

From Prompts to Persuasion: Integrating AI in EFL Copywriting for Critical and Multimodal Literacy

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the ways in which language learners produce, revise, and reflect upon writing. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, copywriting offers a practical and creative context for developing persuasive reasoning, linguistic precision, and multimodal awareness. This study explores how generative and multimodal AI tools—such as ChatGPT, D-ID, and HeyGen—can function as cognitive partners in EFL copywriting tasks. Drawing on sociocultural and critical-thinking frameworks, the research investigates how learners utilise AI to co-construct meaning, regulate their learning processes, and reflect upon issues of authorship and ethics. Data derived from graduate students' reflective portfolios and AI-assisted video projects were analysed using a rigorous, multi-phase thematic analysis incorporating peer debriefing and triangulation. The findings demonstrate that AI-mediated multimodal writing promotes rhetorical precision, self-regulation, and ethical awareness. Consequently, the paper proposes a pedagogical model positioning AI as a creative and reflective collaborator that facilitates the development of critical and multimodal literacies in higher education.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, EFL pedagogy, copywriting, multimodal literacy, critical thinking

1. Introduction

The growing presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is fundamentally reshaping how learners conceptualise writing and communication. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, copywriting—defined as writing designed to persuade or inform specific audiences—demands creativity, linguistic accuracy, and sensitivity to context. However, classroom writing practices often prioritise traditional essays, thereby overlooking the multimodal and critical dimensions of persuasion (Kiili et al., 2021).

Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, alongside multimodal applications like D-ID and HeyGen, offer novel possibilities for pedagogical innovation. These technologies provide instant linguistic feedback, stylistic models, and opportunities to visualise or vocalise text. When students transform a written advertisement into an AI-generated talking-head video, they learn to adapt tone, rhythm, and vocabulary to suit their target audience. This process transforms writing from a static exercise into an embodied, performative act that seamlessly blends text, image, and sound (Mayer, 2009).

Furthermore, these technologies support higher-order reasoning and reflection. Learners must critically evaluate which AI suggestions to retain, modify, or reject—effectively transforming machine interaction into a process of critical thinking and metacognitive awareness. From a sociocultural perspective, AI serves as a mediational tool that scaffolds performance within learners’ zones of proximal development (Thorne & Lantolf, 2006). From a critical-thinking perspective, it strengthens analytical judgment and ethical discernment (Halpern & Dunn, 2022).

While existing studies have demonstrated that AI can enhance coherence and vocabulary in academic writing (Aslan et al., 2025), few have examined its role in genre-specific, persuasive, or multimodal communication. This study addresses this gap by exploring how AI-supported copywriting tasks facilitate the development of rhetorical precision, self-regulation, and ethical awareness among EFL learners.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This qualitative study employed thematic analysis to investigate how learners experience AI as a cognitive partner in copywriting tasks. The research was guided by two primary questions:

- **RQ1:** How do EFL learners interpret the role of AI tools as cognitive partners within copywriting tasks?
- **RQ2:** How does AI-mediated multimodal composition influence learners’ rhetorical, metacognitive, and ethical development?

2.2 Participants

Fifteen graduate students enrolled in an in-service EFL master’s programme at a university in central Taiwan participated in the study. Their English proficiency ranged from intermediate to advanced, and they represented diverse professional fields, including education, business, and design—contexts where persuasive writing is professionally relevant. Participation was voluntary,

and all data were handled with strict confidentiality.

2.3 Data Collection

Two primary sources of qualitative data were gathered over the course of a 15-week semester:

1. Learning Portfolios:

Students submitted weekly reflections documenting their utilisation of AI tools, rationales for tool selection, rhetorical choices, and considerations regarding creativity and ethics. These reflections provided insight into their evolving relationship with AI. To guide these reflections, participants responded to specific prompts, such as: *“Which AI tool did you use this week, and why did you select it?”*; *“How did you evaluate or modify the AI’s output?”*; *“What did you learn about your own writing process through this interaction?”*; and *“Did any ethical questions arise regarding authorship or originality?”*

2. Final Multimodal Projects:

Each participant created an AI-assisted persuasive video utilising tools such as D-ID, HeyGen, and Canva, accompanied by a 150–300-word reflective commentary. The commentary detailed the design process, creative choices, and stance on AI authorship. Participants were guided by prompts including: *“How did you adapt your writing for a multi-modal format (text, image, voice)?”*; *“What rhetorical strategies did you employ to persuade your target audience?”*; *“How did you evaluate and refine AI-generated content?”*; and *“What is your stance on AI authorship, and how did you ensure originality in your final product?”* Collectively, these multimodal artefacts illustrated how students linked linguistic precision to visual and auditory expression.

These two data sources—the weekly learning portfolios and final project commentaries—were analysed using systematic thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following a rigorous multi-phase procedure to ensure reliability and transparency. The analysis was conducted primarily by the author, an experienced qualitative researcher and instructor of the course. To enhance analytical rigour and address potential researcher bias stemming from the dual instructor-researcher role, a second coder—a doctoral student trained in qualitative methods—independently coded a randomly selected subset of the data (approximately 20%). Inter-rater reliability was assessed through collaborative discussion and consensus-building, with any discrepancies resolved via dialogue and refinement of the codebook. This process yielded a high level of coding consistency across the two coders.

Phase 1: Initial Coding employed a hybrid deductive-inductive approach. Deductive codes were derived from the research questions and theoretical framework (e.g., *AI_partnership_dynamics*, *Rhetorical_adaptation*, *Metacognitive_monitoring*, *Ethical_awareness*), while inductive coding captured emergent patterns (e.g., *Tool_integration_complexity*, *Cross_modal_translation*, *Technical_frustration*, *Strategic_prompting*). All codes were organised into a comprehensive codebook containing explicit definitions, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and illustrative exemplars drawn directly from the data. For example:

- *AI_partnership_dynamics* was defined as «statements describing the perceived role of AI in the creative process,» with inclusion criteria including «references to collaboration, co-creation, or negotiation with AI» and an exemplar: «I treated ChatGPT as a collaborative thinking partner to expand my initial ideas.»
- *Cross_modal_translation* was defined as «challenges or strategies related to adapting textual content for visual or auditory modes,» with inclusion criteria including «references to aligning script with video, voice, or image» and an exemplar: “I had to shorten my sentences because the AI avatar spoke too slowly with long text.”

Phase 2: Theme Development involved the iterative review and refinement of coded data using NVivo 14. The researcher actively generated initial thematic maps, visually grouping and linking codes to explore relationships and higher-order patterns. Related codes were clustered into thematic families through an iterative process of comparison and consolidation. For RQ1 (AI as Cognitive Partner), codes including *AI_collaboration_levels*, *Agency_negotiation*, and *Ethical_positioning* were synthesised into the overarching theme “Dimensions of AI Partnership: From Instrumental Tool to Creative Collaborator.” For RQ2 (Competency Development), codes such as *Rhetorical_refinement*, *Metacognitive_evaluation*, and *Ethical_decision_making* coalesced into the central theme “Critical Mediation Cycle: Evaluation, Adaptation, and Refinement.”

Phase 3: Robustness Verification employed three safeguards to ensure analytical trustworthiness:

1. **Analytic Memoing:** Maintained a continuous audit trail documenting coding rationales, interpretive decisions, and reflexive considerations regarding the potential influence of teaching relationships on data interpretation.
2. **Structured Peer Debriefing:** Engaged two external colleagues with expertise in qualitative research and educational technology for a critical

review of the coding framework and thematic organisation. This process provided independent validation and challenged analytical assumptions, prompting richer interpretations of emergent patterns.

- 3. Cross-Temporal Triangulation:** Compared thematic patterns across different data sources and collection points, verifying that emergent themes manifested consistently in both process-oriented weekly portfolios and outcome-focused final reflections. This process also revealed nuanced developmental trajectories. This rigorous analytical procedure facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how EFL learners conceptualise AI as a cognitive partner (RQ1) while demonstrating how AI-mediated multimodal composition fosters the development of rhetorical precision, metacognitive control, and ethical awareness (RQ2). The systematic approach ensured that findings remained grounded in empirical evidence while accommodating the complex, multifaceted nature of AI-assisted learning experiences.

The analysis process highlighted how AI shaped both the creative process and learners’ understanding of authorship and ethics. The alignment between data sources, research questions, and analytical focus is summarised in Table 1.

Rewritten Content

Table 1: *Data Collection Methods, Artifacts, and Corresponding Research Focus*

Data Collection Method	Primary Artifacts	Research Questions Addressed	Analysis Focus
Learning Portfolios	Weekly written reflections (digital documents)	RQ1 & RQ2	Learner perceptions, rationale for tool selection, evolving relationship with AI, and metacognitive and ethical reflections.
Final Multimodal Project	- AI-assisted persuasive video 150–300-word reflective commentary	Primarily RQ2	Analysis of rhetorical and multimodal choices; application of linguistic precision across audio-visual modes; stance on authorship and final creative responsibility.
Thematic Analysis Process	Coded data from both sources	RQ1 & RQ2	Identification of patterns relating to AI’s role as a partner, and the development of rhetorical, metacognitive, and ethical awareness.

Note. *The triangulation of data from portfolios and projects ensured depth and consistency in interpreting learners’ experiences.*

2.4 Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent. Pseudonyms were used

throughout, and participation had no bearing on academic grades. The study fully complied with institutional ethical standards for human research.

3. Results and Discussion

Three key themes emerged from the data.

3.1 AI as a Creative and Cognitive Partner

Students perceived AI not as a replacement for critical thinking but as a collaborator that assisted them in generating and refining ideas. ChatGPT was frequently described as “a sparring partner” that offered linguistic models or rhetorical suggestions. Learners utilised AI outputs as starting points, subsequently editing them for authenticity and tone. This dynamic mirrored the transition from external guidance to self-regulated learning (Lee & Lee, 2024). Rather than diminishing creativity, AI prompted students to articulate their intentions with greater clarity.

3.2 Building Rhetorical and Multimodal Precision

Upon converting text scripts into short films, students became acutely aware of audience perception and emotional resonance. Adjusting sentence rhythm and intonation for speech compelled them to reconsider word choice and coherence. Tools such as HeyGen and D-ID enabled them to visualise their writing, thereby linking linguistic form to gesture and expression. These experiences fostered their multimodal literacy—the capacity to communicate meaning through multiple modes.

3.3 Reflection, Self-Regulation, and Ethics

Engaging with AI required learners to evaluate reliability, detect bias, and ensure originality. Many students described feeling “responsible” for final decisions, even when AI contributed suggestions. They reflected on the nature of authorship, determined when to acknowledge AI assistance, and considered how to balance efficiency with integrity. Through these reflections, learners demonstrated higher-order thinking skills aligned with ethical reasoning frameworks (Zhai et al., 2024).

4. Implications

4.1 Pedagogical Insights

- **AI as a Thinking Partner:** Framing AI as a cognitive collaborator fosters learner autonomy and critical engagement rather than passive dependence.
- **Reflection-Driven Learning:** Structured reflection tasks enable students

to assess their creative decisions and ethical stances.

- **Multimodal Expression:** Integrating text, image, and sound prepares learners for authentic communication across digital platforms.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study supports sociocultural and critical-thinking perspectives on learning as a mediated, reflective process. By extending learners' cognitive space, AI tools facilitate experimentation, evaluation, and meaning-making across multiple modes. These findings align with emerging views of human–AI collaboration as co-learning rather than substitution (Lu et al., 2025).

4.3 Practical Recommendations

Educators can design copywriting tasks that guide students to:

1. Draft persuasive messages with AI support;
2. Transform those messages into multimodal products (e.g., advertisements, pitches, or digital stories); and
3. Critically reflect on linguistic, rhetorical, and ethical dimensions.

This progression facilitates a shift for learners from technical skill development toward creative judgment and self-awareness.

4.4 Contributions to the GaPI Conference Agenda

This research directly addresses GaPI's core mission of exploring how generative AI can augment higher education and prepare students for future challenges. By investigating AI as a cognitive partner in EFL copywriting, the study offers three key contributions to the conference's global discourse:

- **Advancing Pedagogical Innovation:** The study's phased approach to AI integration—progressing from foundational skill development to guided collaboration and finally autonomous synthesis—provides a replicable model for incorporating generative AI into discipline-specific contexts. This responds to GaPI's call for innovative approaches that transcend generic AI literacy in favour of genre-specific applications designed to develop students' professional communication competencies.
- **Fostering Critical and Ethical AI Engagement:** In an era of rapid generative AI adoption, this research demonstrates how structured reflection and multimodal composition can cultivate learners' critical thinking and ethical awareness—competencies identified as essential for responsible AI use across global higher education contexts. The

findings offer evidence-based strategies for educators worldwide who seek to balance technological integration with humanistic values.

- **Addressing Multimodal Literacy in a Digital Age:** As communication increasingly shifts toward multimodal, AI-mediated platforms, this study provides empirical insights into how learners develop rhetorical precision across text, image, and sound. These findings offer significant relevance for international educators grappling with how to prepare students for authentic, digitally mediated communication in diverse cultural and professional settings.

By illuminating how AI-mediated learning can foster both technical proficiency and critical consciousness, this research contributes to GaPI's vision of reframing higher education for an AI-saturated world. The study's focus on EFL learners in Taiwan offers a valuable East Asian perspective, enriching the global conversation on generative AI's role in fostering inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogies. These insights align with the conference's aim to bring together diverse voices to collectively shape the future of AI-augmented higher education.

Acknowledgments

The participating students are gratefully acknowledged for their collaboration and support throughout the study.

Ethics Statement

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Taiwan.

AI Usage Statement

All analysis, interpretation, and revisions were conducted and verified by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the final content.

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