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Unlocking Potential: Saudi EFL Male Students' Perspectives on AI Tools for Enhancing English Writing Proficiency

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Abstract
This study mainly investigates Saudi EFL students' perceptions of artificial intelligence tools in improving their English writing skills. It sheds light on the challenges and opportunities they face when using Artificial Intelligence-powered writing tools by conducting the main research question: What are the Saudi EFL male students' views on how AI tools affect their writing skills? Despite the growing integration of artificial intelligence in education, limited research has focused on its application in the context of Saudi EFL. The study seeks to fill this gap by examining how artificial intelligence tools influence students' English writing proficiency and identifying potential cultural and contextual challenges. The researcher implemented qualitative methodology, utilizing purposive sampling to select 20 male students from the Languages and Translation Department at the University College of Haql, University of Tabuk. The participants, who were in their fourth level of study and enrolled in the Writing 1 course, participated in this group interview. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. The findings showed that AI tools were generally beneficial for improving grammar, vocabulary, and writing confidence, but students noted limitations in the feedback's contextual accuracy and cultural appropriateness. The challenges highlighted included incorrect suggestions, a lack of personalized feedback, and issues with formal tone and cultural nuances in writing. In conclusion, while AI tools offer valuable support for EFL students, it is essential to integrate AI with traditional methods through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to foster a balanced writing approach, contributing to pedagogy by enhancing AI-driven and instructor-guided learning while informing AI tool development to support Saudi EFL male students better.

Keywords: artificial intelligence tools, English writing skills sociocultural theory of Learning, thematic analysis, technology in education, technology in education
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Introduction

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into language has revolutionized the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), offering tools that support the development of the four English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. These AI tools address diverse learners' needs and enhance language acquisition in more sophisticated ways compared to traditional methods, as they provide personalized, efficient, and adaptive learning experiences. All four language skills have benefited uniquely from the integration of AI, and writing has emerged as a focal point due to its importance in academic and professional contexts.

However, it is in writing that AI has demonstrated the most significant impact, addressing long-standing challenges faced by EFL learners. Among the language skills, writing is the most daunting to gain mastery due to its requirement of accuracy, coherence, organization, and creativity. AI writing tools such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and QuillBot have gained popularity among learners and instructors for immediate feedback on grammar, vocabulary, style, and organization. These tools enhance learners' or users' experience in correcting and identifying errors, improving the quality of writing, and enhancing their understanding of the nuances of written English.

Mohebbi (2025) affirms that the use of such tools foster learner autonomy as students can independently and accurately revise and refine their work. Despite the apparent benefits of the integration of AI in EFL writing, several challenges exist.The main aim of this study is to explore Saudi male EFL students' perceptions of artificial intelligence tools in improving their English writing skills. Thus, the formulated study objectives are to investigate the Saudi EFL male students' views on how AI tools affect their writing skills and explore the challenges and opportunities they face while using AI-powered writing tools. Over-reliance on the tools, the accuracy of the feedback generated by AI, and ethical concerns over the issues raised in academic debate are the use of such technologies. For instance, though very easy to use and primarily sufficient for grammatical errors, Grammarly has been somewhat criticized by students in some areas, such as its ability regarding feedback on higher-order missions, like argumentative or research papers, Ullah. et al (2024). Correspondingly, applications like ChatGPT, which lean on large language models, may develop content that lacks contextual appropriateness or critical depth.

However, it reflects the limits of AI in handling higher-order writing skills, which may demand more critical thinking approaches while writing. Utilizing AI in EFL offers a unique combination of opportunities and problems in the context of Saudi EFL learners. Saudi male students encounter it challenging to master English writing because of the linguistic patterns of Arabic and English and their differing degrees of digital literacy. AI tools can close these gaps by providing engaging and unrestricted educational opportunities. For example, Saudi learners choose AI tools like Grammarly or ChatGpt, which are valuable for improving their grammatical accuracy and developing confidence as writers. However, Imane & Siham (2024) claimed that there are considerable barriers ranging from a lack of adequate training in practical use and inadequate institutional support to concerns about the cultural relevance of AI-generated feedback. When creating successful pedagogical strategies for merging AI in EFL classes and maximizing its application in these settings, it is crucial to comprehend these perceptions. Although the current literature has noted the technical effectiveness of such AI tools, few studies have attempted to shed light on the learners' experiences, perspectives, and contextual characteristics influencing engagement with these technologies.

The research problem of this study stems from this gap in the literature. Specifically, the study investigates how Saudi male EFL students perceive AI applications' role in improving and developing writing skills, identifying their challenges in using such applications or tools to build their writing skills. Using the student male perceptions approach, this study explores valuable insights on the pedagogical implications of AI integration in language learning. These were guided by two central research questions: What are Saudi EFL male students' perceptions of the role of AI tools in mastering English writing skills? What challenges and opportunities do Saudi EFL male learners encounter when using AI-powered writing tools? The reason behind considering Saudi male students from the Languages and Translation Department in this study is their direct engagement with the English Writing One course as a core component of their academic curriculum, making them an ideal group to assess the impact of AI tools on writing proficiency.

The significance of this research lies not only in its potential to enhance writing instruction but also in its broader implications for the integration of technology in education. As AI tools become increasingly rampant, there is a need to ensure that these technologies are utilized effectively and equitably, especially for Saudi EFL learners, where unique cultural, linguistic, and technological factors shape educational contexts. Thus, it envisaged that by critically interrogating their perception, students would inform strategies on how AI supports learning outcomes meaningfully to address some challenges toward adoption.

In other words, integrating AI applications into EFL writing instruction is an excellent opportunity but at the same time a manifold challenge. Though these tools represent a new avenue to many problems that have been persistent in language learning, their successful integration involves a critical understanding of student perceptions, contextual challenges, and ethical considerations. The following research attempts to give a detailed analysis of the factors influencing this. Therefore, it provides the essential understanding for adequate and impartial use of AI to improve and enrich English writing skills.

Literature Review

Role of AI Tools in English Writing Skills

The role of AI tools in improving English writing skills for Saudi EFL learners has obtained considerable attention in current studies. Aljuaid (2024) debated the influence of AI tools on academic writing in Saudi higher education. His study found that while AI tools such as grammar checkers and writing assistants can help students develop their writing accuracy and fluency, they cannot fully replace the depth of critical thinking and complex academic skills taught in traditional writing courses. Another researcher like Aljuaid (2024), showed that AI tools are seen as comprehensive and practical supplementary resources, providing immediate feedback, but must be used alongside traditional methods like instructor-guided approaches to ensure the development of skills such as argumentation and creativity. Similarly, Ali (2024) conducted a comparative study examining AI-generated texts and those hand-written by Saudi EFL students, mainly focusing on writing assignments and dissertations. The findings showed that AI tools like ChatGPT could generate clear, factual, and structured writing but often lacked the abstract thinking, narrative depth, and personal touch characteristic of human-produced academic writing. This finding suggests that AI tools could offer helpful support in specific areas, such as structure and clarity. Still, it must be human-complemented input for more nuanced and complex academic writing tasks.

AAljuaid (2024) Reported that Artificial Intelligence has safely impacted the improvement of English writing skills, especially among learners within academic and EFL contexts. Applications of AI in education have their origins in early tools such as grammar checkers and spell checkers. These foundational tools address surface-level language errors and provide corrective feedback to the learner. However, with more development in AI technology, tools have emerged that offer state-of-the-art support, from the generation of content and style improvement down to personalized feedback while learning. These developments have revolutionized how learners approach writing tasks, enabling them to enhance their writing proficiency effectively.

In recent years, studies have shown that AI tools can contribute significantly to enhancing the general quality of writing among learners. For example, with the help of AI tools, students can create ideas for or even outline the content and reform the language, considering those common problems occurring in traditional writing instruction (Widiati, 2023). These tools can indeed play an essential role in providing timely and personalized feedback, which is often difficult for instructors to offer consistently. Several studies confirm that AI tools can enhance language skills among its users; they could improve grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and coherence in written texts to develop their writing skills (Zhao et al. 2024).

Furthermore, AI tools can help learners overcome cognitive barriers in the process of writing by paraphrasing texts to meet the high standard of the student's needs, such as grammar correctors and analyzing the text to increase learners' confidence and motivation for writing accordingly (Nabilla et al. 2024). Based on several challenges, like the linguistic complexities that meet the EFL learners, AI tools are reliable aids in addressing structural and stylistic challenges. These tools, which have real-time support, assist students in being able to focus on content development rather than mechanical errors as a means of fostering critical thinking and creativity in writing.

Cultural and Social Issues in Using AI Tools in Education

Cultural and social issues are influential in using AI tools among EFL learners, particularly Saudi learners who face unique cultural and social challenges. Saudi students, who mainly speak Arabic, often face clear linguistic barriers when learning English language skills and writing due to the linguistic differences between the two languages. Integrating AI tools, such as ChatGPT or grammar checkers, can deliver immediate feedback. These tools may not fully cover the cultural nuances and linguistic complexity of Arabic speakers, but they assist the learners in writing accurately in terms of grammar. In the Saudi learners' context, where education is deeply rooted in traditional values and methods, students may be more disposed to delegate face-to-face interactions with teachers than AI-driven learning tools. As such, the cultural beliefs of AI are that it is a tool for improving language skills and education rather than replacing human interaction in teaching and learning. AI tools may be viewed with skepticism, particularly regarding their capability to respect educational traditions and cultural norms (Yusuf et al., 2024).

However, AI tools are sometimes considered supplementary rather than central to the learning process, especially in more conservative educational settings prioritizing face-to-face interaction. The family and societal expectations of male students to excel in education can also influence how they perceive the role of AI in their academic success. For instance, the pressure to maintain high standards in language proficiency may make students more open to AI tools that promise immediate results, even if they are cautious about relying on them entirely (Qutieshat 2025). The supporters must culturally adapt AI tools for Saudi male students to address their

specific learning needs while complementing the instructor-led teaching methods that dominate the educational system. By incorporating AI in ways that respect Saudi cultural values and academic goals, these tools can enhance the learning experience and provide significant support in mastering English writing skills (Ramamuthie & Aziz 2022)

Artificial Intelligence tools integrate into education, but they also raise various cultural and social issues that impact how they are adopted and used. In most educational systems, cultural attitudes toward technology, technological literacy, and ethical considerations shape students' and educators' perceptions. While AI has proven beneficial in enhancing learning experiences, it often hinders adoption by over-reliance on technology, loss of human interaction, and unequal access to resources (Ahmad et al., 2023). These issues are particularly prominent in developing regions where infrastructure and digital readiness are still evolving.

In the context of language learning, AI tools play an ever-increasing role in improving English reading, speaking, and writing skills. However, cultural perceptions play a virtual, a significant, a critical, a crucial role in how those tools are perceived, especially in regions where English is not the first but the second or foreign language. For example, there is a feeling among learners that the platforms driven by AI lack cultural sensitivity or fail to align with their learning needs (AlAfnan 2025). Writing is one of the most complex skills, and it also saw enormous support through AI when the tools provided grammar correction, suggested content, and even gave feedback simultaneously. Notwithstanding all this, misgivings have arisen out of a seemingly perpetual cultural trepidation towards dependence on technology regarding honing any skill.

Alsariera & Alsaraireh (2024) claimed that the adoption of AI tools in education has unique challenges in the Arab world, as most EFL learners are challenged to write in English due to linguistic features and lack of access to advanced tools. The growing interest of AI tools in Saudi Arabia has led to its integration in education. Nonetheless, it is still considered a challenge, including cultural barriers, reliance on traditional teaching methods, and concerns over ethical AI use. In order to address these issues, culturally sensitive AI tools and targeted training programs are needed to ensure the successful integration of AI into Saudi classrooms.

AI in EFL Classrooms: Recent Developments and Challenges

Mutambik (2024) explored AI-driven language learning platforms that provide personalized feedback based on learners' progress and needs. According to that study, Arabic speakers' particular language acquisition requirements make understanding linguistic and cultural barriers challenging. It also focuses on how successful e-learning platforms are, especially for independent learners who find it challenging to stay up in conventional classroom environments. The integration of AI into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has drawn considerable interest over the last years, owing to the potential of these AI technologies in language learning. These AI tools, which comprise automatic translation systems and modified learning platforms, provide new approaches or practices for teaching and learning simultaneously; they raise a host of challenges, especially for Arabic native learners. Native Arabic students face unique linguistic and cultural challenges in acquiring English, which may impact the AI effectiveness in their language learning process (Garba & Hassan, 2024). Numerous facets of incorporating AI into EFL classes have been brought to light by recent studies, which support the opportunities and challenges of this emerging technology. The use of AI to discuss the needs of individual students has been one central area of focus.

Similarly, while discussing the application of AI tools for the development of EFL students' writing skills, Abdennour (2024) mentioned that AI-powered applications will not only facilitate the delivery of immediate feedback but also bring about a significant change in pronunciation and grammar among students. However, the study found that denying students access to human connection through AI-powered technologies will prevent them from developing the communicative skills crucial for EFL learners, particularly Native Arabic students from non-Western cultural backgrounds. This insight points out the critical gap in the current capabilities of AI tools in fostering real-world communication skills and deeper interaction.

Alwaqdani (2024) investigated multiple challenges Saudi teachers face in integrating AI into their classrooms. Even though AI is considered a fruitful tool in encouraging learners to learn the language rules and engaging them in the mood of e-learning as well as delivering content, some teachers found it challenging to adjust to the new technology, particularly when it came to matching AI tools with the local curriculum and the learning requirements and the needs of their students. In addition, it is important to utilize the potential of AI adequately, as well as professional development and training. From a study conducted in Jordan on incorporating AI in language assessment, Al-Shaboul et al. (2024) claimed that the AI tools could effectively examine written work and provide feedback on vocabulary usage and sentence structure. They, regardless, stated that these AI systems could not account for contextual and cultural distinctions, which is of consideration for native Arabic learners, as the effect on language use is nuanced greatly by culture.

A few challenges still exist in integrating AI tools into EFL classrooms in the Middle East, some highlighted by Ali and Aziz (2023). They found that although chatbots enabled students to practice having conversations, it was challenging to provide contextually suitable feedback, notably to those who struggled with English. They described that AI chatbots failed to address distinct areas of difficulty for native Arabic learners, such as word ordering and verb conjugations (Ali & Aziz, 2023). Most chatbots propose generic replies, overseeing the linguistic challenges of Arabic speakers learning conversational English. Nasser and Alghamdi (2023) found that AI-driven speech recognition tools are helpful for Saudi EFL learners in fixing pronunciation but less useful in handling intonation and emphasis nuances due to the linguistic interference of the Arabic language. This limitation, the authors argued, was especially problematic for Arabic-speaking learners, who may struggle with English's stress-timed nature as opposed to Arabic's syllable-timed structure. The study called for AI systems to have more advanced sensitivity to the phonological complexities of non-native English varieties, especially those of native Arabic learners.

In a study, Kumar and Saha (2023) examined the usage of AI-driven writing assistants among EFL students in different Asian countries, including Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that students struggled with effectively integrating AI feedback into their writing. However, they found that AI tools helped improve students' writing clarity and coherence by providing real-time feedback on sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. Most of the learners, especially those with limited language proficiency, could not understand why a particular correction was suggested. It recommended that AI writing assistants be designed to clarify the suggested change more elaborately, especially in those cultural backgrounds where learners may receive very little explicit grammar instruction in English. For native Arabic learners, this issue is even more noticeable due to the structural differences between Arabic and English.

Whereas these studies recognize the potential benefits of AI tools, they also emphasize a fundamental limitation: the incapability of many AI technologies to adequately address the unique cultural needs and linguistics of Arabic-speaking learners. This gap is particularly obvious in studies focusing on the nuances of Arabic grammar, syntax, pronunciation, and cultural communication styles, which are often unaddressed by current AI tools. The prevailing literature recommends that AI tools be more tailored to specific learner groups, especially those with distinct linguistic profiles like Arabic-speaking students. For example, the challenges posed by Arabic's right-to-left script, complex verb morphology, and semantic differences between the two languages require AI tools to recognize and accommodate these specific features.

Sabbah (2015) claimed that artificial intelligence tools designed predominantly in English face specific challenges due to Arabic, syntax, grammar, phonology, and cultural communication styles. Even though research on AI in EFL classrooms is growing, there is still an apparent lack of attention to Arabic-speaking students' unique difficulties. Insufficient attention is to how AI can be modified to satisfy the requirements of students whose first language is Arabic, even while a large portion of research focuses on the overall advantages of AI or, in other situations, explores its integration in Western contexts. In order to close this gap, this study looks at how AI tools can be modified to meet the needs of Arabic-speaking EFL learners, paying special attention to how language and cultural aspects affect the effectiveness of AI.

Furthermore, the literature review section sheds light on previous studies that have provided valuable insights into the cultural and social issues related to the use of AI tools in education and the recent developments and challenges of AI in EFL classrooms. A Numerous study comes with the fact that AI tools, especially those created with a variety of linguistic origins in mind, frequently ignore the contextual and cultural variations that influence language acquisition, making this disparity even more apparent. Thus, this study is necessary to bridge the gap by providing a detailed investigation of the cultural and linguistic challenges faced by native Arabic learners when interacting with AI technologies.

Theoretical Framework

A foundational framework in educational psychology and applied linguistics is the Sociocultural Theory of Learning, which Lev Vygotsky evolved. This theory highlights how language, social interaction, and cultural background influence cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learning is not a sheltered, individual process but rather a socially intervened experience, where interactions with more familiar individuals (e.g., peers, teachers) within a cultural context play a major role in cognitive abilities determination.

Several key concepts underpin Vygotsky’s theory:

Scaffolding: This term, usually associated with Vygotsky, describes the kind of support a teacher or more qualified peer supplies to allow learners to achieve tasks they could not manage independently. Gradually, the scaffolding is removed as the learner becomes more skilled and can function independently. It concerns nourishing structure, feedback, and resources to direct learners through assignments that challenge their abilities.

1. **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**: The aspect that has become most familiar in Vygotsky's theory is the concept of the zone of proximal development. It is the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can do when guided or in collaboration. The ZPD emphasizes that learning is possible when more experienced

peers or educators support learners. Learning is most effective when the learner is within this zone, where tasks are not too easy but still within reach with support.

2. **Cultural Tools and Mediated Learning**: Vygotsky claimed that human cognition is mediated by tools and signs, especially language, which is critical in shaping thought processes. Language is a cultural tool that is a central medium through which social interactions occur, and knowledge is transmitted. Through interactions, learners internalize cultural knowledge, language, and cognitive tools that facilitate higher-order thinking.
3. **Social Interaction and Collaborative Learning**: Vygotsky stressed the importance of social interaction in the learning process. He believed cognitive development is linked to social experiences as learners engage with peers and mentors. Collaborative learning, guided by a more knowledgeable person, enables learners to participate in authentic, problem-solving activities that enhance their learning.

In this research paper, the Sociocultural Theory of Learning will distribute a theoretical framework for understanding how native Arabic EFL learners engage with AI technologies, particularly regarding the social and cultural dynamics that impact their learning experiences. Integrating AI tools in the classroom is seen as a form of mediated learning, where students interact with technological resources that serve as cultural tools. These tools provide a form of scaffolding that can help learners improve their language skills, but they also involve guidance from teachers or more capable peers to be fully effective.

Finally, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding and fill the research gap of how AI tools can be more effectively integrated into EFL classrooms, particularly for Saudi male students, by exploring and investigating their views and perceptions regarding the role of AI applications in mastering English writing skills and the challenges and opportunities that Saudi EFL male students face when using AI-powered writing tools.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative design. This research design is essential to understand and/or collect participant data based on their perspectives, experiences, and motivations, thus providing rich insights into how and why specific outcomes occur (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods allow, within the context of this study, focused on the use of AI tools in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and students' perceptions, a deeper look at how these applications influence students in their language acquisition and academic performance. This approach befits the research questions, which aim to understand participants' experiences rather than produce generalized quantitative data.

The group interview method has been chosen for this study because, in groups, interaction among respondents may share more ideas and thoughts among the participants to generate a variety of perceptions. Group interviews provide exciting interactive space for participants, enabling them to describe or narrate their experiences far more holistically than most individual interviews allow. Observing how participants discuss shared experiences helps build common themes that may have remained hidden in one-to-one interviews (Kitzinger, 1994).

Participants

The study participants comprised 20 male students from the Languages and Translation Department at the University College of Haql, University of Tabuk. All the participants in this

study are at Level 3 and are studying the course of Writing 1 – three hours daily for 5 days a week. Including only male students in the group, interviews were to confirm a comfortable environment for open discussion, as cultural norms in Saudi Arabia may lead to more ease and participation in same-gender settings to ensure generalizability. Braun and Clarke (2013) prove that 15–20 participants are generally sufficient for thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns. This approach allowed for focused and candid insights into the challenges and perspectives of Saudi male EFL learners regarding AI tools. The study employed purposive sampling in the selection of students. This sampling technique ensures that the participants have specific characteristics relevant to the research questions, such as their active use of AI tools for language learning.

Purposive sampling is appropriate for this study because it focuses on individuals likely to have direct experiences with AI tools in their language learning process, thus providing valuable insights (Palinkas et al., 2015). The selection of students enrolled in the same course and proficiency level allows the researcher to achieve a certain degree of homogeneity, reducing variability to allow focused data collection. The participants were divided into four groups of five students. This group size is based on data saturation, which suggests that around 12 participants are typically sufficient for identifying key themes in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Each group interview will last approximately 45 minutes, and the interviews will take place in the department office during the student's free time, ensuring that the sessions are conducted in a quiet, comfortable environment conducive to open discussion.

Research Design

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews. These interviews allow flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while ensuring the researcher can obtain consistent information across all interviews (Bryman, 2016). This approach will help the researcher ensure that responses are much more profound; it allows follow-up on interesting points raised by participants and maintains focus on the research questions.

Ensure that the interview questions directly addressed the research questions and that the participants were asked different questions, such as: How do AI tools support you in improving specific aspects of your writing? What challenges do you face while using AI tools to improve your writing? In addition to some additional questions to clarify the questions to the participants to disclose their perceptions about the role of AI tools in their writing and its effect on the process of writing development while also investigating the specific challenges and opportunities arising in interactions with AI-powered writing tools to provide enough insight into the impact of AI writing-enhanced tools on the candidate English writing skills.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data obtained from the group interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely employed method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Thematic analysis is particularly suited for this study as it allows for an in-depth investigation of participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges about using AI tools to enhance English writing skills. The process will involve several steps: first, the data familiarity when the researcher will transcribe the interviews verbatim and immerse themselves in the data by reading through the transcript multiple times. Next, generating the initial codes will identify relevant data segments related to the research questions. The researcher will follow the following steps: First, organize these codes below into broader themes that represent the key

aspects of the student's experiences with AI tools. Secondly, identify and refine the themes; a review will ensure an accurate capture of the participants' views is realized and aligns with the research questions. The themes will then be defined and named, creating a clear structure for the analysis. Finally, the researcher will compile the findings, discussing how identification themes address the research questions regarding the role of AI tools in mastering English writing and the challenges and opportunities students encounter. Participant quotes will illustrate the themes throughout the analysis, providing rich, context-specific insights. The researcher will ensure validity and reliability through member checking, sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants for feedback, and peer debriefing, where colleagues review the analysis to ensure its credibility.

Findings

This section presents the findings derived from the group interviews with 20 Saudi EFL male students from the Languages and Translation Department at the University College of Haql, University of Tabuk. Each theme is subdivided into several sub-themes based on the students' responses. The student responses are coded to show their group (Group A, B, C, or D) and participant number (Student 1, 2, etc.).

Theme 1: Perceptions of the Role of AI Applications in Mastering English Writing Skills

The first theme revolves around students' views on how AI tools affect their writing skills. Within this theme, several sub-themes emerged that address students' general perceptions, the ways AI tools have helped them, and their comparison to traditional writing resources.

Sub-theme 1.1: AI Applications as an Aid in Writing Improvement

Students in all four groups generally agreed that AI tools, such as grammar checkers, writing assistants, and chatbots, have been helpful in enhancing their writing skills. Many reported that AI tools have significantly enhanced their ability to identify grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and awkward phrasing. *"AI tools like Grammarly help me catch mistakes I wouldn't have noticed on my own. They correct things like subject-verb agreement and punctuation" (S1/GA).* Another student claimed "*I find the AI tools very useful, especially when it comes to correcting vocabulary usage. It helps me expand my vocabulary and use words correctly in sentences" (S2/GA).*

Sub-theme 1.2: AI applications vs. Traditional Writing Resources

While many students agreed on the usefulness of AI applications, they also expressed that these tools are not a substitute for traditional resources, such as teacher feedback and textbooks. Some participants noted that AI tools are often limited in their ability to provide deep, contextual understanding of their writing. *"AI tools are fast and convenient, but they don't explain why something is wrong in the same way a teacher would. I like teacher feedback because I can ask for clarification" (S3/GB).* Another perception shared by another student "*I think textbooks are more useful for learning rules and structures. AI tools just give feedback, but they don't teach me how to avoid the mistakes in the future" (S4/GD).*

Sub-theme 1.3: Increased Confidence in Writing

A common theme across all groups was the role of AI tools in boosting students' confidence in writing. Many participants noted that using AI tools made them feel more comfortable and secure in their writing abilities as it was shared by a student stating: *"AI tools make me feel more confident because they help me spot errors before submitting my work. I don't worry about making simple mistakes anymore" (S1/GC).* While *(S2/GA)* mentioned: *"I've become more confident in my writing after using AI tools. I trust that my grammar and sentence structure are better."*

Sub-theme 1.4: Perceived Usefulness of Feedback from AI Tools

Students also provided insights into how they perceive the feedback generated by AI tools. Some students found the feedback useful, while others felt that it was insufficient or impersonal. Different perceptions and views shared by the participants for example *(S5/GB)* mentioned: *"The feedback is useful for minor errors like punctuation, but it doesn't help me improve my writing style or explain why something is wrong."* While *(S3/GD)* said: *"I like that the feedback is immediate, but sometimes I wish the AI tools would give more detailed explanations instead of just corrections."*

Theme 2: Challenges and Opportunities

The second theme explores the challenges and opportunities that Saudi EFL students face when using AI-powered writing tools. This theme highlights both the limitations of AI tools and the learning opportunities that they provide.

Sub-theme 2.1: Challenges in Using AI Tools

While many participants appreciated several facilitations provided by AI tools, they also pointed out some of the challenges. Some reported instances when AI tools had at one time or another provided either incomplete or simply incorrect feedback, thus fostering either confusion or frustration. *"Sometimes the AI tool corrects something that is correct. For example, it often changes my use of 'their' to 'there' when it's fine in context" (S2/GA).* Another student mentioned: *"I feel that AI tools don't always understand the context of my writing, especially when I use idiomatic expressions or complex sentences." (S4/GD)*

Sub-theme 2.2: Accuracy and Reliability of Feedback

Some students questioned the validity and reliability of the feedback provided by the AI tools. For instance, some perceived that the suggestions were not always appropriate to their level of English or to the context in which they were writing. In this regard, *(S1/GD)* noted: *"I don't trust AI tools 100%. Sometimes they suggest changes that don't make sense for the context of my writing."* While *(S4/GB)* added *"I've had cases where the tool suggested a change, but when I checked it, the change was wrong. This makes me hesitant to rely on it completely."*

Sub-theme 2.3: Opportunities for Learning New Writing Skills

Despite these challenges, most of the students admitted that the use of AI tools opens opportunities to enhance their writing skills. Some students have reported learning new vocabulary from AI-powered writing tools about sentence structures and writing strategies. Diverse perspectives shared by the participants regarding the opportunities include *(S3/GC)* stated: *"AI*

tools helped me learn new vocabulary and synonyms that I didn't know before. It shows me alternatives for words, which is very helpful." (S5/GA) mentioned: *"AI tools teach me sentence structure, and when I make mistakes, the suggestions show me how to correct them. I will use that knowledge to improve my writing for next time."*

Sub-theme 2.4: Suggestions for Improvement of AI Tools

Students also gave insights into how AI tools could be improved. Many of them suggested that AI tools could benefit from more personalized feedback, taking into consideration the learning styles and writing needs of each person. *(S2/GD)* suggested: *"I think AI tools could be more helpful if they could personalize their feedback based on the type of writing you do. For example, I write a lot of essays, and the feedback should focus on structure and argumentation." (S4/GA)* recommended: *"It would be useful if AI tools could provide explanations or tutorials on why certain corrections are needed. Right now, they just correct things without much guidance."*

Sub-theme 2.5: Future Role of AI Tools in Writing Practice

Finally, several students shared their views on the future role of AI tools in their English writing practice. Indeed, many respondents would like to continue their research with AI tools in order to improve their performance in writing-related academic and professional tasks, appreciating these technologies as 'assistant' rather than 'successor'. *"I see AI tools as a resource I will continue to use in the future, especially for quick checks before I submit assignments or write professional emails" (S3/G3***).** One more student stated: *"AI tools will be part of my future writing practice. They help me a lot, especially when I have tight deadlines" (S2/GC).*

Theme 3: Cultural and Social Issues in Using AI Tools for English Writing

This theme captures students' experiences and concerns regarding how AI tools interact with their cultural and social contexts. The sub-themes highlight how the global nature of AI tools may sometimes conflict with or challenge local practices, beliefs, and communication styles.

Sub-theme 3.1: Cultural Misunderstandings in AI Feedback

One of the key issues students identified was the occasional cultural misunderstanding when using AI tools. Several participants reported that the AI tools sometimes provided feedback that did not align with Saudi cultural norms, particularly in areas related to tone, formality, and style. Since AI tools are often designed with Western cultural norms in mind, they may not always be suitable for contexts where formal or respectful language is expected, especially in academic or professional settings. *(S1/GC)* said: *"Sometimes, the AI tool suggests more casual phrasing, but in Saudi culture, we prefer a formal tone, especially in academic writing. The AI doesn't always understand that. "*Also, another student explained: *"I noticed that the AI sometimes suggests using informal language or contractions, which isn't acceptable in my writing assignments. This is a problem, as it doesn't reflect the way we write in Arabic or even how we write in English for formal tasks here." (S3/GB).*

Sub-theme 3.2: Impact of AI Tools on Writing Identity and Expression

Another significant concern was the impact of AI tools on students' writing identity and how they express themselves in English. Some students felt that AI tools might reduce their ability

to express themselves in a culturally authentic way, particularly in their use of local references, expressions, or phrasing that may be common in Arabic but unfamiliar to AI algorithms. For example, one student shared: *"I sometimes feel like the AI is trying to push me to write in a very neutral or Western style. I want to express myself the way we speak and write in Arabic, but it feels like the AI doesn't always support that." (S4/GD)* While another participant added: *"We have certain ways of writing that reflect our culture, like using formal introductions and specific phrases. The AI tool doesn't always catch that, and it suggests changes that make my writing feel less like 'me.'" (S2/GA).*

Sub-theme 3.3: Social Acceptance and Perception of AI Tools

In some cases, students reported feeling social pressure regarding the use of AI tools. Since AI tools are still relatively new in educational contexts in Saudi Arabia, there are varied opinions about their use. Some students worried about the acceptability of relying on AI tools for academic work, fearing that others might view it as a form of cheating or shortcut. For example, *(S1/GB)* noted: *"Some of my friends believe using AI tools is like cheating. They think it takes away from the effort of learning, even though I see it as a tool to help me get better." "In our culture, we highly value the effort put into learning and writing. Some people might not understand how AI works and might think I'm taking an easy route" (S3/GD).*

Summary

This study investigated Saudi EFL students' perceptions and experiences with AI-powered writing applications. The results showed that AI tools helped enhance their writing skills, especially grammatical and vocabulary errors, thus raising their confidence. At the same time, there are limitations in contextual understanding, and the students noted personal feedback as not being evident when compared to more traditional resources, such as teacher feedback.

The significant challenges for students utilizing AI tools include inaccurate and cultural mismatches in tone and formality, particularly in academic writing. Notwithstanding, many students valued the learning opportunities provided using AI tools, especially in expanding vocabulary and improving sentence structure. Cultural and social concerns also emerged as some students questioned the acceptability of relying on AI tools for academic work and the influence these tools had on their writing identity. Therefore, it simply follows that while AI tool support could be invaluable for helping Saudi EFL students to learn and practice their English, making these tools more effective requires paying due attention to such features as cultural nuances and much greater personalization in giving feedback, putting them side by side with the more traditional sources of learning. It was to ensure that these tools play a complementary role rather than a substitute in the writing process.

Discussion

This section presents the findings addressing the two research questions: (1) Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the role of AI tools in mastering English writing skills, and (2) the challenges and opportunities encountered by Saudi EFL learners while using AI-powered writing tools.

Students' Perceptions of AI Tools in Writing

The first research question sought to analyze the perceptions of AI tools in enhancing writing skills among Saudi EFL students. The outcomes showed that AI tools, like grammar checkers and writing assistants, were perceived entirely by students in terms of their capability to distinguish errors and enhance the quality of writing. This result agrees with current studies that have declared the impact of AI tools on academic writing instruction in Saudi higher education. The study found that while AI tools like grammar checkers and writing assistants can help students improve their writing accuracy and fluency, they cannot fully replace the deep, critical thinking, and complex academic skills taught in traditional writing courses (Aljuaid, 2024). Similarly, Ali (2024) found that AI tools like ChatGPT could generate precise, accurate, and structured writing but constantly lacked the conceptual thinking, narrative depth, and personal touch characteristic of human-produced academic writing.

Students in this study appreciated AI tools for their prompt feedback and ease of use, which made them feel more confident in their writing (Sub-theme 1.3). This finding conforms with Rafiq et al. (2022), who indicated that AI tools aided students in improving their writing accuracy, making them more skilled in their academic writing.

Regardless, most of the students participating in this study indicated inversely that AI tools cannot replace resources such as teachers' feedback and textbooks. This agrees with Hooda et al. (2022), who stated that while AI tools offer corrective immediate feedback, they remain out of context and miss the depth a teacher provides. Unlike human teachers, it is not possible for any AI tool to clarify or even illustrate why particular kinds of errors have occurred nor how to avoid making their recurrence in the future, and in this regard, that considerably restricts the encouragement they can give towards deeper learning. This has also been reflected in previous studies by Al-Kaabi et al. (2024), who mentioned that most AI tools are not good at contextualizing the use of language, specifically for complex writing tasks.

According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, from a perspective of the usage of AI tools, these could be described as some sort of mediating tool in the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). The AI tool immediately provides feedback, which may act like a scaffolding mechanism to identify errors and correct them made by learners (Vygotsky, 1978). However, Vygotsky also underlines the role of social interaction in learning, and the lack of human interaction with AI tools in this study points to the theory's argument that learning is optimized through social contexts, such as teacher-student interactions, where deeper conceptual understanding occurs (Yusuf et al., 2024). The perception that AI tools cannot replace teacher feedback supports this idea, as it highlights the significance of more interactive, socially mediated forms of learning.

Challenges and Opportunities Encountered with AI-powered Writing Tools

The second research question summarizes the challenges and opportunities for Saudi EFL students employing AI-supported writing tools. The conclusions of the present study revealed that though students acknowledged and valued the potential of AI tools, they also incurred some difficulties, such as incompleteness and inaccuracy in the feedback AI should provide forward/Sub-theme 2.1 and 2.2. These findings prove the results from Darwish (2025), who found that the feedback provided by AI tools is occasionally incorrect or irrelevant, specifically when the writing involves complex or culturally specific expressions. For example, some of the students in the study feel that AI tools do not fully understand the context of writing (Sub-theme 2.1), a

concern shared by Al-Shaboul et al. (2024), who experience frequent contextual misunderstandings in these AI tools, often creating wrong suggestions.

The students further voiced concerns about the accuracy of such feedback, especially with the language's word choices and grammatical structures (Sub-theme 2.2). Likewise, (AlAfnan, 2025) points out that reliance on AI tools often may reinforce incorrect language patterns, as the language intelligence tools may not fully integrate the learners' linguistic and cultural context. This finding suggests that while AI tools can be beneficial for highlighting surface-level errors, it would not be satisfactory to cover the subtlety involved in language development, at least in the case of EFL students, whose needs can be better met if the input is contextualized.

Despite these challenges, the students in this study also acknowledged the opportunities provided by experiencing AI tools when learning new writing skills, such as enrichment of vocabulary and sentence structures (Sub-theme 2.3). That corresponds with Al-Shaboul et al. (2024), who mentioned that AI has provided opportunities for students to become familiar with a broader vocabulary and synonyms, allowing language enrichment. Among them, in this case study, some students conveyed acquiring new words and variant phrases from AI. Sub-theme 2.3 supports the suggestion that AI would lead to vocabulary gain since one of its intents is to notice an increase in students' linguistic resources.

The opportunities delivered by AI tools also align with the principles of Vygotsky's theory, particularly in the context of the ZPD. AI tools can facilitate language learning by providing learners with primary feedback that pushes them beyond their current abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). For instance, when AI tools offer alternative vocabulary or correct sentence structures, they help students grow their language proficiency in a way aligned with their current developmental stage. This scaffolding process, however, demands that students engage with the tools to encourage learning, such as reflecting on feedback and applying it in new contexts, which may be challenging without additional direction.

Other recommendations for improvement that the students had for the AI tool contained more personalized feedback. (Sub-theme 2.4) reflects recent calls by Mohebbi (2025) that providing personalized feedback could enhance the efficacy of AI tools in addressing individual learning needs. Personalized learning experiences are also central to Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes learners' need to reflect on their specific cognitive and social contexts (Yusuf et al., 2024).

Cultural and Social Issues in Using AI Tools for English Writing

Several further themes arose concerning the influence of cultural and social issues on using the tools. This theme has shown how AI tools sometimes do not align with Saudi cultural normative tone and formality (Sub-theme 3.1). Al-Shaboul et al. (2024) raised Similar concerns that AI tools created for Western contexts might suggest colloquial language/structures unsuitable for showing respect in formal relationships highly valued professionally and academically throughout a Saudi setting. In this study, the students reported that AI tools sometimes suggested unsuitable tone or phrasing, which disconnected their writing from cultural expectations. Regardless, the finding implies the limitations of AI tools in evaluating local cultural nuances, a concern also addressed by Schmidt and Strasser (2022), who claimed that AI systems must be more culturally knowledgeable to be adequate in diverse educational contexts.

Moreover, the concern regarding the potential erosion of students' writing identity (Sub-theme 3.2) aligns with Abduljawad 's (2024) views. Investigating the Impact of ChatGPT as an AI

Tool on ESL Writing: Prospects and Challenges in Saudi Arabian Higher Education. International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (IJCALLT), 14(1), 1-19. found that students believed using AI tools could make it harder for them to express themselves authentically and culturally. It is even more pertinent for Saudi students who wish to preserve a strong sense of cultural identity in their writing, specifically when writing for official academic purposes. As Vygotsky's theory shows, deeply situated learning in the cultural context and tools such as AI either support or interfere with the process based on how they are utilized (Vygotsky, 1978).

Finally, the social approval of AI tools (Sub-theme 3.3) appeared as a critical issue, with some students expressing respect for the stigma associated with operating AI in academic work. The result is consistent with the findings of Al-Zubaidi et al. (2024), who reported that many students hesitated to employ AI tools because they feared being cheaters or taking shortcuts. This social barrier mirrors the cultural and educational perspectives toward the legitimacy of AI tools in academic settings, emphasizing the demand for more consequential cognition and acceptance of AI-assisted learning.

Conclusion

This study explores the Saudi EFL male students' arguments on how AI tools affect their writing skills and analyzes the challenges and opportunities they face while using AI-powered writing tools. The findings revealed that while students perceive AI tools as practical for enhancing their grammar and vocabulary and enriching their confidence as writers, they do not lean on them above traditional resources such as feedback from pedagogy professionals and textbooks. Utilizing Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning as a framework, the study demonstrates that AI tools mediate students' writing development, growing their zone of proximal development. However, the cultural issues identified suggest a mismatch between the AI tools' design and the students' cultural context, limiting their effectiveness. The significant potential of AI tools for EFL students need further development to fit in with cultural or educational needs. Educators should combine further traditional tools and methods together with modern AI tools to create a whole, more balanced approach in the process of language mastering. Further research is called for as far as refinement and readjustment of already developed AI tools are at issue, with diverse sets of EFL learners in mind.

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