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THE ROLE OF GENERATIVE AI IN ENHANCING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WRITING CONFIDENCE: A PERSPECTIVE FROM EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract:
Writing confidence constitutes a critical affective factor influencing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing behavior and performance. With the rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT into educational settings, new questions emerge regarding their role in shaping learners' psychological engagement with writing. While existing research has predominantly emphasized the linguistic outcomes of AI-assisted writing, limited attention has been paid to its impact on students' self-efficacy and confidence. This perspective article explores how generative AI may serve as a confidence-building mechanism for university-level EFL learners by providing immediate feedback, reducing writing anxiety, offering linguistic scaffolding, and encouraging self-expression. Drawing on current literature, classroom practices, and theoretical models of writing self-efficacy, the paper also highlights potential risks—including overdependence, erosion of originality, and digital inequality—that complicate the pedagogical use of AI. The article concludes with a call for critical and ethically-informed integration of generative AI in writing instruction, emphasizing its dual function as both a linguistic and affective resource.
Keywords: Generative AI, Writing Confidence, EFL Learners, Self-Efficacy, Language Education, ChatGPT

1. INTRODUCTION

In the domain of second language (L2) learning, writing remains one of the most cognitively demanding and emotionally taxing skills to acquire (Xu et al., 2022). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the writing process is often fraught with linguistic limitations and anxiety over academic evaluation (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023). Among the affective variables that shape L2 writing outcomes, writing confidence—understood as learners' belief in their ability to express themselves effectively in writing—plays a pivotal role in determining both performance and engagement. Empirical studies have shown that learners with higher writing confidence are more likely to persist through complex tasks, engage in self-editing, and develop a more autonomous writing identity (Woodrow, 2011; Teng & Zhang, 2016). However, building such confidence remains a persistent challenge in many EFL contexts, particularly where students lack exposure to authentic input and receive delayed or limited feedback.

Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in the pedagogical applications of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI tools, which are increasingly integrated into writing instruction. A growing body of literature has examined how these tools support vocabulary development, improve grammatical accuracy, and enhance overall writing quality (Kohnke et al., 2023; Jiang & Yu, 2022). While these studies underscore the linguistic affordances of AI in L2 writing, relatively little attention has been paid to the affective dimensions of AI-assisted writing, especially the ways in which such tools might influence learners' writing confidence. As a result, the field remains theoretically underdeveloped in terms of understanding how confidence—as both a motivational and emotional construct—is shaped by interaction with AI technologies.

Concurrently, research on L2 writing self-efficacy has highlighted multiple instructional interventions—such as peer feedback, teacher scaffolding, and strategy training—that positively influence students' confidence levels (Han & Hiver, 2018). However, these studies have primarily been situated within traditional, human-mediated

learning environments, with minimal reference to AI-mediated writing processes. In light of the recent proliferation of generative AI tools in educational settings, there is a pressing need to re-examine writing confidence in light of these technological shifts. Specifically, the question remains: To what extent can AI tools function not merely as writing assistants, but as affective enablers that empower learners psychologically as well as linguistically?

In response to these gaps, this article offers a perspective-based analysis of how generative AI tools—particularly large language models—may influence university-level EFL learners' writing confidence. Drawing on recent classroom observations, current empirical literature, and theoretical models of self-efficacy and writing anxiety, this paper argues that generative AI has the potential to function not only as a linguistic support system but also as a confidence-building mechanism. At the same time, it calls attention to the risks of overdependence, authorship erosion, and equity gaps, offering a balanced view of both the pedagogical opportunities and ethical considerations surrounding AI use in L2 writing contexts.

2. Writing Confidence in EFL Contexts

Writing confidence, broadly conceived, refers to learners' self-perceived capability to generate coherent, meaningful, and contextually appropriate written output. In the context of EFL, writing confidence is not merely an affective by-product of language learning but a critical mediator between linguistic competence and actual performance (Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2020). Drawing on Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory, writing confidence can be conceptualized as a domain-specific form of self-efficacy: a learner's belief in their capacity to execute the processes required to produce effective writing in a second language.

Importantly, writing confidence has been shown to influence both cognitive engagement and behavioral outcomes. Learners with high levels of confidence are more likely to engage in iterative drafting, utilize complex structures, and persevere through communicative challenges. In contrast, low confidence often manifests in avoidance behaviors, including reliance on memorized templates, minimal elaboration, and the abandonment of writing tasks when difficulties arise (Latif, 2015; Woodrow, 2011). Such behaviors are particularly pronounced in EFL contexts, where learners may face persistent gaps in lexical resources, syntactic fluency, and exposure to authentic input.

Several factors contribute to the erosion of writing confidence among EFL learners. First, linguistic limitations—especially at the intermediate or lower-proficient levels—constrain students' ability to articulate nuanced arguments, even when conceptual understanding is present. Second, the evaluative nature of writing instruction, often foregrounded in exam-oriented curricula, may intensify students' apprehension of making errors, leading to heightened anxiety and reluctance to experiment with language (Meletiadou & Tsagari, 2022). Third, pedagogical practices that prioritize standardized models over individual expression tend to suppress learners' authorial agency, reinforcing the perception that successful writing is formulaic and unattainable without external templates.

Theoretically, both self-efficacy theory and research on second language writing anxiety (Huerta et al., 2017) underscore the interplay between psychological factors and writing performance. In particular, writing confidence is shaped by students' prior experiences with feedback, perceived success, and the social-emotional climate of the classroom. Thus, enhancing writing confidence necessitates not only linguistic scaffolding but also pedagogical strategies that foster learner autonomy, reduce evaluative pressure, and promote positive writing experiences.

In light of these challenges, the emergence of generative AI presents a timely opportunity to reconfigure the EFL writing environment. Specifically, AI-powered tools may offer alternative pathways for cultivating writing confidence by mitigating anxiety, providing individualized scaffolding, and enabling learners to engage in risk-free linguistic experimentation. These possibilities are explored in the following section.

3. Impact of Generative AI on Writing Confidence
3.1 Immediate Feedback in a Low-Anxiety Environment

The nervousness that comes with writing in a second language is one of the most significant obstacles faced by EFL students. It is not uncommon for traditional writing classes to provide students with feedback that is both restricted and delayed, and this feedback is typically presented in the form of evaluations or corrections. This approach may have the unintended consequence of making students even more afraid of making mistakes (Kurt & Atay, 2007). On the other hand, generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT offer immediate, unbiased input in a secure environment. Students are able to play around with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction while receiving advice in real time, all without the social pressure that comes with being evaluated by an instructor or compared to their classmates (Wahuni, 2017). This atmosphere, where there is not much at stake, gives students the opportunity to explore language in a more unrestricted manner, which reduces fear and eventually increases their confidence in taking risks while writing. For instance, a student who is uncertain about the proper usage of conditionals would enter a sentence such as "I will bring cake if I will go to the party." The artificial intelligence (AI) delivers correction ("If I go to the party...") along with an explanation of the correction. Through this engagement, the student has the ability to detect, comprehend, and independently rectify the mistake.

3.2 Exposure to Rich Linguistic Input

A robust mental storehouse of linguistic patterns and idioms is frequently the foundation of an individual's confidence in writing. Building sentences that are both expressive and coherent can be a hard task for many students of EFL, particularly for those who have had little exposure to actual texts (Küçük, 2023). Examples that are rich in language input are provided by generative artificial intelligence, and these examples are grammatically

correct, relevant to the topic, and contextualized (Ghafouri et al., 2024). Students can use the artificial intelligence tool to create a number of sentence models and paragraph structures. This is accomplished by students providing the AI with a writing topic (for example, "Should college education be free of charge?"). The students are then able to replicate, change, or critique the outputs that the AI generates. In addition to enhancing their consciousness of language, this exposure provides students with an understanding of what constitutes excellent academic writing. This also reinforces the notion that they are capable of producing works that are comparable.

3.3 Assisting the Writing Process

Engaging in the process of writing is not simply one action, but rather a series of actions that involve brainstorming, organising, draughting, and revising. When pupils are first beginning out with a blank sheet, they frequently feel overwhelmed. Generative AI can serve as a cognitive support by providing assistance throughout every phase of the writing process. The AI is capable of producing outlines, recommending topic sentences, or providing synonyms and connections throughout the editing process if it is properly asked (Marzuki et al., 2023). Students are able to increase their perceived competence and control over their writing, which are two of the most important factors in writing self-efficacy, as a result of this step-by-step coaching, which turns writing from a frightening endeavour into a process that can be managed. To illustrate, a student who is working on an argumentative thesis is able to ask the artificial intelligence for "three reasons why social media should be regulated," and then ask for counterarguments to these reasons. Following this, the student constructs their own argument using this organised input as a foundation, thereby feeling a sense of empowerment instead of a sense of being lost.

3.4 Encouraging Self-Expression and Autonomy

Paradoxically, despite the fact that artificial intelligence offers guidance, it also encourages the development of one's own voice and autonomy. Students are encouraged to express their own thoughts and improve the way they communicate their message when they use AI, which responds to their requests in a dynamic manner, in contrast to strict textbook templates. Students are taught to accept responsibility for the decisions they make when writing through a process of iterative prompting, which involves asking them to do tasks such as "make this sound more formal," "include a metaphor," "make it shorter," and so on. In addition to helping students develop their writing abilities, this dialogic engagement also helps them gain confidence in their authorial voice, which is an important but frequently overlooked part of EFL writing.

4. Challenges

While the pedagogical affordances of generative AI have sparked enthusiasm among educators and learners alike, a critical examination of its limitations is essential. The integration of AI into EFL writing instruction entails not only technical and methodological adjustments but also ethical, psychological, and epistemological considerations. Below, we outline four interrelated concerns that require serious attention before generative AI can be responsibly mainstreamed in educational contexts.

4.1 Overdependence and Diminished Learner Agency

One of the most pressing pedagogical concerns associated with generative AI is the risk of learner overdependence, which may erode students' cognitive engagement and undermine the development of autonomous writing competencies (Alsaedi, 2024). In traditional writing pedagogy, the act of composing is seen as an iterative and recursive process, requiring the learner to make decisions about idea generation, argumentation, lexical choice, syntactic structure, and rhetorical style. However, with the availability of AI tools that can produce coherent and contextually relevant prose almost instantaneously, learners may be tempted to outsource these decisions to the algorithm rather than working through them independently.

This shift from "writer as creator" to "writer as curator of AI output" has significant implications for learner agency. When students come to rely on AI not just as a tool for support but as a default problem-solver, they are less likely to struggle productively with linguistic uncertainty—a process that is central to second language acquisition (Abduljawad, 2024). Moreover, the ease of AI use may foster a "performance over process" orientation, whereby students prioritize producing error-free texts over engaging with the deeper cognitive and metacognitive processes that writing entails. Over time, such practices may lead to surface-level fluency at the cost of long-term linguistic development and writing self-regulation.

4.2 Erosion of Originality and Academic Integrity

The second major concern centers on the tension between AI assistance and the principles of academic authorship. Generative AI systems such as ChatGPT are capable of generating content that is not only grammatically accurate but also stylistically sophisticated (Asad et al., 2024). While this can be a powerful scaffolding mechanism for novice writers, it also creates ambiguity regarding the origin of ideas, phrasing, and argumentation. When students incorporate AI-generated content into their assignments, questions arise: Who is the actual author of the text? What constitutes "original work" in the age of algorithmically-assisted composition?

The boundaries between acceptable support and academic misconduct become increasingly blurred, particularly in institutions where explicit guidelines on AI use are absent or evolving. In such cases, students may unintentionally violate plagiarism norms by copying AI output verbatim or paraphrasing without attribution, believing it to be ethically permissible. Additionally, an overreliance on AI-generated language patterns can dilute the learner's authentic voice, especially in argumentative and reflective writing tasks that demand personal stance and critical reasoning. The result is not just a crisis of authorship but a potential stagnation in the development of learners' rhetorical identity and critical expression.

4.3 Inequities in Access and Use

Despite the increasing democratization of AI technologies, access to high-quality generative tools remains uneven, raising concerns about equity and inclusion in AI-mediated writing instruction. Students from technologically under-resourced regions, rural schools, or low-income backgrounds may face barriers in terms of device availability, reliable internet access, and exposure to digital tools (Younus et al., 2024). Furthermore, digital literacy, particularly the capacity to craft effective prompts and critically evaluate AI responses, varies widely across student populations.

Such disparities can lead to unequal learning opportunities, where technologically fluent students gain a disproportionate advantage in writing performance, confidence, and academic outcomes. In competitive assessment systems, the silent incorporation of AI tools may further obscure these inequalities. Additionally, there exists the possibility of institutional inconsistency, where some instructors embrace AI-enhanced learning while others prohibit or ignore it, thereby creating fragmented experiences for students across courses and departments. If left unaddressed, these disparities risk reinforcing rather than reducing existing educational stratification.

4.4 Pedagogical Displacement and Teacher Uncertainty

The rapid emergence of generative AI has also unsettled traditional conceptions of the teacher's role in writing instruction. In particular, the AI's capacity to provide immediate and highly specific feedback—previously a central responsibility of the educator—may inadvertently displace teachers' formative function. This pedagogical displacement can undermine teacher authority, disrupt classroom dynamics, and obscure the importance of human judgment in writing assessment (Praphan & Praphan, 2023).

Moreover, many instructors express uncertainty regarding how to supervise, evaluate, or incorporate AI-influenced writing into their teaching. Given the non-transparent nature of large language models (LLMs), it is often difficult to discern which parts of a student's writing reflect their own effort versus algorithmic assistance. Without clear institutional frameworks, educators may either overestimate or underestimate students' abilities, resulting in inaccurate assessment, misplaced pedagogical intervention, or reduced trust in student work. Additionally, a lack of professional development opportunities related to AI literacy may leave teachers ill-equipped to respond to the ethical and instructional challenges posed by these technologies.

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