Free Writing and ChatGPT to Enhance 11th-Grade Idea Development in Letter Writing

https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i4.1154

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A B S T R A C T

This quantitative study investigated the impact of ChatGPT on idea development in letter writing among seven 11th-grade students at SMA NAM IBS over six weeks. Using a single-group pre-test-post-test design, five assessments were conducted: a pre-test, three ChatGPT-assisted exercises, and a post-test. The assessments were scored based on depth of ideas, coherence and flow, and creativity and originality. Descriptive statistics showed an increase in mean scores from pre-test ($M = 78.43$) to post-test ($M = 86.00$), indicating improvement. However, repeated measures ANOVA showed no significant difference ($F(4, 24) = 1.43$, $p > 0.05$). This may have been due to small sample size, non-normal data, sphericity violations, and high within-subject variability. Despite the lack of statistical significance, the upward trend suggested potential benefits of ChatGPT. Further research with larger samples, improved rubrics, and adjusted statistical methods was suggested to validate ChatGPT's effectiveness in enhancing idea development.

Keywords: *ChatGPT, Free Writing, Idea Development, Letter Writing*

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a foundational skill in English language learning that becomes increasingly essential at the senior high school level, especially in Grade 11 where students are expected to demonstrate higher-order thinking, genre awareness, and coherent written expression. In the Indonesian EFL context, according to Aini et al. (2023), 11th-grade students often struggle with written communication tasks such as letter writing, which demand not only linguistic accuracy but also well-developed ideas and structured organization. These challenges are caused by limited vocabulary, anxiety, and a lack of confidence in expressing personal thoughts—factors that frequently result in underdeveloped or repetitive writing.

According to Handayani et al. (2022) One of the primary struggle's students' faces is idea generation. Many students find it difficult to begin writing, leading to incomplete or repetitive content. Additionally, Kurniati & Aliyah Alkhairaat Biromaru, (2023) explained that confusion with letter structures results in disorganized writing, where students fail to distinguish between the conventions of formal and informal letters. Another major challenge is limited vocabulary, which restricts students' ability to convey their thoughts clearly and appropriately. Furthermore, low confidence levels in writing prevent students from expressing themselves freely, as they fear making mistakes (Maulizan et al., 2024). These challenges hinder students from developing strong letter-writing skills, despite receiving formal instruction in the classroom.

The significance of developing strong writing skills in Grade 11 cannot be overstated. At this level, students begin preparing for national examinations, academic portfolios, and future workplace or university communication. Letter writing, particularly formal and informal letters, remains a key genre in the school curriculum, requiring learners to synthesize

structure, tone, and content purposefully (Nurhasanah & Huriyah, 2019). However, traditional instruction often focuses on grammar and format, with less emphasis on idea development or fluency.

To address common difficulties in student writing, free writing has been introduced as a method to help learners develop fluency, generate ideas, and build confidence. According to Meisani, (2022) free writing is an exercise where students write continuously for a set period without worrying about grammar, structure, or correctness. This process allows them to overcome hesitation and develop their thoughts more naturally.

However, traditional free writing exercises often fall short in guiding students to organize their ideas into structured formats such as letters or essays. This is where Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, particularly ChatGPT, can play a supportive role in writing development. According to Vita Losi et al. (2024), ChatGPT assists students in brainstorming ideas, refining content, expanding vocabulary, and providing real-time feedback on grammar and coherence.

In response to these limitations, emerging technologies such as ChatGPT offer new pedagogical possibilities. ChatGPT provides real-time assistance in generating, organizing, and elaborating ideas, which can serve as cognitive scaffolding for learners facing difficulty in initiating and sustaining writing. Recent studies have suggested that AI tools can support pre-writing processes, reduce writing anxiety, and enhance students' confidence and autonomy. Despite these potentials, research on the integration of ChatGPT in the specific context of EFL letter writing, especially among Indonesian high school students, remains limited.

Recent studies highlighted how integrating advanced Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools like Google Gemini can significantly enhance students' writing abilities, particularly in terms of vocabulary and stylistic development. Prasodjo et al. (2025) found that exposure to AI-driven feedback led to measurable improvements in the use of lexical collocations among English Language Teaching (ELT) students. Their research demonstrated that continuous interaction with AI not only increased the students' vocabulary richness but also promoted more natural and fluent writing. This finding supports the broader argument that technology-assisted learning, particularly through personalized and context-aware feedback, can effectively bridge gaps in traditional language instruction methods and foster more autonomous and confident student writers. In line with this, highlighting ChatGPT's value not just in surface-level corrections, but also in fostering idea development and creative thinking during the writing process. For instance, Alzubi et al. (2025) found that AI tools like ChatGPT support students' creativity and help generate initial ideas in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Similarly, Patchen, (2024) emphasized how ChatGPT can assist learners in crafting arguments and thinking through complex ideas, which is essential for critical academic writing.

Jin et al. (2024) reported that ChatGPT effectively improves writing efficiency and facilitates idea generation across educational levels. In the context of proposal writing, Educazione et al. (2024) noted that students leveraged ChatGPT to overcome initial writing blocks and articulate key concepts. Mahendra, (2024) also observed that ChatGPT aids in expression of ideas, especially in complex tasks like thesis writing. Furthermore, Bani Amer et al. (2025) demonstrated that ChatGPT not only accelerates idea formulation but also motivates learners to experiment with new writing strategies.

In addition to supporting idea generation, ChatGPT significantly contributes to grammar accuracy and structural clarity. (Pantelejeva, 2024) found that ChatGPT improved sentence structure and grammatical precision in academic writing, especially among medical students. Soelistiyowati et al. (2024) confirmed that ChatGPT aids learners in organizing content more cohesively while correcting syntactical and structural errors. Yasmar, (2023) emphasized that ChatGPT offers effective scaffolding for paragraph development and sentence arrangement, making it valuable for guiding coherent academic texts.

Furthermore, Dinh, (2025) reported that undergraduate students perceived significant improvements in grammar usage and error detection when using ChatGPT for academic writing practice. Likewise, Rathakrishnan, (2025) highlighted that ESL learners improved their

grammatical accuracy and structural coherence through ChatGPT-assisted revisions, which also enhanced their overall writing confidence.

ChatGPT-assisted free writing has been proposed as a potential solution, as AI can provide instant feedback, assist in brainstorming, and improve coherence. However, the integration of ChatGPT into Grade 11 writing instruction in Batam, Indonesia, presents both opportunities and challenges that require targeted research. While AI has been found to enhance idea development, its effectiveness across different writing genres remains underexplored. Polakova & Ivenz, (2024) highlights that ChatGPT significantly improves ESL students' writing skills through formative feedback, yet there is a lack of research on how it supports specific genres such as argumentative and narrative writing. Since letter writing requires a balance between structured format and personalized expression, it is essential to investigate whether ChatGPT's assistance fosters the necessary skills for effective communication in formal and informal letters.

Preliminary observations at SMA NAM IBS indicate that many 11th-grade students struggle with letter writing, despite receiving formal instruction. Teachers have noted that students often hesitate to begin writing, struggle to expand their ideas, and make structural and grammatical errors. Many lack confidence in expressing their thoughts, leading to passive writing and reluctance to engage in writing tasks.

These difficulties are particularly evident in four key areas: idea generation, letter structure, vocabulary use, and writing confidence. Many students experience writer's block, making it difficult to initiate and develop ideas, leading to incomplete or repetitive content. They also confuse formal and informal letter formats, affecting coherence and organization. Additionally, limited vocabulary hinders clarity and tone, while low writing confidence discourages students from expressing ideas freely.

Traditional instruction often prioritizes grammar and structure over fluency and creativity, making students hesitant to experiment with language. One possible solution is ChatGPT-assisted free writing, which can support students in brainstorming, improving coherence, and expanding vocabulary. By providing instant feedback and structured guidance, ChatGPT has the potential to help students develop fluency and confidence in letter writing.

However, research on AI-assisted free writing in high school letter writing instruction remains limited. Vita Losi et al. (2024) & Viantika & Dangin, (2024), Explained most existing studies on AI in education focus on general writing improvement, such as essay writing, summarization, or content generation, rather than its specific impact on structured writing tasks like formal and informal letter composition. Furthermore, Eragamreddy, (2024) & Maphoto et al. (2024) explained that only few studies have explored the role of AI in fostering writing fluency and confidence among high school students, particularly in settings where writing anxiety is prevalent. Additionally, the researcher said that there is no prior research on how AI-powered writing tools can be effectively integrated into letter writing instruction at SMA NAM IBS or similar boarding school environments, where students follow structured learning schedules and may have limited access to external writing support. Since boarding school students often rely on independent learning, understanding how AI can serve as a writing aid within this specific academic context is essential.

To address these gaps, this study seeks to answer the following question: 1. "How does ChatGPT-assisted free writing impact the letter writing skills of 11th-grade students at SMA NAM IBS, particularly in idea development?"

This study examines the impact of ChatGPT-assisted free writing on students' letter writing skills by testing the following hypotheses. The null hypothesis (H_0) states that ChatGPT-assisted free writing does not significantly improve students' ability to develop ideas. In contrast, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) suggests that ChatGPT-assisted free writing significantly improve students' ability to develop ideas.

Based on preliminary observations at SMA NAM IBS, many 11th-grade students face significant challenges in letter writing despite receiving formal instruction. Teachers have noted that students often struggle with idea generation, lack clarity in structuring formal and

informal letters, have limited vocabulary, and exhibit low confidence in writing. These difficulties result in hesitation, repetitive content, and structural inconsistencies, ultimately affecting the overall quality of their written communication. Traditional instruction in letter writing emphasizes grammar and structure but often overlooks fluency and creativity, making students reluctant to experiment with language.

In today's digital age, writing remains a crucial skill for effective communication, particularly in English language learning. However, many high school students still struggle with organizing their ideas and expressing themselves clearly in written form. By integrating technology into writing instruction, this study aims to foster greater student engagement, creativity, and confidence in composing personal and formal letters.

Letter Writing in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Letter writing continues to serve as a crucial genre in English Language Teaching (ELT), especially for EFL learners. Raheem & Ghafar, (2024) conducted a study on Iraqi EFL learners' letter writing and discovered that students struggled predominantly with punctuation, spelling, and textual cohesion. Through guided instruction and contextualized writing tasks, learners demonstrated significant improvement in constructing coherent and error-reduced texts. The authors concluded that personalized and scaffolded letter-writing activities enhance not just language mechanics but also confidence in written expression.

Expanding on this, Farneste & Pašinska, (2019) examined the development of peer corrective feedback skills specifically in business letter writing among EFL students. Their research revealed that when learners were trained to give and receive feedback on business correspondence, they not only improved their genre-specific linguistic features (such as tone and format) but also became more autonomous writers. The authors suggest that peer-led revision fosters metalinguistic awareness essential for professional writing.

Further investigating pragmatic dimensions of letter writing, Zhilan et al., (2022) explored Chinese EFL undergraduates' pragmatic competence in English letter writing. Their findings highlighted that while many learners struggled with aspects such as vocabulary choice, grammar, syntax, organization, and mechanics, gender and faculty background significantly influenced performance. Female students and those from social sciences faculties exhibited stronger pragmatic competence compared to their counterparts. The authors emphasized that scaffolded strategies such as the process approach, modeled writing, and revision-focused instruction could enhance learners' ability to produce contextually appropriate and linguistically accurate letters.

Complementing this perspective, Nguyen & Pham, (2023) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs about students' practices of peer correction in letter writing. Their study revealed that teachers widely believe in the efficacy of peer feedback, especially at the post-writing stage, emphasizing corrections in mechanics, vocabulary, and organization. Structured peer correction was found to cultivate critical awareness and collaborative skills, thereby improving students' writing quality and autonomy.

Finally, recognizing the impact of digital tools on letter writing skills, Ferawati et al., (2022) explored the use of Padlet in enhancing personal letter writing among Indonesian vocational students. Their classroom action research demonstrated that integrating Padlet into online instruction during the pandemic significantly boosted students' engagement, content organization, and language accuracy. The project-based learning model adopted in conjunction with digital platforms proved effective in overcoming the challenges of remote learning and fostering a more interactive, learner-centered writing process.

Additionally, Prasodjo et al. (2021) examined the alignment of a Business English (BE) curriculum with workplace communication demands at a private university in Indonesia. Their study, based on working students' perceptions, revealed that while the BE course moderately supported students' writing and speaking skills, more practice-oriented tasks such as peer feedback, case studies, and context-specific writing were needed. Although many students used English at work, issues such as low confidence in speaking and formal writing remained. This highlights the importance of integrating scaffolded and workplace-relevant letter-writing tasks in EFL instruction to bridge academic learning with real-world application.

Together, these studies illustrate the evolving landscape of letter writing in ELT, where traditional writing mechanics intertwine with pragmatic awareness, collaborative feedback, and digital innovation to support learners' holistic development in written communication.

ChatGPT and Writing Skills in EFL Contexts

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into language instruction, particularly through tools like ChatGPT, has revolutionized how students develop their writing skills. ChatGPT, built upon large language models, offers real-time assistance for grammar, vocabulary expansion, sentence restructuring, and idea exploration—providing a form of digital scaffolding that supports both the mechanical and cognitive aspects of writing (Swaroopa, 2025).

In a study by Rathakrishnan, (2025), ESL students who used ChatGPT to assist with academic writing tasks showed marked improvements in sentence structure, paragraph development, and overall clarity. The AI tool also contributed to learners' increased confidence, allowing them to revise their work with autonomy and precision. Likewise, Mammadova, (2024) found that ChatGPT's feedback on grammar and sentence coherence supports learners in identifying and correcting errors in real time. Importantly, the tool helped students internalize grammar rules through iterative feedback rather than rote correction.

Sharma et al. (2025) offer further evidence that students using AI-supported platforms outperformed peers in traditional writing instruction models. Learners demonstrated stronger organization, cohesion, and syntactic control, indicating that ChatGPT supports not just surface-level revision but deeper textual awareness.

Building on these findings, Polakova & Ivenz, (2024) investigated the impact of ChatGPT feedback on EFL students' writing development through a mixed-methods quasi-experimental study. Their results demonstrated significant improvements in conciseness, grammar, use of linking words, and the inclusion of key information following iterative interactions with ChatGPT. Furthermore, qualitative interviews revealed students' positive perceptions, noting the tool's helpfulness in increasing their self-efficacy and detailed understanding of writing structures.

Adding another layer, Song & Song, (2023) assessed the efficacy of ChatGPT in enhancing academic writing skills and motivation among Chinese EFL learners. Their mixed-methods study found that students who engaged in AI-assisted writing activities showed not only superior proficiency in organization, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary compared to a control group but also reported heightened motivation and engagement. Nevertheless, students also voiced concerns about potential over-reliance on AI and the occasional contextual inaccuracy of feedback, suggesting that critical engagement with AI-generated suggestions remains essential.

Overall, these studies underscore that ChatGPT can play a transformative role in the EFL writing classroom by offering immediate, personalized, and iterative feedback that fosters both linguistic accuracy and higher-order textual skills. However, they also highlight the importance of integrating AI thoughtfully, combining its strengths with human critical thinking to achieve sustainable improvements in learners' writing competence and confidence.

Idea Generation in Writing Instruction (EFL Context)

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classrooms, idea generation is often the most cognitively demanding phase for learners. Many students report struggling to initiate their writing due to topic unfamiliarity, lexical limitations, or performance anxiety. Recently, AI tools like ChatGPT have emerged as transformative aids for helping students overcome these pre-writing barriers. These tools enable learners to explore ideas, receive instant linguistic support, and enhance their cognitive readiness before drafting (Tran, 2025).

In a comparative study, Herda et al. (2024) examined EFL learners in the Philippines and Indonesia, focusing on how ChatGPT facilitates academic writing. The results revealed that ChatGPT is especially effective in the ideation phase, providing targeted prompts and vocabulary scaffolding that empower students to initiate and develop ideas independently. This capability was noted to increase motivation and reduce writing apprehension, particularly for lower-proficiency learners.

Building on these findings, Nguyen et al., (2024) analyzed students' perceptions of using ChatGPT to write argumentative essays. A large proportion of respondents reported that ChatGPT was most helpful during the idea generation stage, describing it as a "thinking partner" that not only proposed ideas but also clarified the logical connection between points. The study supports the use of ChatGPT not merely as a writing assistant, but as a cognitive tool for ideational development in EFL writing.

Complementing AI-based approaches, Chen & Li, (2024) explored the role of music in stimulating EFL learners' pre-writing idea generation. Their study revealed that instrumental and pop music had differing impacts depending on gender, with female students benefiting most from instrumental music, while male students responded better to pop music. The findings suggest that tailored musical environments can enhance idea generation, particularly during the early stages of writing.

Extending the conversation toward natural language generation tools, Woo et al., (2023) examined how EFL students interact with NLG tools like ChatGPT for creative writing. Their thematic analysis revealed that while students valued the quantity and diversity of ideas generated, they were also selective and critical, often preferring tools that produced a greater number of relevant ideas. Importantly, students treated ChatGPT as a co-creator during the idea generation phase, enhancing their creative agency and narrative development.

Moreover, Chen, (2022) emphasized the critical role of writing strategy instruction in enhancing EFL learners' ideational fluency. Her study found that process-based strategy training, including brainstorming and clustering techniques, significantly improved students' ability to develop and organize ideas coherently. The results indicate that explicit instruction on idea-generation strategies not only boosts writing quality but also fosters self-regulation and strategic awareness.

In a targeted Vietnamese EFL context, Nguyen et al. (2024) conducted a quasi-experimental study comparing the effectiveness of group discussion and freewriting as idea-generation strategies. Both methods were found to improve writing content and organization, with group discussions producing slightly better results in content development. Additionally, both strategies positively impacted students' writing self-efficacy, particularly in ideation and self-regulation.

Together, these studies underscore the multidimensional nature of idea generation in EFL writing, highlighting that effective pre-writing support—whether through AI tools, music, or strategic instruction—can significantly enhance students' cognitive engagement, confidence, and writing outcomes.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, experimental, single-group pre-test–post-test design to examine the effect of ChatGPT-assisted free writing on students' ability to develop ideas in letter writing. This design was selected to observe within-subject changes over time without the inclusion of a control group, due to the small sample size and institutional constraints. While lacking comparative controls, the repeated measurement structure enabled detailed tracking of individual and group progress across multiple writing sessions.

The study involved a pre-test to establish baseline performance, followed by three ChatGPT-assisted free writing exercises, and concluded with a post-test to measure changes in idea development. The quantitative approach utilized repeated measures ANOVA to analyse scores from five assessments (pre-test, Exercise 1, Exercise 2, Exercise 3, and post-test) for seven students, enabling statistical evaluation of the intervention's effect.

Participants

The participants were seven 11th-grade students enrolled in an English course at SMA NAM IBS, a private boarding school in Batam, Indonesia. These students were selected through convenience sampling based on their consistent class attendance, availability during the six-week study period, and voluntary consent. All participants were classified as A1-level learners under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), as

determined by teacher-assessed placement criteria. The sample consisted of four male and three female students, aged between 16 and 17. Regarding to participation, written parental consent was obtained in accordance with ethical research guidelines set by the school and the researchers' home institution.

Instruments

To assess idea development, students were asked to compose informal letter writing tasks during the pre-test, three intervention exercises, and the post-test. All writing samples were evaluated using a standardized analytic scoring rubric adapted from widely used EFL writing assessment frameworks and validated through expert judgment and pilot testing. Each writing sample could earn a maximum total score of 15. The rubric was reviewed by two ELT experts and revised based on their feedback to ensure construct validity and usability.

Criteria	1 (Poor)	2 (Needs Improvement)	3 (Satisfactory)	4 (Good)	5 (Excellent)
Depth of Ideas	No elaboration, unclear content	Minimal explanation or underdeveloped points	Basic development, but lacks depth	Well-elaborated ideas with clear supporting details	Fully developed and well-supported ideas
Coherence & Flow	No logical order, ideas are scattered	Some order but transitions are weak	Ideas are mostly organized with minor gaps	Well-structured ideas with good transitions	Smooth, logical flow with excellent transitions
Creativity & Originality	Generic or AI-rewritten content	Some originality but limited depth	Mix of personal and common ideas	Creative and personalized content	Highly original, engaging, and well-personalized ideas

Procedures

The intervention was conducted over six weeks. In Week 1, participants completed a pre-test writing task to establish their baseline idea development skills. In Weeks 2–4, students participated in weekly ChatGPT-assisted free writing exercises in a computer lab setting, where they were instructed to interact with ChatGPT (chat.openai.com) as a brainstorming partner. Students were given open-ended prompts for personal or informal letters and guided to ask ChatGPT for idea suggestions, vocabulary support, or organizational advice. Regarding to the intervention, they received a short orientation on how to use ChatGPT responsibly and critically.

In each writing session, students were given 40 minutes to complete their draft, including ChatGPT interactions. All writing was done under teacher supervision to ensure consistency and prevent off-task use of the tool. In Week 6, participants completed a post-test task under the same conditions as the pre-test, without ChatGPT assistance.

Participants weekly portfolios including their writing drafts, ChatGPT chat transcripts, and brief reflective logs on their idea development process were collected. These portfolios were analysed qualitatively to complement the quantitative findings.

To ensure scoring consistency, three trained raters independently assessed all writing samples using the analytic rubric. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a strong agreement score of $\kappa = 0.81$, indicating reliable and consistent rubric application across samples.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation) and repeated measures ANOVA to identify significant changes in idea development scores across the five assessment points (pre-test, three exercises, and post-test). Sphericity assumptions were tested using Mauchly's test, and Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were applied as needed. Post hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment were conducted to identify specific differences. Partial eta-squared (η^2) was used to determine effect size.

Qualitative data from student portfolios were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of progress in idea generation, coherence, and creativity. Common themes, reflections, and ChatGPT-assisted feedback were reviewed to support interpretation of the quantitative results and to offer pedagogical insights.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. The discussion integrates the quantitative results with existing literature to examine whether the findings support or contradict previous studies.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison

Descriptive statistics showed an increase in mean scores from the pre-test (M = 78.43) to the post-test (M = 86.00), suggesting improvement in students' idea development in letter writing. This trend, although not statistically significant ($F(4, 24) = 1.43$, $p > 0.05$), supports the notion that ChatGPT-assisted free writing may contribute to better idea generation. This aligns with the findings of Rathakrishnan, (2025) and Polakova & Ivenz, (2024), who observed improvements in grammar and content development when students used AI writing tools.

The 7.57-point increase from pre-test to post-test was not statistically significant, it holds practical relevance in the context of EFL writing instruction. On a 45-point scale, this gain represents a 16.8% improvement, indicating a substantial development in students' ability to generate, elaborate, and organize ideas. From a pedagogical standpoint, such a gain over six weeks reflects enhanced cognitive fluency, more coherent expression, and increased writing confidence, as also supported by student portfolios and reflections. In instructional settings where students often struggle with writing fluency and idea development, these changes demonstrate the potential of ChatGPT-assisted free writing as a supportive scaffold for improving expressive complexity and content richness, even in a short-term intervention.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Results

Descriptive statistic	Pre test	Exercise 1	Exercise 2	Exercise 3	Post test
Mean	78.43	78.43	80.29	81.14	86.00
Median	80	80	80	80	87
Mode	80	80	80	80	80,87
Standard Deviation	4.76	4.76	4.99	4.34	5.83
Maximum	87	87	87	87	94
Minimum	74	74	74	74	80
Range	13	13	13	13	14

Support from Literature: ChatGPT and Idea Development

Despite the non-significant statistical result, the upward trend in scores resonates with Nguyen et al. (2024), who emphasized that ChatGPT acts as a "thinking partner" during the idea generation process. Students in this study also benefited from brainstorming support, consistent with the findings of Woo et al. (2023), who noted that AI tools help expand students' creative thinking and initial content structuring.

Moreover, Herda et al. (2024) found that ChatGPT is particularly effective during the ideation phase for EFL learners, which may explain the observed improvement between pre- and post-tests in this study. Although not definitive due to the small sample size (n=7), the pattern reflects ChatGPT's potential in reducing students' writing anxiety and helping them initiate and develop ideas more effectively, as also discussed by Maulizan et al., (2024)

Table 2. Repeated Measures ANOVA Table

Source	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	p-value
Assessment (within)	270.43	4	67.61	1.43	> 0.05
Error (within)	1132.49	24	47.19		
Between - Subjects	135.37	6			
Total	1538.29	34			

Structure and Confidence in Writing

The study also observed gradual improvement across the three writing exercises. Students progressed in organizing ideas and demonstrating creativity—findings that align with Pantelejeva, (2024) and Soelistiyowati et al. (2024), who argue that ChatGPT enhances not only grammatical precision but also content cohesion. Additionally, the increasing post-test performance may indicate a boost in students' confidence, as also reported by Dinh, (2025) and Rathakrishnan, (2025), where ESL learners demonstrated higher self-assurance when revising and generating ideas with ChatGPT's help.

Contrasting Views and Limitations

Nevertheless, the findings diverge from some studies such as Song & Song, (2023), which reported statistically significant improvements using ChatGPT. The lack of significance in this study may be attributed to methodological limitations like the small sample size, high within-subject variability, and possible measurement insensitivity. In contrast to Swaroopa, (2025) who claimed ChatGPT's consistent effectiveness, the current study suggests that its benefits may depend heavily on the context, student familiarity with the tool, and duration of exposure.

Pedagogical Implications and Future Directions

The findings underscore the potential of integrating ChatGPT into EFL writing instruction, particularly for idea generation and reducing writing anxiety. However, for more conclusive results, future studies should employ larger sample sizes, longer intervention periods, and consider using triangulated data (quantitative + qualitative). Additionally, incorporating strategies suggested by Chen, (2022), such as writing strategy instruction, may further boost the impact of ChatGPT on student writing.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the impact of ChatGPT-assisted free writing on idea development in letter writing among 11th-grade EFL students. Over six weeks, students completed five writing assessments, including a pre-test, three ChatGPT-supported exercises, and a post-test. Although the repeated measures ANOVA did not reveal statistically significant differences, the descriptive data indicated a 7.57-point increase in students' overall scores. This gain, supported by portfolio analysis and student reflections, suggests that ChatGPT contributed to critical components of effective letter writing, those are idea generation, coherence, and creativity. The practical correlation of these findings lies in the observable shift in students' writing behaviour. Students gradually developed greater fluency in expressing their thoughts, showed more confidence in elaborating ideas, and demonstrated better structural organization across writing tasks. From a pedagogical perspective, this study underscores the potential of ChatGPT as a low-pressure, real-time scaffolding tool to assist students in overcoming writer's anxiety in writing using English text, exploring new content directions, and deepening their engagement with writing tasks. EFL teachers are encouraged to integrate ChatGPT into pre-writing activities, such as free writing or guided brainstorming, especially when teaching structured genres like formal and informal letters. Rather than viewing AI as a replacement for instruction, educators can frame it as a supplement that supports students' cognitive development and fosters writing autonomy. These findings call for a more intentional integration of AI tools like ChatGPT into the high school writing curriculum. This includes not only providing access to AI platforms but also embedding digital literacy components that teach students how to use AI tools wisely, responsibly, critically, and ethically. By aligning technological tools with pedagogical goals, future curricula can better support students' ability to generate, organize, and express idea. Further research with larger samples and extended timelines is needed, this study provides foundational evidence that ChatGPT-assisted free writing holds promise for enhancing idea development in letter writing instruction. With thoughtful integration, AI tools like ChatGPT can become meaningful components of 21st-century EFL classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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