

Volume 4 | Issue 2 | 2024

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# Exploring EFL Students' Perceptions of Using ChatGPT as a Complementary Tool in Writing Classes

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Suggested citation: Kıvrak, C. (2024). Exploring Different Proficiency Level EFL Students' Perceptions of Using ChatGPT as a Complementary Tool in Writing Classes. *Language Education & Technology (LET Journal)*, 4(2), 170 – 180.

Article Info	Abstract	
	This mixed-method study investigates the role of Turkish EFL university preparatory students' competency levels on using ChatGPT as a complementary tool in L2 writing. Involving 100 Turkish EFL students (50 A1 level and 50 B1 level), the study utilizes	
Date submitted: 23/01/2025	questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that while less proficient learners used ChatGPT mostly for correcting their vocabulary and grammar	
Date accepted: 24/02/2025	mistakes, more proficient students benefitted more from advanced feedback on	
Date published: 25/02/2025	coherence and organization. Semi-structured interviews revealed that less profice students require more explanation about the feedback provided by ChatGPT, we more proficient ones were more confident about applying direct corrections provided by this tool. Both groups have positive attitude while recommending ChatGPT complementary tool in L2 writing. This research offers valuable recommendations EFL teachers and students about the benefits of ChatGPT as a complementary tool L2 writing.	
Research Article	Keywords: ChatGPT, L2 writing, proficiency level, writing feedback	

#### 1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been widely used in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and researchers have conducted a great deal of research to examine ChatGPT as the most popular AI tool (Ade-Ibijola & Okonkwo, 2023). ChatGPT has been a trending topic in the language learning research area and can potentially be used as an instructional tool Wahyuni (2022). Its abilities enable ChatGPT to produce human-like responses and interact with people (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023). The interactive nature of ChatGPT aid the improvement of writing proficiency by providing personalized feedback. The capacity of ChatGPT while producing high-quality utterances and meaningful interaction in L2 supports

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learners' writing skills (Kim et al., 2023; Zhang, 2024; Maspul, 2024). Similarly, variety of research mentioned its supporting role in immediate corrections and suggestions (Liu et al., 2023), motivation and engagement (Song, 2023; Roy, 2024). Research also shows that ChatGPT helps learners to improve several aspects in writing such as grammar accuracy, vocabulary richness, cohesion, and coherence (Nguyen, 2024; Mahapatra, 2024).

L2 writing is greatly aided by ChatGPT, but the effectiveness varies according to learners' proficiency levels. While less proficient learners frequently find it difficult to understand AI-generated feedback, more proficient learners gain more from it and use its feedback to improve autonomy and metacognitive abilities (Wang, 2024; Kurt & Kurt, 2024). While ChatGPT improves accuracy and coherence in L2 writing, the effective utilization of it in L2 writing classes necessitates teacher training or overcoming technological barriers (İbrahim & Kirkpatrick, 2024; Yu et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Although there is growing research on the use of ChatGPT in the educational context, there is still a gap in the information of how EFL students utilize and perceive this tool. Not much is known about how learners of different levels of proficiency harness ChatGPT to help with their writing or how they even receive the tool in the Turkish context. This student research limitation prevents the complete practice-oriented assessment of ChatGPT in various environments. To fill this gap, this study investigated the perceptions of Turkish EFL students at A1 and B1 levels of using ChatGPT as an additional tool to improve their writing skills. Therefore, the following questions were addressed:

- 1. How do Turkish A1 and B1 EFL students view the use of ChatGPT as a complementary tool for enhancing their writing skills?
- 2. Are there any differences in how Turkish A1 and B1 EFL students use ChatGPT as a complementary tool to improve their writing proficiency?

## 2. Literature Review

The integration of ChatGPT into EFL education has become a common research area. As a language model powered by AI, ChatGPT provides students with necessary support in language learning, especially in writing tasks by offering feedback capabilities. However, effective utilization of AI-generated feedback requires students to engage proactively by crafting well-structured prompts, rather than passively receiving feedback from the system (White et al., 2023). Research suggests that the quality and usefulness of ChatGPT-generated feedback are strongly linked to learners' ability to seek feedback effectively (Yang, 2024).

The transformative potential of ChatGPT in enhancing ESL writing instruction is emphasized in a study that highlights ChatGPT's ability to support learners by addressing individual needs through immediate feedback and necessary corrections (İbrahim and Kirkpatrick, 2024). In this study it is argued that ChatGPT is effective in the writing process however, infrastructural and pedagogical challenges must be addressed to fully comprehend its potential. Similarly, Yu, Kong, and Hao (2024) investigate the use of ChatGPT to support Chinese L2 learners in Africa. It was mentioned that to facilitate L2 writing, it significantly helps by proofreading, brainstorming. However, internet access and a lack of teacher training on AI integration are the strong barriers.

According to Wang (2024)'s study, the ability of learners while using ChatGPT's features vary depending on their academic profiles and proficiency levels. The research highlights that more proficient students

show more autonomy and effectiveness compared to less proficient ones while utilizing feedback-seeking strategies. Similarly, research on machine translation has been demonstrated that its efficacy in improving L2 revisions differs based on students' proficiency levels. While all L2 learners can benefit from machine translation, more advanced learners demonstrate a greater ability to critically evaluate and choose between their own translations and machine-generated alternatives, making the tool more advantageous for them (Lee, 2022).

Yan & Zhang (2024)'s mixed-method case study explores the feedback-seeking behaviors of L2 students using ChatGPT in their writing. The study concludes that while ChatGPT facilitates various aspects of the writing process, it cannot fully replace human feedback from teachers and peers. The requirement of balanced combination of feedback provided by ChatGPT with traditional teacher feedback is mentioned in the results of this study. To maximize ChatGPT's potential when it is used as a complementary tool rather than replaces human instruction, teacher involvement is essential. In another study, Kurt and Kurt (2024) support the idea that ChatGPT can assist students with grammatical corrections and coherence improvement in L2 writing. The results also show that ChatGPT may not be equally effective for less proficient learners having problems understanding feedback generated by AI. The study recommends incorporating training sessions to help learners effectively use all features of this tool.

#### 3. Methodology

# 3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach by combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This research design merges these two methods to offer a more thorough understanding of the research problem, capitalizing on the strengths of each while addressing their possible limitations (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative data were gathered through a questionnaire including 10 items retrieved from Bok E. & Cho Y. (2023), and qualitative insights were derived from semi-structured interviews with 10 A1-level students and 10 B1-level students. The quantitative method allowed for data collection from a large and varied sample, while the qualitative approach offered deeper insights into how EFL students at various proficiency levels utilize ChatGPT as a complementary tool for L2 writing, along with their views on its role in writing classes.

## 3.2. Participants & Setting

The participants in the study were chosen from a state university in Türkiye, involving two instructors, one of whom was also the researcher of this study. A total of 100 EFL students participated, with 50 at the A1 proficiency level and 50 at the B1 level, all selected from four different preparatory reading and writing classes. Their ages vary between 18 to 21. 63 of them are female and 37 of them are male students. However, gender does not count as a variable in this study. All students learn English as L2 and the proficiency levels were determined based on the university's placement exam, which was conducted at the start of the academic year.

During the first semester, every week a new homework practice was introduced. Students were asked to use ChatGPT 3.0, the free version of the AI tool, to proofread and revise their original paragraphs written during class. ChatGPT 3.0 was introduced and integrated into the classroom activities by the instructors for one semester. Instead of providing specific prompts, examples like "proofread this paragraph" and "revise this paragraph" were demonstrated in class by their teachers. Additionally, students were guided to identify main challenges they faced when independently writing paragraphs. These challenges helped

to determine whether assistance from AI was necessary. The assignments highlighted five key areas of difficulty: grammar, vocabulary/expressions, clarity, coherence, and organization.

To evaluate the extent to which ChatGPT assisted in writing, the survey questionnaire was designed around these areas. After the first semester, 20 participants (10 A1-level students and 10 B1-level students) were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in Turkish when preferred by the participants. To ensure the study addressed the research questions comprehensively, a purposeful sampling technique was employed, allowing the selection of information-rich cases (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

#### 3.3. Data Collection Tools

Quantitative data were collected using 5-point Likert-type scale online questionnaire retrieved from the study of Bok E. & Cho Y. (2023) (see Appendix A). Qualitative data, on the other hand, were gathered through 5 semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) with the selected 20 participants. The quantitative data were collected outside the classroom via Google Forms, ensuring convenience for the participants, while the interviews were conducted in person on the school premises to provide a more interactive and detailed exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions.

## 3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings. The researcher completed the quantitative data, obtained through online questionnaires and statistical analysis. Mean scores, standard deviations, and p-values were calculated to evaluate participants' perceptions of ChatGPT's assistance in L2 writing. The data were meticulously examined using thematic analysis, following the model suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), and facilitated through the utilization of MAXQDA to categorize the findings of the interview results. The thematic analysis involved an iterative process of reading transcripts, identifying recurring themes, and categorizing responses to highlight participants' challenges, experiences, and attitudes toward ChatGPT. To ensure reliability, half of the qualitative data was independently reviewed and coded by an external researcher to raise inter-rater reliability.

#### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Quantitative Insights

Research question 1 was constructed to investigate the views of A1 and B1 level students on using ChatGPT as a complementary tool for enhancing their writing skills (see Table 1). A1 students demonstrated moderate satisfaction with receiving feedback and revising their paragraphs (Mean = 3.54, SD = 0.74), while B1 students showed significantly higher satisfaction (Mean = 4.80, SD = 0.67, p = 0.0002). Similarly, A1 students found ChatGPT helpful while editing their writing (Mean = 3.66, SD = 0.79), but B1 students rated this aspect higher (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.70, p = 0.0007). When asked about their future intention to use ChatGPT, both groups were positive, with A1 students scoring 3.73 (SD = 0.81) and B1 students scoring 4.26 (SD = 0.76, p = 0.0012), highlighting stronger intent among more proficient students.

Table 1. Al and Bl proficiency level students' overall view on the use of ChatGPT in L2 writing

Items	M	SD	M	SD
	(A1)	(A1)	<b>(B1)</b>	<b>(B1)</b>
1. I am satisfied with the activity of receiving feedback on my paragraphs and revising them with ChatGPT.	3.54	0.74	4.8	0.67
2. ChatGPT was helpful in editing my English writing paragraphs.	3.66	0.79	4.19	0.7
3. I intend to use ChatGPT in the future for editing English paragraphs.	3.73	0.79	4.19	0.7
4. The feedback I received from ChatGPT was accurate.	3.75	0.65	4.23	0.67
5. I trust the feedback I received from ChatGPT.	3.65	0.8	4.0	0.75
	3.8			
6. ChatGPT has helped me find and correct grammatical errors.		0.83	4.43	0.59
7. ChatGPT has helped me write clearly.		0.67	4.32	0.58
8. ChatGPT has helped me write coherently.		0.79	4.45	0.58
9. ChatGPT has helped me find and use appropriate English vocabulary and expressions.		0.93	4.23	0.7
10. ChatGPT has helped me organizing a paragraph appropriately.		0.81	4.13	0.81

In terms of the quality of feedback, A1 students rated the accuracy of ChatGPT's feedback at 3.75 (SD = 0.65), compared to 4.23 (SD = 0.67) for B1 students (p = 0.0004). The results about trust in feedback was similar with A1 students giving a mean rating of 3.65 (SD = 0.80) and B1 students rating it higher at 4.00 (SD = 0.75, p = 0.0256). These findings showed that B1 proficiency level students see feedback from ChatGPT as more reliable and accurate. A1 students rated ChatGPT's assistance with making corrections on grammatical errors as 3.80 (SD = 0.83) while it was rated as 4.43 (SD = 0.59) by B1 students (p < 0.05). A1 level students found the role of ChatGPT to improve clarity low 3.80 (SD = 0.67), while the other group of students rated it higher at 4.32 (SD = 0.58, p < 0.05), which was similar in terms of its role in coherence, with A1 students scoring 3.86 (SD = 0.79) and B1 students scoring 4.45 (SD = 0.58, p < 0.05). A1 students gave ChatGPT's assistance with using appropriate vocabulary and expressions a rating of 3.63 (SD = 0.93), whereas B1 students gave it a rating of 4.23 (SD = 0.70) (p < 0.05). Lastly, A1 students gave ChatGPT a rating of 3.51 for paragraph organization, whereas B1 students gave it a considerably higher rating of 4.13 (SD = 0.81, p < 0.05).

Overall, the results of the questionnaire showed that B1 proficiency level students rated all aspects of ChatGPT higher than A1 students. When looking at the p-values showing the statistically significant difference, some themes such as satisfaction, helpfulness, accuracy, and trust were observed as significant difference. All in all, the results demonstrated that B1-level students benefited more from all aspects of ChatGPT.

## 4.2. Qualitative Insights

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 20 participants (10 at the A1 level and 10 at the B1 level) to discuss their experiences using ChatGPT to improve their L2 writing. The questions focused on how ChatGPT enhances organization, coherence, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence in comments, recommendations, and challenges (see Table 2).

Table 2. A1 and B1 level students' responses to interview questions

Interview Questions	A1 Level Students' Responses	B1 Level Students' Responses
1. How do you feel ChatGPT has helped you improve specific aspects of your writing?	"It's good for some grammar mistakes, but I sometimes need my teachers' explanation on the ChatGPT's correction. Also, I sometimes think that my writing has no mistakes. Because my teachers correct my writing again when I generally use every recommendation that ChatGPT provides for me."  "I trust ChatGPT for grammar and clarity, but sometimes it writes everything very academic."	"I trust it because I use it like one term and I never find any major mistake in recommendation."  "I trust it because it always improves my writing. I generally write something in my mind and I use the word 'make it better' and it gives really nice sentences."
2. What challenges have you faced while using ChatGPT for writing corrections or enhancements?	"Sometimes I feel it's correct, but I don't always understand why it's better." "Sometimes I don't understand the suggestions, especially sometimes it uses really advanced words."	"It provides correct feedback most of the time, especially coherence, and sometimes it has good word choice skills. It exactly recommends the word that I consider in my mind. It shows some words that I exactly wanted to use in my writings."  "Sometimes it suggests overcomplicated sentences that don't fit my tone."
3. Do you trust ChatGPT's feedback?	"Sometimes I feel it's correct, but I don't always understand why it's better." "Sometimes I don't understand the suggestions, especially sometimes it uses really advanced words."	"I trust it because I use it like one term and I never find any major mistake in recommendation." "I trust it because it always improves my writing. I generally write something in my mind and I use the word 'make it better' and it gives really nice sentences."
4. What challenges do you face while using ChatGPT?	"Sometimes I feel it's correct, but I don't always understand why it's better." "Sometimes I don't understand the suggestions, especially sometimes it uses really advanced words."	"It provides correct feedback most of the time, especially coherence and sometimes it has good word choice skills. It exactly recommends the word that I consider in my mind. It shows some words that I exactly wanted to use in my writings."
5. Would you recommend ChatGPT to others?	"I find it hard to rewrite my sentences using the advice I use it for grammar checker."  "I generally recommend it for understanding your mistakes but I am not sure about all the recommendations."	"It doesn't explain why the change is better, so I get confused but I will use it in future and I can recommend it as a complementary tool to write more precise sentences."  "Sometimes it suggests overcomplicated sentences that don't fit my tone."

Regarding their use of ChatGPT for writing enhancement, students at the A1 and B1 levels exhibited both significant differences and some similarities in their responses to the five interview questions. Regarding trust in feedback, A1 students trust feedback less than B1 students, while B1level students have more confidence in independently using ChatGPT feedback. Participants were asked about the challenges they faced while using ChatGPT for writing corrections or enhancements. The interviews revealed that A1 students struggle to understand complex feedback and apply recommendations to their longer writings, whereas B1 students occasionally encounter difficulties with overly detailed or stylistic feedback that is sometimes not appropriate for their writing tone.

All participants mentioned the positive role of ChatGPT for helping to clarify their ideas, students highlight improvements in paragraph-level organization and flow whereas A1 students benefit more from basic sentence-level clarity. Lastly, when recommending ChatGPT, A1 students are cautious, suggesting it primarily for basic support in grammar, while B1 students strongly advocate for its use thanks to its advanced features. Despite their differences, both groups mentioned ChatGPT's role as a valuable complementary tool in enhancing their writing, with distinctions largely reflecting their proficiency levels.

#### 5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that more proficient students consistently rate ChatGPT higher than A1-level students across various writing assistance categories, including satisfaction, helpfulness, accuracy, trust, and support in grammar correction, clarity, coherence, vocabulary usage, and paragraph organization. These statistically significant differences suggest that higher-proficiency students perceive ChatGPT's feedback as more useful and relevant to their writing needs. This aligns with the studies of Ibrahim and Kirkpatrick (2024) and Yu, Kong, and Hao (2024), which emphasize that the benefits of ChatGPT depend significantly on students' proficiency levels. To fully realize ChatGPT's potential in L2 writing, it is essential to address pedagogical and infrastructural challenges, particularly for less proficient learners who may struggle to interpret AI-generated feedback effectively. However, effective utilization of AI-generated feedback requires students to engage proactively by crafting well-structured prompts, rather than passively receiving feedback from the system (White et al., 2023). Research suggests that the quality and usefulness of ChatGPT-generated feedback are strongly linked to learners' ability to seek feedback effectively (Yang, 2024).

Moreover, the qualitative findings from student interviews indicate that A1-level students often require additional explanations to fully comprehend ChatGPT's suggestions. This underscores the importance of supplementary teacher support, a finding that corresponds with Ibrahim and Kirkpatrick's (2024) argument that pedagogical barriers must be addressed to maximize AI tools' effectiveness. Providing teacher-led guidance and simplified explanations could help lower-proficiency learners engage with ChatGPT's feedback meaningfully rather than misinterpreting or disregarding it. In another study, Kurt and Kurt (2024) support the idea that ChatGPT can assist students with grammatical corrections and coherence improvement in L2 writing. The results also show that ChatGPT may not be equally effective for less proficient learners having problems understanding feedback generated by AI. The study recommends incorporating training sessions to help learners effectively use all features of this tool.

The results also support Wang (2024)'s study, which indicates that students at different proficiency levels exhibit varying abilities in utilizing feedback-seeking strategies—an essential skill for fostering metacognitive awareness. Higher-proficiency learners tend to demonstrate greater autonomy and confidence in refining their writing based on ChatGPT's feedback, while lower-proficiency students often require additional scaffolding. Similarly, the findings on students' mixed perceptions of ChatGPT's

stylistic feedback, particularly among B1-level learners, align with Mahapatra (2024), who argues that AI-generated suggestions may sometimes be overly sophisticated or contextually mismatched to the user's intended tone. Similarly, research on machine translation has demonstrated that its efficacy in improving L2 revisions differs based on students' proficiency levels. While all L2 learners can benefit from machine translation, more advanced learners demonstrate a greater ability to critically evaluate and choose between their own translations and machine-generated alternatives, making the tool more advantageous for them (Lee, 2022). Furthermore, as highlighted by Yan and Zhang (2024), while ChatGPT provides significant support in the writing process, it cannot fully replace human feedback from teachers and peers. This study corroborates this perspective, particularly in the case of less proficient students, who report needing human explanations to clarify ChatGPT's suggestions. Conversely, more proficient students demonstrate greater confidence and independence in incorporating AI-generated feedback into their revisions. These findings suggest that a balanced approach—integrating both AI tools and human feedback—may be the most effective strategy for optimizing L2 writing instruction.

In conclusion, ChatGPT proves to be a valuable supplementary resource for enhancing L2 writing skills. However, its effectiveness varies depending on the learner's proficiency level, with more advanced students benefiting more from its feedback. To maximize its potential, future developments should focus on tailoring AI-generated feedback to different proficiency levels and incorporating user-friendly explanations for lower-level learners. Additionally, teacher training in AI integration remains crucial to ensure that ChatGPT complements, rather than replaces, human instruction. By leveraging AI tools strategically, educators can enhance both productivity and learner autonomy while maintaining the critical role of human guidance in the writing process.

#### 6. Conclusion

This study revealed potential benefits of using free version of ChatGPT as a complementary tool in L2 writing for both proficiency level students. A1 level students generally trust the feedback provided by ChatGPT for correcting their basic grammar mistakes and vocabulary provision. On the other hand, B1 proficiency level students feel more confident about using ChatGPT to improve coherence and cohesion in their writing. Moreover, B1 level students trust this tool compared to A1 level students. With the help of teacher support, less proficient students may feel more confident about using ChatGPT for higher-order concerns of their writing. Despite the differences between both proficiency level learners, this study proves potential positive role of ChatGPT in L2 writing with its various features. To maximize the positive role of ChatGPT for L2 writing classes and students' writing proficiency, L2 teachers should educate themselves about the correct use of prompts and familiarize their students with this tool. To ensure both L2 teachers and students make optimal use of this tool, institutions should provide both technological support and support for the correct use of ChatGPT. All in all, less proficient students may be better able to use these tools if they receive more assistance and clearer feedback. Second, as proposed by Yu, Kong, and Hao (2024), incorporating training sessions on the correct use of AI feedback could close the gap between varying competence levels and guarantee that everyone has equal access to the advantages of AI-driven language learning resources.

# 7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study reveals several limitations and open gates for further studies about the role of this tool in L2 writing. Firstly, the sample size was limited to one state university in Türkiye, which may limit the generalizability of the results for another context. Secondly, this study only focused on two different proficiency level students. Therefore, a future study may be conducted including various proficiency level students to see the role of ChatGPT in L2 writing classes. Another limitation was time. The results were

only seen in one semester so a longitudinal study on this topic may better reveal the effect of ChatGPT on students' writings.

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## **Appendices**

# Appendix A

- 1. I am satisfied with the activity of receiving feedback on my paragraphs and revising them with ChatGPT.
- 2. ChatGPT was helpful in editing my English writing paragraphs.
- 3. I intend to use ChatGPT in the future for editing English paragraphs.
- 4. The feedback I received from ChatGPT was accurate.
- 5. I trust the feedback I received from ChatGPT.
- 6. ChatGPT has helped me find and correct grammatical errors.
- 7. ChatGPT has helped me write clearly.
- 8. ChatGPT has helped me write coherently.
- 9. ChatGPT has helped me find and use appropriate English vocabulary and expressions.
- 10. ChatGPT has helped me organizing a paragraph appropriately.

## Appendix B

- 1. How do you feel ChatGPT has helped you improve specific aspects of your writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence, or paragraph organization?
- 2. What challenges have you faced while using ChatGPT for writing corrections or enhancements?
- 3. In what ways do you trust (or not trust) the feedback and suggestions provided by ChatGPT, and why?
- 4. How does using ChatGPT compare to receiving feedback directly from a teacher or peer in terms of clarity, reliability, and usefulness?
- 5. Would you recommend ChatGPT to other students for writing improvement, and what advice would you give them about using it effectively?