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A Study of Students' Attitudes and Practices Toward ChatGPT in University Writing Classes

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how 79 University of Labor and Social Affairs students view and use generative AI, specifically ChatGPT, in their writing and self-directed learning processes. Based on the self-directed learning (SDL) concept developed by Garrison (1997), the study looks at how students use ChatGPT at various writing phases and how they control their learning habits and writing process comments. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, survey data from 79 students and follow-up interviews with 10 participants were combined. Results show that brainstorming and outlining were the times when ChatGPT was used the most. Students' motivation and independence in their participation were evident, but their ability to control their behavior was still restricted. Because there were few opportunities for review and reflection, self-monitoring became a major difficulty. The study emphasizes the necessity of promoting critical AI literacy and responsible autonomy in EFL contexts through suitable pedagogical frameworks, while also highlighting the promise and risks of AI-assisted writing.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Information

Self-directed learning (SDL) has become a critical 21st-century competency, particularly for adult learners navigating a world of rapid technological change (Morris, 2019). As schools promote lifelong learning, SDL provides the foundation for students to take responsibility for their own learning. At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful resource for independent research, reshaping traditional approaches to education and presenting both opportunities and challenges for SDL.

Among recent innovations, generative AI tools—especially ChatGPT—have attracted significant attention for their ability to support academic writing. Generative AI systems process vast datasets to produce meaningful, contextually relevant content with human-like qualities (Huang et al., 2023). Although such technologies have been applied in areas like expert systems and automated writing evaluation, their role in fostering SDL remains underexplored. Since its launch in late 2022, ChatGPT has demonstrated strong potential to assist students in multiple stages of writing, yet its influence on learners' capacity for self-direction continues to warrant investigation (Barrot, 2023). To address this gap, the present study explores how undergraduate students use ChatGPT to facilitate SDL in writing.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The integration of AI tools in education is increasing rapidly, with students and teachers adopting them for diverse learning tasks. Yet questions persist about whether students can use such tools to effectively manage their own learning. At the University of Labor and Social Affairs (Ho Chi Minh City campus), many English majors have turned to generative AI for language study, particularly in writing classes, as noted by both professors and students.

Given the importance of SDL and the growing prevalence of AI, it is necessary to examine whether ChatGPT enhances or hinders students' ability to regulate their learning. Specifically, this study investigates how students at ULSA2 employ ChatGPT in the writing process and whether it supports the development of their cognitive and metacognitive skills.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the emerging scholarship on AI-supported learning by investigating the underexplored role of generative AI in building independent writing skills. Insights into how students use ChatGPT to complete writing tasks will be valuable for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to integrate AI responsibly in educational contexts.

The study also addresses both benefits and risks. On the one hand, ChatGPT may enhance writing quality, foster motivation, and reduce social pressures. On the other hand, it raises concerns about self-monitoring, overreliance, and potential misuse. A better understanding of these dynamics will inform the design of pedagogical frameworks that promote critical AI literacy and responsible autonomy, helping learners maximize the benefits of generative AI while minimizing its drawbacks.

1.4 Research Aim and Research Questions

Research Aim

This study examines how undergraduate EFL students at the University of Labor and Social Affairs (ULSA2), Ho Chi Minh City campus, use ChatGPT in their writing processes and how such use influences their development as self-directed learners. Guided by Garrison's (1997) SDL framework, the research also investigates students' motivation, self-regulation, and attitudes toward AI-assisted writing.

Research Questions

1. How do undergraduate students use ChatGPT across different stages of their writing process?
2. What motivational and self-management strategies do students demonstrate when engaging with ChatGPT for writing tasks?
3. How do students monitor, reflect on, and evaluate their use of ChatGPT in relation to their writing development and self-directed learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

Self-directed learning (SDL) has been widely studied in education as a process in which students take responsibility for overseeing their own learning. According to Garrison (1997), SDL emphasizes the learner's active role in shaping educational experiences by assuming both personal responsibility and collaborative control over cognitive processes (self-monitoring) and learning context (self-management). His model identifies three interdependent dimensions—motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring—that together promote effective and independent learning.

In this study, Garrison's (1997) SDL framework is applied to explore AI-supported writing among EFL students. By examining how learners manage their writing processes and outcomes with the assistance of AI, this research aims to deepen understanding of the intersection between SDL and technology use.

2.2 Technology-Enhanced Self-Directed Learning

The expansion of online learning resources has led to significant research on SDL in technology-enhanced environments. Mobile language learning applications such as Duolingo and Busuu, for example, facilitate SDL by offering on-demand access to resources beyond the classroom (Jeon, 2022; Li & Bonk, 2023; Klimova, 2018). Similarly, online platforms such as e-portfolios, MOOCs, and Open Educational Resources (OERs) provide learners with the flexibility to set objectives, access diverse instructional materials, and proceed at their own pace (Zhu et al., 2022; Zhu & Bonk, 2022). Moreover, extended reality (XR) technologies have begun to offer immersive experiential learning opportunities, particularly in STEM education (Iqbal & Campbell, 2023).

Despite these advances, empirical studies examining the role of generative AI in SDL remain limited (Lin, 2023). This gap highlights the need to investigate how AI tools can support learners' ability to self-regulate, manage, and sustain independent learning practices.

2.3 Generative Artificial Intelligence (G/AI) and Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

Generative AI, particularly ChatGPT, has recently gained widespread attention for its potential to enhance SDL. As Lin (2023) notes, ChatGPT can function as a virtual tutor, assisting students with goal setting, preparing learning materials, providing personalized feedback, and offering interactive guidance for asynchronous learning. At the same time, concerns have been raised about overdependence, misinformation, and diminished critical thinking.

In a large-scale qualitative study, Mogavi et al. (2024) analyzed 1,500 social media accounts discussing ChatGPT in education. While many praised its capacity to deliver personalized feedback, they also pointed to risks of academic dishonesty, superficial

learning, and cognitive shortcuts that bypass deep engagement. These findings suggest that, although AI can support SDL, it may also undermine essential cognitive processes that make learning meaningful.

Scholars therefore stress the importance of ensuring active learner engagement, self-assessment, and critical reflection when integrating AI into SDL. Students should be encouraged to evaluate and monitor their own learning rather than relying exclusively on AI-generated outputs. Instructional frameworks are needed to embed AI in ways that foster independence and critical thinking.

2.4 AI-Assisted Writing

AI has long played a role in writing education through tools such as chatbots and automated writing evaluation (AWE) systems. Chatbots provide interactive writing assistance, while AWE systems offer instant error feedback and correction (Huang et al., 2023; Alexopoulou et al., 2017). Such systems have been shown to improve student engagement and writing performance, particularly in thesis statement development, as evidenced by a mixed-methods study by Lin and Chang (2023).

However, drawbacks have also been identified. Zhang et al. (2023), for example, found that while AI chatbots supported Chinese university students in identifying logical fallacies during argumentative writing, they also reduced students' self-efficacy by fostering reliance on AI suggestions rather than encouraging independent critical thinking and revision strategies. These findings underscore the need for a balance between AI intervention and self-regulated learning strategies.

Most existing studies have been conducted in structured classroom environments or within formal writing instruction (Rad et al., 2023). There remains a substantial gap in understanding how students use AI in self-directed, informal contexts, where learners may regulate their own writing processes without instructor guidance. Research in this area is essential for developing effective AI-assisted strategies that promote both writing proficiency and learner autonomy.

2.5 Generative AI and Writing Education

The rise of large language models such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Claude AI has shifted considerable research attention toward writing instruction. While ethical concerns such as academic integrity and fairness dominate much of the debate, scholars also acknowledge the wide range of functions these tools can perform, including scheduling, text generation, refinement, and reflective support (Su et al., 2023; Barrot, 2023).

Yet, empirical studies exploring how students integrate AI into SDL contexts—particularly in informal writing—remain scarce. Given that many learners already use AI tools outside of formal classroom settings, it is crucial to examine how they regulate and integrate these technologies into their writing practices. Addressing this gap will provide valuable insights into the potential of AI-assisted SDL to enhance writing competence and learner autonomy.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a **sequential explanatory mixed-methods design** (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) to examine how undergraduate EFL students at the University of Labor and Social Affairs (ULSA) used ChatGPT in their writing processes and how such use supported or hindered the development of self-directed learning (SDL). This design involved two phases: a quantitative survey to identify general patterns of behavior, followed by qualitative interviews to provide deeper insights into students' experiences and reflections.

3.1 Participants

A total of **79 English-major undergraduates** participated in the quantitative phase by completing an online survey. For the qualitative phase, **10 students** were purposefully selected based on the frequency of their self-reported ChatGPT use and their willingness to reflect on their experiences. These participants were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews designed to capture richer perspectives on AI-assisted writing and SDL.

3.2 Instruments

The survey instrument was developed based on **Garrison's (1997) SDL framework**, supplemented with validated scales such as those proposed by Teng and Zhang (2020). It consisted of **33 items** covering ChatGPT usage patterns, motivation, self-management, self-monitoring, and perceived impact on learning. Items were rated on a **5-point Likert scale**, and the instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.794$).

3.3 Procedures

The online survey was distributed through Google Forms in **March 2025**. After preliminary data analysis, students meeting the selection criteria were invited to participate in follow-up interviews. Each interview lasted approximately **20–30 minutes** and

The Impacts of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Strategies on Listening Comprehension Performance in Preparation Courses was conducted either online or in person. A semi-structured protocol with **ten open-ended questions** guided the discussions, focusing on writing strategies, changes in motivation, critiques of ChatGPT, and reflections on the role of AI in their development as writers.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** with SPSS (version 20) to identify general patterns of ChatGPT use and SDL dimensions. Qualitative data were examined through **thematic analysis**, employing both inductive and deductive coding strategies aligned with Garrison's SDL framework. To ensure trustworthiness, **triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing** were applied throughout the analysis process.

4. Results and Discussion

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Findings from the questionnaire

4.1 Research Question 1: How do undergraduate students use ChatGPT across different stages of their writing process?

4.1.1 Frequency of using ChatGPT for writing

The majority of participants stated very frequently of using ChatGPT for writing as indicated by Table 1. In fact, out of all 21 participants (26.6%), 45 reported using ChatGPT on daily basis and from the other 57.0% respondents, they reported to be using it alone at least once a week. On the contrary, only 6 people (7.6%) reported that they rarely utilize the program, and 7 participants (8.9%) are using the program only on a monthly basis-the data reveal that nearly 84% of the participants said they are using ChatGPT in their writing at least once a week as much as possible or during his or her time of writing. This is a fairly reasonable indication that academic settings are showing extremely high usage of AI assisted writing tools.

Results also indicate that for most respondents, ChatGPT surfaced as a prime candidate among their digital assistants/tools during the academic writing process, with a pattern of use being rather daily and weekly. Therefore, those findings indicate that there is a growing dependence on AI tools for project planning, drafting, and revisions in the academic setting.

Table 1. *ChatGPT usage frequency among undergraduates.*

		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Rarely	6	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Every month	7	8.9	8.9	16.5
	Every week	45	57.0	57.0	73.4
	Everyday	21	26.6	26.6	100.0
	Total	79	100.0	100.0	

4.1.2 Learners' Use of ChatGPT for Specific Writing Tasks

Table 1 shows what stages in writing process the students use ChatGPT for their writing. It can be seen that correspondents assigned degrees of variation among tasks requiring the use of ChatGPT with the most marked mean for making outlines/organizing main points (M = 3.86, SD = 0.693), which was closely followed by generating brainstorms and generating ideas (M = 3.84, SD = 0.649), signifying that most probably, the students' use of ChatGPT

was during the early phases of writing. Surface language supports appear to much retain the user's attention under use of ChatGPT for checking grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure, which scored fairly high means (M = 3.67, SD = 0.571).

On the contrary, means suggest less frequent use, thus indicating lesser stylistic-dominated-or more-nuanced areas of writing-approaches in tasks such as revising tone/formality (M = 3.14, SD = 1.129), summarizing/paraphrasing content (M = 3.23, SD = 1.085), and translating rational thoughts into coherent sentences (M = 2.96, SD = 1.137). The lowest mean rating was given for whether the writing meets task requirements (M = 2.85, SD = 1.075), hinting toward little reliance on ChatGPT in grading whether the writing met the objectives.

Such findings would suggest that use of ChatGPT mostly in ideation and technical editing is something learners feel comfortable with, while they are more hesitant to apply it for tasks requiring the application of judgment, context awareness, or personal voice.

Table 2. *Learners' Use of ChatGPT for Specific Writing Tasks*

ChatGPT is used	N	Min	Max	Mean	S. D
4. To brainstorm and generate ideas	79	2	5	3.84	.649
5. To create outlines or organize main points	79	1	5	3.86	.693
6. To check grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure	79	2	4	3.67	.571
7. To revise tone or formality (e.g., academic vs. professional)	79	1	4	3.14	1.129
8. To evaluate whether your writing meets task requirements	79	1	4	2.85	1.075
9. To translate thoughts into coherent sentences	79	1	4	2.96	1.137
10. To summarize or paraphrase content	79	1	5	3.23	1.085
Valid N (listwise)	79				

4.2 Research Question 2: What motivational and self-management strategies do students demonstrate when engaging with ChatGPT for writing tasks?

4.2.1 Motivating factors underlying the use of ChatGPT in the writing process.

As seen in Table 3, participants' responses exhibited strong motivational factors for ChatGPT use in writing. The top-rated item was "ChatGPT helps reduce stress and pressure when it comes to writing," with an M = 4.25, SD=0.912. This is closely followed by the item "I feel more motivated to write when I am using ChatGPT," with an M = 4.24 and SD of 0.895., suggesting that this tool quite highly brings emotional and motivational comfort into the entire writing process.

Notably, curiosity about AI technology also played a big role with "I started using ChatGPT out of curiosity," scoring a mean of 3.63 (SD = 0.719). Meanwhile, external factors like course or instructor requirements showed slightly high mean motivation (M = 3.70, SD = 1.030), indicating that encouraging such institutions may facilitate initial adoption.

Interestingly, the statement "I prefer writing with ChatGPT to alone" gained a lower mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.503) value, suggesting that students appreciate or like ChatGPT help but are not completely dependent on it for writing. The findings track internal motivation (usually enjoyment, less anxiety) as a stronger driver than external conditions in students' engagement with AI writing.

Table 3. *Motivating factors underlying the use of ChatGPT in the writing process*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**S.D**
11. I started using ChatGPT out of curiosity about AI technology	79	1	5	3.63	.719
12. I began using it due to course or instructor requirements	79	2	5	3.70	1.030
13. I feel more motivated to write when I use ChatGPT	79	3	5	4.24	.895
14. ChatGPT helps reduce stress and pressure when writing	79	2	5	4.25	.912
15. I prefer writing with ChatGPT rather than alone	79	3	4	3.48	.503
Valid N (listwise)	79				

4.2.2 Self-Management Strategies in AI-Assisted Writing

As indicated in Table 4, participants reported a broad diversity of self-management skills employed while engaging with ChatGPT in writing tasks. "I am responsible for improving my writing with the help of AI Tools" (M=3.82, SD=0.525) and "I reduce digital distractions (e.g., social media) while using ChatGpt" (M=3.80, SD=0.540) received the highest mean scores, indicating that most of the time, learners believe that they are working alone and applying willed self-discipline to manage their writing environment for AI-supported tasks. By contrast, the statement "I use ChatGPT differently in different writing contexts (e.g. essay or email)" received the lowest mean rating of 2.44 (SD=1.047) and therefore indicated a low strategic flexibility across different contexts. Further, an important impediment to effective culturally responsive teaching is time management, reflected in the statement "I manage my time well doing AI-assisted writing," which barely managed to attain a mean of 2.62 (SD=0.837).

Moderate agreements were given for "I set personal learning objectives when I write with ChatGPT" (M=3.46, SD=0.616) and "I systematically organize my writing process when I work with ChatGPT" (M=3.20, SD=0.853). This suggests that learners have a set of planning strategies, but there appears to be substantial room for improvement with respect to how the two are applied to AI tools in developing a given structure and goal.

Thus, the results evince a relatively strong degree of self-management and personal responsibility while emphasizing some improvement in time regulation and adaptive strategies to make it possible to take full advantage of AI-assisted writing.

Table 4. *Self-Management Strategies for Writing with ChatGPT*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**S.D**
16. I set personal learning goals when writing with ChatGPT	79	3	5	3.46	.616
17. I manage my time effectively during AI-assisted writing tasks	79	2	5	2.62	.837
18. I organize my writing process when using ChatGPT	79	2	4	3.20	.853
19. I use ChatGPT differently depending on the writing purpose (e.g., essay vs. email)	79	1	4	2.44	1.047
20. I am responsible for improving my writing skills through AI tools	79	3	5	3.82	.525
21. I limit digital distractions (e.g., social media) when using ChatGPT	79	3	5	3.80	.540
Valid N (listwise)	79				

4.2.3 Self-Monitoring and Reflective Strategies in AI-Assisted Writing

As illustrated in Table 5, learners exhibited varying levels of self-regulation during their interaction with ChatGPT. Highest mean values were for “I am aware of the ethical concerns (e.g., plagiarism, overuse) when using AI in writing” (M = 3.91, SD = 0.328) and “I adjust my prompts to improve the quality of ChatGPT responses” (M = 3.84, SD = 0.649), indicating considerable possible awareness of responsible AI use and an emergent capability in prompt engineering among the participants.

The moderate engagement was reported for items like “I critically evaluate the suggestions provided by ChatGPT” (M = 3.30, SD = 0.463), and “I ask follow-up questions to improve the AI-generated content” (M = 2.99, SD = 1.316). This means, while some reflective practices and dialogic interaction do happen with the learners, such instances show variations in their depth of engagement.

Two statements, "I reflect on how ChatGPT helps or limits my writing skills" (M = 2.41, SD = 1.455) and "I revise the output from ChatGPT before submitting written work" (M = 2.62, SD = 1.212), seem to produce rare behavior on the part of the respondents. Hence, metacognitive activities in this case were not performed regularly by respondents: the respondents critically revised the AI output and reflected on it. This means that metacognitive activities, such as critically revising AI output and reflecting upon it, were, therefore, not carried out regularly by the respondents. In the same way, somewhat moderate responses were given for checking AI-generated corrections against other sources (M=3.14; SD=1.129); this further implies that learners may not always cross-check or validate the information provided by AI.

Table 5. *Participants’ Self-Monitoring in Using ChatGPT for Writing Development*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	S. D
22. I critically evaluate the suggestions provided by ChatGPT	79	3	4	3.30	.463
23. I verify information or grammar changes made by ChatGPT with other sources	79	1	4	3.14	1.129
24. I revise the output from ChatGPT before submitting written work	79	1	4	2.62	1.212
25. I reflect on how ChatGPT helps or limits my writing skills	79	1	4	2.41	1.455
26. I ask follow-up questions to improve the AI-generated content	79	1	5	2.99	1.316
27. I adjust my prompts to improve the quality of ChatGPT responses	79	2	5	3.84	.649
28. I am aware of the ethical concerns (e.g., plagiarism, overuse) when using AI in writing	79	2	4	3.91	.328
Valid N (listwise)	79				

In conclusion, despite the participants exhibiting a pronounced ethical awareness and a progressively advanced level of sophistication in their interactions with artificial intelligence instruments, there remains an opportunity for improvement in areas such as reflective revision, content validation, and metacognitive assessment to ensure a responsible and competency-enhancing incorporation of AI.

4.3 Research question 3: How do students monitor, reflect on, and evaluate their use of ChatGPT in relation to their writing development and self-directed learning?

As shown in Table 6, the respondents exhibited an optimistic view of ChatGPT's usefulness in writing enhancement. The statement "My writing quality has improved since using ChatGPT" received the highest mean score of 3.91, SD = 0.328, indicating to a great extent learner confidence in the effectiveness of the tool in improving written output. In a similar vein, the respondents agreed that ChatGPT assisted them in getting over writer's block (M = 3.67, SD = 0.571). Here, the chatbots clearly came to the fore in alleviating emotional and cognitive barriers of the writing process.

For the affective outcomes, the item "ChatGPT improved my confidence in writing" had a mean of 3.14, with a standard deviation of 1.129, which indicates that there were moderately agree. This seems to imply that not all learners shared the benefits in self-efficacy equally. An almost identical mean score was obtained for the statement "I believe ChatGPT will support lifelong learning if used intelligently" (M = 3.14, SD = 1.129), suggesting that the entire cohort has not yet fully developed their acceptance of the potentially reproductive power of AI in education but are beginning to acknowledge the idea.

Table 6. *Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT's Impact on Writing Skills*

	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**S. D**
29. ChatGPT helps me overcome writer's block	79	2	4	3.67	.571
30. ChatGPT has improved my confidence in writing	79	1	4	3.14	1.129

31. My writing quality has improved since using ChatGPT	79	2	4	3.91	.328
32. I rely on ChatGPT too much and it may affect my independent learning	79	2	4	3.67	.571
33. I believe ChatGPT can support lifelong learning if used wisely	79	1	4	3.14	1.129
Valid N (listwise)	**79**				

Fascinatingly, students with a mean score of 3.67 (SD=0.571) on the statement "I rely on ChatGPT too much and it may affect my independent learning" demonstrated some consciousness of the dependency on AI. This finding falls in line with previous studies (e.g., Mogavi et al. 2024; Lin 2023) in which the concerns raised about passive engagement and possible detriment to self-directed learning abilities when AI technologies are used without critical consideration were discussed.

To conclude, while students did recognize the issues regarding over-dependence, they viewed ChatGPT as an ally in their endeavors toward enhancing writing and breaking away mental constraints. The results thus lend weight to the dialectical position of AI in education—as being a hindrance to sustenance of learner autonomy in the long run and/or as a vehicle for advancement.

Here's a refined version of your report, ensuring consistency with the findings from the attached research paper:

Findings from interviews

To complement the quantitative findings from the survey on undergraduate students' use of ChatGPT in writing, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students from ULSA2. These interviews aimed to explore students' motivations, self-management strategies, and self-monitoring practices in AI-assisted writing. Additionally, participants reflected on how ChatGPT influenced their writing development.

The interview protocol consisted of ten open-ended questions covering students' usage patterns, evaluation methods for AI-generated suggestions, challenges faced, and concerns regarding reliance on ChatGPT. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, conducted either in person or via video conferencing. Transcriptions were analyzed using thematic coding aligned with Garrison's (1997) Self-Directed Learning (SDL) Model and emerging themes from ChatGPT integration.

1. Usage of ChatGPT in Writing Stages

Findings confirmed that students primarily used ChatGPT during pre-writing phases, including brainstorming, idea generation, and structuring content. Many students relied on AI assistance to overcome writer's block, organize main points, and refine their early drafts.

As participant 2 noted:

"Whenever I get stuck at the beginning, I use ChatGPT to come up with ideas or an outline."

Or

The participant 5 provided:

"I ask it to help me structure my writing before I start."

Another shared:

"Brainstorming is the hardest part, so I use ChatGPT to generate a list of ideas."

2. Motivation for Using ChatGPT

Motivation to use ChatGPT was primarily intrinsic, driven by its ability to reduce writing anxiety and increase engagement. Some participants started using ChatGPT out of curiosity, but later recognized its practical benefits.

"I feel less anxious when I write with ChatGPT—it gives me a starting point."

(Participant 3)

"At first, I was curious about AI, but then I realized how useful it was."

(Participant 6)

"It keeps me engaged because I get quick suggestions, so I don't feel stuck."

(Participant 1)

3. Self-Management Strategies

Participants demonstrated varying levels of self-management in their AI-assisted writing practices. While many reported strong personal responsibilities and the ability to minimize distractions, others struggled with time management and context adaptation when using ChatGPT.

"I try to use ChatGPT productively, but sometimes I get distracted by playing with prompts too long."

(Participant 4)

"I don't really change how I use ChatGPT depending on the writing type."

(*Participant* 10)

These results highlight the need for better planning strategies to ensure AI usage aligns with academic goals across different writing contexts.

4. Self-Monitoring and Metacognitive Engagement

While students were generally aware of ethical concerns and demonstrated prompt refinement skills, fewer engaged in deeper self-monitoring practices such as revising AI-generated drafts or reflecting critically on ChatGPT's role in writing development.

One participant shared:

"*I mostly copy ChatGPT responses and tweak a few words without checking for accuracy.*"

Another one said:

"*I don't think too much about whether its suggestions are good—I just use them if they sound okay*."

These findings suggest that students could benefit from structured guidance on verifying AI-generated content, cross-checking information, and developing metacognitive writing strategies.

5. ***Perceived Impact on Writing Development***

Most students believed ChatGPT improved their writing (M = 3.91) and helped them overcome writer's block. However, some expressed concerns about dependency, fearing that excessive AI reliance might undermine their ability to write independently.

Some participants indicated"

"*I think my writing has improved—it's like having an instant tutor*."

(*Participant* 3)

"*I worry that I'll rely too much on AI and forget how to write properly*."

(*Participant* 10)

"*ChatGPT helps with grammar and sentence structure, but I still need to make sure my ideas make sense*."

(*Participant* 5)

These observations reinforce the dual impact of AI-assisted learning—enhancing writing quality while presenting challenges for autonomy.

5. Discussion

Based on Garrison's Self-Directed Learning (SDL) model, which is composed of the triad components of motivation, management by self, and self-monitoring. This chapter will be an interpretation of the findings of the study. Also, it contextualizes literature to understand how undergraduate learners at ULSA2 engage ChatGPT into their writing practices and how it influences their SDL competencies.

5.1 Usage Patterns and Prewriting Scaffolding

Findings indicate that undergraduates most frequently used ChatGPT for prewriting engagement, mainly in idea generation (M = 3.84) and major point organization (M = 3.86). Therefore, it adds up to earlier studies since, according to these results, ChatGPT can be regarded as a useful cognitive scaffold that facilitates writing and more so breaking the blocks of writers (Wang et al., 2024). In-addition, Su et al. (2023) intel about the two commonest application areas of AI in academic writing as brainstorming and structural outlining.

The interviews supported that ULSA2 undergraduates found ChatGPT to be helpful in outlining the content and activating prior knowledge in order that they could approach learning tasks with greater confidence. However, this was reported to occur with less frequency in cases where revision was more involved, such as changing tone, summarizing, or aligning answers to fit assignment criteria—pointing to the underuse of the tool for subtler writing functions. This suggests that students possess a somewhat limited conceptualization of the potential uses of AI tools that emphasize idea generation at the expense of higher-order cognitive considerations. This finding is aligned with Ali et al., (2023).

5.2 Motivation: Reducing Anxiety and Increasing Engagement

Among the students, motivation was one of the clearest aspects of SDL behavior; they felt that ChatGPT could relieve them from stress and pressure (M=4.25) toward aid in actually engaging in the writing task (M=4.24). These results give support to Hartnett et al. (2011), who argued that SDL is feted through tools fostering learner autonomy while decreasing cognitive load. This must have engendered a psychologically safe environment from which to experiment and explore the tool's immediate, accessible, and nonjudgmental characteristics.

At first, it was curiosity-driven student motivation (M=3.63), while later in the modeling, they continued to work with the tool habitually because they found it useful. According to Loyens et al. (2008), the SDL process is highly dependent on environmental stimulus that upholds learners' feeling of competencies rather than intrinsic motivational factors. They further lured students into using the tool with comments such as, "keep writing without hesitation." On the scale of motivational factors, teacher encouragement (M = 3.70) was far lower than the motivation arising from intrinsic interest.

Students as a whole preferred writing alone to writing with ChatGPT (M=3.48), perceived the AI as an auxiliary rather than a replacement for their efforts, which demonstrates that learning is that interplay Garrison (1997) describes as a dual motivational dynamic between near internal initiation and teacher-guided scaffolding.

5.3 Self-Management: Strategic Planning and Limitations

It was clear that the students were much responsible towards their own learning, as shown by self-responsibility (M = 3.82) and managing digital distractions (M = 3.80) scores. The results also promise well with the literature which

has embedded that AI-assisted learning can offer self-regulation and discipline through creating constraints imposed by learners on tools' usage (Lai et al. 2022). Importantly, however, the worse were time management skills (M = 2.62) and adaptive usage with writing tasks (M = 2.44). This signifies that they did time management in their use of ChatGPT; otherwise, it suggests that there was not much varied strategy applied according to the situation. The interviews show that most students interact with ChatGPT almost always in the same way for different task types, audiences, or genres. Therefore, according to Li et al. (2024), this rigidity restricts AI's ability to fully support individualized learning. Even more students are likely to play with prompts purposelessly without having any intention, showing their utter lack of metacognitive planning that Garrison owns as part of self-management. Well-laid structured scaffolding opportunities in students' assignment would scaffold their tasks, construct interim writing goals, and recalibrate their AI engagement in relationship to the complexity of assignments.

5.4 Self-Monitoring: Ethical Awareness and Reflective Deficits

Self-assessment was anything but the loftiest area in SDL in this study. However, while students seemed fairly conscious of ethical practices (M = 3.91) and showed off some early signs of developing their prompt refinement skills (M = 3.84), they lacked very basic reflective practice regarding revising AI-generated texts (M = 2.62), questioning what ChatGPT suggested (M = 2.99), and even thinking about the role of ChatGPT in their learning (M = 2.41).

Such behavior matches the ones reported from Ali et al. (2023) that many learners maintain a passive perspective on AI tools and accept outputs at face value without any critical scrutiny. That is through deep reflective engagement that students acquire and transfer knowledge across tasks; these criteria are metacognitive maturity.

In regard to the behavior of self-evaluation, students varied surprisingly amongst themselves in judging the effectiveness of ChatGPT when compared to their academic resources or set rubrics. This fact illustrates the scant, functional and transactional qualities by which many of them qualified the experience of consuming the AI-generated text. This calls for explicit teaching in AI literacy-really, the critical engagement with and assessment of the products of an AI system (Mogavi et al., 2024).

5.5 Perceived Impact

Most of the participants actually did accept the fact that ChatGPT could evolve into fluent, confident, and extremely productive writers. The strongest part of the feedback is that using ChatGPT made their writing better (M = 3.91) and set them writing effortlessly (M = 3.67). Such arrived-out advantages are consonant to Lin and Chang (2023), who reported on the benefit of the AI tools for idea generation and for polishing language.

Thereby contradicting this: more than having over dependency (M = 3.67): learners basically enjoy all the benefits that the tool can access, and yet they moan about being dependent and the lack of independence and skills it incurs upon them. Such kinds of issues are part of a larger academic argument that claims at once the launch pad and the block of generative AI, according to Yan (2023).

The more habitualized AI becomes, the more students fear its future reducing their critical thinking ability or independence in writing. Such comments reveal a need for pedagogical mediation through which students would reflect on when to use AI and when to apply their judgment.

Overall, this study shows that ChatGPT serves as an aid in terms of self-directed writing, especially in encouraging and involving students in the early stages of writing tasks. Learning how to take responsibility has started to take hold and is effective in adopting effective strategies from ChatGPT; still, students demonstrate weak vigor in metacognitive reflection and not much flexibility in contextual application. As a result, AI-based systems like ChatGPT in writing instruction should go beyond access and learning how to use such tools and incorporate structured critical literacy, appropriate topic-sensitive planning, and reflective practices for the development of learners.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

This study investigated how undergraduate EFL students at ULSA2 utilize ChatGPT in their academic writing and how its usage can be furnished for self-directed learning (SDL) per the framework of Garrison (1997). On the whole, the infiltration indicates that students find ChatGPT extremely useful in motivating them to begin writing, especially in the areas of ideation and outlining. Students claimed a high intrinsic motivation level and personal responsibility when using this tool, especially resisting digital distractions and initiating writing tasks. Such situations mark the emergence of self-management skills, which are the basis for SDL.

However, the study specifically identified problem areas for students, such as self-monitoring. For instance, the majority of learners appeared to be minimally engaged in revising AI-generated content, critically reflecting on their learning processes, or adapting the use of ChatGPT according to task demands. This indicates that the metacognitive dimension of SDL remains immature. Furthermore, feelings of over-dependence on ChatGPT seem to necessitate more intended use that fosters independence rather than encourages passivity.

This research provides recommendations for institutions, teachers, and learners to ensure that such tools as ChatGPT will enhance, not hinder, academic development. Thus, institutions should lead the incorporation of AI literacy in the curriculum in terms of ethics, prompt design, and source verification. They must also carve out places for staff professional development vis-à-vis AI's instructional possibilities and outlines for ethical generative AI use.

For teachers, this paper has intended scaffolding for teachers on AI use in different phases of the writing process, stimulating students to give attention to what the machine has produced and auctioning feedback types that can be AI-and-human. Assignments should shape students' relationships with AI into critical and responsible partnerships with use as support rather than as a replacement of cognitive effort.

Finally, the students would be encouraged to use ChatGPT strategically, with goals in mind. They should be able to demonstrate critical usage such as seeking information from other sources and revising contents to academic standards. A scheduled reflection on how ChatGPT impacts students' progress in writing can help them understand where they are growing and what they would find moving toward independence. Thus, all stakeholders could organize their environments around intentional, reflective, and ethical writing practices to further learning, engagement, and academic integrity while developing sustainable self-directed learning.

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