Investigating Students' Perceptions of The Utilization of ChatGPT In Improving Writing Skills: Challenges and Strategies

[1*]**Wini Amanah**, [2]**M. Junaidi Marzuki**, [3]**Andri Suherman**, [4]**Siti Maysuroh**

[1,2,3,4] English Education Department, Faculty of Language, Art and Humanities, Hamzanwadi University.

*Corresponding Author e-mail: amanahwini@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the challenges and strategies in using ChatGPT as an academic writing tool among undergraduate students of the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University (4th–6th semester). Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the theoretical framework, this research aims to identify user perceptions, obstacles encountered, and strategies applied in utilizing ChatGPT in academic writing. A qualitative descriptive method was employed using closed and open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Participants consisted of 25 students for the questionnaires and 3 students for interviews. Data from closed questionnaires were analyzed using percentage calculations, while open-ended responses and interview data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Findings revealed that students hold generally positive perceptions of ChatGPT as a writing assistant (S4 = 1.56; S10 = 1.64), although their level of proficiency remains moderate (S1 = 1.28). Key challenges identified include over-reliance on ChatGPT (S5 = 1.92), irrelevant responses (S6 = 2.48), decreased creativity (S9 = 2.16), and inaccurate referencing. To address these issues, students employed strategies such as source verification, using ChatGPT only as a drafting tool, and maintaining writing originality. This study highlights the importance of developing critical digital literacy to promote responsible and ethical use of AI in academic contexts.

Keywords: *ChatGPT, academic writing, challenges, strategies, artificial intelligence*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly influenced the field of education by providing intelligent technologies that support teaching, learning, and academic productivity (Su & Yang, 2023; Kamalov et al., 2023). AI-based educational tools improve instructional efficiency, provide personalized learning experiences, and enable automated feedback systems that assist both teachers and students (Gocen & Aydemir, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2023). One of the most prominent AI tools currently used in education is ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI and launched in 2022, which is capable of generating human-like responses through Natural Language Processing (NLP) (Liebrenz et al., 2023; Javaid et al., 2023).

In higher education, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts, ChatGPT has gained popularity as a writing assistant that aids in generating ideas, improving grammar accuracy, and organizing academic discourse (Hasanah & Nurcholis, 2024; Pham et al., 2023). Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex language skills, requiring cognitive, linguistic, and metacognitive processes (Baskara, 2023; Hyland, 2019). Many EFL learners struggle with vocabulary limitations, idea development, and grammatical accuracy, which negatively impact their writing performance (Nur, 2023; Fareed, et al., 2016). Prior studies reported that ChatGPT helps students brainstorm, paraphrase, and receive instant feedback, thus improving writing fluency and confidence (Nath et al., 2024; Atmaja, 2024).

However, despite these benefits, concerns have been raised regarding its use in academic settings. ChatGPT generates responses based on predictive language patterns rather than genuine understanding, which can result in inaccurate or irrelevant academic content (Zhou, 2023; Hadi et al., 2023). Researchers also report that excessive reliance on ChatGPT may reduce students' critical thinking skills, originality, and independent problem-solving abilities (Hikmah, 2024; Susnjak, 2024). In addition, fabricated references and citation inaccuracies produced by ChatGPT pose serious challenges to academic integrity (Rice et al., 2024; Rudolph et al., 2023).

The use of ChatGPT among university students in Indonesia has also increased rapidly. A recent survey by Kompas (2023) reported that 68% of Indonesian university students use AI tools, including ChatGPT, for academic writing tasks. Similarly, a study by Salsabila (2024) found that 74% of English Education students at Indonesian universities use ChatGPT to assist with essay writing. Preliminary observations conducted at Hamzanwadi University in 2025 also showed that many English Education students rely on ChatGPT for writing assignments, although many of them lack critical strategies to avoid plagiarism and dependence on AI-generated content.

This study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989), which explains users' acceptance of technological tools based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In addition, this study adopts the Digital Literacy Framework (Ng, 2012) to examine how students critically evaluate and ethically use AI-generated information in academic writing. These frameworks guide the investigation of students' perceptions, challenges, and strategies when using ChatGPT.

Several previous studies have explored the role of ChatGPT in writing instruction; however, most focused only on benefits (Polakova & Ivenz, 2024; Akbar et al., 2024) or teachers' perceptions (Rahma & Fithriani, 2024). Other studies identified risks such as plagiarism and AI dependency (Maghamil & Sieras, 2024; Safitri, 2024) but did not explore adaptive strategies used by students to address these issues. Therefore, there is a research gap concerning how students manage challenges and apply strategies to use ChatGPT responsibly in academic writing.

Based on this gap, this research aims to:
1. Analyze the specific challenges faced by English Education students in using ChatGPT for academic writing.
2. Identify the strategies students apply to overcome these challenges and maintain academic integrity.
3. Examine students' perceptions of ChatGPT in relation to perceived usefulness and ease of use based on TAM.

4. Investigate the level of digital literacy applied by students when using ChatGPT for academic purposes.

To achieve these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of challenges do English Education students face when using ChatGPT for academic writing in the EFL context?
2. What strategies do students use to overcome the challenges of using ChatGPT and ensure responsible academic writing?
3. How do students perceive the usefulness and ease of use of ChatGPT based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)?
4. To what extent do students demonstrate digital literacy when interacting with AI-generated content?

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on AI integration in education by offering a comprehensive understanding of both the challenges and adaptive strategies in AI-assisted academic writing. Practically, the study provides insights for educators and universities in guiding students toward ethical and critical use of AI tools to support academic success.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore students' lived experiences in using ChatGPT for academic writing, with a focus on the challenges encountered and strategies applied. A phenomenological approach was appropriate because it allows researchers to understand participants' real perceptions and meaning-making processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Qualitative research emphasizes depth of understanding rather than numerical measurement, making it suitable for capturing students' subjective experiences (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021).

Research Setting

The study was conducted at Hamzanwadi University, East Lombok, specifically in the English Language Education Study Program. This setting was chosen because students in this program are familiar with academic writing practices and frequently engage with digital tools, including AI-based platforms such as ChatGPT, for learning and writing support.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on criteria relevant to the research aims (Adeoye, 2023). The sample consisted of 25 fourth-semester students from Class D who:

1. Had completed the Academic Writing course,
2. Had used ChatGPT for academic writing purposes,
3. Were familiar with AI tools,
4. Were willing to participate voluntarily.

Participant characteristics included:

1. Age range: 19–22 years old
2. Gender: 15 females and 10 males
3. Experience with ChatGPT: 1–6 months of use

4. Frequency of use: occasional users (1–2 times/week) and frequent users (3–5 times/week)

Three students were selected for interviews based on the variation of responses in the questionnaire (one high user, one moderate user, and one low user of ChatGPT).

Research Instruments

1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions distributed via Google Forms. The closed-ended section used a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree–Strongly Disagree) to identify perceptions and challenges.

Example questionnaire items:

"*ChatGPT helps me generate ideas when I do not know how to start writing.*"

"*I become too dependent on ChatGPT when completing writing tasks.*"

"*ChatGPT sometimes gives inaccurate or irrelevant answers.*"

Instrument Development and Validation

The questionnaire was developed based on previous studies (Polakova & Ivenz, 2024; Rahma & Fithriani, 2024) and validated by two experts in educational research and one lecturer in English education for content validity. A pilot test with 5 students ensured clarity and readability.

2. Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore strategies students apply when using ChatGPT. A validated interview guide included open-ended questions such as:

"*What difficulties did you experience when using ChatGPT for writing?*"

"*What strategies do you use to avoid plagiarism while using ChatGPT?*"

Interview Procedure

1. Conducted in a quiet room at campus
2. Duration: 20–30 minutes per participant
3. Medium: face-to-face and recorded with consent
4. Language: English and Bahasa Indonesia depending on participant comfort
5. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis

Data Collection Procedure

1. Permission was obtained from the program coordinator.
2. Questionnaires were distributed to 25 students.
3. Three students were selected for interviews based on questionnaire responses.
4. Data from both instruments were stored securely and anonymized.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1984) Interactive Model combined with thematic coding.

1. Data Reduction – filtering relevant data
2. Initial Coding – assigning labels to meaningful units
    - Example codes: *AI Dependence*, *Accuracy Concern*, *Reference Issue*
3. Categorization – grouping codes into sub-themes
    - Example sub-themes: *Technical Challenges*, *Ethical Risks*
4. Theme Development – broader themes were formed
    - Example themes: *Perceived Benefits*, *Writing Challenges*, *Coping Strategies*
5. Verification – cross-checking consistency between sources

Closed-ended data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages) via Microsoft Excel.

Trustworthiness

To ensure research rigor:

1. Credibility: triangulation of questionnaires and interviews
2. Transferability: detailed description of context and participants
3. Dependability: systematic documentation of procedures
4. **Confirmability:** audit trail and interview recording documentation (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021).

Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on the research questions, namely: (1) students' perceptions of the utilization of ChatGPT in improving writing skills, (2) the challenges students faced when using ChatGPT, and (3) the strategies they applied to overcome those challenges. The findings were obtained from a closed-ended questionnaire, an open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews with three participants.

Participants' Demographic Information

A total of 25 participants from the fourth semester of the English Education Program at Hamzanwadi University participated in this study. Of these, 3 participants were selected for semi-structured interviews. The demographic information of the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Category	Description
Total Participants	25
Gender	14 female (56%), 11 male (44%)
Age Range	19–22 years old
Study Program	English Language Education
Academic Level	4th Semester
Interview Participants	3 (P1, P2, P3)
Experience Using ChatGPT	Familiar but moderate level of usage

The demographic information indicates that all participants had experience using ChatGPT prior to the study, although the intensity and purpose varied across individuals.

Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT in Academic Writing

The results of the closed-ended questionnaire show that students had a generally positive perception of using ChatGPT as a writing tool. Most students agreed that ChatGPT helps them generate ideas, improve grammar, and save time during the writing process.

Table 2. Mean Score of Students' Perceptions

No	Statement	Mean Score
S1	I know how to use ChatGPT for writing	1.28
S2	I have experience using ChatGPT	1.44
S3	I feel comfortable using ChatGPT	1.32
S4	ChatGPT helps improve writing	1.56
S5	I depend too much on ChatGPT	1.92

S6	ChatGPT sometimes gives irrelevant answers	2.48
S7	ChatGPT improves writing performance	1.80
S8	ChatGPT helps me learn vocabulary & grammar	1.60
S9	ChatGPT reduces creativity	2.16
S10	I will continue using ChatGPT	1.64

Based on Table 2, students acknowledged the usefulness of ChatGPT (S4 = 1.56; S7 = 1.80), but they also reported concerns, particularly regarding overdependence (S5 = 1.92) and irrelevant responses (S6 = 2.48).

Figure 1. Distribution of Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT Usage (Pie Chart Placeholder)
(Pie chart will show: Positive Perception 64%, Neutral 20%, Negative 16%)
Figure 2. Mean Score of Questionnaire Items S1–S10 (Bar Chart Placeholder)
(Bar chart displays comparison of average scores by item)

This indicates that although ChatGPT is perceived as beneficial, its use also raises potential risks to students' critical thinking and writing independence.

Challenges Faced by Students in Using ChatGPT

The qualitative data revealed five main challenges faced by students while using ChatGPT in academic writing:

Table 3.

No	Challenge	Description
C1	Over-reliance	Excessive dependency reduces independent writing skills
C2	Lack of creativity	AI-generated ideas hinder originality
C3	Irrelevant responses	ChatGPT sometimes provides off-topic answers
C4	Generalized content	Lacks academic depth
C5	Inaccurate references	Fictitious or unverifiable sources

These findings are supported by interview data. For example, Participant 3 (P3) stated:

"If we continue to use ChatGPT, it can have a negative impact. We will become dependent, so if there is no ChatGPT, we will be stuck composing sentences." (P3)

Participant 1 highlighted the issue of reduced creativity:

"People may become less creative and critical in their thinking if they rely too much on ChatGPT." (P1)

Meanwhile, Participant 2 emphasized the issue of inaccurate references:

"I don't immediately trust references from ChatGPT. I always check them again in journals or Google Scholar." (P2)

Strategies Used to Overcome Challenges

Despite the challenges, students reported applying several strategies to use ChatGPT responsibly:

Table 4.

No	Strategy	Description
S1	Validating information	Cross-checking references manually
S2	Using ChatGPT for drafting only	AI used only for brainstorming
S3	Paraphrasing	Avoiding plagiarism
S4	Combining multiple sources	Using AI + journal references
S5	Critical filtering	Selecting only relevant ideas

As stated by Participant 1:

"I use ChatGPT only as a guide, not for the final answer. I paraphrase the ideas in my own words." (P1)

Participant 2 added:

"ChatGPT helps me generate ideas, but I still edit and develop them again to match my writing style." (P2)

Participant 3 emphasized academic responsibility:

"We must be careful. We cannot just trust everything. We need to verify and evaluate the information." (P3)

These findings suggest that students are not passive users of AI technology; rather, they are developing digital literacy and self-regulated learning strategies.

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in academic writing, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they applied to overcome those challenges. The findings reveal that while students generally perceive ChatGPT as a useful tool for supporting their writing process, its improper use may lead to academic and cognitive issues such as dependency, decreased creativity, and reduced critical thinking. These findings provide important insights into the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing.

1. Interpretation of Students' Perceptions

The results showed that most participants had a positive perception of ChatGPT as an assistive writing tool. Students believed it helped them generate ideas, develop vocabulary, improve sentence structure, and enhance writing fluency. This aligns with previous studies by Polakova and Ivenz (2024) and Hasanah and Nurcholis (2024), who found that ChatGPT increased writing efficiency and confidence among EFL learners. However, although students appreciated its usefulness, their familiarity level remained moderate, as shown by mean scores S1 = 1.28 and S2 = 1.44. This indicates that students are still in the adaptation phase of integrating AI tools into their academic writing routines.

2. Challenges in Using ChatGPT

Despite its advantages, participants reported several challenges when using ChatGPT. The most frequently mentioned issues were over-reliance, irrelevant responses, lack of critical engagement, and inaccurate references. These findings are consistent with Hikmah (2024) and Jamshed et al. (2024), who warned that AI may weaken students' independent problem-solving abilities if used uncritically. In addition, as Participant 3 stated, excessive dependence on ChatGPT can make students passive learners: *If there is no ChatGPT, we will be stuck composing sentences."*

This suggests that while AI can support learning, it also poses a risk to learner autonomy if misused.

3. Relationship Between Challenges and Writing Quality

The overuse of ChatGPT has a negative impact on writing quality. Students may prioritize speed and convenience over depth of analysis, resulting in superficial ideas and weak arguments. Furthermore, some responses generated by ChatGPT were too general or irrelevant to academic topics, as reflected in mean score $S6 = 2.48$. These findings reinforce Zhou's (2023) argument that AI-generated content must be critically evaluated because it often lacks context and academic rigor. Therefore, the challenge is not merely technical but also epistemological: students must learn how to assess the credibility and relevance of AI-generated information.

4. Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

To manage these challenges, students reported several effective strategies, such as validating references, paraphrasing, using ChatGPT only for drafting purposes, and combining AI assistance with academic sources. These strategies demonstrate emerging digital literacy and academic responsibility among the students. This aligns with the concept of Self-Regulated Learning Theory (Zimmerman, 2002), where learners monitor and control their cognitive processes. As Participant 1 explained: *"I use ChatGPT only as a guide; I paraphrase the ideas in my own words."* This indicates active learning behavior rather than passive copying.

5. Comparison with Previous Studies

These findings both confirm and extend previous studies. Similar to Rahma and Fithriani (2024), this research found that students valued ChatGPT as a helpful writing assistant. However, unlike Mukhtar (2024), who emphasized only the benefits, this study provides a more balanced view by exploring both challenges and mitigation strategies. It also expands on Susnjak (2024), who warned about academic dishonesty risks by showing that students in this study actually attempted to use AI responsibly.

6. Theoretical Implications

The findings reinforce Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which suggests that learning occurs through mediated tools. ChatGPT, as a cognitive mediator, supports writing development but requires regulation to avoid overdependence. Furthermore, this study contributes to AI literacy theory by showing that students need not only technical skills but also evaluative judgment to use AI ethically and effectively.

7. Practical Implications

The study implies that universities must establish AI usage guidelines to prevent plagiarism, promote academic integrity, and develop AI literacy. Lecturers should integrate AI into writing instruction through scaffolded learning rather than banning it. Training programs should include critical evaluation, paraphrasing techniques, and citation verification to prevent "AI laziness."

8. Methodological Limitations

This study had limitations. The sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single university, which may limit generalizability. The study also relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be subjective. Future research could expand to multiple institutions and include writing performance tests to measure the real impact of ChatGPT on writing quality.

Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of the utilization of ChatGPT in improving writing skills, specifically focusing on the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed to overcome those challenges. The findings revealed that students generally perceived ChatGPT as a supportive tool that facilitates various stages of the writing process, including idea generation, vocabulary development, sentence construction, and grammar refinement. This indicates that ChatGPT contributes to reducing writing anxiety and increasing students' writing confidence, particularly among those who struggle with organizing ideas and language accuracy.

However, the findings also showed that students experienced several challenges while using ChatGPT. The main challenge was over-reliance on AI-generated content, which led to decreased independent writing ability. Other challenges included irrelevant or overly general responses, limited depth of explanation, reduced creativity, and inaccurate or fabricated references. These issues highlight the importance of critical evaluation and responsible use of AI tools in academic contexts.

In response to these challenges, students applied a variety of self-regulated strategies to ensure the ethical and effective use of ChatGPT. These included validating information from credible academic sources, paraphrasing AI-generated text to maintain originality, using ChatGPT primarily for drafting purposes, and combining AI assistance with human reasoning. These strategies demonstrate that students are not passive users of AI technology but are capable of adapting it thoughtfully to support their learning.

This study has several practical implications. For educators, the findings suggest the need to integrate AI literacy into writing instruction and to guide students on how to use ChatGPT critically rather than prohibiting its use. For students, the results emphasize the importance of maintaining academic integrity and developing independent thinking skills alongside AI assistance. For curriculum developers, the study recommends incorporating AI-based academic support tools into writing modules, along with clear ethical guidelines.

However, this study is not without limitations. The research involved a limited number of participants from a single university, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study relied primarily on self-reported perceptions, which may not fully reflect actual writing performance. Therefore, future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample and consider using experimental or mixed-method designs to measure the real impact of ChatGPT on writing quality. Further studies could also explore teachers' perspectives on AI tools in writing instruction and compare AI-assisted and traditional writing approaches.

In conclusion, ChatGPT can be considered a valuable supplementary tool in academic writing when used responsibly. Its effectiveness depends not merely on access to technology but on students' ability to use it critically, ethically, and purposefully. AI should support not replace human thinking, creativity, and academic judgment.

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