



Generative AI as a Task-Oriented Resource: English Learning Motivation and Sense of Ownership Among Korean Secondary School Students*

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study examines how secondary school students perceive and use generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools in English learning and how these experiences shape their task engagement, sense of achievement, and motivation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 Korean EFL students who had used GenAI for English-related tasks. Thematic analysis showed that students rarely experienced GenAI as a continuous learning environment. Instead, they used it selectively as a task-oriented resource, especially for performance assessment, translation, writing, idea generation, revision, and information checking. GenAI increased students' efficiency, reduced anxiety, and helped students initiate or complete tasks that might otherwise have been burdensome. However, the same support sometimes weakened students' sense of ownership and achievement when they felt that GenAI had completed the task on their behalf. Students also differed in how they reworked and verified GenAI-supported output, indicating that GenAI-mediated task performance involved different ways of engaging with AI assistance. The findings suggest that GenAI does not automatically strengthen English learning motivation. Rather, it reorganizes task performance by creating a tension between efficiency and ownership. The educational significance of GenAI depends not only on its technological capabilities but also on how it is situated within learning tasks and how students engage with and interpret the resulting work.

KEYWORDS

generative AI (GenAI), English learning motivation, task performance, learner agency, psychological ownership

1. Introduction

The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has introduced new possibilities and tensions into English language learning. Tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and other large language model-based applications can generate sentences, translate texts, explain grammar, provide feedback, and suggest ideas almost instantly. For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), this immediacy is particularly consequential. A learner who previously had to consult a teacher, search a dictionary, compare several online sources, or revise a draft independently can now request linguistic support within seconds. Such support may reduce the practical barriers that have often made English learning difficult, especially for students who lack confidence in writing or speaking.

Recent research has emphasized the potential of GenAI for language learning. Studies have reported that ChatGPT and related tools can support writing, vocabulary development, feedback, task preparation, and self-regulated learning (Dizon et al. 2025, Hwang et al. 2025, Kohnke et al. 2023, Su et al. 2023). At the same time, scholars have repeatedly cautioned that GenAI may produce inaccurate information, encourage surface-level task completion, and weaken learners' critical engagement with language (Cotton et al. 2024, Kasneci et al. 2023, Kohnke et al. 2023). These studies suggest that understanding the educational value of GenAI requires attention not only to what learners accomplish with GenAI but also to how they experience GenAI-supported learning.

Among these learner experiences, learning motivation has emerged as a particularly important issue. In much public discussion, GenAI is assumed to motivate students because it makes learning faster, easier, and more personalized. Recent work on GenAI and language learning motivation, however, cautions against this simple assumption by showing that GenAI may both support and undermine motivation depending on how it affects learners' autonomy, competence, relatedness, cognitive engagement, and dependence on external support (Al-Hoorie et al. 2026, Kim and Hong 2026). A tool that helps students complete English tasks more efficiently may also change how they interpret the task, how much effort they invest, and whether they experience the final product as their own achievement. In this sense, GenAI may not merely increase or decrease motivation. It may reorganize the conditions under which students experience effort, anxiety, confidence, and ownership in English learning.

These motivational issues are particularly important in assessment-oriented EFL contexts such as South Korea, where English learning is closely tied to school achievement, performance assessment, and entrance examinations (Kim 2021, 2026). Students may therefore encounter English not only as a communicative resource but also as a subject that must be performed, evaluated, and recorded. In such a context, GenAI can easily become attached to task completion. Students may use it to complete performance-assessment assignments, generate English scripts, translate Korean ideas into English, revise awkward expressions, or search for information. These practices may be useful, but they may also reinforce an existing orientation toward English as a means of completing assessed tasks.

Although this study is situated in South Korea, its findings are relevant to other assessment-oriented EFL contexts in Asia where English functions not only as a communicative resource but also as a school subject tied to performance assessment, credential competition, and future educational mobility. The broader relevance of the Korean case lies in the fact that GenAI may be taken up differently in contexts where English tasks are embedded in high-stakes schooling, parental expectations, and institutionalized assessment practices.

The present study responds to this tension by examining how secondary school students perceive and use GenAI in English learning and how these experiences relate to their motivation. Rather than asking whether GenAI is effective in a general sense, this study asks how learners experience GenAI-mediated task performance. The analysis focuses on three connected issues: first, whether students experience GenAI as a continuous learning

environment or a selectively used resource; second, how GenAI changes the process of task performance; and third, how students interpret the motivational consequences of such use, particularly in relation to efficiency, emotional comfort, achievement, and ownership.

To examine these questions, this study conceptualizes GenAI as a task-oriented resource, defined as a form of tool use in which students activate GenAI selectively in response to immediate task demands rather than integrating it into a sustained learning trajectory. This concept differs from broader notions of GenAI-assisted learning because the tool is organized primarily around task completion, output improvement, and assessment readiness rather than sustained language development.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do secondary school students use GenAI tools in English learning?
2. How do secondary school students engage with GenAI while carrying out English-learning tasks?
3. What motivational experiences do secondary school students report when using GenAI in English learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1 GenAI in English Language Learning

The use of artificial intelligence in language learning is not entirely new. Earlier forms of automated writing evaluation, automated written corrective feedback, machine translation, and chatbot-based practice had already influenced EFL learning before the release of ChatGPT. These tools helped learners identify errors, compare alternatives, or obtain immediate linguistic support (Lee 2020, Ranalli 2018, Zhang and Hyland 2018). However, earlier tools were often limited to specific functions such as grammar checking, translation, or form-focused feedback. GenAI differs because it can participate in multiple stages of a task: generating ideas, drafting sentences, revising style, explaining grammar, producing examples, and answering follow-up questions in an interactive manner (Kohnke et al. 2023, Su et al. 2023).

Recent research has documented these affordances in language learning and writing contexts. Su et al. (2023) argued that ChatGPT can support argumentative writing by assisting students with planning, content revision, proofreading, and reflection. Hwang et al. (2025) used screen-recording data to show that second language (L2) learners often use ChatGPT in the early stages of writing for idea generation and later for grammar checking, polishing, and example generation. Dizon et al. (2025) found that EFL university students used ChatGPT for formal language learning, including summarization and translation, while also recognizing the danger of overreliance. These studies suggest that GenAI is often experienced not as a single-purpose application but as an adaptable resource that can be called upon at different moments in a learning task. This pattern also resonates with earlier technology-enhanced language learning research on on-demand learning. In mobile-assisted language learning, on-demand learning has been identified as an affordance that enables learners to access learning support in response to their immediate needs (Jung 2018).

Related research has also examined how learners appropriate technological tools within learning activities. Overdijk and van Diggelen (2008) conceptualized tool appropriation as a process through which the use and effects of a technological tool are shaped by how learners enact and organize its use in activity. In an L2 classroom context, Wen et al. (2015) showed that different groups of students developed alternative ways of appropriating a representational tool during collaborative second-language writing. These studies suggest that technological tools do not necessarily have a fixed role in learning activities; rather, their use and effects can develop through learners'

interaction with the tool and the activity context.

In addition to improving writing performance, recent studies have begun to show that students' experiences with GenAI extend beyond instructional effectiveness to motivational and psychological dimensions. Song and Song (2023) reported that ChatGPT-assisted language learning enhanced both academic writing performance and learning motivation, while Yuan et al. (2024) found that students simultaneously perceived opportunities and challenges in GenAI-assisted writing. These findings suggest that learners' responses to GenAI involve not only perceived usefulness but also confidence, dependence, responsibility, and the extent to which they regard GenAI-supported work as meaningful learning.

At the same time, GenAI raises important concerns for language learning. Because it can produce fluent and coherent English, students may submit output that exceeds their current proficiency. Cotton et al. (2024) warned that ChatGPT complicates academic integrity because educators may find it difficult to distinguish students' own learning from machine-generated work. Kasneci et al. (2023) similarly emphasized both opportunities and challenges of large language models in education, including support for personalized learning as well as risks related to accuracy, dependence, and learner agency. These concerns extend beyond ethical or administrative issues because they directly influence how students experience effort, competence, responsibility, and ownership during English-learning tasks. Accordingly, understanding GenAI requires attention not only to what students produce but also to how they experience GenAI-supported task performance.

Recent research has increasingly emphasized that the educational value of GenAI depends not only on what the technology can do but also on how learners position it within their learning process. Learners may use GenAI in different ways depending on their instructional goals and task demands. For example, some learners use GenAI as a tutor to obtain explanations, model expressions, and feedback, whereas others rely on it primarily to complete assignments more efficiently. Some learners also move flexibly between these roles according to the demands of particular learning tasks. This variability suggests that students' experiences with GenAI cannot be understood solely in terms of technological affordances but must be interpreted in relation to learner perception and task context.

Overall, existing research on GenAI in English language learning has progressed from examining its instructional affordances and effectiveness to exploring learners' perceptions and experiences of GenAI-supported learning. More recent studies have also begun to acknowledge both the opportunities and challenges associated with GenAI use, including issues of dependence, confidence, and learner engagement. However, these studies have primarily focused on evaluating learning outcomes or documenting learners' perceptions of GenAI. Relatively little attention has been paid to how students experience GenAI-mediated task performance in everyday school contexts and how these experiences shape English learning motivation. Accordingly, the present study examines how secondary school students perceive and use GenAI during English-learning tasks and how motivation is experienced and constructed through GenAI-mediated task engagement.

2.2 Task Performance, Verification, and Learner Agency

The educational value of GenAI-supported language learning depends not simply on access to the technology but on how learners engage with its outputs. Because direct empirical research on GenAI-mediated language learning is still developing, earlier studies of automated feedback and machine translation provide relevant, although not directly equivalent, conceptual precedents. Learners may interpret, revise, reject, or selectively incorporate automated feedback rather than accept it passively (Ranalli 2018, Zhang and Hyland 2018). Likewise, machine translation can support comparison and revision, but its value depends on learners' ability to evaluate and

modify the output (Lee 2020). Although these technologies differ from GenAI, they support a broader principle: technologically generated output becomes educationally meaningful when learners exercise evaluative judgment rather than treating it as an authoritative final product.

Such judgment is especially important because GenAI responses may appear fluent and convincing while remaining factually inaccurate, stylistically inappropriate, unnecessarily complex, or poorly aligned with task requirements. Learners must therefore assess not only linguistic acceptability but also accuracy, relevance, appropriateness, and consistency with their communicative intentions. The interpretive demands of GenAI are thus broader than those associated with conventional automated feedback or machine translation.

Verification is consequently central to GenAI-mediated task performance. Although Wineburg and McGrew's (2019) study preceded the widespread use of GenAI and focused on online information, its emphasis on lateral reading and source checking offers a useful general framework. In GenAI-assisted English learning, learners may need to corroborate factual claims, examine original sources, compare alternative formulations or translations, and determine whether generated language conveys their intended meaning. These transferable practices may reduce uncritical reliance on plausible but unreliable output and encourage reflective judgment.

Evaluation and verification are closely related to learner agency. Drawing on Bandura's (2001) concept of human agency, learner agency in GenAI-assisted English learning refers to students' intentional regulation of technology use in pursuing task goals. It includes defining the task, formulating prompts, interpreting and verifying responses, revising language, and deciding what to retain, reject, or transform. Agency is therefore demonstrated not merely by using GenAI but by the decisions learners make throughout task performance. Learners who critically adapt generated material exercise a different degree of agency from those who reproduce it without understanding or modification.

A related issue is whether learners experience a GenAI-assisted product as meaningfully their own. Psychological ownership, originally developed in organizational psychology, refers to the subjective perception that a target is "mine" and has been associated with self-identity, accountability, and efficacy (Avey et al. 2009, Pierce et al. 2001). Although this framework was not developed for GenAI-assisted learning, it offers an interpretive lens for examining whether successful task completion reflects learners' perceived competence, effort, and judgment.

Psychological ownership may be stronger when learners can identify their own intentions, evaluations, decisions, and revisions in the final product. When students critically modify and appropriate generated material, they may perceive it as an expression of their own meaning and competence. By contrast, when GenAI performs most of the linguistic or conceptual work, successful completion may not produce a corresponding sense of authorship or achievement. In this study, psychological ownership is therefore used as an interpretive concept rather than a formal theory to be tested. Accordingly, students' statements about whether a GenAI-assisted product felt like their own work or achievement, and whether it reflected their own effort, judgment, or contribution, were treated as indicators of psychological ownership.

Learner agency and psychological ownership are related but analytically distinct. Learner agency concerns how students regulate GenAI use through prompting, evaluation, verification, revision, and decision-making. Psychological ownership concerns whether they perceive the completed product as reflecting their own effort, judgment, and identity. Ownership is not simply a component of agency; rather, it may emerge as a motivationally important outcome of how responsibility is distributed between the learner and GenAI during task performance.

In sum, the relevant literature does not establish that principles derived from automated feedback, machine translation, digital-information evaluation, human agency, or organizational psychology can be transferred to GenAI without qualification. It does, however, provide a set of conceptual foundations for investigating how

learners evaluate generated output, regulate their use of technological assistance, and interpret the resulting product as their own. Emerging GenAI research increasingly raises these issues, but verification, learner agency, and psychological ownership have rarely been examined as interconnected processes in students' everyday school-based English learning. The present study addresses this gap by investigating how learners' evaluative actions, regulation of GenAI use, and perceived ownership of the final product jointly shape their experiences of task performance and English learning motivation.

2.3 Motivation as an Experience Formed Through Task Engagement

As GenAI becomes increasingly integrated into English language learning, understanding learners' motivation requires attention not only to learning outcomes but also to how students experience GenAI-mediated task engagement. L2 motivation has often been conceptualized as a psychological force that initiates and sustains language learning (Dörnyei 2005, Gardner 1985). This tradition has generated important insights into attitudes, goals, self-images, effort, and persistence. However, qualitative and sociocultural approaches have also emphasized that motivation is not merely a stable internal variable. It is formed, negotiated, and reshaped through learners' experiences in particular contexts (Kim 2006, 2021). This perspective is especially useful for studying GenAI because GenAI use changes the activity of learning itself. Learners' motivation may shift not because their long-term goals have changed but because the task now feels easier, less threatening, less effortful, or less personally owned.

Recent research in technology-enhanced language learning has similarly connected motivation to experience. Li and Liu (2023) argued that language learning experience can be theorized through positive psychology because learners' engagement, meaning, and emotions contribute to motivational development. Wang and Wang (2025) examined enjoyment, self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement in GenAI-assisted English learning through the lens of self-determination theory, showing that learners' motivational responses to GenAI-mediated environments are multidimensional. These studies suggest that motivation should be examined through the quality of learning experience rather than only through pre-existing attitudes toward English.

This view is also consistent with Al-Hoorie et al.'s (2026) argument that the motivational significance of GenAI should be examined not simply in terms of increased interest or positive attitudes, but in terms of the quality of learners' motivation. From this perspective, GenAI may support motivation when it strengthens learners' autonomy, competence, and meaningful engagement, but it may undermine motivation when it encourages dependence, superficial task completion, or reduced cognitive engagement.

The present study therefore conceptualizes English learning motivation not as a fixed personal trait or a general liking for English, but as a task-situated experience through which learners decide whether and how to initiate, continue, revise, verify, and personally claim English-learning tasks. This position is consistent with earlier L2 motivation research that views motivation as involving effort, desire, attitudes, goals, and persistence (Dörnyei 2005, Gardner 1985), while also aligning with more contextual and qualitative approaches that emphasize how motivation is shaped through learners' lived experiences in specific educational settings (Kim 2006, 2021, Li and Liu 2023). This represents a deliberate narrowing of the broader L2 motivation tradition: rather than examining enduring motivational dispositions, future L2 selves, or general attitudes toward English, the present study focuses on motivation as it is experienced during GenAI-mediated task engagement. This narrower focus allows the analysis to capture how changes in required effort, perceived control, emotional burden, and personal meaningfulness shape students' willingness to engage with specific English tasks, while leaving longer-term motivational orientations outside the scope of the study.

This definition includes experiences that directly shape students' willingness to engage with English tasks. For example, efficiency is treated as motivationally relevant only when it helps students begin or continue a task that they might otherwise avoid. Emotional comfort is included only when reduced anxiety enables students to attempt, revise, or rehearse English more actively. Perceived control is relevant when students feel able to shape GenAI output through prompting, evaluation, and revision. Sense of achievement and psychological ownership are also included because they influence whether students interpret a GenAI-assisted product as the outcome of their own effort, judgment, and developing competence (Avey et al. 2009, Pierce et al. 2001, Weiner 1985). Thus, the study does not treat convenience, enjoyment, or anxiety reduction as motivation in themselves. They become motivationally meaningful only when they affect students' engagement with English-learning tasks.

The focus on ownership in the present paper is also related to achievement attribution. From an attributional perspective, learners' emotional responses to success depend partly on whether they understand the outcome as resulting from their own effort and ability or from external support (Weiner 1985). In GenAI-assisted English tasks, this distinction is particularly important because a polished final product may not produce a strong sense of achievement if students attribute the outcome mainly to GenAI rather than to their own judgment, revision, and learning.

Importantly, this task-situated definition does not assume that positive perceptions of GenAI necessarily indicate stronger motivation. A student may find GenAI convenient, interesting, or emotionally safe while still using it mainly to complete an assignment with minimal personal investment. Conversely, a student may feel dissatisfied with GenAI-assisted work precisely because the task no longer feels like an opportunity for self-development. This distinction is central to the study: GenAI may support motivation when it functions as a scaffold for learners' own decision making, revision, verification, and expression, but it may weaken motivation when it separates task completion from personal effort and ownership.

Overall, research reviewed in this subsection has increasingly examined the motivational implications of GenAI through learners' engagement, self-efficacy, enjoyment, and attitudes toward GenAI-supported language learning. These studies have clarified several ways in which GenAI may facilitate or constrain motivation. However, they have paid less attention to how students experience motivation during the actual completion of GenAI-mediated English tasks, particularly when their own effort, decision-making, and perceived ownership are involved. The present study therefore approaches motivation as an experience constructed through students' engagement with specific GenAI-assisted tasks rather than as a general disposition toward English or technology.

This task-based perspective is particularly important in assessment-oriented EFL contexts, where GenAI may reproduce rather than transform existing educational practices. When English tasks are closely tied to school performance, students may use GenAI primarily to complete assignments rather than to develop sustained language competence. The technology may make task performance more efficient without altering the broader purpose of learning. The motivational question is therefore not simply whether GenAI makes students more interested in English or more favorably disposed toward technology. Rather, it concerns whether GenAI enables students to experience English learning as meaningful, agentic, productively effortful, and connected to their own development.

In general, the literature reviewed across the preceding sections indicates that GenAI has considerable potential to support English language learning while raising interconnected questions about task performance, verification, learner agency, psychological ownership, and motivation. Existing studies have often examined these issues separately or primarily through learning outcomes, perceptions, and technology acceptance. As a result, comparatively little is known about how these processes interact during students' everyday engagement with GenAI-mediated English-learning tasks. The present study addresses this broader gap by examining how

secondary school students jointly experience task completion, verification, agency, ownership, and motivation when using GenAI. In doing so, it offers an integrated account of the motivational processes involved in GenAI-supported English learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine how secondary school students perceived and used GenAI tools in English learning and how those experiences were connected to motivation. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand students' meaning-making rather than to measure the frequency or effectiveness of GenAI use. The central concern was not whether students had a positive or negative attitude toward GenAI in general, but how they described concrete moments of GenAI use in English-related tasks and how they interpreted those moments in relation to effort, anxiety, achievement, and ownership.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 16 Korean secondary school students who had experience using GenAI tools in English learning. The sample included nine middle school students in Korean Grades 2-3, roughly equivalent to Grades 8-9, and seven high school students in Korean Grades 1-3, roughly equivalent to Grades 10-12. The sample had an equal gender balance of eight female and eight male students. Participants were recruited from several regions, including Seoul, Gyeonggi, Sejong, and Chungcheong, to include a range of school and learning contexts. All participants had used GenAI for English-related tasks such as writing, translation, performance assessment, information searching, idea generation, grammar checking, or revision. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic characteristics and GenAI-use contexts.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. English teachers who had participated in the researchers' earlier qualitative study on GenAI use in English education were asked to recommend students who had actual experience using GenAI in English learning and who were able to describe those experiences in detail. The researchers then invited the recommended students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The selection criteria were that students should be currently engaged in English learning, should have used GenAI in actual English-learning or task-performance contexts, and should be able to describe their learning experiences in detail. Both middle and high school students were treated as a single group of secondary school students because school level was not treated as a central analytic variable. Rather, in keeping with the qualitative orientation of the study, the analysis attended to individual differences in students' prior GenAI experience, task context, proficiency-related confidence, verification practices, and perceived ownership of GenAI-assisted work. To protect participants' privacy, students are identified only by participant codes, school level, and gender.

All participants had prior experience using GenAI not only during classroom English activities but also in their own out-of-class English learning. Consequently, the interviews explored a broad range of GenAI-supported learning experiences, including both school-based tasks and self-directed learning. This enabled participants to reflect on their everyday use of GenAI based on authentic learning experiences rather than limiting their accounts to classroom instruction alone.

This individual-difference orientation was maintained throughout the analysis. Rather than treating middle and

high school students as two fixed comparison groups, the study examined how students' English-proficiency confidence, prior GenAI experience, verification habits, task type, and sensitivity to ownership shaped their use of GenAI. This approach is consistent with the qualitative aim of understanding patterned meanings without reducing students' experiences to school-level categories.

Table 1. Summary of Participants

Group	N	Gender		Grades	Regions	GenAI-use contexts
		M	F			
Middle school students	9	4	5	Korean Grade 2-3 (about G8-9)	Seoul and Gyeonggi	Translation, sentence revision, GenAI-assisted speaking or writing practice, performance assessment
High school students	7	4	3	Korean Grade 1-3 (about G10-12)	Gyeonggi, Sejong, and Chungcheong	Writing, translation, source searching, performance assessment, presentation scripts, revision
Total	16	8	8		Multiple regions	Experience using GenAI in English-related tasks

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom in February 2026. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Before the interviews, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw, and the ways in which the data would be used and protected. Because all participants were minors, written assent was obtained from the students together with written informed consent from their parents or legal guardians before data collection. Permission to contact and recruit the students was also obtained from the teachers who assisted with participant recruitment. All names, school names, and other identifiable information were removed from the manuscript and replaced with participant codes.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method. This format was appropriate because semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' situated experiences while maintaining sufficient consistency across cases, a common practice in applied linguistics research (Dörnyei 2007, Kim 2006, Talmy 2010). The interview protocol included questions about GenAI tools used, contexts of use, task types, verification practices, emotional responses, perceived learning effects, achievement, and concerns about dependence. Students were encouraged to recall specific English-learning situations rather than offer general opinions about GenAI. This emphasis on concrete episodes was important because the study conceptualized motivation as an experience formed through task engagement.

The interview protocol consisted of 20 open-ended questions (see Appendix). The interview guide was developed based on previous studies on GenAI-assisted language learning and relevant theoretical frameworks. The questions were organized into four domains: (a) experiences using GenAI tools, (b) psychological experiences, (c) motivational experiences, and (d) perceived learning outcomes. The first domain included introductory questions designed to understand participants' prior experiences using GenAI in English learning. The psychological domain was informed by Psychological Safety Theory (Edmondson 1999) and Control-Value Theory (Pekrun 2006). The motivational domain drew on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci 2000, 2017), the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2005, 2009), and the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic motivation (Huta and Ryan 2010). The questions encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences of using GenAI for English learning and the psychological, motivational, and learning-related meanings they attached to

those experiences.

A pilot interview was conducted with one male high school student and one female middle school student before the main round of interviews. These two students were also included in the final dataset because the pilot interviews addressed the same core research questions and the subsequent revisions concerned the wording, sequencing, and prompting of questions rather than substantive changes to the interview domains. The pilot interviews showed that abstract questions about the ‘meaning’ or ‘value’ of GenAI-based English learning were difficult for students to answer. Accordingly, the interview questions were revised to elicit specific task episodes, such as using GenAI for writing, translation, performance assessment, or revision. This revision helped students describe concrete learning experiences rather than provide generalized evaluations.

All interviews were conducted in Korean. The excerpts presented in this article were translated into English by the researchers and repeatedly checked against the original Korean transcripts to preserve participants’ intended meanings. Where literal translation sounded unnatural in English, wording was adjusted for readability while retaining the analytic meaning of the original utterance. This translation process was especially important because the analysis depended on students’ nuanced expressions of comfort, responsibility, disappointment, and ownership.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) procedures and by methodological discussions of qualitative analysis in applied linguistics and education research (Mackey and Gass 2015, Nowell et al. 2017). The analysis involved repeated reading of transcripts, initial coding, comparison of codes across participants, development of candidate themes, review of themes against the dataset, and refinement of thematic interpretations. Qualitative thematic analysis was appropriate because the study sought to identify patterned meanings in students’ accounts while preserving the contextual and interpretive complexity of their experiences. Although the analysis was sensitized by existing concepts such as task engagement, learner agency, achievement, and psychological ownership, these concepts were not used as a fixed a priori coding scheme. Instead, the coding categories were refined iteratively through engagement with students’ accounts.

The primary coding was conducted by the second author and confirmed by the first author. To enhance analytic trustworthiness, 20% of the interview data were independently coded by a doctoral student in English education. Before independent coding, the researchers and the doctoral student discussed the initial codebook, sample excerpts, and coding criteria. As a consistency check, the two coders initially agreed on approximately 91% of the coding decisions for this subset. Disagreements occurred mainly when an utterance could be coded both as efficiency and reduced ownership, or both as verification and as distrust of GenAI. The disagreements were subsequently discussed in relation to the surrounding context of each utterance until full agreement was reached on all coding decisions. This procedure was intended to enhance transparency and consistency in the application of the coding scheme rather than to suggest that qualitative interpretation could be reduced to a numerical measure of reliability.

The codebook was organized around the two main analytic domains of the study: task-oriented GenAI use and motivational experience. For example, utterances such as ‘I used GPT to fix awkward parts of the translation’ were coded as linguistic revision and GenAI-mediated task completion. Statements such as ‘I asked it for sources but checked again because I did not fully trust it’ were coded as partial trust and verification. Statements such as ‘It felt comfortable because I could make mistakes without being judged’ were coded as emotional safety, whereas statements such as ‘I felt that GenAI had done what I should have done’ were coded as weakened ownership and reduced achievement. This codebook made it possible to distinguish between the practical function of GenAI and

the motivational meaning students attached to that function.

Member checking was also conducted as a procedure for enhancing credibility in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985). After transcription, participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts or summarized statements to confirm whether their responses had been represented accurately. Minor clarifications were incorporated when participants indicated that a statement required contextual correction. This process helped ensure that the analysis remained grounded in participants' intended meanings. In addition, the researchers maintained analytic memos throughout the coding process, documenting emerging interpretations, alternative explanations, and possible negative cases.

The researchers' positionality was considered throughout the analysis. Because the study focused on students' motivational experiences with GenAI, the researchers remained attentive to the possibility of interpreting GenAI-related experiences primarily through a motivational lens. To minimize this potential bias, the analysis continually returned to participants' own wording and the broader context of each interview, particularly when distinguishing among task efficiency, enjoyment, anxiety reduction, achievement, and ownership.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in accordance with the three research questions. The first section examines students' use of GenAI in English learning. The second section examines how students engaged with GenAI while carrying out English-learning tasks. The third section examines the motivational experiences students reported when using GenAI in English learning. The analysis does not treat school level as the main explanatory variable. Instead, it foregrounds individual differences in how students positioned GenAI in relation to task completion, verification, emotional comfort, and ownership. Four recurring individual-difference dimensions were especially visible across the data: students' confidence in English proficiency, their prior experience with GenAI tools, their habits of verifying GenAI output, and their sensitivity to whether GenAI-assisted work still felt personally owned. These dimensions appeared across both middle and high school participants, suggesting that students' GenAI-mediated motivation was shaped less by school level alone than by how they interpreted the role of GenAI in their own task performance.

4.1 Students' Use of GenAI in English Learning

The first section examines how students used GenAI in English learning. Students did not generally describe GenAI as a continuous environment for English learning. Instead, they used it selectively when a task required immediate support. This pattern was especially visible in performance-assessment contexts, where students needed to produce English output, locate supporting information, prepare a presentation, or revise a text. GenAI was therefore experienced less as an everyday language-learning space and more as a resource that could be called upon when a specific problem emerged. This task-oriented pattern was broadly shared across participants, although the specific tasks and purposes for which GenAI was used varied across individual learners.

This does not mean that students regarded GenAI as unimportant. On the contrary, they often described it as useful, efficient, and accessible. However, its usefulness was framed through task completion. Students rarely described using GenAI to develop long-term English proficiency or to engage in sustained communicative practice. Their accounts instead centered on moments when GenAI helped them move forward in an assignment. The following excerpt illustrates this task-oriented pattern of GenAI use.

Excerpt 1 (S8, middle school, male)

When I was studying English, I used AI on my own when I reached a point where I thought, “I can’t do this. Maybe I should ask AI.”

This excerpt illustrates the task-oriented nature of GenAI use particularly clearly. The student did not describe AI as something continuously integrated into his English learning. Instead, he turned to it when he encountered a difficulty that he felt unable to resolve on his own. GenAI thus functioned as an immediately available resource activated by a specific problem, rather than as a sustained learning environment.

A similar pattern appeared when students used GenAI to complete English presentations or writing assignments. In these cases, GenAI served as a bridge between what students wanted to express and what they could produce in English. The next excerpt shows how a student used GenAI when preparing an English presentation.

Excerpt 2 (S13, middle school, female)

There was a class where I had to make a presentation script in English. I used GPT to fix the parts that sounded awkward when I translated them.

Here, the student’s difficulty was not the absence of an idea but the difficulty of turning an idea into acceptable English. GenAI was used to repair the gap between intended meaning and linguistic expression. This kind of use may support learning if the student compares versions and notices differences. Yet the excerpt itself emphasizes completion and correction rather than reflection. The student’s experience was organized around producing a usable presentation script, which again suggests that GenAI was embedded in task performance rather than broader language development.

Students also used GenAI when teacher support was not available. The following excerpt shows how accessibility shaped the perceived value of GenAI.

Excerpt 3 (S15, middle school, male)

GenAI does not have time limits, so it was good that I could study at night without much restriction. When I cannot get help from a teacher, GenAI helps me instead, so I think it is good that there are no time or space limits.

The student’s account highlights one of GenAI’s most powerful affordances: availability. GenAI becomes useful because it is present when teachers are not. However, the wording also shows that GenAI was positioned as a substitute support system rather than as a learning community or sustained curriculum. It helped the student overcome immediate constraints of time and access. This kind of accessibility can be motivational because it reduces frustration and enables task continuation. Yet it may also reinforce a reactive pattern of use in which students consult GenAI only when a problem appears.

Overall, these excerpts show that students’ GenAI use was strongly shaped by the organization of school tasks. GenAI was not irrelevant to motivation, but its motivational significance lay in its ability to make tasks

approachable and manageable. These findings complicate claims that GenAI automatically creates a new learning environment. For these students, GenAI functioned primarily as a task-oriented resource within existing school practices.

4.2 GenAI-Mediated Task Performance

This section examines how students engaged with GenAI while carrying out English-learning tasks. Two interrelated themes emerged from the analysis. First, students engaged in GenAI-mediated linguistic scaffolding by revising, adapting, and appropriating AI-generated output. This theme was broadly shared across participants, although the extent to which students actively reworked AI-generated output varied across individual learners. Second, although students recognized the usefulness of GenAI, they demonstrated only partial trust in AI-generated output and frequently engaged in verification practices to ensure accuracy. Trust was broadly evident across participants, whereas systematic verification was more characteristic of a subset of students. Overall, these themes illustrate how students actively reworked and critically evaluated AI-generated output during task performance rather than relying on it passively.

One high school student explained that GenAI helped with the difficulty of composing English sentences even when vocabulary and grammar knowledge were available.

Excerpt 4 (S1, high school, male)

Even if I know a lot of words and grammar, writing or composing in English is a different problem. I had difficulty figuring out how to combine things and make them sound natural. I think GenAI helped me with that kind of writing ability.

This excerpt reveals a common problem in EFL writing: knowing discrete vocabulary or grammar rules does not automatically lead to fluent composition. GenAI was experienced as a scaffolding tool that helped the student coordinate linguistic resources into a more coherent text. The student's wording, however, also suggests that GenAI support was located at the level of product improvement. GenAI helped the text sound more natural, but the excerpt does not show whether the student developed transferable writing strategies. This distinction is crucial. GenAI can improve the immediate performance while leaving open the question of long-term learning.

Another student described using GenAI to understand English texts at the level of sentence structure rather than simply translation.

Excerpt 5 (S11, middle school, female)

It translates well. The reason I ask GenAI to translate is that, unlike Papago, it explains the sentence structure a little. It tells me things like where the conjunction is, so I can understand how the sentence is put together.

This excerpt is analytically important because it shows a potentially learning-oriented form of GenAI use. The student was not only asking for a translation but also using GenAI to interpret grammatical structure. In this case, GenAI functioned as a metalinguistic scaffold. It helped the learner see how the sentence worked. This differs

from simple task outsourcing because the student used GenAI output to understand the language rather than merely to obtain a final answer. Such examples indicate that GenAI-mediated performance can contain genuine learning opportunities when the learner attends to explanation and structure.

Students also reported modifying GenAI output to make it more appropriate for their own speech, age, or presentation context.

Excerpt 6 (S5, high school, female)

I usually change it a little. If I read it and there are words or sentences that feel awkward, I remove them or change them into words that are used more in everyday life. Since I am the one who has to present it, I try to use words that fit better in my mouth.

This excerpt shows a movement from AI-generated language to learner-owned language. The student did not accept the output as final. Instead, she evaluated whether the words sounded natural for her and whether they could be spoken comfortably in a presentation. The phrase “fit better in my mouth” is particularly significant. It suggests that ownership is not only cognitive but also embodied and performative: the English has to become speakable by the learner. This kind of revision may preserve agency because the student actively adapts GenAI output to her own communicative situation.

A middle school student described a similar process of revising AI-generated language. However, his account highlights a different aspect of how learners made AI-generated language their own.

Excerpt 7 (S12, middle school, male)

The GenAI style remains in the text, so I always changed it. While changing it, I also checked my knowledge a little. If it sounded too unlike something a person wrote, or if it was too long or difficult, I changed it into something more appropriate for my age.

This excerpt highlights a different form of learner ownership, suggesting that ownership is achieved through critical evaluation and self-monitoring rather than primarily through making AI-generated language personally speakable. The student recognized a “GenAI style,” evaluated whether the output matched his own linguistic level, sounded appropriately human, and reflected his own knowledge before revising it into a form that better matched his identity as a learner. The act of revision also became a moment of self-monitoring and knowledge checking. Rather than accepting GenAI output uncritically, the student actively judged what should be retained, modified, or discarded. However, the excerpt also implies that students need the linguistic and metacognitive capacity to identify what should be changed. Without such capacity, GenAI output may remain unexamined. Thus, the educational value of GenAI depends not merely on access to the tool but on learners’ ability to critically evaluate, interpret and rework its output.

Together, these findings show that GenAI-mediated task performance cannot be reduced to copying. Students used GenAI in varied ways: to initiate ideas, repair translation, understand structure, generate more natural phrasing, and revise GenAI-like language. Yet these practices were still largely tied to task completion.

The second theme concerns students’ awareness that AI-generated output is not always reliable. Several participants reported checking AI-generated information, asking for sources, or comparing GenAI responses with other materials. This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that secondary school students

necessarily accept GenAI output uncritically. At the same time, their verification practices were uneven and task-dependent, suggesting the need for explicit instruction in critical GenAI literacy.

One high school student described using GenAI only for preliminary information search because he doubted its reliability.

Excerpt 8 (S1, high school, male)

When I was doing an assignment, I only received help for information searching. Even then, I doubted whether the information was reliable, so I remember checking it one more time myself.

This excerpt shows that the student positioned GenAI as a starting point rather than a final authority. His distrust did not lead him to reject GenAI completely; instead, it led to secondary verification. This is an important form of learner agency. The student recognized that GenAI could help him begin a task but that responsibility for accuracy remained with him. In motivational terms, this may support competence because the learner remains actively involved in judgment rather than surrendering responsibility to the tool.

Another student explained that GenAI sometimes produced false source information and that she therefore developed a routine of asking about sources.

Excerpt 9 (S7, high school, female)

When I ask ChatGPT, ‘What source did you use for this?’ and it gives me a book title, it is often false. I think its accuracy and reliability are low in that way. So I always ask, ‘What is the source for this?’

The student’s account highlights the specific problem of fabricated references or unsupported claims. Her response was to ask for sources, but the excerpt also indicates the limits of source asking: if GenAI can fabricate sources, then asking GenAI alone is not sufficient. The motivational relevance of this practice lies in sustaining learners’ evaluative role. Rather than accepting AI-generated information at face value, learners remain actively engaged in judging the credibility of information.

A middle school student described a similar strategy of checking information through papers, encyclopedias, or other sources.

Excerpt 10 (S9, middle school, female)

Because there is so much information on the internet, ChatGPT does not always give only accurate facts. I also look for papers, and for historical facts I check encyclopedias. When I do information searching, I think I always check it at least once.

This excerpt is valuable because it shows that verification was not limited to older students. The middle school student recognized the broader information environment in which GenAI operates and used other sources to check. The finding suggests that GenAI use can potentially encourage critical information practices when students are aware of its limits. However, the interviews also showed that such verification was often self-developed rather

than systematically taught.

Together, these excerpts show that students' relationship with GenAI was characterized neither by total trust nor by complete distrust. Rather, it involved partial trust combined with pragmatic verification. Students used GenAI because it was useful, but they also recognized that usefulness did not guarantee accuracy. Verification was therefore not only a technical literacy practice but also a motivationally relevant form of agency. When students checked sources, compared information, or questioned GenAI output, they remained responsible for the final product and could more plausibly claim it as their own work.

4.3 Motivation Through the Tension Between Efficiency and Ownership

This section examines the motivational experiences students reported when using GenAI in English learning. Two interrelated themes emerged from the analysis. First, students described GenAI as a source of efficiency and emotional safety that reduced task difficulty and supported continued engagement. Second, they reported that when GenAI assumed too much of the cognitive work, their sense of ownership and achievement weakened. This contrast highlights the ambivalent motivational consequences of GenAI use in English learning.

The first theme concerns the positive motivational experiences associated with GenAI use. Students frequently described GenAI as efficient, convenient, and emotionally comfortable. It helped them find information quickly, revise language, and continue working when they might otherwise feel stuck. These experiences can support motivation because they reduce task difficulty and make English work feel more manageable. Efficiency appeared consistently across students' accounts, while emotional comfort was also common, though not experienced in the same way by all students.

One high school student contrasted ordinary internet search with ChatGPT-based searching.

Excerpt 11 (S2, high school, male)

When I searched on the internet, the results often did not match what I wanted. With ChatGPT, I could keep modifying the result and find materials that matched my purpose better, so it was more interesting and more useful.

This excerpt shows that GenAI increased perceived controllability. The student did not simply receive information; he could refine the request and adjust the output. This iterative interaction made the task feel more useful and even more interesting. From a motivational perspective, this suggests that GenAI may support engagement by giving students a sense that they can shape the learning process. The important point is not only speed but responsiveness. GenAI allowed the student to negotiate the task through repeated prompting.

Another student emphasized the time-saving function of GenAI.

Excerpt 12 (S7, high school, female)

I could find English words or newspaper articles faster, so I could secure more study time, and the efficiency of the assignment itself also increased.

Here, GenAI is experienced as a tool for managing time. The student linked faster searching to more available study time and more efficient task completion. Such efficiency can be motivational when it reduces frustration and

allows learners to continue working. However, it can also narrow the learning experience if students come to value only speed and completion. The excerpt therefore illustrates both the benefit and the limitation of GenAI-based efficiency.

Students also described emotional comfort. GenAI reduced the burden of making mistakes, particularly because it was not perceived as a judgmental human audience.

Excerpt 13 (S5, high school, female)

I felt completely comfortable. When I use GenAI, maybe because it does not feel like a person, I can just treat it as a tool. If it says my grammar is wrong, I can check why and change it more comfortably. I felt that the burden definitely decreased, and I thought it was okay to make mistakes.

This excerpt shows how GenAI can create emotional safety. The student felt less judged because GenAI was not a person. This reduced fear of error and made revision more comfortable. In language learning, where anxiety about mistakes can inhibit participation, this function is important. GenAI can provide a low-stakes space for experimentation. Yet this emotional safety is not automatically equivalent to deeper learning. It becomes educationally meaningful when students use that comfort to notice, revise, practice, and reflect.

A male high school student expressed a similar point by contrasting GenAI with a human evaluator.

Excerpt 14 (S6, high school, male)

I felt that I could learn comfortably. If I make a mistake in front of a person, I worry that the mistake will stand out. But GenAI is just an information system. There is no risk that it will spread somewhere, and it will not be reflected in my evaluation, so I felt comfortable.

This excerpt identifies two sources of comfort: privacy and non-evaluation. The student felt safer because GenAI would not publicly expose his mistakes and because the interaction was not directly graded. This suggests that GenAI may be especially useful for rehearsal before public performance. In motivational terms, it can reduce performance anxiety and help students attempt language use that they might avoid in front of peers or teachers.

Together, these excerpts show that students experienced GenAI as a motivational resource because it increased efficiency while reducing emotional barriers to English learning. By making English tasks feel more manageable, responsive, and psychologically safe, GenAI encouraged continued engagement with learning activities. These findings suggest that the positive motivational value of GenAI lies not only in improving task efficiency but also in creating conditions that support learners' confidence and willingness to participate in English learning.

The second theme in this section concerns the negative motivational consequences of GenAI-mediated task performance. In contrast to the more common experiences of efficiency and emotional comfort, concerns about ownership and achievement emerged among a smaller group of students. Several students reported that when GenAI did too much of the work, they felt a reduced sense of achievement or even discomfort. This finding is central to the study because it shows that task completion and motivation can diverge. Students may complete an English assignment more successfully with GenAI while feeling that the result is not fully theirs.

One middle school student expressed this tension strongly.

Excerpt 15 (S16, middle school, female)

I think I actually felt something like self-disappointment. By using GenAI, I gave it the work that I was supposed to do. I just gave a prompt and it did everything. I did not learn anything, and I threw away the opportunity to grow by doing it myself.

This excerpt provides the clearest evidence of weakened ownership. The student did not merely say that GenAI was unhelpful. She described GenAI use as a transfer of responsibility: “I gave it the work that I was supposed to do.” The phrase indicates that the task had a moral and developmental meaning for her. Completing it through GenAI felt like losing an opportunity for growth. This interpretation goes beyond simple dependence. It shows that students may evaluate GenAI use in relation to what kind of learner they want to be and whether the completed work represents their own development.

The excerpt also demonstrates why efficiency alone cannot be used as the measure of successful GenAI use. From the perspective of task completion, GenAI may have helped. From the perspective of motivation, however, the student experienced self-disappointment. The final product may have been improved, but the sense of achievement was weakened. This is precisely the ambivalence at the center of the study: the same tool that reduces burden can also reduce the feeling that effort and growth belong to the learner.

A high school student expressed a similar concern in terms of satisfaction and reliance.

Excerpt 16 (S6, high school, male)

When I did an assignment or activity with AI’s help, I did not feel a sense of achievement or satisfaction because I did not do it completely by myself. I felt that I had relied on AI, and I sometimes felt dissatisfied.

This excerpt directly links GenAI use to achievement. The student did not reject GenAI entirely, but he distinguished between completing a task and feeling that he had completed it through his own ability.

Another middle school student made the relationship between personal contribution and ownership particularly explicit.

Excerpt 17 (S14, middle school, female)

Honestly, I don’t think I would consider it my own achievement. If I ask myself whether my writing skills have actually improved in the long term, I don’t think they have. So I feel that AI played a greater role in creating the work. But when I gain grammatical knowledge or other knowledge, such as scientific knowledge, through AI, I do feel a sense of achievement because I have actually learned that knowledge myself.

This excerpt further clarifies the conditions under which students experienced ownership and achievement. For S14, using GenAI did not necessarily reduce a sense of achievement. Rather, the distinction depended on whether GenAI replaced her own learning or contributed to it. When she perceived AI as making the greater contribution to a written product without improving her own writing ability, she was reluctant to regard the outcome as her own achievement. In contrast, when GenAI helped her acquire knowledge that she had actually learned, she experienced

a sense of achievement. This contrast suggests that ownership depended not simply on whether GenAI was used, but on whether students perceived its contribution as replacing or supporting their own learning.

Together, these findings show that GenAI-mediated motivation is not simply a matter of interest or convenience. It involves the learner's interpretation of agency. If GenAI is experienced as a scaffold that the student controls, it may support confidence and engagement. If GenAI is experienced as an agent that completes the work on behalf of the student, it may weaken ownership and achievement. Importantly, the findings indicate that ownership was shaped not simply by the presence of GenAI assistance, but by how students perceived the distribution of effort, contribution, and learning between themselves and GenAI.

5. Discussion

5.1 GenAI as a Task-Oriented Resource

The findings suggest that GenAI functioned primarily as a task-oriented resource for the participating secondary school students. Students did not generally describe GenAI as a continuous environment for English learning but used it selectively in response to particular task demands. Although GenAI has the technical capacity to provide personalized and sustained language support, students in assessment-oriented school contexts may use it mainly to complete immediate tasks.

This interpretation gives conceptual substance to the term task-oriented resource. GenAI was not simply a writing assistant or a general learning aid; it was a mediational resource activated when students encountered a task demand that exceeded their immediate linguistic or informational resources. This pattern is related to on-demand learning in technology-enhanced language learning (Jung 2018), but the concept of a task-oriented resource emphasizes not only when support is accessed but also how a particular task defines the purpose and boundaries of its use. The concept also differs from tool appropriation, which concerns how learners develop and adapt ways of using technological tools within learning activities (Overdijk and van Diggelen 2008, Wen et al. 2015), whereas a task-oriented resource focuses on the role GenAI assumes in relation to a particular task demand.

This point partly aligns with Hwang et al. (2025), who found that L2 learners used ChatGPT at different moments in the writing process, especially for idea generation and later polishing. It also resonates with Dizon et al. (2025), who reported that EFL learners used ChatGPT for summarization and translation while recognizing both usefulness and risk. Whereas these studies demonstrate the range of functions that GenAI can serve in language learning, the present study contributes a situated account of how particular school task demands shaped which functions students selected and the role that GenAI ultimately assumed in their English learning.

The Korean assessment-oriented context helps explain why this task-oriented pattern was salient. Assignments and performance assessments provided specific requirements and expected outcomes, thereby creating concrete purposes for GenAI use. Rather than reorganizing their English learning around GenAI, students largely incorporated the technology into existing school-based learning practices. This suggests that the educational role of GenAI is shaped not only by what the technology can potentially provide, but also by the tasks and practices into which it is introduced.

5.2 Reworking and Verification in GenAI-Mediated Task Performance

The findings suggest that GenAI-mediated task performance involves more than simply receiving linguistic

assistance from an AI system. Although GenAI provided linguistic support, its contribution to task performance depended on how students incorporated the generated output, ranging from direct reliance to reworking it to fit their intended meaning or task requirements. This interpretation is consistent with earlier research on automated feedback and machine translation, which has shown that learners may revise and adapt technology-generated language rather than simply reproduce it (Lee 2020, Ranalli 2018, Zhang and Hyland 2018).

A similar distinction emerged between recognizing potential inaccuracies and systematically verifying GenAI output, as awareness of possible errors did not always lead to actual checking. The difference is particularly relevant because GenAI can produce fluent and plausible responses even when the information provided is inaccurate. This distinction adds a GenAI-specific dimension to Wineburg and McGrew's (2019) emphasis on source checking by showing that awareness of possible inaccuracy and actual verification were not equivalent in students' task performance. Verification consequently becomes part of how students manage the information they incorporate into an English task, rather than simply an additional activity undertaken after task completion.

Viewed through the lens of learner agency (Bandura 2001), reworking and verification can be understood as decisions through which students regulated how GenAI output entered their tasks. Agency was evident not simply in whether students used GenAI, but in whether they evaluated, modified, or checked its output. The unevenness of these practices indicates that access to GenAI did not itself ensure agentic engagement.

Overall, these findings extend earlier research in two respects. First, whereas previous studies of automated feedback and machine translation have primarily examined learners' evaluation and modification of technology-generated language, the present findings show that these practices occur alongside students' use of GenAI for a broader range of linguistic and informational task demands. Second, the findings indicate that students' engagement with GenAI output is not uniform: variation was evident both in the extent to which students reworked generated language and in the extent to which they verified generated information. The contribution of the present study therefore lies not in showing that students can modify or check AI-generated output, but in demonstrating how these different forms of engagement coexist within everyday secondary-school English task performance. This suggests that GenAI-mediated task performance is better understood as a process in which technological assistance is incorporated into tasks to different degrees, rather than as a uniform form of AI-supported performance.

5.3 Ownership as the Missing Link in GenAI-Mediated Motivation

The most important contribution of this study is the identification of ownership as a key dimension of GenAI-mediated motivation. Ownership is described here as a missing link because the students' accounts revealed a gap between successful task completion and motivational satisfaction. Efficiency and emotional safety may increase task engagement by making English tasks easier and less threatening, but these benefits do not necessarily translate into deeper learning motivation. GenAI sometimes helped students produce faster, more fluent, or more polished English output, but this did not necessarily lead to pride, achievement, or a stronger willingness to continue learning. When students felt that GenAI had done the work for them, they sometimes experienced reduced satisfaction, self-disappointment, or a weakened sense of growth. Ownership helps explain this gap by showing that successful task completion becomes motivationally meaningful when learners can recognize their own decisions and effort in the resulting work.

The main theoretical contribution of the study is that GenAI-mediated motivation cannot be adequately explained through perceived usefulness, reduced anxiety, or improved output quality alone. Rather than treating ownership as a statistically tested mediator, this study uses it as a conceptual link between GenAI-supported task completion and students' motivational experience. This interpretation offers a cautious reading of recent studies

reporting positive attitudes toward and perceived usefulness of GenAI in language learning (Al-Obaydi et al. 2025, Wang and Wang 2025). Positive attitudes and perceived usefulness may facilitate engagement, but they should not be equated with sustained motivational development. The present findings suggest that the motivational significance of GenAI depends partly on whether students can connect successful task performance to their own effort, judgment, and developing ability. This contribution extends L2 motivation research by showing how technological assistance can reshape not only learners' engagement but also the motivational meaning they attach to their own performance.

The concept of psychological ownership helps explain this phenomenon. Pierce et al. (2001) argued that people experience ownership when they feel that something is connected to the self, while Avey et al. (2009) further linked psychological ownership to self-efficacy, accountability, belongingness, and self-identity. In the context of English learning, students may feel ownership when the final text reflects their effort, decision making, and developing ability. GenAI may threaten this ownership when the output appears to come primarily from the machine. The problem is not GenAI use itself but whether students can recognize their own contribution within the resulting work. If students cannot identify what they contributed, they may not experience the product as their own achievement.

The attributional perspective introduced in the literature review also helps clarify the motivational role of ownership. Achievement emotions depend partly on how learners explain success or failure (Weiner 1985). If students attribute a successful English product mainly to GenAI, their pride and satisfaction may be reduced even when the product is linguistically improved. By contrast, if they attribute the outcome to their own revision, judgment, verification, and learning, their sense of achievement may be preserved. This interpretation also aligns with the view that GenAI may reshape not only the amount of language learning motivation but also its quality (Al-Hoorie et al. 2026). In the present study, the motivational significance of GenAI depended not simply on whether it reduced difficulty or facilitated task completion, but on whether students could experience the resulting achievement as connected to their own learning.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Korean secondary school students perceived and used GenAI in English learning and how these experiences were connected to task performance, motivation, and a sense of ownership. The findings showed that students generally experienced GenAI not as a continuous learning environment but as a task-oriented resource used selectively for performance assessment, translation, writing, idea generation, revision, and information checking. GenAI made English-related tasks more efficient and emotionally manageable by providing immediate support and reducing the burden of mistakes. At the same time, it created motivational tension when students felt that the final product was no longer fully theirs. Students also differed in how they reworked and verified GenAI-supported output, indicating that GenAI-mediated task performance involved different ways of engaging with AI assistance.

The main contribution of this study is to show that GenAI does not automatically enhance English learning motivation. Rather, it reorganizes task performance in ways that can either support or weaken motivation depending on how students experience agency and ownership. Efficiency, convenience, and emotional safety may help students initiate or complete tasks, but they are not sufficient for meaningful learning. The findings suggest that ownership provides an important link between GenAI-supported task completion and students' sense of achievement, highlighting that the motivational significance of GenAI depends not only on successful performance

but also on how students interpret their own contribution to that performance. Overall, the findings indicate that the educational significance of GenAI depends not only on its technological capabilities but also on how it is situated within learning tasks and how students engage with and interpret the resulting work.

The study has limitations. The data were collected through interviews at a single point in time and therefore reflect students' retrospective accounts rather than observed behavior across time. In addition, the sample included students who already had experience using GenAI, and participants were recommended by teachers who had previously participated in a GenAI-related study. The findings may therefore underrepresent students with little GenAI experience, strongly negative views, or limited exposure to GenAI-integrated classrooms. Future research should combine interviews with classroom observations and longitudinal tracking to examine how GenAI-mediated motivation changes over time. Further studies should also examine individual differences such as proficiency, prior GenAI experience, task type, confidence, assessment pressure, verification habits, and students' perceived ownership of GenAI-assisted products. Comparative research across assessment-oriented Asian EFL contexts would also clarify whether the efficiency–ownership tension identified in this Korean study appears in other educational systems where English is closely linked to school achievement and future mobility.

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Appendix. Interview Questions

A. Experiences Using GenAI Tools

1. Have you used any AI tools for English learning, either during school English classes or when studying English on your own? For example, you may have used ChatGPT, Gemini, Suno, or AI digital textbooks. Please describe which AI tools you have used and the situations in which you used them.
2. What was your first impression when you used an AI tool for the first time? For example, did you find it interesting, difficult, or surprising? Please describe your initial experience.
3. Which AI tool or AI-supported activity did you find the most interesting? For example, you may have used ChatGPT to write English texts, Suno to create English songs, or an AI chatbot to practice English. Please describe the experience you found particularly enjoyable or meaningful.
4. Were there any AI tools that you found difficult to use or less interesting? Alternatively, did you experience any inconvenience while using the AI tool you mentioned in Question 3? Please describe your experience.

B. Psychological Experiences

5. Can you describe a specific occasion when using AI helped you express yourself more accurately in English while writing sentences or texts?
6. Have you ever modified the English sentences or expressions suggested by AI, or did you usually use them without changes? Please explain why.
7. When interacting with AI in English, did you ever feel as if you were talking to a real person, or did you not have that feeling? What made you feel that way?
8. When using AI, did you feel comfortable learning even when you made grammatical or language mistakes, or did you still feel anxious or pressured? Please explain your experience.
9. When you completed English assignments or learning activities with the help of AI, did you experience a sense of achievement or satisfaction? Please explain why or why not.
10. While learning English with AI, did you experience difficulties or repeatedly make mistakes, or did your learning generally proceed smoothly? How did you continue your learning in those situations?

C. Motivational Experiences

11. Have you ever studied English with AI because your parents or teachers expected you to, or because you felt that you were supposed to do so? Please describe your experience.
12. While learning English with AI, were you aware of your parents' or teachers' expectations, or did you rarely feel influenced by them? Please explain your reasons.
13. When using AI to write English sentences or communicate in English, did you find the experience enjoyable or interesting, or was it difficult to stay interested? Please describe your experience.
14. While learning English with AI, did you ever feel that your English ability or way of thinking had improved, even slightly? Alternatively, did using AI change the way you thought about why you learn English? Please explain.
15. While learning English with AI, did you ever imagine yourself becoming a more proficient English learner in the future? If so, what led you to think that way? If not, why not?
16. Did learning English with AI encourage you to continue studying English more consistently, or did it make little difference? Please explain your reasons.

D. Perceived Learning Outcomes

17. In what ways, if any, has learning English with AI influenced your English abilities, such as vocabulary, grammar, writing, or speaking?
18. How has learning English with AI influenced your study time, speed of understanding, or the overall efficiency of your learning process? Please provide examples.
19. Since you began using AI for English learning, have your study habits, learning routines, or learning strategies changed? If so, please describe how.
20. What aspects of learning English with AI did you find difficult, or what areas do you think still need improvement?

Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Secondary