were analyzed. Those students were coded as S1, S2, ..., and S8.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The current research was conducted to follow the DThU's ethical regulations as well as the general educational research principles to ensure reliability and honesty. All informants gave their informed consent and took part in the quasi-experimental research and the interview voluntarily. They knew that they had rights and freedom to withdraw from the research whenever they wanted. They were instructed not to ask ChatGPT to write essays on their behalf.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Pre-assignment and Post-assignment Findings

The results of pre- and post-assignments were analyzed based on four assessment criteria of the IELTS Writing Task 2. The findings indicate that all four components illustrate a light increase following the ChatGPT intervention. More specifically, the mean score for task response rose from 5.95 (Standard Deviation/SD=0.58) in the pre-assignment to 6.33 (SD=0.77) in the post-assignment, and the mean difference was 0.38 in comparison, coherence and cohesion from 5.95 to 6.13, lexical resource from 5.91 to 6.0, and grammar range and accuracy from 5.66 to 5.95. Additionally, the t-tests were run and showed significant results with $p < 0.01$. This confirms the valid differences between the pre- and post-assignment scores, and not random chance (Cronk, 2018; Hair et al., 2019), as displayed below.

Table 1. Comparisons of Students' pre- and Post-assignments Writing Scores (N=12)

Criteria	Pre-assignment Mean (SD)	Post-assignment Mean (SD)	Mean Difference: Post-Pre Mean	p-value (Sig.)
1 Task Response	5.95 (.58)	6.33 (.77)	.38	.000
2 Coherence and Cohesion	5.95 (.54)	6.13 (.71)	.18	.000
3 Lexical Resource	5.91 (.28)	6.0 (.73)	.09	.000
4 Grammatical Range and Accuracy	5.66 (.32)	5.95 (.81)	.29	.000

4.2. Interview Findings

4.2.1. Opinions about the Effects of ChatGPT as an Automated Scoring and Feedback Tool

After writing each task, eight participants typed the prompts (see section 3.2) and sent them to ChatGPT. Then, ChatGPT scored their essays and gave them some feedback about their strengths and weaknesses in writing performance. 100% admitted that ChatGPT marked their first essay (pre-assignment) as the same one as their human teachers gave their essays in writing lessons in the classrooms. Besides, ChatGPT scored the following ones, which were exact. They considered ChatGPT's suggestions and then corrected their work. In addition, if they had any questions about elements in their essays, they could ask ChatGPT to show them more. Thereby, S2, S7, and S8 asked ChatGPT to check their grammar and vocabulary in their essays. Moreover, S3, S5, and S6 said that ChatGPT helped them get good ideas, correct sentences, and come up with new words to make more excellent sentences. When asked about the frequency of utilizing ChatGPT each week to support practicing writing, S1 and S8 responded that they used it from 3 to 5 times a week to practice writing skills. S2 used it only once; S3, S5, and S6 utilized it more than 5 times a week. Besides, S4 and S7 accessed it about twice.

For the next question, S1 and S5 answered that they requested a few more questions to improve their essays' grammar structure and vocabulary, which really fitted their band scores. Besides, S1, S7, and S8 often asked questions about resources that were close to her reference needs at that time. As a result, ChatGPT suggested about 70% of the resources she requested. For S5 and S6, they asked for more synonyms and paraphrase techniques since their essays often had redundancies due to a lack of vocabulary sources. S6 also asked it to broaden ideas that were suitable for her essays according to the IELTS writing task 2 criteria. Additionally, S2 followed the two student-co-researchers' instructors. It meant that he only did what the host asked and did not ask ChatGPT more. Meanwhile, S3 and S4 had the same idea when they responded that while using ChatGPT, in addition to following the suggested prompt instructions, they usually asked detailed questions with branches of the question to help make the answers clearer.

When asked which functions of ChatGPT they liked most, S1, S3, S5, and S6 agreed that it could correct their wrong structures, suggest ideas and vocabulary, and explain their mistakes. S1 liked the diverse vocabulary from ChatGPT; S4 loved the IELTS writing criteria most. Furthermore, S4 said that ChatGPT helped her recognize mistakes and gave solutions to improve her writing skills. S7 appreciated that ChatGPT gave a variety of logic structures. S8 valued the memory of ChatGPT as she could type prompts only once, and it remembered them for the following accesses. Additionally, during the experimental time, S1, S3, and S4 also actively asked ChatGPT detailed, simple questions, intending to give them exact answers.

With the question "*Which difficulties did you meet when using ChatGPT to support your writing skills?*", S1, S3, S4, S5, and S7 had the same idea that they had some problems with expressing their ideas clearly when asking questions or providing context. Sometimes ChatGPT's answers used quite complex language, which took them longer to understand and apply. Additionally, there were times when the answers did not completely fit the purpose or context of their essays; therefore, they had to re-edit them. S6 said that sometimes ChatGPT provided some high levels of structures which were not appropriate for her English background; hence, she asked it to decrease those for her to understand easily. S8 claimed that the most challenging aspect for her was how to write the right prompts for ChatGPT to support exactly what she needed. In contrast, S2 had no problems when applying for ChatGPT.

When asked, “*Has ChatGPT ever provided inaccurate or misleading information? If so, please describe*”, six of eight answered “Yes”; S2 and S8 said “No”. For more details, S1, S5, S6, and S7 reported that ChatGPT sometimes provided inaccurate or inappropriate information, especially when they asked questions about topics that required high accuracy, namely data or specific examples. One time, they asked ChatGPT to suggest a real example for an essay, but the information given was factually incorrect and unsourced, which forced them to double-check and compare it with information from other sources. In the same vein, S3 indicated that ChatGPT sometimes suggested sentences that were not contextually appropriate or had incorrect vocabulary usage. For example, in some cases, it suggested synonyms that did not fully match the meaning she wanted to express. In addition, S4 said that she once asked a question about education and asked ChatGPT to give her views, content, and meaning. She found it just an academic, general explanation and not based on reality. Therefore, it easily created a misunderstanding and confusion for the person asking the question.

4.2.2. Major Reflections on English Writing Skills

When asked whether ChatGPT helped students feel more confident than before in writing, seven of eight agreed with this term. All seven indicated that using ChatGPT helped them have the opportunity to practice writing regularly and receive immediate feedback. They were guided through common mistakes, improving sentence structure, and constructing a complete essay by ChatGPT’s instructions and explanations. Additionally, ChatGPT provided them with sample sentences and ideas that they could use to express their thoughts better and more smoothly, which helped them feel more prepared when they had to write without any support. S4 emphasized, “*When I practice writing an essay and ask ChatGPT to mark it, I know where my abilities are and what I need to improve. Because ChatGPT scores my essays and gives comments to me, I do not feel pressured or worried when compared to writing essays for my teacher to grade*”. S5 said that she often forgot vocabulary, but now she has ChatGPT as a reference resource. Only S2 said that he felt normal when using ChatGPT.

After ending the experiment, thanks to ChatGPT, all eight informants agreed that their writing skills had shown improvements. For instance, S2, S4, S7, and S8 could use diverse vocabulary with higher levels and make fewer mistakes in using grammar than before. In addition, because of practicing writing tasks every week, S4 could brainstorm and generate ideas faster and more coherently. S1, S3, S5, and S6 could develop logical and organized ideas as well as new words or phrases, and improve their application of grammar via suggestions and corrections. S5 shared that her generating-idea ability had improved clearly, and she could expand one main point into diverse sub-ideas.

For the next question, all eight students admitted that they felt confident writing essays without using ChatGPT. For example, S1 said that she knew how to outline before writing, used appropriate vocabulary in the real context, and avoided repeating the same grammar mistakes she made. These skills helped her write better and save time without direct support from ChatGPT. S2 revealed that he could master using appropriate vocabulary and make fewer grammatical mistakes. S3 often memorized the sentence structures and vocabulary that ChatGPT suggested applying in independent writing. It helped her improve her writing skills and expand her vocabulary. S4 expressed that after writing essays with the support of ChatGPT, she had gained some useful experiences and learned what to add to her writing production; therefore, she could write her own essays without its support later. S5, S6, S7, and S8 shared that they could apply vocabulary, structures, and modes of developing ideas from ChatGPT’s suggestions before applying them to other topics of essays in the classrooms effectively and flexibly. Because of practicing writing essays regularly in the experimental

process, S5 could memorize words, grammar, and ideas deeply. S7 told us that her teacher commented that her later essays were improved. She also applied what she had practiced writing essays autonomously with ChatGPT into her final writing exam in the last semester and achieved better scores than those in the previous term.

With the question, “*Has ChatGPT ever given suggestions that made you reduce your critical thinking?*” 100% participants answered “Yes”, even “Always”, like S2’s response. S1 explained that because ChatGPT’s answers were often so comprehensive and detailed, she sometimes found herself relying too much on the suggestions instead of thinking and developing my own ideas. This was especially evident when she had to write creative essays or give her own arguments, but she was too lazy to think, and then she chose to use ideas from ChatGPT. S3 felt the same as S1; however, she realized this and tried to use ChatGPT as an assistant tool rather than completely replacing her thinking. S8 revealed that since Chat GPT sometimes gave such perfect answers that she could not find anything better, she chose them. As a result, she did not think anymore or create new ideas.

For the last question, seven of eight respondents responded that using ChatGPT helped them more actively with the writing learner autonomy process because they could ask it to grade and comment on their essays. In other words, they did not absolutely depend on the teachers or references (S5). S6 said that she could have ChatGPT correct her essays immediately instead of finding her teacher to mark and give feedback. Six of eight thought that ChatGPT was a useful autonomous learning resource if we knew how to use it meaningfully. Only S7 claimed that she seemed to be more passive while using ChatGPT in the intervention.

The findings of this research, which were displayed above, answered the two research questions above. For question 1, the findings from pre-assignment, post-assignment, and interview indicated that ChatGPT could mark students’ essays and comment on their strengths and points that needed to improve in writing autonomously. Those echoed some prior studies (e.g., Mizumoto & Masaki, 2023; Liew & Tan, 2025; Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Furthermore, this showed that ChatGPT could support students as an assistant while they were practicing English writing skills in their learner autonomy process. Two student-researchers conducted the current study with their supervisor’s support, which revealed that students could learn English writing skills, particularly, and other skills and language in general, autonomously with the help of ChatGPT. This will increase students’ learner autonomy abilities and save time for teachers in the classroom. Although they encountered some challenges with writing requirements for ChatGPT, some complicated language, and some confusing information from ChatGPT, it is believed that students will achieve AI-technological skills better if they are trained in them, as well as in AI use.

For research question 2, all eight participants had positive perceptions of using ChatGPT. The results from the second theme of the interview revealed that their English writing skills had enhanced remarkably. These were the same as Mizumoto and Masaki’s (2023), Xiao and Zhi’s (2023), and Liew and Tan’s (2025) studies’ findings. In addition, students felt more confident in writing topics for various types of essays than before the intervention. They could apply ChatGPT’s suggestions and explanations to other essays in the English classes and the final English writing exam last semester, and obtained higher results than before. Specifically, seven of them considered ChatGPT as an assistant tool that supported them in learning writing autonomously. This is similar to some previous studies (Agustini, 2023; Belabcir, 2024; Du & Alm, 2024; Nguyen & Doan, 2025; Sujannah et al., 2025; Van Horn, 2024). In some cases, ChatGPT also made them reduce their critical thinking in creating new ideas in writing.

The novelty of the present study is that English major students utilized ChatGPT as an automated scoring and feedback tool outside of the classroom and without the teacher's instructions, while most of the related research was conducted on ChatGPT in writing courses in the classroom, and teachers controlled and organized this activity. Next, the participants worked with the host, the third-year students who had mastered and experienced ChatGPT, for 10 weeks without working with teachers. This research aims to provide one more learner-autonomy tool for students and develop their learner-autonomous abilities. They can learn independently after school. Additionally, the current research found some more evidence that they could apply independently what they learned from the ChatGPT intervention procedure in their writing of other essays in real classes and writing exams. It means that they can write essays without using ChatGPT after finishing the experiment.

However, this research had some limitations while conducted. For example, the number of participants was small, only twelve volunteers. If a larger number of English majors had taken part in this study, the results would have been collected more and more diversely. Moreover, students lacked AI-technological skills due to not being trained in them before.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The present study was conducted with twelve English-major students to practice writing essays with ChatGPT as an automated grading and feedback tool in ten weeks. The findings showed that participants enhanced their writing abilities more than before. Additionally, they appreciated the benefits of this tool as well as indicated their difficulties in the experiment process. The results of this study provided insight into the literature review in this field in the specific context of Dong Thap University.

The limitation of this study is that only twelve participants joined this study. Due to a lack of conditions, the authors could not invite more students to take part in this project. In the future, the authors will research more negative impacts of ChatGPT and seek solutions for them. Moreover, the researchers hope that this model will be applied to a larger number of not only English-major students but also non-English-major students in other faculties at Dong Thap University as an autonomous learning instrument to help them be able to improve their writing skills in learning English and develop their learner autonomy ability.

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