

## **Students' Perceptions of Using ChatGPT in Completing Academic Writing Tasks**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research was to explore students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in completing academic writing tasks. This research was descriptive research with qualitative approach. Data collection in this study were collected through semi-structured interview. Respondents for this research were five fourth-semester English education students at Abulyatama University who actively used ChatGPT in their writing process. The aspects examined in this research included the frequency of use, advantages and disadvantages of ChatGPT, writing improvements, and the need for peer and lecturer feedback. The results showed that students perceived ChatGPT as a beneficial tool in improving grammar, vocabulary, structure, and confidence in completing academic writing tasks. However, they also noted disadvantages such as overdependence, reduced critical thinking, and occasional inaccuracy. Students expressed that while ChatGPT supported their learning, human feedback remained essential. The findings indicate that ChatGPT can be effectively used as a supplementary tool for completing academic writing tasks when guided by responsible use and critical evaluation.

**Keywords:** Academic Writing, AI in Education, Students' Perceptions, Using ChatGPT

### **A. Introduction**

Writing is universally acknowledged as one of the most important yet challenging skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Unlike listening, speaking, and reading, which can be more communicative and receptive in nature, writing demands the integration of multiple language components grammar, vocabulary, organization, and coherence—into a productive skill. Prior studies have consistently emphasized that students find writing particularly difficult because it requires critical thinking, creativity, accuracy, and attention to detail (Gautam, 2019; Harmawan et al., 2023; Hidayatun, 2021). In the Indonesian context, many university students continue to struggle with academic writing tasks such as essays, reports, and research papers, due to limited mastery of grammar and vocabulary, lack of confidence, and insufficient exposure to authentic academic texts. These challenges were also reflected in the initial

observations of English students at Universitas Abulyatama, where students reported difficulties in generating ideas, structuring paragraphs, and applying academic conventions correctly. This suggests that even when students have basic linguistic competence, transforming knowledge into formal written discourse remains an area of struggle.

Technological advancement has reshaped how students approach learning, including in writing instruction. The integration of digital tools has been promoted to facilitate learning autonomy and provide scaffolding support. With the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), new opportunities for enhancing the teaching and learning of writing have become available. One of the most prominent AI applications is ChatGPT, a generative language model developed by OpenAI, which can simulate human-like conversations and produce coherent text outputs in response to user prompts. In the field of education, ChatGPT is increasingly being adopted by students to assist in completing academic writing tasks. Research indicates that students use ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, generate outlines, improve grammar, check vocabulary, and refine sentence structure (Fikri et al., 2024; Song & Song, 2023). In addition, ChatGPT is reported to increase writing fluency, reduce anxiety, and improve students' motivation to write (Esmaeil et al., 2023; Fauziah & Minarti, 2023). Findings from this study reinforce these claims: students at Universitas Abulyatama frequently reported that ChatGPT made their writing more structured, clearer, and more academic in tone while also boosting their confidence to attempt tasks they previously found intimidating.

Although the benefits of ChatGPT in supporting writing tasks are evident, significant gaps remain in understanding its pedagogical role in specific contexts. Most studies available so far have been conducted in international settings such as Jordan (Al-harashseh et al., 2025), Malaysia (Esmaeil et al., 2023), and global higher education contexts (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Ma, 2025). These studies demonstrate that students generally perceive ChatGPT positively as a tool for improving their writing, but they also highlight concerns such as academic integrity, plagiarism, and dependency. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence focusing on Indonesian students' perceptions, particularly at the undergraduate level where writing skills are crucial for academic achievement. This study attempts to fill that gap by focusing specifically on the lived experiences of EFL students in Aceh, Indonesia.

Furthermore, most prior research has relied heavily on quantitative survey-based approaches, which provide broad generalizations but often lack in-depth understanding of students' lived experiences. Little is known about how students negotiate the benefits and challenges of ChatGPT in their everyday academic writing practices, how they evaluate its accuracy, and how they balance its use with traditional forms of learning and teacher feedback. Another unknown aspect is whether students perceive ChatGPT as a temporary aid, a permanent writing partner, or a potential

threat to their own critical and creative capacities. These unanswered questions provide the rationale for a qualitative investigation into students' perceptions in the Indonesian context. By using interviews with five active users of ChatGPT, this research uncovers nuanced insights such as the tendency of students to rely on ChatGPT when under pressure, their awareness of its inaccuracies, and their continued reliance on lecturer and peer feedback for validation.

Scholarly interest in generative AI and its educational applications has expanded rapidly since 2022. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) provided one of the earliest systematic reviews on AI in higher education, highlighting both opportunities and gaps in understanding how AI tools could be integrated into pedagogy. More recent studies have explored the role of ChatGPT in academic writing. Yunita et al. (2025) found that Indonesian students had generally positive knowledge and perspectives about AI in academic writing, but their study employed a quantitative design with limited depth. Fikri et al. (2024) examined ChatGPT's potential in teaching writing and concluded that students benefited in terms of vocabulary development, grammar accuracy, and text organization. Internationally, Dwivedi et al. (2023) argued that ChatGPT offers disruptive opportunities across disciplines, though they cautioned about ethical, pedagogical, and policy implications. In comparison, the present study adds qualitative depth by capturing students' reflections on how ChatGPT shapes not only their texts but also their motivation, discipline, and confidence levels.

At the same time, critical perspectives have also emerged. Rahman and Watanobe (2023) discussed the risks of ChatGPT in educational and research contexts, including misinformation, lack of originality, and academic dishonesty. Rane et al. (2023) emphasized that large language models should not be regarded as co-authors due to ethical concerns, while Tarchi et al. (2024) explored the limitations of ChatGPT in source-based writing, where it often failed to provide accurate citations or evaluate sources critically. These debates reflect the current state of the art: while ChatGPT has been celebrated as a powerful tool for supporting writing instruction, there is no consensus on its long-term impact on students' learning and academic integrity. Consistent with these criticisms, the participants in this study admitted that ChatGPT was "not always correct" and could sometimes encourage laziness and overdependence, as several students confessed that they felt less motivated to write independently after using the tool.

The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative exploration of Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in academic writing. Unlike previous research that predominantly employed large-scale quantitative surveys with limited interpretive depth, this study adopts semi-structured interviews to capture rich and nuanced accounts of students' real experiences. The investigation focuses on English Language Education students at Universitas Abulyatama, Aceh, providing a localized perspective that has been underrepresented in international discussions on AI-

assisted academic writing. By situating the study within a specific institutional and cultural context, it reveals the diverse ways students adopt, adapt, and negotiate the use of ChatGPT in their writing processes ranging from strategic assistance to tendencies of dependence. This context-sensitive insight adds new empirical depth to global scholarship and highlights the dynamic interplay between technological support, learner agency, and academic writing development.

In line with the identified research gap and objectives of the study, the present research is guided by the following research question: “What are the students’ perceptions of using ChatGPT in completing academic writing tasks?” To further elaborate this focus, the study addresses the following sub-questions:

1. What benefits do students perceive from using ChatGPT in academic writing?
2. What challenges or limitations do students experience when using ChatGPT in academic writing?

## **B. Methods**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, as recommended by Baškarada (2014). The case study approach was selected because the purpose of the research was not to produce statistical generalizations, but to gain a deep, contextualized understanding of students’ perceptions regarding the use of ChatGPT in academic writing. Consistent with qualitative research principles, this study prioritizes rich, thick description over breadth of coverage, allowing the researcher to explore how students experience, interpret, and negotiate the role of ChatGPT in their writing practices. As Creswell and Poth (2016) emphasize, small-scale, in-depth qualitative case studies are appropriate when the goal is to generate exploratory insights and nuanced interpretations rather than universal conclusions. Therefore, the findings of this study should be understood as context-specific and exploratory, offering analytical rather than statistical generalization.

The research was conducted at Abulyatama University, Aceh, specifically within the English Language Education Department, which served as the focus of the study. The fieldwork took place on 17 May 2025. The participants consisted of five fourth-semester students, selected through purposive sampling because they had direct and ongoing experience using ChatGPT to support academic writing tasks. Although the sample size is small, this is deliberate and theoretically grounded. In qualitative inquiry, the purpose is not representativeness but information-rich sampling, enabling detailed examination of participants’ lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The small-N design allowed close engagement with participants’ narratives and facilitated the production of in-depth, contextually grounded interpretations. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and participants are referred to as Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E. Basic demographic and usage characteristics are presented below to enhance transparency.

**Table 1. Participant Demographic Profile**

Participant	Gender	Frequency of ChatGPT use	Typical Writing Tasks	Primary Purpose of Use
Student A	Male	Frequent (daily/weekly)	Essays & assignments	Idea generation & grammar support
Student B	Male	Frequent	Reports & summaries	Vocabulary and sentence refinement
Student C	Male	Frequent	Academic paragraphs	Structure and coherence improvement
Student D	Female	Occasional	Short tasks & drafts	Checking grammar and vocabulary
Student E	Female	Frequent	Coursework writing	Brainstorming and rewriting support

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview adapted from the interview framework of Fikri et al. (2024) and refined to align with the aims of the present study. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to explore emerging ideas in greater depth. Sample guiding questions included: “How do you usually use ChatGPT in your writing tasks?”, “What benefits or challenges do you experience when using ChatGPT?”, and “How does ChatGPT influence your motivation or confidence in writing?” The interviews lasted approximately 10–15 minutes each participant. Although relatively brief, this duration was sufficient because participants were active and experienced users who were able to articulate their perceptions clearly and directly. Moreover, follow-up probing questions were used to deepen responses. Data saturation was considered during the process; recurring themes began to appear across participants, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to produce substantially new categories.

All interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment to ensure openness, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994) consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Coding began with repeated reading of the transcripts, followed by initial open coding to identify recurring meanings and patterns. Related codes were then clustered into broader themes, such as perceived benefits, confidence development, reliance and overdependence, and concerns about accuracy. The inductive approach ensured that the themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed a priori.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. Credibility was supported through member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their interview summaries. Peer debriefing was conducted with a research colleague to discuss coding decisions and thematic

interpretations. Thick description was provided to support transferability, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts. Finally, an audit trail of coding notes, transcripts, and analytic memos was maintained to strengthen dependability and confirmability.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that students perceive ChatGPT as a supportive tool in completing academic writing tasks. They reported that ChatGPT helps them generate ideas, correct grammar, enrich vocabulary, and structure their writing more effectively. In addition, students experienced increased confidence in producing academic texts. However, the findings also indicate risks of overdependence and occasional inaccuracies, showing that ChatGPT functions best as a supplementary writing aid rather than a replacement for human instruction. Thus, the results clearly answer the research question by demonstrating that students value ChatGPT as an efficient and practical tool, while remaining aware of its limitations. This dual perception of usefulness and caution demonstrates that students are both enthusiastic and critical users of AI technology in academic writing, reflecting a balanced and mature stance toward digital tools.

These results are strongly supported by a wide range of prior studies. Fikri et al. (2024) confirmed that students improved their vocabulary and grammar with ChatGPT, while Esmail et al. (2023) highlighted its role in refining sentence structure and coherence. Dwivedi et al. (2023) reported its beneficial impact on higher education, and Yunita et al. (2025) together with Al-harashsheh et al. (2025) documented positive student perceptions of AI use in writing. Furthermore, Fauziah and Minarti (2023), Song and Song (2023), and Wischgoll (2017) pointed out that AI tools increase writing confidence, enhance coherence, and improve performance. However, these convergent findings also gain theoretical significance in the present study because the students demonstrate that AI-assisted improvement is not merely mechanical correction but part of a broader learning interaction between the tool and the learner. Broader theoretical contributions also support this perspective: Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) and Gautam (2019) further reinforce the interpretation that writing development emerges from the interaction between cognitive processes, learning tools, and instructional environments. In this sense, the current study not only confirms earlier empirical findings but deepens them by showing how students appropriate ChatGPT as a learning scaffold within real academic contexts.

A closer look at the participants' responses provides deeper insights into how these benefits are manifested in practice. Several students reported that ChatGPT was particularly helpful in generating ideas at the early stage of writing. When faced with a blank page, they could ask the tool for suggestions, outlines, or topic elaboration, which helped them overcome writer's block. This is consistent with Song and Song

(2023), who emphasized that AI tools can serve as brainstorming partners for learners. Analytically, this indicates that ChatGPT supports the planning and ideation phase of writing, enabling students to externalize thinking and reduce cognitive load during task initiation. In addition, students noted that the tool helped them with sentence construction and lexical variety, allowing them to write more sophisticated academic texts. Rather than functioning as a mere grammar checker, ChatGPT acts as a modeling tool through which students observe and internalize examples of formal academic register, supporting the development of genre awareness and writing identity (Esmaeil et al., 2023).

Beyond grammar and vocabulary, the results also revealed improvements in writing coherence and organization. Several participants stated that ChatGPT helped them link ideas logically, use transition signals more effectively, and structure their arguments in ways that aligned with academic writing conventions. These outcomes are particularly important because coherence and cohesion are among the most challenging aspects of writing for EFL learners (Brown, 2001; Oshima & Hogue, 1998). The tool acted not only as a grammar checker but also as a model of how well-written academic paragraphs should flow. By providing examples of structured writing, ChatGPT encouraged students to internalize patterns of logical organization, thereby enhancing their long-term writing competence. This role as a “scaffold” reflects Vygotskian perspectives on learning, where external support enables learners to achieve tasks they could not accomplish independently.

Another significant finding relates to confidence. Students consistently mentioned that ChatGPT boosted their confidence in completing assignments. For learners who often struggle with English writing, the availability of immediate feedback and correction provided reassurance. This psychological dimension is important because writing anxiety has been shown to hinder students’ performance (Fauziah & Minarti, 2023). By reducing uncertainty, ChatGPT created a safer space for students to attempt complex writing tasks. This also motivated them to engage more actively with academic assignments. In this sense, ChatGPT functioned not only as a cognitive aid but also as an affective support tool. However, the findings also highlight important risks. Several students admitted that they became dependent on ChatGPT and felt less inclined to think critically because the tool provided ready-made answers. This aligns with Ma (2025), who cautioned that excessive reliance on AI may limit students’ critical thinking and independent problem-solving. In fact, some participants confessed that they used ChatGPT almost every time they had writing assignments, raising concerns about the sustainability of their independent learning skills. While the tool saved time and effort, it risked reducing opportunities for students to practice their own creativity and analytical abilities. This tension between support and dependence illustrates the pedagogical dilemma of integrating AI into education: while it enhances performance, it can also unintentionally weaken core academic competencies if not used carefully.

Another drawback noted by participants was the issue of inaccuracy. Students recognized that ChatGPT's answers were not always correct or relevant, and they often had to verify information from other sources. For instance, one participant explained that she needed to double-check ChatGPT's suggestions with books or articles to ensure accuracy. This aligns with Rahman and Watanobe (2023) and Tarchi et al. (2024), who observed that ChatGPT sometimes produces misleading or fabricated content. Encouragingly, the students in this study demonstrated awareness of these limitations and did not rely blindly on the tool. Instead, they developed strategies for critical evaluation, such as cross-checking with references and seeking lecturer feedback. This indicates that while AI can pose risks, students are capable of exercising agency and discernment in its use.

The findings also underscore the irreplaceable role of human feedback. Students expressed that while ChatGPT improved grammar and structure, feedback from lecturers and peers remained essential for developing higher-level skills such as argumentation, originality, and critical engagement. Some participants even shared that their lecturers noticed improvements in their writing but still advised them to refine ideas further. This reflects the complementary relationship between AI tools and human instruction: ChatGPT can provide immediate technical support, but human teachers provide contextualized guidance, nuanced critique, and encouragement that AI cannot replicate. As Rane et al. (2023) emphasized, AI cannot substitute for human authorship or mentorship but should be positioned as an assistant within the learning ecosystem.

In terms of broader implications, the results suggest that ChatGPT can play a transformative role in EFL writing instruction if integrated responsibly. For students, it offers a flexible, accessible, and personalized writing assistant that enhances language accuracy and confidence. For educators, it provides an opportunity to redesign writing pedagogy by incorporating AI as a supplementary tool while still emphasizing critical literacy and academic integrity. The challenge lies in guiding students toward responsible use, ensuring that they view ChatGPT not as a shortcut but as a learning partner. Educators need to teach students how to evaluate AI outputs, cite sources properly, and maintain originality in their work. Institutions, likewise, must develop clear policies on AI use to promote ethical practices while leveraging the benefits of technology.

At the theoretical level, these findings contribute to the ongoing debate about technology-enhanced language learning. They illustrate how human agency interacts with machine assistance in the writing process. Rather than replacing human learning, ChatGPT appears to extend students' capabilities within their zone of proximal development, functioning as a scaffold that supports but does not replace cognitive engagement. However, this balance is fragile and requires careful pedagogical mediation. The study therefore reinforces the need for a balanced approach: one that

integrates the efficiency of AI with the irreplaceable value of human judgment, reflection, and creativity.

In summary, the results demonstrate that students perceive ChatGPT as both beneficial and problematic. Its benefits include enhanced grammar, vocabulary, structure, coherence, and confidence. Its risks involve overdependence, occasional inaccuracies, and reduced critical thinking. These findings align with both supportive and critical perspectives in the literature, confirming that ChatGPT is best positioned as a supplementary writing tool. The contribution of this study lies in highlighting the nuanced perceptions of Indonesian EFL students, whose voices add depth to the international conversation on AI in education. By situating the findings in a specific local context, the study underscores that technology adoption is not uniform but shaped by learners' needs, attitudes, and environments. Ultimately, ChatGPT can enrich academic writing instruction when used responsibly, but its effectiveness depends on how students, teachers, and institutions negotiate the balance between technological assistance and human-centered learning.

#### **D. Conclusions**

This study concludes that students perceive ChatGPT as a supportive and effective tool in completing academic writing tasks, particularly in enhancing grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and writing confidence. The key finding is that ChatGPT provides immediate assistance and efficiency in drafting and revising texts, which helps students overcome difficulties in language use and organization. However, while the benefits are evident, the study also highlights limitations such as potential overdependence, occasional inaccuracies, and the risk of reduced critical thinking if used without guidance. The practical implication of these findings is that ChatGPT can be integrated into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classrooms as a complementary learning aid, provided that educators emphasize responsible and ethical use. Teachers should encourage students to verify AI-generated content, combine it with peer and lecturer feedback, and use ChatGPT as a tool for scaffolding rather than replacement of their own thinking. Institutions may also provide training and guidelines to maximize the pedagogical value of AI tools while minimizing risks of misuse and plagiarism. For students, the implication is that ChatGPT can serve as a practice partner to develop writing fluency and confidence, but must be balanced with self-regulated learning strategies to ensure originality and academic integrity. Future research should broaden the scope by involving larger samples across different universities and contexts, as well as employing mixed methods to capture both perception and measurable writing outcomes. Comparative studies across disciplines could also provide deeper insight into how ChatGPT impacts academic writing differently in language education compared to other fields. Longitudinal studies are recommended to explore the long-term effects of ChatGPT on students' writing skills, independence, and critical thinking development. In sum,

while ChatGPT offers significant advantages, its sustainable value in education depends on careful integration, ethical awareness, and continuous evaluation by both learners and educators.

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