

A Study of Using the Virtual Writing Tutor Website for Enhancing Grammar in EFL Learners' Essay Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the effectiveness of the Virtual Writing Tutor (VWT) website in improving grammatical accuracy in IELTS Task 2 essay writing among Vietnamese high school learners of English as a foreign language. The research was conducted in an IELTS preparation course at an English center in Hanoi with 15 students aged 15 to 17 whose initial Grammatical Range and Accuracy scores were between 4.0 and 5.0. Using a one-cycle classroom action research design within a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated the free Grammar Checker function of VWT into eight weeks of writing instruction. Quantitative data were collected through IELTS-style pre- and post-tests and an attitude questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews. The findings show a clear improvement in students' grammatical accuracy after the intervention. The mean score increased from 4.40 in the pre-test to 6.03 in the post-test, and a paired-sample t-test confirmed that the difference was statistically significant. Students also reported moderately positive attitudes toward VWT, particularly its usefulness for identifying common grammar errors and supporting independent revision. However, they continued to value teacher feedback as more reliable for complex, context-sensitive, and meaning-related errors. The study concludes that VWT can be a useful supplementary tool for grammar-focused IELTS writing instruction, especially when combined with teacher guidance.

KEYWORDS: Virtual Writing Tutor; IELTS Writing; Grammatical Accuracy; EFL Learners; Automated Feedback; Action Research

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology has increasingly become an essential part of English language teaching and learning because it provides learners with access to flexible resources, immediate feedback, and opportunities for independent practice. In EFL writing instruction, digital tools are especially valuable because many learners have difficulty identifying and correcting their own grammar mistakes. Although students may have ideas to express, weaknesses in grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and sentence construction often prevent them from presenting those ideas clearly in written English.

This issue is particularly important in IELTS preparation. IELTS Writing Task 2 requires candidates to produce a coherent academic essay within a limited time, and the Grammatical Range and Accuracy criterion directly affects the final writing band score. In the Vietnamese context, IELTS has become increasingly important for high school students because it can support university admission and future academic opportunities. However, many learners receive lower writing scores than scores in other skills, partly because they are not fully aware of their grammatical errors and cannot revise them independently.

The Virtual Writing Tutor (VWT) website is an AI-aided writing platform that offers grammar checking, spelling support, word counting, and writing feedback. Its free Grammar Checker function can help learners identify errors and revise their essays before receiving teacher feedback. However, automated feedback is not always contextually accurate, and learners may still require teacher explanation to understand why a correction is necessary. Therefore, this study investigates whether the free version of VWT can improve grammatical accuracy in IELTS Task 2 essays and how students perceive its effectiveness.

Objectives and Research Questions

The study has two main objectives: first, to investigate the extent to which the VWT website helps students improve grammatical accuracy in essay writing; and second, to explore students' attitudes toward using VWT as a grammar-support tool.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) *To what extent does the use of the Virtual Writing Tutor website help students improve the grammar in their essays?*
- 2) *What are students' attitudes toward using the Virtual Writing Tutor website to enhance their grammatical accuracy in essay writing?*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. *Writing Skills and Academic Writing*

Writing is an important skill in EFL learning because it requires learners to organize ideas, use appropriate vocabulary, and produce accurate language. It is also a complex mental process that involves planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001; Oshima & Hogue, 2007). In academic contexts, writing is essential for assignments, examinations, and higher education preparation, yet many EFL learners still face difficulties with grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and idea organization (Lowe et al., 2010; Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019).

2. *Essay Writing in IELTS Preparation*

Essay writing is a common form of academic writing that requires students to present ideas clearly through an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). In IELTS Writing Task 2, students are assessed according to criteria such as Task Response, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Among these, grammatical accuracy is a major challenge for Vietnamese EFL learners because grammar errors can reduce clarity and lower writing scores (Green, 2005; Priyanti, 2017).

3. *Grammar and Grammatical Accuracy*

Grammar is the system of rules that allows language users to form meaningful and accurate sentences (Crystal, 2003). In second language learning, grammatical errors are natural because they reflect learners' developing linguistic competence (James, 1998; Ellis, 2006). However, frequent errors in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, sentence structure, and punctuation can affect the quality of essay writing. Therefore, grammar feedback is necessary to help learners notice, understand, and correct their mistakes.

4. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning and AI-Aided Writing Tools*

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) refers to the use of computers and digital technology to support language teaching and learning (Chapelle, 2001; Egbert, 2005). In writing instruction, AI-aided writing tools can provide automated feedback on grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. These tools are useful because they support independent learning and give students immediate feedback, but they should not replace teacher instruction because automated feedback may be limited or inaccurate in context-based writing situations (Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Nazari et al., 2021).

5. *Virtual Writing Tutor Website*

Virtual Writing Tutor (VWT) is an online writing-support platform that provides grammar checking, spelling checking, word counting, and essay feedback. It can help EFL learners identify common grammatical errors and revise their writing more independently. Since written corrective feedback is important for developing grammatical accuracy, VWT may support learners during the drafting and editing stages of essay writing (John et al., 2017). However, the free version of VWT has limitations, so teacher guidance is still needed when students cannot understand or apply the automated feedback correctly.

6. *Related previous studies*

Previous studies have shown that VWT can improve students' writing accuracy. Al Badi et al. (2020) found that VWT helped Omani EFL students improve grammar, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary in academic writing. Similarly, Zein et al. (2025) reported improvements in grammar accuracy, coherence, and vocabulary after integrating VWT into writing instruction. Viantika and Dangin (2024) also found that students' writing scores increased after using VWT in a classroom action research context. However, other studies noted that students still needed teacher support because VWT feedback could sometimes be confusing or limited (Nasution et al., 2023).

7. *Research Gaps*

Although previous studies have examined the use of VWT in writing instruction, several gaps remain. First, many studies focused on general writing performance rather than grammatical accuracy as the main variable. Second, most research was conducted in university contexts, while fewer studies examined high school EFL learners preparing for IELTS Writing Task 2. Third, limited research has investigated the free version of VWT through classroom action research. Therefore, the present study examines how VWT, combined with teacher guidance, can improve Vietnamese high school students' grammatical accuracy in IELTS essay writing.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. *Research Design*

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach within a one-cycle classroom action research design. Quantitative data were collected from pre-test and post-test scores and from a Likert-scale questionnaire. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The action research cycle followed the stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, allowing the

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teacher-researcher to implement VWT in writing instruction, monitor the process, and evaluate its effect on students' grammar development.

2. *Participants and Setting*

The study was conducted at an English center in Hanoi from December 1, 2023 to January 31, 2024. The participants were 15 Vietnamese high school students aged 15 to 17 who were enrolled in an IELTS preparation course. Their entrance-test scores for the Grammatical Range and Accuracy criterion in IELTS Writing Task 2 ranged from 4.0 to 5.0, indicating a broadly comparable level of proficiency. Students attended a three-hour writing lesson each week and used the Complete IELTS Bands 5-6.5 coursebook as part of the course.

3. *Intervention Procedure*

The intervention lasted eight weeks and integrated the VWT free Grammar Checker into weekly IELTS writing lessons. Each lesson followed a structured process. First, the teacher introduced the IELTS writing task type and the target grammar focus. Second, students wrote a first draft under IELTS timing conditions. Third, they submitted their drafts to VWT and reviewed the automated grammar feedback. Fourth, students revised their essays based on the VWT report. Fifth, the teacher provided additional feedback on errors that VWT overlooked, misclassified, or explained unclearly. Finally, students reflected on recurring mistakes and applied the feedback in the next writing task.

4. *Data Collection and Analysis*

The pre-test and post-test were IELTS Writing Task 2 essays assessed according to the Grammatical Range and Accuracy criterion of the IELTS Task 2 band descriptors. Both tests were marked by the teacher-researcher and another experienced IELTS teacher, and the mean score from the two markers was used as the final score. Questionnaire data were collected through 11 Likert-scale items based on the ABC model of attitudes, covering affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. Interviews with four students were transcribed and analyzed thematically according to the same three dimensions. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and through a paired-sample t-test using SPSS.

5. *Data Collection Instruments*

This study used four instruments: pre-test, post-test, questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The pre-test and post-test measured students' grammatical accuracy before and after the VWT intervention, while the questionnaire and interviews explored students' attitudes toward using VWT.

The pre-test was conducted before the intervention, and the post-test was conducted after eight weeks. Both tests required students to write an IELTS Writing Task 2 essay within 40 minutes. The essays were assessed based on the Grammatical Range and Accuracy criterion of the IELTS Writing Task 2 band descriptors. Two raters marked the essays, and the average score was used as the final score.

The questionnaire included 11 items adapted from Yousofi (2022), using a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items were organized according to the ABC model of attitudes: affective, behavioral, and cognitive components (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Hogg & Vaughan, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four students after the intervention to gain deeper insights into their experiences with VWT. The interviews focused on students' feelings, use of the tool, and perceptions of its effectiveness. The responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

1. *Findings from the Pre-Test and Post-Test Results*

To answer the first research question, the pre-test and post-test scores of 15 students were analyzed. The pre-test was conducted before the 8-week intervention, while the post-test was administered after students had used the VWT website in their writing lessons. Both tests focused on the Grammatical Range and Accuracy criterion of IELTS Writing Task 2.

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY TABLE OF PRE-TEST RESULTS OF THE GA CRITERIA

Scores	Frequency	Percent
4.0	6	40.0
4.5	6	40.0
5.0	3	20.0
Total	15	100.0

The pre-test results show that students' GA scores ranged from 4.0 to 5.0. Most students were in the lower to mid-range bands, with 6 students scoring 4.0 and another 6 students scoring 4.5. Only 3 students reached 5.0. This indicates that most participants had limited grammatical control before the intervention.

TABLE 2. FREQUENCY TABLE OF POST-TEST RESULTS OF THE GA CRITERIA

Scores	Frequency	Percent
4.5	1	6.7
5.0	1	6.7
5.5	4	26.7
6.0	6	40.0
6.5	2	13.3
7.0	1	6.7
Total	15	100.0

The post-test results reveal a clear improvement after the intervention. Scores ranged from 4.5 to 7.0, and most students scored between 5.5 and 6.5. The most common score was 6.0, achieved by 6 students. This upward movement suggests that students gained better control of grammar after using the VWT website with teacher support.

TABLE 3. PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS OF GA SCORES

Paired Samples Statistics				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PRG	4.400	15	.3873	.1000
POG	6.033	15	.5164	.1333

The mean score increased from 4.40 in the pre-test to 6.03 in the post-test. This shows an average improvement of 1.63 band points in students' grammatical accuracy.

TABLE 4. PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST RESULT

Paired Samples Test								
	Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
PRG - POG	-1.6333	.5499	.1420	-1.9379	-1.3288	-11.504	14	.000

The paired-sample t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, $t(14) = -11.504$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the VWT intervention had a positive effect on students' grammatical accuracy in IELTS essay writing.

2. Findings from Students' Grammatical Mistakes

Students' essays were also analyzed to identify changes in common grammatical errors. Before the intervention, students frequently made errors in countable and uncountable nouns, articles, relative clauses, conjunctions, comparison structures, and complex sentences. After the intervention, the frequency of these errors decreased.

TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

Grammar Category	Pre-Test Errors	Post-Test Errors
Countable / Uncountable Nouns	Errors in 10/15 scripts	Errors in 4/15 scripts
Articles	Errors in 12/15 scripts	Errors in 5/15 scripts
Relative Clauses	Errors in 9/15 scripts	Errors in 4/15 scripts
Conjunctions and Linkers	Errors in 11/15 scripts	Errors in 6/15 scripts
Comparison Structures	Errors in 8/15 scripts	Errors in 2/15 scripts
Complex Sentences	Errors in 12/15 scripts	Errors in 5/15 scripts

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The comparison shows that students made fewer grammar errors in the post-test. The most noticeable improvements were found in comparison structures, countable and uncountable nouns, articles, and complex sentences. This suggests that the combination of VWT feedback and teacher explanation helped students recognize and correct repeated grammatical mistakes more effectively.

3. Findings from the Questionnaires

The questionnaire was used to examine students' attitudes toward the VWT website. It included 11 items based on three components: affective, behavioral, and cognitive attitudes.

For the affective component, students showed moderate satisfaction with the VWT. The mean scores ranged from 3.00 to 3.73, showing that students generally felt positive about the tool but had different levels of satisfaction. The highest affective mean was found in the statement that students were happy with how the VWT helped them improve grammar.

For the behavioral component, students reported moderate use of the VWT when practicing writing. The mean scores for using the tool and applying its feedback were 3.20 and 3.13. However, the statement "I want teachers to continue providing grammar feedback through the VWT in my classroom" received the highest mean score of 4.00. This indicates that students supported the continued use of VWT in writing lessons.

For the cognitive component, students believed that the VWT helped them understand grammar rules and improve accuracy. The mean scores ranged from 3.40 to 3.73. These results suggest that students recognized the learning value of the VWT, especially in helping them notice grammar problems and become more aware of accurate language use.

4. Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of the VWT website. The interview data were also grouped into affective, behavioral, and cognitive components.

In terms of affective attitudes, students expressed moderate satisfaction with the VWT. They said that the tool was useful for identifying simple grammar mistakes, such as verb tense and subject-verb agreement. However, they also stated that teacher explanations were clearer and more reliable.

Regarding behavioral attitudes, students reported that they used the VWT to check their essays before submission. Nevertheless, they often asked the teacher to confirm the feedback because some automated comments were difficult to understand. This shows that students used the VWT as a first step in revision rather than as a complete replacement for teacher feedback.

In terms of cognitive attitudes, students believed that the VWT was useful for identifying basic grammar errors and supporting self-correction. However, they also noted that the tool was less effective for complex grammar, meaning-related errors, and context-based corrections. Therefore, they considered the VWT a helpful supplementary tool, but not a substitute for teacher guidance.

5. Discussion

The findings show that students' grammatical accuracy improved after the 8-week intervention. The increase in the mean score from 4.40 to 6.03, together with the statistically significant t-test result, indicates that the VWT website supported students in improving grammar in IELTS Task 2 essays. The reduction in common grammatical mistakes also suggests that students became more aware of their errors and were better able to revise their writing.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that VWT can support writing accuracy, grammar development, and learner autonomy (Al Badi et al., 2020; Viantika & Dangan, 2024; Zein et al., 2025). However, the present study also confirms that the free version of VWT has limitations. Some students found the feedback unclear, and the tool did not always detect complex or context-dependent errors. This finding supports Nasution et al. (2023), who emphasized the need to combine VWT with teacher guidance.

The questionnaire and interview results show that students had generally positive attitudes toward the VWT. They appreciated its quick feedback and usefulness in identifying grammar mistakes. However, they still preferred teacher feedback for detailed explanations. Therefore, VWT should be used as a supplementary tool in writing instruction rather than as a replacement for teachers.

6. Summary

In summary, the results show that the VWT website had a positive effect on students' grammatical accuracy in IELTS essay writing. Students improved their GA scores, reduced common grammar mistakes, and developed more positive awareness of grammar correction. However, the findings also show that teacher support remained necessary, especially when students needed help understanding complex grammar feedback. Therefore, the most effective approach is to combine automated feedback from VWT with teacher explanation and classroom guidance.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of the Virtual Writing Tutor website to enhance grammatical accuracy in IELTS Task 2 essay writing among Vietnamese high school EFL learners. The findings show that students' grammatical accuracy improved significantly after an eight-week action research intervention. The mean score rose from 4.40 in the pre-test to 6.03 in the post-test, and students showed fewer basic grammar errors and greater control over sentence structures.

The study also found that students held moderately positive attitudes toward VWT. They valued the tool because it provided immediate feedback, helped them notice recurring grammar mistakes, and supported independent revision. Nevertheless, students did not consider VWT a complete replacement for teacher feedback. Instead, they saw it as a supplementary tool that was most effective when combined with teacher explanation and classroom support.

The study has several pedagogical implications. Teachers can use VWT to encourage learner autonomy and reduce time spent correcting surface-level grammar errors. Students can use it as a self-correction resource before submitting writing tasks. Educational institutions may also consider integrating AI-aided writing tools into English programs, provided that such tools are used critically and accompanied by teacher guidance. However, the study is limited by its small sample size, short duration, and exclusive focus on the free version of VWT. Future research should involve larger groups, compare free and premium versions, examine long-term effects, and explore the impact of VWT on other aspects of writing such as coherence, cohesion, and idea development.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Questionnaire for Students after Classroom Action Research Students' questionnaire Guildelines

1. Put a checklist mark (√) on one of the answers you choose in the column below
2. Please fill in honestly according to the circumstances
3. The answer will not affect your English subject grade

Strongly disagree: 1 Disagree: 2 Neutral: 3 Agree: 4 Strongly agree: 5

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
AFFECTIVE CONSTRUCT	(1) I am satisfied with the grammar feedback provided by the VWT.					
	(2) I feel that the VWT's grammar feedback is useful for improving my writing skills.					
	(3) I like the way the VWT provides detailed grammar corrections.					
	(4) Considering all aspects of the VWT, I am happy with how it helps me improve my grammar.					
BEHAVIORAL CONSTRUCT	(5) I frequently use the VWT to check my grammar when I practice writing essays.					
	(6) I actively apply the grammar feedback from the VWT to improve my writing accuracy.					
	(7) I want teachers to continue providing grammar feedback through the VWT in my classroom.					
COGNITIVE CONSTRUCT	(8) I think the VWT helps me understand grammar rules better.					
	(9) Using the VWT has increased my confidence in using correct grammar in my writing.					
	(10) I believe the VWT is suitable for students of different levels who want to improve their grammar.					
	(11) I think the VWT is an effective tool for helping me become more accurate in my grammar usage.					

Appendix B. Interview Questions Based on ABC Model of Attitude

Interview Questions about Students Attitudes

Would you mind if I recorded your voice?

Would you introduce yourself? (Name, Age, Gender, and Year of Schooling/English Class)

AFFECTIVE CONSTRUCT	(1) Do you feel satisfied with the grammar feedback the VWT website provides? Why? Which aspects of grammar feedback do you find most helpful?
	(2) Do you feel that the VWT website's grammar feedback has improved your essay writing skills? How?
	(3) How has your teacher used the VWT website to provide grammar feedback in your writing class? Did you like the way the teacher implemented it for grammar improvement?
BEHAVIORAL CONSTRUCT	(1) I want teachers to keep providing grammar feedback through the VWT website in my classroom. Do you agree? Why?
	(2) Has the VWT website enhanced any specific grammar aspects of your writing? Mention some instances where it helped correct grammar mistakes, with examples.
COGNITIVE CONSTRUCT	(1) From your point of view, is the VWT website adequate for students at different levels to improve grammar? Why or why not?
	(2) Do you think that the VWT website is a good assistant for improving grammar in essay writing? Why?
	(3) From your point of view, what grammar areas (e.g., verb tense, subject-verb agreement, punctuation) does the VWT website help develop the most?
	(4) What are the limitations of the VWT website in identifying and correcting grammar mistakes? How could these be addressed?



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