

# University EFL Students' Perceptions of Generative AI in Academic Writing: A Qualitative Case Study in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into higher education has significantly transformed academic writing practices, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. While GenAI tools offer pedagogical benefits, they also raise concerns regarding academic integrity, authorship, and student autonomy. This study explores university students' perceptions of GenAI in academic writing. A qualitative case study design was employed involving 12 undergraduate EFL students at an Indonesian university. Participants were purposively selected based on their prior use of AI tools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Four major themes emerged: (1) perceived benefits, including improved linguistic accuracy, idea generation, time efficiency, and reduced writing anxiety; (2) challenges and limitations, such as inconsistent AI output, over-reliance, and loss of personal writing voice; (3) ethical concerns, including plagiarism risks, unclear institutional policies, and ambiguity surrounding authorship; and (4) the impact on learning processes, where AI functions both as a cognitive scaffold and a potential barrier to critical thinking and independent learning. The findings indicate that GenAI plays a dual role in EFL academic writing, simultaneously enhancing and complicating students' writing development. While it supports language proficiency and productivity, excessive dependence may hinder deeper cognitive engagement and authenticity. The study underscores the necessity of integrating AI literacy and establishing clear ethical guidelines to promote responsible use. These insights provide implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in fostering balanced and ethical AI integration in academic writing.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, especially in higher education, has significantly transformed educational practices and writing pedagogy, particularly in English as a

Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. AI applications, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot, provide valuable support to students by generating ideas, enhancing grammatical accuracy, and assisting in creating coherent texts. These advancements enable students to navigate writing tasks that might otherwise exacerbate their linguistic challenges and cognitive load (Bensalah, 2024; Zhao et al., 2025). By leveraging AI's capabilities, students can engage more deeply in the drafting and revision processes, thus potentially improving their overall writing fluency and reducing anxiety associated with academic tasks (Arowosegbe et al., 2024; Zaheer et al., 2025).

However, the proliferation of Generative AI, hereafter GenAI in academic settings also invites considerable scrutiny regarding its ethical implications and the risks it poses to academic integrity. Concerns about students' reliance on AI tools raise questions about originality, authorship, and the potential dampening of critical thinking skills. As AI systems become increasingly adept at generating coherent text, the boundaries of academic integrity are challenged. Studies indicate growing apprehension about students misrepresenting AI-generated content as their own, thus undermining trust in educational assessments (Hutson, 2024; Williams, 2024).

Moreover, the necessity for educational institutions to adapt their policies and assessment methods in light of these technologies is pressing. Many universities are now reevaluating their stance on AI tools, with some institutions explicitly prohibiting their use in academic submissions due to fears of exacerbating academic dishonesty (Chan, 2023; Sullivan et al., 2023). Innovative strategies such as implementing AI literacy programs and advanced plagiarism detection systems are being recommended to navigate the challenges posed by generative AI (Wiredu et al., 2024).

The discussions about AI's role in educational contexts emphasize both its transformative potential and the ethical quandaries it engenders. It is evident that while AI tools can enhance learning and writing practices, they can also complicate the understanding of academic integrity, necessitating a careful, nuanced approach to their integration into higher education curricula (McIntire et al., 2024; Singh, 2023). Educational stakeholders must strive to foster environments where the advantages of AI can be harnessed without compromising the foundational values of academic honesty and critical engagement (Farrelly & Baker, 2023).

In contemporary higher education, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in academic writing, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), has created a complex interplay of benefits and challenges. A significant aspect of this discourse is the dichotomy between institutional policies surrounding AI usage and students' actual practices. While some universities advocate for AI tools, seeing them as facilitators of academic development, others express concern about issues related to academic integrity and the ethical dimensions of their use (Abas et al., 2023; McGuire, 2023; Pan, 2024). As a result, policies can be inconsistent, leaving students with ambiguous guidelines regarding how to properly utilize these technologies.

Research indicates that students perceive AI tools, such as ChatGPT, as valuable in easing the academic burdens associated with writing tasks, providing tailored feedback, and enhancing language skills (Li et al., 2024; Soelistiyowati et al., 2024). These tools reportedly improve various facets of writing, including grammatical accuracy and coherence, thus enabling students to better manage their learning demands (Minh, 2024). However, the benefits come with concerns: many students reportedly lack formal instruction on ethical writing practices, which can lead to potential misuse of AI tools (Pan, 2024; Soelistiyowati et al., 2024). This concern highlights a prevalent tension in educational contexts, where the perceived advantages of AI contrast sharply with apprehensions regarding academic integrity (Abas et al., 2023) and the development of autonomous writing skills (Soelistiyowati et al., 2024).

Additionally, existing literature has predominantly focused on quantitative measures of AI effectiveness in writing outcomes or student acceptance of these technologies through established models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Dahri et al., 2024; Maton & Carrington, 2011). While these studies provide valuable insights into the perceived ease of use and utility, they do not fully capture the nuanced emotional and situational contexts that underpin students' decisions to

engage with AI writing tools. In particular, qualitative research exploring students' beliefs and personal experiences with AI integration in their academic writing remains notably underdeveloped (Syabilla et al., 2023). This gap is critical as qualitative inquiries could better illuminate the complexities of students' writing processes, their motivations for AI tool usage, and the ethical dilemmas they encounter.

In EFL settings, where students often face significant challenges in academic writing, AI technologies present a double-edged sword. On one hand, they can support learners by offering immediate feedback and resources tailored to specific writing needs (Nugroho et al., 2023; Yavuz et al., 2025). On the other hand, excessive reliance on these tools risks diminishing students' self-efficacy and critical thinking skills, as they may come to depend more on AI-generated content rather than developing their own writing capabilities (Abas et al., 2023; Soelistiyowati et al., 2024). The challenge for educators and institutions lies in striking a balance: leveraging the advantages of AI tools while cultivating an environment that promotes academic integrity and deepens students' writing skills.

In the Indonesian EFL context, this gap is even more pronounced. Despite the increasing prevalence of AI use among university students, empirical studies examining students' perceptions remain limited. Some early research touches on AI-assisted writing, but few explore the interplay between perceived benefits, ethical concerns, and the evolving role of AI in shaping writing autonomy. Given the cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical characteristics of Indonesian higher education, such as varied digital literacy levels and differing institutional policies, understanding students' perspectives is crucial for informing responsible and effective AI integration.

Therefore, this study seeks to qualitatively explore university students' perceptions of Artificial Intelligence in academic writing tasks. By employing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, this research aims to uncover the meanings students attach to AI use, the opportunities they perceive, the challenges they encounter, and the ethical considerations they negotiate. The qualitative design allows for a deeper exploration of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of students' experiences.

This study is guided by the following research question: What are university students' perceptions of Artificial Intelligence in academic writing tasks? To address this overarching question, the research also seeks to: (1) identify the perceived benefits of AI use in academic writing; (2) explore the challenges and limitations experienced by students; and (3) understand students' ethical concerns and their impact on writing autonomy.

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this research expands current discussions on AI literacy, digital literacy, and academic writing development by providing empirical insights from a qualitative perspective. It enriches conceptual understandings of how AI is perceived not merely as a technological tool but as a shaping force in students' academic identities and writing practices. Practically, the findings have important implications for educators, curriculum designers, and institutional policymakers. By understanding how students perceive and use AI, universities can develop clearer guidelines, integrate AI literacy into writing curricula, and design instructional approaches that balance technological assistance with the cultivation of critical thinking and academic integrity.

In an era where AI has become an inevitable component of academic life, it is essential to understand how students interact with these tools and how such interactions influence their learning. This study contributes to ongoing efforts to interpret the shifting role of AI in higher education, offering insights that may guide the development of ethical, pedagogically meaningful, and contextually appropriate practices for AI-assisted academic writing.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore university students' perceptions of the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic writing tasks. A qualitative approach was considered

appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, beliefs, and concerns regarding AI-assisted writing, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The case study design enabled the researchers to examine this phenomenon within a specific institutional and educational setting.

The research was conducted at a private university in Indonesia in which academic writing is taught as part of undergraduate study, particularly in the English Education program. The participants were undergraduate students who had prior experience using AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, or similar applications, in completing academic writing assignments. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were considered capable of providing rich and relevant information related to the focus of the study.

A total of 12 undergraduate students participated voluntarily in this research. They represented varied levels of writing ability and experience in using AI tools for academic purposes. All participants were between 18 and 35 years old and had used AI in at least one academic writing task prior to the study. Their participation was based on informed consent, and their identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD). The semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' individual experiences, perceptions, and personal reflections on the benefits, challenges, and ethical issues surrounding AI use in academic writing. In addition, the FGD was used to generate interactive discussion and capture shared perspectives among participants. Both data collection methods allowed the researchers to obtain detailed and contextualized accounts of students' views.

The interview and discussion protocols were designed around the main focus of the study, including students' perceived benefits of AI, the limitations they encountered, ethical concerns, and the impact of AI on their writing development. All interviews and the FGD were conducted in a supportive setting to encourage participants to speak openly and honestly. The sessions were audio-recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed for analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the interview and FGD transcripts. Second, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful features relevant to the research questions. Third, the codes were grouped into potential themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance to the dataset. Fifth, each theme was defined and named clearly. Finally, the findings were reported by presenting the themes alongside representative excerpts from participants to illustrate the main patterns identified in the data. The analysis proceeded as follows:



**Figure 1.** Braun & Clarke's Thematic Analysis

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers paid close attention to credibility, consistency, and transparency throughout the research process. The use of two data collection methods, namely interviews and FGD, allowed for data triangulation. In addition, the researchers carefully documented the coding and theme development process to maintain analytical transparency. Representative participant quotations were also included in the findings to support interpretation and strengthen the authenticity of the analysis.

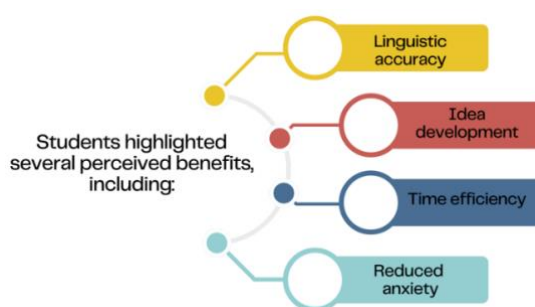
Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the research began. To ensure confidentiality, all personal information was anonymized, and the data were stored securely with restricted access. Participants were also reminded not to disclose sensitive personal or institutional information related to their use of AI tools.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored university students' perceptions of Artificial Intelligence in academic writing tasks. Thematic analysis generated four major themes, each representing a central dimension of students' experiences with AI-assisted writing. These themes include: Perceived Benefits of AI in Academic Writing; Challenges and Limitations in AI Use; Ethical Concerns and Academic Integrity Issues; and The Impact of AI on Writing Learning Processes. Each theme is described below, supported by representative excerpts from participants.

#### 3.1 Theme 1: Perceived Benefits of AI in Academic Writing

Across participants, AI was widely perceived as a valuable support tool that enhanced the overall writing process. Students highlighted several perceived benefits, including linguistic accuracy, idea development, time efficiency, and reduced anxiety. Theme 1 can be seen on the figure below:



**Figure 2.** Theme 1 of the research finding

Many students acknowledged that AI improved their grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. This was particularly helpful for participants who struggled with English proficiency.

*"AI make me easier to analyze if there is an error. For example I can use grammarly to check our grammar in academic text."*(Participant 3)

Students acknowledge that AI tools substantially improve their linguistic accuracy. Many report that these tools assist them in correcting grammar, expanding vocabulary, and refining sentence structures, which is especially pivotal for those grappling with English proficiency. For example, participants explicitly noted how tools like Grammarly allow them to identify grammatical errors in

their academic texts. Such observations align with findings that AI, including tools like ChatGPT, serves as an effective educational companion, facilitating the learning process by providing instant feedback on written content

Participants reported that AI played a significant role in brainstorming ideas, structuring arguments, and clarifying concepts.

*“I think technology help a lot. We can use google scholar for research journal or article, grammarly to check grammar and chat GPT to get ideas.”* (Participant 7)

In addition to enhancing linguistic aspects, students frequently expressed that AI aids in idea generation and the structuring of arguments. Participants highlighted their use of AI for brainstorming ideas, organizing their essays, and clarifying complex concepts. For instance, one student remarked on the utility of platforms like Google Scholar in researching journal articles while simultaneously utilizing AI to foster idea generation. Research illustrates that such AI-assisted methods can invigorate the creative process of academic writing, helping students develop more coherent and structured arguments

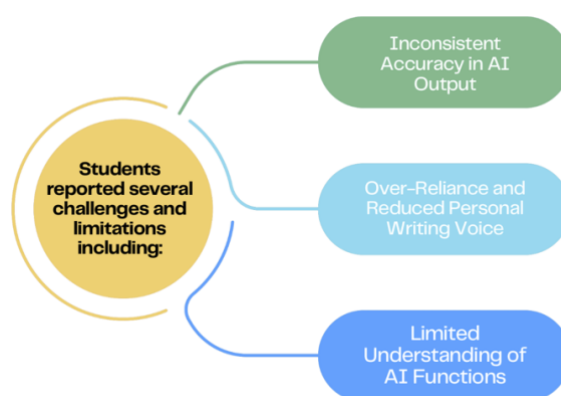
AI also perceived as a powerful time-saving tool, allowing students to complete writing tasks more efficiently. As one participant illustrated, reliance on AI technology enabled them to write faster and improved their confidence, stating:

*“Using AI makes writing faster. I feel less afraid because I know AI can help me revise. And i can complete the task on time”* (Participant 2)

This sentiment reflects a broader trend wherein students utilize AI not only to facilitate immediate revisions but also to manage deadlines and academic pressures. These findings indicate that AI tools can streamline various stages of the academic writing process. For instance, the availability of real-time assistance from AI significantly reduces the anxiety students often experience when tackling complex writing tasks.

### 3.2 Theme 2: Challenges and Limitations in AI Use

Although AI offered substantial benefits, participants also reported several challenges and limitations that affected their writing experience. One of the predominant challenges reported was the inconsistent accuracy of AI-generated information. Generally, theme 2 can be seen in the figure below:



**Figure 3.** Theme 2 of the research findings

Students were often concerned about the reliability of AI outputs, noting instances of inaccuracy, generality, and incoherence. For example, one participant stated:

*“Sometimes the article from AI is wrong or fictiv and bad to complete my writing task.sometimes the argument also out of my expectation. I still need to check everything.” (Participant 5)*

This observation is echoed the phenomenon where AI systems generate plausible-sounding but factually incorrect or wholly fabricated content. The necessity for students to manually verify the information diminishes the convenience that AI initially promised, leading to added stress and workload. Consequently, the integration of AI may create more burdens if students feel compelled to check every output for credibility.

Another notable issue arises from the over-reliance on AI assistance, which some participants indicated could dilute their personal writing style and voice. One student articulated this concern by saying:

*“The sentences feel too repetitive and feels ambiguous. If I follow AI too much, my writing becomes unnatural.” (Participant 8)*

Students reported a tension between using AI for improvement and preserving their authenticity. This aligns with findings regarding the tension between utilizing AI for enhancement and the desire to maintain authenticity in writing. Such over-reliance risks leading students to produce work that lacks their individual insights and critical thinking, highlighting the importance of using AI tools as supplementary aids rather than primary generators of content

Finally, a critical challenge stems from students’ limited understanding of how to effectively use AI tools. Many reported difficulties arising from inadequate digital literacy or uncertainty about the capabilities of the tools at their disposal. For example, one participant mentioned:

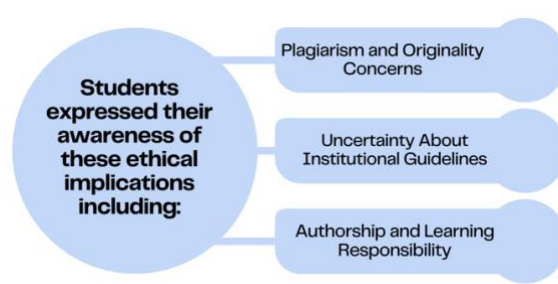
*“I only know how to use AI develop the idea or correct grammar. I feel hard to find AI that can help me find credible references to support my essay. ” (Participant 6)*

This finding is significant, as limited familiarity with AI functions can lead students to misuse or overuse these tools, which could ultimately impede their learning and writing development. Educators must recognize this gap and provide necessary training to ensure students can confidently and effectively leverage AI technologies.

While AI offers substantial benefits for academic writing, significant challenges remain that can hinder the overall writing experience. These include concerns over the accuracy and reliability of AI outputs, risks associated with over-dependence on AI affecting personal writing style, and varying levels of comprehension regarding AI functionalities. Addressing these challenges through enhanced educational support and effective guidelines is essential for maximizing the potential of AI tools while mitigating their limitations.

### **3.3 Theme 3: Ethical Concerns and Academic Integrity Issues**

The emergence of AI tools in academic writing has highlighted significant ethical concerns surrounding their use, particularly regarding academic integrity. Participants in qualitative studies have expressed their awareness of these ethical implications, revealing complex issues tied to plagiarism, lack of clear institutional guidelines, and questions about authorship and learning responsibility. Participants expressed strong awareness of the ethical implications of AI use in academic writing. Despite acknowledging the benefits, many students were concerned about potential violations of academic integrity. As can be seen in the figure below:



**Figure 4.** Theme 3 of the research finding

A primary ethical concern expressed by students pertains to the potential for AI-generated text to unintentionally resemble existing sources or produce content that could be flagged for plagiarism. One participant articulated this concern by stating:

*"I'm afraid the AI text will be detected by my lecture. I always read paraphrase it again."* (Participant 10)

Such worries are valid, given the literature discussing how AI writing tools can generate text that, while appearing original, may closely mirror existing works, leading to potential violations of academic integrity standards. Moreover, studies indicate that the sophistication of AI-generated content can sometimes obscure its actual originality, creating dilemmas for students regarding the ethical use of these tools

Participants also revealed significant confusion regarding institutional policies on AI use in writing assignments. The inconsistency of such guidelines creates an environment rife with anxiety, as students are uncertain about which practices are acceptable. One participant remarked:

*"Some lecturers allow AI, others say it's cheating. We don't know which one to follow."* (Participant 1)

This ambiguity influences how students perceive the use of AI and impacts their willingness to engage with these tools, often resulting in either discreet usage or complete avoidance. To address these challenges, it is critical for educational institutions to establish clear and comprehensive policies that delineate the acceptable boundaries of AI use, promoting responsible engagement with these tools while safeguarding academic integrity.

The ethical tension surrounding authorship is palpable through students' reflections on the authenticity of their work when supported heavily by AI. As one participant questioned:

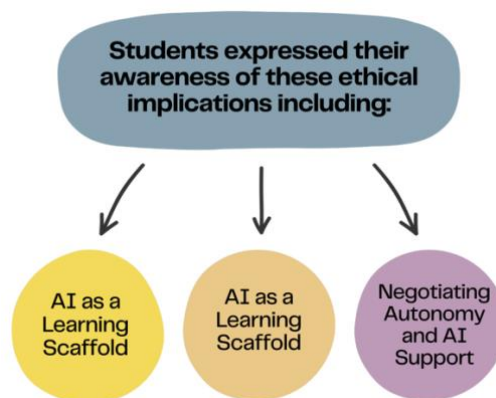
*"If AI helps too much, is it still my writing? I feel like I'm not learning enough. Because i feel like do nothing much"* (Participant 9)

This concern taps into a broader apprehension about the impact of AI on personal learning and autonomy, particularly as students grapple with the paradox of utilizing AI to enhance their writing skills while fearing that it undermines their own academic growth. The potential dilution of authorship raises questions about individual accountability in learning and complicates the definitions of authorship and ownership within academic contexts.

While the integration of AI in academic writing holds potential for enhancing efficiency and output quality, it simultaneously raises significant ethical concerns that challenge the principles of academic integrity. These include worries about plagiarism, the ambiguity of institutional guidelines, and questions about authorship and the value of authentic learning. As the landscape of academic writing continues to evolve with AI, addressing these ethical issues through clear policies and educational practices will be pivotal in navigating the complexities of AI integration responsibly.

### 3.4 Theme 4: The Impact of AI on Writing Learning Processes

The fourth theme encompasses students' perceptions of how artificial intelligence influences their writing learning processes, motivation, and overall writing development. This section discusses the perceived benefits of AI as a cognitive support tool, potential hindrances to critical thinking, and the ongoing negotiation between AI assistance and personal learning responsibility. The illustration of theme 4 can be seen in the figure below:



**Figure 5.** Theme 4 of the research findings

Many participants viewed AI as a valuable cognitive support system that aids in understanding, revising, and self-correcting their writing. A participant noted:

*"I learn academic vocabulary and phrases from AI. It's like a tutor that gives examples anytime."* (Participant 4)

Such sentiments are supported by research indicating that AI can enhance vocabulary acquisition and assist learners in internalizing academic writing structures, particularly for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The modeling of academic language provided by AI tools can scaffold student learning, helping them to reinforce language patterns and effectively engage with academic discourse. This scaffolding is essential in creating a conducive environment for language learning, where students can develop their writing skills iteratively.

Despite the benefits of AI, several participants expressed concern that its convenience might lead to superficial engagement with writing tasks. One student reflected:

*"If I rely on AI too much, I don't think deeply about the topic. And i didn't really understand about the text itself."* (Participant 12)

This indicates a potential drawback where the reliance on AI could diminish cognitive engagement and motivation to develop writing skills independently. Research corroborates this view, suggesting that while AI can provide support, it may also foster dependency on these tools, thereby undermining critical thinking and analytical abilities necessary for comprehensive understanding and synthesis of information. This reflects an essential tension where, despite the facilitation provided by AI, students must remain vigilant to ensure deep learning rather than superficial completion of tasks.

Participants articulated a continuous negotiation between leveraging AI for writing improvement and maintaining personal accountability for their learning. As one participant expressed:

*"AI helps me, but I still need to understand the content. I read, i try to found the line of the idea, and try to rewrite it."* (Participant 11)

This reflects the evolving nature of writing practices in an era dominated by AI, where students must redefine effective learning strategies to balance the use of technological assistance with individual agency in their educational journeys. Research shows that this negotiation requires students to actively engage with content rather than passively depend on AI, thereby fostering a more profound understanding and ownership of their work.

While AI presents significant advantages as a scaffold for learning and writing development, it simultaneously poses challenges that can hinder critical thinking and autonomously driven writing practice. The awareness and negotiation demonstrated by students in utilizing AI highlight the necessity for a balanced approach that promotes both the advantages of AI as an academic tool and the maintenance of critical engagement with content. As educators continue to integrate AI in learning contexts, it is crucial to provide frameworks that support students in navigating these complexities effectively.

### *Discussion*

The findings of this study reveal that university students perceive generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) as both a valuable academic support tool and a source of pedagogical and ethical tension in academic writing. This duality confirms that AI integration in higher education, particularly in EFL contexts, cannot be understood in purely optimistic or pessimistic terms. On the one hand, participants viewed AI tools as beneficial for improving grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, idea generation, and writing efficiency. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that AI-powered tools can function as immediate linguistic support systems that help students overcome language barriers and reduce the cognitive burden associated with academic writing (Bensalah, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2023). For EFL learners, this benefit is especially important because writing in English often involves difficulties related not only to content development but also to linguistic accuracy and confidence. In this sense, AI appears to act as a form of scaffold that supports students in drafting, revising, and refining their written work, which may enhance their confidence and lower writing anxiety. This aligns with research suggesting that AI can provide personalized assistance and facilitate more efficient engagement with writing tasks (Arowosegbe et al., 2024; Soelistiyowati et al., 2024).

At the same time, the findings also demonstrate that students are aware of the limitations of AI-generated output. Participants reported that AI sometimes produces inaccurate, overly general, repetitive, or even fabricated content, requiring them to verify and revise the information before using it. This supports concerns raised in previous scholarship that generative AI can produce plausible yet misleading responses, which may create new challenges rather than simply reducing students' workload (Farrelly & Baker, 2023; Hutson, 2024; Williams, 2024). In the context of academic writing, where credibility, precision, and evidence-based reasoning are essential, such unreliability is a serious concern. The findings therefore suggest that AI should not be positioned as an autonomous writing agent, but rather as a supplementary tool whose output requires critical evaluation. This interpretation also resonates with research emphasizing that students need adequate AI literacy to use these tools effectively and responsibly (Chan, 2023; Wiredu et al., 2024).

A major contribution of this study lies in its illumination of students' ethical concerns regarding plagiarism, authorship, and academic integrity. Participants expressed uncertainty about whether extensive AI assistance still allows a piece of writing to be considered genuinely their own. They also highlighted confusion caused by inconsistent lecturer expectations and unclear institutional policies. These findings support the growing body of literature arguing that the rise of generative AI has complicated conventional understandings of originality, ownership, and ethical academic practice (Chan, 2023; McIntire et al., 2024; Singh, 2023). Importantly, the participants' responses show that students are not necessarily uncritical users of AI; rather, many of them are actively negotiating the boundaries between acceptable assistance and academic dishonesty. This indicates that ethical problems related to AI use are not merely individual failings, but also institutional issues shaped by

the absence of clear guidelines and pedagogical support. As argued by Pan (2024) and Williams (2024), universities need to respond proactively by developing transparent policies and embedding ethical AI use into academic writing instruction.

Another important finding concerns the impact of AI on students' learning processes. While many participants appreciated AI as a "tutor-like" tool that models academic vocabulary and writing patterns, others worried that frequent dependence on AI might weaken critical thinking, reduce deep engagement with content, and diminish their personal writing voice. This tension reflects a broader issue in AI-assisted education: technologies that enhance productivity may simultaneously risk undermining autonomy and intellectual development if used unreflectively (Abas et al., 2023; Nguyen Minh, 2024; Zhao et al., 2025). The findings therefore suggest that the educational value of AI depends less on the tool itself than on how students are taught to interact with it. When used reflectively, AI can support learning by offering feedback, examples, and organizational assistance; however, when used as a shortcut, it may discourage independent thinking and authentic meaning-making. For this reason, the study reinforces the need for pedagogical frameworks that balance technological affordances with the cultivation of critical literacy, self-regulation, and academic responsibility. Overall, this study confirms that GenAI occupies a complex role in EFL academic writing: it empowers students by increasing linguistic support and efficiency, yet it also challenges institutions and learners to redefine what it means to write, learn, and author responsibly in the age of AI.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that university students perceive generative artificial intelligence as both a supportive and problematic tool in academic writing, particularly in the EFL context. The main findings show that AI helps students improve linguistic accuracy, generate ideas, save time, and reduce writing anxiety, while also creating concerns related to inaccurate output, overdependence, loss of personal voice, unclear authorship, and academic integrity. These findings indicate that AI plays a dual role in students' writing development, functioning as a useful scaffold for learning while also posing risks to critical thinking and writing autonomy when used excessively or uncritically. However, this study has several limitations. It involved only a small number of participants from a single institutional context, which limits the transferability of the findings to other universities or disciplinary settings. In addition, the study focused solely on students' perceptions and did not include lecturers' perspectives, classroom observations, or analysis of students' written products, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of AI use in academic writing. Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, include multiple universities or educational contexts, and examine the perspectives of both students and lecturers. Further studies may also explore how AI affects actual writing performance, critical thinking development, and academic integrity practices over time, so that more balanced and context-sensitive approaches to AI integration in higher education can be developed. a nuanced understanding of AI-assisted writing within the EFL higher education context.

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