

From Tool to Partner: ChatGPT-Supported Instruction for English Majors' Academic Writing in Diverse EFL Contexts

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ABSTRACT:

Within Vietnamese higher education, English majors need advanced writing skills in technology-mediated and diverse English as a foreign language learning environments. This study examined whether ChatGPT could support second-year English majors in developing academic writing. Drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding, and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the intervention integrated technology-supported instruction and formative evaluation. Over seven weeks, 73 students participated in a quasi-experimental design, with 38 receiving ChatGPT-supported instruction and 35 following conventional writing classes. Both groups focused on advanced language use and APA in-text citation. Pre- and post-test writing scores and semi-structured interviews with 12 students examined perceptions of ChatGPT-assisted instruction. Results showed that the ChatGPT group made significant gains in academic writing (Sig. 2-tailed < .05, large effect size Cohen's $d = 1.27$ and 1.03). Interview findings indicated that students perceived ChatGPT as useful for thesis development, argument quality, in-text citation, and easy to integrate into writing autonomously. However, concerns about over-reliance and critical thinking highlighted the need for careful pedagogical scaffolding. Overall, findings demonstrate ChatGPT's potential to support academic writing' learner autonomy, and engagement while emphasizing instructor guidance, critical reflection, and purposeful AI integration across diverse EFL learning contexts.

Keywords: academic writing, advanced language, APA In-text citation, ChatGPT, diverse EFL Contexts, TAM2

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1. Introduction

Academic writing is a core competency for university students, particularly English majors who need to move beyond grammatical accuracy toward clear argumentation, rhetorical coherence, source integration, and discipline-specific conventions (Hyland & Hyland, 2019;

Swales & Feak, 2011). In Vietnam, English majors often face difficulties developing these advanced skills because of large classes, limited individualized feedback, and insufficient scaffolding when moving from formulaic school writing to academic discourse. These challenges make accessible and responsive learning support

increasingly important in diverse EFL contexts. This study views ChatGPT as a technology-mediated partner that can provide guided input, feedback, and opportunities for revision. Recent research also suggests that ChatGPT can promote language use and APA in-text citation of academic writing (Kasneci et al., 2023; He, 2025). Against this background, the study examines ChatGPT-integrated instruction for supporting diverse English majors' academic writing. It addresses two research questions: (1) the extent to which ChatGPT enhances advanced language use and APA in-text citation, and (2) students' perceptions of ChatGPT's usefulness and ease of use. The study proposes the alternative hypothesis (H1) that students' academic language use and APA in-text citation will be improved under ChatGPT support.

2. Literature Review

Academic writing in diverse EFL Contexts

Academic writing requires more than accurate language; students need to understand genre conventions, rhetorical choices, and disciplinary communication (Hyland, 2009). For diverse English majors, this includes developing theses, building arguments, synthesizing evidence, and maintaining an appropriate style (Swales & Feak, 2011). In diverse contexts of Asia, writing instruction has often focused on grammatical accuracy and formulaic structures, although pedagogy emphasizes revision and rhetorical awareness (Din et al., 2021). Students need support in hedging, source integration, and syntactic variety (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Effective feedback is central to writing development (Hyland, 2003; Nicol, 2010), particularly when it is timely, specific, and useful for revision (Ferris, 2014). Yet large classes and limited teaching time can make individualized feedback difficult. ChatGPT can function as a learning partner, providing feedback and scaffolding adapted to learners' needs (Gibbons, 2015). Accordingly, current study examines ChatGPT-supported instruction for English majors' academic writing in diverse EFL learning contexts-situated writing shaped by linguistic, cultural, disciplinary, and institutional differences

(Canagarajah, 2022) that are influenced by culture of a representative Vietnamese university training English language studies, focusing on writing development and students' perceptions of AI-supported learning.

Previous studies and research gap

Research on automated writing evaluation (AWE) has reported positive effects on student writing, particularly revision engagement and grammatical accuracy (Alshehri, 2025; Lin & Hung, 2025). However, AWE systems often focus on linguistic form, with limited capacity to respond to context, explain rhetorical choices, or engage learners in dialogue about writing decisions. ChatGPT offers possibilities because it can provide explanations, model alternatives, and adjust support, potentially shifting AI from an evaluator toward a learning partner in academic writing.

Recent evidence suggests that ChatGPT feedback can encourage revision and multiple drafting (Lin, 2025), while explanations of rhetorical strategies and argument structures may strengthen metacognitive awareness (Godwin-Jones, 2022). Yet these benefits should not be assumed. Without guidance, students may accept AI suggestions uncritically, raise concerns about authorship and authenticity, or become overly dependent on support (Ramadhan et al., 2025). Affective outcomes, including reduced writing anxiety, increased confidence, and learner autonomy, may sustain engagement (Ramadhani et al., 2025). Hosseini et al. (2023) reported gains in L2 grammatical accuracy and fluency following ChatGPT feedback ($p < .001$), while Pretorius and Thewissen (2026) found that strategic AI use can foster learner autonomy. Although perceived usefulness predicts technology adoption intention (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), limited research has examined how guided ChatGPT support can develop English majors' advanced writing in diverse EFL contexts.

Despite these findings, critical research gaps persist. Limited empirical work simultaneously examines perceived usefulness and engagement in EFL academic writing contexts, particularly among English majors in diverse resource-

constrained institutions. Few studies explore whether engagement intensity correlates with argumentative quality improvements or whether technology acceptance patterns remain consistent across various institutional and cultural contexts. Moreover, contextual factors influencing implementation success in resource-limited environments, such as institutional infrastructure, faculty training, and pedagogical scaffolding, remain underexplored, necessitating further investigation in Southern Vietnamese university settings.

Theoretical framework and research plan

Sociocultural perspectives and Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) provides a useful framework for understanding ChatGPT-supported academic writing development. It views learning as socially and culturally mediated, with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) describing what learners can achieve with appropriate support beyond their independent performance. Cultural tools can extend learners' cognitive resources and reshape engagement with

knowledge (Wertsch, 1998). From this perspective, ChatGPT functions not merely as a technological tool but as a mediating resource for interpreting academic discourse, developing arguments, and revising writing. Its effectiveness, however, depends on teacher-guided interaction and the gradual transfer of responsibility to learners (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) complements this perspective by emphasizing comprehensible input slightly beyond learners' current competence. ChatGPT can provide models of sophisticated syntax, vocabulary, argumentation, and disciplinary conventions, potentially extending English majors' linguistic resources (Gass & Mackey, 2015; Mohamed et al., 2025). However, advanced input alone does not ensure learning; students must actively interpret, evaluate, and apply it through purposeful interaction and revision. Together, these theories explain ChatGPT-supported learning as a process in which challenging linguistic input and scaffolded interaction work toward increasingly independent academic writing competence.

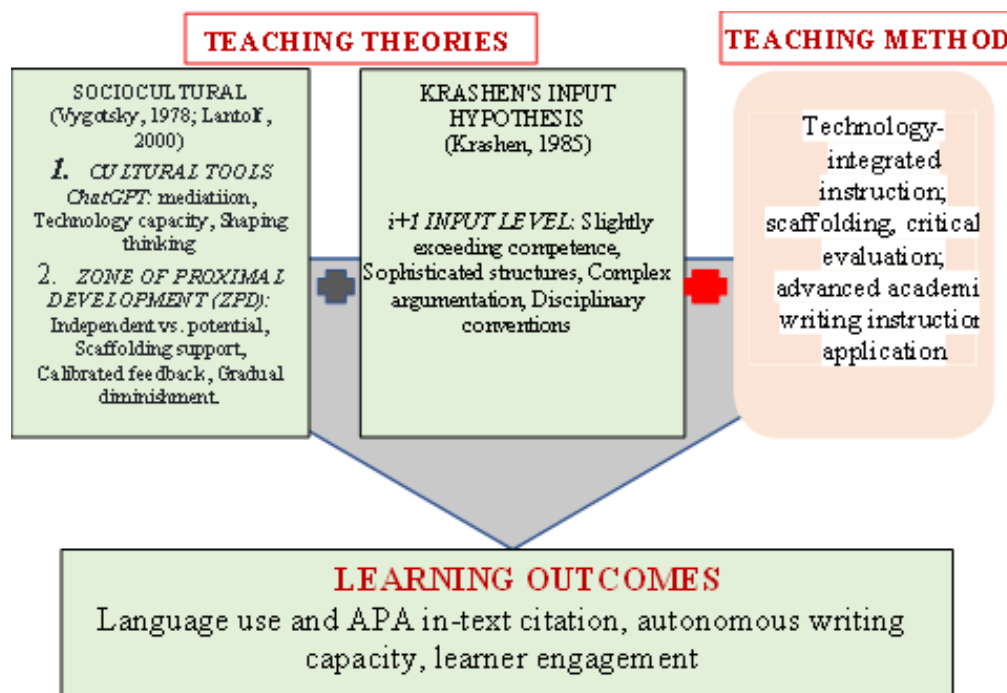


Figure 1. Theoretical framework and research plan

Technology-Integrated academic writing instruction and (TAM2)

Technology-integrated instruction embeds digital tools within the writing process rather than treating them as supplementary resources (Godwin-Jones, 2022). In advanced academic writing, this approach can support ideation, thesis development, argument construction, evidence integration, and revision through structured interaction with AI feedback (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Hyland & Hyland, 2019). However, meaningful integration requires students to evaluate AI-generated suggestions critically and retain ownership of their ideas and academic voice (Lawasi et al., 2025). This reflects a sociocultural view of technology as a mediating resource that extends, rather than replaces, human cognition (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000).

In Vietnamese universities, such integration may help address large classes, limited individualized feedback, and differences in instructor expertise (Le et al., 2025). ChatGPT can provide accessible, responsive support, while instructors remain responsible for pedagogical scaffolding, metacognitive guidance, and critical evaluation of AI output (Raitskaya & Tikhonova, 2025).

The Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM2) (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) complements this framework by explaining students' perceptions and adoption of ChatGPT. Perceived usefulness (PU) concerns whether students believe ChatGPT improves thesis development, argumentation, and academic writing, whereas perceived ease of use (PEOU) reflects how readily they can incorporate it into their writing practices. Yet acceptance alone does not demonstrate learning; its educational value depends on purposeful use and pedagogical guidance. Accordingly, this study applies TAM2 to examine how Vietnamese English majors perceive ChatGPT's usefulness and ease of use as they engage with AI-supported academic writing, positioning ChatGPT as a guided learning partner rather than merely a technological tool.

3. Methodology

Research design

Within a mixed-methods framework, a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with an equivalent control group, was appropriately designed for an Vietnamese state university setting, where random assignment was impractical and could disrupt existing classes (Shadish, 2001). Seventy (73) second-year English majors aged 19–20 from two intact classes: the experimental group (n=38) receiving ChatGPT-supported instruction and the control group (n=35) receiving conventional writing instruction with teachers' and students' interaction, groupwork. All participants had completed first-year writing coursework with comparable scores indicating no significant difference in writing proficiency between the students in two groups and had no prior formal training in ChatGPT use.

Writing development was measured through pre- and post-test compositions assessed using a rubric focusing on advanced language use and APA in-text citation. To complement these outcomes, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 experimental-group students, including six higher-performing and six lower-performing students, to capture varied experiences with ChatGPT-supported writing. Twelve open-ended questions, informed by TAM2 (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), explored perceived usefulness, ease of use, and concerns about over-reliance. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) identified three themes: writing-development support, ease of integration, and critical-thinking concerns. These qualitative findings contextualize the quantitative results by showing how students experienced ChatGPT as a learning partner and how pedagogical guidance shaped their engagement.

Procedures - Experimental Intervention in 9 weeks

The experimental group received structured ChatGPT-integrated writing instruction. The first two weeks focused on platform training, ethical use, and responsible AI engagement. Subsequent bi-weekly phases emphasized academic language

development, and APA in-text citation by ChatGPT support to create teaching content and feedback. Instruction was scaffolded by the lecturer, with students critically evaluating AI feedback and engaging in metacognitive reflection.

The control group attended traditional lectures on grammar and sentence structure, participated in peer review sessions without AI support, and received instructor feedback on academic language development, and APA in-text citation as well. Final drafts were evaluated traditionally on both factors by teacher' direct assessment rather than evaluation under AI-support.

Data Analysis, Validity, and Ethical Considerations

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 28). Paired-sample t-tests compared pre-test and post-test writing quality within each group, while independent-sample t-tests examined post-test differences between groups, with significance set at $p < .05$ and effect sizes (Cohen's d) interpreted conventionally. Data were screened for normality and homogeneity of variance to ensure test assumptions were met. Instruments' validity was checked by two experts'

review for pre-test, post-test quality, and the semi-structured questions of the interview protocol developed by TAM2, to ensure the data collection validity and trustworthiness before conduction.

Ethically, participation was voluntary with informed consent obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. Students received explicit training on responsible ChatGPT engagement to ensure academic integrity.

4. Research results

Experimental results

Paired Sample t-Test (Experimental Group): Paired-sample t-tests were run to see if the experimental group made progress from pre-test to post-test. The results showed significant gains in both areas. Advanced language writing scores jumped from 58.4 to 82.9 (mean difference = 24.5, $p < .001$, $d = 2.26$). APA citation scores rose from 55.2 to 78.1 (mean difference = 22.9, $p < .001$, $d = 2.16$). Both effect sizes were large, confirming that ChatGPT-assisted instruction led to meaningful improvements in students' academic writing performance.

Table 1. Paired Sample t-Test Results (Experimental Group, $n = 38$)

Knowledge	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t(df=29)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Advanced language	58.4 (6.7)	82.9 (7.4)	+24.5	12.37	.000	1.24
APA In-Text Citation	55.2 (7.1)	78.1 (6.9)	+22.9	11.84	.000	1.05

The experimental group showed clear progress in both elements after the intervention. Advanced language scores rose from 58.4 to 82.9, while APA citation scores climbed from 55.2 to 78.1. These gains, ranging from 29% to 42%, were highly significant ($p < .001$) with large effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 1.24$ and 1.05). The findings confirm that ChatGPT-supported instruction meaningfully enhanced students' academic writing, highlighting its potential as an effective scaffolding tool in EFL contexts.

Independent Sample t-Test (Experimental versus Control Groups): Independent t-tests were used to compare the two groups after the intervention. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in both areas. For advanced language, they scored 82.9 versus 67.2 (mean difference = 15.7, $p < .001$, $d = 2.20$). For APA citation, they scored 78.1 versus 64.4 (mean difference = 13.7, $p < .001$, $d = 2.05$). Both effect sizes were large, confirming the clear advantage of ChatGPT-assisted instruction.

Table 2. Independent Sample t-Test Results (Experimental versus Control Groups, $n = 38$ versus $n = 35$)

Knowledge	Experimental Post-test Mean (SD)	Control Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	Levene's Test F	Sig.	t(df=57)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's d
Advanced language	82.9 (7.4)	67.2 (6.9)	+15.7	0.62	.43	8.46	.000	1.27 (large)
APA In-Text Citation Style	78.1 (6.9)	64.4 (7.2)	+13.7	0.71	.40	7.92	.000	1.03 (large)

Independent t-test results showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in both advanced language writing and APA citation, with mean differences of 15.7 and 13.7 points respectively ($p < .001$), effect size (Cohen's d) is large at the threshold 1.27 and 1.03. These findings confirm that ChatGPT-assisted instruction offers clear advantages over conventional teaching methods.

Within the experimental group, paired-sample t-tests revealed substantial gains, with improvements ranging from 25% to 40%, while the control group showed only modest progress (15–27%). These results align with TAM2's claim that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive technology adoption (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) and support Ma and Liu's (2005) view that acceptance is linked to tangible performance benefits. While ChatGPT shows strong pedagogical promise, the findings also highlight the importance of instructor scaffolding to prevent over-reliance and preserve critical thinking development.

Interview Findings

Semi-structured interviews with 12 experimental group students (six high-performing, six lower-performing) were conducted to complement the quantitative findings. Thematic analysis revealed three overarching themes: (1) writing-development support (PU), (2) ease of integration (PEOU), and (3) critical-thinking concerns.

Perceived Usefulness: writing-development support

Interviewees consistently highlighted ChatGPT's role in enhancing academic writing, particularly in areas traditionally difficult to develop through conventional instruction. Students emphasized that ChatGPT provided immediate, personalized, and patient feedback, something instructors in large classes could not always offer. High-performing students described ChatGPT as a "thinking partner" that helped them understand not just what to revise, but why certain rhetorical choices were more effective. ChatGPT's explanations of grammatical structures and argumentative strategies enhanced their metacognitive awareness, enabling them to recognize patterns in their writing and articulate revision rationales. Lower-performing students found ChatGPT particularly valuable for scaffolding complex conventions like APA citation. Rather than simply correcting errors, ChatGPT explained the logic behind formatting rules, helping students internalize rather than imitate citation practices. This suggests that ChatGPT's explanatory capacity, its ability to provide rationales alongside corrections, played a crucial role in developing deep, transferable writing competence.

Perceived Ease of Use: ease of integration

Students consistently described ChatGPT as intuitive and requiring minimal technical training. Even those initially anxious about using AI reported becoming comfortable within the first

two weeks. ChatGPT was characterized as "talking to a friend", requiring no complicated commands. More importantly, students highlighted how seamlessly ChatGPT integrated into their existing writing workflows. Rather than disrupting their processes, they described it as a "natural extension" of drafting and revision. Many reported voluntary use beyond assigned tasks, indicating sustained behavioral engagement and technology acceptance beyond the intervention period.

Concerns about critical thinking

Despite positive perceptions, a recurring concern was the risk of over-reliance. Students acknowledged occasionally defaulting to AI suggestions without critical evaluation, particularly when suggestions appeared plausible. This tendency was more pronounced among lower-performing students, who expressed less confidence in evaluating AI-generated feedback. However, students noted that instructor scaffolding, particularly mandatory reflection on why they accepted or rejected AI suggestions, helped mitigate this tendency. This highlights the critical role of pedagogical structure in ensuring AI tools enhance rather than replace independent critical thinking.

Alignment with TAM2 and Quantitative Findings

The interview findings strongly align with the quantitative results reported in Tables 1 and 2. Students' descriptions of ChatGPT's usefulness, its capacity to improve language quality, and APA In-text citation accuracy, correspond with the large effect size (Cohen's d from 1.03 to 1.27) and $p < .05$ were confirmed by narratives of intuitive interaction and seamless integration of the mixed-methods analysis results. The concerns about over-reliance also contextualize the slightly lower scores for items related to complex writing tasks, suggesting that while students find ChatGPT easy to use, they remain aware of its limitations for higher-order thinking.

Discussions

This study examined whether ChatGPT-supported instruction could enhance advanced

academic writing among Vietnamese English majors and explored how students perceived its usefulness and ease of use. The findings provide converging quantitative and qualitative evidence that ChatGPT-supported instruction significantly improved writing performance, supporting the alternative hypothesis (H1). More importantly, the results suggest that its value lies not simply in providing answers, but in supporting students' thinking, revision, and engagement with academic writing.

The substantial gains in advanced language use ($d = 1.26$ and 1.24) and APA citation ($d = 1.24$ and 1.05) indicate a strong instructional effect. These findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, in which learning develops through mediated support that enables learners to perform beyond their current independent capacity. In this study, ChatGPT functioned as a flexible mediating resource by providing immediate, individualized, and explanatory feedback. Unlike conventional feedback that may identify errors without fully explaining the reasoning behind them, ChatGPT enabled students to question, compare, and revise language and rhetorical choices. Interview responses showed that students particularly valued explanations of why particular choices were more appropriate, suggesting that AI-supported feedback may contribute to metacognitive awareness rather than merely surface-level correction. This convergence between effect-size evidence and students' accounts strengthens the interpretation of ChatGPT as a scaffold for academic writing development.

A further contribution concerns the role of ChatGPT as a learning partner. Students described the system as accessible, intuitive, and easy to incorporate into their writing processes, while some reported reduced anxiety and greater willingness to experiment with rhetorical strategies. Such engagement supports the TAM2 perspective (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), particularly the importance of perceived usefulness and ease of use in shaping technology acceptance. However, the findings also complicate a purely positive interpretation of

acceptance. Students' willingness to use ChatGPT does not necessarily mean that all AI-supported engagement produces deeper learning. Rather, its educational value appears to depend on how students interact with, evaluate, and act upon AI-generated suggestions.

The findings also extend previous research on AI-supported L2 writing (Hosseini et al., 2023; Lin & Hung, 2025) by demonstrating substantial gains in APA in-text citation, an academic literacy that has received comparatively limited attention in ChatGPT research. This result is particularly relevant because effective academic writing requires not only linguistic sophistication but also responsible engagement with sources and disciplinary conventions. ChatGPT's dialogic capacity may therefore offer an advantage over earlier automated writing evaluation systems, which were generally more focused on linguistic correction than sustained explanation and interaction (Din & et al., 2023).

At the same time, the study reveals an important pedagogical tension. Although students valued ChatGPT's support, they also expressed concerns about over-reliance and reduced critical thinking. This finding echoes concerns about cognitive offloading (He, 2025; İlhan et al., 2024) and reinforces the sociocultural view that ChatGPT should mediate learning and learners' partner rather than replace human cognition (Lantolf, 2000). Thus, the central contribution of this study is not simply evidence that ChatGPT "works," but evidence that its effectiveness is closely tied to pedagogical mediation. Across diverse EFL learning contexts, ChatGPT is most productive when positioned as a guided learning partner, one that extends students' capabilities while leaving intellectual judgment, rhetorical decision-making, and ownership of writing with the learner.

Contributions to Academic Writing Pedagogy

This study makes three main contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence that ChatGPT can support advanced academic writing among English majors in a resource-constrained Vietnamese university, where large classes and

limited instructional time make individualized feedback difficult. Second, it shows that the educational value of ChatGPT depends less on access to the technology itself than on how deliberately it is integrated through explicit guidance, critical evaluation, and metacognitive reflection. Third, it extends current understanding of AI-supported writing by highlighting ChatGPT's potential to provide explanatory feedback as students' partner that goes beyond surface-level accuracy toward stronger rhetorical awareness and more purposeful academic writing.

The findings also suggest several practical implications. Instructors should (1) provide explicit guidance on responsible and effective AI use, (2) require students to evaluate, question, and reflect on AI-generated feedback, and (3) design writing tasks that encourage active decision-making rather than passive acceptance. Such scaffolding is particularly important when ChatGPT is positioned as a learning partner: without pedagogical direction, its convenience may encourage dependence and weaken rather than strengthen students' critical engagement with writing. Overall, the study supports ChatGPT's pedagogical potential while making a central point: meaningful improvement comes not from the technology alone, but from the quality of the instructional relationship built around it.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that structured ChatGPT-supported instruction can strengthen academic writing among English majors in a diverse EFL context in Southern Vietnam. The experimental group made substantial gains in advanced language use and APA citation accuracy, supporting H1 with large effect sizes ($p < .05$, Cohen's $d < 1.2$). Students also demonstrated strong technology acceptance, with perceived usefulness supporting sustained engagement within the TAM2 framework. Interview findings further indicated enhanced metacognitive awareness, reduced writing anxiety, and greater willingness to experiment with rhetorical strategies. The intervention was also feasible in a

resource-constrained university, where AI can extend access to responsive writing support. Overall, ChatGPT's value lies not in replacing teachers but in complementing teacher guidance and learner agency. As a learning partner, it requires structured integration, critical evaluation of AI feedback, and gradual movement toward independent writing while balancing accessibility with authenticity, critical thinking, and student

ownership. This study is limited by its small sample, short intervention period, and single-institution setting, which may constrain generalizability. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs to examine sustained writing development, learner autonomy, and the long-term effects of ChatGPT-supported instruction across diverse EFL contexts.

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