

Academic Writing in the AI Era: Students' Experiences and Challenges Using ChatGPT

Abdul Rahman R

Tomakaka University of Mamuju, Indonesia

ammanyuyu54@gmail.com

Abstract

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed academic writing practices in higher education. Among various AI-based technologies, ChatGPT has become one of the most widely used tools by university students to assist writing activities such as generating ideas, paraphrasing, summarizing, and improving grammatical accuracy. While ChatGPT offers various academic benefits, its use also raises concerns regarding students' critical thinking, academic integrity, and overreliance on AI-generated content. This study aims to explore students' experiences and challenges in using ChatGPT for academic writing in higher education. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving university students who actively used ChatGPT in their academic writing activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students perceived ChatGPT as a helpful academic assistant that improved writing efficiency, vocabulary development, idea organization, and language accuracy. However, students also experienced several challenges, including dependency on AI tools, inaccurate information, reduced critical engagement, and ethical concerns related to plagiarism and originality. The study highlights the importance of integrating AI literacy and ethical guidance into academic writing instruction in higher education. The findings contribute to the growing discussion on the role of AI in education and provide pedagogical insights for lecturers and institutions in responding to the rapid development of AI-assisted learning environments.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Artificial Intelligence, Chatgpt, Higher Education, Students' Perceptions*

Introduction

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed various aspects of human life, including communication, business, healthcare, and education. In higher education, AI technologies have increasingly become integrated into teaching and learning practices, particularly in language learning and academic writing. One of the most influential AI tools in recent years is ChatGPT, an AI-powered language model capable of generating human-like responses and assisting users with various writing activities. Since its emergence, ChatGPT has attracted considerable attention from students, educators, and researchers because of its ability to support idea generation, paraphrasing, grammar correction, summarization, and academic text production (Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Tlili et al., 2023).

Academic writing is considered an essential competency in higher education because it reflects students' abilities to think critically, organize ideas systematically, develop arguments, and communicate academic knowledge effectively. Nevertheless, many university students, particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, continue to experience difficulties in academic writing. These difficulties commonly include limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, inadequate coherence and cohesion, difficulties in developing arguments, and

insufficient confidence in expressing ideas academically. In response to these challenges, students have increasingly used digital technologies and AI-assisted writing tools to improve the quality, efficiency, and productivity of their writing activities (Fathi & Rahimi, 2026; Song & Song, 2023).

The integration of ChatGPT into academic writing practices has created both opportunities and challenges in higher education. On the one hand, ChatGPT provides immediate assistance that may help students improve language accuracy, sentence construction, vocabulary selection, text organization, and overall writing quality. AI-assisted writing tools also enable students to receive rapid feedback and access learning support independently throughout different stages of the writing process. These benefits have contributed to the increasing use of ChatGPT among university students from various academic disciplines (Fathi & Rahimi, 2026; Kasneci et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023). On the other hand, the growing use of ChatGPT in academic writing has raised important concerns regarding academic integrity, originality, information accuracy, authorship, critical thinking, and the ethical use of technology. ChatGPT may generate information that appears convincing but is inaccurate, biased, irrelevant, or unsupported by credible academic references. Excessive dependence on AI-generated content may also reduce students' active engagement in the writing process and weaken their ability to develop independent arguments, analytical judgment, and individual academic voices.

Therefore, students should not merely accept AI-generated responses but must critically evaluate, verify, revise, and contextualize the information before incorporating it into academic work (Farrokhnia et al., 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Tili et al., 2023). The emergence of AI technologies in education has also shifted the traditional understanding of academic writing. Writing is no longer viewed solely as an individual cognitive activity but increasingly as a process mediated by interactions between students and intelligent digital systems. Students may use ChatGPT during different stages of writing, such as exploring topics, generating ideas, constructing outlines, improving vocabulary, correcting grammatical errors, revising sentences, and evaluating text organization. This transformation requires educators and higher education institutions to reconsider pedagogical approaches, assessment methods, academic-integrity policies, and ethical guidelines related to the use of AI-assisted writing tools (Farrokhnia et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2025; Tili et al., 2023).

Students' digital literacy is another important factor influencing the responsible use of ChatGPT in academic writing. The ability to access and operate an AI tool does not automatically indicate that students are capable of evaluating, verifying, and using AI-generated information appropriately. Students need adequate digital literacy to recognize inaccurate information, identify possible biases, compare generated responses with credible academic sources, and distinguish between acceptable learning assistance and academic misconduct. Digital literacy in the AI era therefore includes not only technical competence but also critical, ethical, reflective, and responsible decision-making when interacting with AI-generated content (Kasneci et al., 2023; Nabila et al., 2025).

Insufficient digital literacy may cause students to accept ChatGPT responses directly without examining their relevance, accuracy, credibility, or conformity with academic conventions. Students may also experience difficulty determining when AI assistance is educationally appropriate and when it may violate principles of originality and academic integrity. For this reason, digital literacy education should guide students in formulating effective prompts, evaluating generated content, verifying information through reliable sources, acknowledging the use of AI when required, and maintaining responsibility for the final written product.

Strengthening these competencies is essential to ensure that ChatGPT functions as a learning aid rather than as a replacement for students' intellectual participation in academic writing (Nabila et al., 2025; Tlili et al., 2023).

The use of ChatGPT also changes students' roles and responsibilities throughout the academic writing process. Students are expected to remain actively involved in determining the purpose of their writing, selecting relevant information, developing arguments, evaluating generated responses, revising the text, and ensuring that the final work reflects their own understanding. When used appropriately, ChatGPT may function as a writing assistant that encourages students to explore ideas, improve sentence construction, expand vocabulary, and review the organization of arguments. However, when students rely excessively on automatically generated responses, the writing process may become mechanical, passive, and less reflective. The educational value of ChatGPT consequently depends on how students interact with, evaluate, revise, and take responsibility for the content generated by the system (Fathi & Rahimi, 2026; Kohnke et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023).

From an institutional perspective, the increasing use of ChatGPT requires universities to establish clear and practical guidelines for AI-assisted academic writing. Simply prohibiting generative AI may not adequately address the issue because these technologies have become widely accessible and increasingly embedded in students' academic activities. Lecturers and institutions should clarify which forms of AI assistance are permitted, how students should disclose or acknowledge AI use, and how originality and individual understanding will be evaluated. Lecturers may also redesign writing assignments by emphasizing drafting processes, reflective explanations, source verification, classroom discussions, personalized topics, and oral confirmation of students' arguments. These approaches can help educators distinguish between responsible AI-assisted learning and inappropriate dependence on generated content (Farrokhnia et al., 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023). Several previous studies have investigated ChatGPT and other AI-assisted tools in education. Existing research has examined the opportunities and challenges of large language models, their potential influence on language learning, their contribution to writing performance, and their implications for academic integrity and educational practice.

Studies have also reported that AI-assisted writing may support students' motivation, linguistic accuracy, idea development, and revision processes when it is accompanied by critical evaluation and appropriate instructional guidance (Farrokhnia et al., 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023). Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of previous research has focused on the technical capabilities of ChatGPT, general perceptions of its educational benefits and risks, or quantitative measurements of students' writing achievement. Studies exploring students' lived experiences, learning behaviors, challenges, and ethical considerations when using ChatGPT throughout the academic writing process remain comparatively limited, particularly within higher education EFL contexts. Furthermore, students' experiences cannot be fully understood only through measures of writing scores or learning outcomes because their interactions with ChatGPT may involve personal strategies, doubts, dependence, critical evaluation, and ethical decision-making.

The rapid development of generative AI also requires continuous investigation because students' patterns of interaction with these tools and institutional responses to their use continue to evolve (Fathi & Rahimi, 2026; Nugroho et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to explore students' experiences and challenges in using ChatGPT for academic writing in higher education. This study is significant because it provides deeper insights into how students use

ChatGPT during academic writing activities, how they perceive its benefits, and what linguistic, technical, academic, and ethical challenges they encounter. Unlike studies that primarily emphasize measurable writing outcomes, the present study focuses on students' lived experiences and their interpretations of AI-assisted writing practices. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to discussions on AI-assisted language learning and academic writing while providing practical recommendations for lecturers, institutions, and policymakers in designing ethical, responsible, and effective AI-integrated learning environments.

To address the research question, "How do students experience the use of ChatGPT in academic writing?", this study focuses on students' experiences of interacting with ChatGPT throughout the academic writing process. The investigation examines the use of ChatGPT for idea development, organization of arguments, grammar correction, vocabulary improvement, sentence revision, and text evaluation. It also explores students' perceptions of the advantages, limitations, challenges, and ethical issues emerging from AI-assisted writing practices. By examining these experiences in depth, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ChatGPT influences students' academic writing practices, learning behaviors, critical engagement, and responsibilities in the AI era.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore undergraduate students' experiences of using ChatGPT for academic writing. This design was selected because it enables the researcher to understand participants' perceptions, practices, challenges, and interpretations in detail. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of ChatGPT statistically, the study focused on how students used and experienced ChatGPT during academic writing activities, including idea generation, outlining, grammar correction, vocabulary improvement, paraphrasing, and text revision.

Participants

The participants were undergraduate students from several higher education institutions who had experience using ChatGPT for academic writing. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: they were active undergraduate students, had used ChatGPT for at least one academic writing task, and were willing to participate in an interview. Students who had never used ChatGPT for academic writing were excluded from the study. The number of participants was not predetermined because recruitment continued until data saturation was reached. Data saturation was considered achieved when additional interviews no longer produced substantially new information or experiences related to the research focus. Participants' identities were protected using codes such as P1, P2, and P3.

Research Instruments

The researcher served as the primary instrument in collecting and interpreting the qualitative data. A semi-structured interview guide was used as the main supporting instrument to maintain consistency while allowing participants to explain their experiences freely. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions covering students' patterns of ChatGPT use, writing activities supported by ChatGPT, perceived benefits, encountered difficulties, and ethical concerns. Examples of interview questions included: "How do you use ChatGPT during academic writing?", "What benefits have you experienced?", "What difficulties have you encountered?",

“How do you verify the information generated by ChatGPT?”, and “What ethical concerns do you have when using ChatGPT for academic assignments?” Follow-up questions were used to obtain clarification and concrete examples. Additional instruments included a participant information form, an audio recorder, field notes, and a transcription sheet.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' locations and availability (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Newman et al., 2021). Before each interview, participants received an explanation of the research purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw from the study (McGrath et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2021). Each interview was expected to last approximately 30–45 minutes. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure data accuracy (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). The researcher also took field notes to record important statements, contextual information, and initial reflections (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; McGrath et al., 2019). Participants were encouraged to describe specific experiences of using ChatGPT for essays, reports, assignments, or other academic projects (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). After each interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim (Rutakumwa et al., 2020; Whitney et al., 2024). The researcher reviewed each transcript while listening to the recording to ensure transcription accuracy (Whitney et al., 2024). Personal information, including participants' names and institutional identities, was removed before the data were analyzed (Newman et al., 2021; Whitney et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using narrative analysis because the study focused on how participants described and interpreted their experiences of using ChatGPT. The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts and field notes to gain an overall understanding of each participant's account. Relevant statements were then identified and assigned initial codes. The codes represented experiences such as idea generation, grammar assistance, vocabulary improvement, writing efficiency, inaccurate information, dependence on AI, source verification, originality, and academic integrity. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories representing the benefits, challenges, writing practices, and ethical concerns associated with ChatGPT use.

Each participant's narrative was subsequently examined to identify the sequence and meaning of their experiences, including why they began using ChatGPT, how they used it, the outcomes they experienced, and how they evaluated its influence on their writing. The narratives were then compared across participants to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns. The resulting categories were organized into broader narrative themes. However, the final themes were developed from the collected data rather than determined before the interviews. The researcher reviewed the themes by comparing them with the original transcripts to ensure that the interpretations accurately represented participants' experiences. The findings were presented through narrative explanations supported by selected participant quotations.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through member checking by asking participants to confirm summaries of their interview responses. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview transcripts, participant information forms, and field notes. The researcher also maintained documentation of the coding process, category development, and analytical decisions. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data

collection. Participant codes were used to maintain anonymity, while recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used only for research purposes. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer questions or withdraw from the study without any academic consequences.

Results

Students' Experiences in Using ChatGPT for Academic Writing

The findings of this study revealed that students experienced the use of ChatGPT in academic writing as both supportive and transformative. Most participants perceived ChatGPT as a practical academic assistant that facilitated various stages of the writing process, including brainstorming, organizing ideas, paraphrasing, grammar correction, vocabulary development, and summarizing academic sources. Students reported that ChatGPT helped them reduce difficulties commonly encountered in academic writing, particularly when writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. One of the dominant experiences reported by participants was the ability of ChatGPT to assist them in generating ideas and initiating writing tasks. Many students admitted that they often experienced difficulty in starting essays or developing academic arguments. In this context, ChatGPT functioned as a stimulus that encouraged them to begin writing more confidently.

One participant stated:

"When I do not know how to start my essay, ChatGPT gives me ideas and examples that make the writing process easier."

Another participant explained:

"ChatGPT helps me organize my thoughts into paragraphs. Before using it, I often felt confused about how to structure my writing." These findings indicate that students experienced ChatGPT as a cognitive support tool that reduced writing anxiety and increased confidence during academic writing activities. For many students, especially those with limited academic writing proficiency, ChatGPT became a form of scaffolding that supported them in constructing academic texts more systematically. In addition to idea generation, participants also emphasized the role of ChatGPT in improving language accuracy and writing efficiency. Students reported that ChatGPT assisted them in correcting grammatical errors, improving vocabulary selection, and refining sentence structures. As a result, they perceived improvements in the quality and clarity of their writing.

One participant commented:

"I usually use ChatGPT to check grammar and improve academic vocabulary because it makes my writing sound more formal and academic." The findings further revealed that students perceived ChatGPT as a time-saving tool. Participants explained that AI-generated assistance enabled them to complete assignments more efficiently, particularly when summarizing journal articles, paraphrasing sources, or generating writing outlines. However, despite these positive experiences, students also encountered several challenges in using ChatGPT for academic writing. One of the major concerns involved dependency on AI-generated responses. Some participants admitted that excessive use of ChatGPT reduced their motivation to think critically and independently during the writing process.

A participant stated:

“Sometimes I rely too much on ChatGPT, and I realize that I become less active in developing my own ideas.” Another challenge involved the accuracy and reliability of information generated by ChatGPT. Participants acknowledged that AI-generated responses occasionally contained inaccurate or misleading information, requiring them to verify information through other academic sources.

One participant explained:

“ChatGPT is helpful, but not all information is accurate. I still need to check journals and other references.” Ethical concerns also emerged as an important issue in students’ experiences. Several participants expressed concerns regarding plagiarism, originality, and responsible AI usage in academic contexts. Students recognized that directly copying AI-generated content without critical evaluation could violate academic integrity principles.

One participant commented:

“Using ChatGPT is helpful, but students should not simply copy the answers because academic writing should still reflect our own understanding.” The findings demonstrate that students experience ChatGPT not merely as a technological innovation but as a tool that reshapes their writing practices, learning behaviors, and academic experiences in the digital era.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that ChatGPT has substantially shaped students’ experiences of academic writing in higher education. Participants generally perceived ChatGPT positively because it provided accessible and immediate assistance during different stages of writing, reduced difficulties in beginning academic tasks, and helped them complete assignments more efficiently. However, the findings also show that these benefits were accompanied by concerns about dependency, information accuracy, originality, and academic integrity. Therefore, students’ experiences of using ChatGPT cannot be categorized as entirely positive or negative. Instead, they reflect a complex relationship in which ChatGPT functions as a useful writing assistant while simultaneously requiring students to exercise critical judgment and responsibility. Similar patterns have been identified in studies showing that students appreciate the immediacy and accessibility of generative AI while remaining concerned about fairness, integrity, and the authenticity of academic work (Holland & Ciachir, 2025; Wang, 2025).

One of the most prominent findings was that ChatGPT helped students overcome initial difficulties in academic writing. Students frequently experienced uncertainty when selecting a topic, developing an opening paragraph, or determining how to structure their ideas. The immediate responses provided by ChatGPT enabled them to begin writing without spending excessive time dealing with writer’s block. This assistance also appeared to reduce writing anxiety because students could request examples, explanations, and revisions without fear of being negatively evaluated. Research involving undergraduate ESL students similarly found that ChatGPT-based formative feedback supported writing performance and reduced anxiety associated with requesting and receiving feedback (Mahapatra, 2024).

AI-assisted writing activities have also been associated with increased motivation and confidence when students receive guidance that is responsive to their individual writing difficulties (Song & Song, 2023). The role of ChatGPT in helping students generate ideas and organize arguments suggests that generative AI can function as a form of instructional

scaffolding. In this role, ChatGPT does not necessarily produce the final academic text but provides temporary support that allows students to perform tasks they initially find difficult. Participants used the tool to brainstorm relevant ideas, produce preliminary outlines, identify possible arguments, and arrange information into a more systematic structure. These functions may be particularly useful for EFL students who must simultaneously manage academic content, argument development, and English-language conventions. Students from both native- and nonnative-English-speaking backgrounds have similarly reported using ChatGPT for brainstorming, organization, argument development, coherence, and other global aspects of academic writing (Wang, 2025). Nevertheless, scaffolding is educationally meaningful only when students gradually assume responsibility for evaluating and developing the ideas offered by the system rather than copying the responses directly.

The findings further demonstrate that students valued ChatGPT for grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, paraphrasing, and sentence revision. Students perceived the tool as useful because it could identify grammatical weaknesses, suggest alternative expressions, and provide more formal vocabulary within a relatively short time. Such assistance enabled them to concentrate on both language accuracy and the broader content of their academic work. Previous research has shown that ChatGPT can support content organization, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary selection, and revision when used as a formative feedback tool in ESL writing classes (Mahapatra, 2024). Its conversational format also allows learners to request clarification and adjust their questions, making feedback more interactive than conventional automated correction systems (Kohnke et al., 2023). Similarly, source-based writing research has found that students using ChatGPT produced texts with fewer grammatical errors and greater lexical diversity, although the tool was less effective when used as the principal source of academic information (Tarchi et al., 2025).

Despite these linguistic benefits, technically improved writing does not always represent deeper learning or stronger academic understanding. Students may produce grammatically accurate and well-organized texts without fully comprehending the arguments contained in them. ChatGPT can suggest sophisticated vocabulary or complex sentence patterns that exceed students' usual language proficiency, potentially creating a mismatch between the final text and the writer's actual ability. Participants must therefore decide which suggestions reflect their intended meaning and which should be modified or rejected. Research involving Indonesian EFL students similarly highlights the challenge of balancing the linguistic accuracy offered by ChatGPT with the preservation of students' personal voices and cultural identities (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). This finding emphasizes that academic writing quality should not be assessed solely through grammatical correctness but also through authorship, reasoning, contextual relevance, and the student's ability to explain the ideas presented.

Another important finding concerns students' potential dependency on ChatGPT. The availability of rapid and apparently complete responses may encourage students to prioritize convenience over sustained engagement with academic problems. When students repeatedly ask ChatGPT to produce arguments, paragraphs, or revisions, they may become less willing to struggle productively with difficult writing tasks. This tendency could limit opportunities to develop independent reasoning, persistence, and confidence in personal writing abilities. Nevertheless, the relationship between ChatGPT use and critical thinking is not automatically negative. When students are required to compare AI-generated responses with scholarly literature, identify weaknesses, and justify their revisions, ChatGPT may instead become a resource for critical evaluation. A recent classroom study found that critically assessing AI-generated essays could strengthen students' evaluation skills, even though the AI-generated

essays did not improve their overall academic performance (Oates & Johnson, 2025). Therefore, the educational effect of ChatGPT depends less on the existence of the tool itself than on the learning activities and responsibilities surrounding its use.

The reliability of AI-generated information was also identified as a major challenge. Participants recognized that ChatGPT sometimes generated inaccurate explanations, irrelevant information, unsupported statements, or references that could not be verified. Because its responses are linguistically fluent and presented confidently, students may find it difficult to distinguish reliable information from misleading content. This issue becomes particularly serious when ChatGPT is used to locate theories, research findings, quotations, or bibliographic references. Research on ChatGPT-assisted source-based writing similarly shows that the tool may support surface-level writing quality but should not be treated as the primary source of academic evidence (Tarchi et al., 2025). Students must therefore verify AI-generated information through peer-reviewed articles, academic books, institutional reports, and other credible sources before including it in their work. These verification practices require information literacy as well as an understanding of how generative AI produces responses.

Digital and AI literacy are therefore central to the responsible use of ChatGPT. The ability to operate the application or formulate prompts does not necessarily mean that students can use its responses critically and ethically. Competent use requires students to understand the limitations of generated information, recognize possible bias, evaluate the suitability of suggestions, and retain responsibility for the final academic product. Digital literacy also includes the ability to distinguish legitimate assistance—such as brainstorming or language feedback—from practices that replace students' intellectual contributions. Research in the Indonesian academic context has emphasized that digital literacy plays an important role in ensuring that AI is used productively, ethically, and responsibly (Nabila et al., 2025). Accordingly, universities should not assume that students will automatically develop these competencies merely through frequent exposure to AI technologies.

Ethical concerns regarding plagiarism, disclosure, and originality further illustrate the complexity of AI-assisted academic writing. Participants understood that submitting AI-generated text without substantial intellectual contribution could misrepresent their actual abilities and violate academic-integrity principles. At the same time, students may remain uncertain about which forms of ChatGPT assistance are permitted because institutional rules differ across lecturers, courses, and assignments. Qualitative research has shown that students and educators often hold varying perceptions of whether ChatGPT constitutes legitimate assistance or academic misconduct (Karkoulou et al., 2025). Large-scale student research also indicates that students tend to support limited forms of AI assistance but reject the use of ChatGPT to produce an entire essay, while many students request clearer university-wide policies (Johnston et al., 2024). Clear guidelines are consequently needed to explain acceptable uses, required disclosure, authorship responsibility, data privacy, and procedures for acknowledging AI assistance.

The findings suggest that prohibiting ChatGPT entirely may be less effective than developing structured approaches to its responsible integration. Because generative AI is widely accessible, total prohibition may encourage hidden use without providing students with the knowledge needed to evaluate its outputs. Universities should instead establish policies that differentiate between acceptable assistance, restricted use, and misconduct according to the learning objectives of each assignment. An effective institutional framework should combine pedagogical guidance, ethical governance, staff development, student training, and clear operational

procedures (Chan, 2023). Assessment practices may also need to place greater emphasis on writing processes, drafts, source verification, reflective statements, oral explanations, and students' justifications for accepting or rejecting AI-generated suggestions. These measures would help lecturers evaluate students' understanding rather than relying solely on the polished appearance of a final text.

Finally, the findings indicate that lecturers' roles are evolving in the generative AI era. Lecturers remain essential not merely as providers of information but as facilitators who guide students in evaluating evidence, constructing arguments, preserving their academic voices, and using technology responsibly. Academic-writing instruction should therefore incorporate prompt evaluation, fact-checking, citation verification, AI-use disclosure, reflective revision, and discussion of ethical boundaries. Lecturers also need opportunities to strengthen their own AI literacy so that guidance is consistent and aligned with course outcomes. ChatGPT should ultimately be positioned as a supplementary and dialogic writing resource rather than as an authoritative source or substitute for human intellectual effort. When accompanied by critical evaluation, ethical awareness, and appropriate pedagogical guidance, it may contribute positively to students' writing development. Without these conditions, however, convenience and linguistic improvement may come at the expense of independent thinking, authentic authorship, and meaningful engagement with academic writing.

Conclusion

This study explored students' experiences of using ChatGPT for academic writing in higher education. The findings indicate that students generally perceived ChatGPT as a helpful academic assistant that supported idea generation, grammar correction, vocabulary development, argument organization, and writing efficiency. ChatGPT also helped reduce writing anxiety and increase students' confidence in producing academic texts, particularly among EFL learners. However, these benefits were accompanied by several challenges, including dependence on AI-generated responses, inaccurate or unreliable information, reduced critical engagement, and ethical concerns related to plagiarism, originality, and academic integrity. These findings demonstrate that the educational value of ChatGPT depends not only on its technological capabilities but also on students' ability to evaluate and use its outputs critically and responsibly. The findings have practical implications for lecturers and higher education institutions. Academic writing instruction should integrate AI literacy, source verification, ethical awareness, and clear guidelines regarding acceptable and unacceptable uses of generative AI. ChatGPT should be positioned as a supplementary learning tool rather than as a substitute for students' reasoning, creativity, and independent academic work. This study is limited by its qualitative design, purposive participant selection, and reliance on students' self-reported experiences. The findings may therefore not represent all students or institutional contexts. In addition, the study did not directly assess changes in writing quality before and after ChatGPT use. Future research should involve larger and more diverse participant groups, compare experiences across disciplines and proficiency levels, and combine interviews with writing samples, classroom observations, or experimental data. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine how sustained ChatGPT use influences writing competence, critical thinking, academic integrity, and learner independence.

Acknowledgment

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