

FROM SCROLLING TO STRUCTURING: THE ROLE OF MOBILE AI TOOLS IN IDEA GENERATION FOR ESL WRITING AMONG GENERATION Z LEARNERS

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Abstract

The shift to mobile-assisted learning has dramatically influenced writing instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, especially among Generation Z learners. This paper explores how mobile-based AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, serve as catalysts for idea generation in ESL writing instruction. Grounded in digital learning theories and constructivist pedagogy, the study examines practical classroom applications of ChatGPT on mobile devices and surveys learners' perceptions. The findings suggest that mobile AI tools help ESL students overcome idea-generation blocks, promote learner autonomy, and enhance cognitive engagement. Pedagogical implications and ethical considerations are discussed.

Keywords: ESL writing, mobile learning, ChatGPT, idea generation, Generation Z, artificial intelligence, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)

1. Introduction

In the contemporary ESL classroom, technology is no longer a supplement—it is a necessity. The educational landscape has evolved significantly with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), presenting both opportunities and challenges for educators. For Generation Z—students born between the late 1990s and early 2010s—technology is not an external tool but an extension of their daily lives. These learners are digital natives, accustomed to smartphones, social media, and instant access to information. In this context, mobile AI tools such as ChatGPT have emerged as powerful resources to support various aspects of language learning, particularly writing. This paper focuses on the role of ChatGPT as accessed via mobile phones in facilitating idea generation, a critical but often challenging stage in ESL writing. It argues that when implemented thoughtfully, ChatGPT can foster creativity, reduce anxiety, and support learner independence in the writing process.

2. Literature Review

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has become increasingly relevant in recent years, offering flexibility and personalization that traditional classroom settings often lack. According to Kukulska-Hulme (2020), mobile learning enables learners to engage in language tasks anytime and anywhere, supporting a more autonomous and continuous learning experience. For Generation Z, who prefer visual, interactive, and fast-paced learning environments, MALL aligns well with their preferences and

learning behaviors. Research indicates that these learners value immediate feedback, personalized assistance, and a sense of control over their learning pathways.

AI tools like ChatGPT leverage deep learning algorithms to generate human-like responses, making them suitable for language learning support. Yang (2023) emphasizes that ChatGPT can act as a brainstorming partner, offering structured ideas and feedback that students can use as springboards for their writing. However, concerns remain regarding students' overreliance on AI-generated content and the potential for academic dishonesty. Bui (2023) suggests that while AI can enhance writing skills when used judiciously, it must be complemented by teacher guidance and ethical considerations. These insights provide a foundation for examining how ChatGPT, when accessed via mobile devices, contributes to idea generation in ESL writing classrooms.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. A survey was distributed to 45 intermediate-level ESL students enrolled at a public university. All participants had used ChatGPT on their mobile devices for at least one writing task in class. The survey included multiple-choice and open-ended questions focusing on students' experiences with idea generation using ChatGPT.

In addition to the survey, six ESL instructors participated in semi-structured interviews. These educators had integrated ChatGPT into their writing lessons and observed its impact on students' brainstorming and drafting processes. Interview questions explored both pedagogical benefits and concerns regarding mobile AI use in the classroom. Data from both instruments were analyzed thematically to identify key trends, perceptions, and instructional strategies.

4. Findings

Survey results revealed several significant trends in how students used ChatGPT for idea generation. A majority (80%) stated that the tool helped them generate ideas more quickly compared to traditional brainstorming methods. About 76% mentioned that using ChatGPT reduced their anxiety about writing, as they felt supported by the instant suggestions. Moreover, 62% reported increased confidence when approaching new writing tasks, attributing this to the guidance provided by ChatGPT.

Interestingly, students appreciated the ability to ask follow-up questions, personalize prompts, and interact with the AI in a conversational way. One participant noted, "It's like having a personal tutor in my pocket. I can get ideas, examples, and even corrections without feeling judged."

However, 15% of students admitted that they relied too heavily on AI-generated content, sometimes copying responses verbatim. This raised concerns among instructors about plagiarism and surface-level understanding. Still, most teachers

observed that the tool was effective in unlocking student creativity. One instructor shared, "Giving students 5–7 minutes to brainstorm with ChatGPT on their phones before we outline essays in class has made a noticeable difference in the quality and variety of their ideas."

5. Discussion

The use of ChatGPT on mobile devices transforms the traditional brainstorming process into a more dynamic, responsive, and individualized experience. The tool acts as an ever-available resource that students can consult without fear of failure or embarrassment. For learners who struggle with vocabulary, topic development, or critical thinking, ChatGPT provides an entry point to engage with content more confidently.

Mobile access makes this support even more immediate and practical. Students can use ChatGPT while commuting, during breaks, or at home—allowing them to extend the writing process beyond the classroom. This increased access aligns with constructivist theories that advocate for learner autonomy and authentic engagement.

Despite these benefits, challenges persist. Some students become passive recipients of AI suggestions rather than active processors. Overuse can lead to dependency, while the temptation to copy entire outputs can compromise academic integrity. Teachers also expressed concern about students being distracted by other mobile apps during writing lessons. These issues highlight the need for digital literacy education and responsible integration strategies.

6. Pedagogical Implications

Effective use of ChatGPT in ESL writing instruction requires structured planning and clear objectives. Teachers should design classroom activities that promote critical engagement with AI outputs rather than passive consumption. For instance, instructors can assign tasks that require students to compare ChatGPT-generated ideas with their own or revise AI-generated outlines to suit their writing goals.

Reflection activities can also be beneficial. Asking students to write a short paragraph on how they used ChatGPT to generate ideas helps ensure they are thinking critically about the process. Educators may also provide prompt templates to guide students in crafting effective ChatGPT inputs, such as "Give me three ideas for a persuasive essay about environmental protection."

Incorporating digital ethics into the curriculum is equally important. Students should understand the limitations of AI, the importance of originality, and how to properly attribute AI assistance. Schools and universities might consider creating guidelines or policies on acceptable AI use in academic settings. Teacher training programs should also prepare educators to integrate AI tools thoughtfully and effectively.

7. Conclusion

The use of mobile AI tools like ChatGPT represents a significant shift in how ESL writing instruction can be approached, particularly in relation to idea generation. For Generation Z learners, who value autonomy, immediacy, and personalization, mobile-based ChatGPT offers a compelling support system. When used ethically and thoughtfully, it helps students overcome common writing barriers, fosters creativity, and builds confidence.

Nevertheless, the tool must be integrated within a pedagogically sound framework that prioritizes critical thinking, responsible use, and instructor guidance. As technology continues to evolve, educators must strike a balance between innovation and academic integrity to fully harness the potential of mobile AI tools in ESL writing education.

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