



## Unraveling EFL Learners' Perceptions and Transformative Practices in Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Essay Writing: Unleashing the Potentials?

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### Abstract:

This study investigates EFL learners' perceptions and practices regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in essay writing. The research involved 71 participants enrolled in an essay writing course and utilized a questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire aimed to explore learners' familiarity with AI, their use of AI-based tools, beliefs about the impact of AI on writing skills, confidence in using AI tools, perceptions of AI's effect on essay quality, satisfaction with AI tools, and ethical concerns. The findings revealed that while the majority of learners had a reasonable understanding of AI technology, there were variations in their level of familiarity. Grammarly was the most frequently used AI tool, followed by Turnitin and Chat GPT. The frequency of AI tool usage varied among learners. Learners held differing beliefs about the impact of AI tools on their writing skills, with some acknowledging positive improvements and others expressing disagreement. Overall, learners exhibited a moderate level of confidence in using AI tools but voiced concerns about essay quality and ethical considerations. The study emphasizes the need for further exploration, educational initiatives, and ethical considerations to effectively integrate AI into essay writing instruction, taking into account the diverse perspectives and requirements of learners.

**Keywords:** EFL learners' essay writing; artificial intelligence; perceptions and practices

### Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menginvestigasi persepsi dan praktik mahasiswa pembelajar bahasa Inggris terkait penggunaan kecerdasan buatan (AI) dalam menulis esai. Penelitian ini melibatkan 71 partisipan yang mengambil mata kuliah essay writing dan menggunakan kuesioner sebagai instrument utama penelitian. Kuesioner bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pemahaman mahasiswa tentang AI, penggunaan AI, keyakinan tentang dampak AI pada kemampuan menulis, kepercayaan diri dalam menggunakan AI, persepsi tentang pengaruh AI pada kualitas esai, kepuasan terhadap AI, dan keprihatinan mereka terhadap isu-isu etika penulisan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa meski mayoritas mahasiswa memiliki pemahaman yang wajar tentang teknologi AI, variasi dalam tingkat familiaritas mereka cukup nampak. Grammarly adalah alat berbasis AI yang paling sering digunakan, disusul Turnitin dan Chat GPT. Frekuensi penggunaan AI bervariasi di antara mahasiswa. Mereka juga memiliki keyakinan berbeda-beda tentang dampak AI pada kemampuan menulis mereka, ada yang mengakui adanya perbaikan positif dan ada yang menyatakan sebaliknya. Secara keseluruhan, mahasiswa menunjukkan tingkat kepercayaan diri yang moderat dalam menggunakan AI sekaligus juga mengungkapkan keprihatinan tentang kualitas esai dan etika penulisan. Penelitian ini menekankan perlunya eksplorasi lebih lanjut, inisiatif pedagogis, dan pertimbangan etis untuk mengintegrasikan AI secara efektif dalam pembelajaran essay writing, dengan memperhatikan beragam perspektif dan kebutuhan mahasiswa.

**Kata kunci:** kemampuan menulis esai pembelajar L2; kecerdasan buatan; persepsi dan praktik



## INTRODUCTION

Writing proficiency plays an essential role for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners as it facilitates effective communication and in expressing ideas. However, traditional approaches to writing instruction, such as teacher feedback, peer review, and self-revision, pose certain limitations, including time-consuming and a lack of prompt, personalized feedback (Ferris, 2007; Lee, 2009; Zhang, 2016). The emergence of AI tools in writing instruction presents promising opportunities to address these constraints (Fan, 2023; Ingley & Pack, 2023; Link et al., 2020). AI tools may offer prompt and targeted feedback, assisting learners in identifying and correcting errors, refining language accuracy, enhancing their writing style, and resulting in improved accuracy (Sinha & Nassaji, 2022; Thi & Nikolov, 2022). Likewise, plagiarism detection tools help learners understand academic integrity and encourage original writing by detecting instances of accidental plagiarism (Alharbi & Al-Hoorie, 2020). More importantly, AI tools have also been reported to provide personalized feedback made to the specific needs of learners; thereby promoting engagement, motivation, and confidence (Fan, 2023; Rad et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Despite the considerable volume of research on the potential of AI, the scholarly discourse regarding EFL learners' perceptions and practices in utilizing AI for writing remains underexplored. Prior studies have predominantly focused on areas such as writing accuracy and academic integrity; yet, there is an urgent need to investigate learners' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the integration of AI in writing instruction (Hidayat et al., 2017). This research aims to bridge the existing gap by investigating the perceptions and practices of EFL learners concerning the use of AI in writing. By examining various facets such as learners' familiarity with AI technology, usage, beliefs regarding its impact on writing skills, confidence levels in using AI tools, perceptions of essay quality, satisfaction, and ethical concerns, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of learners' perspectives on AI tools and their implications for writing instruction. Moreover, by addressing ethical concerns and taking into account learners' satisfaction, this research contributes to the ethical integration of AI in writing instruction.



## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The integration of AI into second language (L2) writing instruction has significantly impacted the field by offering a range of features that support learners in improving their writing skills. Technology-enhanced approaches facilitate immediate error correction and revision through prompt and targeted feedback (Li & Han, 2021; Sinha & Nassaji, 2022; Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020; Thi & Nikolov, 2022; Yin et al., 2021). These tools have also been reported to offer personalized feedback tailored to individual needs, facilitating targeted improvements in writing (Hu & Qiu, 2020; Jurs & Špehte, 2021). Moreover, AI tools assist learners in detecting plagiarism, guiding them in proper academic attribution to promote integrity (Alharbi & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Additionally, AI-powered interactive writing assistance tools potentially simulate human-like conversations, promoting engagement, motivation, and learner autonomy (Fan, 2023; Rad et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

However, the integration of technology and AI in L2 writing instruction brings numerous benefits. On the one hand, it also poses threats that require careful consideration. One noteworthy concern is the potential overreliance on AI tools, which could reduce human interaction and feedback. Achieving a balance between AI-based and human feedback is crucial to ensure learners receive personalized guidance and benefit from instructor interaction (Häkkinen et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2023). Ethical considerations, including privacy and responsible use of learner data, must also be thoroughly addressed to protect learners' rights and well-being (Cope et al., 2020; McStay, 2019). Furthermore, limited access to technology and technical support may prevent the effective implementation of technology-enhanced pedagogies, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Berendt et al., 2020; Celik et al., 2022).

Therefore, when integrating technology and AI into L2 writing instruction, careful pedagogical considerations are essential for successful implementation. Teachers should design tasks and activities that align with learners' proficiency levels, ensuring appropriate technology usage to support writing development (Rad et al., 2023). Providing adequate training and professional development opportunities for teachers is crucial to equip them with the required skills and knowledge to effectively harness technology and AI tools in the classroom (Link et al., 2020; Rad et al., 2023). Clear guidelines on the ethical use of

technology and AI tools, emphasizing academic integrity and responsible writing practices, are also crucial (Berendt et al., 2020; McStay, 2019).

## **METHOD**

The research methodology employed in this study involved the use of a questionnaire to gather data on learners' familiarity, perceptions, and practices regarding the use of AI-based tools in their writing. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items, with 14 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The closed-ended questions utilized a 5-Likert-Scale format, allowing participants to rate their responses on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements. The questionnaire was specifically designed to explore various aspects related to AI in essay writing. These aspects included assessing participants' familiarity with AI technology, the frequency of AI tool usage, beliefs about the impact of AI tools on writing skills, confidence levels in using AI tools, perceptions of the effect of AI on essay quality, satisfaction with AI tools, ethical concerns regarding the use of AI, and overall experience with AI-based tools for essay writing.

Participants were instructed to rate their responses based on their own experiences and perceptions. The Likert scale provided a structured and standardized format for data collection, allowing for quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize participants' responses to each item in the questionnaire. These statistical measures provided an overview of the distribution of participants' views and opinions. The collected data were analyzed by tabulating the results and presenting them in tables.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into EFL learners' perceptions and practices regarding the use of AI tools in writing. A majority of the learners exhibited a reasonable level of familiarity with AI, indicating a growing awareness and integration of AI in educational contexts (29.6% very familiar, 45.1% moderately familiar). These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the increasing role of technology, including AI, in language learning and writing instruction (Chiu, 2021; Rad et al., 2023). The widespread availability and accessibility of AI tools such as Grammarly,

Turnitin, and Chat GPT are likely contributing factors to this growing familiarity among EFL learners.

**Table 1. EFL Learners' Perceptions and Practices on the Use of AI in Writing**

No	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I am familiar with AI and its use in different areas.	1%	18.30%	45.10%	29.60%	7%
2	I frequently use AI-based tools for writing.	11.30%	22.50%	43.70%	21.10%	1.40%
3	I perceive the use of AI-based tools has improved my writing skills.	4.20%	9.90%	47.90%	38%	0%
4	I am confident in using AI-based tools for writing.	14.10%	43.70%	40.80%	1.40%	0%
5	I perceive that AI has improved the quality of my writing.	16.90%	49.30%	25.40%	7%	1.40%
6	I perceive AI-based tools help me with sentence structure improvement in my writing.	0%	15.50%	47.90%	26.80%	9.90%
7	I perceive AI-based tools help me with grammar and spelling corrections in my writing.	2.80%	18.30%	43.70%	26.80%	8.50%
8	I perceive AI-based tools help me with style and tone suggestions in my writing.	9.90%	29.60%	42.30%	14.10%	4.20%
9	I perceive AI-based tools help me with plagiarism detection in my writing.	11.30%	11.30%	36.60%	22.50%	18.30%
10	I perceive AI-based tools help me with word choice suggestion in my writing.	2.80%	12.70%	42.30%	22.50%	19.70%
11	I am satisfied with the effectiveness of AI-based tools in improving my writing skills.	0%	1.40%	54.90%	43.70%	0%
12	I believe AI-based tools should replace human/teacher feedback in writing.	19.70%	52.10%	23.90%	4.20%	0%
13	I am concerned about the ethical implications of using AI in writing, such as bias or privacy concerns.	1.40%	16.90%	42.30%	31%	8.50%
14	I have had a positive experience using AI-based tools for writing.	4.20%	18.30%	42.30%	32.40%	2.80%
15	AI-based tools are commonly used in English essay writing. Grammarly 67.60% Chat GPT 42.30% Turnitin 57.70% ProWritingAid 1.40% Quillbot 5.60% Google Translate 1.40% - Thesaurus 1.40%					

The integration of AI tools in essay writing instruction provides numerous benefits for learners and teachers. The data show that Grammarly is the most frequently used AI tool, followed by Turnitin and Chat GPT. These tools are highly favored for their effectiveness in improving writing accuracy and detecting unintended plagiarism (Alharbi & Al-Hoorie, 2020; Thi & Nikolov, 2022). However, while learners generally feel moderately confident in using AI tools, there is room for further development to enhance their confidence levels. This observation aligns with previous studies highlighting the importance of providing learners with proper training and support to fully utilize the benefits of AI tools (Häkkinen et al., 2016; Link et al., 2020; Rad et al., 2023).

Learners also seem to believe that AI tools somewhat improve the quality of their writing, particularly in aspects such as sentence structure improvements and grammar and spelling corrections. The usefulness ratings of AI tools in these areas align with previous research, highlighting their effectiveness in providing targeted feedback and enhancing language accuracy (Barrot, 2021; Koltovskaia, 2020; Link et al., 2020). However, regarding satisfaction with AI tools, learners expressed a neutral stance, indicating the need for further improvements to meet their expectations (Berendt et al., 2020; Rad et al., 2023). Ethical concerns were also raised, with learners expressing moderate to high levels of concern. These concerns center around issues of bias and privacy in the use of AI tools in education. Teachers and policymakers must address these concerns by promoting ethical use and ensuring transparency in the design and implementation of AI tools (Berendt et al., 2020; McStay, 2019).

The present study highlights that AI tools have the potential to unleash learners' writing potential by providing instant feedback and assistance, resulting in improved writing quality processes (Jiang & Yu, 2020). However, there is a concern regarding overreliance on AI tools, which may hinder the development of higher-order writing skills that require extensive human interaction and feedback. No matter how advanced the technology, effective learning relies on teachers' ability to orchestrate all available resources to support learners' development (Tondeur et al., 2020). In other words, striking a balance between AI-based feedback and human feedback is crucial for the holistic development of learners' writing abilities.



## CONCLUSION

The integration of AI tools in L2 writing instruction potentially enhances L2 learners' writing skills. Participants in the study demonstrated moderate familiarity with AI, with Grammarly being the most frequently used tool, followed by Turnitin and Chat GPT. They reported moderate confidence in using AI tools and believed that AI somewhat improves the quality of their writing. The usefulness of AI-based tools in areas such as sentence structure improvements and grammar and spelling corrections was rated as moderate to very useful.

However, participants expressed concerns about the ethical implications of using AI in writing, including biases and privacy concerns. Addressing these concerns is crucial to ensure fairness, transparency, and protection of learners' rights and privacy. Responsible and ethical use of AI tools should be prioritized by educators and policymakers. Balancing AI-based feedback with human feedback is important for the holistic development of writing abilities. Further research is needed to explore the benefits and limitations of AI-based tools and address concerns related to bias, fairness, transparency, and privacy. By promoting responsible and ethical use of AI tools, educators can create a supportive learning environment that maximizes the potential of AI while nurturing critical writing skills among EFL learners.

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