

LEVERAGING CHATGPT TO ENHANCE TASK RESPONSE AND GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY IN IELTS ESSAY WRITING

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) has influenced traditional learning programs by providing individualized, interactive, and effective learning experiences. Among these advancements, ChatGPT, a cutting-edge AI language model, has emerged as a powerful tool for effectively promoting creative learning environments. This study examines the effectiveness of ChatGPT in improving IELTS essay writing scores, focusing on task response, and grammatical range and accuracy. Using a pre-test and post-test design, alongside interviews, the research evaluates students' writing performance and attitudes toward using AI in their writing practice. Results suggest significant improvements in students' scores, particularly in grammatical accuracy, and highlight positive attitudes toward ChatGPT as a supplementary writing tool.

Keywords: AI, ChatGPT, IELTS essay writing, task response, grammatical range and accuracy.

1. Introduction

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a widely recognized language proficiency test and has been witnessing rapid growth in popularity in Vietnam, where it is accepted by the Ministry of Education as an alternative to the National High School English Exam and used as a criterion for university admission and graduation [1], [2]. Despite its importance, IELTS essay writing poses challenges for EFL students, including English majors, as they often struggle to provide sufficient supporting details and examples when writing academic essays. Additionally, students frequently make grammatical errors, such as sentence structure, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation, which significantly affect their scores and performance [3].

With advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), tools like ChatGPT have emerged as potential aids in enhancing writing skills. ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is an AI chatbot that employs natural language processing to generate human-like conversations and various written content, utilizing a transformer-based neural network architecture [4], [5]. It offers interactive feedback and suggestions that can help students improve their writing quality, a benefit documented in numerous studies [6]-[9]. For instance, Zohery (2023) emphasizes the tool's positive impact on writing performance by enhancing creativity and engagement [9].

While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of AI tools in writing instruction in various settings, there is a gap in research concerning its application in Vietnamese educational contexts, particularly regarding how ChatGPT can influence key criteria in IELTS essay writing,

such as task response (TR), coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy (GRA). Although all four criteria are critical for learners to make progress in academic writing, this study specifically targets TR and GRA due to their particular challenges for Vietnamese EFL learners and the limited research on AI tools' impact in these areas.

The objectives of this research are twofold: to evaluate the effectiveness of ChatGPT in improving IELTS writing performance and to assess students' attitudes toward its use in their writing practice. The research poses the following questions:

- 1) To what extent does ChatGPT improve TR and GRA in IELTS essay writing?
- 2) What are the students' attitudes toward ChatGPT in writing skills?

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to provide insights that could inform teaching practices and the integration of AI tools into educational curricula, ultimately fostering greater student engagement and improving writing outcomes.

2. Content

2.1. English writing skills

Writing is a crucial skill in English language learning and teaching, requiring a combination of structure, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and precision. It reflects a blend of knowledge, creativity, and intellectual rigor, and plays a vital role in achieving success in competitive examinations, job opportunities, promotions, and social services [10]. However, writing is often regarded as the most challenging language skill to master and teach. Effective writing instruction involves systematically introducing foundational elements such as paragraph writing, providing explicit guidance on aspects like spelling and syntax, and engaging students with diverse writing tasks. Teachers should also employ both theoretical insights and practical strategies to facilitate successful writing sessions [11]. Furthermore, integrating technologies such as ChatGPT or other AI tools into writing lessons can enhance student engagement, support self-directed learning, improve outcomes, and alleviate teacher workload.

2.1.1. Assessing English writing skills

A well-designed writing assessment evaluates multiple dimensions that contribute to the quality of a written work, including content development, organization, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, grammatical accuracy, and mechanics [12]. Educators have long debated the most effective approach to assessing writing skills. Traditionally, norm-referenced assessments, which rank students against their peers, were prevalent. In contrast, criterion-referenced assessments, which measure performance against fixed standards, have gained wider acceptance today due to their emphasis on specific skills and competencies. These assessments can be holistic (providing an overall score), analytic (breaking down scores by criteria), or trait-based (focusing on specific features), each offering varying levels of feedback detail [12].

2.1.2. Using AI in teaching and learning English writing skills

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become increasingly prominent in language education, offering innovative ways to enrich both teaching and learning experiences. In English language instruction, AI-powered tools enhance writing skills by delivering real-time feedback, personalized learning paths, and interactive environments [13]. These technologies not only support instructors but also promote learner engagement, self-regulation, and autonomy [14].

Among these tools, ChatGPT a sophisticated language model developed by OpenAI stands out as a valuable asset for teaching and learning academic writing. It aids the writing process by providing immediate, personalised feedback on grammar, vocabulary, structure, and coherence. It supports students across all stages prewriting, drafting, and revising by assisting with idea generation, content organization, and language refinement. Research indicates that ChatGPT

aligns with feedback theories that prioritize interaction and growth, making it a powerful tool for fostering writing improvement and learner autonomy [15].

2.2. IELTS Essay Writing

IELTS essay writing is the second section of the writing test, requiring candidates to compose a minimum 250-word essay on a specific topic using academic, semi-formal, or neutral language [16], [17]. Examiners assess responses based on IELTS band descriptors, which contain four evaluation criteria: task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy. Each criterion is rated on a 0-9 scale, reflecting an increasing continuum of proficiency levels [18].

2.2.1. Task Response in IELTS Essay Writing

Task Response is used to evaluate a writer's ability to effectively address the specific requirements and goals outlined in a given task or prompt [19]. According to the IELTS Writing key assessment criteria (2023), the TR criterion assesses: (1) how fully the candidate responds to the task, (2) how adequately the main ideas are extended and supported, (3) how relevant the candidate's ideas are to the task, (4) how clearly the candidate opens the discourse, establishes their position, and formulates conclusions, and (5) how appropriate the format of the response is to the task. [21] Based on these aspects, a checklist was developed to assess the level of completion of the Task Response criteria of the participants in this study.

2.2.2. Grammatical Range and Accuracy in IELTS Essay Writing

GRA refers to the diversity, precision, and appropriateness of the candidate's grammatical use in their writing at sentence level [20]. The GRA criterion assesses: (1) the range and appropriacy of structures used in a given response (e.g. simple, compound and complex sentences), (2) the accuracy of simple, compound, and complex sentences, (3) the density and communicative effect of grammatical errors, and (4) the accurate and appropriate use of punctuation This study utilizes these IELTS scoring criteria to develop a checklist evaluating students' performance in meeting the GRA criteria.

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Context and Participants

This study was conducted at the Faculty of English of a leading pedagogical university in Vietnam, renowned for training English language teachers nationwide. The study spanned five weeks during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year.

The research involved 20 second-year English majors enrolled in a compulsory course designed to advance their reading and writing skills to the C1 level, as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [21]. Their English proficiency was estimated at the B2 level (CEFR). Three-fourths of them had prior experience with the IELTS test and were familiar with its format and requirements. Additionally, 75% of the students reported having used ChatGPT, with two-thirds rating it as either useful or very useful.

2.3.2. Research design

2.3.2.1. Action research

Action research is a type of study that aims to simultaneously explore and remedy a particular problem. As the name suggests, this approach blends research activities with immediate action. Initial definitions of the term include a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action and a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action [22]. Our research took the design of Kurt Lewin's action research spiral, which consisted of four main phrases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. To be specific, the research started with a

pre-test to assess the participants' writing competence. It was then followed by four intervention lessons. A post-test was then conducted after the intervention lessons to measure whether there were any improvements in the participants' writing skills. Lastly, the data collection procedure was concluded by conducting a semi-structured interview with some representatives of the participants.

2.3.2.2. Pre-test and Post-test

The research methodology involves administering a pre-test and a post-test to measure changes in participants' writing skills before and after the intervention. In both tests, students needed to write an essay of at least 250 words under the restricted time of 40 minutes. The researcher ensured that the level of difficulty in the post-test was relatively the same as the pre-test. Although the two tests required students to write different types of essays argumentative and discursive the topics were similar, focusing on opinions regarding advanced versus traditional

Both the pre-test and post-test essays were meticulously evaluated using the public version of the IELTS Writing Task 2 Band Descriptors. Two experienced members of the research team, who possess extensive expertise in IELTS instruction and assessment, independently marked the scripts to ensure objectivity and to strengthen the inter-rater reliability of the scoring process. In cases where notable discrepancies arose between the scores, a moderation procedure was carried out through professional discussion to achieve a consensus, thereby enhancing the overall validity and consistency of the assessment.

2.3.2.3. Intervention Plan

Student participants were assigned homework tasks across four consecutive weeks, which required them to engage with ChatGPT using a set of pre-designed prompts to facilitate the processes of brainstorming, outlining, and drafting their IELTS essays. The use of these researcher-provided prompts was compulsory (*Table 1*); however, upon completion, students were also encouraged to generate and experiment with their own prompts to further explore the tool's potential. To ensure transparency and track usage, participants were instructed to submit screenshots as tangible evidence of their interactions with ChatGPT and the applied prompts.

Table 1. Suggested prompts for TR and GRA criteria

Suggested prompts for TR criteria	Suggested prompts for GRA criteria
1. "This is an IELTS writing question. Give me some brief ideas for 2 views of the below topic " <i>topic</i> ".	1. Provide a very detailed explanation of the mistakes I've made in my answer based on the grammatical range and accuracy criteria of the IELTS Writing test " <i>your essay</i> ".
2. Does the introduction " <i>your introduction</i> " have a thesis statement for the topic " <i>topic</i> " according to IELTS Writing Task 2 criteria?	2. How many grammar errors and spelling are there in the essay?
3. Does the conclusion " <i>your conclusion</i> " effectively summarize the main points for the outline " <i>your outline</i> "?	3. In terms of grammatical range and accuracy criteria of IELTS writing, give me some suggestions to upgrade my essay.
4. Is my example " <i>your example</i> " relevant and clear to the idea that " <i>your idea</i> "?	4. Rewrite my simple sentence " <i>your sentence</i> " to a compound/ complex sentence.
5. Are my ideas for the following view " <i>the 1st view/ 2nd view of the question</i> " relevant and specific and why? Idea 1: " <i>your ideas</i> "; Idea 2 " <i>your ideas</i> ".	5. Rewrite my sentence " <i>your sentence</i> " to another structure so that the essay will have a variety of sentence structures.

Throughout the study, the researchers concurrently played the roles of instructors, prompt facilitators, and weekly progress monitors, providing ongoing guidance and oversight to support student engagement and learning outcomes.

ChatGPT's feedback was then used by the students to refine their essays, with a particular focus on improving TR and GRA. After each week during the intervention, researchers checked

students' submissions on Google Classroom and provided them with further guidance and support as needed.

2.3.2.4. Interview

Following the intervention, semi-structured interviews were conducted alongside the post-test to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences with ChatGPT. Six participants were purposefully selected for these interviews based on their pre-test and post-test performance, comprising two high achievers, two average performers, and two low performers, to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. The interviews consisted of ten questions, grouped into five thematic categories: (1) perceived usefulness and general impressions of ChatGPT (two questions), (2) its impact on Task Response and Grammatical Range and Accuracy (two questions), (3) its role in supporting various stages of the writing process, including brainstorming, outlining, and revising (two questions), (4) concerns and potential drawbacks of using ChatGPT (two questions), and (5) pedagogical suggestions and practical challenges for integrating ChatGPT into IELTS writing instruction (two questions).

To ensure clarity and validity, the interview questions were developed by the research team and piloted with one student, who also served as the class monitor. Feedback from the pilot test informed refinements to the interview protocol, resulting in a finalized version used for formal data collection.

2.3.2.5 Data analysis

To analyze the data collected, the study used both descriptive statistics and thematic statistics. First of all, descriptive statistics were used in calculating the mean and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test. Secondly, thematic statistics were also used to analyze data gained from the interviews. The research team collected and prepared textual data for analysis, including transcribing interviews or converting textual documents into analyzable formats. Next, based on the similarities found among the answers, 3 major themes were formed, namely student attitudes towards ChatGPT in IELTS essay writing, student attitudes towards ChatGPT on helping improve TR score in IELTS essay writing, and student attitudes towards ChatGPT on helping improve GRA score in IELTS essay writing.

2.4. Findings and discussion

2.4.1. Findings

2.4.1.1 Comparisons between the pre-test and the post-test

The bar chart (*Figure 1*) illustrates the pre-test and post-test scores of 20 student participants across three categories: overall writing score, TR score, and GRA score.

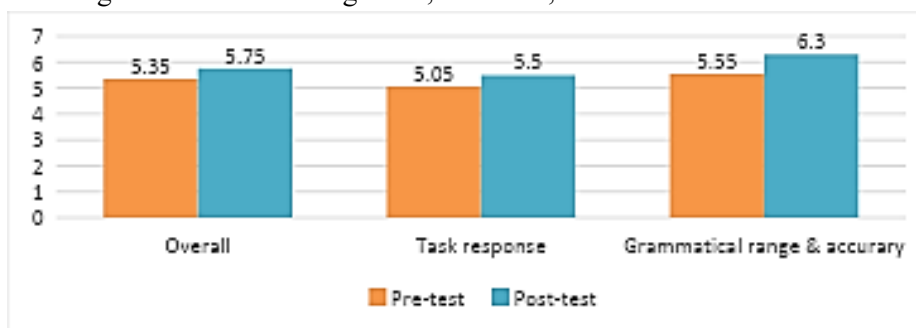


Figure 1. Comparisons between the scores of the pre-test and the post-test

Notably, post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores across all categories. Specifically, the overall writing score increased from 5.35 in the pre-test to 5.75 in the post-test following the four-week intervention, reflecting a gain of 0.4 points. GRA demonstrated the more significant

improvement between the two criteria, with an increase of 0.75 points, compared to a 0.45-point increase in the TR score.

Table 2 compares pre-test and post-test mean scores for TR criteria related to unity and content development among 20 student participants. Overall, the results demonstrate enhanced performance in most aspects of unity and content development, though some criteria require further attention to achieve more consistent progress.

Table 2. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for TR Criteria

TR Checklist	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Improvement
a. Relevant details, examples, or reasons	2.20 (0.68)	2.65 (0.57)	0.45
b. Clear and relevant main points	2.4 (0.66)	2.65 (0.654)	0.25
c. Answering all parts of the question prompt	2.5 (0.67)	2.7 (0.71)	0.2
d. Extended and well-developed supporting ideas	1.6 (0.58)	1.75 (0.68)	0.15
e. Topic sentence in each paragraph	2.5 (0.87)	2.65 (0.55)	0.15
f. Clear thesis statement in the introduction	2.55 (0.74)	2.65 (0.65)	0.1
g. Effective summary of main points in conclusion	1.65 (0.79)	1.7 (0.95)	0.05
h. Restating the thesis in the conclusion	2.5 (0.87)	2.25 (0.94)	-0.25
i. Relevant background information before the position statement	2.15 (0.96)	1.7 (0.84)	-0.45

The results reveal notable improvements in several areas following the intervention. The most significant progress was observed in presenting relevant details, examples, or reasons (criterion a), where the mean score increased from 2.20 (SD = 0.68) to 2.65 (SD = 0.57), indicating an improvement of +0.45. Similarly, clarity and relevance of main points (criterion b) showed a +0.25 increase, rising from 2.40 (SD = 0.66) to 2.65 (SD = 0.65). Smaller gains were seen in answering all parts of the question prompt (criterion c), which improved by +0.20, and extended and well-developed supporting ideas (criterion d), with a gain of +0.15.

Table 3 highlights the changes in the use of different types of sentences between the pre-test and the post-test for 20 student participants, focusing on GRA criteria. Overall, the results demonstrate notable advancements in students' ability to construct varied and complex sentence structures, particularly in the use of compound and compound-complex sentences. This improvement illustrates the positive impact of using ChatGPT in diversifying sentence structures.

Table 3. Comparisons of Pre-test and Post-test GRA criteria
(Use of different types of sentences)

TYPE OF SENTENCES	PRE- TEST		POST- TEST	
	Percentage of users	No. of sentences	Percentage of users	No. of sentences
Compound sentences	80%	37	100%	57
Complex sentences	100%	47	100%	67
Compound and complex sentences	60%	20	90%	38

Table 4 compares the percentages of students who made specific grammatical errors in the pre-test and post-test. The results indicate a significant reduction in the proportion of students making common errors following the intervention. The most notable improvement was in the use of articles, where the percentage of students making errors decreased by 30% (from 60% in the

pre-test to 30% in the post-test). Similarly, the percentage of students with spelling mistakes and comma errors declined by 25% each (from 90% to 65% and 45% to 20%, respectively). Reductions were also observed in subject-verb agreement (-20%) and incorrect preposition choice (-15%). Besides the errors that have decreased, there are still two types of errors witnessing a slight increase, namely run-on sentence errors (+5%) and sentence fragment errors (+10%).

Table 4. Percentages of students making grammatical errors

Type Of Grammar Errors	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Comparison
Incorrect Use of Articles	60%	30%	-30%
Spelling	90%	65%	-25%
Comma errors	45%	20%	-25%
Problems with plurals and countable/uncountable nouns	40%	15%	-25%
Subject-verb agreement	75%	55%	-20%
Incorrect preposition choice	35%	20%	-15%
Sentence sprawl	20%	15%	-5%
Lack of parallel structure	30%	25%	-5%
Incorrect verb tenses/verb form/word form	50%	45%	-5%
Run-on sentences	35%	40%	+5%
Sentence fragments	5%	15%	+10%

2.4.1.2 Students' attitudes towards the use of ChatGPT for IELTS Essay Writing

Data gained from the interviews shows all of the students agreed that ChatGPT is a useful tool in helping them with their writing process and enhancing their writing abilities. ChatGPT was praised for its prompt feedback and guidance, aiding in idea generation, argument refinement, and vocabulary expansion.

Interestingly, some students expressed enthusiasm about ChatGPT's role as an additional teacher, providing instant feedback and guidance during writing tasks. They highlighted its utility in pointing out the writer's errors, improving sentence structure, and generating ideas. Moreover, students appreciated ChatGPT's availability, enabling them to seek immediate assistance both during class and outside of school hours, while teachers cannot do that in a class full of students. For instance, S3 mentioned *"If teachers and students can make great use of ChatGPT in the classroom, it can be a valuable tool...Students can use it to receive instant ideas for each topic and feedback after writing, while teachers can use it as a marking support tool."*

Regarding the TR criteria, all of the interviewed students said that ChatGPT helps them improve their TR scores when they are working on an IELTS Task 2 Writing. Specifically, ChatGPT helped them brainstorm ideas, develop coherent responses, and check the relevance of the ideas and examples to the topic. It gave them effective ideas and feedback and ensured that their writing directly addresses the requirements of the task at hand. *"I think ChatGPT has given me a lot of ideas about the topic and checked how well-developed and related my ideas are to the topic. I even use ChatGPT to check whether my introduction and conclusion are effective or not."* - S5

In terms of GRA, students all showed a consensus about ChatGPT as an effective and multifaceted resource that supported their ongoing development of grammatical knowledge, making it an invaluable tool in their writing endeavors. They stated that ChatGPT's instant feedback on writing, including error identification and correction suggestions, significantly

contributed to improving grammatical accuracy. Moreover, its provision of alternative phrasing and sentence structures allowed them to expand their grammatical range and enhance the variety of the essay. Additionally, ChatGPT served as a reliable grammar reference, offering clarification and examples whenever needed, thereby reinforcing students' understanding and usage of grammar rules. *“ChatGPT not only provides effective grammar feedback on my writing but also offers alternative phrasing and sentence structures, exposing me to a variety of grammatical constructs. By experimenting with different options, I can expand my choice of grammatical patterns and enhance my writing versatility.”* – S6

Besides the positive feedback, some students, however, expressed concerns over the use of ChatGPT in the essay writing process, such as its complex and elaborate language, incorrect grammar corrections, and irrelevant ideas suggested. Notably, five out of six students were concerned about becoming too reliant on ChatGPT and losing their unique voice. The following are direct quotes from the students' responses to illustrate: *“Sometimes I find myself kinda stuck in this loop where I'm just waiting for ChatGPT to give me all the answers. And then I'm not really thinking by myself or coming up with my own ideas.”* - S1

2.4.2. Discussion

2.4.2.1. Effectiveness of using ChatGPT to enhance TR and GRA in IELTS essay writing

The results of this study indicate improved IELTS writing scores following a four-week intervention with ChatGPT. Specifically, Task Response (TR) scores rose by 0.45 points, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA) scores increased by 0.75 points. Overall, the findings of this study align with those of Eun-young Jo and Ji-yoon Kim (2023), both indicating that ChatGPT can serve as a valuable tool for enhancing students' writing skills [23]. These findings are also consistent with Yan (2023) [24], who noted that ChatGPT enhances students' writing skills through immediate feedback and tailored prompts, leading to higher-quality essays.

Regarding Task Response, the most significant improvements were observed in providing relevant details (+0.45) and presenting clear main points (+0.25), consistent with Nguyen et al. (2024) [26]. Their study reported notable progress in idea generation ($M=4.62$, $SD=0.166$) and organization ($M=4.09$, $SD=0.183$) when students used ChatGPT. However, this current study also identified declines in restating the thesis (-0.25) and providing background information (-0.45), highlighting ChatGPT's limitations in guiding essay structure. This contrasts with the more consistently positive outcomes reported by Nguyen et al. (2024) [25].

For Grammatical Range and Accuracy, an increase in the use of complex sentences and a reduction in errors related to articles and spelling were observed, aligning with Nguyen et al. (2024). These findings confirm ChatGPT's effectiveness in improving grammatical accuracy and diversity [25].

2.4.2.2. The attitudes of students toward Chat GPT

Interview findings revealed overwhelmingly positive attitudes among students toward using ChatGPT for IELTS essay writing, consistent with prior research. All six interviewed students valued ChatGPT's ability to provide instant feedback, facilitate idea generation, and enhance grammatical accuracy, often describing it as an “additional teacher.” This perception aligns with Baskara and Mukarto (2023), who noted that students felt more confident using ChatGPT as it reduced their reliance on direct teacher assistance [26].

However, five of the six students expressed concerns about potential over-dependence on ChatGPT, fearing it could diminish their unique writing voice. This concern echoes Baskara and Mukarto (2023), who highlighted reliability issues in ChatGPT's responses and emphasized the need for cautious use to avoid over-reliance [26], [27]. These findings underscore the importance of using ChatGPT judiciously to complement, rather than replace, students' independent writing efforts.

3. Conclusions

This action research demonstrates a significant improvement in both TR and GRA scores following a four-week integration of ChatGPT. Additionally, student feedback indicates a generally positive perception of ChatGPT as a tool for idea generation and grammatical refinement. Based on the positive student feedback and improved scores, it is evident that ChatGPT serves as a valuable supplementary tool. However, to address concerns about over-dependence, educators should encourage students to critically evaluate AI-generated suggestions consistently and cross-check outputs for accuracy. Recommendations for students include using ChatGPT for targeted tasks such as brainstorming or grammar checks and incorporating personal experiences to maintain originality. While ChatGPT has proven effective, students are advised to use it judiciously to complement their critical thinking and writing skills.

Future research should explore the optimal frequency and duration of ChatGPT use to maximize its long-term impact on writing proficiency. Additionally, increasing the sample size would enhance the generalizability of these findings and provide deeper insights into the role of AI in educational contexts.

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