

## Beyond Writing Assistance: Exploring Students' Critical Dependence and Autonomous Learning in Chatgpt-Supported Writing Classes

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### Abstract

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Writing is an important skill in English language learning, and the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), especially ChatGPT, has provided new support for students in writing classes. However, there are still different views regarding its benefits and challenges in learning. Therefore, this study aimed to explore students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT in writing classes at STKIP Insan Madani Airmolek, with a particular focus on the tension between AI dependency and learner autonomy — an underexplored dimension in the Indonesian EFL context. This study used a qualitative descriptive design involving 14 students selected through purposive sampling. The data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, then analysed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings showed that students generally had positive perceptions of ChatGPT because it helped improve grammar, vocabulary, idea development, and writing efficiency. However, several challenges were found, such as irrelevant responses and concerns about dependency on AI, as well as ethical considerations regarding academic integrity and responsible AI use. In conclusion, ChatGPT can be a useful supporting tool in writing classes if it is used wisely under lecturers' guidance to maintain students' critical thinking and independent learning.

#### Kata Kunci:

*ChatGPT, Artificial Intelligence, persepsi mahasiswa, kelas menulis, ketergantungan, kemandirian belajar.*

#### Abstrak

Menulis merupakan salah satu keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, dan perkembangan Artificial Intelligence (AI), khususnya ChatGPT, telah memberikan dukungan baru bagi mahasiswa dalam kelas menulis. Namun, masih terdapat berbagai pandangan mengenai manfaat dan tantangannya dalam proses pembelajaran. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan ChatGPT dalam kelas menulis di STKIP Insan Madani Airmolek, dengan fokus khusus

pada ketegangan antara ketergantungan terhadap AI dan kemandirian belajar — sebuah dimensi yang masih jarang diteliti dalam konteks EFL di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan 14 mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa pada umumnya memiliki persepsi positif terhadap ChatGPT karena membantu meningkatkan tata bahasa, kosakata, pengembangan ide, dan efisiensi menulis. Namun, beberapa tantangan juga ditemukan, seperti respons yang tidak relevan serta kekhawatiran terhadap ketergantungan pada AI, termasuk pertimbangan etis terkait integritas akademik dan penggunaan AI yang bertanggung jawab. Kesimpulannya, ChatGPT dapat menjadi alat pendukung yang bermanfaat dalam kelas menulis apabila digunakan secara bijaksana di bawah bimbingan dosen untuk menjaga kemampuan berpikir kritis dan kemandirian belajar mahasiswa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the main skills in mastering English is writing, which plays an important role in the academic context as it is used in various activities such as completing assignments, reports, and scientific papers. Writing is a productive skill that enables individuals to express ideas in a structured and systematic written form (Tarigan, 2008). Jeremy Harmer (2004) emphasizes that writing is not merely about conveying messages, but also involves the process of organizing ideas logically so that they can be clearly understood by readers. H. Douglas Brown (2001) further argues that writing is a complex process integrating various language components simultaneously, making it the most difficult skill for many learners.

Along with the development of technology in education, various innovations have emerged to support the learning process, including in English language learning. Tony Bates (2015) argues that the use of technology in education can enhance learning effectiveness through broader access to learning resources and faster feedback. One significant development is the emergence of

Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly ChatGPT, which has begun to be widely utilized by students to assist in the writing process — from generating ideas and correcting grammar to providing better sentence examples (Nilsson, 2010).

Recent studies (2023–2025) have examined students' general perceptions of ChatGPT in educational settings. Kasneci et al. (2023) found that ChatGPT can assist students in generating ideas, correcting language errors, and improving writing quality. Crompton and Burke (2024) highlighted the affordances and challenges of ChatGPT in education, while Dunlop and O'Brien (2024) documented positive student experiences with ChatGPT in college assignments. Similarly, Almahasees et al. (2024) explored students' perceived benefits and challenges in higher education. However, these studies predominantly focus on general perceptions without sufficiently addressing the specific tension between AI dependency and learner autonomy — a critical concern for long-term learning development.

Despite the growing body of research, three key gaps remain in the existing literature. First, most studies lack a thorough synthesis of findings across different educational contexts, making it difficult to draw general conclusions about ChatGPT's impact on writing development. Second, no study has clearly identified the conditions under which ChatGPT promotes autonomous learning versus fostering unhealthy dependency, particularly in non-Western settings. Third, the Indonesian EFL context remains significantly underrepresented in the literature. Indonesia presents a unique educational environment characterized by large class sizes, limited access to native-speaker input, and a curriculum that is still adapting to digital integration. Understanding how Indonesian EFL students navigate AI tools in writing classes is therefore particularly relevant and timely.

Based on the above background, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT in writing classes at STKIP Insan Madani Airmolek, with a specific focus on the interplay between perceived benefits, challenges, and the critical dimension of dependency versus autonomous learning. The research questions are: (1) What are students' perceptions of ChatGPT in writing classes? (2) How do students experience using ChatGPT during the

writing process? (3) What are the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT, particularly in relation to learner autonomy and dependency?

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore students' perceptions of the use of ChatGPT in writing classes. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, opinions, and perspectives regarding the use of ChatGPT in the writing process, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone.

The population of this study consisted of students of the English Education Study Program at STKIP Insan Madani Airmolek. A total of 14 participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the criterion that they had prior experience using ChatGPT in writing classes. The participants were drawn from the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters, with an age range of 19 to 23 years. The group consisted of 11 female and 3 male students. In terms of frequency of ChatGPT use, 5 students reported using it daily, 4 used it several times a week, and 5 used it occasionally.

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

| Category                 | Detail               | n  | %   |
|--------------------------|----------------------|----|-----|
| Semester                 | 2nd                  | 3  | 21% |
|                          | 4th                  | 2  | 14% |
|                          | 6th                  | 3  | 21% |
|                          | 8th                  | 6  | 43% |
| Age                      | 19–21 years          | 8  | 57% |
|                          | 22–23 years          | 6  | 43% |
| Gender                   | Female               | 11 | 79% |
|                          | Male                 | 3  | 21% |
| Frequency of ChatGPT Use | Every day            | 5  | 36% |
|                          | Several times a week | 4  | 29% |
|                          | Occasionally         | 5  | 36% |

Two instruments were used in this study: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interview guidelines. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of 10 questions organized into five themes: perceptions, experiences, benefits, challenges, and reflections on ChatGPT use in writing. A total of 11 students participated in the questionnaire. Sample questionnaire items included: “What are the benefits you feel when using ChatGPT in writing?” and “Do you think using ChatGPT makes you more independent or dependent in writing? Explain.”

The semi-structured interview guideline also consisted of 10 main questions organized under the same five themes, designed to explore deeper perspectives from participants. A total of 3 students participated in the interviews. Sample interview questions included: “Can you tell me about your experience using ChatGPT in writing class?” and “What are your suggestions regarding the use of ChatGPT in writing learning on campus?”

The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, responses from the questionnaires and interview transcripts were coded and focused on data relevant to the research objectives. The data were then presented in the form of organized narratives based on five main themes: (1) students’ perceptions of ChatGPT, (2) experiences in using ChatGPT, (3) benefits of ChatGPT, (4) challenges in using ChatGPT, and (5) reflections on dependency versus learner autonomy. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the results of the overall analysis.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the data, triangulation was applied by comparing findings from the open-ended questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews, so that the data were expected to be more valid and capable of providing a more comprehensive description of students’ perceptions toward the use of ChatGPT in writing classes.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Findings***

The data collected from open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were analysed and organized into five main themes: (1) students' perceptions of ChatGPT, (2) students' experiences in using ChatGPT, (3) benefits of ChatGPT in writing, (4) challenges in using ChatGPT, and (5) reflections on dependency versus learner autonomy. Each theme is presented below with direct evidence from the data.

#### **Theme 1: Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT in Writing Classes**

The first theme revealed that all 14 participants held generally positive perceptions toward the use of ChatGPT in writing classes. Students consistently described ChatGPT as a helpful AI-based tool that could support various aspects of writing, particularly grammar, vocabulary, and idea development. This positive view was expressed across both interview and questionnaire data.

"ChatGPT is a technology AI that can help answer questions and also assist in writing. In writing class, I think its use is very helpful, especially for students who still have difficulties arranging sentences in English." (Interview Respondent 1)

"I see ChatGPT as a very helpful tool in the writing process, especially in developing ideas and improving writing." (Interview Respondent 2)

Questionnaire responses also reflected this positive stance. Questionnaire Respondent 5 stated that ChatGPT is "a technology that can help produce text, provide ideas, and improve writing," while Questionnaire Respondent 10 noted that ChatGPT is "a tool that can provide ideas and help tidy up writing." Several participants, however, added a note of caution, emphasizing that ChatGPT should be used wisely and not relied upon as the sole source of writing assistance.

These perceptions indicate that students view ChatGPT primarily as a supplementary learning tool. The consistency of positive responses across different semester levels suggests that ChatGPT is perceived as relevant and accessible regardless of students' academic stage.

## **Theme 2: Students' Experiences in Using ChatGPT**

The second theme explored how students actually used ChatGPT in writing activities. The data revealed that students engaged with ChatGPT at various stages of the writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, grammar checking, vocabulary searching, and revising.

"I usually use ChatGPT when working on essay assignments. I asked ChatGPT to check my grammar and improve my sentences so they became clearer." (Interview Respondent 1)

"I often use ChatGPT to create the first draft of my writing. Usually, I ask for an outline or ideas, then I develop them myself." (Interview Respondent 2)

"I have used ChatGPT to help with a recount text assignment, especially in correcting sentence structure." (Interview Respondent 3)

Questionnaire data provided additional variety. Questionnaire Respondent 3 used ChatGPT to find synonyms to avoid repetition, while Questionnaire Respondent 8 used it to request translation of unfamiliar words. Questionnaire Respondent 9 described a balanced approach: "I used ChatGPT to help find ideas and example sentences, but I always revised them afterwards to match my own writing style." Questionnaire Respondent 11 stated that she used ChatGPT to compose an essay from scratch and then adjusted it to the task requirements.

These diverse experiences suggest that students are not passive users of ChatGPT. Rather, they actively select specific functions of the tool depending on their individual writing needs, demonstrating a degree of strategic agency in their use of AI assistance.

## **Theme 3: Benefits of Using ChatGPT in Writing**

The third theme identified several key benefits that students perceived from using ChatGPT in writing. The most frequently mentioned benefits were grammar correction, vocabulary enrichment, idea generation, writing efficiency, and increased confidence in writing.

"The benefits I feel are helping improve grammar, giving sentence examples, and speeding up the writing process." (Interview Respondent 1)

“The benefits are quite many, such as helping find ideas, enriching vocabulary, and improving sentence structure.” (Interview Respondent 2)

“The benefit I feel is helping correct grammar mistakes and making my writing neater.” (Interview Respondent 3)

Questionnaire Respondent 5 provided one of the most comprehensive answers: “The benefits I feel include helping find ideas more quickly, correcting grammar mistakes, and adding new vocabulary. In addition, ChatGPT also helps me understand how to form good and correct sentences.” Questionnaire Respondent 9 emphasized practical efficiency, stating that ChatGPT helped to speed up the writing process, add vocabulary, and improve understanding of correct sentence structure. Questionnaire Respondent 4 highlighted that beyond quality, ChatGPT helped complete tasks more quickly.

Grammar and vocabulary emerged as the two most commonly cited areas of benefit, reflecting the well-documented challenges that Indonesian EFL learners face in these aspects. The frequency of these mentions indicates that students view ChatGPT as particularly effective in addressing their core writing weaknesses.

#### **Theme 4: Challenges in Using ChatGPT**

Despite the positive perceptions and benefits, the fourth theme revealed several challenges that students encountered when using ChatGPT. The most common challenges included receiving responses that were too general, too formal, too long, or not fully aligned with the task context. Additionally, some students expressed doubt about the accuracy and reliability of ChatGPT’s responses.

“The problem is sometimes the answer from ChatGPT is too general or not suitable for the task context.” (Interview Respondent 1)

“Sometimes ChatGPT gives answers that are too long or less relevant to what I need.” (Interview Respondent 2)

“The obstacle is that sometimes the explanation from ChatGPT is a bit difficult to understand, especially if it is too long.” (Interview Respondent 3)

Questionnaire data reinforced these challenges. Questionnaire Respondent 5 noted that “the results from ChatGPT are not always appropriate to the context I want, so they need to be adjusted.” Questionnaire Respondent 6 stated that answers were “sometimes too formal or lacking in context, so I had to re-read them.” Questionnaire Respondent 8 mentioned a technical constraint, noting that limited file upload features sometimes slowed down the writing process.

Regarding doubt about ChatGPT’s responses, Questionnaire Respondent 5 explained: “Yes, I have felt doubtful with the results from ChatGPT, especially when the results looked too general or not specific. In that situation, I usually re-check with other sources.” Questionnaire Respondent 9 added: “Yes, especially if the sentence feels strange or too formal. I usually compare it again with the lecturer’s material or other sources.”

These findings highlight an important point: students are not uncritical consumers of ChatGPT output. Their awareness of the tool’s limitations and their habit of checking and revising AI-generated text demonstrate an active engagement that reflects developing metacognitive skills.

### **Theme 5: Reflections on Dependency versus Learner Autonomy**

The fifth and most theoretically significant theme concerned students’ reflections on whether using ChatGPT made them more independent or more dependent in writing. The data revealed contrasting perspectives, with some students believing that ChatGPT fostered independence, while others expressed concern about dependency.

“ChatGPT can make us more independent if it is used as a supporting tool, not as a replacement for our own effort.” (Interview Respondent 2)

“ChatGPT can create dependency if it is used continuously without learning independently.” (Interview Respondent 3)

“According to me, ChatGPT can make me slightly dependent, but if used wisely it can actually help learn more independently.” (Interview Respondent 1)

Questionnaire responses reflected similar tensions. Questionnaire Respondent 5 provided a nuanced reflection: “The use of ChatGPT can make me

more independent if used wisely, because I can learn from mistakes and improve writing ability. However, if used excessively without my own effort, it can create dependency.” Questionnaire Respondent 8 took a more positive stance: “Not dependent but very helpful; lots of practice using ChatGPT greatly improves writing skills.” Questionnaire Respondent 9 stated: “In my opinion it does not create dependency, as long as it is used wisely. It can even help learning, because I still understand and edit the results myself.” In contrast, Questionnaire Respondent 11 expressed concern: “In my opinion, ChatGPT can create dependency if used continuously without learning independently.”

Regarding recommendations, most students suggested that ChatGPT should be used under lecturers’ guidance. Questionnaire Respondent 4 recommended that “lecturers provide rules or limits on ChatGPT use so students keep learning and do not only rely on AI.” Questionnaire Respondent 2 emphasized that “using ChatGPT is not wrong if we do not copy and paste entirely; we must trust our own arguments more.”

The divergence in students’ reflections suggests that the relationship between ChatGPT use and learner autonomy is not straightforward. It is shaped by how the tool is used, the extent to which students engage critically with its output, and the degree of pedagogical guidance provided.

### ***Discussion***

The findings of this study demonstrate that students at STKIP Insan Madani Airmolek generally perceive ChatGPT as a beneficial and practical writing tool. This is consistent with findings from Kasneci et al. (2023), who report that ChatGPT can assist students in generating ideas, correcting language errors, and improving writing quality. The positive perceptions found in this study also align with Warschauer (1996), who argues that technology can increase student motivation and support language learning. In the Indonesian EFL context, where students frequently face challenges in grammar and vocabulary, ChatGPT appears to fill an important gap by providing immediate, accessible feedback and examples.

The diversity of ways in which students used ChatGPT — from brainstorming and drafting to grammar checking and vocabulary searching — aligns with Oshima and Hogue's (1997) description of writing as a multi-stage process involving planning, drafting, and revising. The fact that most students used ChatGPT selectively at specific stages, rather than to complete tasks entirely, suggests that they retained meaningful ownership of the writing process. This finding is particularly significant in the context of the dependency-autonomy tension raised by the reviewer, as it indicates that many students are already practicing a form of bounded AI use.

However, the challenges identified — including responses that were too general, too formal, or contextually mismatched — reveal that ChatGPT cannot fully replace domain-specific writing instruction. Students' habit of rechecking and revising AI output before use demonstrates a degree of critical awareness that Harmer (2004) identifies as essential to effective writing development. This finding contributes to the literature by suggesting that the process of evaluating and revising ChatGPT output may itself serve as a metacognitive exercise, supporting rather than replacing critical thinking skills.

The most theoretically significant contribution of this study lies in its direct examination of the dependency-autonomy tension in an Indonesian EFL context. Unlike studies conducted in Western higher education settings (e.g., Dunlop & O'Brien, 2024; Crompton & Burke, 2024), this study shows that Indonesian EFL students navigate this tension with considerable awareness. Students who used ChatGPT as a model to learn from — reading its corrections, understanding its suggestions, and adapting them independently — reported developing rather than losing writing confidence. Conversely, students who used ChatGPT to generate complete texts without critical engagement expressed concern about dependency. This finding operationalizes the warning of Luckin et al. (2016) that AI should support rather than replace cognitive processes, demonstrating that the outcome depends not on the tool itself but on the nature of student engagement with it.

### **Ethical Considerations in AI-Assisted Writing**

The data also raised important ethical concerns that the existing literature has not fully addressed in the Indonesian EFL context. Several students acknowledged using ChatGPT to draft paragraphs or even entire essays before revising them, raising questions about the boundary between legitimate AI assistance and academic dishonesty. Questionnaire Respondent 2 explicitly noted that “using ChatGPT is not wrong if we do not copy and paste entirely,” suggesting an awareness of ethical boundaries but also the ambiguity surrounding them.

Lund et al. (2023) argue that AI-generated text in academic submissions constitutes a new form of academic dishonesty that existing institutional policies are not yet equipped to address. This concern is directly applicable to the current study context: none of the participants reported receiving explicit institutional guidance on the ethical use of ChatGPT in assignments. Without clear policies, students are left to navigate these boundaries independently, often based on personal judgment rather than institutional norms.

The role of lecturers in addressing this gap is therefore critical. Navales (2024) found that English teachers who provide structured guidance on AI use report more ethically aware student behavior. The current findings support this: students who expressed the most nuanced reflections on responsible AI use — such as Questionnaire Respondent 5 — appeared to have developed a personal framework for ethical AI engagement. Lecturers should actively model responsible use, set explicit task boundaries, and design assessments that require students to demonstrate independent thinking beyond what AI tools can generate. Institutions should also develop and communicate clear AI use policies at the beginning of each course.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated students’ perceptions of ChatGPT use in writing classes at STKIP Insan Madani Airmolek, with a specific focus on the underexplored dimension of dependency versus learner autonomy in the

Indonesian EFL context. The findings confirm that students generally hold positive perceptions of ChatGPT, viewing it as a helpful tool for improving grammar, vocabulary, idea generation, and writing efficiency. Students primarily use ChatGPT during specific stages of the writing process, particularly brainstorming, drafting, and revising, rather than relying on it to complete entire tasks.

Importantly, this study reveals that the relationship between ChatGPT use and learner autonomy is conditional and context-dependent. ChatGPT promotes autonomy when used selectively and reflectively, but risks fostering dependency when used as a substitute for independent thinking, particularly in the absence of pedagogical guidance. The Indonesian EFL context amplifies these dynamics due to limited access to alternative language feedback and institutional policies that have not yet caught up with AI developments.

Additionally, ethical concerns surrounding academic integrity, responsible AI use, and plagiarism risks must be centrally addressed in any pedagogical framework for AI-assisted writing instruction. Lecturers play a pivotal role in modeling responsible use, setting clear boundaries, and designing tasks that require independent critical thinking beyond AI output.

Future research should extend this work with larger and more diverse participant samples across different Indonesian institutions, employ longitudinal designs to track how ChatGPT use affects writing development over time, and investigate the effectiveness of specific pedagogical interventions in promoting responsible and autonomy-enhancing AI use. Comparative studies across different educational contexts and cultural settings would also strengthen the generalizability of findings in this rapidly evolving field.

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