



BEYOND THE BOT: LEVERAGING GENERATIVE AI AS A WRITING MENTOR FOR UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

For many students in Uzbekistan, the transition from local thought patterns to English academic writing is a complex process. It is often a struggle to avoid literal translations and "Uzlish" structures. This paper discusses how generative AI, specifically ChatGPT and Gemini, can be integrated into the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for critical thinking. Instead of simply generating essays, we examine a more practical "tutor-mode" approach. This involves using AI to identify repetitive errors and suggest contextual synonyms that fit the specific tone of the writing. By analyzing the student-AI interaction, the study suggests that these tools can bridge the gap in environments where personalized feedback from instructors is limited. Ultimately, the goal is to show that when used as a reflective mentor, AI helps learners develop a more natural and sophisticated writing style without compromising academic integrity.

Introduction

In the corridors of many Uzbek universities, the rise of generative AI like ChatGPT and Gemini was initially met with a wave of anxiety. Professors feared a "plagiarism pandemic," while students saw a shortcut to finishing their assignments. However, as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) student myself, I believe this technology represents something far more significant than a mere cheating tool. It is a response to a long-standing problem in our education system: the massive feedback gap in writing classes.

For an Uzbek learner, the journey to becoming a proficient English writer is steep. Our native language belongs to the Turkic family, meaning our sentence structures, logic, and even the way we express thoughts are fundamentally different from Indo-European English patterns. When we write, we often produce "shadow translations"—English sentences that follow Uzbek grammar. In a typical classroom with thirty students and one instructor, getting detailed, line-

by-line feedback on these structural errors is a luxury most cannot afford. This is precisely where generative AI steps in, not as a replacement for the teacher, but as a digital mirror.

This paper does not argue for the blind use of AI. Instead, it explores how localized integration of ChatGPT can help students overcome "L1 interference" (the influence of the native language). We will look at how AI can be a "tutor" that explains why a certain preposition is wrong or how a paragraph can be restructured to sound more academic. The focus here is on the process, not the product. By shifting the perspective from "submitting AI-generated work" to "using AI for iterative improvement," we can turn these controversial bots into the most effective writing mentors available to the modern Uzbek student.

For an Uzbek learner, the journey to becoming a proficient English writer is steep. Our native language belongs to the Turkic family, meaning our sentence structures, logic, and even the way we express thoughts are fundamentally different from Indo-European English patterns. In my daily observations as a student at the Uzbekistan State University of World Languages (UzSWLU), I have seen how this structural gap often leads to a plateau in writing skills, even among dedicated language learners. When we write, we often produce 'shadow translations'—English sentences that follow Uzbek grammar. In a typical classroom setting at UzSWLU, where one instructor often manages a large group of talented but linguistically diverse students, getting detailed, line-by-line feedback on these structural errors is a luxury most cannot afford. This is precisely where generative AI steps in, not as a replacement for our professors, but as a digital mirror that reflects our progress in real-time.

Results and Discussion: The Shift from Output to Process

The observation of students using AI as a mentor reveals a fascinating trend: the quality of the final essay is often less important than the "negotiation" that happens during the writing process. In our analysis, we noticed that students who engaged in a dialogue with Gemini or ChatGPT started to recognize their own linguistic rurics. For instance, the common Uzbek habit of omitting the "to be" verb in the present continuous tense (e.g., "*He working*") was flagged by the AI consistently. After three or four such interactions, students began to self-correct even before consulting the tool. This suggests that AI can effectively trigger a "noticing" phase in language acquisition, which is often difficult to achieve in crowded Uzbek classrooms.

However, the results weren't entirely perfect. A significant challenge we discussed was the "robotic tone" that often creeps into student work when they rely too heavily on AI suggestions. We found that while the grammar became flawless, the "human soul" of the writing—the unique cultural nuances that an Uzbek student brings to the table—was sometimes lost. Students often felt pressured to use words like "*furthermore*" or "*nevertheless*" simply because the AI suggested them, even if they didn't fully grasp the stylistic weight of those connectors.

The discussion here leads to a vital conclusion: the effectiveness of AI in an Uzbek EFL context is not about the technology itself, but about the student's AI literacy. Those who treated the bot as a critical friend showed a marked improvement in their independent writing ability. Conversely, those who viewed it as an "answer machine" saw their skills stagnate. This confirms that for the Uzbek audience, the teacher's role is shifting; we no longer need teachers to be walking dictionaries, but rather "AI-coaches" who teach us how to filter the digital noise.

Practical Implications: How to Co-exist with the Algorithm

The shift toward AI-assisted writing requires a fundamental rethink of our classroom dynamics. Based on the observations in this study, several practical steps can be taken to ensure that technology enhances, rather than erodes, the learning process in Uzbek institutions.

First, the focus of assessment must change. If we only grade the final essay, we are inviting students to cheat. Instead, educators should reward the "edit history" or the dialogue between the student and the AI. Seeing how a student challenged an AI's suggestion or how they simplified a robotic-sounding sentence is a much more accurate measure of their true

proficiency. This "process-based grading" turns the AI into a laboratory where mistakes are part of the learning curve, not a reason for a low grade.

Secondly, we need to address the "over-reliance" trap. To maintain their unique cultural voice, Uzbek students should be encouraged to write their first drafts entirely without digital help. Only once the raw, "Uzbek-flavored" English is on the paper should the AI be introduced as a polisher. This ensures that the heart of the message remains local, while the skin—the grammar and syntax—is refined for a global audience.

Finally, there is a dire need for "AI Literacy" workshops. Neither the students nor the teachers fully understand the biases of these models yet. AI often leans toward Western-centric idiomatic expressions that might feel alien to an Eastern context. Teaching students to say "*No, this sounds too formal*" or "*This doesn't capture my meaning*" is the ultimate goal of modern language education in the age of algorithms.

Conclusion: Empowering the Human Behind the Screen

The integration of generative AI into the Uzbek EFL landscape is no longer a futuristic debate; it is a current reality in every university library and dorm room. However, as this paper has argued, the true value of tools like ChatGPT lies not in their ability to generate text, but in their capacity to act as a linguistic mirror for the struggling learner. For the Uzbek student, AI bridges a gap that textbooks cannot: it provides immediate, contextual, and non-judgmental feedback on the complex transition from Turkic thought patterns to English academic structures.

We must move away from the binary view of AI as either a "miracle cure" or a "plagiarism machine." Our findings suggest that when AI is used as a mentor, it fosters a unique kind of "digital autonomy," allowing students to notice their own errors in real-time. Yet, the human element remains irreplaceable. The role of the instructor is now more critical than ever—not to police the use of technology, but to teach the art of "AI-assisted critical thinking."

Ultimately, the goal of using AI in the Uzbek classroom should be its own obsolescence. We use these tools to learn the rules, internalize the rhythm of the language, and eventually, find our own authentic voice that can stand solo on the global stage. The bot is merely the scaffolding; the building—the student's intellect—is what must remain standing

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