**Enhancing Learner Autonomy in English Writing Skills through the Adoption of ChatGPT: A Case Study of English-Majored Freshmen at Ho Chi Minh University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT)**

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**Abstract**

Becoming lifelong learners who have the potential to pursue academic success in language learning requires a number of factors, ranging from linguistic competencies, dedication to studies, to learner autonomy development. The latest emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in education, specifically the availability of ChatGPT, promises to foster learner autonomy in a way that is distinct from conventional methods. This paper aims to investigate the enhancement of learner autonomy in English writing skills through the employment of ChatGPT among EFL freshmen at Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT). A questionnaire-based survey was undertaken with the participation of fifty-four first-year students, eight of whom would then be randomly chosen to attend a semi-structured interview. The findings of the study reveal ChatGPT could turn HUFLIT freshmen into autonomous writers of English reflected through a reduced dependence on lecturers for offering corrective feedback, self-reflection, and self-evaluation of their own paragraphs, as well as an increase in interest and motivation for writing. The majority of the participants also agreed that ChatGPT assisted them in a variety of aspects such as making better planning of ideas and structure, asking critical questions to fill gaps in their knowledge of English writing, and improving their problem-solving and decision-making skills. However, they asserted that only if ChatGPT was employed for reference purposes could learners of English take a self-directed approach to writing English and that ChatGPT adoption under the guidance of lecturers could be more beneficial to students’ learner autonomy enhancement.

***Keywords:*** learner autonomy, English writing skills, ChatGPT, English-majored freshmen

1. **Introduction**

The creation of a high-quality piece of writing is composed of a variety of elements, ranging from idea planning and generation to putting those ideas into grammatically correct sentences and error rectification. This process can be monitored and facilitated under the instruction of lecturers in charge of writing subjects in classrooms, but accomplishing proficiency in writing demands more than lecturers’ guidance and supervision. Indeed, the competence to assume responsibility for one’s own learning is a prerequisite for those wishing to maintain their all-consuming passion for writing in another language such as English. The enormous influence of such external factors as learning environments and appropriate strategies is irrefutable; however, learner autonomy seems to be a deciding factor in guiding language learners to keep stepping on to uncharted territory to explore what is beyond the limits of their linguistic knowledge, which may lay the foundations for their progress later on.

The enhancement of learner autonomy can be partially achieved through a mixed diversity of student-centered activities such as debates, projects, and group discussions where opportunities to engage in critical thinking, problem solving, planning their own thoughts, and expressing their perspectives on a particular issue in both spoken and written English are plentiful. Aside from these seemingly conventional approaches, the proliferation of advanced technological tools, such as ChatGPT, has brought about both opportunities and challenges for students, especially those pursuing tertiary education, to delve into issues about which they express concern, but are not courageous enough to seek for advice from those in charge of the subjects. It is a more comfortable experience for language learners to have a conversation with a chatbot who can act as an assistant to give prompt responses to any questions raised without worrying about making pronunciation-related errors or losing face as the questions are too fundamental or too complicated.

Earlier studies have pointed out a plethora of benefits associated with the adoption of ChatGPT in assisting students with language skills improvement, many of which have placed an emphasis on the potential merits of utilizing ChatGPT in the betterment of writing skills (Chukwuere, 2024; Ho, Ho, & Thai, 2024; Nguyen, 2024; Tseng & Lin, 2024; Zebua & Katemba, 2024). There also exists research conducted on the correlation between the application of ChatGPT and increased motivation in language learning among students (Ali, Shamsan, Hezam, & Mohammed, 2023; Yıldız, 2023); however, such research on the topic of enhancing autonomy competency of learners in English writing seems to be deficient in the context of Vietnamese higher education institutions. Therefore, more studies need to be undertaken to affirm the impacts of ChatGPT on the enhancement of learner autonomy in terms of English writing capabilities.

The objective of this study was to examine the efficacy of employing ChatGPT as a writing assistant tool on HUFLIT English-majored freshmen’s learner autonomy. The study aims to figure out answers to the following questions:

1. What are HUFLIT first-year English majors’ perception on the efficacy of ChatGPT in enhancing learner autonomy in English writing?
2. What aspects of English writing can HUFLIT English-majored freshmen take responsibility for subsequent to the utilization of ChatGPT?
3. How can freshmen at HUFLIT foster their learner autonomy in writing English with the assistance of ChatGPT?
4. **Literature Review**
	1. ***English writing skills:***

Writing is, unarguably, a crucial skill that helps to transfer people’s thoughts into chains of ideas that are coherent and meaningful in some way. Prior studies have underlined the significance of writing skills in language development (Ho, Ho, & Thai, 2024) and efficient communication (Graham & Perin, 2007). Writing is also perceived as a powerful tool for those aiming to pursue higher education and/or postgraduate degrees and embark on occupations requiring good to excellent writing skills. The process of writing includes several steps namely “brainstorming and planning, outlining, organizing and drafting, and rewriting” (Aziz, Hoesny, & Arifiyah, 2022, p. 227), which takes years of sustained effort and consistent practice to master.

* 1. ***Learner autonomy:***
		1. *Definition of learner autonomy:*

There has been a range of interpretations with regard to learner autonomy. This term was originally defined by Holec (1981) as the ability to shoulder responsibility for one’s academic studies, which is a multi-step process encompassing goal setting, method selection, procedure implementation and observation, as well as evaluation of its progress and efficacy. Holding the same view with Holec (1981) of learner autonomy, Little (1991), however, highlighted the involvement of learners’ critical mind to reflect on what has been achieved in the process of learning, the capacity to make their own decisions, and self-reliance in their actions to execute their own learning. Autonomy, from the perspective of both researchers, is not the complete freedom to carry on academic activities at will, but it is the independence and self-direction “within a defining framework” (Dickinson, 1987) that learners take for real learning to occur, in addition to an active sense of engagement coupled with a high degree of responsibility. According to Dickinson (1987, as cited in Joshi, 2011, p. 13), learner autonomy refers to “a mode of learning; one in which the individual is responsible for all the decisions connected with her learning, and undertakes the implementation of these decisions.” Different from those being spoon-fed by teachers, autonomous learners are not only decision makers but also responsibility bearers for their own success or failure in the pursuit of knowledge.

In Joshi’s (2011) opinion, learner autonomy is made up of two main components which are “ability” and “willingness.” He added that the two characteristics were inextricably intertwined, and the absence of one of these could lead learners to find it difficult or impossible to exercise control of their learning. This is particularly true in Eastern cultures where knowledge is often imparted to students by teachers who are also the ones to make ultimate decisions on the content of the lessons and the skills their students need to acquire, and these decisions tend to disregard learners’ real interests, needs, and capabilities. What is more, this kind of capacity is innately unobtainable, and it can only be achieved through “systematic learning” (Gardner, 1981, as cited in Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020, p. 201). The practice of accumulating knowledge and skills should be done in a methodological manner, which requires practice over time to reinforce the habit of independent learning.

* + 1. *Advantages of learner autonomy:*

When it comes to the potential benefits, firstly, learner autonomy has proved its effectiveness in assisting students to have an understanding of their goals and be able to hone skills for attaining these goals (Najeeb, 2012). Defining goals is of paramount importance; if language learners have no clear goals, then they are not likely to appreciate the learning activities that are taking place and tend to face the risks of losing opportunities to polish and equip themselves with the skills that are crucial to their goal attainment. Another noticeable merit is autonomous learners can get over the hindrances stemming from educational background, cultural norms, and previous experience (Çakici, 2015). What can be referred here is autonomy development can provide learners with the internal strengths to tackle barriers stemming from a variety of factors. Irrespective of challenges in backgrounds, cultures, and learning experiences, learners who acquire a sense of autonomy can still determine the objectives they should be working towards and map out the suitable strategies to fulfill their targets. Motivational promotion (Ma & Ma, 2012) also encourages learners to accept greater accountability as well as expressing willingness and a positive attitude towards their academic performance, ensuring a passionate interest in exploring in-depth knowledge pertinent to the major they have opted for.

* 1. ***ChatGPT:***
		1. *An overview of ChatGPT:*

The emergence of ChatGPT in 2022 as a result of AI explosion has made a revolution in numerous fields such as education, healthcare, and finance, enabling the generation of texts resembling to those of humans on a wide array of subjects (Baskara & Mukarto, 2023) and production of natural conversations with users (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023) accommodating to people’s needs and demands by means of responding to specific prompts relevant to various requests concerning problem resolution, translation, language learning assistance, and so on. The most outstanding feature of the chatbot is its “vast vocabulary and ability to generate contextually appropriate responses,” which could maximize the chances to nurture proficiency in communication (Baskara & Mukarto, 2023, p. 347).

ChatGPT has an enormous potential in providing “interactive learning experiences” (Baskara & Mukarto, 2023, p. 347), “customized support” (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023, p. 5), and “immediate feedback” (Abas et al., 2023, p. 3536). Such experiences, support, and feedback are crucial to the establishment of a learning environment conducive to effective knowledge acquisition and skills development since ChatGPT’s ability to interact with language learners can create a sense of comfort and help them gain confidence in making inquiries about what seems to be lacking in their linguistic repertoire. Moreover, ChatGPT’s “access to a wealth of knowledge that is available online” and its employment of “massive language modeling to identify patterns in the word choices” (Maghamil & Sieras, 2024, p. 118) help to produce reliable responses tailored to each individual’s specific needs.

* + 1. *ChatGPT’s potential in enhancing learner autonomy:*

There is a body of literature centering on the effectiveness of ChatGPT on increasing learner autonomy in language learning. One of the most outstanding studies is the one conducted by Yildiz (2023) who found an improvement in experimental students’ test scores and autonomy following the employment of ChatGPT in handling vocabulary tasks. In a similar fashion to Yildiz’s finding, in their research, Ali, Shamsan, Hezam, & Mohammed (2023) drew a conclusion that the incorporation of ChatGPT in language classes could foster students’ motivation in English reading and writing skills, and the most enhanced micro skills were grammar and vocabulary, which was demonstrated in their independence learning, self-assurance gain, pleasure and interest stimulation, increased interaction with language speakers, as well as enthusiasm for future job-seeking. Such researchers as Hatmanto & Sari (2023), when aligning theoretical frameworks with their interview results, have found out that a sense of autonomy among students could be fostered by means of “initiating conversations, exploring a variety of topics, and formulating learning objectives” in the process of learning.

1. **Methodology**
	1. ***Subjects:***

The study was conducted with the attendance of a total of 54 freshmen majoring in English language studies, utilizing convenience sampling method. The focus of the paper was on first-year English majors as these were taking English writing courses on how to write paragraphs and compose essays of varying types. First year was also the period when these students were exposed to challenges in adapting themselves to the new educational setting where the traditional teacher’s role of conveying knowledge was minimized, giving way to student-centered approaches. This means students in their first year were expected to take on greater responsibility for their learning in all disciplines including writing.

* 1. ***Materials:***

The research paper employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with the main instrument being a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview due to their convenience, quickness, as well as reliability in data collection. The questionnaire was drafted based on the existing ones suggested by former studies with some modifications subsequent to consulting other lecturers teaching the same skills – English writing subjects. The questionnaire consisted of questions of various types such as multiple choice, 5-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions categorized into four major sections, namely the use of ChatGPT, aspects of writing facilitated by ChatGPT, ChatGPT and learner autonomy, and enhancing learner autonomy in writing through ChatGPT. The questions were composed on Google Forms, which generated the link to the survey questionnaire just at the click of a mouse. A semi-structured interview which was made up of three questions coupled with some follow-up questions was adopted to investigate HUFLIT freshmen’s perception of utilizing ChatGPT to enhance their autonomy in English writing.

* 1. ***Procedure:***

The questionnaire link was sent to groups of English first-year majors via Zalo. The survey was conducted online over the course of two weeks. The participants’ answers were gathered and automatically saved in the tab entitled ‘Responses’ on the top of the page, which greatly simplified the analysis process. Afterwards, the one-week interview with randomly chosen participants was conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The interviewees’ responses to the questions were then recorded and transcribed for analysis later on.

* 1. ***Statistical treatment:***

The data collected from the questionnaire went through a meticulous and comprehensive analysis with the assistance of Google Forms, and the figures were then displayed through a combination of charts and diagrams. Thematic analysis was employed as the principal data analysis tool since this method aided in the exploration and presentation of the key themes emerging from the participants’ responses.

1. **Results**
	1. ***Questionnaire:***

Regarding section 1 which examines the students’ use of ChatGPT in writing:

***Figure 1. Students’ adoption of ChatGPT in English writing skills***



As can be seen from Figure 1, the overwhelming majority of English-majored freshmen at HUFLIT revealed that they had employed ChatGPT to assist them with their English writing tasks in related courses, which indicated that a very large percentage of students were fully conscious of the benefits of ChatGPT in promoting their writing skills.

***Figure 2. The frequency of utilizing ChatGPT in English writing skills***

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Figure 2 shows that slightly over three-quarters of the survey respondents made use of ChatGPT for writing purposes but at varying levels of frequency ranging from ‘sometimes’ to ‘always’, followed by 16.7% of those adopting ChatGPT on a rare basis and 7.4% not relying on this chatbot for improving their writing skills.

Section 2 revolved around the aspects of writing facilitated by the employment of ChatGPT. According to Figure 3, idea generation was the aspect that received the most support from ChatGPT, with around two-thirds of students consulting ideas generated from it. Asking for suggestions on lexical resources and grammatical structures was the second most prevalent inquiry from the survey participants, constituting 42.6%. The figures for students turning to ChatGPT for writing a sample paragraph or essay and writing a general outline were exactly the same (38.9%); however, writing a specific outline was an area appealing to the lowest proportion of students (29.6%). Paragraph or essay correction was opted for by just more than a third of the freshmen surveyed.

***Figure 3. Aspects of writing the participants turned to ChatGPT for help***

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***Figure 4. Aspects of writing facilitated by ChatGPT***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Statements*** | ***Strongly agree*** | ***Agree*** | ***Neutral*** | ***Disagree*** | ***Strongly disagree*** |
| Adopting ChatGPT assists me in developing my knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. | ***18.5%*** | ***48.1%*** | 31.5% | 1.9% | 0% |
| Adopting ChatGPT provides me with opportunities to learn from the sample answers in terms of idea expression, organization, and writing styles. | ***20.4%*** | ***50%*** | 24% | 5.6% | 0% |
| Adopting ChatGPT increases my confidence in word choice and collocations, use of grammar, and other aspects of writing (prepositions, articles, conjunctions, etc.) | *20.4%* | *42.6%* | 35.1% | 1.9% | 0% |
| Adopting ChatGPT enables me to figure out and learn from my mistakes in writing without relying on lecturers’ feedback. | 22.2% | 42.6% | 27.7% | 5.6% | 1.9% |

The highest percentage of first-year English majors agreed that ChatGPT provided them with sample answers whose idea expression, organization, and writing styles they could learn from, at just above 70%. This was closely followed by the employment of ChatGPT for lexical and grammatical assistance (66.6%), recognition and correction of mistakes (64.8%), and confidence boost in word choice, collocations, along with other aspects of writing (63%). The figures for those remaining neutral ranged from 24% to 35%, while the proportion of respondents expressing disapproval of the statement made up a small minority (1.9% - 7.5%).

***Figure 5. The impacts of ChatGPT on learner autonomy in writing***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Statements*** | ***Strongly agree*** | ***Agree*** | ***Neutral*** | ***Disagree*** | ***Strongly disagree*** |
| Adopting ChatGPT helps me become better at planning a paragraph or an essay. | **16.7%** | **48.1%** | 27.8% | 3.7% | 3.7% |
| With the aid of ChatGPT, I can set short-term and long-term goals in order to enhance my writing skills. | *9.3%* | *48.1%* | 35.2% | 5.6% | 1.9% |
| I can keep track of my own progress in English writing thanks to ChatGPT. | 5.6% | 44.4% | 40.7% | 5.6% | 3.7% |
| Utilizing ChatGPT helps me make better-informed decisions related to learning English writing. | *18.5%* | *40.7%* | 37% | 0% | 3.7% |
| Adopting ChatGPT boosts my problem-solving skills in English writing. | ***11.1%*** | ***50%*** | 29.6% | 5.6% | 3.7% |
| I can ask ChatGPT critical questions to fill gaps in my knowledge of English writing. | *14.8%* | *42.6%* | 35.2% | 5.6% | 1.9% |
| Adopting ChatGPT helps me reflect on what I have learnt in English writing classes. | 13% | 38.9% | 29.6% | 11.1% | 7.4% |
| Adopting ChatGPT makes me feel more interested and motivated in English writing. | *5.6%* | *53.7%* | 22.2% | 16.7% | 1.9% |
| Adopting ChatGPT can foster my independence (learner autonomy) in English writing. | ***14.8%*** | ***40.7%*** | 31.5% | 7.4% | 5.6% |

The data from Figure 5 reveals that there was an overall approval of enhanced learner autonomy in English writing thanks to the employment of ChatGPT, which was represented by just over half of the students participating in the survey. A closer look at the Figure demonstrates that paragraph or essay planning became the most important aspect of learner autonomy improved by ChatGPT, which was agreed by slightly under two out of three of students. Problem-solving skills in dealing with writing exercises of English also witnessed a noticeable boost (61.1%) when ChatGPT was put in use. Increases in motivation and interest as well as betterment in decision-making skills contributed to the effectiveness of ChatGPT in learner autonomy enhancement, with each comprising approximately 59%. The utilization of the chatbot also facilitated HUFLIT freshmen’s goal setting and critical thinking abilities, particularly when it comes to inquiring questions to fill gaps in their knowledge of writing in English, each of which represented 57.4%. About half of the respondents considered reflection and progress tracking to be two areas of improvement by ChatGPT. On the other hand, figures for disagreement varied from a low of 3.7% to a high of 18.6%. Those selecting ‘neutral’ accounted for the greatest percentage in ‘progress tracking’ category and lowest in motivation boost.

***Figure 6. Methods of enhancing learner autonomy in writing through ChatGPT***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Statements*** | ***Strongly agree*** | ***Agree*** | ***Neutral*** | ***Disagree*** | ***Strongly disagree*** |
| I just use ChatGPT as a guiding tool to help me with planning and structuring paragraphs or essays. | ***14.8%*** | ***38.9%*** | 33.3% | 9.3% | 3.7% |
| I only use ChatGPT to refer to their sample ideas after I have generated my own ideas. | ***7.4%*** | ***46.3%*** | 33.3% | 9.3% | 3.7% |
| I usually spend a large amount of time asking ChatGPT to suggest me some good vocabulary and grammar on a specific topic as well as taking notes of these. | *9.3%* | *40.7%* | 31.5% | 13% | 5.6% |
| I often finish my own pieces of writing and then ask ChatGPT to offer corrections for me. | *11.1%* | *40.7%* | 29.6% | 13% | 5.6% |
| I often read paragraphs or essays generated by ChatGPT to learn from these. | 13% | 35.2% | 35.2% | 13% | 3.7% |
| I still ask my lecturers for advice on how to make best use of ChatGPT in writing. | ***5.6%*** | ***55.6%*** | 25.9% | 9.3% | 3.7% |

As can be observed from Figure 6, the respondents who were in favour of asking their lecturers for advice on how to make the best use of ChatGPT in writing were in the majority (61.2%). The proportions of students who utilized ChatGPT as a guiding tool to assist them with planning and structuring paragraphs or essays were equal, at 53.7%, which was slightly higher than the figures for those who required ChatGPT to recommend interesting vocabulary and grammar on a specific topic and offer corrective feedback for their pieces of writing, at 50% and 51.8% respectively. By contrast, learning from sample answers generated from ChatGPT was seen as the least preferred method in promoting students’ sense of independence in learning writing.

Concerning the question on the greatest weaknesses in English writing skills, responses did not vary much since the majority of respondents surveyed realized their shortcomings in writing were mainly attributed to their limited repertoire of vocabulary and grammar. Many freshmen stated that they could not compose a decent paragraph or composition since the lexical items used in their sentences lacked precision, range, and appropriateness, while some recognized a failure in utilizing more complex grammatical structures:

*“I sometimes find it difficult to express myself fluently due to a limited vocabulary.”*

*“I think it is grammar and vocabulary. I sometimes struggle with sentence structure and punctuation, and I can have difficulty expressing myself clearly. I also tend to use repetitive language and struggle to find the right words at times.”*

 *“I may sometimes make mistakes in proofreading and editing my work, which can lead to unclear or confusing writing. I also find myself repeating certain words and phrases due to a limited vocabulary, making my writing repetitive and dull.”*

*“My greatest weaknesses in English writing skills are probably my difficulty in grasping grammar and syntax rules, and my limited vocabulary. I often struggle to construct complex sentences with proper structure and tend to use repetitive and simple language.”*

Apart from obstacles stemming from a shortage of vocabulary and incompetence in using complicated grammatical structures, the first-year students also pointed out problems associated with idea generation, structure planning, and error correction:

 *“I struggle with structuring my writing and expressing my thoughts in a clear and concise manner, as I tend to provide too much information or lack clarity.”*

*“I may struggle with proofreading and editing my work to ensure accuracy and clarity. My writing style may also be weak, limited by a lack of expressive vocabulary, leading to repetitive phrasing and a dull tone. I struggle to identify areas of confusion and ambiguity in my own writing, which can make it difficult for readers to understand my message.”*

As regards the role of ChatGPT in helping these students overcome these limitations, the majority of students asserted that ChatGPT could offer detailed suggestions for better, alternative words and phrases and grammatically correct sentence structures to improve clarity, cohesion, and idea flow. The survey participants said they could also revise or rectify their own errors based on the chatbot’s identification of problem areas.

*“If I'm struggling to find the right word to express my thoughts, ChatGPT can suggest alternative words or phrases that better convey my intended meaning.”*

*“ChatGPT can provide suggestions on how to rephrase or rearrange sentences or paragraphs to improve the flow and clarity of my writing.”*

*“It help me identify areas where my writing is unclear or ambiguous, allowing me to make necessary revisions.”*

*“ChatGPT can help me overcome these limitations by providing real-time feedback and suggestions on my writing. It can identify grammatical and punctuation errors, suggest alternative phrasing to improve clarity and cohesiveness, and offer synonym recommendations to expand my vocabulary.”*

When being asked to choose between ChatGPT or lecturers for offering feedback on writing pieces, most students preferred a combination of both. Even though students exhibited their appreciation of ChatGPT for its convenience as well as a quick ability to supply instantaneous feedback and recommendations on how to improve different areas of writing, they still highly valued lecturers’ role in providing “personalized advice and targeted exercises” and the two-way interaction or “human touch” that could not be found anywhere in the chatbot.

A diversity of methods was proposed to foster autonomy among first-year students of English language studies at HUFLIT, the most notable of which was increasing students’ familiarity with the potential capabilities of ChatGPT in providing feedback and suggestions for writing enhancement, setting goals and evaluating their own progress, and practising using ChatGPT independently of lecturers’ guidance so that they could maximize chances for learning on their own, which may in turn help them gain greater autonomy in completing writing tasks.

* 1. ***Interview:***

A number of major themes emerge subsequent to the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews.

***Theme 1: ChatGPT’s potential in the facilitation of writing skills:***

***Linguistic aspects***

Seven out of eight students stated that they adopted ChatGPT in English writing subjects on a various basis to aid them in several aspects of writing, most notably idea development which involves idea generation, expression, and expansion, outline making, and correction of errors, especially those concerning vocabulary, grammar, and spelling.

*“Firstly, I use ChatGPT so I can have many more ideas than the ideas available. You know, I want to expand my ideas. Secondly, when I feel like lazy, I can ask ChatGPT to make an outline for me, from which I can develop my ideas. Thirdly, if I have my own writing, I will ask ChatGPT to check spelling, sentence structures, vocabulary, grammar, etc.”*

*“Normally I write my own essays first, and then I use ChatGPT as a tool to correct my errors and synthesize grammar and vocabulary… to advance my writing or to synthesize materials for writing purposes.”*

Only one student did not make use of the tool owing to her fear of overreliance on it and its ability to undermine her English writing skills despite her acknowledgment of ChatGPT’s capabilities to support her in generating ideas, planning paragraphs or essays, identifying mistakes, and bettering lexical items and grammatical structures:

*“I think if I use ChatGPT, I will depend on it since ChatGPT is able to provide answers to assignments in class or questions from the test. If I think on my own, I can study English better. I’m afraid when I’m overdependent on it, I will not study English well…”*

***Aspects of learner autonomy***

Most of the participants agreed that after a period of exposing themselves to ChatGPT, they could assume responsibility for writing outlines, utilizing diverse vocabulary items, many of which are advanced and uncommon, recognizing and rectifying basic, repetitive mistakes in their subsequent writing tasks, and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in writing so that they could come up with suitable strategies to develop their strong points as well as minimizing their shortcomings.

*“ChatGPT provides me with a large vocabulary, and it also provides grammar source but I think it is not enough as I require. It helps the sentences flow smoothly and my vocabulary more diverse.”*

*“I search on ChatGPT for the outlines and then I use my own way to write. After I finish my writing, I’ll use ChatGPT for reference so that I can insert extra information into the sentences.”*

*“I often write essays for Ielts writing task 2. After I complete my essays, I ask ChatGPT to evaluate my essays based on Ielts criterion. It’ll give me a list of weaknesses and strengths, from which I can keep up with my strengths and reduce my weaknesses.”*

*“The aspects I feel I can be responsible for are outlines and vocabulary. I do not depend much on ChatGPT for consulting grammar.”*

*“I think ChatGPT can check basic mistakes and advance my vocabulary stock. You know, it can help us use more advanced words. We will use those words and apply them in sentences in the next writing exercises.”*

Almost all of the interviewees felt an increase in their learner autonomy, specifically their responsibility for their own writing pieces and reduced dependence on lecturers. They attributed this to ChatGPT’s assistance in idea generation, idea flow boosting, coherence and cohesion, outline suggestion, as well as vocabulary advancement and reuse. The students who valued ChatGPT in this respect thought they could learn and imitate the way ChatGPT structured a paragraph or an essay or built sentences using correct grammar and appropriate words. Some of them also noticed an improvement in their problem-solving and critical thinking skills, pointing out that they gained more experience in choosing what to write, how to plan a piece of writing more effectively, and how to input prompts to find out relevant information from ChatGPT after a period of time of employing it.

*“I think ChatGPT helps me know more vocabulary about a particular topic, and so I can write better and more coherent essays. I feel I less depend on my lecturers. When I look at a question, I’ll know what I should write next. After some time of conversing with it, I know what I should write, too.”*

*“My writing ability really improves. I write my own essay and then ask ChatGPT to check for errors, but it can only correct some mistakes so I’ll ask other people for correction. If I have a question that I don’t know how to deal with, I’ll ask ChatGPT for planning ideas, then I’ll consult its ideas and writing styles, imitate and paraphrase the ideas. If there are some difficult questions which I can’t solve, I will refer to ChatGPT so as to find out the core of the problem more easily…”*

***Theme 2: Some drawbacks of ChatGPT when adopted in English writing:***

Despite the potential benefits of ChatGPT in fostering student autonomy in English writing, one of the students expressed her concern about the accuracy and the *“mechanical aspect”* of ChatGPT in the use of adjectives and adverbs, stating that ideas expressed by ChatGPT were rather general and sometimes emotionless. The ideas appeared to be smoothly written, but the lexical icons utilized in the sentences were not as specific and concise as they should be, and they could not display emotions in the same way as English students can do. Some of the participants did not appreciate ChatGPT when it comes to grammar, pointing out inaccuracies or inappropriacy in the use of grammatical structures of this tool particularly in different contexts. They specified that sentences could be constructed in a correct manner by ChatGPT; however, these failed to suit the context they wished to mention; sometimes the ChatGPT-generated grammatical structures seemed to lack precision when they were employed in the settings which differed from the ones they often appeared.

***Theme 3: Methods of fostering learner autonomy in English writing skills through the assistance of ChatGPT:***

Views on how to improve learner autonomy in English writing with the support of ChatGPT were quite similar. The interviewees suggested that English-majored freshmen should bear responsibility for their writing tasks by thinking about the topic and brainstorming ideas before consulting ideas and outlines generated from ChatGPT. They also placed a great emphasis on the role of lecturers in providing supportive instructions on how to take the most advantage of ChatGPT, specifying that lecturers had better assign writing exercises to students who are supposed to work on their writing at home and then make use of ChatGPT to check their piece of writing prior to seeking advice on the accuracy of ChatGPT-produced comments from lecturers. They thought the best practice to help them enhance their autonomy was a coordination of ChatGPT and lecturers’ guidance. Ultimately, from these students’ standpoint, ChatGPT could not supersede lecturers, and it should be only considered as a tool for reference so as not to erode students’ critical thinking and creativity as well as increasing their reliance on the chatbot.

*“Lecturers should give students an exercise, and students should do it at home themselves. ChatGPT will correct the exercise once. Then the students should ask lecturers to correct the mistakes once more so they can have experience in correcting the same mistake. At that time, I think students can improve their writing…”*

*“I think first we should ask ChatGPT to make sample outlines from which we can develop the ideas or if we get stuck with ideas or we want to consult ideas, we can ask ChatGPT to produce a complete sample essay or paragraph but we have to check grammar, sentence structures and the sources presented by ChatGPT carefully… ChatGPT cannot completely replace humans, so we should select the source of information. Lecturers still have an important role. They should coordinate with books and information on websites. They can also give students tips to search for information, write prompts so that ChatGPT can do the task the most accurately and with the fewest faults. Besides ChatGPT, lecturers can give students other sources to do writing exercises so we won’t depend on ChatGPT too much.”*

One student stated that ChatGPT should be adopted to “provide a personalized route” for students to follow so that they could develop their full awareness of the mistakes they made from the analysis, synthesis, and rectification of errors. Another participant held the belief that students should work on the assigned writing tasks on their own by writing basic sentences and only obtained feedback from lecturers and ChatGPT when they wished to incorporate more advanced grammatical structures in their writing tasks.

1. **Discussion**

The research paper aims to address the following questions:

1. What are HUFLIT first-year English majors’ perception on the efficacy of ChatGPT in enhancing learner autonomy in English writing?
2. What aspects of English writing can HUFLIT English-majored freshmen take responsibility for subsequent to the utilization of ChatGPT?
3. How can freshmen at HUFLIT foster their learner autonomy in writing English with the assistance of ChatGPT?

With regard to the first and second questions, a large proportion of English-majored freshmen at HUFLIT perceived ChatGPT as a beneficial and efficacious tool for fostering learner autonomy which is attributable to its potentialities of serving as a reference source of idea generation, outlines, sample paragraphs and essays, lexical items, grammar, and error correction. Among these, vocabulary advancement, idea generation and development, outline making, and error rectification were the areas students felt capable of handling without reliance on lecturers. Aside from this, aspects of learner autonomy such as the ability to take charge of planning paragraphs or essays, problem-solving, decision-making skills, goal setting and reflection as well as motivation and interest were also cultivated after a period of time of adopting ChatGPT in writing. This finding concurred with that of Yildiz (2023), Hatmanto & Sari (2023), and Ali, Shamsan, Hezam, & Mohammed (2023). The possible explanation for this might lie in ChatGPT’s capabilities to provide the students with instantaneous support and feedback based on its enormous linguistic repertoire. HUFLIT first-year students often find themselves get stuck with ideas for a writing topic, so by employing ChatGPT, they can gain easy access to a large number of perspectives produced by ChatGPT, which can facilitate their brainstorming process later on. Reading comments or suggestions offered by the chatbot also allowed the students to critically re-evaluate and make necessary adjustments to their own paragraphs or compositions. Vocabulary was, unsurprisingly, the aspect that most benefited from the employment of ChatGPT, and thanks to the suggestions offered by the tool, HUFLIT’s English majors were more likely to utilize less common lexical items of intermediate and advanced levels, enabling them to be more confident in the selection of words for their writing. Moreover, by referring to examples related to planning, outlining and sample answers produced by ChatGPT, these first-year students could visualize the specific steps they could take in order to deal with a certain writing topic, from which their enthusiasm for the subject might be stimulated. With the aid of ChatGPT, the ability to analyze, structure, and correct their own work has been gradually nurtured, which was one of the two preconditions for students to promote their independence in learning. What is more, their willingness to adopt ChatGPT in writing has also contributed to the enhancement of this crucial competency in the technological era. However, the English-majored freshmen also claimed that students should not totally dependent on ChatGPT for generating written sentences owing to its failure to provide ideas which are less general and more emotional, as well as its shortage of appropriateness and precision in the use of grammatical patterns.

When it comes to the third question, the findings reveal that the best approach agreed by the participants of the survey and interview was the combination of lecturers’ instructions and ChatGPT as a tool for consultation and assistance in idea brainstorming and vocabulary advancement due to its personalization of learning experiences. However, its imprecision in grammar and limitation in conveying emotions in the construction of ideas seemed to be the greatest hindrance, making the tool’s writing quality inferior to that of humans. The participants, therefore, suggested that to achieve the optimal enhancement in learner autonomy, lecturers still have a pivotal role to play in assisting their students to double-check the feedback given by ChatGPT or provide instructions on how to employ the tool in writing properly, and ChatGPT should only be utilized as a supplementary means of aiding students with the process of writing and editing.

1. **Conclusion**

The utilization of ChatGPT in English writing for learner autonomy enhancement has been successfully investigated in this research paper. The results of the study suggest the potential abilities of ChatGPT in promoting a sense of independence in writing among freshmen of English major at HUFLIT. Surveyed participants’ manifestations of increased autonomy include a reduction in their reliance over their lecturers for feedback provision, a growing responsibility for several key aspects of writing, goal setting, and skills development, an enhancement in motivation and enthusiasm for writing, along with a boost in the abilities to evaluate and reflect on their own writing. The participants suggested that first-year English majors would benefit the most if they employed ChatGPT as a writing assistant tool, with lecturers acting as facilitators in guiding them to utilize ChatGPT in a proper manner.

* 1. ***Limitations:***

There are a number of limitations that should be taken into consideration. First and foremost, the small number of students involved in the study (54 freshmen) could influence the precision and reliability of the findings, making it difficult to generalize the results to a broader population. Furthermore, if an experiment had been able to be carried out in classrooms, more comprehensive and in-depth insights into how ChatGPT made positive changes to learner autonomy in writing subjects would have been obtained to further ascertain the impacts of ChatGPT on students’ accountability for their learning.

* 1. ***Recommendations for further studies:***

Future studies should take other qualitative approaches such as experiments and observations into consideration to further examine the specific impacts ChatGPT exerts on learners’ autonomy in English writing and other related subjects like research writing. A larger number of participants should also be involved in future research so that the reliability of study results can be strengthened. The positive correlation between the adoption of ChatGPT and learner autonomy in English writing skills indicates that ChatGPT, if employed properly over a certain period of time, could be beneficial to first-year students in the betterment of various writing aspects, most notably idea brainstorming, lexical and grammatical suggestion, and error detection as well as correction. Future research, however, had better expand the scope by investigating how learner autonomy can be developed in other skills through the adoption of ChatGPT among English-majored students of other years of study.

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**Bionote**

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**Appendix A**

**QUESTIONNAIRE: ENHANCING LEARNER AUTONOMY THROUGH CHATGPT**

The aim of this questionnaire is to investigate HUFLIT freshmen's perspectives on how ChatGPT can assist them in enhancing their learner autonomy in English writing skills. Thanks for spending your quality time on giving responses to the following questions. All the personal information and responses provided in this questionnaire will be kept confidential.

**SECTION 1: THE USE OF CHATGPT**

1. ***Have you ever utilized ChatGPT to assist you with your English writing skills?***
* Yes
* No
1. ***How often do you utilize ChatGPT for the purpose mentioned above?***
* Always
* Usually
* Sometimes
* Rarely
* Never

**SECTION 2: ASPECTS OF WRITING FACILITATED BY CHATGPT**

1. ***What aspects of writing do you often use ChatGPT for?***
* Generating ideas for a particular topic
* Writing a general outline
* Writing a specific outline
* Suggesting vocabulary and grammar for use
* Writing a sample paragraph or essay
* Correcting a paragraph or an essay
1. ***Choose the option that best fits your opinion.***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Statements*** | ***Strongly disagree*** | ***Disagree*** | ***Neutral*** | ***Agree*** | ***Strongly agree*** |
| a. Adopting ChatGPT assists me in developing my knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. |  |  |  |  |  |
| b. Adopting ChatGPT provides me with opportunities to learn from the sample answers in terms of idea expression, organization, and writing styles. |  |  |  |  |  |
| c. Adopting ChatGPT increases my confidence in word choice and collocations, use of grammar, and other aspects of writing (prepositions, articles, conjunctions, etc.) |  |  |  |  |  |
| d. Adopting ChatGPT enables me to figure out and learn from my mistakes in writing without relying on lecturers’ feedback. |  |  |  |  |  |

**SECTION 3: CHATGPT AND LEARNER AUTONOMY**

1. ***Choose the option that best fits your opinion.***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Statements*** | ***Strongly disagree*** | ***Disagree*** | ***Neutral*** | ***Agree*** | ***Strongly agree*** |
| a. Adopting ChatGPT helps me become better at planning a paragraph or an essay. |  |  |  |  |  |
| b. With the aid of ChatGPT, I can set short-term and long-term goals in order to enhance my writing skills. |  |  |  |  |  |
| c. I can keep track of my own progress in English writing thanks to ChatGPT. |  |  |  |  |  |
| d. Utilizing ChatGPT helps me make better-informed decisions related to learning English writing. |  |  |  |  |  |
| e. Adopting ChatGPT boosts my problem-solving skills in English writing. |  |  |  |  |  |
| f. I can ask ChatGPT critical questions to fill gaps in my knowledge of English writing. |  |  |  |  |  |
| g. Adopting ChatGPT helps me reflect on what I have learnt in English writing classes. |  |  |  |  |  |
| h. Adopting ChatGPT makes me feel more interested and motivated in English writing. |  |  |  |  |  |
| i. Adopting ChatGPT can foster my independence (learner autonomy) in English writing. |  |  |  |  |  |

**SECTION 4: ENHANCING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN WRITING THROUGH CHATGPT**

1. ***Choose the option that best fits your opinion.***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Statements*** | ***Strongly disagree*** | ***Disagree*** | ***Neutral*** | ***Agree*** | ***Strongly agree*** |
| a. I just use ChatGPT as a guiding tool to help me with planning and structuring paragraphs or essays. |  |  |  |  |  |
| b. I only use ChatGPT to refer to their sample ideas after I have generated my own ideas. |  |  |  |  |  |
| c. I usually spend a large amount of time asking ChatGPT to suggest me some good vocabulary and grammar on a specific topic as well as taking notes of these. |  |  |  |  |  |
| d. I often finish my own pieces of writing and then ask ChatGPT to offer corrections for me. |  |  |  |  |  |
| e. I often read paragraphs or essays generated by ChatGPT to learn from these. |  |  |  |  |  |
| f. I still ask my lecturers for advice on how to make best use of ChatGPT in writing. |  |  |  |  |  |

1. What do you think are your greatest weaknesses in English writing skills?
2. How can ChatGPT help you overcome those limitations?
3. Do you prefer to use ChatGPT alone to improve your English writing skills or rely on your lecturers to give corrective feedback or both? Explain why.
4. What recommendations can you make to enhance learner autonomy (independence) in their English writing skills through the employment of ChatGPT?

**Appendix B**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Do you use ChatGPT to help you with English writing tasks? For what purposes? Do you think it can enhance your learner autonomy (independence in learning) in writing?

2. What aspects of writing can you take responsibility for after a period of time of utilizing ChatGPT? Can you specify your point?

3. How can you improve your autonomy in English writing with the support of ChatGPT? What do you think about the role of lecturers?