THE EDUCATIONAL USE OF CHATGPT IN AN INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL JAPANESE WRITING COURSE: A SURVEY-BASED STUDY OF STUDENT PRACTICES, PERCEIVED BENEFITS, AND PEDAGOGICAL CAUTIONS

Mei Haruna
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand
E-mail: mei.ha@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

Abstract—This study investigates how university students used ChatGPT in an intermediate Japanese writing course and what learning effects and instructional concerns emerged when its use was permitted under explicit conditions. The participants were 21 third-year Japanese-major students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University who attended the course for approximately five months. After the course, a questionnaire was administered via Google Forms, and the results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings show that many students used ChatGPT mainly for supportive purposes, such as grammar checking and paraphrasing into more natural Japanese, and reported benefits including reduced psychological burden toward writing and improved understanding of errors. At the same time, some students expressed concerns about overuse, dependency, and a potential decline in independent thinking. In addition, a strong need for teacher guidance on "how to use ChatGPT effectively" was identified, suggesting that when generative AI is introduced into foreign-language writing education, it is essential to clarify the scope of permitted use, provide concrete guidance on prompting, and foster learners' ability to evaluate AI outputs critically rather than banning the tool uniformly.

Keywords— Writing, AI Tools, Japanese language teaching techniques, The basic Japanese language learners

INTRODUCTION

Generative AI has the potential to support learners' thinking and expression, but educational settings also face concerns that students may rely solely on AI-generated outputs in reports and writing assignments. Accordingly, clear guidance on appropriate use is required. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2023) also the importance of avoiding blanket bans and instead having each institution consider responses suited to its educational context, communicate them appropriately to students and staff, and revise them when necessary.

In Japanese writing education, generative AI may help with grammar and vocabulary checks and improving naturalness of expressions. However, because AI outputs can become highly similar to learners' writing depending on the prompts given, it becomes difficult to draw a clear line between appropriate support and misconduct; this makes instructional design and

guidance crucial. Yoshimura (2023) points out that ChatGPT outputs can closely resemble learners' intended writing depending on instructions, emphasizing the need for clear purposes and careful instruction.

Prior research on Thai EFL learners also reports that AI tools are often used for grammar correction, paraphrasing, and summarizing, improving writing confidence while simultaneously raising concerns about excessive dependence and accuracy (Sumsawathanasuk, 2025).

Based on this background, this study examines a classroom practice in which ChatGPT was introduced conditionally in an intermediate Japanese writing course at a Thai university, with the aim of organizing learners' actual use and perceptions and considering appropriate pedagogical approaches in Japanese language education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To clarify in which situations*and to what extent*learners used ChatGPT in an intermediate Japanese writing course.

2. To identify perceived learning effects (writing ability, understanding of errors) and challenges (anxiety, dependence) associated with ChatGPT use.

3. To derive implications for appropriate scope of use and instructional design in foreign-language writing classes, based on prior studies and educational guidance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants and course context

Participants were 21 third-year students in the Japanese program at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. They attended the author's intermediate writing course for approximately five months, and the survey was administered after the course.

The course aimed to develop students' ability to express their own opinions in Japanese and write logically while comparing multiple outcomes or examples. Students had intermediate Japanese proficiency and had practiced verbalizing their ideas through presentations and discussions.

3.2 Rules for ChatGPT use (conditional permission)

ChatGPT was permitted only as a supplementary learning-support tool, limited to purposes such as:

checking meanings of unknown vocabulary,
confirming example expressions close to what the student wanted to say, and
checking grammatically uncertain parts.

Students were required to use words/sentences/expressions found via ChatGPT only after fully understanding their meanings and usage; copying results directly into assignments or using vocabulary/kanji they did not understand was prohibited. Entering the assignment theme

as-is and using the generated full text was also strictly prohibited.

Because the author is a native speaker of Japanese, unnatural expressions or direct reuse of ChatGPT-style text could be identified relatively easily; when inappropriate use was observed, individual guidance was provided, including instructions not to use ChatGPT if necessary.

3.3 Survey

The questionnaire covered Q1–Q17 (learning background, prior experience, use situations, perceived effects, attitudes, and open-ended responses).

RESULT

4.1 Learner background

Average years of Japanese study: 4.6 years (6 years: 9 students; 3 years: 8; 4 years: 2; 5 years: 2).

4.2 Prior recognition/experience with ChatGPT (before the course)

Used often: 38.1% (8)

Used a little: 28.6% (6)

Did not know: 19.0% (4)

Knew only the name: 14.3% (3)

4.3 Amount of use during the course (self-report)

Used about half the time: 47.6% (10)

Used frequently: 33.3% (7)

Used a little: 9.5% (2)

Used almost everything: 9.5% (2)

4.4 Situations in which ChatGPT was used (multiple responses)

Paraphrasing / making expressions more natural: 81.0% (17)

Grammar checking: 66.7% (14)

Drafting (first draft): 33.3% (7)

Adjusting length/structure: 28.6% (6)

Theme selection / final version creation: 19.0% (4) each

Overall, use tended to be more for revision and improvement*than for full creation.

4.5 What students asked ChatGPT to do (multiple responses)

"Fix only the grammar": 66.7% (14)

"Explain why it is wrong": 61.9% (13)

"Make it natural Japanese without changing content": 61.9% (13)

"Improve the text structure": 57.1% (12)

Notably, a substantial number requested explanations, not only corrections.

4.6 Perceived change in writing ability (self-evaluation)

Improved greatly: 23.8% (5)

Improved somewhat: 47.6% (10)

Not much change: 28.6% (6)

Total reporting improvement: 71.4%.

4.7 Effect on understanding mistakes (5-point scale)

Mean: 4.0 (3: 23.8%, 4: 52.4%, 5: 23.8%), indicating responses leaned toward "became easier to understand."

4.8 Perceived similarity between AI output and "their own style"

Fairly similar: 38.1% (8)

Slightly similar: 38.1% (8)

Not similar: 23.8% (5)

About 76% felt at least some similarity, reinforcing the need to clarify purpose and boundaries of use.

4.9 How far ChatGPT should be used in class (students' views)

Up to paraphrasing: 71.4% (15)

Up to first draft: 23.8% (5)

Up to ideas only: 4.8% (1)

Students themselves tended to prefer a revision-focused approach.

4.10 Need for teacher instruction on effective use

"Strongly agree" 28.6% + "Agree" 42.9% = 71.5%, indicating strong demand for guidance.

4.11 Open-ended responses and pedagogical implications

In the open-ended responses, many students valued deeper understanding of vocabulary/grammar, but they also expressed anxiety about accuracy and concerns that relying too much on ChatGPT could reduce independent thinking. This pattern aligns with prior findings on Thai EFL learners, where gains in efficiency and confidence coexisted with concerns about dependence and reduced thinking.

These results suggest that allowing ChatGPT is not sufficient by itself; teachers should clarify why and how students should use it. In this practice, positioning ChatGPT not as a tool

to "look up and finish," but as a means to deepen learning, may contribute to improved learning effects.

Because the participants were intermediate-level learners, inputting the entire assignment or using generated text was prohibited as it contradicts learning goals, while checking example sentences or paraphrase options when learners struggled to express ideas was permitted.

The findings also imply that the quality of prompts matters: prompts such as "Rewrite this into intermediate-level expressions" may reduce opportunities to use learned vocabulary, whereas prompts requesting alternatives or examples (e.g., "Give words with similar meaning," "Rewrite in easier Japanese," "Provide several similar example sentences") can better support learning through comprehension and linkage to prior knowledge.

Additionally, since learners often ask questions in their first language, intended meanings may not be conveyed accurately and unnatural expressions may be generated; therefore, instructors specializing in foreign-language education should present prompt examples appropriate to learners' levels and goals and explicitly teach what kinds of use lead to learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that intermediate Japanese language learners primarily utilize ChatGPT as a **supportive tool for revision** rather than a generative tool for content creation. With 81% of students using it for paraphrasing and 66.7% for grammar checking, there is a clear trend toward "refining" their own output. Notably, the high demand for explanations (61.9%) suggests that learners view AI as a **private tutor** that helps clarify linguistic nuances, which correlates with the reported 71.4% improvement in writing ability and better understanding of mistakes (Mean: 4.0).

However, the "similarity" felt between AI output and students' own styles (76%) presents a dual-edged sword; while it boosts confidence, it necessitates clear boundaries to prevent the loss of personal voice. The study also highlights a **gap in prompt engineering skills**, where L1-based prompts may lead to inaccuracies. This aligns with the students' own desire for formal instruction (71.5%), suggesting that the teacher's role must shift from a traditional evaluator to a facilitator of **AI literacy**, guiding students on *how* to ask questions that stimulate rather than replace independent thinking.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ChatGPT serves as an effective pedagogical aid for intermediate Japanese learners by enhancing writing confidence and facilitating a deeper understanding of grammatical errors. By enhancing writing, grammar, and vocabulary acquisition while increasing motivation and engagement through its accessibility and versatility (Karataş, et al., 2024). Specifically for Japanese learners, ChatGPT has been found to outperform other

grammar-checking tools in helping English language learners improve their grammar and writing clarity, with students showing a preference for AI-assisted editing over traditional writing groups (Schmidt-Fajlik, 2023). Japanese university students using ChatGPT for English learning reported positive experiences, especially when guided by teachers, highlighting the importance of instructional support to maximize benefits (Ito, 2025). ChatGPT also supports personalized learning and immediate feedback, which fosters learner autonomy and critical evaluative skills, important for intermediate language proficiency (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). However, concerns remain about academic integrity and the need for ethical guidelines and pedagogical adjustments to ensure responsible use in language education (Noroozi et al., 2024). Overall, ChatGPT shows promise as a supportive, motivating, and effective teaching tool for intermediate-level Japanese language learners, particularly when integrated thoughtfully into curricula with proper guidance (Yamaoka, 2024). Most learners demonstrate a responsible attitude, preferring to use AI for paraphrasing rather than full-scale drafting. To maximize learning effects, it is crucial that instructors move beyond mere permission of AI use and instead provide explicit guidance on effective prompting and ethical boundaries. Positioning AI as a tool for "learning through comprehension" rather than "efficiency in completion" is key to ensuring that technology supports, rather than undermines, the development of independent linguistic competence.

REFERENCES

[1] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2023). Guidelines on the use of generative AI in teaching and learning at universities and colleges of technology. https://www.mext.go.jp/

[2] Yoshimura, Y. (2023). Application and concerns of ChatGPT in Japanese language education: An analysis of similarities and differences in generated texts. In Proceedings of the CAJLE Annual Conference (pp. 196–200). CAJLE. (in Japanese)

[3] Fukuyama, Y., Nose, Y., Nishiguchi, K., & Tokito, J. (2025). The impact of academic writing course attendance on university students' evaluation of text generation capabilities of generative AI. Japanese Journal of Educational Technology, 49(1), 175–185. https://doi.org/10.15077/jjet.4901_175

[4] Susamawathanakun, P. (2025). Utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools for Improving Academic Writing: Thai EFL Learners' Perspectives. *Ph.D. in Social Sciences Journal, 15*(3), 917–936. retrieved from https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/phdssj/article/view/276252

[5] Karataş, F., Abedi, F., Gunyel, F., Karadeniz, D., & Kuzgun, Y. (2024). Incorporating AI in foreign language education: An investigation into ChatGPT's effect on foreign language learners. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29, 19343 - 19366. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12574-6.

[6] Schmidt-Fajlik, R. (2023). ChatGPT as a Grammar Checker for Japanese English Language Learners: A Comparison with Grammarly and ProWritingAid. *AsiaCALL Online Journal*. https://doi.org/10.54855/acoj.231417.

[7] Ito, Y. (2025). Japanese English learners' perceptions of ChatGPT for learning purposes: A preliminary study on use and guidance. *JALTCALL Trends*. https://doi.org/10.29140/jct.v1n1.2135.

[8] Xiao, Y., & Zhi, Y. (2023). An Exploratory Study of EFL Learners' Use of ChatGPT for Language Learning Tasks: Experience and Perceptions. *Languages*. https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030212.

[9] Noroozi, O., Soleimani, S., Farrokhnia, M., & Banihashem, S. (2024). Generative AI in Education: Pedagogical, Theoretical, and Methodological Perspectives. *International Journal of Technology in Education*. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijte.845.

[10]   Yamaoka, K. (2024). ChatGPT's Motivational Effects on Japanese University EFL Learners: A Qualitative Analysis. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*. https://doi.org/10.58304/ijts.20240303.