

# EFL Students' Attitudes Towards the Use of ChatGPT in Learning How to Write Essays: Vietnamese Context

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**Abstract**—The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has created opportunities for the development of platforms to be integrated into English language learning (ELL). Appearing in late 2022, ChatGPT has gained widespread popularity due to its usefulness across all fields. This study investigates how ChatGPT affects students when learning essay writing and students' attitudes towards the implementation of such chatbots in learning essay writing. Data collection involved distribution of a questionnaire to 150 university students majoring in English language. Additionally, eight participants participated in a semi-structured interview to provide deeper insights. The findings revealed that students view the generation of ideas, the enhancement of coherence and cohesion, the expansion of vocabulary, the improvement of grammatical skills, and the acquisition of suitable ideas for abstract topics as key benefits of ChatGPT. Meanwhile, cheating, excessive dependency, and unreliable replies are amongst the challenges EFL students reported. While ChatGPT holds promise as a supplementary tool in EFL writing instruction, its use must be guided by appropriate pedagogical strategies to mitigate associated risks. The findings contribute to a growing body of research on artificial intelligence in language education and suggest directions for future studies across varied educational contexts.

**Index Terms**—ChatGPT, student attitudes, essay writing, learning motivation, learning strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of ChatGPT has been useful in assisting individuals with solving problems across numerous fields, ranging from accounting to education. Introduced in 2022, the public has given significant attention to ChatGPT, an outstanding artificial intelligence (AI) tool (Ngo, 2023). Indeed, the number of ChatGPT users reached 100 million in 2023, demonstrating its widespread influence around the world.

Interestingly, the increasing use of ChatGPT in classrooms is attributed to its various benefits. Automated assistance, or chatbots, are becoming increasingly popular due to their ability to provide users with prompt and effective support. Higher education institutions have begun utilising this technology to enhance the educational experiences of students and scholars (Chukwuere, 2024). For example, chatbots can assist with tasks such as locating information about courses, arranging timetables, and providing general guidance (Yeo et al., 2023). According to Nugroho et al. (2023), ChatGPT can offer students more engaging, individualised, and flexible learning possibilities, thereby enhancing their educational experiences. Additionally, this AI chatbot platform can be used to improve students' writing skills by helping with translation, idea generation, and grammar correction (Nugroho et al., 2023).

In the field of language teaching and learning, numerous studies have explored ChatGPT's possible applications. Hong (2023) determined that educators and universities could improve second language teaching and assessment through the use of ChatGPT. Likewise, Baskara (2023) revealed that the application of ChatGPT in teaching and learning foreign languages at university level was promising. In another study, Kohnke et al. (2023) highlighted both the potential benefits and the limitations of ChatGPT in enhancing second language teaching and learning. The advantages included providing authentic interaction, correcting linguistic errors, and generating texts in various topics, while drawbacks included excessive dependence on technology, inaccurate responses, and ethical concerns.

ChatGPT has gained significant attention in research conducted within the Vietnamese context. To explore the benefits and challenges that ChatGPT presents to university students, Duong and Tran (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study demonstrating that convenience and language support are key advantages of ChatGPT in English language classrooms, whereas scepticism about its reliability and limited development of critical thinking were reported as disadvantages. Similarly, results from interviews conducted by Hung (2024) revealed that the strengths of ChatGPT include its capacities to enhance language practice, provide instant feedback, and simulate conversational exchanges. In contrast, problems associated with this application involve issues of accuracy and overreliance on the chatbot for completing assignments. In another study, En et al. (2024) found that only 50% of participants expressed a favourable view of using ChatGPT in English classrooms.

Since most studies have focused heavily on the pros and cons of ChatGPT in English as a Foreign language (EFL) learning, there is limited research on how to implement ChatGPT in English language teaching. Hence, this study aims

to investigate whether ChatGPT is effective in teaching essay writing to EFL students at the university level. To this end, two research questions are proposed:

- *What are the benefits and challenges of ChatGPT in essay writing?*
- *What are EFL students' attitudes towards ChatGPT in essay writing?*

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Definition of ChatGPT*

According to Deng and Lin (2023), ChatGPT is an AI chatbot that utilises natural language processing (NLP) and a large language model (LLM) to source information from diverse online materials such as books, articles, and dialogues and generate responses based on an extensive human language corpus. Taecharunroj (2023) explained that ChatGPT is able to accurately anticipate upcoming words owing to its use of billions of parameters and vast datasets. In addition, ChatGPT is designed to support human users by generating outputs based on their prompts (Baskara, 2023).

Thus, ChatGPT is a sophisticated AI chatbot that utilises NLP and LLM in its operations. Existing research acknowledges its dependence on an extensive dataset for comprehension and response generation. Although Deng and Lin (2023), Taecharunroj (2023) and Baskara (2023) focus on different aspects including prediction, training, and information sourcing, they all emphasise the vast amounts of data and parameters that support ChatGPT's capabilities.

### *Benefits of ChatGPT in EFL*

Since ChatGPT can mimic human speech, it can be a valuable resource for teachers of English as a foreign language who want to provide students with constructive criticism and guidance on their writing. By offering real-time feedback and advice on vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, ChatGPT can support students' writing development in ways that are tailored to their specific needs and abilities. When used to teach EFL writing, ChatGPT's natural language capabilities render it an engaging and inspiring tool. ChatGPT thus offers an immersive and interactive writing experience that can keep students interested and motivated in EFL writing (Baskara, 2023).

ChatGPT can also assist with EFL writing education by allowing students to practice and reinforce specific language skills. Students' vocabulary, grammar, and syntax as well as their overall language development can benefit from ChatGPT's writing practice and feedback features (Baskara, 2023; Ngo, 2023). This feedback helps students build their own knowledge and comprehension by allowing them to ask questions and seek information in a personalised and adaptable manner, rather than relying solely on traditional learning methods such as lectures and textbooks. This aligns with the constructivist theory of learning, which emphasises integrating new knowledge with existing knowledge and providing scaffolding to facilitate learning (Geng & Razali, 2020).

Another benefit relates to generating ideas for writing on various topics. According to Ngo (2023) and Nugroho et al. (2023), ChatGPT can quickly generate writing ideas. For example, if students are struggling to write an essay about the effects of the one-child policy, they can ask ChatGPT to generate ideas and then choose relevant points to explore and develop their own arguments.

ChatGPT has also been shown to motivate students in learning English reading and writing (Ali, 2023; Baskara, 2023). It boosts students' confidence in essay writing by offering instruction, corrective feedback, and positive reinforcement, allowing them to feel capable of expressing their ideas clearly and creatively. Some students are hesitant to write because they fear making mistakes or lack confidence in their abilities. ChatGPT helps to alleviate this difficulty by fostering a supportive environment, offering assistance and information without judgment, and making the writing process less intimidating.

In summary, ChatGPT is an innovative tool for EFL instruction. It assists students in improving their writing abilities, provides engaging learning experiences, and fosters a supportive environment for language development.

### *Challenges of ChatGPT in EFL*

Despite its advantages, ChatGPT also presents a number of drawbacks. First, ChatGPT sometimes provides information that is not reliable (Ngo, 2023). ChatGPT gathers information from a wide range of unverified sources on the internet before generating answers; as a result, this information may not be validated, leading to unreliable or biased data.

Additionally, several scholars have argued that the widespread availability of ChatGPT causes users to become dependent on the chatbot for various tasks (Ngo, 2023; Yu, 2023). Relying too much on this tool may discourage students from generating their own ideas, thereby hindering the development of independent thinking.

Besides, plagiarism and academic dishonesty present another challenge that students encounter when using ChatGPT (Lund & Wang, 2023). It is easy to understand why students might plagiarise as ChatGPT can produce fluent and error-free essays. Those who struggle with writing may view ChatGPT as a convenient tool to help them complete assignments. However, new platforms designed to detect AI-generated or plagiarised content have been developed to prevent or even prohibit the incorporation of AI assistance in education more broadly.

Thus, scholars' concerns about the risks of AI in education range from reliability to ethical considerations.

### *Definition of an Essay*

According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), an essay is a text that is longer than a paragraph. Writers must be skilled at developing well-organised paragraphs as paragraphs are the foundation of an essay. The quality of the paragraphs directly influences the effectiveness of an essay, which is a series of paragraphs that collectively discuss one central

topic or idea (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003). Accordingly, the most distinctive feature of an essay is its focus on a single topic.

In terms of structure, both Oshima and Hogue (2007) and Zemach and Rumisek (2003) agree that an essay consists of three main parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction is always placed at the beginning of the essay and presents the main topic to be discussed. The thesis statement is the most essential sentence in the introduction and typically appears at or near the end of the paragraph. Regarding the body of the essay, Oshima and Hogue (2007) and Zemach and Rumisek (2003) stated that it may consist of one or more paragraphs, depending on the required length and scope of the assignment. The conclusion is the final paragraph, which summarises the main points discussed in the body.

#### *Difficulties in Essay Writing*

One of the difficulties in essay writing is generating ideas (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Although the majority of participants in the study by Bulqiyah et al. (2021) stated that they struggle with producing ideas related to a specific topic, the underlying reasons for this issue were not explored. Another challenge students encounter when writing an essay is maintaining coherence and cohesion (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). To ensure coherence and cohesion in an essay, it is important to use a wide range of linking words and maintain a logical flow of ideas. Students should not only read sample essays but also practice writing regularly to become familiar with different types of linking words.

Lack of vocabulary is another difficulty EFL students face when writing essays (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Students often learn vocabulary passively, meaning they simply receive new words without expanding on them, such as learning synonyms, antonyms, or the prefixes and suffixes of the words. Essays are longer pieces of writing in which students are expected to use a wide range of vocabulary. To achieve this, students should create a daily vocabulary learning plan as the brain needs time to absorb new knowledge.

Grammar errors are the most common difficulty experienced by second-language learners (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Each language has different grammatical rules, and it is easy to find mistakes in students' writing. According to Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017), students' grammatical problems include verb tense, subject-verb agreement, personal pronouns, word order, articles, auxiliary verbs, and sentence fragments.

In sum, the inability to generate ideas, issues with coherence and cohesion, limited vocabulary, and grammatical mistakes are common difficulties EFL students contend with.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. LLMs such as ChatGPT provide a scaffolded approach to learning that aligns with the constructivist theory of education (Schunk, 1995). ChatGPT can effectively support adaptive learning through a constructivist approach by building on existing knowledge via appropriate prompts (Rudolph et al., 2023). This enhances learning by connecting prior knowledge with new information, thereby forming new connections and meanings that contribute to knowledge construction. The conversational nature of LLMs like ChatGPT facilitates the active construction of knowledge as students are continuously engaged with tasks, encouraged to identify patterns through a scaffolded approach (Stapleton & Stefaniak, 2019), and learn through experimentation and experience. This is a key component of knowledge generation (Rudolph et al., 2023). To contribute to a smart learning environment, ChatGPT can utilise big data and learning analytics to monitor student performance, predict success, and respond to students—including recognising their emotional states—in real-time. This results in personalised adaptive learning that is consistent with constructivist theory (Peng et al., 2019; Rudolph et al., 2023).

According to Vygotsky (1978), constructivism is the idea that people create their own understanding and knowledge based on their experiences as learners. Learners use what they already know as a foundation and add new information to it. Hence, each person's learning process is unique due to their individual experiences. The chart below illustrates the key features of constructivism.

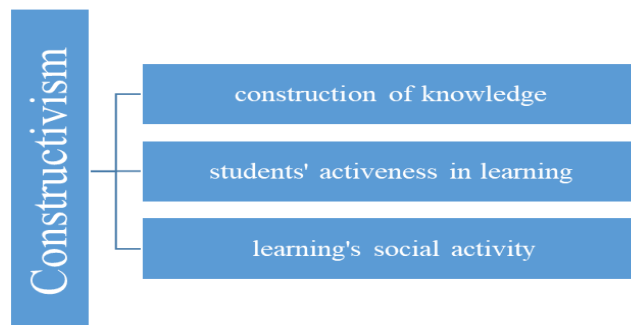


Figure 1. Features of Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978)

The primary feature is the construction of knowledge. This means that what people know is built upon on what they already know. People interpret and integrate information in their own unique ways, resulting in different understandings

from person to person. Thus, what a student already knows, has experienced, believes, and has learned become the foundation for future learning.

The second feature of constructivism is that students must be active participants in the learning process. Learning requires sensory input and active engagement. The learner must be involved: learning is not a passive process. To truly engage in learning and growth, students must interact with the world around them through reading, discussing, performing tasks, and more, rather than just passively listening.

Finally, learning is a social activity and often involves group work. Connecting with others directly influences what we learn. Teachers, family members, and peers play a vital role in shaping how students learn. Progressive education recognises the value of interaction and therefore incorporates group work, discussion, and social engagement to reinforce knowledge and ensure retention.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Given that the findings from qualitative research cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree and ambiguities can emerge during the analysis process (Atieno, 2009), the combination of quantitative and qualitative research sheds greater light on the research outcomes. In this study, the researcher adopted a sequential explanatory strategy wherein the initial phase involved the collection and analysis of qualitative data, and the second quantitative phase built on the results. Accordingly, 150 second-year students majoring in English language were invited to complete a questionnaire on the benefits and challenges of ChatGPT in writing essays. Eight of these students were also chosen for semi-structured interviews about their attitudes towards the use of ChatGPT in writing essays.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Findings

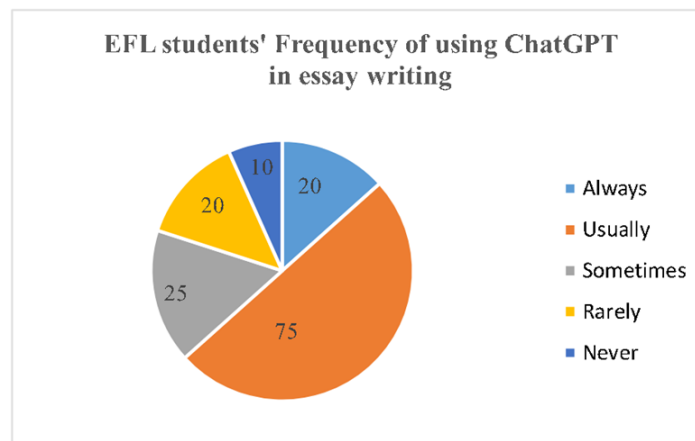


Figure 2. The Frequency of ChatGPT Use for Essay Writing

Figure 2 depicts how often EFL students use ChatGPT to write essays according to the following frequencies: Always, Usually, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. It is clear that most students use ChatGPT as an essay-writing tool. The majority of students belong to the 'Usually' group, while there are only 10 students who never use it. Twenty-five students sometimes use ChatGPT as a supportive platform in writing essays. Interestingly, the number of students who always use ChatGPT (20 students) is the same as those who rarely use it (20 students).

**Answering the first research question:** *What are the benefits and challenges of ChatGPT in essay writing?*

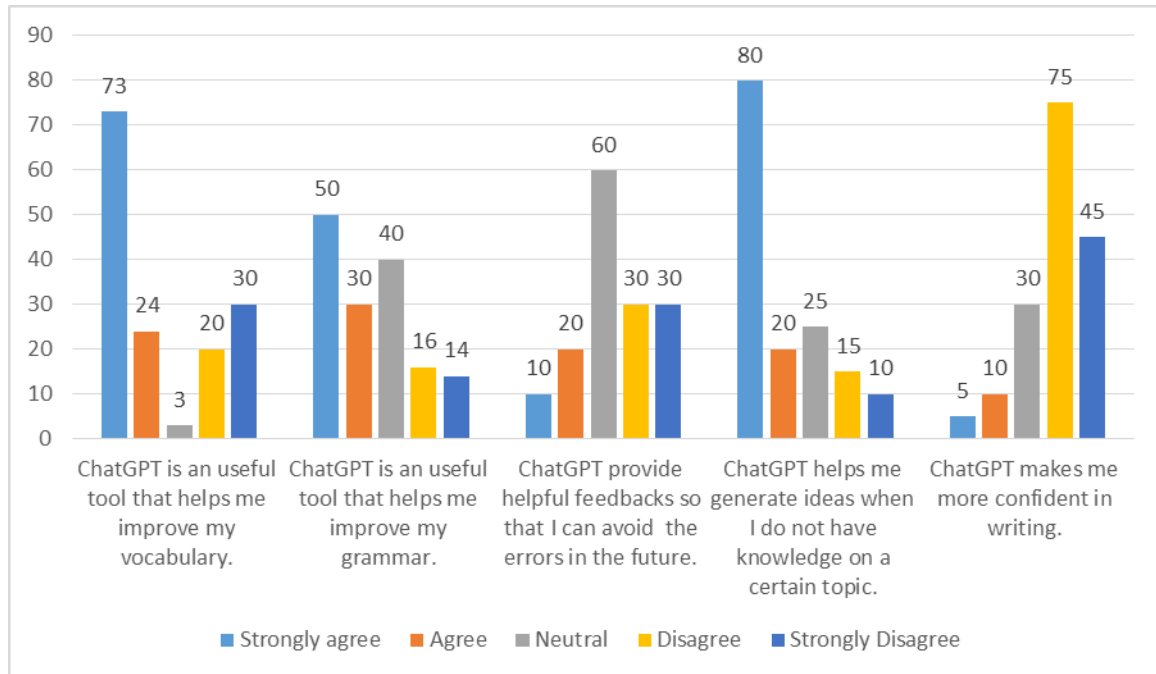


Figure 3. The Challenges of Using ChatGPT in Writing Essays

*Statement 1: ChatGPT is a useful tool that helps me improve my vocabulary.*

A significant proportion of respondents (73 students counting for 48.7%) strongly agreed that ChatGPT is beneficial for enhancing vocabulary. In contrast, a minority of 3 students (2%) reported a neutral stance about its use, while 30 students (20%) strongly opposed the use of ChatGPT. These results indicate that the majority of users perceive ChatGPT as advantageous for improving their vocabulary abilities.

*Statement 2: ChatGPT is a useful tool that helps me improve my grammar.*

Half of respondents counting for 50% strongly agreed that ChatGPT is a useful tool for grammar. A greater proportion of respondents (40 participants or 26.7%) expressed a neutral opinion about ChatGPT's usefulness for grammar than for vocabulary. A minority (16 students counting for 16.7%) felt sceptical of ChatGPT's ability to correct grammar mistakes and either disagreed or strongly disagreed (14 participants or 9.3%) with its usefulness in improving grammar.

*Statement 3: ChatGPT provides helpful feedback so that I can avoid errors in the future.*

Regarding ChatGPT's capacity to provide constructive comments that help prevent errors, 60 respondents (40%) felt neutral, while 30 (20%) either strongly agreed or agreed. A notable minority of 20 students counting for 14.7% expressed disagreement. This elevated neutrality indicates that although certain users perceive ChatGPT's feedback as beneficial, a significant number remain uncertain about its long-term effects.

*Statement 4: ChatGPT helps me generate ideas when I do not have knowledge on a certain topic.*

The capability of ChatGPT to produce ideas in situations where users lack expertise received the greatest proportion of strong agreement (n = 100). Surprisingly, 25 respondents (16.7%) felt neutral, and the other 25 students (16.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thus, the majority of people consider ChatGPT to be an effective tool for brainstorming.

*Statement 5: ChatGPT makes me more confident about writing.*

Mixed reactions were reported on the confidence-building component of ChatGPT. Despite the fact that 75 respondents (50%) disagreed and another 45 (30%) strongly disagreed that ChatGPT enhances their confidence, 30 respondents (20%) had a neutral opinion, and 15 people (10%) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Nevertheless, a significant number of users reported feeling more confident in their writing as a result of ChatGPT's aid.

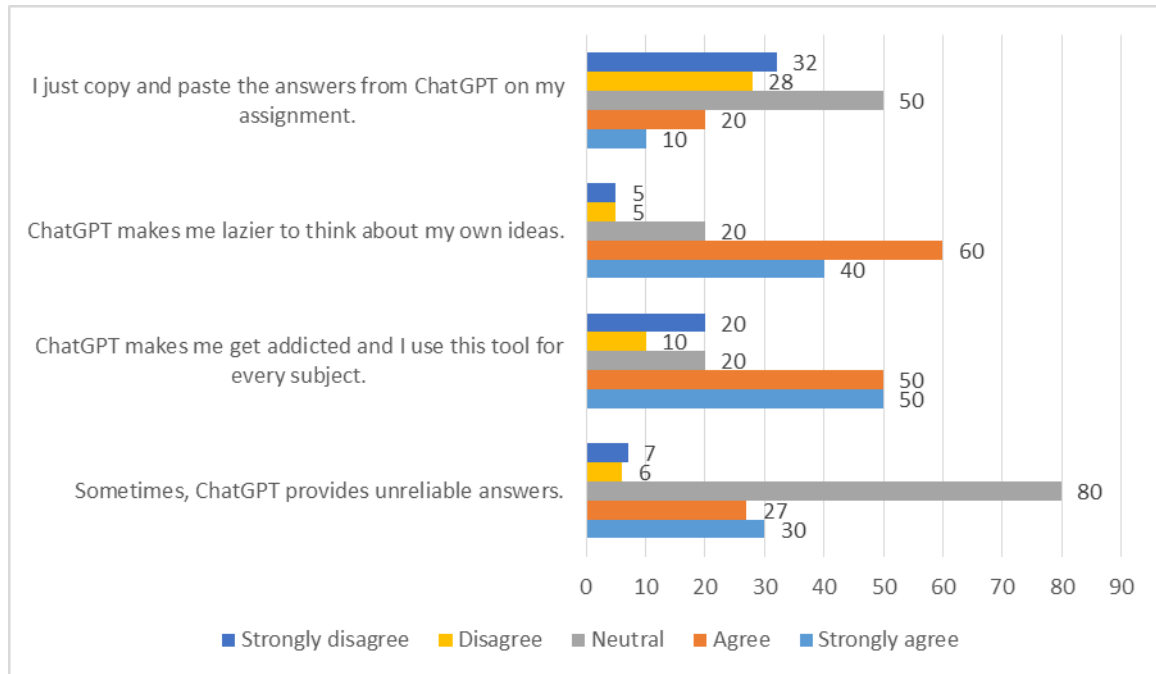


Figure 4. The Challenges of Using ChatGPT in Writing Essays

Figure 4 illustrates the difficulties encountered by students when using ChatGPT for essay composition. The responses are divided into four categories, reflecting varying degrees of agreement with each statement: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

*Statement 1: Sometimes ChatGPT provides unreliable answers.*

Half of the survey participants expressed uncertainty about ChatGPT as a reliable source for completing their homework. A potential concern about overreliance on AI-generated content is evident as 32 respondents strongly agreed and 28 agreed that ChatGPT sometimes provides unreliable information. Nevertheless, most students likely use ChatGPT's responses to some extent given that only a small number of participants ( $n = 10$ ) strongly disagreed that ChatGPT gives unreliable answers.

*Statement 2: I have become addicted to ChatGPT and use this tool for every subject.*

A total of 60% of respondents (90 students) felt that ChatGPT has reduced their creativity, with 40 students or 26.7% strongly agreeing with this statement. In contrast, only five respondents disagreed, and 20 (counting for 13%) strongly disagreed. These findings suggest that while ChatGPT is a helpful tool, it may also hinder users' critical thinking abilities.

*Statement 3: ChatGPT makes me lazier in developing my own ideas.*

Numerous students acknowledged that they have become reliant on ChatGPT for all their subjects, with 50 (33.3%) agreeing and another 50 (33.3%) strongly agreeing with this statement. A moderate number of 20 respondents (13%) remained neutral, while 30 students (20%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This underscores the potential for overreliance on AI tools, which could potentially diminish independent learning endeavours.

*Statement 4: I just copy and paste the answers from ChatGPT for my assignments.*

Although a substantial number of 80 respondents (53.3%) felt neutral regarding the reliability of ChatGPT, a small number of 30 students (20%) acknowledged that the tool occasionally generates unreliable responses. Furthermore, 27 respondents (18%) expressed strong agreement. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that errors are not the most pressing concern, as only 13 students (8.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Answering the first research question: What are EFL students' attitudes towards ChatGPT in essay writing?**

*Positive Attitudes*

Some students expressed positive attitudes towards the use of ChatGPT in writing an essay, citing aspects such as convenience, enhancement of coherence and cohesion, vocabulary expansion, grammar improvement, and the generation of suitable ideas for abstract topics.

All the students in this study reported that ChatGPT was convenient for learning how to write an essay in English. The excerpts below support this point of view.

I am thankful for ChatGPT because it is very convenient for my studies at university. Nowadays, the internet is very popular, and 90% of students can access to internet at school or at home, so I can use ChatGPT anytime when I need an answer. When I study writing subjects, I can open the ChatGPT app on my mobile phone to get ideas and complete my task within the time allowance. (Student 1)

ChatGPT is quite convenient because I can get answers for all the subjects at school. In terms of writing an essay, I use it to provide a sample, and I can imitate how to write based on the structure, grammar, and vocabulary in it. (Student 2)

The results from the interviews revealed that one student was able to improve the coherence and cohesion of her essays in English with ChatGPT. She said,

Before using ChatGPT, I just knew several linking words such as 'and', 'or', 'but', 'because', and 'therefore'. After reading the sample answers provided by ChatGPT, I noticed that these samples used various kinds of connecting words which seemed to be more fluent. Then I learned how to apply these words in my writing, and this worked. (Student 3)

Students in the interviews believed that asking ChatGPT to provide a sample essay about a specific topic helped them learn more academic words. One student shared,

I lack academic words, which is a big problem for me. We are studying how to write different kinds of essays this semester, and the teacher has asked us to learn as many academic words as possible. I am struggling with this because I can't remember the words. Luckily, I can use ChatGPT to generate a sample essay, and I read it carefully to try to understand not only the content but also the use of academic words in context. By doing this, I naturally absorb the academic words in my head and can recall them in my essays. (Student 2)

Students in the study stated that they use ChatGPT to generate ideas related to abstract topics. The extracts below illustrate this point of view.

I do not have much knowledge about abstract topics such as space tourism, archaeology, or business. When I use ChatGPT to generate ideas, I can choose the relevant ones for my essay. (Student 2)

#### *Negative Attitudes*

Students in this study also expressed negative points of view towards the utilisation of ChatGPT for writing an essay, citing issues such as unreliable answers, excessive dependence, and cheating.

One student stated that the answers provided by ChatGPT are not reliable. He explained,

I often ask ChatGPT for sample answers, and I spend time reading them carefully. When I check [the information] on Google, I often find that the information is not reliable because there are lots of views that go against the ideas that the chatbot gives me. (Student 4)

In addition, eight out of 10 students believed that ChatGPT led to excessive dependence on it for task completion. The following two quotations support this view:

ChatGPT is a must-use tool whenever I open my laptop to search for any kind of information. This is because I am too addicted to the chatbot as it gives me answers within seconds. (Student 5)

Since ChatGPT is a useful platform used by billions of users around the world, why don't we exploit this tool to help us in our studies? I don't feel ashamed to be addicted to this platform because I just use it for references. (Student 6)

In addition, half of the interviewees blamed ChatGPT for causing cheating when they write essays.

My friends are very much into using ChatGPT for answers, and they are lazy about revising those answers. When our teacher used AI detection applications to scan [our work], she concluded that the students were cheating. (Student 5)

I wish ChatGPT never existed because it has made me so addicted that I just want to cheat. Some of my friends are the same, and the teacher is very sad when she realises we are cheating. (Student 6)

Finally, one student considered the limitation of answers as the biggest challenge for students. She observed,

The price for using ChatGPT without limitations is quite expensive for students in developing countries like us. Therefore, I have to think twice before I send my questions to the chatbot. My friends suggested that I use several emails to solve this problem, but it is still not enough. (Student 7)

#### *B. Discussion*

Vygotsky's (1962) constructivist theory of learning aligns with the findings obtained from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research. It is unsurprising that ChatGPT constructs its responses by drawing from a variety of resources on the internet, thus adhering to the core premise of constructivist theory. In this way, students are able to develop their own knowledge to meet the requirements of their lecturers while also learning. The participants in this research reported using ChatGPT to improve their grammar, learn new vocabulary, and develop ideas when writing essays.

The notion that knowledge is a personal experience and that learning is an active process are further characteristics shared by both constructivism and ChatGPT. Students need to be actively engaged in their studies to achieve the best possible results. The tool directly benefits students by gathering material from various sources before producing a personal essay, and they can use ChatGPT to understand how to write an essay in English.

The conclusions of this study regarding the advantages of using ChatGPT for essay writing have many similarities with past research. Consistent with the work of Baskara (2023), Ngo (2023), and Geng and Razali (2020), the results of this study revealed that ChatGPT helps students with idea generation, enhanced coherence and cohesion, expanded vocabulary, improved grammar, and access to relevant ideas for abstract topics. However, the findings of this study also

present a key distinction from previous work: Students in this study stated that ChatGPT was convenient for studying English, but no evidence supporting this claim was found in the existing literature.

Regarding the challenges of using ChatGPT for essay writing, students in this study expressed similar concerns to those reported by previous scholars (Lund & Wang, 2023; Ngo, 2023; Yu, 2023). In this regard, the disadvantages of ChatGPT include academic dishonesty, overreliance, and the generation of unreliable responses. The only notable difference between the findings of prior research and those of this study is the issue of word count limitations in ChatGPT's responses. Overall, this appears to be the sole distinguishing factor between the two bodies of research.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study identified both the advantages and disadvantages of using ChatGPT in the context of teaching EFL students how to write essays. The emergence of ChatGPT has been particularly beneficial to education due to its quick responses, which help students easily access sample essays. This provides a valuable opportunity for students to explore various aspects of essay writing, including structure, the use of transition words, and writing style. Once students study the samples carefully, it becomes easier for them to produce their own essays. However, some students may be reluctant to analyse the samples and instead resort to plagiarism, ignoring the serious consequences they may face if caught by their teachers. Since this study was conducted on a small scale at a university in Vietnam, the results are only applicable to students at that institution and cannot be generalised to the entire country. Therefore, it would be beneficial for further research on the use of ChatGPT in essay writing to be conducted in different regions of Vietnam to inform broader comparisons and insights.

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