



## **FROM SCREEN TO SCRIPT: QUILLBOT SUPPORT FOR FILM REVIEW WRITING THROUGH *THE PRESENT* (2014) IN AN INDONESIAN EFL CLASSROOM**

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### **Abstract**

The increasing use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classrooms raises questions about authorship, dependency, and students' ability to construct meaning. This study examines how AI-supported writing interacts with film-based instruction by using *The Present* (2014) as the learning medium for a film review writing task. Drawing on Christian Metz's semiotics of cinema, the study employs a qualitative case study approach involving twelve EFL students at a language institution in Indonesia. Data were collected through post-instruction surveys and analyzed interpretively. The findings indicate that QuillBot assisted students with grammatical accuracy and sentence clarity but did not reduce difficulties related to evaluative writing and interpretation. The study concludes that generative AI functions as linguistic mediation rather than a generator of meaning. It recommends that AI tools be integrated reflectively within film-based writing pedagogy that prioritizes interpretation, structure, and critical voice.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, EFL writing, film-based learning, semiotics

### **Introduction**

The growing presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education is reshaping how teachers and students approach learning. In language education, particularly in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, AI technologies are becoming tools not only for correcting errors but also for supporting creativity and confidence in writing. Applications such as QuillBot, Grammarly, and



ChatGPT have begun to change how students think about writing as a process, offering immediate linguistic support and stylistic suggestions (Raheem, B. R., 2023). Yet, these developments also create new pedagogical tensions. While AI can make writing more accessible and less intimidating, it may also reduce opportunities for independent thinking if students rely on it too heavily. This tension places teachers in an increasingly complex position.

On the one hand, AI-assisted tools promise efficiency, accuracy, and reduced anxiety, especially for learners who struggle with linguistic form. On the other hand, their growing availability raises questions about authorship, agency, and the nature of learning itself. If writing becomes a process of selecting and revising AI-generated language, the role of students as meaning-makers may shift in ways that are not yet fully understood. These concerns are particularly pressing in EFL classrooms, where writing already involves negotiating limited linguistic resources, confidence, and identity. Much of the current discussion around AI in education tends to focus on performance outcomes, such as improved grammar or faster text production, rather than on how students experience writing as a cognitive and interpretive activity. This emphasis risks overlooking the deeper processes involved in writing, including interpretation, evaluation, and the articulation of personal perspective. As AI tools become embedded in everyday classroom practice, there is a need to examine not only what students produce with AI support, but how they engage with meaning when technology becomes part of the writing process.

Using film in language teaching is not new, but it continues to offer rich possibilities for contextual and emotional engagement (Pegrum, M., 2008). Films bring stories, culture, and character expression into the classroom, giving students authentic material for interpretation and reflection. *The Present* is a 2014 animated short film directed by Jacob Frey and co-written with Markus Kranzler. The film has received widespread critical recognition, winning 81 awards across various international film festivals. The film tells a brief yet powerful story about a boy who receives a dog and gradually learns to accept his own disability. Through writing a review of this film, students not only practice grammar and vocabulary but also learn to express opinions, describe moral messages, and interpret emotions, all of which encourage meaningful language use. However, many EFL learners struggle to transform their ideas into well-structured written texts, especially when faced with the dual challenge of accuracy and expressiveness (Siska, A., 2025). This difficulty suggests that while film can stimulate ideas and emotional response, it does not automatically support students in organizing those responses into coherent written discourse. Understanding a film's message and articulating that understanding in writing are related but



distinct skills. Many students can identify themes or moral lessons, yet hesitate when required to frame these insights as evaluative arguments in English. This gap highlights the difference between comprehension and articulation, where learners must move beyond personal reaction toward structured interpretation.

In film-based writing tasks, this challenge becomes more pronounced because students are asked to translate visual and emotional experience into language. Films communicate meaning through images, silence, and movement, whereas writing demands explicit explanation and logical sequencing. As a result, students must perform an inter-modal shift that requires both cognitive effort and rhetorical awareness. Without sufficient guidance, learners may rely on surface description rather than deeper evaluation, limiting the potential of film as a tool for developing critical writing skills. These challenges raise important questions about how film-based instruction should be supported pedagogically, particularly in EFL contexts where students may already feel uncertain about their writing abilities. While films like *The Present* provide a strong foundation for engagement and interpretation, students often need additional scaffolding to help them convert emotional understanding into analytical expression. This is where the integration of supportive tools, including AI-based writing assistants, becomes relevant, not as replacements for thinking, but as potential mediators in the writing process.

Here, AI-supported writing tools such as QuillBot can offer valuable assistance. Unlike systems that produce entire texts autonomously, QuillBot invites students to interact with their own sentences, providing rephrased options that they can choose from or modify further. This interactive process allows students to see multiple ways of expressing the same idea, helping them notice nuances of style and tone. It also aligns with the principles of process-based writing, which emphasize drafting, revising, and reflection. Yet the use of AI tools in EFL classrooms remains underexplored, especially in creative writing tasks such as film reviews, where personal interpretation and critical thinking play essential roles (Darwin, Rusdin, D., 2024).

In the Indonesian EFL context, where writing instruction often prioritizes grammatical correctness over expression and argumentation, the integration of AI presents both an opportunity and a challenge (Rahman, M. A., 2024). It invites teachers to reconsider how writing can be taught not merely as a technical exercise but as a form of engagement with meaning. The presence of AI in the classroom raises important questions about how technology can shape the way students learn to express themselves (Rofikah, U., 2025).



Pedagogically, film review writing offers a fertile ground for such exploration (Rajpopat, V., 2023). It brings together narrative interpretation, evaluative thinking, and linguistic expression. Writing about a film allows students to make connections between language and emotion, between structure and storytelling. Therefore, the use of QuillBot serves not as a replacement for thinking but as a reflective partner, a digital mediator that helps students experiment with phrasing and clarity (Fitria, T. N., 2022). This aligns with sociocultural views of learning that regard tools as extensions of human cognition. From this perspective, the interaction between the student and the AI tool becomes a site of co-construction where understanding evolves through feedback and adaptation.

At the same time, the growing dependence on AI tools in writing education demands critical awareness. Students need to understand that while technology can assist them in shaping language, it does not think or interpret meaning on their behalf (Chun, D., 2016). Developing critical AI literacy is therefore essential. This literacy involves recognizing the tool's benefits while also questioning its limitations, its lack of context sensitivity, and the possibility that it may simplify rather than deepen expression. Teaching with AI thus becomes not only a technical integration but also an ethical and reflective practice.

This study explores how QuillBot, a generative AI tool that focuses on paraphrasing and rewording, can assist Indonesian EFL students in writing a film review of *The Present* (2014), a short film by Jacob Frey. This study explores these pedagogical and ethical dimensions by examining the experiences of Indonesian university students who used QuillBot while writing a film review of *The Present*. The research focuses on their perceptions of how AI assistance affected their writing process, their self-editing strategies, and their sense of independence as language learners. Rather than treating AI as a novelty, this study aims to understand it as part of the evolving ecology of learning, where human and technological elements interact in complex ways.

By focusing on student voices and perceptions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about how generative AI can be meaningfully integrated into language education. It suggests that when used thoughtfully, AI can support not only linguistic improvement but also reflective engagement with writing as a human act of interpretation. The intersection between film, writing, and AI in this classroom setting reveals the potential for technology to serve as a bridge rather than a barrier, a means to help learners connect their ideas, emotions, and language more effectively.



## Literature Review

This study adopts Christian Metz's semiotic theory of cinema as its conceptual foundation, situating film, language, and technology within a shared system of meaning-making. Metz, in his book, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (1974:75-76), argues that film operates as a complex language composed not of words but of moving images, sounds, and editing patterns that function as signs. Each cinematic element, such as the framing of a shot, the rhythm of montage, the use of sound or silence, contributes to a signifying system through which audiences read emotion, motive, and narrative intent. Unlike verbal language, filmic meaning emerges through what Metz calls the impression of reality: the illusion that moving images directly reflect life even though they are, in fact, coded representations.

When students write a film review, they engage in a process that mirrors Metz's semiotic translation. They must interpret filmic signs, like gestures, lighting, camera angles, or visual metaphors, and then re-express those signs through verbal language. The act of reviewing *The Present* (2014), for example, requires students to convert visual cues of empathy and disability into descriptive and evaluative sentences. Writing thus becomes an inter-semiotic process, a movement from cinematic to linguistic codes. Through this translation, students practice not only language use but also interpretation: they decide what the film's signs mean and how those meanings can be communicated in words.

Within this framework, the introduction of a generative AI tool such as QuillBot adds a third semiotic layer. If the film is the first system of signs and student writing the second, then AI intervention represents a meta-system that reconfigures linguistic signs themselves. QuillBot does not generate new content from images or sound; rather, it paraphrases the verbal text that students produce, modifying the syntactic and stylistic form of their expressions. From a Metzian perspective, this process can be seen as a new kind of montage, which is an editing of language in which AI reshapes the sequence and rhythm of signs. The student, positioned between filmic interpretation and algorithmic mediation, becomes an active negotiator of meaning, evaluating whether the machine's rephrasing preserves or alters the emotional tone derived from the original film.

Metz's theory also highlights the viewer's role as an interpreter who reconstructs meaning through perception. The spectator does not passively receive images but actively organizes them into coherent narrative structures. Similarly, in an AI-assisted classroom, the writer is not merely corrected by technology but must make interpretive decisions about which AI-generated



suggestions align with their intended meaning. This parallels Metz's idea of the imaginary signifier, the notion that film spectators invest themselves imaginatively in what they see, bridging the gap between illusion and understanding. In the writing classroom, AI becomes part of that imaginary field, shaping how students envision and articulate their linguistic identity.

By drawing on Metz's semiotics, this study views the EFL writing task as a multilayered process of representation. The film provides a visual narrative; the student's review translates it into verbal form; and QuillBot re-mediate that language through computational suggestion. Each stage involves interpretation, selection, and editing, which are processes central to both cinema and writing. The semiotic relationship among these three elements illustrates how meaning is never fixed but constantly re-constructed through interaction.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study approach with a descriptive design to explore students' perceptions of using generative AI, specifically QuillBot, in writing a film review of *The Present* (2014) within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The case study approach suits the study well because based on John W. Creswell said in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2013:98-100), case study works as the research examined a clearly bounded, real-life instructional setting, which is in this case is an English film review writing class at a language institution in Surabaya conducted within a specific time frame, allowing for an in-depth interpretation of participants' experiences and meaning-making processes during AI-supported writing practices.

The participants consisted of twelve learners enrolled in the English Writing Class: Film Review Writing program at Rumah Bahasa Surabaya, a language institution located in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The class focused on developing students' writing skills through audiovisual media, particularly short films, as a means of stimulating critical thinking and narrative construction in English. The participants, aged between 18 and 26 years old, represented mixed proficiency levels, ranging from intermediate to upper-intermediate English users.

The selection of participants used purposive sampling, as they were deliberately chosen based on their direct involvement in the classroom where the research was conducted. The author of this study served as the classroom instructor, which provided opportunities for close observation and contextual understanding of students' writing practices. While this insider position facilitated rich qualitative insight, reflexivity was maintained to ensure that personal involvement did not



influence the interpretation of the findings. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, agreed to take part voluntarily, and were assured of anonymity through the use of non-identifiable data, a measure that was adopted to protect participants' privacy and minimize potential ethical risks.

Data were collected through an online survey administered after the completion of the classroom activity. The survey consisted of both Likert-scale and open-ended questions designed to assess students' perceptions of the use of QuillBot as a generative AI tool in the writing process. Quantitative data from the Likert-scale responses were interpreted narratively to support the qualitative insights derived from the open-ended responses. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes that reflect students' engagement, perceived usefulness, and critical reflections regarding AI-assisted writing and film-based learning.

Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring participants' anonymity and voluntary participation. No personal identifiers were recorded in the survey, and all participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study.

## Results

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Category	Group	Frequency
Gender	Female	6
	Male	6
Age	18	1
	19	2
	20	1
	22	2
	23	1
	24	1
	25	1
	28	1
	35	2





Category	Group	Frequency
Occupation	University student	3
	High school student	1
	Freelancer	3
	Housewife	1
	Florist	1
	Jobseeker	1
	Caregiver	1
	Office employee	1

**Table 2**

*Students' Responses to the Survey Questions*

No.	Survey Question	Responses (Frequency)
1	How did you feel about watching <i>The Present</i> (2014)?	Very interested (9); Somewhat interested (3)
2	Which aspect of the film helped you most in writing the review?	Storyline and moral message (8); Visual expressions and emotions (4); Theme of disability and empathy (1)
3	What was the most challenging part of writing the film review?	Expressing opinions (6); Grammar and vocabulary (4); Organizing ideas and structure (3)
4	How confident did you feel when writing the first draft of the review?	A little confident (5); Somewhat confident (4); Very confident (3)
5	How did QuillBot help you improve your writing?	Grammar and spelling correction (10); Rephrasing sentences more clearly (1); Did not help much (2)
6	How often did you use QuillBot during the writing activity?	Only for final proofreading (5); For selected sentences (4); Did not use it (3)





No.	Survey Question	Responses (Frequency)
7	How did using QuillBot affect your motivation in writing?	Helped a bit but writing was still difficult (8); Made me more motivated (2); No change (2)
8	What do you consider the main benefit of using QuillBot?	Instant feedback and correction (8); Learning how to improve English (3); Saving time and reducing anxiety (1)
9	Would you like to use similar AI tools in future writing activities?	Definitely yes (6); Maybe (5); No (1)
10	Would you like to learn English through another short film in the future?	Yes (12)

### Students' Interest in Watching *The Present* (2014)

The findings indicate a high level of student interest in watching *The Present* (2014) as part of the writing lesson. Out of twelve participants, nine reported being very interested, while three indicated they were somewhat interested. No participants expressed a lack of interest. This suggests that the short film successfully captured students' attention and created an engaging entry point for the writing activity. Students' interest appeared to stem from the emotional narrative and moral dimensions of the film, which provided a meaningful context for reflection and expression in English.

### Film Aspects That Supported Film Review Writing

When asked which aspect of the film helped them most in writing the review, the majority of participants selected the storyline and moral message. Eight students identified this aspect as the most supportive, while four highlighted the visual expressions and emotions presented in the film. Only one participant emphasized the theme of disability and empathy specifically. These results indicate that narrative coherence and moral clarity played a central role in helping students generate ideas, while visual and emotional cues also supported interpretation and descriptive writing.

### Challenges in Writing the Film Review

The most frequently reported challenge was expressing personal opinions, selected by six participants. Four students identified grammar and vocabulary as their main difficulty, while three reported organizing ideas and structure as the most challenging aspect. These findings suggest that



while students were able to understand the film, many struggled to transform their interpretations into coherent evaluative language. The difficulty in expressing opinions indicates that higher-order writing skills, such as argumentation and critical reflection, remain challenging in the EFL context.

### **Students' Initial Writing Confidence**

Regarding confidence when drafting the film review, five students described themselves as a little confident, four as somewhat confident, and three as very confident. None of the participants reported being not confident. This distribution reflects moderate overall confidence, suggesting that while students were not entirely insecure about their writing ability, many still felt uncertain about producing extended written texts in English, particularly when required to express evaluation and interpretation.

### **Perceived Role of QuillBot in Improving Writing**

Most participants perceived QuillBot as helpful primarily for linguistic accuracy. Ten students stated that the tool helped them correct grammar and spelling, while one reported that it helped rephrase sentences more clearly. Two participants indicated that QuillBot did not help them much. These responses demonstrate that students viewed QuillBot mainly as a language support tool rather than a content generator, emphasizing its role in surface-level textual improvement rather than idea development.

### **Frequency of QuillBot Use During the Writing Activity**

Students demonstrated varied patterns of QuillBot usage. Five participants used QuillBot only for final proofreading, four used it for selected sentences, and three did not use it at all during the activity. This variation suggests that students exercised individual judgment in deciding when and how to use AI support. The fact that several students chose not to use QuillBot at all indicates that AI use was perceived as optional rather than compulsory.

### **Decision-Making in Accepting or Rejecting AI Suggestions**

Participants reported different strategies in responding to QuillBot's suggestions. Several students stated that they accepted most suggestions automatically, particularly those related to grammar. Others reported comparing QuillBot's version with their own writing and selecting the clearer option. A smaller number indicated that they did not pay much attention to the suggestions. These findings suggest differing levels of critical engagement with AI output, ranging from reflective comparison to passive acceptance.



### **Impact of QuillBot on Writing Motivation**

Most participants reported that using QuillBot helped them slightly but did not eliminate the difficulty of writing. Eight students selected this response, while two reported increased motivation and two indicated no change in motivation. These findings imply that although AI assistance reduced some linguistic anxiety, it did not fundamentally alter students' perceptions of writing as a challenging task. Motivation appeared to be influenced more by the writing activity itself than by the technology used.

### **Perceived Benefits of Using AI Tools in Writing Class**

The most commonly identified benefit of using AI tools was instant feedback and correction, selected by eight participants. Three students highlighted learning how to improve English, while one emphasized saving time and reducing anxiety. These responses suggest that students valued AI tools for their immediacy and efficiency, particularly in supporting language accuracy and revision during the writing process.

### **Willingness to Use AI Tools in Future Writing Activities**

Regarding future use, six participants responded definitely yes, five responded maybe, and one responded no. This indicates generally positive attitudes toward continued AI integration, accompanied by a degree of caution. While most students recognized the usefulness of AI tools, some expressed hesitation, suggesting an awareness of potential overreliance and a desire to maintain control over their own writing.

## **Discussion**

### **Film as a Semiotic Catalyst for Writing**

The high level of student engagement with *The Present* (2014) confirms the pedagogical value of film as a semiotic resource in EFL writing instruction. Most participants reported strong interest in the film, particularly in its storyline and moral message. From a Metzian perspective, this response reflects cinema's capacity to produce what Metz describes as the impression of reality, in which viewers experience images as emotionally immediate rather than symbolically coded (Rushton, R., 2014). This illusion of immediacy appears to have facilitated students' entry into the writing task, as the film's narrative coherence provided a stable interpretive framework.

However, engagement alone did not guarantee ease of expression. Despite understanding the film, many students reported difficulty in articulating their opinions in English. This gap highlights the challenge of inter-semiotic translation, where visual and emotional signs must be transformed into linguistic form. The findings thus complicate the assumption that film



automatically simplifies writing tasks. Instead, they suggest that film intensifies interpretive responsibility by requiring learners to stabilize affect into structured discourse.

In the case of *The Present* (2014), the emotional immediacy of the visual narrative appeared to generate strong affective responses, particularly in relation to themes of empathy, disability, and moral reflection. While these responses facilitated engagement, they also demanded a higher level of abstraction when students were asked to translate their reactions into written evaluation. The cinematic sign system, which operates through movement, silence, and visual juxtaposition, does not offer direct equivalence in written language. As a result, students were required to actively interpret and reorganize meaning rather than simply describe what they had seen. From a Metzian semiotic perspective, this difficulty is not incidental but structural. Metz argues that cinematic meaning is produced through a syntagmatic flow that resists discrete segmentation. When students attempt to write a film review, they must interrupt this flow and impose linguistic order through sentences, paragraphs, and evaluative claims. This process exposes the tension between the continuity of cinematic experience and the discontinuity of written discourse. The findings suggest that students' struggles stem less from a lack of understanding and more from the cognitive demand of converting cinematic impressions into analytical language.

### **Writing Difficulty and the Limits of Visual Comprehension**

The prominence of opinion expression as the main challenge indicates that higher-order writing skills remain a significant hurdle in EFL contexts. While grammar and vocabulary were mentioned, they were secondary to difficulties in evaluative and reflective language use. This challenges a common pedagogical assumption that linguistic accuracy is the primary barrier to writing proficiency. The findings suggest that meaning construction, rather than language form alone, constitutes the central difficulty. In semiotic terms, students appeared to struggle not with decoding the film's signs but with re-encoding them into coherent written arguments. This aligns with Metz's assertion that cinematic meaning is continuous and non-discrete, whereas written language demands segmentation and hierarchy (Thompson, B. E., 2019). The act of writing a review therefore requires students to impose structure on a flow of visual impressions, a task that remains cognitively demanding even with technological support.

This cognitive demand is further compounded by the evaluative nature of film review writing, which requires learners to position themselves critically in relation to the film. Rather than merely recounting narrative elements, students must formulate judgments, justify opinions, and articulate personal interpretations in a coherent manner. For EFL learners, this shift from



description to evaluation introduces an additional layer of difficulty, as it necessitates both linguistic control and rhetorical awareness. The reliance on visual comprehension may obscure the need for explicit scaffolding in analytical writing. While the film provides a shared interpretive reference, it does not supply the linguistic or rhetorical frameworks required for critical response. As a result, students may possess a strong understanding of the film's themes yet remain uncertain about how to organize their ideas into a structured argument. This suggests that visual media, although effective for engagement, cannot substitute for instruction in evaluative discourse.

From a semiotic standpoint, this limitation reflects the non-equivalence between cinematic and written sign systems. The meaning generated through visual sequencing and affective cues must be reorganized into linear and hierarchical structures characteristic of academic writing. This transformation requires conscious intervention, as the coherence of cinematic meaning does not automatically translate into textual coherence. The findings therefore indicate that writing difficulty emerges at the intersection of semiotic translation and discursive expectation. The persistence of these challenges points to the importance of mediating tools and instructional strategies that support learners in bridging visual understanding and written expression. Without such mediation, students risk remaining at the level of comprehension without progressing toward critical articulation. This observation sets the stage for examining how generative AI tools may function as linguistic mediators within this complex meaning-making process.

### **QuillBot as Linguistic Mediation Rather Than Meaning Generator**

Students' reported use of QuillBot reveals a clear pattern of instrumental engagement. Most participants used the tool primarily for grammar correction and sentence refinement, and many limited its use to final proofreading. This finding is significant because it contradicts the fear that AI tools inevitably promote dependency or replace student thinking. Instead, students positioned QuillBot as a surface-level mediator that operates on linguistic form rather than conceptual content. From a semiotic standpoint, QuillBot functions as an editor of signifiers rather than a producer of signified meaning. Its paraphrasing capacity reshapes syntactic and lexical choices without altering the underlying interpretation derived from the film. This process resembles cinematic montage, in which meaning emerges through the rearrangement of elements rather than the creation of new narrative material (Marcus, G. E., 2014). Students who selectively accepted or rejected AI suggestions demonstrated semiotic agency by evaluating whether algorithmic output aligned with their intended meaning.



This selective engagement indicates that students did not attribute epistemic authority to the AI tool, but instead treated it as a supportive resource subject to human judgment. Rather than accepting QuillBot's output uncritically, students evaluated its suggestions in relation to their own intentions, retaining control over meaning while allowing the tool to assist with expression. This pattern suggests that AI use in the classroom can coexist with interpretive autonomy when learners are positioned as decision-makers rather than passive users.

The instrumental use of QuillBot also reflects an implicit awareness of the boundaries between meaning construction and linguistic presentation. Students appeared to recognize that while AI could enhance clarity and correctness, it could not generate evaluative insight or interpretive depth. In this sense, QuillBot functioned as a mediating layer within the writing process, intervening after meaning had been formed rather than during its construction. This temporal positioning of AI use reinforces the idea that interpretation remained grounded in students' engagement with the film. The reliance on QuillBot for surface-level revision highlights the persistence of linguistic anxiety among EFL learners. Even when students possessed a clear interpretive stance, uncertainty about grammatical accuracy and sentence structure prompted them to seek technological assistance. This finding suggests that AI tools may reduce affective barriers associated with language production without diminishing cognitive effort related to interpretation and evaluation.

At the same time, the limited scope of QuillBot's use shows its inability to address deeper organizational and argumentative challenges. While students benefited from improved fluency at the sentence level, difficulties related to coherence and critical framing remained. This limitation reinforces the view that generative AI, when confined to linguistic mediation, cannot substitute for pedagogical guidance in developing higher-order writing skills. Instead, its value lies in supporting expression once interpretive work has already been undertaken.

### **Agency, Motivation, and Critical AI Awareness**

Despite recognizing QuillBot's usefulness, many students reported that writing remained difficult and that their motivation only slightly increased. This finding challenges techno-optimistic narratives that portray AI as a solution to writing anxiety. Instead, the results suggest that motivation is shaped more by task meaning and learner identity than by technological assistance.

Importantly, several students expressed awareness of potential dependency on AI tools. This reflects an emerging form of critical AI literacy, in which learners recognize both the benefits





and limitations of algorithmic support. Such awareness is pedagogically significant because it suggests that ethical engagement with AI can develop organically when students are encouraged to reflect on their writing choices rather than merely adopt tools uncritically.

This awareness indicates that students did not perceive AI as a neutral or authoritative presence, but as a tool whose use required conscious regulation. Rather than viewing QuillBot as a shortcut to writing success, students demonstrated sensitivity to the balance between assistance and autonomy. This perception complicates assumptions that learners will inevitably over-rely on AI when it is introduced into the classroom, suggesting instead that reflective pedagogical contexts can foster responsible use. The limited motivational impact of AI support further emphasizes the importance of task design in writing instruction. Students appeared more engaged by the thematic and emotional dimensions of the film than by the presence of technological tools. This finding reinforces the idea that motivation in EFL writing is closely tied to opportunities for personal interpretation and meaning-making, rather than to efficiency or error reduction alone. AI tools may ease certain technical burdens, but they do not inherently enhance learners' investment in the writing process (Khalifa, M., & Albadawy, M., 2024).

From an educational perspective, the emergence of critical AI awareness among students suggests the potential for integrating ethical reflection into everyday classroom practice. When learners are invited to evaluate the role of AI in shaping their writing, they begin to recognize issues of authorship, responsibility, and control. Such reflection aligns with broader concerns in AI-assisted education regarding agency and transparency, positioning students not merely as users of technology but as active negotiators of its influence.

### **Authorship and Meaning in AI-Supported Writing**

The interaction between students and QuillBot reveals a reconfiguration of authorship rather than its disappearance. Students remained the primary interpreters of the film and the decision-makers in their writing, while AI operated as a secondary mediator. This challenges the assumption that AI-assisted writing necessarily undermines originality. Instead, originality in this context emerged through students' interpretive stance toward the film and their selective engagement with AI suggestions. In Metz's terms, meaning does not reside in the image alone but in the relationship between sign systems and the spectator's interpretive work (Lefebvre, M., 2018). Extending this logic, AI becomes another layer in the chain of signification, influencing form but not determining meaning. The classroom thus becomes a site of semiotic negotiation, where students learn to manage multiple mediators of expression.





The findings further indicate that students' sense of ownership over their writing was not diminished by the presence of AI. Instead, authorship was reinforced through decision-making practices, particularly when students chose to accept, modify, or reject AI-generated suggestions. These acts of selection reflect an ongoing negotiation of meaning in which students assert control over how their interpretations are articulated. In this sense, AI functions as a responsive tool rather than a directive force (Dixon-Román, E., 2020). This reconceptualization of authorship also invites a reconsideration of originality in educational contexts. Originality, as demonstrated in this study, did not depend on the absence of technological assistance but on the presence of interpretive intention. Students' written reviews were shaped by their engagement with the film's themes and their personal perspectives, even when AI was used to refine expression. Such findings challenge reductive views of AI-assisted writing as inherently inauthentic and instead highlight the importance of process-oriented evaluation. The integration of AI into film-based writing instruction shows the need for pedagogical frameworks that acknowledge multiple layers of mediation. By situating AI within a semiotic chain rather than outside it, educators can better understand its role in shaping, but not controlling, meaning-making practices. This perspective positions the writing classroom as a dynamic interpretive space where students learn to navigate visual, linguistic, and technological signs while maintaining authorship and responsibility for their work.

## **Conclusion**

The classroom practice examined in this study shows that neither film nor generative AI makes writing easier in the way they are often assumed to do. Students understood the film, engaged with its message, and made use of AI to refine their language, yet writing evaluatively remained difficult. This difficulty did not stem from a lack of tools, but from the demand to translate visual and emotional experience into structured written judgment.

QuillBot did not take over students' writing. It intervened only at the level of language form. Meaning, interpretation, and evaluative stance remained firmly in students' control. Rather than weakening authorship, AI use made authorship more visible, because students had to decide what to accept, what to reject, and how their ideas should finally appear on the page. In this sense, authorship was not erased by AI, but foregrounded through interaction with it.

The most unsettling finding of this study is that generative AI did not solve any of the core problems it is often expected to address. Instead, it revealed them more clearly. When AI removed surface-level linguistic concerns, what remained was the unresolved challenge of interpretation,



structure, and critical voice. Technology did not transform writing instruction; it exposed its unresolved foundations. For this reason, the central issue raised by this study is not whether AI should be used in EFL writing classrooms, but whether writing pedagogy has adequately addressed the semiotic work that writing demands. As long as writing is treated primarily as a technical skill rather than an interpretive practice, no technological tool, however advanced, will fundamentally change students' struggles. In this sense, AI does not mark a turning point in writing instruction. It marks a moment of reckoning.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study offer several implications for EFL writing pedagogy, particularly in contexts where generative AI and multimodal materials are increasingly present. First, the study suggests that generative AI tools such as QuillBot can be productively integrated into writing instruction when their role is clearly framed as linguistic support rather than content generation. When students used AI primarily for revising grammar and sentence clarity, their interpretive agency and authorship were maintained. This indicates that AI can support writing accuracy without undermining students' responsibility for meaning-making.

Second, the use of film as a writing stimulus highlights the need for explicit instructional support in evaluative writing. Although films like *The Present* (2014) promote engagement and emotional understanding, they do not automatically help students develop structured written arguments. Teachers may therefore need to place greater emphasis on guiding students through the transition from visual comprehension to analytical expression, for example by modeling evaluative language or providing frameworks for review writing.

Finally, the study implies that concerns about AI dependency should be addressed pedagogically rather than technologically. Students in this study demonstrated awareness of AI's limitations, suggesting that reflective classroom practices can foster responsible and critical use of AI tools. This positions teachers as key mediators in shaping how AI is understood and used in writing instruction.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted as a single qualitative case study involving a small number of participants in one instructional setting. As a result, the findings are context-specific and cannot be generalized to all EFL classrooms or educational levels. The study aims to provide depth of understanding rather than broad representativeness.



Second, the data relied primarily on self-reported survey responses, which reflect students' perceptions rather than direct measures of writing improvement. While these perceptions are valuable for understanding learner experience, they do not allow for claims about changes in writing proficiency or long-term learning outcomes. Future studies could combine perception data with textual analysis of student writing to examine how AI use influences writing quality more concretely.

Third, the dual role of the researcher as both teacher and researcher may have influenced classroom dynamics and student responses. Although this position allowed for close observation, it also requires careful reflexivity. Future research could involve independent observers or multiple instructors to reduce potential bias.

Further research is recommended to explore AI-supported writing across different proficiency levels, genres, and instructional contexts. Longitudinal studies may also be useful to examine how sustained exposure to reflective AI use affects students' writing development and critical awareness over time. Comparative studies involving different AI tools could provide additional insight into how specific technological features shape writing practices.

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