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"I No Longer Need a Tutor": Saudi EFL Students' Independent Use of ChatGPT for Essay Writing and Grammar Learning

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Abstract

This study examined the independent use of ChatGPT by EFL students outside the classroom. It focused on how these Saudi EFL students used ChatGPT for essay writing and grammar learning without prior instruction. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) How do EFL students use ChatGPT for essay writing? (2) How do EFL students incorporate ChatGPT into grammar learning? Eight participants were recruited using snowball sampling from a specific university in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected via semi-structured and stimulated-recall interviews, along with screen recordings of the student's interactions with ChatGPT, and were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that Saudi EFL students adopted two distinct approaches to using ChatGPT for essay writing. The first was a comprehensive, process-oriented approach in which students refined their ChatGPT use throughout various stages of the writing process. The second was a product-oriented approach in which students primarily relied on AI-generated essays and utilized the AI Humanizer feature. The findings also identified specific features that students adapted to enhance their grammar learning. The study concludes with pedagogical implications for EFL learning, highlighting the need to assess students' writing processes, monitor their progress, and instruct them on the ethics of AI use and acceptable applications in academic settings. It provides valuable insights into how EFL students leverage ChatGPT for both essay writing and grammar learning.

Keywords: ChatGPT, English as a foreign language students, essay writing, grammar learning, independent use, language learning, practices

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Introduction

The world is increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the integration of AI into all aspects of life is gaining popularity across age groups. This rise in AI use prompted the Saudi Ministry of Education and the Saudi Data and AI Authority to launch the SAMAI initiative. The goal is to empower one million Saudis with knowledge and competencies in AI through training programs covering AI tools, concepts, ethics, and practical applications to support lifelong learning and enable safe, effective interaction with AI (Saudi Data & AI Authority, 2025). The initiative was launched in September 2024, aiming to fulfill the Saudi Vision 2023 by positioning the country as an international leader in technological innovation (Saudigazette, 2025).

The growing prevalence of AI has also inspired researchers to investigate its integration, particularly ChatGPT, in Education and language learning, and its effects on these processes. ChatGPT in education can empower students by providing resources for summarizing texts, generating knowledge, helping them understand writing conventions and genres, and potentially developing their critical thinking, research abilities, and composition skills (Steele, 2023). It facilitates assignment completion (Farhi et al., 2023; Pavlenko & Syzenko, 2024) and supports sustainable learning, allowing students to adjust their learning pace to meet individual needs while offering an interactive environment to enhance their engagement (Faisal, 2024). Additionally, it serves as a supplementary tool for practicing English-speaking skills by guiding students in creating suitable prompts for speaking interactions (Alsalem, 2024).

EFL students view ChatGPT as an effective resource for learning English. It can be valuable in informal settings (Liu & Ma, 2024) and can enhance student autonomy (Rahmani, 2025). It can improve grammar teaching and engage students in grammar lessons (Kucuk, 2024; Tsai et al., 2024); and support productivity and academic tasks, including essay writing (Corbita et al., 2024; Farhi et al., 2023; Salam, 2024). Language learners use ChatGPT to enhance their writing and grammar skills in the EFL context through instant feedback that guides the organization and structure of their writing (Tseng & Lin, 2024). It also fosters motivation, communication, collaboration, understanding, and engagement in the classroom (Alharthi, 2024; Karataş, 2024; Khan et al., 2025; Teng, 2024; Van Horn, 2024), while identifying surface-level errors (Algaraady & Mahyoob, 2023).

As Saudi Arabia expands AI training for its citizens and interest grows in ChatGPT's role in language education, there is limited evidence on how students use ChatGPT independently to support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. This study investigates how EFL Saudi students integrate ChatGPT outside the classroom specifically for essay writing and grammar practice. The following research questions guide the study.

1. How do EFL students use ChatGPT for essay writing?
2. How do EFL students incorporate ChatGPT in grammar learning?

Literature Review

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and hosted by OpenAI; it can be accessed as an app on smart devices or through web browsers. GPT stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, a type of language model that generates text by mimicking human-written material (Steele, 2023). ChatGPT provides learners with an interactive environment to inquire, exchange ideas, and receive instant responses, allowing real-time engagement (Alharthi, 2024).

Cai, Lin, and Yu (2023) noted that ChatGPT can continue conversations when users post follow-up questions, and this property was not provided by conventional search engines. In this respect, they asserted:

> This unique feature enabled tailored responses to address users' specific challenges, thereby individualizing answers based on an existing corpus (appropriability). Appropriability means that learners make their own [use] of ChatGPT by asking questions in their own words and personalizing responses to their specific needs. (Cai et al., 2023, p. 7113)

ChatGPT could potentially assist EFL students by providing personalized replies to their specific questions and queries, thereby creating a dynamic, interactive platform where they can progress.

ChatGPT in Language Learning

The use of ChatGPT has been examined by scholars in language education, each focusing on a particular aspect. For instance, Kohnke et al. (2023) explored features of ChatGPT that can be used in language learning, highlighting that it provides a platform for learners to practice the language as needed, offers linguistic content similar to human conversation, customizes learning pace, aids in comprehending vocabulary meaning in context, corrects language errors, delivers dictionary entries, provides translations, and constructs sentences correctly with target vocabulary. Adeshola and Adepoju (2023) focused on ChatGPT as a pedagogical tool, noting that it assists learners in problem-solving, enhances student interaction and comprehension in educational contexts, generates texts, and creates an interactive learning environment. In synthesizing literature from 2022 to 2023 on the use of ChatGPT for second-language learning, Yang and Li (2024) identified its primary functions as content generation, providing feedback, enhancing the four language skills, offering additional opportunities for L2 practice, and creating a dynamic, enjoyable, and engaging learning setting.

The perspectives of university-level language learners regarding the integration of ChatGPT into their language learning process- without focusing on a specific skill- were also explored. It was regarded as a revolutionary resource that improved essay writing and facilitated translation (Farhi et al., 2023), served as a supportive tool that enhanced autonomy, improved writing skills, increased confidence, and clarified complicated tasks (Syahrin & Akmal, 2024). Furthermore, it was seen as a valuable resource for facilitating presentations and enhancing writing quality by assisting with brainstorming and correcting language errors (Pavlenko & Syzenko, 2024).

The perceptions of university-level language learners regarding ChatGPT's potential to improve speaking and communication skills were explored via questionnaires. In Saudi Arabia, Alsalem (2024) examined EFL students' views on using ChatGPT to enhance their English-speaking skills. The study involved 74 students from three universities who used ChatGPT for oral tasks over six weeks. The findings revealed that students viewed ChatGPT as an effective tool for practicing speaking: it aided pronunciation, comprehension of colloquial expressions, fluency, and vocabulary, and it provided feedback. In Morocco, Rahmani (2025) investigated how ChatGPT impacted the communication skills of EFL students majoring in economics. The findings revealed that most participants reported increased motivation and improvements in communication skills, including pronunciation, vocabulary knowledge, and grammatical structures.

The effect of using ChatGPT to enhance the autonomy of university-level language learners was explored by Van Horn (2024). It involved 120 Korean university students and employed pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The results indicated that

students had positive views on how ChatGPT could enhance their language skills, particularly in structuring sentences, improving grammar, expanding vocabulary, and providing opportunities for speaking practice.

Moreover, the impact of using ChatGPT on the vocabulary size and word-family strength of Saudi EFL students at Al Jouf University over four months was explored by Mugableh (2024). This experimental study compared the effect of ChatGPT-generated exercises with traditional exercises. Sixty male students enrolled in a vocabulary course were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group engaged in ChatGPT-generated exercises (e.g., interactive quizzes, fill-in-the-blanks, and question tests) for each vocabulary topic. The study found that the experimental group outperformed the control group, achieving higher scores on the post-test measuring vocabulary size and word-family strength.

It is important to note that the ChatGPT exercises in Mugableh (2024) were prepared and monitored by the instructor to supplement the vocabulary course and did not originate from the learners. The current study aims to fill in the above gaps by examining how Saudi EFL students engage with ChatGPT without prior instruction.

ChatGPT and the Writing Skills of University-Level EFL Students

This section discusses studies on the use of ChatGPT by university-level students to enhance writing skills in EFL settings. To begin, Balraj (2025) scrutinized literature from 2023 to 2025, exploring undergraduates' perceptions of ChatGPT in academic writing. The findings indicated that undergraduates recognized the benefits of using ChatGPT for improving writing skills, such as brainstorming content, organizing essays, and providing personalized feedback.

Questionnaires were the primary tool for investigating ChatGPT's effectiveness as a writing resource (El Messaoudi et al., 2025), its impact on academic writing (Al-Zubaidi et al., 2024), and its influence on essay courses (Mahfouz & AbdelMohsen, 2025). To provide an overview, in Morocco, El Messaoudi et al. (2025) explored usage patterns and student satisfaction with ChatGPT among 101 undergraduates in the English department. Their study found that students reported using ChatGPT for creative writing, academic writing, grammar editing, and idea generation, appreciating its time-saving and efficiency-enhancing qualities. Similarly, Al-Zubaidi et al. (2024) found that Moroccan students viewed ChatGPT as a powerful tool that facilitated their academic writing, specifically in structuring sentences, paraphrasing, correcting grammar, and providing instant feedback. In Egypt, Mahfouz and AbdelMohsen (2025) surveyed 521 students about the use of ChatGPT in EFL essay-writing courses. They found that most students valued ChatGPT in essay writing for its user-friendliness, accessibility, and rapid, easy drafting assistance.

The systematic use of ChatGPT in EFL writing courses was explored in Taiwan by Tseng and Lin (2024), in Algeria by Boudouaia et al. (2024), and in Saudi Arabia by Abduljawad (2024). To provide an overview, Tseng and Lin (2024) integrated ChatGPT into an EFL composition course involving 15 students who were instructed to use ChatGPT at various writing stages- drafting, revising, and editing- to improve writing quality. They used ChatGPT to assess their needs and areas of weakness before integration. Their data included two tools: (1) analysis of the students' writing before and after using ChatGPT, with particular focus on grammar, cohesion, and overall writing quality; and (2) students' reflective essays detailing their experiences using ChatGPT. They found ChatGPT effective for organizing essays, providing instant feedback, and replacing peer review. Boudouaia et al. (2024) conducted an experiment with questionnaires to

explore ChatGPT use in an EFL writing course and students' acceptance of that use. Their study involved 76 students: 37 in the experimental group and 39 in the control group. The study found that the experimental group outperformed the control group, demonstrating ChatGPT's effectiveness in EFL writing. They reported that ChatGPT offered a venue to practice course content and helped students relax. Abduljawad (2024) examined ChatGPT's formative feedback feature on students' writing proficiency using mixed-methods approach that included questionnaires, focus-group interviews, and classroom observation. The study found that ChatGPT improved students' writing skills by enhancing grammar, coherence, sentence structure, vocabulary, and autonomy.

Two studies focused on improving grammar skills using ChatGPT as a supplementary tool via experimental design: one in Saudi Arabia by Ali et al. (2025) and another in Iraq by Kucuk (2024). Ali et al. (2025) divided 100 students into two groups: one received grammatical lessons using traditional methods, and the other received the same lessons via ChatGPT. Participants were tested before and after receiving these grammar lessons; those assisted by ChatGPT scored higher on the grammar tests. Similarly, Kucuk (2024) employed 30 students who were divided into two groups: an experimental group where ChatGPT was used in grammar lessons and a control group where grammar was taught traditionally. Participants were pre-tested and post-tested to measure their grammar proficiency. Experimental-group participants were interviewed to collect their perspectives on using ChatGPT for grammar. The study found improvements in grammar proficiency among students using ChatGPT: participants appreciated its ease of use, availability, ability to improve understanding of grammar, interactive tailored replies, and immediate feedback.

None of the studies mentioned above investigated how EFL students use ChatGPT outside the classroom to learn grammar or write essays. While Tseng and Lin (2024), Boudouaia et al. (2024), and Abduljawad (2024) focused on teaching EFL students how to use ChatGPT to enhance their writing, Ali et al. (2025) and Kucuk (2024) employed ChatGPT in classroom settings under instructor supervision. Additionally, none of these studies incorporated stimulated-recall interviews with screen recordings of EFL student's devices while they engaged with ChatGPT, which would provide deeper insights into how they personalize their learning experiences. The present study aims to address these gaps by examining how EFL students use ChatGPT outside the classroom without prior instruction, using two research tools: semi-structured interviews and stimulated-recall sessions assisted by screen recordings of their activities.

Method

This study drew on a qualitative research design to investigate how Saudi EFL students independently integrate ChatGPT outside the classroom for essay writing and grammar practice. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured and stimulated-recall interviews.

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited using snowball sampling, in which one participant who met the selection criteria invited others to participate (Morgan, 2008). The researcher initially contacted a key participant who had completed an English course with an A+ at a specific university. The researcher explained the study to obtain the participants' consent, ensuring that ethical requirements for research involving human participants were met. This key participant had used ChatGPT for over a year in English and invited other students to participate only if they (1) had passed the English course with a B+ or higher at the same university and (2) had used ChatGPT

for at least six months to learn grammar or improve their essay writing. Eventually, eight participants were recruited for the study. Table (1) illustrates the basic demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. *The basic demographic information for each participant.*

Participant names (pseudonyms)	Age	Gender	English course grade	ChatGPT experience (months)
Participant 1	19	Female	A+	11
Participant 2	19	Female	B+	9
Participant 3	19	Female	A	12
Participant 4	20	Female	A	9
Participant 5	19	Female	B+	11
Participant 6	20	Female	B+	10
Participant 7	20	Female	A	12
Participant 8	21	Female	A	10

Research Instruments

This study employed two qualitative tools: semi-structured interviews and stimulated-recall interviews. Semi-structured interviews are effective for gathering the views and experiences of language learners (Dörnyei, 2007; Mann, 2011). Stimulated-recall interviews involve participants recalling thoughts and activities by re-engaging in a previous task and articulating their experiences during the process (Gass & Mackey, 2017). Participants were asked to screen-record their interactions with ChatGPT during the stimulated-recall interviews to elicit data on their thought processes while performing the tasks. The combination of interviews and screen recordings strengthens the validity of the research by capturing participants' on-screen interactions and documenting their information-searching skills (Enríquez Raído et al., 2025). Screen recordings also provide insights into language learners' interaction with the app and their perceptions of the learning process (Ho, 2019).

In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher aimed to collect students' experiences using ChatGPT to learn English and their prior experience (see Appendix A). The stimulated-recall interviews aimed to elicit participants' thoughts and reflections during their interaction with ChatGPT (see Appendix B). Therefore, semi-structured and stimulated-recall interviews, supplemented by screen recordings, were used to explore students' use of ChatGPT for essay writing and grammar learning, providing a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

Research Procedures

Data were collected during two sessions. The first session involved semi-structured interviews aimed at understanding participants' background regarding their use of ChatGPT. The second session took place after the researcher had established a good rapport with the participants and involved asking them to answer questions while screen recording their activity with ChatGPT. Table (2) illustrates the mode of each tool used and the number of screen recording obtained.

Table 2. *Mode of tool used, name of app involved, and the number of screen recording videos for each participant*

Participant names (pseudonyms)	Research tool			
	Semi-structured interview		Stimulated recall interview	
	Face to face	Online	Online	No. of screen-recording videos
Participant 1	√	×	WhatsApp	5

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Participant 2	×	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	5
Participant 3	×	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	5
Participant 4	×	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	5
Participant 5	√	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	5
Participant 6	√	×	WhatsApp	5
Participant 7	×	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	4
Participant 8	×	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	3

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Saldaña's (2016) pattern-and-process coding. The analysis was conducted using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) called ATLAS.ti which ensured efficiency in organizing and managing various data forms (Saldaña, 2016). Utilizing CAQDAS enables researchers to analyze data systematically, thereby enhancing the validity of the study's findings (Friese, 2022).

The researcher imported texts, audio, and screen-recording videos from both the interviews and stimulated recall into ATLAS.ti. The audio was transcribed, and the text and video documents were arranged accordingly. The researcher read the texts and played the videos multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the data. Pattern codes were attached to segments of texts and videos whenever an action or data point was repeated more than once. Process codes were also attached to express observable routines or sequences within the data. After that, the codes were visualized using the network feature of ATLAS.ti allowing the researcher to view segments associated with these codes. This feature also enabled the merging, grouping, and renaming of codes. Themes were then developed from the codes and then the researcher carefully reviewed the codes to reflect the participants' experiences, ensuring they address the research questions. Finally, the researcher created sequential process figures to narrate the findings, selecting texts and capturing screenshots from the videos to illustrate the results to present in this research.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings and discussion of the current study are arranged according to the research questions.

RQ1: How Do EFL Students Use ChatGPT for Essay Writing?

The data reveal that EFL students primarily employed two approaches when using ChatGPT for writing their essays (see Figure one). Typically, students log into the ChatGPT app on either their smartphone or iPad when they begin writing their English essays. It is essential to highlight that approach (1) was process-oriented, in which students refined their ChatGPT use by following a detailed, sequential process with several components, whereas approach (2) was product-oriented, in which ChatGPT wrote the essay as requested by the students and the process was shorter with fewer components. Each sequential process employed by students in essay writing, whether process-oriented or product-oriented, is discussed in this section.

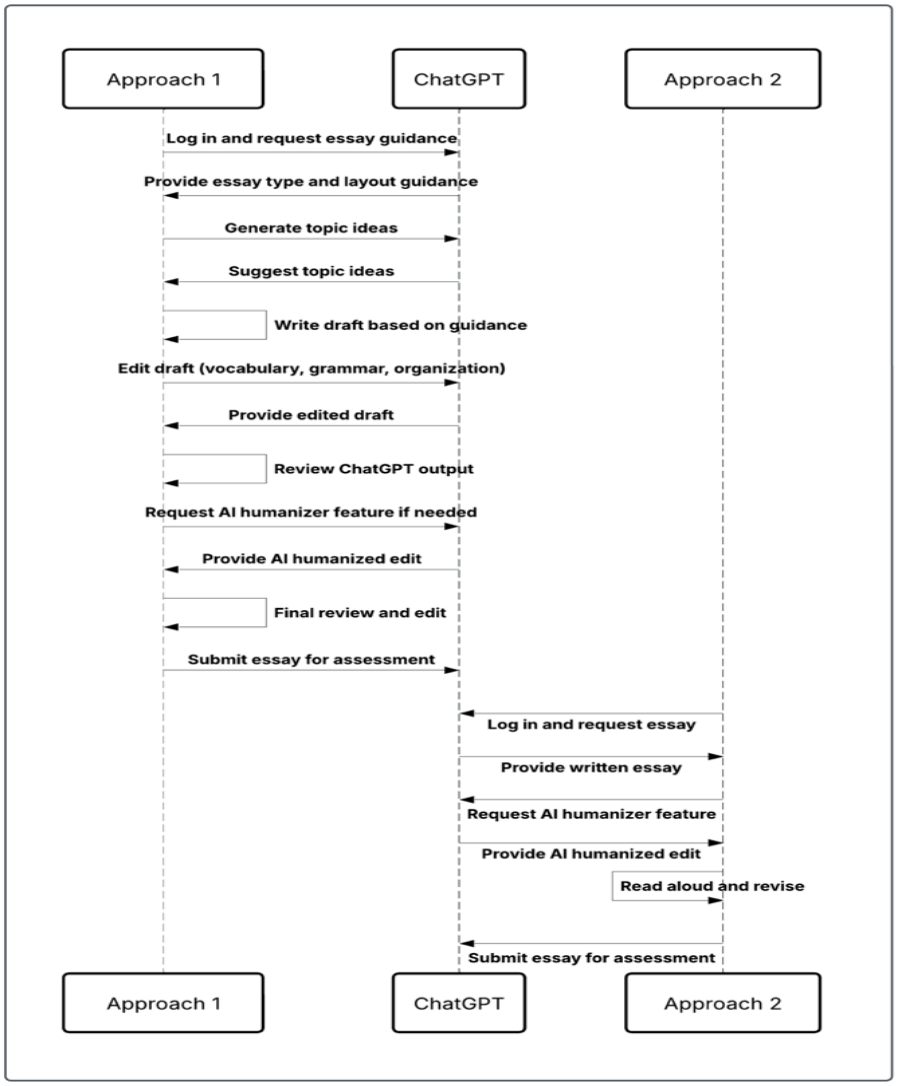
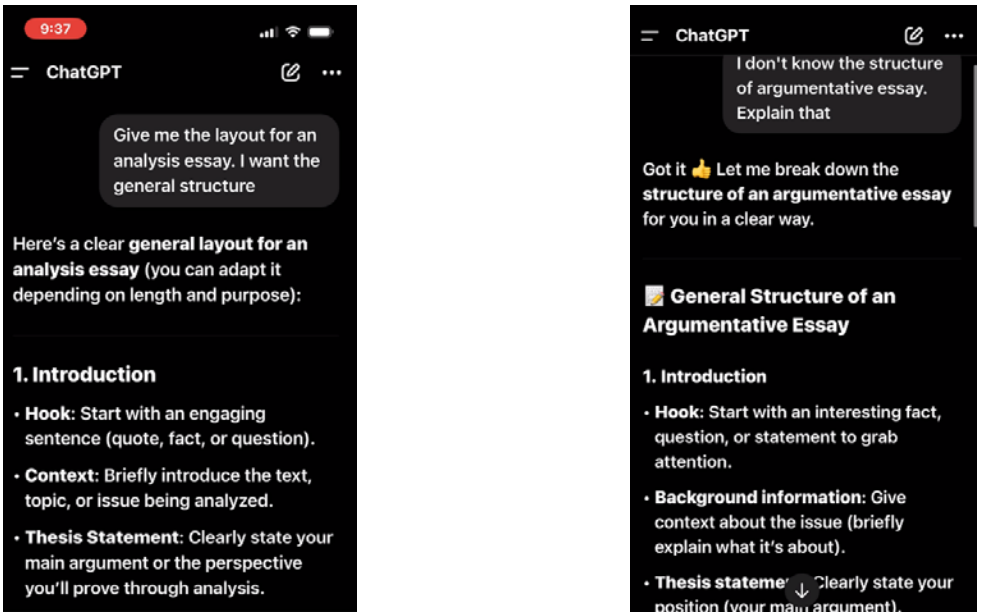


Figure 1. Sequential process of students' approaches to essay writing using ChatGPT

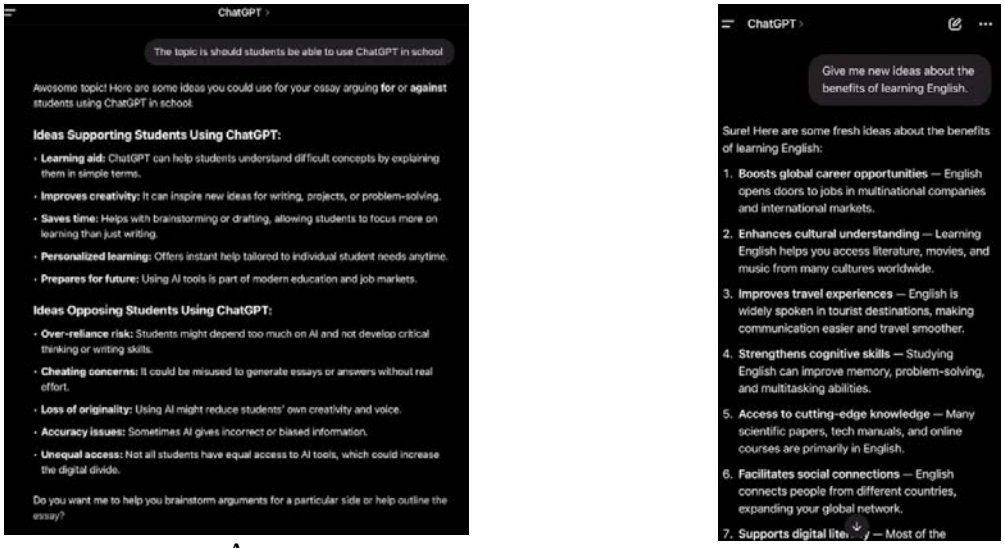
Approach (1) was process-oriented, where students refined their use of ChatGPT. They use ChatGPT to explore the genera, types of essays and learn the main structure associated with each type. Participant 1 reported consulting ChatGPT for guidance on the layout and structure of an analytical essay (see Figure 2A). She clarified that this method allowed her to consolidate classroom learning by reviewing the output provided. Participant 5 noted that she asked ChatGPT to explain the argumentative essay to help complete her assignment (see Figure 2B). She explained that she wanted to refresh her memory of the class concepts before drafting her essay. It seems that participants independently used ChatGPT to supplement their classroom learning and reinforce their understanding of specific essay types. These echoes finding by Boudouaia et al. (2024) who noted that EFL students employed ChatGPT as a tool to apply what they had learned about writing essays in the classroom.



A B

Figure 2. The process of using ChatGPT for guidance on essay layout and type

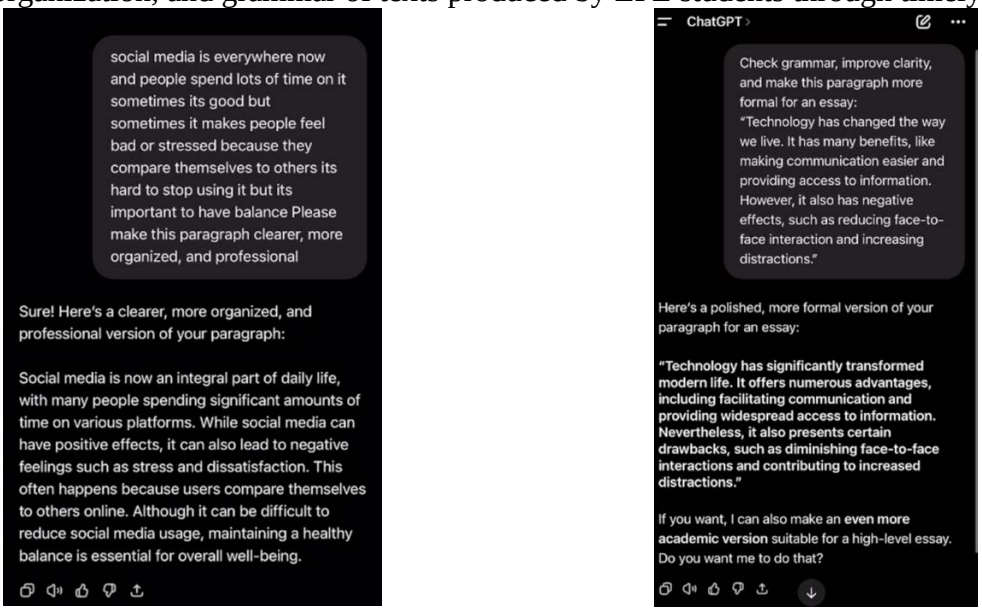
Students generate ideas about their topics through ChatGPT after learning about essay types. Participant 3 reported using ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas for her chosen topic. She clarified that she consulted ChatGPT to generate arguments for and against students using ChatGPT in schools (see Figure 3A). She then reviewed these ideas, selected from them, and wrote a draft in her own words. Participant 4 mentioned using ChatGPT to generate ideas about the benefits of learning English (see Figure 3B). She explained that while she did not rely entirely on the generated ideas, it aided her brainstorming process. This finding aligns with those of Pavlenko and Syzenko (2024) and Balraj (2025), who reported that EFL students drew on ChatGPT to brainstorm their ideas.



A B

Figure 3. The process of generating topic ideas using ChatGPT

Students begin drafting their essays based on the guidance provided after reviewing ideas suggested by ChatGPT. These participants wrote their drafts in their own words to prevent plagiarism-detection software from recognizing their use of ChatGPT-generated ideas. Once drafting was completed, participants consulted ChatGPT to edit their drafts for vocabulary, grammar, and organization by writing specific prompts. Participant 2 explained that she used ChatGPT to correct errors in her essay after drafting in her own words. She clarified that she copied and pasted each paragraph into ChatGPT to enhance clarity, and organization using the prompt "Please make this paragraph clearer, more organized, and more professional" (see Figure 4A). Participant 4 adopted a similar approach, dividing her drafted essay into paragraphs to improve each one in terms of clarity and grammar, using the prompt "Check grammar, improve clarity, and make this paragraph more formal for an essay" (see Figure 4B). This indicates that students use ChatGPT as a proofreading tool for language aspects such as grammar, vocabulary choice, and structure. These findings align with previous studies conducted by Algaraady and Mahyoob (2023), El Messaoudi et al.(2025), Kohnke et al. (2023), and Tseng and Lin (2024), who reported that ChatGPT can edit writing and language errors of EFL students. Additionally, these findings align with Tsai et al. (2024) who posited that ChatGPT has the potential to improve the qaulity of content, organization, and grammar of texts produced by EFL students through timely feedback.



A B

*Figure 4***.** Participants' process of editing drafts for grammar, clarity and organization

Students carefully evaluated the output and independently modified some vocabulary to ensure their essays did not appear AI-generated after reviewing ChatGPT's revised draft. If participants lacked sufficient time to complete the review process, they requested assistance from the AI Humanizer feature (see Figure 5). Participants then reviewed the humanized output and made final revisions to produce their completed essays. Once the final revision was finished, participants submitted their essays for assessment through an online platform. The finding that ChatGPT helped save time corresponds to those of Corbita et al. (2024), El Messaoudi et al. (2025), and Tseng and Lin (2024), who found that ChatGPT helps language learners manage their time efficiently.

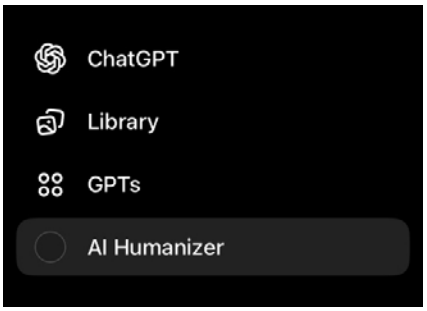
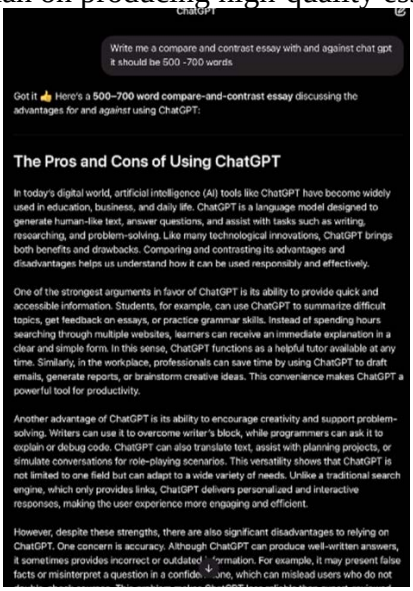
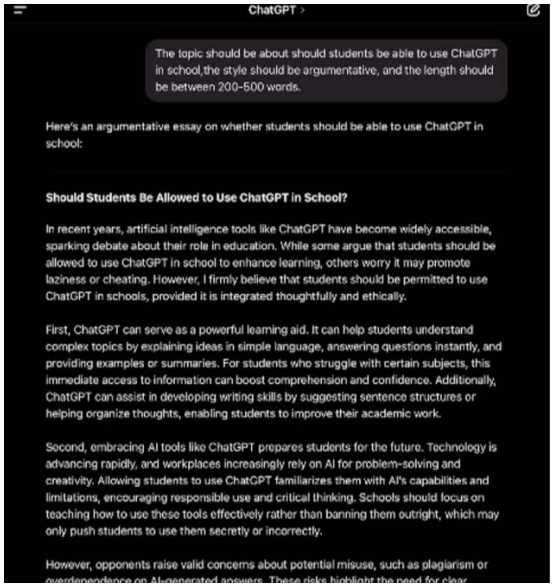


*Figure 5***.** The AI Humanizer feature in ChatGPT

Approach (2) was product-oriented, in which ChatGPT wrote the essay as requested by the students. They requested ChatGPT to write the entire essay by specifying the topic, essay type, and word count. Participant 7 reported requesting ChatGPT to write a compare-and-contrast essay about the use of ChatGPT, with a word count between 500 and 700 words (see Figure 6A). She noted that she rarely uses this approach and only does so to "cut corners" when overwhelmed by university assignments. For her, weekly assignments were not exam papers, were not graded on their quality, and she reviewed the essay herself. Similarly, Participant 3 reported asking ChatGPT to write an argumentative essay of 200–500 words on whether students should be able to use ChatGPT in schools (see Figure 6B). She explained that this is not her usual method for writing essays but that she resorts to it when facing a deadline, as they were graded on meeting deadlines rather than on producing high-quality essays.



A



B

Figure 6. The written essay generated by specifying the essay type, word count and topic.

Participant 5 justified using ChatGPT for complete essays by stating their GPA depended on exams (midterm or final) and that they were graded for submitting assignments on time. It appears that EFL students used ChatGPT to generate complete essays, and this finding contrasts with Salam (2024), who emphasized that university-level EFL students do not use ChatGPT to produce complete essays for take-home assignments.

After generating complete essays, participants interacted with ChatGPT by either copying and pasting the produced essay into the AI Humanizer feature or simply type the prompt "humanize the essay" in the chat box. Participants reported that using the AI humanizer feature "makes the essay less robotic"

(P6) and "makes the essay more natural and smoother" (P8). They reviewed the output by reading the essay aloud and revised it by modifying the vocabulary and adjusting grammatical tense as needed. After completing the revision process, participants submitted the essay for assessment through the online platform.

This finding revealed that students reviewed the edited essay after using the AI Humanizer feature of ChatGPT, aiming to adapt the writing to reflect their personal style and ensure it sounded primarily like their own work, rather than predominantly produced by someone else. These participants did not solely rely on generating essays by copying and pasting the output from ChatGPT; instead, they engaged in a thorough review process. It also highlighted that certain conditions compelled participants to use ChatGPT for essay production, especially when assignments were not evaluated based on the quality of the essays but rather on the quantity. This finding raises ethical concerns regarding their academic integrity as they did not produce the essay independently. This concern was echoed by Kohnke et al. (2023), He and Kang (2025), Adeshola and Adepoju (2023), and El Messaoudi et al. (2025), who noted that ChatGPT could potentially lead to plagiarism and cheating. It was also raised by Al-Zubaidi et al. (2024) who reported that cheating and generating essays through ChatGPT were among the primary concerns of EFL teachers.

RQ2: How Do EFL Students Incorporate ChatGPT in Grammar Learning?

The data indicate that students engage in a sequential process with ChatGPT to learn English grammar. This process begins when students seek to study grammar independently at home or encounter difficulties with a grammatical rule introduced in the classroom, which prevents them from completing their assignments or homework. Students reported that they did not want ready-made answers from ChatGPT without understanding; instead, they used it as a resource to learn grammar and improve their capacity in grammar.

The sequential process can be summarized in five steps (see Figure 7). These steps are explained in the following sections.

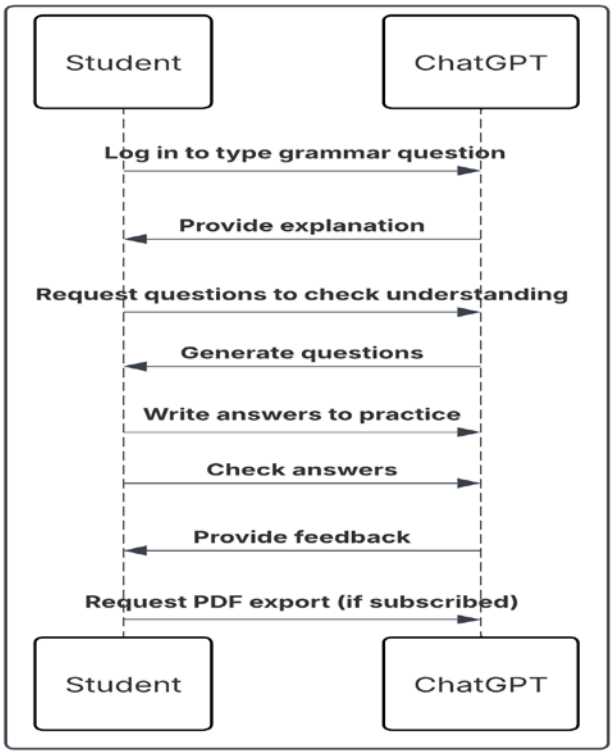
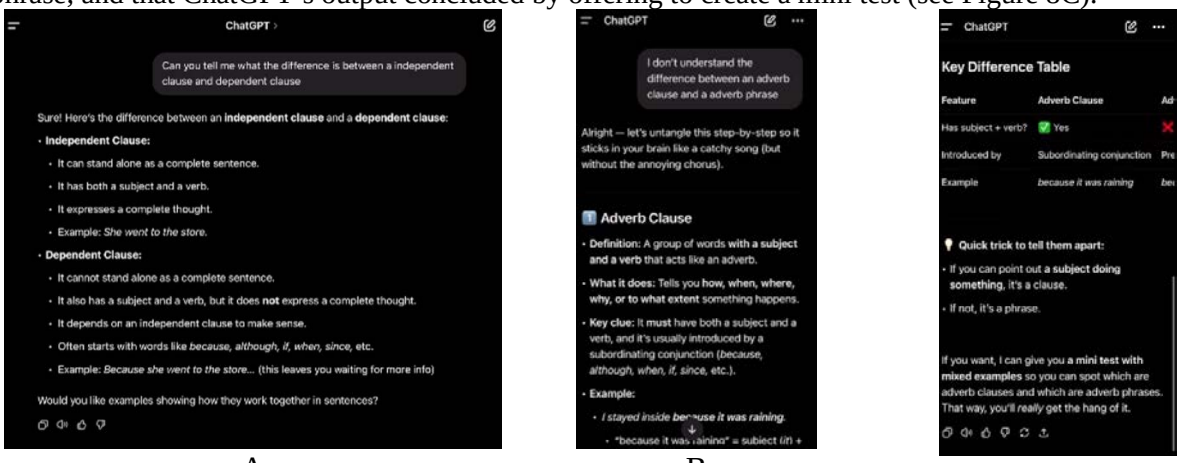


Figure 7. The sequential process students follow when using ChatGPT to learn English grammar

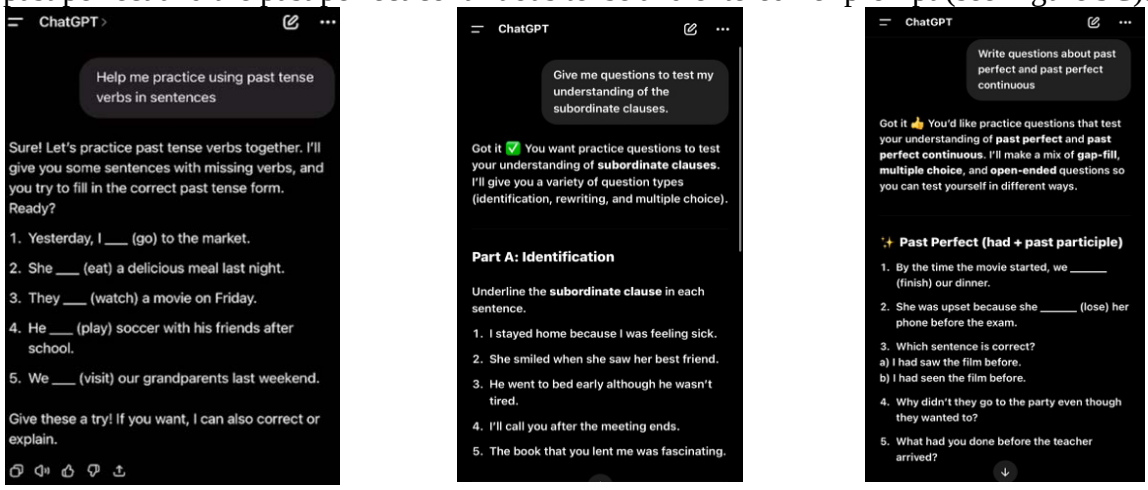
In step (1), students logged into ChatGPT using the "Study and Learn" feature and typed their grammar questions, after which they read the provided explanations. Participant 5 reported that she asked about the difference between an independent clause and a dependent clause and reviewed the output (see Figure 8A). She noted that she used the 'Study and Learn' feature to gain more clarification. Participant 6 indicated that she struggled to understand the difference between an adverb clause and an adverb phrase, so she logged to ChatGPT and submitted her inquiry (see Figure 8B). She elaborated that the explanation was thorough, mainly because it included a table summarizing the differences between the clause and the phrase, and that ChatGPT's output concluded by offering to create a mini test (see Figure 8C).



A B C

Figure 8. Examples of ChatGPT output where students input their grammatical inquiries

In step (2), students requested ChatGPT to generate questions that assess their knowledge of specific grammatical rules. These students expressed a desire to study independently without hiring a tutor. Participant 4 reported that she aimed to check her understanding of the past tense and its contextual usage by typing a prompt into ChatGPT (see Figure 9A). Participant 7 noted that she asked ChatGPT to generate questions to evaluate her understanding of subordinate clauses, as she did not have a tutor (see Figure 9B). Participant 8 intended to assess her understanding of the past perfect and the past perfect continuous tense and entered her prompt (see Figure 9C).



A B C

Figure 9. ChatGPT output showing students generating questions to assess their understanding of the grammatical rule

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In step (3), students wrote answers in the chat box to practice the grammatical rule, and in step (4), they submitted their responses to ChatGPT for evaluation. Participant 2 explained that she answered the grammatical questions generated by ChatGPT at two intervals: after attending the lectures and while studying for the exam. Participant 7 reported that she engaged with the grammar mini test, which consisted of yes/no questions, fill-in-the-blank items, and multiple-choice questions provided by ChatGPT after completing her study for the final or midterm exams. She noted that she asked ChatGPT to generate questions in a mini-test format related to the grammatical rules included in the exams.

In step (4), students indicated that ChatGPT provided them with instant feedback, which they reviewed to reinforce their understanding of the grammatical rule. This finding aligns with the findings of Corbita et al. (2024), who highlighted that ChatGPT offers clear feedback, as well as with the findings of previous literature (Abduljawad, 2024; Al-Zubaidi et al., 2024; Alsalem, 2024; Balraj, 2025; Tsai et al., 2024; Tseng & Lin, 2024; Yang & Li, 2024), which reported that ChatGPT delivers instant, personalized, and tailored feedback.

In step (5), students requested to export the exercise as PDFs, but only if they had an active subscription. This allowed them to continue studying and practicing the grammatical rule using a hard copy handout produced by ChatGPT. These findings indicate that students benefited from the 'Study and Learn' feature of ChatGPT, which provided them with customized instruction on their desired grammatical rule and enabled them to take the advantage of interactive guidance and simplified explanations. These findings align with previous studies, which, although they did not specifically mention the 'Study and Learn' feature, found that ChatGPT engages university-level English language students in grammar lessons (Ali et al., 2025; Tsai et al., 2024; Tseng & Lin, 2024) and improves their grammar learning (Abduljawad, 2024; Kucuk, 2024).

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how Saudi EFL students used ChatGPT independently in essay writing and grammar learning. It found that EFL students engaged in two distinct approaches to using ChatGPT for essay writing. The first was a process-oriented, comprehensive approach that involved students interacting with ChatGPT throughout multiple stages of the writing process. The second was a product-oriented, concise approach, with students predominantly depending on the AI-generated essay and the AI Humanizer feature. The study also identified specific ChatGPT features that EFL students used to enhance their grammar learning. The "Study and Learn" feature enabled students to pose grammar-related questions, prompt ChatGPT to create questions to evaluate their understanding of specific grammatical rules, submit written responses to practice those rules, and request ChatGPT to export the exercises in PDF format.

Implications

Based on the findings, several pedagogical implications could be drawn. First, instructors should design essay assignments to assess the writing process. Instructors could require students to submit drafts and to outline the topic sentence and supporting ideas for each paragraph rather than assessing only the final product. This could reduce students' reliance on ChatGPT-generated text and on the AI Humanizer feature. Second, instructors should structure grammar exercises to monitor students' processes as they work. They could require students to explain and justify their answers orally to ensure they understand the relevant grammatical rules. Third, universities should clarify AI usage policy in academic settings by stating explicit rules governing ChatGPT use. The

AI Humanizer feature raises concerns about academic integrity, since some students view integrity mainly in terms of grades rather than the integrity of submitted work.

Limitations

This study was limited by its sample size and sampling technique. It consisted of a small, homogeneous sample of eight high-achieving female students from a single university who were recruited via snowball sampling. Although this purposive sampling provided valuable insights into how students independently used ChatGPT for essay writing and grammar learning, it may introduce sampling bias because participants knew each other and may share similar practices and perceptions. Future studies could use larger, gender-diverse samples and include participants from multiple universities.

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Appendixes

Appendix A
Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How was your first experience using ChatGPT to learn English? Describe in detail.
2. What motivated you to use ChatGPT for the first time?
3. Did you face any challenges or difficulties when using ChatGPT at the beginning?
4. What benefits have you gained from using ChatGPT on your English language skills?
5. How did ChatGPT features specifically assist you?
6. How has using ChatGPT affected your approach to learning English?
7. Do you have any advice for other students who wish to use ChatGPT to improve their English skills?

Appendix B
Stimulated Recall Questions

1. How do you usually start your interaction with ChatGPT when using it for English grammar?
2. What steps do you take when using ChatGPT to write English essays?
3. Can you explain how you use ChatGPT to develop your ideas while writing? Describe this process with a screen recording.
4. How does ChatGPT help you correct grammatical and linguistic errors in your writing?
5. How have your texts changed after using ChatGPT? Describe these changes with a screen recording.