Enhancing Learner Motivation in Writing Courses through AI Tools: A Case Study at Van Lang University

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is described as a partner tool facilitating students’ process of learning writing skills. Although many studies have demonstrated that the power of AI tools positively influences learners' writing skills in various aspects, there is limited research on their effects on motivation in learning writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, including Vietnam. This quantitative study aims to investigate how AI tools change learner motivation in the process of learning writing skills through the perceptions of 121 EFL students in writing courses at Van Lang University (VLU). When it comes to the learners' motivation in their process of learning writing skills, the findings show that AI tools tend to boost their engagement, their desire to write, and their confidence, as well as reduce their stress levels. In addition, most of the students report that AI tools motivate them to improve certain aspects of their writing skills, including grammar, vocabulary, idea development, and content and organization. This study can serve as a reference to provide a deep understanding of Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions about utilizing AI tools to motivate them to improve their writing skills.

***Keywords*:** artificial intelligence (AI), perceptions, learner motivation, writing skills, Vietnamese students

1. Introduction

One of the most crucial skills in English language learning is writing because it is an indispensable requirement to achieve high academic status and educational success (Hosseini et al., 2013). Writing requires students’ cognitive and linguistic competencies (Yamin, 2019), so this skill can be considered the most challenging to master (Tran, 2021).

The advent of technology helps meet educational needs (Pham et al., 2022), plays a crucial role in acquiring languages like English (Pham et al., 2023), and creates activities in language classes (Tri et al., 2023). When it comes to technology, AI enhancement makes a contribution to education, personalized learning environments, and content creation (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023). The advancement of generative AI has changed how students learn a language. Research on AI tools’ role in English education has attracted the attention of researchers and educators around the world, including Vietnam (Pham & Cao, 2025a).

Learner motivation is regarded as a factor increasing learners’ interest in language learning. Motivation is defined as internal conditions, such as desires or needs, which provide additional energy and direction to behaviors (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). It is also an important factor in education because it engages students in learning activities and uses higher cognitive processes to learn more (Filgona et al., 2020). Additionally, a learner’s motivation in learning includes the ability to take responsibility for learning and other related decisions (Tran & Vuong, 2022).

Learners have different English language learning experiences (Pham & Cao, 2025b). They may face many language-related difficulties in terms of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical structures, organizing ideas, and limitations in training, leading to low English writing proficiency (Husin & Nurbayani, 2017; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Nasser, 2019; Toba et al., 2019). This makes students uninterested in writing, whether for academic or other reasons (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Because of these reasons, there is almost no effect in encouraging students to write (Dastgeer & Afzal, 2015); in other words, students are not motivated to write and improve their writing skills. Vietnamese students also have these problems, making them lack interest in learning writing skills. The time to teach writing skills is limited, and they encounter errors related to spelling and grammar as well as a lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures (Hang, 2021; Hoa & Mai, 2016; Huy, 2015; Phuong, 2021). In addition, the lack of background knowledge and difficulties in organizing thoughts and expressing opinions are challenges that learners face (Nguyen et al., 2021). This shows that students in Vietnam, like other countries, lack motivation to learn and improve their writing skills. At VLU, according to the researchers’ observation, students have difficulty in writing classes for the reasons mentioned above. They sometimes do not keep up with the curriculum of the university, leading to a loss of motivation. There have been many studies on the use of AI tools for enhancing writing skills, but few articles mention improving EFL learners' motivation in learning writing skills through AI tools. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore EFL students’ perceptions of the potential of AI tools in improving students' motivation in learning writing skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The use of AI tools in writing courses

Sumakul et al. (2022) claim that AI tools are described as intelligent machines. AI tools can think and act as human beings (Russell & Norvig, 2016). In language courses, AI tools can act as a language instructor (Bailin, 1988; Matthews, 1993). Accordingly, students can possess more personalized learning environments thanks to AI tools (Sumakul et al., 2022). When it comes to aspects of writing, AI tools assist learners in furnishing comments on their grammar (Bailin, 1988; Dodigovic, 2007; Nagata, 1996), encouraging written interactions (Jehle, 1987), providing language input (Holland et al., 1993), giving superior learning experiences (Kose & Arslan, 2015), and promoting their motivation in learning (Ali et al., 2023). In EFL contexts, several articles discuss the utilization of AI tools in writing courses.

Thao et al. (2023) found out the advantages and challenges of the integration of ChatGPT with EFL writing exercises with the support of the theoretical frameworks of Constructivist Learning Theory and the Technological Acceptance Model. Through a qualitative method, 20 EFL students from two higher education institutions were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. The findings showed some good effects of ChatGPT on interest in writing exercises, writing skills, and various uses of language.

Nguyen et al. (2024) explored students’ perceptions and practices in terms of using ChatGPT for developing argumentative essay writing skills. This paper helps bridge the gap in understanding AI’s role in improving language learning outcomes, focusing on eight aspects of writing development: vocabulary, grammar, idea generation, organization, writing styles, translation, mechanics of writing, and plagiarism management. A ninety-two-item questionnaire was designed to discover the perceptions and practices of 100 students from the Reading-Writing B2.2 course. The findings showed that the students have positive views on the use of ChatGPT for improving their writing skills. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that learners are more likely to lose their active engagement in their writing process if they depend mainly on this tool to get support for their writing.

Marzuki et al. (2023) investigated various AI tools for writing and their impact on learners’ writing skills regarding organization and content. Through a qualitative method, the data of this paper were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The participants were EFL lecturers from three universities in Indonesia. The participants agreed that the AI tools have positive effects on student writing regarding the quality of organization and content. The findings revealed that AI tools can evaluate students’ writing quality in EFL contexts well.

2.2. Motivation

Motivation is described as an explanation of why people act, how long they are willing to maintain it, and how much and how persistently they are in pursuing that activity (Dörnyei, 2001). Deci and Ryan (1985) stated that motivation is divided into two kinds: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to people having a personal interest in doing their task. They tend to carry out actions to achieve their target, not because of any extrinsic reward. This type of motivation, intrinsically motivated, comes along with consequences, including satisfaction and improved competence as well as self-determination. Otherwise, extrinsic motivation refers to those who anticipate external achievement, for instance, awards, praise, prizes, and evaluation. People who are motivated by extrinsic motivation do their tasks for achievements or to avoid punishment. This supports the research of Schwartz and Wrzesniewski (2019), stating that intrinsic motivation is related to the internal satisfaction and enjoyment in the process of completing a mission, whereas extrinsic motivation is related to external factors that push the participants into doing an action. These factors involve reward achievements or avoidance of punishments. Another view regarding two types of motivation is that intrinsic motivation results in higher engagement and better performance (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004), whereas extrinsic motivation, in several cases, can inhibit intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Murayama, 2019).

2.3. Motivation in learning

There is a strong correlation between learning and motivation. According to social cognitive theory, the learning cycle is governed by four connected processes, including concentration, retention, production, and motivation (Bandura, 1997). In order to reinforce the importance and connection of motivation and learning, Raedts et al. (2017) state that motivation, which is in the fourth process, plays a significant role in the attention and retention process. This determines whether learners' production occurs or not. Recognizing the influence of motivation on learners, researchers have investigated the connection between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation toward learning. Jones (2013) claims that learners' engagement and performance are affected by both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, Deci and Ryan (1995) highlight the significant role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation toward learner learning outcomes. Learners who are fostered by intrinsic motivation find enjoyment during learning progress as well as achieve learning satisfaction while reducing anxiety. Besides, others rely on extrinsic motivation to boost learning efforts (Teng & Wu, 2024).

Regarding motivation in language learning, there is a connection between motivation and learners' language acquisition abilities. Dörnyei (2009) claims that language learning motivation affects learner attitudes and behaviors. There are two terms that refer to learning motivation towards language learners: intrinsic factors (personal factors), including prior learning experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of the target language's efficiency; as well as extrinsic factors (social factors), which refer to perceptions toward the target language's social standard. For a clear perspective on the significant role of motivation in language learning, various studies have been carried out to investigate the importance of motivation in language learning. Renniger and Hidi (2019) claim that intrinsic motivation plays an important role in effective language acquisition. Gardner (1985) and Deci and Ryan (1985) support this view. They report that motivation is the most important factor for a language learner to achieve success in language acquisition. Furthermore, Ramage (1990), Crooked and Schmidt (1989), and Gardner (1985) explore the role, importance, and influence of motivation toward learners' language learning. Motivation also influences language learners' behavior. According to Xu (2011), students' motivation has a significant correlation with their learning strategies. The use of multiple learning strategies is carried out by highly motivated students. As a result, compared to those who have lower motivation in terms of learning a language, the higher the learners’ motivation is, the more successful they become.

Nasihah and Cahyono (2017) investigated the relationship between learners’ motivation and writing achievement, and the relationship between language learning strategies combining learners’ motivation and writing success. This study was conducted on 100 EFL students from a high school in Indonesia through questionnaires and writing tests. The study showed that there was a relationship between motivation and writing achievement. Furthermore, there was a significant correlation between language learning strategies combined with learners’ motivation and writing achievement. The findings, theoretically, support the significant role of language learning strategies toward learner motivation as well as the significant role of language learning strategies combined with learners’ motivation and writing achievement. Regarding the educational framework, instructors are encouraged to convey, emphasize the importance as well as the potential of language learning strategies, boost learner motivation in order to enhance writing performance.

2.4. The impact of AI tools on learner motivation

Some studies explored AI tools’ effects on learner motivation in English education.

Song and Song (2023) conducted a study investigating the integration of AI-driven language learning for English language learners in improving academic writing skills and learners' motivation. This study was conducted on 50 EFL students at a university in China through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The participants were enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program and matched for proficiency. The study showed that students who received AI-assisted instruction achieved improvements in writing skills and motivation. It revealed positive perspectives toward AI-assisted instruction, including a positive impact on writing skills and motivation.

Biju et al. (2024) investigated AI-assisted language assessment’s effects on EFL learners’ motivation and writing skills. This study was conducted on 70 intermediate English learners at a university in Bangladesh through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings indicated that AI-assisted language assessment contributes to creating a positive and helpful learning environment and reducing anxiety. The study showed possible improvement in writing skills and a positive impact on learners' attitudes and motivation. The research implied that AI can serve as a comprehensive and beneficial tool for language teachers in designing the curriculum.

Wei (2023) examined AI language instruction’s effects on learners' English learning achievement and motivation. With the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study was conducted with 60 university students in China through pre-tests and post-tests and interviews. The findings indicated that the students who received AI language instruction achieve higher learning outcomes. AI language instruction also boosted learner motivation.

He (2024) investigated the impacts of employing AI-based automated writing evaluation on learners' writing skills and motivation to write. 86 intermediate EFL students at Ningbo University of Finance and Economics in China joined the research using quantitative approaches. The findings indicated that the students who received both instruction and feedback from instructors and AI-based automated writing evaluation outperformed the students who only received instruction and feedback from instructors. The results showed better outcomes for the students who utilized AI-based automated writing evaluation regarding motivation to write, as well as academic success in writing results.

2.5. Research gap

The previous studies showed the role of AI tools in developing learners’ writing skills and motivation. However, there are few studies on the effects of AI tools on promoting learner motivation in learning writing skills in EFL contexts, including Vietnam. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of AI tools on learner motivation in developing writing skills and the aspects of writing skills that students are motivated to improve.

2.6. Research questions

Research Question 1: How do AI tools motivate VLU students to learn writing skills?

Research Question 2: What aspects of writing skills do AI tools motivate VLU students to focus on improving?

3. Methodology

3.1. Pedagogical Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The participants were 121 students (85 seniors and 36 juniors), including 49 males and 72 females. They participated in academic writing courses ranging from Writing 1 to Writing 5 and used AI tools in their learning and writing progress. They had blended learning experiences, including face-to-face and online learning. The researchers used descriptive statistics of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 20 (SPSS 20) to describe demographic information, showing participants’ year of study and gender.

**Table 1**

*Participants' year of study*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Frequency** | **Percent** | **Valid Percent** | **Cumulative Percent** |
| Seniors | 85 | 70.2 | 70.2 | 70.2 |
| Juniors | 36 | 29.8 | 29.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | 121 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |

**Table 2**

*Participants' gender*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Frequency** | **Percent** | **Valid Percent** | **Cumulative Percent** |
| Male | 49 | 40.5 | 40.5 | 40.5 |
| Female | 72 | 59.5 | 59.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 121 | 100.0 | 100.0 |  |

3.2. Design of the Study

This study utilized quantitative approaches to investigate the participants' perceptions of using AI tools for boosting their motivation in learning writing skills. In terms of the benefits of quantitative research, employing questionnaires provides automated data collection, which saves researchers' time and effort (Wright, 2005). An online questionnaire with content about the research questions included multiple-choice and multiple-response questions and questions using a five-point Likert scale.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The researchers used Google Forms to design an online questionnaire and sent it to 121 students in writing courses. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section had two questions regarding demographic information, including gender and year of study. The second section contained one question to explore which AI tools the participants used to learn writing skills. The third section had seven questions using a five-point Likert scale (SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree) to discover how AI tools boost learner motivation in learning writing skills and one multiple response question regarding the aspects of writing skills AI tools motivate the participants to focus on improving. After collecting sufficient data, the researchers used SPSS 20 to analyze the data.

 4. Results

**Figure 1**

*The AI tools students used to learn writing skills*

Figure 1 illustrates the AI tools the participants utilized to learn their writing skills. Many students (more than 50%) used ChatGPT (90.9%), Grammarly (86.8%), and Quillbot (64.5%) for learning their writing skills during their learning process.

**Table 3**

*Students' perceptions of using AI tools to enhance their motivation in learning writing skills*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Item** | **N** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** | **Mean** | **Std. Deviation** |
| 1 | AI tools increase my engagement in the writing process. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.55 | 0.846 |
| 2 | AI tools' personalized feedback on my writing helps boost my desire to write. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.50 | 0.905 |
| 3 | Using AI tools reduces stress levels in my writing process. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.73 | 0.931 |
| 4 | AI tools make me feel more confident in achieving my writing goals. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.73 | 0.922 |
| 5 | AI tools make my writing process more enjoyable. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.68 | 0.985 |
| 6 | AI tools allow me to apply my preferred learning writing style effectively. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.61 | .934 |
| 7 | AI tools make writing practice interesting through my favorite topics. | 121 | 1 | 5 | 3.51 | 1.034 |

Table 3 refers to the participants’ perceptions of using AI tools for boosting their motivation to learn writing skills. In Item 1, more than half of the students believed that AI tools boost their engagement in their writing process, while more than a third of the respondents expressed a neutral attitude (M=3.55). In Item 2, while more than two-fifths of the students expressed a neutral opinion, 47.11% of the participants expressed that receiving personalized feedback from AI tools increased their desire to write (M=3.50). The mean scores imply that students moderately agreed that AI tools determine their engagement in their writing process. In Item 3, two-thirds of the respondents found that AI tools help reduce stress levels during their writing process (M=3.73). In Item 4, 62.81% of the participants affirmed the benefits of AI tools in enhancing confidence in achieving writing goals (M=3.73). In Item 5, more than half of the learners indicated that using AI tools made the writing process more enjoyable (M=3.68). In Item 6, more than half of the respondents found that they applied their preferred learning style effectively with the support of AI tools (M=3.61). In Item 7, most of the participants agreed that AI tools make them feel interested in their writing process, particularly in terms of writing practice through their favorite topics (M=3.51).

**Figure 2**

*Aspects of writing skills that students are motivated to improve*

Figure 2 displays the percentage of participants who are motivated to improve several aspects of writing skills with the assistance of AI tools. According to the statistics, a very large majority of the participants (79.3%) reported that they are motivated to improve their grammar since AI tools help identify grammatical errors. Many of the participants are also motivated to improve vocabulary and idea development, at 67.8% and 62%, respectively. Approximately half of the participants (51.2%) report that they desire to improve content and organization. Only one student believed that AI tools motivate users to focus on improving their writing style (0.8%). The findings suggest that the students take advantage of AI tools to improve their writing skills based on their personalized feedback and instructions in every single aspect.

5. Discussion

The study explores EFL students’ perceptions of using AI tools to motivate them to learn writing skills in their writing process. The findings indicate that AI boosts learner motivation in learning writing skills and improving some aspects of writing. AI positively determines learner engagement in the writing process. The study agrees with the research of He (2024), which shows that students are motivated to write since they report enjoyment in writing with the utilization of AI-based automated writing evaluation. Furthermore, the study agrees with the research of Biju et al. (2024), which demonstrates that AI-assisted language assessment impacts students' learning environments, creating a positive and effective learning environment. This study indicates that AI tools reduce stress during the writing process, increase confidence, and make the writing process more enjoyable. This is in line with the result of Biju et al. (2024), investigating the effect of AI-assisted language assessment on learners’ motivation and writing skills. Their study shows that students who receive AI-assisted language assessment reduce anxiety in their learning process. Moreover, learners appreciate the interesting and dynamic features of the AI-assisted assessment tools. In terms of personalized and effective learning environments created by AI, the mentioned studies agree with this finding. The research of Wei (2023), examining the effects of AI language instruction on learners' English learning achievement and motivation, reveals that with the use of personalized learning strategies, students achieve greater motivation, which has a positive impact on self-regulated learning. However, Nguyen et al. (2024) disagree with the current finding concerning engagement because they report that students tend to lose their active engagement in their writing process if they rely solely on the support of AI. Song and Song (2023) and He (2024) conclude that AI tools support learners’ writing process by improving writing skills, organization, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary, thereby improving their academic performance. The findings are similar to the present ones.

6. Conclusion

Through quantitative approaches, the researchers discover EFL students’ perceptions of utilizing AI tools for enhancing their motivation in learning writing skills. Regarding learner motivation, AI tools play a crucial role in boosting students’ engagement in their writing process thanks to their personalized feedback. AI tools tend to reduce learners’ stress levels and boost their confidence, which leads to an enjoyable learning journey. In terms of writing skills, the participants reported that they were motivated to improve some writing aspects, including grammar (79.3%), vocabulary (67.8%), idea development (62%), and content and organization (51.2%). Overall, AI tools are considered beneficial because they simplify the students’ learning process in writing courses, leading to the development of their writing skills. This case study can be a reference to provide educators and researchers with a deep understanding of Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of utilizing AI tools to motivate them to improve their writing skills.

The research has some limitations. Due to the time limit and the difficulty in looking for participants, this study lacked the use of qualitative approaches. The number of participants in this research is limited. The findings could not represent the whole population because this study was carried out at a university. The design of the questionnaire only focused on students’ perceptions of the use of AI tools to boost their motivation in writing classes. Each AI tool has its function and use, facilitating learners’ learning experience, especially in EFL contexts. Consequently, this research might not help comprehend the benefits, challenges, or issues regarding a specific tool.

Future researchers should undertake their studies with a mixed methods approach. In addition, they can consider using other methods such as experiments, observations, and so forth with teachers’ assistance. They should research one particular AI tool to provide deeper insights about its use for learning writing skills in EFL contexts. Future studies can include teacher participants to explore their voices on this topic.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Demographic information

Your year of study

1. Senior
2. Junior

Your gender

1. Male
2. Female

Appendix B

Which AI tools have you used to learn writing skills?

1. Grammarly
2. Quillbot
3. ChatGPT
4. Poe
5. Google Al studio
6. Wordtune
7. Jenni
8. Paperpal
9. Copy.ai
10. Essay Writer
11. Gemini
12. Gemeni Al
13. Jasper Al
14. ProWritingAid
15. Other

Appendix C

Students' perceptions of using AI tools to enhance their motivation in learning writing skills

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Item** | **SD** | **D** | **N** | **A** | **SA** |
| 1 | AI tools increase my engagement in the writing process. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | AI tools' personalized feedback on my writing helps boost my desire to write. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | Using AI tools reduces stress levels in my writing process. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 | AI tools make me feel more confident in achieving my writing goals. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 | AI tools make my writing process more enjoyable. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6 | AI tools allow me to apply my preferred learning writing style effectively. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | AI tools make writing practice interesting through my favorite topics. |  |  |  |  |  |

Appendix D

What aspects of writing skills do AI tools motivate you to focus on improving?

1. Grammar
2. Vocabulary
3. Idea development
4. Content and organization
5. Writing style
6. Other
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