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Exploring Saudi EFL Learners' Motivation and Perceptions of ChatGPT and Instructor Feedback in Paragraph Writing

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Abstract
Developing writing skills is a central goal for English as a Foreign Language learners, yet large class sizes frequently limit instructors' ability to provide timely and individualized Written Corrective Feedback. This study investigated how receiving corrective feedback from ChatGPT, compared with instructor feedback, influences Saudi English learners' writing motivation and their experiences and perceptions in paragraph writing. The significance of the study lies in clarifying how AI-mediated feedback may support learners' autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as conceptualized by Self-Determination Theory. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted. Survey data from 52 preparatory-year students were analyzed descriptively, and interview data from 13 participants were examined through content analysis to identify themes related to motivation and feedback experiences. Findings revealed that learners valued ChatGPT's immediacy and personalized explanations, and reported improvements in sentence structure, vocabulary use, and organization. Concerns about accuracy and occasional irrelevance persisted, and participants emphasized the continued importance of instructor guidance. The study concludes with the recommendation that ChatGPT be integrated as a complementary feedback tool to enhance writing development while maintaining teacher oversight to ensure accuracy and pedagogical appropriateness.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, corrective feedback, generative feedback, motivation, paragraph writing, Saudi EFL learners, writing motivation

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Introduction

Improving writing skills has long been a central goal for both Second Language (L2) students and their instructors. ESL teachers often assume that providing extensive grammar instruction and correcting students' errors will lead to error-free writing—an assumption that may be unrealistic in authentic contexts (Ferris, 2008). Nevertheless, WCF remains an essential pedagogical tool. Consistent WCF supports learners in identifying and correcting linguistic errors (Ferris, 2010), and focused feedback has been shown to improve writing accuracy in both immediate and delayed posttests (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2011). Despite its effectiveness, providing high-quality Corrective Feedback (CF) is complex, particularly in large classrooms where heavy workloads limit the depth, detail, and immediacy of instructor feedback.

Recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT have emerged as pedagogical supports that supplement rather than replace teacher feedback, offering personalized explanations, immediate responses, and language adjustments tailored to learner needs (Bonner et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). Research on ChatGPT in EFL writing has expanded rapidly and yields findings across three thematic areas. First, several studies report improvements in grammar, organization, and overall writing quality when learners revise with ChatGPT, although many rely on short-term interventions and small samples, which limit generalizability. Second, empirical work highlights positive learner perceptions of ChatGPT's clarity, accessibility, and usefulness for idea development and text organization, yet much of this evidence depends heavily on self-reported attitudes rather than validated performance measures. Third, other studies document motivational benefits such as increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and stronger willingness to revise; however, these outcomes are rarely interpreted within an established theoretical framework. Together, these synthesized findings draw on work by Han et al. (2023), Xiao and Zhi (2023), Mabrouk (2024), Song and Song (2023), Tica and Krsmanović (2024), Woo et al. (2024), Alwadai (2025), and Zare et al. (2025).

Although these studies highlight the potential of ChatGPT in supporting various dimensions of writing development, a clear research gap remains. Most existing studies investigate ChatGPT in isolation, leaving limited understanding of how AI-generated feedback compares with instructor feedback specifically in paragraph writing. Moreover, few studies examine this comparison through the lens of SDT, making it unclear how ChatGPT influences learners' autonomy, competence, and relatedness—three core SDT constructs. While some studies refer broadly to motivation, none have connected SDT's psychological needs to a direct comparison between AI- and instructor-generated feedback. This gap is particularly significant in the Saudi EFL context, where AI tools are increasingly incorporated into writing instruction but have not yet been systematically evaluated alongside instructor feedback.

The present study therefore aims to investigate Saudi EFL learners' motivation and perceptions regarding ChatGPT-generated feedback compared with instructor feedback in paragraph writing. Its significance lies in clarifying how AI-mediated feedback aligns with SDT-related motivational needs and offering pedagogical insights for integrating AI tools into writing instruction in ways that complement instructor feedback. To achieve this aim, the study addresses two objectives: (1) to examine how receiving corrective feedback from ChatGPT contributes to learners' writing motivation within the framework of SDT, and (2) to compare learners' perceptions of ChatGPT and instructor feedback.

Accordingly, the study investigates the following research questions:

1. How does receiving corrective feedback from ChatGPT, compared to traditional instructors, influence Saudi EFL learners' writing motivation?
2. What are Saudi EFL learners' experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT to improve their paragraph writing, and how do they compare this feedback with that from traditional instructors?

To address these questions, the study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, using descriptive analysis of survey data followed by content analysis of interview responses to provide a comprehensive understanding of learners' feedback experiences.

Literature review

Theoretical Foundation – Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT explains motivation as a function of fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2020). When these needs are supported, learners are more likely to internalize goals, sustain engagement, and demonstrate higher intrinsic motivation. In language learning, feedback is not merely corrective but motivational, shaping how learners perceive their capability and control over learning tasks. Feedback that enhances competence—by being clear, constructive, and encouraging—and that supports autonomy—by offering choice or rationale—helps internalize motivation and fosters self-directed learning.

In this context, teacher and AI-generated feedback support SDT needs in different ways. Teacher feedback typically supports relatedness through interpersonal interaction and strengthens competence through context-specific explanations; yet delayed or directive feedback may limit autonomy. In contrast, AI-generated feedback promotes autonomy through immediate, on-demand access and supports competence for surface-level revisions (Alshehri, 2025), but lacks interpersonal connection and may undermine competence when inaccurate or generic.

Recent research indicates that AI-mediated tools can influence learner needs in ways that differ from traditional teacher feedback. Alshehri (2025) reports that such tools foster autonomy and confidence in lower-level writing skills, including grammatical accuracy and vocabulary selection. Their ease of use enables students to work independently and evaluate their writing regularly, thereby enhancing their sense of empowerment. In addition, Mahapatra (2024) asserts that, unlike traditional instructor feedback in large classrooms—which is often delayed or inconsistent—AI systems such as ChatGPT provide prompt responses and support autonomous writing practice. This view is supported by Alwadai's (2025) findings, which show that interactions with ChatGPT significantly increased Saudi EFL learners' autonomous motivation and perceived autonomy.

However, AI feedback may not support relatedness because learners sometimes perceive it as impersonal (Alwadai, 2025). Building on these insights, the current study adopts SDT as a framework to examine the distinct motivational affordances and limitations of teacher and AI feedback and to interpret how each source nurtures or constrains learners' psychological needs during paragraph-level writing.

Benefits of ChatGPT Compared to Teachers in Providing Written Corrective Feedback

Recent research has examined ChatGPT's effectiveness as a feedback provider relative to traditional instructor input. Studies indicate that ChatGPT can deliver high-quality written corrective feedback (WCF) on surface-level errors, though its accuracy remains below that of

human teachers when addressing complex issues. For instance, Algaraady and Mahyoob (2023) found that ChatGPT effectively identified grammatical and structural errors, yet teachers provided more precise and pedagogically grounded comments. Similarly, Steiss et al. (2024) reported that teacher feedback outperformed ChatGPT in accuracy, clarity, and prioritization, while ChatGPT performed comparably on criterion-based evaluations. These findings suggest that ChatGPT is particularly useful for detecting mechanical errors but less effective for higher-order concerns such as organization, coherence, and argumentation, which thereby indicate that AI may build competence for mechanical accuracy but offers limited scaffolding for rhetorical development. These findings illustrate how different feedback types align with SDT needs: AI feedback tends to support autonomy by enabling self-paced revision and competence for mechanical skills, whereas teacher feedback provides deeper competence support and sustains relatedness through human interaction.

A growing set of experimental studies—including Alsofyani and Barzanji (2025), Mahapatra (2024), and Masoudi (2024)—documents the positive influence of ChatGPT feedback on learners' writing performance. However, many of these studies rely on small samples, brief interventions, or single-task measures, which limits generalizability. Few investigate how learners actually apply AI feedback during revision, leaving a methodological gap. Narrative accounts by Han et al. (2023) and Xiao and Zhi (2023) further show that students value ChatGPT's immediacy, personalization, and usefulness for idea generation. In Xiao and Zhi's (2023) qualitative study, for example, participants reported that ChatGPT helped them organize their writing, generate ideas, and prepare for proficiency exams. These findings collectively suggest that students value AI for brainstorming and error correction but still rely on teachers for accuracy, depth, and interpersonal clarification. Such outcomes also highlight ChatGPT's potential as an accessible and scalable supplementary feedback tool in writing instruction, with particular relevance to supporting autonomy and competence while reducing anxiety during planning and revision.

Despite these perceived benefits, concerns persist regarding the reliability and ethical implications of AI-generated feedback. Students in multiple studies reported that ChatGPT occasionally produced inaccurate or irrelevant suggestions, requiring repeated prompt modifications to achieve satisfactory results (Alyami et al., 2025; Han et al., 2023; Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Ethical apprehensions—especially those related to plagiarism and overreliance—were also noted, with many learners emphasizing the need for teacher supervision to ensure appropriate and responsible use (Aljasser, 2025). Importantly, rather than advocating for prohibition, most students favored the guided integration of ChatGPT under teacher oversight.

Synthesizing this body of research, findings indicate that learners perceive ChatGPT as a valuable complement to instructor feedback rather than a replacement. Its immediacy, accessibility, and individualized responses enhance engagement and motivation, yet its limitations in accuracy and contextual depth underscore the continuing importance of human feedback. An optimal pedagogical approach may therefore involve combining ChatGPT's automated feedback with instructor guidance to leverage the strengths of both sources for improving writing development and sustaining learner motivation. Overall, the literature positions ChatGPT not as a replacement for teacher feedback but as a complementary tool that can strengthen autonomy and competence while still depending on teachers to provide relational support and safeguard academic integrity. AI-generated feedback supports autonomy and accessibility, while teacher feedback remains essential for higher-order competence development and for fulfilling learners' need for relatedness—an important balance highlighted in SDT.

Empirical Studies on Students' Motivation and Perceptions of ChatGPT

Motivation has long been recognized as a central factor in second language acquisition (Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner, 2007; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). It influences learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement in language learning tasks. With the increasing integration of AI into education, researchers have begun to explore whether tools such as ChatGPT can enhance or hinder learners' motivation and perceptions in EFL contexts.

A growing body of evidence suggests that ChatGPT positively influences both writing performance and motivation. For instance, Song and Song (2023) demonstrated that Chinese EFL university students who used ChatGPT in a mixed-methods intervention reported greater motivation and improved writing quality compared with a control group. Students valued ChatGPT's immediacy and interactivity, although some questioned its accuracy. Similarly, Mabrouk (2024) found that Algerian students perceived ChatGPT as motivating because it fostered autonomy and reduced writing anxiety. These findings demonstrate enhanced feelings of competence and autonomy; however, participating instructors cautioned that excessive reliance on AI might undermine creativity and independence. These findings underscore the dual nature of AI tools as both motivating and potentially overused resources. Synthesizing these studies reveals a clear pattern: AI feedback supports autonomy by allowing learners to control the pace of revision and supports competence by providing consistent, low-pressure feedback that reduces anxiety. However, several studies note risks—such as overreliance, reduced cognitive engagement, and diminished creativity—which indicate that AI does not always promote deeper competence development.

Other studies have explored learners' perceptions and outcomes across varied EFL contexts. Mun (2024) reported significant post-test gains among Korean learners who received ChatGPT-generated feedback on presentation scripts. Students expressed satisfaction with the grammatical corrections but also voiced concerns about diminished creativity. Woo et al. (2024) observed similar patterns among Chinese high school students: motivation increased modestly and cognitive load remained high. Yamaoka (2024) found that Japanese learners using ChatGPT in online courses experienced higher confidence and lower anxiety, although misuse occasionally reduced their perceived competence. Collectively, these studies highlight ChatGPT's capacity to enhance writing motivation while also revealing the need for guided use to prevent overdependence. Further, the findings indicate that while AI supports autonomy and competence, it may unintentionally undermine these same needs when feedback is inaccurate or difficult to interpret.

Research has also examined whether proficiency level influences learners' motivation and perceptions of ChatGPT feedback. Kıvrak (2024) found that both beginner and intermediate Turkish EFL students valued ChatGPT's feedback; however, higher-proficiency learners benefited more in coherence, organization, and autonomy. Lower-level learners required more teacher mediation to interpret AI feedback effectively, suggesting that proficiency moderates ChatGPT's motivational impact. Similarly, Alwadai (2025) found that Saudi EFL learners who interacted with ChatGPT in structured sessions reported increased autonomous motivation and a greater sense of autonomy, though relatedness declined over time. These findings align with SDT, which posits that learners' motivation strengthens when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. AI-mediated feedback appears to support the first two needs, though its impersonal nature may limit relatedness. This suggests that AI alone may not satisfy competence needs across all proficiency levels, reinforcing the importance of teacher involvement.

Comparative studies have also explored ChatGPT alongside other feedback technologies. Shi et al. (2025), for example, compared ChatGPT feedback with that from an automated writing evaluation (AWE) system and found that the ChatGPT group outperformed the others in writing improvement but exhibited lower "ideal L2 writing self" scores—indicating possible reductions in creativity and personal agency. Tica and Krsmanović (2024) similarly found that students primarily used ChatGPT for instrumental purposes, appreciating its immediacy but questioning its reliability. Across studies, ChatGPT is perceived as a valuable aid that promotes motivation through instant, individualized feedback, yet it may not fully support deeper cognitive engagement or creativity.

Studies grounded explicitly in SDT (e.g., Zare et al., 2025; Alwadai, 2025) confirm that ChatGPT can strengthen autonomy and competence but may fall short in fulfilling relatedness. Zare et al. (2025) demonstrated that Iranian EFL learners who interacted with ChatGPT exhibited significant increases in motivation, particularly in competence and autonomy. Although motivation slightly declined in delayed posttests, participants continued to describe ChatGPT as supportive and enjoyable. Likewise, Alwadai (2025) found that students' autonomous motivation increased while controlled motivation decreased, reflecting a shift toward self-regulated learning. These outcomes reinforce SDT's assertion that motivation thrives when instructional tools support autonomy and perceived competence. This pattern underscores a central limitation: AI feedback supports only two of SDT's three psychological needs.

Across the literature, three themes emerge:

(1) ChatGPT enhances motivation by supporting autonomy and surface-level competence;
(2) teacher feedback remains essential for deeper competence and relatedness;
(3) existing research typically examines AI feedback in isolation, relies heavily on self-report methods, and lacks direct comparisons between AI and teacher feedback framed within SDT.

Consequently, a clear gap remains: no prior study has systematically compared ChatGPT and instructor feedback in relation to autonomy, competence, and relatedness—particularly in paragraph-level writing. By explicitly grounding this comparison in SDT, the present study extends prior work and provides a theory-based explanation of how different feedback sources shape EFL learners' motivation and perceptions.

Methodology

Research Questions

1- How does receiving corrective feedback from ChatGPT, compared to traditional instructors, influence Saudi EFL learners' writing motivation?

2- What are Saudi EFL learners' experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT to improve their paragraph writing, and how do they compare this feedback with that from traditional instructors?

Research Design

This study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate Saudi EFL learners' motivation and perceptions regarding the use of ChatGPT-generated feedback in paragraph writing, interpreted through the lens of SDT. The design begins with quantitative survey analysis followed by qualitative interviews. This sequence enables the identification of initial patterns in learners' motivational orientations and perceptions through the quantitative phase, while the qualitative phase serves to explain, elaborate on, and contextualize these patterns. In this

study, the interview data provide deeper insight into why learners responded to AI-mediated feedback in particular ways and how they compared ChatGPT-generated feedback with traditional instructor feedback. By integrating numerical findings with rich qualitative explanations, the design offers a comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences with ChatGPT as a feedback tool and supports a theoretically grounded interpretation of how AI-mediated feedback influences learners' autonomy and competence in the writing process. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods designs are well established in educational research for their methodological rigor and their ability to generate nuanced accounts of complex instructional phenomena (Creswell, 2008).

Participants

Participants in this study were 52 Saudi female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners enrolled in a university preparatory-year program. All participants demonstrated intermediate-level proficiency based on the institution's placement criteria. A subset of 13 students voluntarily participated in follow-up semi-structured interviews. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that all participants shared comparable instructional contexts and writing requirements. All participants provided informed consent, and the study received ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board.

The intervention extended over six weeks. During this period, participants completed six paragraph-writing tasks and received generative feedback from ChatGPT using a single standardized prompt to ensure consistency across learners. The AI-generated feedback was delivered in written form, often presented as tables summarizing linguistic and structural issues along with recommended revisions. Students were instructed to revise their drafts based on the provided feedback but did not engage in direct interaction with the tool. Survey data were collected immediately after the six-week writing cycle, followed by individual interviews conducted in the subsequent week. These instruments explored learners' motivation and perceptions of AI-generated feedback within the context of writing development.

Data Collection

To address the first research question on learners' motivation, a Likert-scale survey was administered after participants completed six writing sessions using ChatGPT for corrective feedback. To address the second question, which examined students' perceptions and experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This qualitative phase allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' views on ChatGPT-generated feedback, particularly regarding writing improvement, motivation, and comparisons with traditional instructor feedback.

Research Instruments

For Research Question 1, a 24-item Likert-scale survey was used to measure learners' motivational orientations toward ChatGPT-generated feedback. The instrument assessed key SDT constructs, including autonomy (e.g., items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, & 13), competence (e.g., items 1, 2, 7, 17, 18, & 19), and relatedness (e.g., items 8, 9, 10, & 12), along with items examining learners' perceptions of ChatGPT's usefulness, engagement with feedback, and confidence in improving their writing with AI support. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey was administered online via Google Forms. It was piloted with 17 students and reviewed by three EFL experts; revisions were made accordingly. To ensure accessibility, the survey was translated into Arabic. Cronbach's alpha for the initial 24-item version was 0.81,

indicating good internal consistency. After two items were removed based on expert recommendations, the revised 22-item version produced a coefficient of 0.75, which reflects acceptable reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

For Research Question 2, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet and private setting, each lasting approximately 45 minutes and audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interview protocol explored learners' perceptions of improvements in paragraph writing, comparisons between AI-generated and instructor feedback, the clarity and usefulness of ChatGPT feedback, and challenges encountered while using the tool. Interview data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify recurring patterns related to learners' motivation and perceptions.

Data Analysis

For Research Question 1, the quantitative data collected from the Likert-scale survey were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including the calculation of means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. These analyses provided a clear overview of participants' motivational responses to ChatGPT feedback, organized around four key themes in the survey: the perceived benefits of using ChatGPT for writing motivation, its role as a tool for providing corrective feedback, students' concerns regarding its use, and the perceived limitations of ChatGPT in supporting writing motivation. The analysis enabled the researchers to identify general trends and levels of agreement across the measured items.

For Research Question 2, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis. The process began with open coding to identify initial concepts in the interview transcripts. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories through axial coding. Finally, selective coding was employed to relate the emerging themes directly to the research question, with particular attention to learners' motivational factors, perceived benefits and limitations of ChatGPT feedback, and comparisons with instructor-led feedback.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions. The quantitative data, obtained from a Likert-scale survey, provide an overview of learners' motivational attitudes and preferences regarding ChatGPT-generated feedback. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed to offer deeper insights into participants' perceptions and experiences of using ChatGPT in writing instruction.

RQ1 — How does receiving corrective feedback from ChatGPT, compared to traditional instructors, influence Saudi EFL learners' writing motivation?

Based on the analysis of the motivation survey responses, the findings were organized around four key themes: (1) the perceived benefits of using ChatGPT, (2) its role as a corrective feedback tool, (3) students' concerns regarding its use, and (4) the perceived limitations of ChatGPT in supporting writing motivation.

First, with respect to the perceived benefits of using ChatGPT, the highest mean score was reported for the statement, "*I find using ChatGPT in my writing classroom useful"* (*M = 4.4*). The lowest mean was reported for the statement, "*I like receiving feedback from ChatGPT because it*

is always accurate" (*M = 3.6*). The statement, *"I like that ChatGPT provides immediate feedback for my writing,"* received strong approval (*M = 4.3*). Learners also expressed appreciation for ChatGPT's utility in generating and brainstorming ideas (*M = 4.2*), as well as for its provision of useful examples and comments (*M = 4.1*). Personalized feedback targeting individual writing errors was also rated favorably (*M = 4.1*).

These results suggest that ChatGPT's immediacy, personalization, and support for idea generation contribute positively to learners' motivation. While the feedback is generally perceived as beneficial, the slightly lower rating for accuracy may reflect learners' awareness of the limitations inherent in AI-generated responses. Overall, the findings indicate a strong motivational influence of ChatGPT on EFL learners, particularly in fostering a more engaging and autonomous feedback experience. The benefits of using ChatGPT to enhance writing motivation are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Summary of EFL learners' perceptions of the benefits of using ChatGPT in enhancing writing motivation*

Responses	Mean score
I find using ChatGPT in my writing classroom useful.	4.4
It is extremely important for me to use ChatGPT if I want to improve my writing quality.	4.3
I like that ChatGPT provides immediate feedback for my writing	4.2
I like that ChatGPT helps me in generating and brainstorming ideas for my writing.	4.2
I like that ChatGPT provides me with useful examples and comments about my writing. I really enjoy receiving feedback from ChatGPT because it is personalized and only targets my own writing errors.	4.1 4.1
I like receiving feedback from ChatGPT because it is always accurate.	3.6

Second, regarding students' perceptions of ChatGPT as a feedback tool, the highest mean score (*M = 4.1*) was reported for two statements: *"I enjoy interacting with ChatGPT while receiving feedback*" and "*ChatGPT feedback motivates me to edit my writing."* The lowest mean score *(M = 3.0)* was associated with the statement, "*ChatGPT feedback regarding the content, organization, and structure of my writing is better than my English teacher's feedback."*

Other responses reflected moderate levels of agreement. For example, learners expressed a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward receiving written corrective feedback from ChatGPT rather than from their teacher *(M = 3.3)* and rated its grammatical feedback somewhat favorably *(M = 3.1)*. Additionally, the statement *"Without using ChatGPT in my writing classes, it will be difficult to enjoy the feedback process"* received a moderate level of agreement *(M = 3.5)*, suggesting a perceived need for the tool to maintain engagement.

Overall, the results indicate that while students still prefer instructor feedback in certain areas—particularly in aspects related to writing structure and content—they are highly motivated and engaged when using ChatGPT. Its immediacy, interactive nature, and ability to support revision were perceived as valuable features that enhanced their learning experience. Table 2 presents EFL learners' perceptions of ChatGPT as a feedback tool for enhancing writing motivation.

Table 2. *Summary of EFL learners' perceptions of ChatGPT as a feedback tool for writing motivation*

Responses	Mean score
I prefer receiving written corrective feedback from ChatGPT more than receiving it from my teacher.	3.3
ChatGPT feedback regarding the content, organization, and structure of my writing is better than my English teacher's feedback.	3.0
ChatGPT feedback regarding the grammatical errors such as capitalization, verb tenses, spelling, and using personal pronouns is better than my English teacher's feedback.	3.1
Without using ChatGPT in my writing classes it will be difficult to enjoy the feedback process.	3.5
I enjoy interacting with ChatGPT while receiving feedback.	4.1
ChatGPT feedback motivates me to edit my writing.	4.1

The third theme, concerning students' ethical concerns about using ChatGPT in the writing classroom, revealed relatively low levels of agreement. The statement "I think using ChatGPT in the writing classroom is unfair" received the lowest mean score *(M = 2.0)*. The other two statements—"I think using ChatGPT in my writing class will have a negative impact on writing integrity" and "I think that using ChatGPT in the writing classroom will increase plagiarism"—both had a mean score of 2.4. These results suggest that ethical concerns about ChatGPT use were limited among participants, and such concerns may not significantly impede learners' motivation to utilize the tool in writing contexts. Table 3 provides a summary of EFL learners' ethical and motivational concerns regarding the use of ChatGPT in the writing classroom.

Table 3. *Summary of EFL learners' ethical and motivational concerns regarding ChatGPT use in writing classroom*

Responses	Mean score
I think using ChatGPT in my writing class will have a negative impact on writing integrity.	2.4
I think using ChatGPT in the writing classroom is unfair.	2.0
I think that using ChatGPT in the writing classroom will increase plagiarism.	2.4

The findings related to the last theme of the survey—the perceived limitations of ChatGPT in supporting writing motivation—revealed varied responses from participants. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement, *"I would benefit more from ChatGPT feedback when I become advanced in English"* (*M = 4.0*), suggesting that many students perceive ChatGPT as more beneficial at higher levels of English proficiency. In contrast, the lowest mean score was reported for the statement, *"I think using ChatGPT in my writing class is boring"* (*M = 2.1*), indicating that most learners did not find the use of ChatGPT to be disengaging.

Other responses under this theme received moderate mean scores. The statement, *"I think that the long and detailed feedback I receive from ChatGPT is confusing,"* had a mean of 3.0, and *"I think ChatGPT sometimes provides me with irrelevant feedback"* scored 2.9. These responses

indicate some concerns about the clarity and relevance of the feedback. Meanwhile, *"I think that the long and detailed feedback I receive from ChatGPT demotivates me to edit my writing"* received a mean score of 2.6, and *"I would rather use Grammarly or any other automated writing evaluation tools to edit my writing than use ChatGPT"* had a mean of 2.5, demonstrating a generally neutral perception of ChatGPT in comparison with other tool. Overall, these findings highlight that while learners generally appreciate the potential of ChatGPT, concerns regarding feedback quality, clarity, and comparative usefulness may moderate its motivational impact. Table 4 highlights the key limitations EFL learners perceive in ChatGPT's role as a motivational writing tool.

Table 4. *Summary of EFL learners' perceived limitations of ChatGPT in supporting writing motivation*

Responses	Mean score
I think that the long and detailed feedback I receive from ChatGPT is confusing.	3.0
I think that the long and detailed feedback I receive from ChatGPT demotivates me to edit my writing.	2.6
I think ChatGPT sometimes provides me with irrelevant feedback.	2.9
I would benefit more from ChatGPT feedback when I become advanced in English.	4.0
I would rather use Grammarly or any other automated writing evaluation tools to edit my writing than use ChatGPT.	2.5
I think using ChatGPT in my writing class is boring.	2.1

In summary, the results indicate that the benefits of ChatGPT—particularly its immediate feedback—positively contribute to learners' motivation. ChatGPT-generated feedback further supports motivation by facilitating revision and fostering a sense of writing autonomy. Ethical concerns and perceived limitations related to the use of ChatGPT were minimal and do not appear to negatively influence students' willingness to use and engage with the tool in writing tasks.

RQ2 -What are Saudi EFL learners' experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT to improve their paragraph writing, and how do they compare this feedback with that from traditional instructors?

The content analysis revealed four main themes: improvements in writing skills, preferences for receiving feedback, effective features of ChatGPT, and perceived challenges along with recommendations for other learners using ChatGPT.

Theme 1: Improvements in Writing Skills

Participants reported notable improvements in various aspects of their writing skills because of using ChatGPT-generated feedback. Many students highlighted that the AI-generated feedback helped them refine sentence structure and correct punctuation errors, which they had previously struggled with. For instance, one student emphasized, *"ChatGPT improves my sentence structure and punctuation,"* while another noted that continuous reminders about capitalization helped maintain consistent punctuation in her writing. The AI-generated feedback was also credited with enhancing vocabulary usage, enabling learners to select more appropriate and

professional words in their paragraphs. As one participant explained, *"ChatGPT replaces my vocabulary with more professional and appropriate words."* Additionally, several students observed that ChatGPT feedback helped them better organize their paragraphs—particularly in writing clear topic sentences, adequate and accurate supporting sentences, and coherent conclusions. As a result, participants acknowledged improvements in the overall flow and sentence structure of their writing.

Theme 2: Preferences in Receiving Feedback

Participants expressed varied preferences regarding the source of feedback, comparing ChatGPT with traditional instructor feedback. Many appreciated the immediacy and availability of feedback from ChatGPT, particularly outside class hours. For example, one participant remarked, *"I prefer ChatGPT because it is always available, even at midnight."* They also valued the continuous and immediate corrective feedback provided by ChatGPT, which helped them avoid repeating the same errors.

In contrast, when receiving feedback from instructors, participants noted that they often had to wait in line until all their peers had finished, which they found burdensome for both the teachers and themselves. Some participants highlighted that ChatGPT made them feel more independent and "like college-level students" because they needed to read through all the corrections and understand why their responses were incorrect. However, other participants found it challenging or felt unmotivated to read through the errors identified by ChatGPT and its explanations.

Meanwhile, several participants emphasized the importance of face-to-face interactions with instructors, which they believed offered a deeper understanding through non-verbal cues such as body language and direct, personalized explanations. One participant shared, *"I prefer the teacher's feedback because I can ask face-to-face questions and understand better."* These diverse preferences suggest that while AI tools offer convenience and accessibility, many learners still view human interaction as essential for effective feedback and learning.

Theme 3: Effective Features of ChatGPT

Several features of ChatGPT were identified by participants as particularly effective in enhancing their writing skills. Participants expressed a preference for the corrective feedback presented in a table format, describing it as well-organized and helpful in reinforcing corrections in memory. They appreciated the detailed explanations accompanying each correction, which facilitated a clearer understanding of their mistakes. As one participant noted, *"The tables specify what the mistake is and show me how I can correct it,"* indicating that the structured feedback format was conducive to learning. Additionally, students valued the specific suggestions ChatGPT provided for improving their writing, such as alternative word choices or more effective supporting details. This tailored feedback enabled them to make more informed decisions during revision and ultimately increased their confidence in academic writing.

Theme 4: Perceived Challenges

Despite its advantages, participants identified several challenges when using ChatGPT. A common concern was the overwhelming amount of feedback provided by the tool. Some students found the feedback excessively detailed, particularly the lengthy tables, which were difficult to process—especially for English language learners. One student expressed, *"Sometimes I feel too*

much reading the comments, and I am an English language learner; I struggle when I see lots of reading." Others preferred more concise and focused feedback, as reflected in one participant's comment: *"I like it, but I want it to make the editing brief and close to what I wrote."*

Another frequently reported issue was that ChatGPT occasionally added content that students had not written or intended to include. For instance, some participants noted that the tool sometimes flagged correct spellings as errors or generated additional supporting details that were neither mentioned nor necessary. These challenges highlight the need for more customizable feedback options to accommodate learners' varying levels of proficiency and individual preferences.

Discussion

RQ1— How does receiving corrective feedback from ChatGPT, compared to traditional instructors, influence Saudi EFL learners' writing motivation?

SDT: Autonomy

Students in the current study did not perceive the use of ChatGPT in their writing classes as boring. On the contrary, most students reported finding it motivating and engaging. This perception may stem from ChatGPT's ability to provide immediate and personalized feedback at any time. Unlike human instructors, ChatGPT is accessible on demand and can generate individualized responses tailored to students' specific needs. This feature is particularly important for enhancing learners' autonomy and independence, as emphasized by SDT. Unsurprisingly, recent studies (Tica & Krsmanović, 2024; Xiao & Zhi, 2023; Woo et al., 2024) show that students appreciate this particular feature and have positive attitudes toward it.

SDT: Competence

The results of the motivation survey indicated that, regarding ChatGPT's benefits and services, students found using it in the classroom useful and believed it improved the quality of their writing. These findings are consistent with several prior studies (e.g., Mabrouk, 2024; Tica & Krsmanović, 2024; Xiao & Zhi, 2023). However, students expressed uncertainty about the accuracy of ChatGPT, which supports the findings of Song and Song (2023), Tica and Krsmanović (2024), and Xiao and Zhi (2023). Nonetheless, consistent with Aljasser's (2025) study, students in the current study did not agree that ChatGPT provides better feedback than their teachers. They remained skeptical about ChatGPT's capacity to deliver feedback superior to that of human instructors.

Regarding ChatGPT's limitations, most students agreed that they would benefit more from the tool as their proficiency improves. This phenomenon may be attributed to the detailed and lengthy feedback typically provided by ChatGPT, which can, in some cases, confuse less proficient learners. The findings of Kivark (2024) indicated that lower-proficiency students required more explanation and teacher support to fully comprehend ChatGPT's feedback compared to advanced learners. Although the students in the current study were at an intermediate level of language proficiency, their responses suggest that they still require assistance in understanding the feedback provided by ChatGPT. In summary, the results indicate that AI tools contributed to improving students' sense of competence; however, students emphasized that they still require teacher guidance, particularly at intermediate and lower levels of language proficiency. This suggests that although AI tools can support the need for competence, instructor involvement remains essential for students to fully develop this need as conceptualized within the SDT framework.

SDT: Relatedness

With respect to the use of ChatGPT as a feedback tool, the majority of students in the present study reported that they enjoyed interacting with ChatGPT while receiving feedback and felt that this feedback motivated them to revise their writing. These findings align with those of previous research (e.g., Song & Song, 2023; Mabrouk, 2024; Zare et al., 2025), in which students also found ChatGPT a motivating tool for interaction and feedback. Although students reported that they appreciated interacting with ChatGPT, they did not prefer it over communication with their instructors. Therefore, within the framework of SDT, this suggests that AI tools may offer some support for students' need for relatedness; however, when compared with instructors, it is evident that teachers are better positioned to fulfill this need. The interpersonal connection, clarity of communication, and ease of interaction available in human-to-human contexts provide relational support that AI tools cannot fully replicate.

RQ2 -What are Saudi EFL learners' experiences and perceptions of using ChatGPT to improve their paragraph writing, and how do they compare this feedback with that from traditional instructors?

SDT: Autonomy

Students expressed varying preferences regarding the source of feedback—whether from their teacher or from ChatGPT. Several students indicated a preference for ChatGPT due to its ability to provide immediate feedback, whereas teacher feedback typically involved a longer wait time. This supports the psychological need for autonomy, as ChatGPT's instant and personalized responses promote learner independence. This preference may also explain why many students agreed that incorporating ChatGPT into their writing classrooms is beneficial.

SDT: Competence

The findings from the interviews provided deeper insight into several aspects of the students' survey responses. For instance, students reported that their paragraph writing skills improved after using ChatGPT. Specifically, they noted enhancements in sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, vocabulary usage, organization, and coherence. In particular, students appreciated the detailed explanations and tables accompanying each correction provided by ChatGPT. They stated that revising their paragraphs based on this feedback helped build their confidence, thereby supporting their writing development. These findings align with those of Mun (2024), Kivrak (2024), and Song and Song (2023), in which students similarly reported improvements in various aspects of writing, including structure, punctuation, and grammatical accuracy.

In the present study, students received detailed feedback generated by ChatGPT using a specific prompt. The prompt instructed ChatGPT to provide feedback on content, structure, grammar, and punctuation, and to explain the errors in a tabular format. This method appeared effective, as evidenced by students' responses in both the survey and interviews, which indicated noticeable improvements in their writing. This finding aligns with the concept of competence as a basic psychological need in SDT, as the observed improvement in writing quality contributed to an increased sense of writing competence.

SDT: Relatedness

Some students reported a preference for receiving feedback from their teachers, particularly because they valued real, face-to-face interaction. In these cases, students favored teacher feedback because such personal engagement fulfilled their need for relatedness. Direct communication with a teacher fostered an emotional connection, which in turn enhanced their motivation.

To summarize, synthesizing the findings of the current study through the lens of SDT reveals several notable outcomes. First, AI-generated feedback appeared to support students' need for autonomy more effectively than instructor-generated feedback. This advantage is largely attributable to the immediacy and personalization of AI feedback, which is accessible at any time. In contrast, instructor feedback often requires a longer response time and may unintentionally undermine autonomy when it becomes overly directive or evaluative. With respect to the need for competence, the findings indicate that both sources of feedback fulfilled this need, albeit in different ways. Instructor feedback contributed to improvements in higher-order writing competencies, particularly those related to deeper-level issues such as content development and organization. AI tools, on the other hand, were more effective in facilitating improvement in surface-level writing features, including punctuation, capitalization and vocabulary usage. Finally, regarding the need for relatedness, the results demonstrate that instructor feedback was superior. Students expressed a clear preference for face-to-face interactions, noting that direct communication with their teachers enhanced their understanding of the feedback and fostered a stronger sense of interpersonal connection.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of intermediate-level Saudi EFL university students, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Learners at different proficiency levels or from other educational contexts may respond differently to AI-generated feedback, and thus the findings cannot be assumed to apply broadly across diverse populations.

Second, the study design limited students' interaction with ChatGPT to feedback generated through a predetermined prompt. Because students did not engage in open-ended or iterative exchanges with the tool, the investigation did not capture the full range of ChatGPT's capabilities or how learners might naturally employ the tool in real writing conditions. This controlled use may have constrained the depth of feedback students received and their perceptions of its usefulness.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of AI technologies poses an inherent limitation. The version of ChatGPT used in this study may differ substantially from future iterations or alternative AI tools. As these technologies continue to develop, students' experiences and perceptions may shift accordingly, potentially altering the relevance or applicability of the present findings.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine Saudi EFL learners' motivation and perceptions regarding ChatGPT-generated feedback in comparison with traditional instructor feedback in paragraph writing. Using a mixed-methods design grounded in SDT, the study investigated how AI-mediated feedback influences learners' motivational orientations and how students evaluate ChatGPT's effectiveness in supporting their writing development.

The findings demonstrate that students generally viewed ChatGPT as a useful and motivating feedback source. Quantitative results showed strong appreciation for its immediacy,

personalization, and support in idea generation, which contributed positively to learners' sense of autonomy and competence. Interview data further revealed perceived improvements in sentence structure, vocabulary use, punctuation, and paragraph organization. Students also identified benefits such as the clarity of structured, table-based explanations, while noting challenges related to occasional inaccuracies, overly detailed feedback, and instances where the tool introduced ideas not intended by the writer.

Overall, the study indicates that ChatGPT can effectively complement instructor feedback by providing accessible and immediate support that enhances writing motivation and skill development. At the same time, the enduring value of teacher guidance underscores the need for a balanced integration of AI tools within writing instruction.

Recommendations and Future Studies

Building on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed for future research and pedagogical practice. Because students received ChatGPT feedback through a standardized prompt and did not engage in open-ended dialogue with the tool, future studies should examine more interactive feedback exchanges to explore the dynamics of learner–AI interaction. As the participants were intermediate-level learners, subsequent research could involve advanced or beginner students, or compare proficiency levels to determine whether motivational and perceptual patterns differ across groups. Moreover, while this study focused on learners' perspectives, investigating teachers' motivation and perceptions toward AI feedback would provide a more comprehensive view of its pedagogical impact.

Although ChatGPT was the primary AI tool employed here, other technologies capable of delivering written corrective feedback warrant exploration. Future studies could compare multiple AI systems and analyze their effects on writing motivation, accuracy, and learner autonomy. Applying diverse theoretical frameworks beyond SDT could also enrich understanding of the psychological and pedagogical mechanisms underlying AI-assisted feedback.

In summary, future research should examine both teachers' and students' perceptions and motivational orientations toward AI tools for written corrective feedback. Such comparative analyses can inform more effective and ethically grounded pedagogical practices for integrating AI technologies into EFL writing instruction.

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Appendices

Appendix A: ChatGPT Motivation Survey

Please indicate how much you liked using ChatGPT in the writing class or for the purpose of improving writing in English.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	5	4	3	2	1
1 – I find using ChatGPT in my writing classroom useful. 2 – It is extremely important for me to use ChatGPT if I want to improve my writing quality. 3 – I like that ChatGPT provides immediate feedback for my writing. 4– I like that ChatGPT helps me in generating and brainstorming ideas for my writing. 5– I like that ChatGPT provides me with useful examples and comments about my writing. 6 – I really enjoy receiving feedback from ChatGPT because it is personalized and only targets my own writing errors. 7- I like receiving feedback from ChatGPT because it is always accurate. 8 – I prefer receiving written corrective feedback from ChatGPT more than receiving it from my teacher.					

Appendix A (continued)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	5	4	3	2	1
9 –ChatGPT feedback regarding the content, organization, and structure of my writing is better than my English teacher's feedback.					

10 –ChatGPT feedback regarding the grammatical errors such as capitalization, verb tenses, spelling, and using personal pronouns is better than my English teacher's feedback. 11 – Without using ChatGPT in my writing classes it will be difficult to enjoy the feedback process. 12 – I enjoy interacting with ChatGPT while receiving feedback. 13- ChatGPT feedback motivates me to edit my writing. 14 – I think using ChatGPT in my writing class will have a negative impact on writing integrity. 15 – I think using ChatGPT in the writing classroom is unfair. 16 – I think that using ChatGPT in the writing classroom will increase plagiarism. 17- I think that the long and detailed feedback I receive from ChatGPT is confusing. 18- I think that the long and detailed feedback I receive from ChatGPT demotivates me to edit my writing. 19- I think ChatGPT sometimes provides me with irrelevant feedback.					

Appendix A (continued)

Statement	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
	5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
20- I would benefit more from ChatGPT feedback when I become advanced in English. 21 – I would rather use Grammarly or any other automated writing evaluation tools to edit my writing than use ChatGPT. 22 – I think using ChatGPT in my writing class is boring.					

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