

Embedding ChatGPT in the Teaching–Learning Cycle: An SFL Genre-Based Approach to Revision

This classroom-based study examines how generative AI (ChatGPT) can be integrated into Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)–informed Genre-Based Approach (GBA) literacy pedagogy, shifting attention from AI as an “auto-corrector” to AI as a resource that requires pedagogical mediation. The study involved 45–46 Japanese university EFL learners in a 15-week SFL–GBA writing course, grouped by year level and English proficiency (first-year lower proficiency; first-year higher proficiency; second-year higher proficiency). The target task was revising explanation-genre academic essays within a Teaching–Learning Cycle (TLC). Two AI-supported revision pathways were compared: (1) learner-only prompting with ChatGPT and (2) teacher-mediated prompting, where students entered a teacher-prescribed prompt designed to scaffold genre expectations. Data were collected in three phases: (a) a post-course survey of perceived effectiveness, (b) SFL-informed content analysis of prompts using Field–Tenor–Mode, and (c) qualitative comparison of revised texts, focusing on thesis statements as a discourse-critical site for Mode (cohesion or coherence). Survey results indicated that first-year learners (both proficiency levels) most strongly valued the teacher + ChatGPT condition, suggesting that teacher scaffolding functioned as a “trust anchor” for effective AI use. In contrast, second-year higher-proficiency learners evaluated all pathways positively and also valued self-revision based on teacher feedback. Prompt analyses showed clear developmental differences: lower-proficiency novices largely used ChatGPT for grammar correction or vague “academicisation,” with minimal reference to genre or Mode; higher-proficiency and more experienced learners produced more targeted, genre- and discourse-aware prompts. Text analyses found that learner-only prompting often increased lexical density but sometimes shifted thesis statements toward argument/exposition (e.g., “argues”), misaligning with explanation-genre purposes. Teacher-mediated prompting produced more stable explanation-genre thesis statements with clearer staging and stronger cohesion. Overall, the findings highlight how SFL metalanguage and teacher mediation can make AI-supported revision more genre-aligned and literacy-relevant.