

Undergraduates' Reflection on Applying ChatGPT in ESP Writing Skills: A Case from Foreign Trade University HCMC

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI)-driven automated feedback is fast becoming a norm. ChatGPT can provide meaningful writing samples, adjust the difficulty level of texts matching learners' proficiency level and facilitate guided writing. ChatGPT is capable of rapidly generating texts which are not only appropriate but are also error-free in terms of language. This study investigates Business students' reflection on applying ChatGPT in ESP writing skills. The study involved fifty-two undergraduates in Business who were taking an English language course during one semester at Foreign Trade University (FTU) – HCMC, a public university of Vietnam. Mixed-methods design was used to investigate students' beliefs in and perspectives on the effectiveness of ChatGPT application in English Teaching and Learning. Two study tools were employed: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Comprising ten items, the questionnaire measured undergraduate learners' perceptions of using ChatGPT for improving their writing skills and at the same time focusing on higher-order thinking skills as they are related to effective writing. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, consisted of the pros and cons of utilizing ChatGPT-based essay writing versus self-dependent essay writing. The results revealed most respondents confirmed ChatGPT's effectiveness in saving time and enhancing their language accuracy. However, the progress they could make in acquiring writing skills and increasing higher-order

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thinking abilities could not be seen significant. The research paper also made some implications and recommendations for language educators in Vietnamese higher institutions.

Keywords: ChatGPT, English for specific purposes, thinking skills, Vietnamese higher educational institutions

Introduction

In Vietnam's higher education system, non-English-major students, such as those in Business, study English as a compulsory subject tailored to domain-specific needs, unlike English majors who focus primarily on language studies. This distinction shapes ESP instruction, which is critical for preparing Vietnamese business undergraduates for global workplaces. The integration of AI tools like ChatGPT into Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) offers potential to enhance ESP writing but raises concerns about creativity and critical thinking. Despite growing global research, ChatGPT's impact in Vietnam's ESP context remains underexplored, particularly for non-English majors facing unique linguistic and cultural barriers (Nguyen, 2023). This study addresses three research questions (RQs):

1. What are Vietnamese business undergraduates' perceptions of ChatGPT in ESP writing?
2. How do ChatGPT-assisted and self-dependent writing compare in accuracy, creativity, and critical thinking?
3. What pedagogical strategies optimize ChatGPT integration while mitigating risks like plagiarism?

Literature Review

AI tools have revolutionized CALL by offering adaptive feedback and personalized learning (Stockwell, 2015). ChatGPT supports ESP writing with error-free texts and tailored suggestions (Baskara & Mukarto, 2023), creating conducive environments for Business English (Kim et al., 2023). However, concerns about plagiarism and reduced creativity persist (Cotton et al., 2024; Al-Alami, 2024). Self-dependent writing fosters critical thinking (Yamashita, 2021), and AI should complement, not replace, it (Zhao, 2022). In Vietnam, ESP learners face challenges due to domain-specific language demands and limited exposure to authentic English contexts (Nguyen, 2023). Recent meta-analyses confirm AI improves writing accuracy but less so higher-order thinking (Zang & Wang,

2025). This study fills a gap by examining ChatGPT's role in Vietnam's ESP context, where cultural and educational constraints necessitate tailored pedagogical approaches.

Methodology

Participants

Fifty-two (52) business undergraduates aged 18–22 (balanced gender) at FTU HCMC participated, majoring in Business Administration, Banking and Finance, and Accounting. All were enrolled in a standard ESP English course during the 2024–2025 academic year, focusing on business-specific communication (e.g., sales contracts, business reports, emails).

Research Design

A 10-item, five-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from Al-Alami (2024) was used to assess perceptions of ChatGPT's impact on ESP writing skills such as vocabulary, coherence, critical thinking, and authenticity. Sample items included: "ChatGPT helps improve my vocabulary specific to business writing" and "Using ChatGPT encourages me to think critically about my writing." Semi-structured interviews with 16 volunteers explored detailed experiences comparing ChatGPT-assisted and self-dependent writing, focusing on language accuracy, creativity, ethical concerns, and task authenticity.

Procedure

Over one semester, students completed weekly ESP writing assignments in class. For each task, participants produced two drafts: one independently, and one revised using ChatGPT feedback targeting grammar, vocabulary, and structure. Students finalized all texts themselves. Questionnaires were completed post-intervention in class, with items explained to ensure clarity. Interviews were conducted individually (approximately 4 minutes each). Ethical protocols ensured voluntary participation, anonymity, and consent.

Data Analysis

Quantitative questionnaire data were analyzed as percentages of agreement to gauge perceptions. Qualitative interview data were thematically coded using NVivo, focusing on themes like efficiency, language accuracy, creativity, plagiarism risk, and critical thinking development. Percentage summaries were used only for quantitative data, while qualitative insights provide depth and nuance.

Results

Advantages of ChatGPT and Self-dependent Writing

- 60% of students agreed that self-dependent writing improved their overall writing proficiency through practice and reflection.
- 50% of respondents reported enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills from self-dependent writing.
- 45% of them found self-dependent writing enabled more authentic and personalized expression.
- For ChatGPT, 60% valued the time-saving benefits in ESP writing tasks.
- 55% noted improved grammatical accuracy via ChatGPT feedback.
- 25% appreciated the ease of task completion facilitated by AI assistance.
- Smaller portions of learners (15% and 10%) highlighted better-structured responses and incorporation of business-specific vocabulary, respectively.

Disadvantages of ChatGPT and Self-dependent Writing

- 33% of students expressed concerns that ChatGPT encourages passive learning habits.
- 27% of them felt their authentic writing voice was diminished with AI reliance.
- 22% of respondents raised plagiarism concerns, highlighting a need for institutional policies and teacher guidance.
- Self-dependent writing was criticized by 65% for its time-consuming nature.
- 25% of learners mentioned recurring linguistic inaccuracies when writing independently.

Thematic Insights

Interviewees preferred a hybrid approach: initial drafts with ChatGPT support, followed by independent revision to nurture creativity and critical thinking. Significant emphasis was placed on teacher mediation, clear guidelines on AI use, and fostering student responsibility to avoid ethical pitfalls.

Discussions

Addressing research question 1, 60% of students valued ChatGPT's time-saving and 55% its accuracy, but only 30% saw writing proficiency gains, suggesting limited impact on skill development. For research question 2, ChatGPT improved accuracy but hindered creativity (27%) and critical thinking (35%),

while self-dependent writing fostered authentic expression (45%) and thinking skills (50%). This aligns with Al-Alami (2024) and Yamashita (2021), emphasizing balanced pedagogy. For research question 3, a hybrid approach integrating ChatGPT with independent revision mitigates plagiarism risks (22%) and supports authentic learning. In Vietnam's ESP context, cultural emphasis on rote learning (Nguyen, 2023) underscores the need for teacher training and institutional policies to mediate AI use effectively. Limitations of this study include the small, business-specific sample and self-reported data. Future research should use objective measures and explore diverse ESP domains.

Conclusion

ChatGPT serves as a valuable aid for improving ESP writing efficiency and error reduction among Vietnamese business undergraduates. However, to foster originality, critical thinking, and authentic language use, it must be integrated within blended instructional frameworks that emphasize independent revision, ethical awareness, and teacher guidance. Institutional policies and teacher training are essential to maximize the pedagogical benefits while avoiding misuse. Further research is needed to optimize AI-supported ESP teaching across varied disciplines and contexts.

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