

Scaffold, Not Surrogate: Korean EFL Writers' Perceived Benefits and Concerns of ChatGPT

Jae-Yeon Heo¹, Ju-Youn Sim^{2*}

¹Lecturer, Institute of Liberal Education, Kangwon National University

²Professor, Department of General Studies, Hanshin University

한국 EFL 학습자들의 ChatGPT 활용 인식: 학습 발판으로서의 가능성 탐색

허재연¹, 심주연^{2*}

¹강원대학교 교양교육원 강사, ²한신대학교 평화교양대학 교수

Abstract The rapid emergence of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT has opened new possibilities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, yet research on their application in scriptwriting for oral presentations remains scarce. This study explored Korean EFL college students' perceptions of incorporating ChatGPT into a general English speaking course, focusing on both benefits and challenges. A qualitative design employed pre- and post-surveys, reflective journals, and interviews, following a three-stage writing process (drafting - AI-assisted revision - self-reflective revision). To analyze the data collected, inductive thematic analysis was used, following three coding process: pre-coding, open-coding, and coding to capture recurring patterns. Findings indicate that ChatGPT facilitated linguistic development and fostered positive affective outcomes including motivation, and reduced anxiety, while concerns emerged about over-reliance, reliability, and authorship ethics. The study highlights the importance of teacher-guided and ethical AI use in EFL contexts to enhance learner autonomy and competence. Despite limitations of a single context and self-reported data, findings suggest that thoughtful use of ChatGPT can effectively.

Key Words : Generative AI, ChatGPT, English writing utilizing AI-powered tool, Learner perceptions, Learner motivation

요약 생성형 인공지능과 같은 도구의 급속한 등장은 영어를 외국어로 배우는(EFL) 교육 분야에서 새로운 가능성을 열고 있다. 본 연구는 한국의 한 대학 교양영어 말하기 교과목에서 ChatGPT를 통합하여 활용한 학생들의 인식과 그에 따른 장단점을 탐색하였다. 연구는 질적 연구 설계를 바탕으로, 79명의 1학년 대학생을 대상으로 사전·사후 설문, 성찰저널, 심층 면담을 실시하였다. 연구 결과, ChatGPT는 문법, 어휘, 문맥의 흐름, 장르 적합성과 같은 언어적 측면을 향상시켰으며, 자신감과 동기 부여를 높이고 영어 쓰기 불안을 완화하는 등 정적 측면에도 긍정적인 영향을 미쳤다. 또한 AI와의 반복적 상호작용과 AI로부터 얻은 피드백을 바탕으로 한 성찰적 수정 과정은 학습자의 자율성과 주체성을 촉진하는 것으로 나타났다. 반면, AI에 대한 과도한 의존, 산출물의 신뢰성, 저작권 및 평가의 윤리적 문제에 대한 우려도 제기되었다. 이러한 결과는 교사의 지도와 제도적 윤리 기준을 기반으로 한 체계적이고 과정 중심의 AI 활용이 필요함을 시사한다. 단일 기관을 대상으로 한 연구와 자기보고식 자료에 의존했다는 한계에도 불구하고, 본 연구는 영어 쓰기 과정에서 ChatGPT의 신중한 사용이 EFL 환경에서 언어 능력과 학습자 자신감 향상에 효과적으로 기여할 수 있음을 보여준다.

주제어 : 생성형 인공지능, ChatGPT, 인공지능을 활용한 영어 글쓰기, ChatGPT 활용에 대한 학습자들의 인식, 학습자 동기부여

*교신저자 : 심주연(joan7475@hs.ac.kr)

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of generative AI-powered tools has attracted growing attention in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. In this context, recent advances in large language models (LLMs) highlight the importance of comparing ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude. While ChatGPT supports conversational practice and creative writing, Gemini excels in multimodal tasks—the ability to process multiple types of input simultaneously, such as text, images, audio, video, or graphs, and Claude provides nuanced reasoning for complex language activities, involving higher-order language skills such as logical structuring, debate, and analytical writing[27]. Among these tools, ChatGPT has emerged as one of the most widely adopted technologies, supporting language learners in diverse ways[2,7,37].

Existing literature has primarily examined the use of ChatGPT to support language skill development, particularly writing and speaking by generating ideas, providing instant feedback, and facilitating learner autonomy—with more than 40% of empirical studies addressing these areas[2,20]. However, its benefits in scriptwriting for oral presentations (e.g., vlog creation) remain significantly underresearched. This research gap is particularly salient in Asian EFL contexts, where learners often experience high levels of speaking anxiety. English scriptwriting can thus be regarded as writing practice for oral communication, an area that directly addresses many learners' communicative needs.

Integrating ChatGPT into scriptwriting tasks holds considerable pedagogical promise. Learners can improve oral fluency, receive immediate feedback on grammar and vocabulary, and enhance coherence and cohesion[4]. Beyond linguistic improvement, AI-assisted writing may also generate affective benefits, including increased autonomy and confidence, self-regulation, and reduced speaking anxiety[8,9,21]. Nevertheless,

potential drawbacks should not be overlooked, as overreliance on AI tools can undermine learners' critical thinking, creativity, and independent language production[2,13,26].

Within the Korean university context, recent research has begun to explore how students engage with generative AI tools[1,6]. For example, Dillon [29] examined prompt literacy training among Korean EFL learners, revealing how students strategically used ChatGPT through diverse learning strategies. Another study investigated Korean undergraduates' perceptions of ChatGPT in academic writing courses, uncovering nuanced attitudes toward its usefulness and limitations. These studies emphasize that context matters: in other words, students' engagement with AI, their confidence, and their ethical awareness vary according to educational context, proficiency levels, and cultural expectations.

Given these theoretical and contextual considerations, the present study examines the impact of incorporating ChatGPT into a general English (speaking) course at a Korean university on its benefits and concerns. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perceived benefits of integrating ChatGPT into English writing?
- 2) What are the perceived concerns and challenges associated with using ChatGPT in English writing?

2. Literature Review

This section examines how ChatGPT is integrated into university-level EFL writing, addressing both its educational benefits and pressing challenges with a focus on linguistic outcomes, affective impacts, and notable challenges within academic contexts.

2.1 Linguistic and Learning Outcomes

A substantial body of recent literature indicates that using ChatGPT within iterative, process-based writing frameworks can facilitate significant improvements in students' linguistic performance. Several studies have found that when learners cycle through drafting, AI-generated suggestions, peer or instructor feedback, and revision, the produced texts tend to show a reduction in grammatical errors, enhanced cohesion, and improved adherence to genre conventions [3,25,37]. Rather than relying on the model for single-step corrections, the greatest gains are observed in students who engage actively with alternatives provided by ChatGPT, analyzing and reasoning through them in order to add nuance and depth to their writing[17,19].

Collaborative activities, particularly those scaffolded by teacher feedback, help extend these benefits beyond mechanical accuracy, fostering skills in argument structure and genre awareness [19,33,35]. Moreover, empirical investigations and classroom-based evaluations point to ChatGPT's ability to act as an accessible and low-pressure support, sustaining writers' engagement and perseverance throughout revision cycles[13,27,34]. The literature further demonstrates that instructional methods requiring self-explanation and careful documentation of writing processes lead to improved attention to task, better goal setting, and heightened learner interest[11,15,35]. Enhancements have also been reported in collaborative planning and self-monitoring, particularly within group-based drafting environments[22].

2.2 Affective Impacts

Besides linguistic improvements, recent research highlights robust affective impacts associated with the structured use of ChatGPT. Multiple studies confirm a reduction in writing-related anxiety among undergraduates engaging with the tool in iterative drafting activities. Learners

report that the model provides a low-stakes environment to experiment with different ideas, alleviating concerns about errors and initial reluctance[22]. Research in higher education indicates that student engagement tends to increase, with the effect most salient in instructional contexts that emphasize reflection and explanation rather than passive acceptance of AI-generated outputs[35].

Motivational gains appear consistently, with ChatGPT's capacity to prompt idea generation and offer immediate formative feedback cited as reasons for greater sustained interest and the reduction of avoidance behaviors. Studies tracking social-emotional indicators have observed improvements in self-management skills and collaborative abilities, reflecting the tool's alignment with peer- and team-oriented composition tasks[18]. Additionally, as students recognize the usefulness of AI support in improving grammar, structure, and coherence, their self-efficacy increases. Research consistently shows that structured drafting routines promote higher revision willingness and a stronger sense of writing competence[11,21,25]. A number of accounts also highlight the emotional support afforded by the tool, with its nonjudgmental and always available feedback frequently mentioned as normalizing iteration and reducing isolation during individual drafting.

2.3 Risks and Challenges

Despite the benefits, researchers have raised important concerns about the risks accompanying the adoption of ChatGPT in academic writing. Chief among these is the threat of over-reliance: excessive dependence on automated feedback may reduce the distinctiveness of students' writing, dampen creativity, and undermine critical thinking [10,19,30,31,34]. Qualitative research has linked habitual use of AI-generated text with diminished originality and more superficial, less reflective revision strategies[28]. Concerns regarding academic integrity and authorship are increasingly salient. As generative

language models become commonplace, it is more challenging to distinguish between genuine student work and AI-produced content, complicating efforts to uphold ethical standards and prevent plagiarism[6,26]. Scholars have warned that product-centric assessment systems may inadvertently incentivize dishonest practices, whereas approaches emphasizing process, such as annotated drafts, revision notes, and transparent prompt logs, are more effective in fostering learner responsibility and authentic engagement with writing tasks[9,33].

3. Research Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach to explore Korean EFL university students' perceptions of integrating ChatGPT into English writing. The research employed students' reflective journals, pre- and- post survey questionnaires, and individual interview as primary data sources to examine both the benefits and concerns that emerged from AI-assisted English writing experiences. By analyzing data collected, this study sought to capture how generative AI tool assisted students' writing task in two ways: (i) what are the perceived benefits of integrating generative AI (ChatGPT) into English writing?: (ii) what are the perceived concerns and challenges associated with integrating generative AI (ChatGPT) into English writing?

3.1 Context

The course, Essential English (Speaking), was a compulsory module for first-year students across various majors, designed to develop English speaking and presentation skills. Students were required to give three presentations during the semester—individual, pair, and group—to enhance their oral proficiency. For the group presentation, students collaboratively created YouTube shorts or vlogs.

To support scriptwriting and spoken fluency, free version of ChatGPT-4 was purposefully integrated into the course. ChatGPT was selected over other AI tools such as Gemini and Claude due to its greater accessibility and familiarity, offering a more flexible free-tier model that allows continuous interaction within a five-hour window, whereas Gemini and Claude limit free usage to five and three prompts per day, respectively. Most students used the free version of ChatGPT-4 available on their tablets or mobile phones. After mid-term exam, the teacher-researcher provided instruction on how to effectively utilize ChatGPT for vlog scriptwriting, lexical development, and grammar correction. A few students also used ChatGPT to check pronunciation; however, the primary pedagogical goal in this course was not to achieve native-like pronunciation, but to enhance overall communicative competence in contextually appropriate ways. Consequently, most students focused on natural language use, grammar correction, fluency, coherence rather than pronunciation correction.

3.2 Participants

This study involved 79 first-year university students from various majors, including economics, statistics, public administration, liberal arts, and humanities. Participants varied in English proficiency and prior English learning experiences. According to pre-survey responses, most identified themselves between beginner and pre-intermediate levels. Of the total participants, eight students were selected for in-depth individual interviews to provide richer qualitative insights. Two sampling strategies were applied: (i) homogeneous sampling for the questionnaire and journal data, involving participants from a particular group relevant to the study[38]; and (ii) convenience sampling for the interview phase, based on participants' accessibility and willingness to participate[23].

3.3 Research Design and Procedures

A qualitative research design was adopted to explore students' perceptions of ChatGPT integration into English scriptwriting. Data were collected from three sources: pre- and post-survey questionnaires, reflective journals, and individual interviews to ensure data triangulation.

The research was conducted for a 16-week semester. During the first eight weeks, students followed the course textbook (Present Yourself 1, 2nd Ed.), completing two presentations (individual and pair). These activities helped students build basic speaking skills through communicative tasks such as self-introduction, introducing best friend, and describing favorite places, promoting both writing and speaking skills.

From week 9, the teacher-researcher introduced ChatGPT as a pedagogical tool and demonstrated effective prompting strategies for scriptwriting. Students were encouraged to follow a three-step writing process: (i) independent drafting – each student wrote an initial English script without AI assistance, though dictionary use was permitted; (ii) AI-supported revision: students prompted to request feedback on grammar, naturalness, and coherence and revised their drafts according to the feedback from ChatGPT; (iii) self-revision and reflection: students analyzed ChatGPT's feedback and revised their scripts to produce a final version.

This AI-student interaction model emphasized active engagement and metacognitive reflection, positioning ChatGPT not as a translation tool but as a scaffold for autonomous learning.

3.4 Data Collection

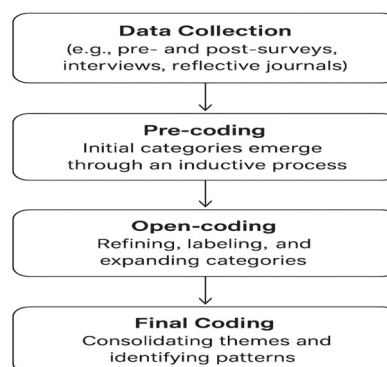
A pre-survey questionnaire was administered in week 2 to gather students' demographic information, English learning backgrounds, self-assessed proficiency, and course expectations. A post-survey questionnaire, adapted from Dillon[29], was conducted after the final project

to capture detailed insights into students' experiences of using ChatGPT for English script writing. It included both closed- and open-ended items focusing on the usefulness of ChatGPT's feedback, perceived learning benefits, and concerns.

Reflective journals were collected at the end of the semester as part of course evaluation. Students submitted journals via the Learning Management System (LMS) to encourage authentic expression.

After the final project, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with eight students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions. The interviews elicited positive and negative experiences of ChatGPT-assisted writing. As noted by Creswell [14], qualitative interviews provide access to participants' underlying emotions and beliefs often inaccessible through quantitative instruments. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Observation of facial expressions, tone, and affective reactions further enriched the interpretation of students' experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis



[Fig. 1] Inductive Coding Process

The researcher conducted a systematic qualitative content analysis of all reflective journals, supported by triangulation with survey and interview data. An inductive thematic analysis[23,32] was used to identify recurring patterns aligned with the research questions and followed three coding

systems: pre-coding, open-coding, and coding. This is illustrated in Fig. 1. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed cross-checking between researchers[36].

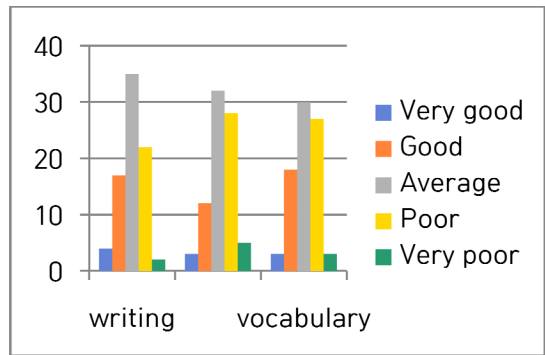
4. Findings and Discussion

This section explores the benefits students perceived of integrating ChatGPT in English writing based on the pre- and post-surveys, in-depth interviews, and reflective journal data. More specifically, three main factors identified through the inductive coding process in Figure 1 are examined and discussed as follows: (i) linguistic and learning development, (ii) affective outcomes (anxiety, motivation, writing self-confidence, perceived emotional support), and (iii) concerns and challenges. To ensure consistency and anonymity across data sources, each participant was assigned an identification code (e.g., S1, S2, S3). Data excerpts were labeled according to their source: interview data as INT-S1, reflective journal entries as RJ-S1, and post-survey responses as PS-S1.

4.1 Linguistic and Learning Development

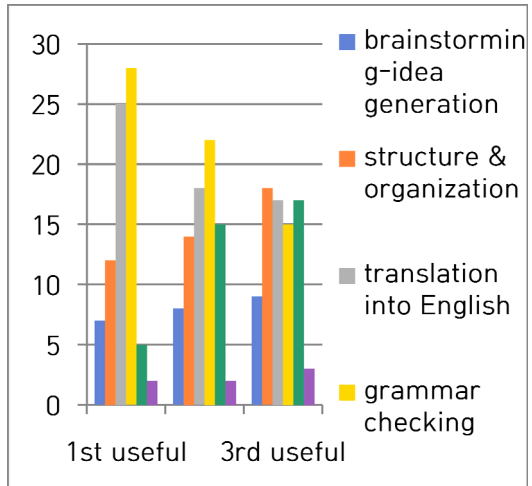
From the answers of pre-survey, most of the participant students self-evaluated themselves in the average and poor bands, with grammar showing the heaviest lower-tier concentration (poor + very poor = 41.3%) and writing the highest share of average (43.8%). The graph summarizes students' self-assessment survey of their English skills in writing, grammar, and vocabulary and each skill is rated on five levels (Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor), as shown in Figure 2.

In fact, the following open-ended questions in the post-survey indicated such a lack of linguistic competence.



[Fig. 2] Students' Reported Levels

“Because my basics, vocabulary and grammar, are weak, it’s hard to write in English. I’m not sure whether what I’ve written is being communicated properly to the reader.”(PS-S1)
 “Not knowing many words and worrying that my grammar might be wrong make me lose confidence. And when I think about the stress of having to revise the writing, my confidence drops even more.”(PS-S2)



[Fig. 3] Usefulness of ChatGPT

However, when the students responded to the question, “Which parts of ChatGPT were most useful? (Rank 1 = most useful, 6 = least useful),” grammar checking was ranked 1st as the most useful part (see Fig. 3). The largest number of students who had difficulties in grammar errors and lack of vocabulary answered using ChatGPT

was beneficial to their writing.

In addition, two interviewees expressed the advantages of ChatGPT as a learning tool regarding not only specific formats and organization but also genre in writing.

"After getting feedback from ChatGPT, I could see my script reorganized in a way that reflects how native speakers think and build sentences. Every time I see that, I'm reminded how useful the AI really is."(INT-S3)

"What's really great about GPT is that when I ask about an unfamiliar word, it also gives examples, how it's used in different situations. So when I'm learning new vocabulary, it even shows the context-specific uses."(INT-S4)

These findings correspond to observable enhancements in linguistic performance[4,25], including reductions in morpho-syntactic errors, improved cohesion, and more genre-appropriate use of language. Moreover, one interviewee articulated agentic self-awareness in using ChatGPT as a learning tool.

"I spend hours in one sitting trying to think and write, but ChatGPT just clicks and spits it all out at once. I caught myself thinking, 'So this is what people mean by taking the easy way,' and it really hurt my pride. Still, I told myself there must be something to learn from AI. If something seems better than me, if it does things so easily, that doesn't mean I should resent it; it means I should learn from it."(INT-S3)

These benefits are closely intertwined with the affective domains such as confidence, anxiety, motivation, and willingness.

4.2 Affective impacts: Confidence, Anxiety, Motivation, and Willingness

Most students mentioned they enhanced their confidence in English writing more than before

while using ChatGPT in class. In the reflective journals, they presented their confidence building and a decrease in anxiety of writing as follows:

"Before using it, I was anxious, wondering whether what I wanted to say would really come across in English. After using it, I felt more certain about my sentences, and the anxiety subsided." (RJ-S16)

"Because it points out grammatical errors and suggests vocabulary that fits the nuance better, my worries like 'What if I'm wrong? What if I say it incorrectly?' have dropped markedly, and I feel more comfortable when speaking." (RJ-S32)

"I asked ChatGPT to revise my sentences into conversational style. Seeing it rewrite them in grammar simple enough for me to understand made me realize that using simpler grammar in conversation is fine, which gave me confidence." (RJ-S45)

"Even though I'm using a script, it's my script, so I'm clear about the overall flow and direction. Because it's my own story, I can highlight the parts where I'm strong and confident. And when I ask ChatGPT about things like grammar or even pronunciation, it gives me guidance, so I've gained a great deal of confidence in those areas."(RJ-S34)

As mentioned above, affective gains are among the most consistently reported outcomes when undergraduates use ChatGPT for writing[11,22]. Along with an increase in self-confidence and a decline in anxiety, the following interview data showed students' motivation and willingness to utilize ChatGPT as well as English writing as an active learning agent. Some studies[4,19] also reported similar results.

"In a way, using it to get background information lets me expand, add things, and turn it into something of my own. And because the answers change depending on the prompt, it made me think more about 'what's the

difference here?’ Instead of just swallowing whatever it gives me and pasting it in, I’ve gotten curious about those differences—that really stuck with me, and I think I’ll use ChatGPT more going forward.”(INT-S7)

“Rather than copying it as is, I think I’ll use it more as a reference.”(INT-S8)

In addition, one of the important functions of ChatGPT was identified as an emotional supporter and encourager. The interviewee mentioned.

“ChatGPT always responds kindly and thoughtfully. It constantly checks if I need anything else and never seems to get tired of helping. Even when I do something small, it praises me and encourages me as if I’ve achieved something great. Sometimes I even feel touched by its words, it just makes me feel calm and comfortable.”(INT-S4)

In spite of positive outcomes and responses, potential concerns and challenges also were reported and discussed in the next section.

4.3 Concerns and Challenges

Three principal challenges emerged from the data: over-reliance, limits to trustworthiness, and ethical issues in educational contexts. First, a large number of students expressed too much reliance on ChatGPT without relevant thinking processes, judging any possible errors or wrong information beyond their ability.

“I’m concerned that my own thinking ability won’t grow.”(PS-S23)

“Even though I don’t speak English well, I was hopeful because it helps me converse and write in English. But I also worried that I couldn’t tell whether the English it produced was actually correct.”(RJ-S33)

“There are times when ChatGPT makes mistakes, so I sometimes wonder whether what I’ve done is actually correct.”(PS-S57)

“When information I don’t know comes up, I worry because I can’t judge whether it’s right or not.”(PS-S69)

“I’m afraid the generic style that AI produces will make my writing sound similar to other people’s answers. And the more I use it, the more my active, independent thinking might decline as I become dependent on AI.”(RJ-S19)

In the same vein, many researchers[10,18,30,32] argued that depending too heavily on automated feedback could diminish the individuality of students’ writing, stifle creativity, and weaken critical thinking.

In addition to over-reliance, some responses were related to limits to trustworthiness due to inconsistency, context insensitivity, systematic biases, and factual errors. The following interview data presented this concern clearly.

“Sometimes the stuff ChatGPT writes just feels a bit out of context.”(INT-S6)

“If ChatGPT gives me incorrect information and I fail to notice, it could disadvantage me.”(INT-S7)

“I worry that ChatGPT might distort my meaning or intent.”(INT-S3)

“ChatGPT said the sentence was natural and commonly used by native speakers, so it shouldn’t be awkward, but no matter how I looked at it, it still felt awkward to me. I asked my professor, and she agreed it was indeed a bit awkward, so I deleted the sentence. That experience made me feel that instructor intervention is sometimes necessary.”(INT-S4)

When it comes to ethical issues including plagiarism, authorship, and evaluation, some students raised questions as follows:

“I’m worried that the generic AI writing style will make my answer sound just like everyone else’s.”(PS-S15)

“When I run ChatGPT over and over, I lose track of which ideas are mine and which are

the model's. I end up just going along with it. So... who's the author of this piece, really?" (RJ-S49)

"Then will the professor really be able to evaluate my writing? Can I get a fair grade?"(RJ-S69)

Ethical worries centered on plagiarism, authorship ambiguity, and fair evaluation, emphasizing the need for transparent educational policy and rigorous teacher oversight[31]. Furthermore, it is recommended that institutions develop clear guidelines, provide systematic instructor training, and adopt pedagogical practices that promote transparent and ethical use of AI tools.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating ChatGPT into a Korean EFL writing course can enhance linguistic performance and affective outcomes. Students reported improvements in grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, and genre-appropriate writing, as well as increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater motivation. However, concerns regarding over-reliance, trustworthiness of AI output, and ethical issues such as authorship and fair assessment were noted. These findings highlight the importance of structured, process-oriented implementation, including iterative drafting, reflective revision, and teacher guidance to promote autonomous learning while mitigating risks. Limitations of this study include its focus on only one term for research data collection and reliance on self-reported data, which may affect generalizability. Future research should examine long-term effects, cross-institutional contexts, and the impact of AI-assisted writing on oral proficiency. Additionally, developing clear institutional guidelines and AI literacy training is recommended to ensure ethical and effective use. Overall, ChatGPT offers considerable pedagogical potential as a scaffold for EFL writing when integrated thoughtfully.

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허 재 연(Jae Yeon Heo)

[정회원]



- 2013년 7월 : University of Warwick (응용언어학박사)
- 2015년 3월 ~ 2019년 2월 : 고려대학교 연구교수
- 2019년 9월 ~ 현재 : 강원대학교 교양교육원 강사

<관심분야>

영어교육, 교사교육, 에듀테크 등

심 주 연(Ju Youn Sim)

[정회원]



- 2011년 7월 : University of Warwick (응용언어학박사)
- 2015년 3월 ~ 2016년 2월 : 고려대학교 연구교수
- 2017년 3월 ~ 현재 : 한신대학교 평화교양대학 부교수

<관심분야>

영어교육, Intercultural Competence, 에듀테크 등