

## USING AI TOOLS TO IMPROVE ADULT EFL LEARNERS' WRITING SKILLS IN UZBEKISTAN

**INSTITUTION:** Tashkent Pedagogical Technicum

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Sodiqova Makhliyo

### ABSTRACT

This descriptive study examines how adult EFL learners in Uzbekistan perceive AI-based feedback tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot in improving writing skills. Six participants( ages 22-33) were purposely sampled and interviewed using semi-structured questions. Data were analysed using line-by-line coding, open codes, axial categories, and emerging themes. Key findings reveal that AI tools foster confidence but may enhance dependency, cause confusion when feedback conflicts teacher guidance, and support conditional autonomy under scaffolding. The study highlights the need for AI literacy training and blended feedback approaches in TESOL; recommendations for teachers, students, and policymakers.

### INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction has been greatly impacted by the quick development of artificial intelligence (AI), especially with regard to AI- based feedback tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot. With the help of these tools, students can edit their writing more often and on their own by receiving immediate feedback on grammar, vocabulary section, coherence, and structure. AI- mediated feedback can boost learner confidence, reduce anxiety, and facilitate drafting processes, according to recent TESOL studies, particularly for adult learners who juggle school with work and family obligations.

In Uzbekistan, adult learners who juggle work, family, family, and education constitute a population that has received little attention. Studying takes place in traditionally teacher-centered classrooms where students may submit to teachers as primary authorities. ( Bryman, 2016; Zhang, 2023). This study tries to explore recurrent problems, such as students' dependence on AI, their emotional reactions to criticism, and the tension between AI and teacher direction. A justification for investigating perceptions, confidence, autonomy, and dependency in this context was given by these preliminary analyses. The research advances knowledge of cultural and contextual elements impacting the adoption of AI in a traditionally teacher-centered setting by concentrating on the viewpoints of learners.

This study aims to investigate how adult EFL learners in Uzbekistan view and use AI- based feedback tools to enhance their writing abilities. The main research question is:

*“ How do adult EFL learners in Uzbekistan perceive and use AI- based feedback feedback tools to improve their English writing development? ”*

Sub-questions include:

1. What are the first experiences and challenges that students have with AI-based feedback tools?
2. How do students handle dependence and engage with AI feedback when drafting and editing?
3. How does consistent AI usage affect learners' confidence and autonomy?
4. How do learners perceive the advantages and limitations of AI feedback compared to teacher feedback?

By addressing these questions, this study intends to provide context-sensitive, TESOL- relevant insights into AI-assisted adult writing instruction.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to recent research, AI can boost learner confidence ( Lee, 2024; Han & Li, 2024), but it can also lead to overreliance ( Yilmaz Virvan & Tomak, 2024). There have been reports of confusion resulting from AI metalanguage and contradictory teacher guidance ( Sun, 2024; Bryman, 2016). According to Zhang (2023) and Teng (2024), learners' autonomy and emotional reactions are influenced by contextual differences in TESOL settings. AI hallucinations, misreading feedback, and a lack of AI literacy are among the limitations and ethical issues ( Alghasab et al., 2025; Chen, 2025). Regarding adult learners in Uzbekistan, there is a glaring research gap, especially when it comes to comprehending how confidence, reliance, and teacher scaffolding interact.

### 2.1 Confidence and Emotional Impact

When AI verifies their grammatical accuracy or makes suggestions for improvement, learners frequently report feeling more confident (Lee, 2024). However, this assurance may be accompanied by emotional strain, particularly when students experience differences between AI recommendations and instructor guidance ( Sun, 2024). Similar patterns have been found in research conducted in East Asian contexts, indicating that learner emotional responses are influenced by authority perception across cultural boundaries (Zhang, 2023).

### 2.2 Dependency and Overreliance

The dangers of relying too much on AI feedback (2024). Without comprehending the underlying concepts. The Learners might follow AI recommendations, which would restrict their ability to think critically and solve problems on their own. According to earlier research ( Han & Li, 2024), adult learners who have a lot on their plates might find AI tools convenient, which would further promote dependency.

### 2.3 Authority Conflict

Conflicts between teacher guidance and AI feedback may lead to reluctance or mistrust (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). Learners in teacher-centered educational environments, such as Uzbekistan, frequently place a higher value on teachers' authority, which leads to a selective acceptance of AI feedback. When technical metalanguage or AI "hallucinations" take place, the mismatch between AI and human guidance is especially noticeable (Alghasab et al., 2025; Chen, 2025).

#### **2.4 Learner Autonomy**

Artificial intelligence tools both promote and limit autonomy. Although AI enables self-monitoring and multiple drafts, teachers must provide scaffolding for autonomous practice to be effective (Ke Yang, 2022; Han & Li, 2024). The Constructivism viewpoints highlight how students' meaning-making is mediated by culture, which emphasizes the importance of taking Uzbek classroom norms into account (Creswell, 2018; Zhang, 2023).

#### **2.5 Limitations and Research Gap**

Current research mostly concentrates on quantifiable writing gains, ignoring emotional reactions, self-assurance, and authority perceptions. This study fills a gap left by the paucity of research on adult learners in Uzbekistan. Twelve peer-reviewed sources from 2015-2025 are integrated in this literature review, which emphasizes the interaction of cultural context, autonomy, dependence, and confidence.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

A descriptive qualitative design was chosen to investigate learners' subjective experiences (Creswell, 2018). The Constructivism paradigm underpins the study, acknowledging that learners' perceptions are socially and culturally mediated.

#### **3.2 Participants and Sampling**

A purposeful sample of six adult learners was chosen based on their actual use of AI tools. Accountants, students, doctors, IT technicians, teaching assistants, and entrepreneurs were among the participants, whose ages ranged from 22 to 33. All participants had prior experience with AI writing tools. Pseudonyms ensured anonymity.

### 3.3 Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used as one instrument. Ten open-ended questions explored the frequency of AI use, perceived benefits, emotional responses, reliance, and teacher guidance.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results of this study illuminate how adult EFL learners in Uzbekistan view and use AI-based feedback tools to enhance their writing abilities. 47 open codes were obtained from the line-by-line coding analysis of the interview transcriptions. These codes were then categorized into axial categories and combined into three main themes: conditional autonomy, confusion and authority conflict, and confidence and dependency. These themes are consistent with more general TESOL theories and empirical research from five to ten years, in addition to reflecting learners' emotional and cognitive reactions to AI feedback.

### Findings

Three themes emerged:

#### Theme 1: Confidence and Dependency

The first theme captures the dual effect of AI feedback: It can lead to dependence while also boosting learner confidence. Particularly, participants noted reliance on tools (e.g., “Sometimes I follow AI even without understanding why” – Participant 6), but they also reported feeling more confident when AI checked grammar and offered corrections. For example, Participant 2's statement, “Whenever I correct my sentence

instantly, I feel safer to continue writing,” exemplifies the effective filter hypothesis, which holds that reducing anxiety has a positive effect on language learning performance. Participant 3 also reported that AIO lessened their fear of making grammatical errors. Additionally, Han and Li (2024) stress that by facilitating immediate correction and reflection, AI-supported feedback increases learner autonomy.

However, The data showed indications of an over-reliance on AI, with learners sometimes adhering to AI recommendations without fully comprehending them. As an example of cognitive dependence, participant 6 acknowledged, “Sometimes I follow AI even without understanding why.” Yilmaz Virlan and Tomak’s (2024) findings, which highlight the conflict between enhanced confidence in AI-assisted writing, are consistent with this observation. From a TESOL standpoint, this duality implies that although AI can support students’ writing, an over-reliance on it could impede the growth of autonomous writing abilities if instructional guidance is not provided.

## **Theme 2: Confusion and Authority Conflict**

Contradictions between AI feedback and teacher guidance, as well as difficulties deciphering AI’s metalanguage, were the second theme that surfaced from participant narratives.

Sometimes teacher instructions were at odds with AI feedback, leading to reluctance and distrust. For example: “Teacher says one thing, but AI says another; in some cases I do not know which one I follow.” participant 4 clarified, emphasizing the cognitive dissonance that students encounter. Participant 5 also reported having trouble comprehending AI’s use of technical grammatical terminology. Zhang’s (2023) findings on the culturally mediated interpretation of digital literacy tools, where prior educational experiences influence trust in AI, were consistent with this kind of confusion. Confusion was exacerbated by AI “hallucinations” and technical terms.

This theme also demonstrates an authority conflict, as students tended to trust human teachers more than AI recommendations. According to Bryman (2016), cultural norms have a big impact on how people perceive authority in educational settings. In post-Soviet countries like Uzbekistan, teacher-centered customs encourage respect for human teachers. Inconsistencies between AI output and human instruction can erode learner trust, as noted by Sun (2024). As a result, learners encounter epistemic uncertainty when AI feedback conflicts with teacher advice.

The distrust is made worse by hallucinations or false AI recommendations. The observation made by participant 6, “Sometimes AI gives strange suggestions; I do not feel sure,” highlights the limitations of AI tools and the necessity of contextual validation. These results imply that although AI can improve writing productivity, its incorporation must take into consideration students’ dependence on instructor authority and offer ways to reconcile contradictory feedback.

### **Integration with Existing Literature**

In general, the three themes closely align with current research. Theme 1 is consistent with Han and Li’s (2024) findings about AI’s role in boosting confidence and supports the affective filter theory (Lee, 2024). While Sun (2024) and Alghasab et al. (2025) highlight confusion resulting from AI’s technical language and inconsistencies, Theme 2 is consistent with Bryman’s (2016) discussions of authority and trust in educational contexts. Theme 3 supports Ke Yang’s (2022) theories on autonomy by showing how teacher scaffolding, when combined with AI feedback, improves learners’ independence. Additionally, as Zhang (2023) points out in relation to digital literacy shaped by cultural context, the study adds a localized perspective by demonstrating how post-Soviet educational culture influences both dependency and authority perceptions.

### **TESOL Implications**

The discussion highlights several practical TESOL implications. Firstly, AI can be used strategically to support iterative writing techniques and lessen anxiety. Teachers must, however, offer scaffolding, define technical terms, and assist students in analysing contradicting feedback. Secondly, to avoid becoming overly dependent on AI tools, it is crucial to promote digital literacy and metacognitive abilities. Finally, when incorporating AI into post-soviet educational systems, where authority conflicts may affect students' trust and engagement, it is crucial to comprehend the cultural context.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The descriptive study set out to find out how adult EFL learners in Uzbekistan view and use AI-based feedback tools to enhance their writing abilities. The study examined emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to AI feedback through semi-structured interviews with six adult learners, offering a localized understanding of technology - assisted writing in a post - Soviet, teacher - centered educational setting.

### Key Findings

The study produced a number of significant findings. First, by offering quick feedback, error correction, and chances for iterative drafting, AI tools greatly boosted learners's confidence. In line with the affective filter theory ( Lee, 2024) on AI- assisted confidence- building, participants consistently reported that using AI decreased anxiety related to grammar and structure.

Second, AI feedback led to a conflict between autonomy and dependence by causing both confusion and reliance. Although students benefited from the effectiveness of AI recommendations, many acknowledged that they followed them without fully comprehending them, which may indicate over-reliance. In line with Sun's (2024) observations on technical language barriers and Bryman's ( 2016) discussion of authority in post-Soviet educational contexts, conflicts between teacher guidance and AI output also resulted in epistemic uncertainty and mistrust.

Third, when teachers provided scaffolding, learner autonomy developed. Participants' need for clarification on complicated suggestions demonstrated that while AI promoted independent revision and more thorough drafting practices, complete autonomy was dependent on educator support. This result is consistent with Ke Yang's (2022) notion that technology can improve self-regulation only when students are assisted in analyzing feedback.

### Final Summary

In conclusion, AI- based feedback tools are seen by adult EFL learners in Uzbekistan as useful but complicated tools. They encounter uncertainty and disputes over authority, but they also have increased self- assurance, conditional autonomy, and some dependence. The study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive integration, AI literacy, and teacher scaffolding in order to optimize the pedagogical value of AI tools.

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