

Exploring Students Experience in Using AI to Improve Their Writing Skills

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an important tool in supporting students' academic writing. This study aimed to explore students' experience of using AI to improve their writing skills. A qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured interviews with 20 students of STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with NVivo 12 software. The findings identified four main themes and seven sub-themes covering students' use of AI, feelings toward AI, perceived advantages, and challenges. Students perceived AI as a helpful tool for generating ideas, improving grammar, and increasing writing efficiency. However, concerns regarding academic honesty, limited access, contextual language, inaccurate information, and generic arguments were also reported. The study concluded that AI could effectively support academic writing when it was used critically, ethically, and responsibly.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, academic writing, students' experiences

Abstrak

Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) telah menjadi sarana penting dalam mendukung penulisan akademik mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa dalam menggunakan AI untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis mereka. Pendekatan kualitatif diterapkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 20 mahasiswa STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan perangkat lunak NVivo 12. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi empat tema utama dan tujuh sub-tema yang mencakup penggunaan AI oleh mahasiswa, persepsi perasaan terhadap AI, manfaat yang dirasakan, serta berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi. Mahasiswa memandang AI sebagai alat yang bermanfaat untuk menghasilkan gagasan, memperbaiki tata bahasa, dan meningkatkan efisiensi penulisan. Namun, terdapat pula kekhawatiran terkait kejujuran akademik, keterbatasan akses, aspek kontekstual bahasa, informasi yang tidak akurat, dan argumen yang bersifat umum. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa AI dapat mendukung penulisan akademik secara efektif apabila digunakan secara kritis, etis, dan bertanggung jawab.

Kata Kunci: Kecerdasan Buatan, penulisan akademik, pengalaman mahasiswa

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INTRODUCTION

Writing abilities are crucial for academic success, especially in higher education where students must finish theses, essays, reports, and research papers. In addition to serving as a communication tool, academic writing fosters disciplinary knowledge and critical thinking (Hyland, 2019). Nonetheless, a lot of students still struggle with coming up with ideas, structuring arguments, preserving coherence, and using appropriate grammar in academic writing. These difficulties frequently lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, and a delay in finishing writing assignments (Bailey, 2015; Hyland, 2019).

University students in Indonesia frequently encounter these challenges, particularly those studying English as a foreign language (EFL). In order to improve their writing performance, students often look for extra help because they find it difficult to articulate ideas clearly and adhere to academic writing conventions.

Innovative ways to assist academic writing have been made possible by the quick development of artificial intelligence (AI). Idea generation, grammar correction, paraphrasing, vocabulary improvement, and text organization are just a few of the features offered by AI-powered programs like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot. Higher education students are using these technologies more and more.

The beneficial effects of AI on writing development have been emphasized in recent studies. According to Alharbi (2023), AI-assisted writing tools enhance students' writing quality by providing language support and automated feedback. In a similar vein, Kasneci et al. (2023) discovered that generative AI can support learning by offering tailored support during the composition process. Additionally, Tlili et al. (2023) highlighted how AI can improve students' writing confidence, accuracy, and efficiency.

Notwithstanding these advantages, earlier research has also pointed out a number of issues with AI's application in education. According to Nakazawa et al. (2022), students' creativity and critical thinking skills may be diminished by an over-reliance on AI. Concerns about academic integrity, moral dilemmas, and an excessive dependence on content produced by artificial intelligence have been voiced by other academics (Tlili et al., 2023).

The majority of research has concentrated on learning outcomes, technological features, or educators' perspectives, despite earlier studies examining the efficacy of AI-assisted writing tools and their impact on students' writing performance. Particularly in the context of Indonesian higher education, few studies have examined students' individual experiences, perspectives, and difficulties when utilizing AI to enhance their writing abilities.

This disparity suggests that more research is necessary to determine how students truly encounter the application of AI in academic writing. To give a more complete picture of the opportunities and difficulties related to AI-assisted writing, it is crucial to comprehend these experiences.

This study aims to address the following research question in light of the identified gap: How do students feel about using AI to help them write better? This study specifically intends to investigate how students use AI tools, the advantages they see, and the difficulties they face when writing. This study is novel because it focuses on students' real-world experiences rather than just looking at writing results or the usefulness of technology.

Furthermore, this study offers perspectives from the Indonesian higher education setting, which is still underrepresented in earlier studies on AI-assisted academic writing.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' experiences in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve their writing skills. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives, perceptions, and lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon (Kusumastuti,

2019). The study focused on understanding how students utilize AI tools in academic writing, the benefits they perceive, and the challenges they encounter during the writing process.

The research questions guided the development of the interview questions and the subsequent thematic analysis. The data collection and analysis were organized to address the students' use of AI tools, their experiences and feelings, the perceived benefits of AI-assisted writing, and the challenges encountered during the writing process.

The participants of this study were university students who actively used AI-powered tools, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot, to support their academic writing activities. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had direct experience with AI-assisted writing and were therefore able to provide relevant and meaningful information related to the research objectives (Nowell et al., 2017). The participants were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria developed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Participants were required to have experience using AI tools for academic writing for at least one semester and to be willing to share their experiences.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This technique enabled the researcher to obtain rich and detailed information while maintaining flexibility to explore emerging issues during the interview process (Davis, 1989). An interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature concerning AI-assisted writing. The interview questions focused on students' experiences in using AI, perceived benefits, challenges, ethical concerns, and the influence of AI on their writing skills. All interviews were conducted individually and recorded with participants' consent to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. Before the interviews, the researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study to the participants and obtained their verbal consent to participate and to have the interviews recorded.

Although the duration of each interview was relatively short, ranging from approximately two to six minutes, the interviews generated sufficient data to address the research objectives. The total duration of all 20 interviews was 1 hour, 21 minutes, and 54 seconds, producing a total of 8,999 words. The relatively short duration of the interviews was influenced by the focused nature of the semi-structured interview questions and the participants' direct experiences with AI-assisted writing. The interview questions were designed to focus specifically on students' experiences, perceived benefits, feelings, and challenges related to the use of AI in academic writing. Therefore, the length of the interviews should not be considered the sole indicator of data adequacy. Instead, the relevance, richness, and recurrence of the information provided by participants were considered during the thematic analysis. The data produced recurring patterns across participants, which enabled the researcher to identify four main themes and seven sub-themes.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Nowell et al. (2017). The analysis began with transcribing the interview recordings, followed by repeated reading of the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data. The researcher then generated initial codes, identified recurring patterns, and organized them into broader themes. Finally, the themes were

reviewed and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences in using AI to improve their writing skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative analysis conducted four main themes and seven sub-themes that explore students' experiences in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve their writing skills. This study involved 20 STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya students from various semesters (Table 1).

Table 1. Table of interview process

Name of Participant	Semester	Duration	Amount of Words
Participant 1	4 th	02:07	373
Participant 2	6 th	03:55	375
Participant 3	6 th	03:36	553
Participant 4	4 th	02:42	443
Participant 5	4 th	02:22	383
Participant 6	2 nd	03:33	519
Participant 7	6 th	04:36	502
Participant 8	2 nd	02:35	329
Participant 9	8 th	05:13	611
Participant 10	8 th	05:49	455
Participant 11	8 th	03:17	425
Participant 12	2 nd	03:47	389
Participant 13	4 th	02:09	381
Participant 14	8 th	04:49	580
Participant 15	8 th	04:43	531
Participant 16	4 th	02:40	444
Participant 17	2 nd	02:19	367
Participant 18	2 nd	02:29	341
Participant 19	6 th	05:39	602
Participant 20	6 th	02:53	396
Total		1:21:54	8999

As presented in Table 1, the individual interviews lasted between 2 minutes and 7 seconds and 5 minutes and 49 seconds, with a total interview duration of 1 hour, 21 minutes, and 54 seconds. The interviews generated 8,999 words in total. Although the duration of each interview was relatively short, the focused interview questions generated recurring and relevant responses related to the research objective.

The unit of analysis in this study was each individual participant interview. Each interview was treated as a separate unit of qualitative data and was analyzed to identify meaningful statements, initial codes, recurring patterns, and broader themes related to students' experiences of using AI in academic writing. The duration and word count presented in Table 1 provide descriptive information about the amount of data obtained from each participant, while the thematic analysis focused on the meaning and content of participants' responses rather than the length of the interviews alone.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonymous labels, namely Participant 1 to Participant 20, throughout the study. These labels were used in Table 1, the interview transcripts, and the presentation of interview quotations. No real names or other personally

identifying information were included in the dataset or reported in this article. This procedure ensured that the participants could not be directly identified from the research data and helped maintain the confidentiality of their responses.

To explore students' experiences of using artificial intelligence (AI) to improve their writing skills, the interview responses were analysed systematically using thematic analysis. The data were organised into major themes and sub-themes to capture the patterns emerging from the participants' experiences. These themes represent student experiences of using AI in the writing process, including their feelings when using AI, the advantages of using AI, and the challenges encountered by students while using AI.

Table 2. Presentation of the themes, subthemes and codes

Themes	Subthemes	Codes (n = references)
Students' experiences in using AI for writing	Students' perceived while using AI	Helpful for tasks (85), Fact-checking for AI answers (26)
Students' feelings when using AI for writing	Negative or mixed feelings	Mixed feelings (both good and bad) (28), Guilty or uneasy (3)
	Positive feelings	Happy with faster progress (13), More confident (7), Less anxious (3)
The advantages of using AI	Better quality and learning help	Better grammar and spelling (25), Learn from AI examples (22), Clearer structure and wording (20)
	Efficiency and productivity	Faster drafting (11), Saves search time (9), Speeds up editing (7)
Difficulties and Challenges of Using AI	Access, technical, and ethical issues	Worry about academic honesty (43), Limited access or cost (6), Hard to use the tools (1)
	Content and quality problems	Language not suitable for context (8), Wrong or inaccurate facts (4), Shallow or generic arguments (3)

To provide an initial overview of the interview data, a word cloud and hierarchy chart generated using NVivo 12 software is presented below (Figure 1). This visualization highlights the words that appeared most frequently in participants' responses, with larger word and sizes reflecting higher frequencies of occurrence.

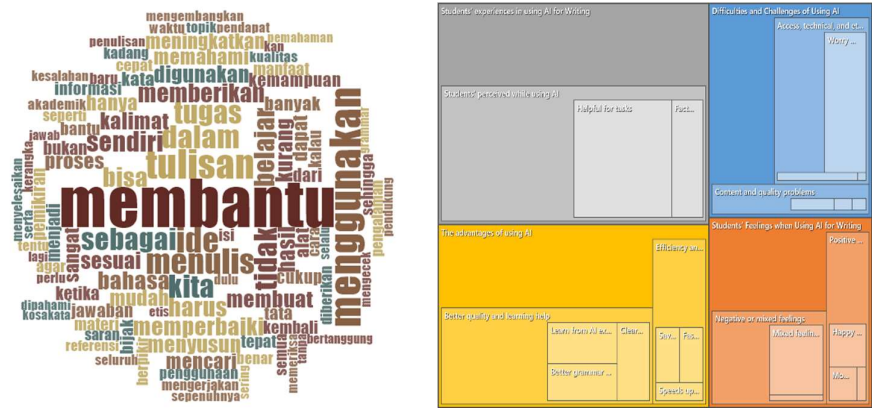


Figure 1. Word cloud and hierarchy chart illustrating the frequency and organization of themes identified from students' experiences of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in academic writing

There was also a concept map presented the relationships among codes, sub-themes, and themes identified through thematic analysis. It complements the findings by illustrating the hierarchical structure of the themes generated from the interview data using NVivo 12 software (Figure 2).

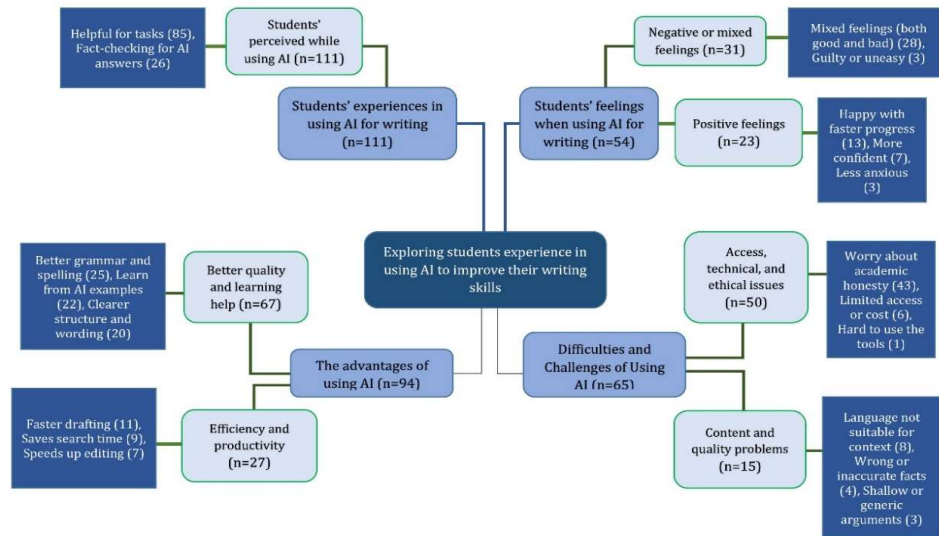


Figure 2. Concept map illustrating the relationships among the themes, sub-themes, and codes identified through thematic analysis

Based on Figure 2, it can be seen that students' experiences in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve their writing skills were represented by four main themes, namely Students' experiences in using AI, students' feelings when using AI, the advantages of using AI, and the difficulties and challenges of using AI. The most frequently identified theme was Students' experiences in using AI, with AI being helpful for completing writing tasks (85) and fact-checking AI-generated answers (26) emerging as the codes of subtheme. These findings indicate that students primarily relied on AI as a writing assistant and as a tool to verify information.

The second major theme, students' feelings when using AI, revealed that participants experienced both positive and negative feelings. Positive feelings included being happy with faster progress (13), more confident (7), and less anxious (3). However, negative or mixed feelings were more frequently reported, particularly mixed feelings about AI use (28) and feelings of guilt or uneasiness (3), suggesting that although AI provided benefits, some students remained concerned about its use.

In addition, the advantages of using AI were reflected in two subthemes, there are better quality and learning help and efficiency and productivity. Students highlighted improvements in grammar and spelling (25), opportunities to learn from AI-generated examples (22), and clearer sentence structure and wording (20). They also reported that AI enabled faster drafting (11), saved time when searching for information (9), and sped up the editing process (7).

Finally, difficulties and challenges of using AI consisted of access, technical, and ethical issues and content and quality problems. The most frequently mentioned challenge was concerns about academic honesty (43), followed by limited access or cost (6) and difficulty using AI tools (1). Students

also reported problems related to language that was unsuitable for the context (8), incorrect or inaccurate information (4), and shallow or generic arguments (3). Overall, the figure demonstrates that students' experiences of using AI for writing were shaped by their patterns of AI use, emotional responses, perceived benefits, and the challenges they encountered during the writing process.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of Students' experiences in using AI, students' feelings when using AI, the advantages of using AI, and the difficulties and challenges of using AI.

Students' experiences in using AI

Students' perceived while using AI

The findings show that students perceived AI as a practical writing assistant that helped them complete writing tasks more quickly and with less effort. This means that AI was not only used to generate text, but also to support students in organizing ideas, drafting sentences, and finishing assignments more efficiently. One of the participants said, "Since there are so many assignments at university, AI helps answer the questions given by lecturers." (Participant 10, 00:00:23). Another participant added, "I use AI when I have difficult assignments, and it helps me complete them." (Participant 9, 00:00:39).

This result was consistent with Hyland (2019), who emphasized that writing support should help learners move through the composing process more effectively while still maintaining their own control over the text. It was also in line with Bailey (2015), who viewed writing assistance as a scaffold that could improve student productivity without replacing the learner's role in writing.

The students also felt it necessary to fact-check the information or answers generated by the system. This indicated that they did not fully rely on AI output, but instead used it as a quick tool to verify whether the information was accurate before including it in their writing. One of the participants said, "AI helps me complete tasks more easily, although I still have to double-check the output to ensure it meets my task requirements." (Participant 15, 00:01:13). Another participant said, "In my experience, it has been quite good. AI makes the work easier and faster, but I still have to double-check the answers to ensure there is no incorrect information." (Participant 7, 00:00:31).

This result was closely related to the concern raised by Kasneci et al. (2023) and Tlili et al. (2023), who noted that generative AI could produce incorrect or misleading information. Therefore, the students' habit of checking AI-generated answers showed a more critical and responsible way of using AI in academic writing.

Students' Feelings When Using AI

Positive feeling

The findings show that students experienced positive feelings when using AI because it helped them make faster progress in their writing tasks. The use of AI reduced the time needed to develop ideas, revise drafts, and complete assignments, so students felt happier and more satisfied with the

writing process. One of the participants said, “My experience has been quite good. I am happy because AI helps make the writing process easier and faster.” (Participant 1, 00:00:41).

This result was consistent with prior studies showing that AI support could increase learners’ writing confidence and reduce the pressure they felt during drafting. It also aligned with Hyland’s (2019) view that supportive writing tools could help learners move more smoothly through the composing process, especially when they needed assistance with fluency and revision.

Another findings show that some students felt more confident and less anxious when using AI because it gave them immediate help with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction. This support made them feel more secure about the quality of their writing and reduced the stress they usually experienced when writing in English. One of the participants said, “After I finish writing, I sometimes have doubts about what I’ve written. My grammar tends to be a bit all over the place. So, I use AI to polish my grammar and put those doubts to rest.” (Participant 14, 00:02:15). Another participant also said, “AI helps me feel more confident when writing because it can provide feedback when a sentence is unclear.” (Participant 20, 00:01:06). This result was in line with Hyland’s (2019), who found that AI-assisted writing could improve self-efficacy and lower emotional barriers in language learning.

Negative or mixed feelings

The findings show that negative or mixed feelings were the most frequently reported emotional response, suggesting that students saw both the benefits and the limitations of AI at the same time. While they appreciated the convenience and speed of AI, they were also uncertain about whether heavy reliance on it was always appropriate. One of the participants said, “Actually, both offer plenty of benefits, but they also come with risks.” (Participant 19, 00:03:22). Another participant said, “AI offers greater benefits when used wisely; it can aid in learning and improve the quality of writing. However, excessive use can make a person lazy in their thinking.” (Participant 6, 00:02:37).

This result was consistent with Kasneci et al. (2023) and Tlili et al. (2023), who emphasized that generative AI created both opportunities and concerns in education. It also showed that students’ emotional responses were not simply positive, but were shaped by a balance between usefulness, caution, and uncertainty.

Some students also felt guilty or uneasy when using AI because they worried that it might reduce the originality of their writing or make their work feel less authentic. These feelings suggested that students were aware of the ethical tension between using AI as support and depending on it too much. One of the participants said, “Yes, the reliance is so heavy that it's no longer possible to study independently without using AI.” (Participant 8, 00:01:33).

This result was related to Hyland’s (2019) argument that writing development should support learner ownership and voice. It also reflected Nowell et al. (2017), since the presence of guilt and uneasiness enriched the interpretation of the data and showed that students’ feelings toward AI were complex and layered.

Advantages of Using AI

Better quality and learning help

The findings show that students perceived AI as useful for improving the quality of their writing and supporting their learning process. They reported that AI helped them with grammar and spelling, provided examples they could learn from, and gave clearer sentence structures and wording, which made their writing more accurate and understandable. One of the participants said, "AI can identify grammatical errors and offer suggestions for improvement, making sentences more correct and easier to understand." (Participant 10, 00:01:10). Another participant said, "AI helps me choose more precise words, correct grammatical errors, and offers suggestions to make the writing easier to understand." (Participant 11, 00:01:39).

This finding was consistent with Bailey (2015), who emphasized that learners benefited when writing assistance helped them notice language patterns, revise their drafts, and develop greater control over sentence-level accuracy.

Efficiency and productivity

The findings show that students also saw AI as a tool that increased efficiency and productivity in the writing process. They explained that AI helped them draft faster, saved time when searching for information, and sped up editing, which made the whole writing process feel less burdensome. One of the participants said, "In my opinion, using AI for writing assistance saves time." (Participant 11, 00:00:31). Another participant said, "In my opinion, it really helps speed up the process of completing assignments, and I've also learned how to construct better sentences." (Participant 2, 00:01:13).

This result was in line with Alharbi (2023), who reported that AI tools often supported faster drafting and smoother revision in academic writing. It also matched Kasneci et al. (2023), who noted that AI could improve productivity when students used it as a support tool rather than as a replacement for independent writing effort.

Difficulties and Challenges of Using AI

Access, technical, and ethical issues

The findings show that access, technical, and ethical issues were among the main challenges experienced by students when using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support their writing. These findings indicate that although students generally perceived AI as beneficial for writing, they remained aware of the ethical implications of relying on AI-generated content. One of the participants said, "Ethical use of AI means prioritizing academic integrity and refraining from directly copying or copy-pasting AI-generated content." (Participant 4, 00:02:17). These statements illustrate that students were not only concerned about producing quality writing but also about maintaining academic integrity while using AI. These findings are consistent with Perkins (2023), who argued that generative AI has fundamentally changed the concept of academic integrity in higher education. Rather than focusing solely on plagiarism detection, educators need to redefine assessment practices and establish clear policies

regarding responsible AI use.

Besides ethical concerns, several participants mentioned limited access or cost as another challenge. Students explained that free AI platforms often provide fewer features than premium versions, limiting their ability to receive comprehensive writing assistance. One of the participants stated, "The difficulties are that the application is a paid one, and that it does not fully meet the criteria required by the institution." (Participant 19, 00:02:28). Another participant commented, "It's simply a matter of limited access, since most AI tools come with premium options or don't." (Participant 14, 00:02:35). These responses indicate that while students generally adapted easily to AI technology, unequal access to premium services remained a practical concern that could influence the quality of AI-assisted learning experiences.

This finding supports the argument of Dwivedi et al. (2023), who explained that successful implementation of generative AI in education requires not only technological readiness but also equitable access, institutional support, and ethical governance. The findings of the present study therefore suggest that universities should provide clear guidelines on responsible AI use while also considering equitable access to AI resources so that students can benefit from the technology without compromising academic integrity.

Content and quality problems

The findings show that language that was unsuitable for the context was the most frequently reported issue. Although participants acknowledged that AI could generate grammatically accurate sentences and appropriate vocabulary, they found that the generated language did not always match the context of their academic assignments. One of the participants said, "If, for instance, our instruction is somewhat ambiguous, the answer it gives is also ambiguous and off target." (Participant 14, 00:03:02). Another participant explained, "Sometimes, AI answers don't quite match the topic I'm interested in, or the information is inaccurate. Therefore, it is essential to verify the content before accepting the AI's output." (Participant 14, 00:02:01).

These results are consistent with Lo (2023), who found that ChatGPT is effective in supporting writing processes such as brainstorming, drafting, and language improvement but still requires users to evaluate and adapt the generated content according to the intended educational context. Therefore, students' ability to critically revise AI-generated language remains essential to ensure that the final writing is appropriate, coherent, and academically acceptable.

The findings also show that shallow or generic arguments represented another limitation of AI-assisted writing. Several participants explained that although AI could quickly generate ideas and organize information, the resulting arguments often lacked depth, originality, and critical analysis. One of the participants said, "Sometimes, the AI's answers are too generic or don't meet my needs." (Participant 20, 00:01:49).

These findings are consistent with Farrokhnia et al. (2024), who concluded that although ChatGPT can effectively support brainstorming and drafting activities, its outputs often lack critical

reasoning and discipline-specific depth. Similarly, Walter (2024) argued that generative AI should be viewed as a collaborative learning tool because meaningful academic writing requires students to critically evaluate, expand, and refine AI-generated ideas. Therefore, the findings of the present study indicate that AI contributes positively to writing efficiency but cannot replace students' intellectual engagement in constructing well-developed academic arguments.

The findings show that incorrect or inaccurate information was another challenge experienced by students when using AI for academic writing. Participants reported that AI occasionally generated information that was inaccurate, lacked supporting evidence, or contained fabricated references. One of the participants stated, "One of the difficulties I have encountered is that AI sometimes provides information that is inaccurate or irrelevant to the topic being discussed. " (Participant 10, 00:03:21). These statements demonstrate that students were aware of AI's limitations regarding factual accuracy and recognized that human verification remained necessary to maintain the credibility and reliability of academic writing.

This finding supports the study conducted by Dwivedi et al. (2023) that generative AI should be used cautiously in higher education because users may unknowingly accept inaccurate information if they fail to critically evaluate AI-generated outputs. Therefore, the present findings reinforce the importance of students' information literacy and critical evaluation skills when integrating AI into academic writing activities.

Pedagogical Implications for EFL/ELT

The findings of this study have several important implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. First, the findings suggest that AI should be integrated as a writing support tool rather than used as a substitute for students' independent writing. Since students reported that AI helped them generate ideas, improve grammar, and organize sentences, EFL teachers can incorporate AI into different stages of the writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of developing students' AI literacy and critical evaluation skills. Students reported that AI-generated information could sometimes be inaccurate, inappropriate for the context, or too generic. Therefore, EFL teachers should explicitly teach students how to evaluate AI-generated responses, verify information, identify inappropriate language, and revise AI-generated content according to the purpose, audience, and context of their writing.

Third, the findings have implications for writing instruction and assessment. Rather than focusing only on the final written product, EFL teachers can place greater emphasis on the writing process. Students may be required to submit different stages of their writing, such as initial ideas, first drafts, revisions, and final versions. They can also be asked to explain how and why they used AI during the writing process. Such practices can encourage transparency, maintain learner ownership, and reduce the possibility of students simply submitting AI-generated texts as their own work.

Finally, the findings suggest that AI integration should be sensitive to the realities of EFL

learners. Students may have different levels of English proficiency, digital literacy, and access to AI tools. Consequently, teachers should provide clear guidance on responsible AI use and ensure that AI functions as a scaffold for language development while preserving students' critical thinking, creativity, learner autonomy, and ownership of their writing.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study involved 20 students from a single higher education institution, which may limit the transferability of the findings to students in other educational contexts. Students from different institutions, academic disciplines, or levels of English proficiency may have different experiences with AI-assisted writing.

Second, the duration of the individual interviews was relatively short, ranging from approximately two to six minutes. This limitation was partly related to the focused interview questions and the participants' direct and concise responses. Although the interviews produced a total of 8,999 words and revealed recurring patterns across participants, longer interviews might have provided more detailed accounts of students' personal experiences, decision-making processes, and changes in their writing practices over time.

Third, the study relied primarily on participants' self-reported experiences. Therefore, the findings reflect how students perceived and described their use of AI rather than directly measuring changes in their actual writing performance. Future research could address this limitation by combining interviews with writing samples, classroom observations, or a comparison of students' writing before and after using AI.

Finally, this study focused on students' experiences and perceptions rather than examining the effectiveness of a specific AI tool. Future studies may investigate particular AI applications, compare different tools, or use a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between AI-assisted writing practices and measurable developments in students' writing.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study identified four main themes and seven sub-themes describing students' experiences of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support their academic writing. The findings indicate that students perceived AI as a useful complementary tool for generating ideas, improving grammar and spelling, developing clearer sentence structures, and increasing writing efficiency. However, students also reported several challenges, including concerns about academic honesty, limited access to premium features, inappropriate contextual language, inaccurate information, and generic or shallow arguments.

The findings suggest that the value of AI in academic writing depends largely on how students use and evaluate its output. AI can provide useful linguistic and procedural support, but it should not replace students' independent thinking, critical evaluation, or responsibility for the final written product. Therefore, in the context of EFL education, AI should be integrated as a supportive learning tool within

a guided pedagogical framework that promotes critical thinking, language development, academic integrity, and learner autonomy. The study does not claim that AI independently improves students' writing skills; rather, it highlights students' perceptions and experiences of how AI can support the writing process when used critically, ethically, and responsibly.

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