STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF CHATGPT IN IMPROVING ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS

Vanes Kuera*, Maya Pinkan Warouw, F. Ari Anggraini Sebayang
Sam Ratulangi University, Indonesia
vanneskuera092@student.unsrat.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The use of artificial intelligence in education has become increasingly important, particularly in supporting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing. Although many previous studies have examined the effectiveness of ChatGPT on writing performance, most have used quantitative approaches, and limited qualitative research has explored students' independent use of ChatGPT in higher education EFL contexts. This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of using ChatGPT to improve English writing skills, focusing on its benefits, challenges, and user strategies. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six undergraduate students from the English Department of Sam Ratulangi University who had experience using ChatGPT in academic writing. The data were analyzed thematically following Creswell's qualitative data analysis procedures. The findings show that students perceive ChatGPT as useful for improving grammar and tense accuracy, constructing academic sentences, generating ideas, and supporting self-directed learning. However, students also reported challenges, including rigid and generic output, increased revision demands, and the risk of psychological dependence that may reduce independent writing ability. To overcome these challenges, students used strategies such as paraphrasing AI-generated text, refining prompts, selecting essential ideas, and maintaining control over drafting and revision. In conclusion, ChatGPT can effectively support EFL writing development when used critically and strategically. This study recommends that educators guide students in using ChatGPT as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for independent writing to preserve learner autonomy and writing competence.

Keywords: *Academic writing, Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, EFL writing, students' perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency plays a crucial role in academic and professional success in today's globalized world. As an international language widely used across fields such as education, science, and technology, English requires learners to master the four fundamental language skills from an early stage in order to support future competence (Warouw, 2023). Since a large proportion of global knowledge is published in English, students are expected to develop sufficient English proficiency, particularly in writing, to engage effectively with academic and professional information. Among the four language skills, writing is considered one of the most complex yet essential

competencies. Writing not only functions as a means of communication but also serves as a medium for expressing critical and analytical thinking, fostering creativity, and supporting academic and professional development (Suastra & Menggo et al., 2020). In educational contexts, strong writing skills significantly influence students' academic achievement and readiness to compete in the global arena. Similar to writing, literacy studies also emphasize that reading comprehension is a core academic skill that supports students' ability to process knowledge and develop critical thinking (Sugiarto, 2024; Ahmad, 2025; Hidayati, 2025).

Despite its importance, mastering English writing skills remains a major challenge for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Many EFL learners encounter difficulties related to grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, coherence, and the organization of ideas. In addition, some students still rely heavily on rote memorization rather than developing critical and creative thinking skills in the learning process (Feng et al., 2023). Research on reading comprehension shows similar problems, where EFL learners struggle to understand academic texts and apply effective strategies (Rinantanti, 2024). These challenges indicate the need for learning tools and instructional strategies that can better support students' writing and literacy development.

Recent developments in information technology have introduced tools designed to support language learning, including artificial intelligence (AI). One notable AI-based tool is ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), developed by OpenAI, which provides real-time feedback, assists in organizing ideas, and supports learners throughout the writing process, from brainstorming to revision. In EFL contexts, ChatGPT offers opportunities to address common writing difficulties by providing immediate assistance during academic writing tasks.

As a learning tool, ChatGPT helps students by correcting grammatical errors, suggesting vocabulary, and providing models of academic sentences and text organization. Through flexible interaction, ChatGPT supports self-directed learning and encourages students to engage more actively in writing (Maharani et al., 2024). Previous studies report that AI technologies, including ChatGPT, can increase engagement in grammar and writing learning (Özçelik, 2024) and support idea generation and revision

(Alamri et al., 2025).

However, the effectiveness of ChatGPT is strongly influenced by students' perceptions. Students' engagement is shaped by how useful they believe the tool is and how they experience its role in learning (Polakova, 2024). Some students see ChatGPT as helpful for improving writing, while others see it as a shortcut that may reduce learning effort and weaken independent writing ability (Dewi, 2024). This shows that the value of ChatGPT cannot be understood only through test results.

Although many studies have examined ChatGPT and writing improvement, several gaps remain. Most previous studies focus on quantitative outcomes, with limited attention to students' real experiences of using ChatGPT independently, especially in higher education EFL contexts. Few studies also explore how students manage issues such as autonomy, dependence, strategy use, and critical control of AI output.

This study offers a novel contribution by providing qualitative insights into how university EFL students independently use ChatGPT in academic writing, with specific attention to autonomy, dependence, and strategy use. Unlike previous perception studies that only describe attitudes, this study examines how students negotiate the benefits and risks of AI support in their writing process, showing how technology shapes learning behavior rather than simply improving outcomes.

Understanding students' perceptions is important for effective integration of ChatGPT in EFL education. Examining how students interact with AI tools reveals their learning strategies and difficulties (Tarchi et al., 2024). This study focuses on students from the English Department at Sam Ratulangi University, who have different levels of writing ability. As future professionals in academic and educational fields, they are required to develop strong writing skills.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions of using ChatGPT to enhance English writing skills, focusing on its benefits, challenges, and the strategies students use to maintain writing autonomy. The findings are expected to be useful for EFL educators, curriculum designers, and applied linguistics researchers who seek to integrate AI tools responsibly in literacy and writing instruction.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recent developments in educational technology have significantly influenced language learning, particularly in the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing. Writing is a complex skill involving planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Harmer, 2004). For EFL learners, difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and idea organization often hinder effective written communication (Feng et al., 2023). These challenges have encouraged educators and learners to adopt technological tools to support writing development. However, writing is also closely connected to broader literacy skills, especially reading comprehension. Studies in EFL contexts show that students' ability to understand academic texts influences how they organize ideas and develop arguments in writing (Ahmad, 2025; Hidayati, 2025). In digital environments, learners rely on online reading strategies before transforming information into written form (Rinantanti, 2024). This indicates that challenges in writing cannot be fully separated from challenges in reading, even though the present study focuses mainly on writing.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has recently emerged as one of the most influential technologies in education. Among AI-based tools, ChatGPT has gained widespread attention due to its ability to generate text, provide feedback, and assist learners throughout the writing process. Fitria (2023) argues that ChatGPT functions as a fast and practical source of written information, making it useful for academic writing tasks. Similarly, Song and Song (2023) found that students who used ChatGPT showed improvement in writing skills and learning motivation compared to those using traditional instruction. However, their study was conducted in a structured classroom setting where teachers guided the use of ChatGPT, which may differ from situations where students use the tool independently.

Several studies specifically highlight the positive impact of ChatGPT on writing quality. Anggeraja et al. (2024) reported that students perceived ChatGPT as helpful in improving vocabulary, grammar, and sentence construction. Roisah et al. (2024) quantitatively demonstrated that students using ChatGPT achieved higher writing scores than those taught using conventional methods. Many of these studies were conducted in secondary school contexts, where learners usually depend more on teacher guidance. In

contrast, university students are expected to be more autonomous, suggesting that findings from secondary-level studies cannot be fully generalized to higher education contexts. Moreover, these studies mainly focus on learning outcomes and do not explain how students experience and manage ChatGPT in real writing situations.

Beyond linguistic accuracy, some researchers emphasize ChatGPT's role in idea generation and writing process support. Soelistiyowati et al. (2024) found that ChatGPT helped college students generate ideas and improve sentence structure, although concerns about originality and ethics were also noted. Dewi (2024) revealed that students preferred ChatGPT because it provided clear and immediate feedback, helping them overcome writing anxiety and build confidence. These findings relate to themes of idea generation and academic sentence construction that are later discussed in this study. Nevertheless, they provide limited insight into how students regulate their dependence on AI assistance and how they maintain authorship.

Despite these benefits, other studies raise concerns about the negative effects of technological dependence. Alhusban (2016), although not focused on AI, found that excessive use of technological tools could reduce formal writing quality. In the context of AI, Yazid and Dzulfikri (2024) reported that heavy reliance on ChatGPT led to dependency, reduced comprehension, and uniform writing style. These concerns relate directly to the themes of dependence and writing autonomy explored in this study. However, most of these studies describe risks in general terms and do not examine how learners themselves attempt to control or limit their reliance on technology.

From a pedagogical perspective, several studies discuss how ChatGPT should be integrated into instruction. Daza et al. (2024) demonstrated that AI-based didactic strategies increased student engagement and helped overcome writing difficulties through interactive learning. Polakova and Ivenz (2024) showed that ChatGPT feedback improved students' writing quality, but only when students actively revised and reflected on the feedback. These findings emphasize that strategies and learner control are essential, which directly connects to the theme of student strategies discussed in the findings of this study. However, these studies mainly focus on teacher-guided use in classrooms, not on independent use outside formal instruction.

Although previous studies confirm that ChatGPT can improve grammar, vocabulary, idea clarity, motivation, and writing confidence (Anggeraja et al., 2024; Song & Song, 2023; Soelistiyowati et al., 2024), several gaps remain. First, most studies use quantitative or experimental methods that focus on test scores rather than students' lived experiences. Second, many studies are conducted in secondary school or teacher-controlled contexts, leaving limited evidence from independent use in higher education EFL settings. Third, few studies explore how students balance the benefits of ChatGPT with risks such as dependence, increased revision demands, and loss of autonomy.

Therefore, there is a need for qualitative research that explores students' real experiences in using ChatGPT independently for academic writing in higher education EFL contexts. This study addresses this gap by focusing on students' perceptions, strategies, and reflections, particularly regarding grammar support, idea generation, revision workload, dependence, and writing autonomy. By explicitly linking reviewed studies to these themes, this research contributes a deeper understanding of how ChatGPT functions not only as a writing assistant, but also as a factor shaping learners' writing behavior and independence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design to explore students' perceptions of using ChatGPT to improve English writing skills. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, meanings, and interactions with technology in real academic contexts (Creswell, 2009). Rather than measuring learning outcomes numerically, this design focuses on understanding how students experience, interpret, and manage the use of ChatGPT in their writing process.

Participants and Data Sources

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was chosen to ensure that participants met specific criteria relevant to the research focus and were able to provide rich and meaningful information (Nunan, 1992).

The participants consisted of six undergraduate students from the English Department of Sam Ratulangi University, Manado, batch 2022. To be included in the study, participants were required to:

(1) be active students,

(2) have completed the Research Method course, and

(3) have experience using ChatGPT in academic or English writing activities.

The six participants represented three fields of interest: Applied Linguistics, Linguistics, and Literature. Although the number of participants was relatively small, the sample size was considered sufficient because data saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes emerged in the later interviews.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. This method was chosen because it allows flexibility in exploring participants' responses while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Creswell, 2009). The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions covering the following areas:

(1) experiences using ChatGPT in writing,

(2) perceived benefits,

(3) perceived challenges,

(4) strategies used to manage ChatGPT output, and

(5) views on writing independence.

Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their consent. Interviews were conducted individually at the Faculty of Humanities, Sam Ratulangi University. Each interview lasted approximately 25–40 minutes and was audio-recorded to ensure accurate data capture.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Creswell's (2009) qualitative data analysis procedures. First, all recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a general understanding of the data. Next, coding was conducted by identifying meaningful segments of text and labeling them with descriptive codes.

These codes were then grouped into categories based on similarities and patterns. The categories were further synthesized into broader themes related to the research questions, such as perceived benefits, challenges, and user strategies. Finally, the themes were interpreted and connected to relevant theories and previous studies to explain their meanings in the context of EFL writing and AI-assisted learning.

To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher carefully rechecked transcripts, coding, and theme formation. Participants' direct quotations were used in the findings section to represent their authentic voices and strengthen the credibility of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the thematic analysis and discusses their meanings in relation to relevant theories and previous studies. The findings answer the research questions by describing students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in improving English writing skills, including its benefits, challenges, and the strategies students use to manage AI assistance.

Integrative Overview of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that students experience ChatGPT as both supportive and challenging. ChatGPT helps with language accuracy, academic expression, and idea generation, but it also creates new demands for revision and raises concerns about dependence. These themes are interconnected: support from ChatGPT often increases the need for critical editing, which then encourages students to develop strategies to maintain control over their writing. This shows that ChatGPT does not automatically improve writing; its impact depends on how students use and manage it.

Linguistic Support and Writing Accuracy

Students reported that ChatGPT helped them check grammar, tense, and sentence structure. They commonly compared their original sentences with the revised versions to understand their mistakes. This finding supports Harmer's (2004) view that feedback and revision are essential parts of writing development. From a sociocultural perspective, ChatGPT can be seen as temporary support that helps learners in areas they still find difficult (Vygotsky, 1978). Similar results were found by Anggeraja et al. (2024) and

Roisah et al. (2024), who reported improvements in grammatical accuracy when students used ChatGPT. However, in this study, improvement is based on students' perceptions rather than measured writing scores.

Academic Expression and Idea Generation

Students also perceived ChatGPT as useful for constructing academic sentences and generating ideas, especially when they felt stuck. This supports Harmer's (2004) view of writing as a process involving planning and revising. In line with Dewi (2024), ChatGPT helped reduce hesitation at the beginning of writing tasks. However, many students felt that ChatGPT's language was often too general or rigid, so they needed to revise it carefully. This suggests that ChatGPT supports idea generation but does not replace students' responsibility to shape their own writing.

Increased Complexity of the Writing Process

Although ChatGPT was expected to make writing easier, many students felt that it sometimes made the process longer because the output required heavy editing. This shows that technology does not always reduce workload. According to Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model, a tool may be seen as less useful if it increases effort. This finding differs from studies such as Song and Song (2023), which highlight efficiency gains, suggesting that efficiency depends on how critically students use AI output.

Dependence and Writing Autonomy

Some students worried about becoming too dependent on ChatGPT, especially under time pressure. This supports Yazid and Dzulfikri's (2024) finding that heavy reliance on ChatGPT can lead to dependency and uniform writing styles. From Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, support should be temporary; if it becomes constant, it may reduce independent skill development. However, this study does not claim that all students become dependent; it only shows that the risk is perceived by some students.

Strategies to Maintain Control

To avoid overdependence, students used strategies such as paraphrasing, refining prompts, selecting only important points, and drafting ideas before consulting ChatGPT. These strategies show that students actively manage AI support rather than using it

passively. This aligns with Harmer's (2004) emphasis on learner involvement in drafting and revising and with constructivist ideas that learning happens through active engagement (Vygotsky, 1978).

Counter-Interpretation: Productivity Tool or Learning Tool

ChatGPT can be viewed as a productivity tool that speeds up writing. However, the findings suggest a more cautious interpretation. While ChatGPT can help students start writing more quickly, it often requires careful editing to fit academic style and personal voice. Therefore, increased speed is not guaranteed. This challenges the idea that ChatGPT always makes writing easier and suggests that its value depends on how critically students use it.

Synthesis of Findings

In summary, ChatGPT supports students in grammar, academic expression, and idea generation, but it also introduces challenges related to revision workload and dependence. Students respond to these challenges by developing strategies to maintain control over their writing. These findings suggest that ChatGPT is most helpful when used as a supportive tool rather than as a replacement for students' own writing efforts. The role of ChatGPT in writing is therefore shaped more by students' strategies and awareness than by the technology itself.

CONCLUSION

This study explored university students' perceptions of using ChatGPT to support English writing in an EFL context through a qualitative descriptive approach. By examining students' experiences, this study aimed to understand the perceived benefits, challenges, and strategies related to the use of ChatGPT in academic writing.

The findings indicate that students generally perceive ChatGPT as helpful for improving grammar and tense accuracy, constructing academic sentences, and generating ideas. At the same time, students also experience challenges, including rigid or generic AI output, increased revision demands, and concerns about dependence that may affect writing autonomy. To manage these challenges, students use strategies such as paraphrasing, refining prompts, selecting essential ideas, and limiting ChatGPT's role

during drafting. These findings suggest that ChatGPT is most useful when used critically and strategically as a supportive tool rather than as a replacement for independent writing.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a small number of participants from a single university, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative design relies on self-reported perceptions rather than direct measurement of writing improvement. Third, the study focused only on students' perspectives and did not include teachers' views or classroom observations.

Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, use mixed-method or longitudinal designs, and examine the long-term impact of AI-assisted writing on learner autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking. Further studies may also explore teachers' perspectives and instructional strategies for integrating AI tools such as ChatGPT in EFL writing instruction.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, N. Y. (2025). Effective strategies for teaching reading in EFL contexts: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of English Perspectives and Innovations, 2*(1), 45–60.

Alamri, W., Qasem, F., Alfotais, A., & Al Taisan, H. (2025). Leveraging ChatGPT AI model in academic writing and avenues for further development: SWOT framework. *Forum for Linguistic Studies, 7*(2), 61–71.

Alhusban, A. M. (2016). The impact of modern technological tools on students' writing skills in English as a second language. *US–China Education Review A, 6*(7), 438–443.

Anggeraja, M. F. A., Samtidar, & Aeni, N. (2024). The use of ChatGPT in enhancing students' writing ability. *Journal of Excellence in English Language Education, 3*(3), 396–399.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly, 13*(3), 319–340.

Daza, E. P. S., Macías Angulo, F. del R., & Ramírez Lozada, H. (2024). ChatGPT-based didactic strategies to improve students' English language reading and writing skills. *Revista Científica y Académica, 4*(1), 390–396.

Dewi, F. (2024). The inception of ideas: How students use ChatGPT for academic writing. *Jurnal Sosioteknologi, 23*(2), 291–295.

Feng, L., He, L., & Yiganmu, A. (2023). Determinants of students' academic success in English as a medium of instruction classes: A systematic review. *Heliyon, 9*, e20421.

Fitria, T. N. (2023). Students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in writing. *Journal of English Teaching and Learning, 8*(1), 45–56.

Harmer, J. (2004). *How to teach writing*. Pearson Education.

Hidayati, C. L. (2025). Examining English reading comprehension skills among EFL learners. *Al-Ishlah: Journal of Education Studies, 17*(1), 101–115.

Maharani, R., Arzuna, P., Nasution, N. A. D., Setyorini, S., & Zulpianto, R. (2024). Pelatihan penggunaan ChatGPT sebagai asisten pembelajaran bagi mahasiswa. *Edu Society: Jurnal Pendidikan, Ilmu Sosial, dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, 5*(1), 316–327.

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.

Özçelik, N. P. (2024). Cultivating writing skills: The role of ChatGPT as a learning assistant—A case study. *Smart Learning Environments, 11*, 10.

Polakova, P., & Ivenz, P. (2024). The impact of ChatGPT feedback on the development of EFL students' writing skills. *Cogent Education, 11*(1), 2410101.

Rinantanti, Y. (2024). Exploring online reading strategies and comprehension in EFL learners. *Al-Ishlah: Journal of Education Studies, 16*(4), 234–249.

Roisah, S., Widyaningsih, T. L., & Purwananti, Y. S. (2024). The impact of ChatGPT use on EFL students' writing ability. *Concept: Journal of Social Humanities and Education, 3*(3), 191–199.

Soelistiyowati, E., Permatasari, A. N., Nugroho, V. A., & Kusmulyadi, A. S. F. (2024). Enhancing college learners' writing skills through the integration of ChatGPT: Strategies, benefits, and concerns. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra, 8*(1), 1–23.

Song, C., & Song, Y. (2023). Enhancing academic writing skills and motivation: Assessing the efficacy of ChatGPT in AI-assisted language learning for EFL students. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1260843.

Suastra, I. M., & Menggo, S. (2020). Empowering students' writing skill through performance assessment. *International Journal of Language Education, 4*(3), 432–441.

Sugiarto, B. R. (2024). Unlocking Multilingual Potential: Systemic Functional Linguistics Strategies for effective descriptive writing instruction. Sawerigading, 30(2), 328–336.

Tarchi, C., Zappoli, A., Casado Ledesma, L., & Wennås Brante, E. (2024). The use of ChatGPT in source-based writing tasks. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Warouw, M. P. (2023). English teaching and learning in Indonesian schools. Manado: Local Publisher.

Yazid, S. R., & Dzulfikri, D. (2024). ChatGPT as a smart writing assistant: Analysis of its drawbacks. *Abjadia: International Journal of Education, 9*(1), 41–56.