LANGUAGE : Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra
Vol. 6, No. 4, September-November 2026
e-ISSN : 2807-1670 | p-ISSN : 2807-2316
Online Journal System : https://jurnalp4i.com/index.php/language

ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING AI TOOLS IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A CASE STUDY

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Diterima: *13/10/2026*; Direvisi: *20/10/2026*; Diterbitkan: *3/11/2026*

ABSTRAK

Integrasi kecerdasan buatan generatif (*generative artificial intelligence*) telah merevolusi praktik penulisan akademik di perguruan tinggi, namun pemaknaan pedagogis oleh mahasiswa calon guru bahasa Inggris masih jarang diteliti secara mendalam. Penelitian studi kasus kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris terhadap penggunaan perangkat kecerdasan buatan (*AI tools*) dalam penulisan akademik, yang berfokus pada persepsi manfaat, tantangan, dan negosiasi integritas akademik. Sebanyak sepuluh mahasiswa sarjana yang terdiri atas delapan mahasiswa Semester 8 dan dua mahasiswa Semester 6 di Institut Pendidikan Indonesia dipilih melalui teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dihimpun melalui kuesioner terbuka daring asinkron (*asynchronous open-ended questionnaire*) dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik enam tahap. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa mahasiswa memanfaatkan perangkat kecerdasan buatan terutama untuk pencarian ide awal, penyusunan kerangka karangan, serta perbaikan tata bahasa, meskipun mereka menghadapi kendala berupa sitasi halusinasi, kekakuan gaya bahasa, dan kecemasan akan erosi keterampilan berpikir kritis mandiri. Dalam menegosiasikan integritas akademik, mahasiswa menerapkan adopsi selektif dengan memverifikasi rujukan ilmiah serta menyepakati batasan etis bahwa bantuan penyuntingan bahasa dapat dibenarkan, sedangkan penyalinan teks secara utuh merupakan bentuk pelanggaran.
Kata Kunci: *kecerdasan buatan*, *penulisan akademik*, *persepsi mahasiswa*, *pendidikan bahasa Inggris*, *integritas akademik*

ABSTRACT

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly altered academic writing practices in higher education, yet its pedagogical implications for pre-service English teachers remain underexplored. This qualitative case study aimed to investigate English Education students' perceptions of utilizing AI tools in academic writing, specifically examining perceived benefits, operational challenges, and academic integrity negotiations. Ten undergraduate students, comprising eight eighth-semester and two sixth-semester students at Institut Pendidikan Indonesia, were purposively recruited. Data were gathered through an asynchronous online open-ended questionnaire and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed that students utilized AI tools primarily for brainstorming, outlining, and grammatical refinement, while contending with fabricated citations, stylistic rigidity, and anxieties regarding the erosion of independent critical thinking. In negotiating academic integrity, participants practiced selective verification and established a collective ethical boundary that endorsed linguistic scaffolding while strictly proscribing unreflective wholesale text generation.

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https://doi.org/10.51878/language.v6i4.16430



LANGUAGE : Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra
Vol. 6, No. 4, September-November 2026
e-ISSN : 2807-1670 | p-ISSN : 2807-2316
Online Journal System : https://jurnalp4i.com/index.php/language

Jurnal P4I

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, academic writing, student perceptions, English education, academic integrity*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) platforms has fundamentally altered text composition practices within global higher education. Tertiary students increasingly rely on applications such as ChatGPT to streamline text production, ranging from formulating arguments to refining syntactic precision (Sustaningrum & Haldaka, 2025). Broad survey studies indicate that automated language models offer substantial structural assistance during the planning, drafting, and revision phases of academic writing (Boillos & Idoiaga, 2025). Nevertheless, the rapid integration of these tools raises urgent pedagogical dilemmas regarding textual authenticity, authorial identity, and the risk of cognitive dependency among developing writers (Deep & Chen, 2025; Kotsis, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024; Wang, 2024).

Most existing literature on automated writing assistance has focused heavily on quantitative surveys administered to general undergraduate cohorts, leaving the disciplinary experiences of language education majors largely overlooked. Pre-service English teachers inhabit a dual position as both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writers and future language pedagogues who must model literacy standards (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). Previous research has noted that EFL learners frequently utilize automated tools as surrogate tutors for lexical expansion and grammar correction, yet they require structured guidance to evaluate the validity of machine feedback (Arifin et al., 2025). Consequently, writing with algorithmic assistance evolves into an ethically charged negotiation, wherein student teachers must safeguard their linguistic autonomy against excessive automation (Delina & Rondilla, 2026). Within this context, the pedagogical challenge lies less in prohibiting generative tools than in cultivating reflective practices that position AI-generated feedback as a resource for critical evaluation rather than a substitute for independent composition (Banfi & Pedroni, 2026; Escalante et al., 2023; Voicu, 2026; Yang et al., 2026).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) asserts that user adoption is governed by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). In higher education, positive attitudes toward automated writing systems have been documented to mediate students' behavioral intentions to adopt AI tools for scholarly production (Zou & Huang, 2023). However, traditional acceptance frameworks fail to explain why learners who acknowledge the high utility of AI simultaneously constrain their own usage out of ethical caution and fear of skill degradation. Recent evidence suggests that students' moral reflexivity and academic integrity beliefs actively moderate technical convenience, prompting them to curate, revise, or discard unverified text generated by AI (Lund et al., 2025).

This unresolved tension exposes a distinct research gap concerning how pre-service language educators balance procedural utility against professional competence in their writing tasks. To address this empirical void, this case study investigates the subjective perceptions and ethical negotiations of undergraduate English Education students when incorporating generative AI into academic writing. Specifically, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How do English Education students perceive the benefits of using AI tools in academic writing? (2) What challenges and developmental concerns do they experience when using these tools? (3) How do they negotiate boundaries of academic integrity and disclosure when presenting AI-assisted writing?

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RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an interpretive qualitative case study design to examine the contextualized perceptions of pre-service English teachers regarding AI-assisted writing. A case study approach was selected because it enables an intensive exploration of subjective decision-making within a bounded institutional environment (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research site was Institut Pendidikan Indonesia (IPI) Garut, focusing specifically on the English Education undergraduate program. This methodological framework prioritized the descriptive depth of participants' reflective reasoning over statistical generalization.

The participants comprised ten undergraduate students purposively selected according to clear eligibility criteria: active enrollment in the English Education program, practical experience using generative AI for academic assignments within the preceding semester, and willingness to participate. The sample consisted of eight students in Semester 8 and two students in Semester 6, representing cohorts actively engaged in intensive research writing, term papers, and thesis drafting (*skripsi*). These upper-division students possessed sufficient disciplinary maturity to reflect on both writing mechanics and their future roles as classroom teachers. Ethical standards were maintained by obtaining digital informed consent, guaranteeing voluntary participation, and anonymizing personal identities using alphanumeric codes (R1 to R10).

Data were collected through an asynchronous written qualitative questionnaire administered via Google Forms (Schiek, 2022). Asynchronous written questionnaires provide participants with adequate space and time to formulate articulate, self-paced reflections without social anxiety. The instrument contained ten open-ended prompts divided into three conceptual clusters: perceived writing benefits, operational challenges and skill concerns, and academic integrity negotiations and disclosure practices. Participants were granted 48 hours to complete their responses, and the text was submitted in Indonesian to allow for nuanced self-expression.

Data analysis followed the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical procedure commenced with familiarization through iterative reading of the transcripts, followed by systematic line-by-line initial coding of semantic features. These preliminary codes were collated into overarching subthemes and primary themes aligned with the three research questions. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking of synthesized theme summaries with participants, peer debriefing with an applied linguistics colleague, and rigorous back-translation of all cited excerpts into English to preserve interpretive fidelity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The qualitative analysis of the questionnaire transcripts yielded three coherent thematic domains addressing the research questions. To illustrate the distribution of these empirical patterns across the cohort, Table 1 summarizes the primary themes, descriptive subthemes, and the exact participant frequency for each category.

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Table 1. Summary of Thematic Findings on Students' Perceptions of AI in Academic Writing

Research Focus	Primary Themes	Descriptive Subthemes	Participant Frequency (N=10)
Perceived Benefits	Scaffolding Writing Processes	Idea generation and outlining	9 participants (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10)
		Linguistic and grammatical refinement	7 participants (R1, R2, R3, R5, R7, R8, R9)
	Operational Efficiency	Alleviating *writer's block* and saving time	8 participants (R1, R2, R3, R4, R6, R7, R8, R10)
Perceived Challenges	Content Unreliability	Fabricated citations (*hallucination*)	7 participants (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R9)
		Generic, formulaic, and context-mismatched output	6 participants (R2, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10)
	Cognitive and Skill Erosion	Anxiety regarding diminished critical thinking	8 participants (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10)
Negotiating Integrity	Selective Adoption Strategy	Cross-verifying and filtering AI content	9 participants (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10)
	Conditional Disclosure	Reporting AI use only when explicitly mandated	8 participants (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10)
	Ethical Boundary Demarcation	Distinguishing procedural aid from direct plagiarizing	10 participants (All respondents)

As summarized in Table 1, participants exhibited substantial convergence regarding the supportive affordances of AI alongside deep professional anxieties concerning critical literacy. The data indicate that while technological adoption was extensive across the cohort, it was accompanied by active verification and strict moral boundaries. Furthermore, Table 1 reveals notable deviant orientations in disclosure and dependency that provide critical texture to the collective findings.

Regarding perceived benefits, nine out of ten participants recognized generative AI as a powerful cognitive scaffold during initial conceptualization. Students consistently reported that generating an initial outline represents the most intimidating hurdle in foreign language writing. Participant R3 explained, "I usually use AI to find initial ideas (*brainstorming*), build an outline, and look for vocabulary variations that fit an academic context." Participant R8 similarly noted, "It is most helpful during the initial drafting stage, because starting to write is usually the hardest part." Additionally, seven participants emphasized that AI polished their academic register by suggesting formal syntactic collocations that enhanced sentence maturity.

Operational efficiency emerged as an equally prominent benefit, with eight participants noting that algorithmic processing significantly mitigated *writer's block*. Participants leveraged AI to summarize complex theoretical literature into digestible conceptual points, thereby

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reducing cognitive fatigue. Participant R6 stated, "It saves time and makes it easier to start writing by providing instant templates." Participant R2 echoed this sentiment, remarking, "It is much faster for brainstorming, and the draft turns out a bit neater than when I produce it entirely alone." Consequently, AI operated primarily as an interactive brainstorming companion rather than an autonomous author.

Despite acknowledging high technical utility, participants reported severe challenges concerning factual inaccuracy and linguistic artificiality. Seven students encountered fabricated references, commonly characterized as data hallucinations, where the software generated plausible titles with non-existent Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs). Participant R1 recounted, "AI often fabricates references or fake journal sources (*data hallucination*)." Six participants also complained that the generated text frequently sounded robotic, impersonal, and disconnected from the communicative nuances of specific essay prompts. Participant R5 observed, "The language is stiff, and the citations provided are frequently nonsensical when checked."

The most critical finding under the challenges dimension was a pervasive anxiety regarding the erosion of independent intellectual capabilities. Eight participants expressed deep concern that over-reliance on automated prompts would atrophy their analytical faculties and English composition competence. Participant R1 reflected, "I am genuinely afraid that my critical thinking, analytical skills, and sentence-crafting ability will become dull because I am used to instant answers." Within this shared concern, two contrasting deviant cases emerged: Participant R2 reported actively curtailing AI usage to preserve personal writing competence, whereas Participant R9 admitted to near-total writing dependency despite maintaining an awareness of grammatical structures.

When negotiating academic integrity, all ten participants established a clear ethical boundary distinguishing legitimate procedural scaffolding from illegitimate plagiarism. Nine participants practiced selective adoption, treating AI output as raw material that required systematic cross-referencing against peer-reviewed literature. Participant R4 detailed this curation process: "I take the ideas that are logical, revise the stiff language, and discard information that lacks a clear source." Regarding institutional disclosure, eight participants practiced conditional silence, revealing AI assistance to course lecturers only when explicitly mandated by syllabus guidelines. In contrast, Participant R9 practiced unconditional transparency by always documenting AI involvement, asserting that pedagogical honesty remains fundamental for a future language educator.

Discussion

The empirical findings complicate traditional formulations of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989; Zou & Huang, 2023). While perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use drove initial adoption for idea generation, high utility did not lead to uncritical or passive submission to automated systems. Instead, participants engaged in constant critical curation, evaluating generated text against academic standards and their own emerging identities as English educators (Delina & Rondilla, 2026). This active resistance to cognitive reliance demonstrates that ethical awareness and disciplinary identity act as internal filters that regulate technological adoption. These findings suggest that adoption decisions in writing pedagogy are shaped less by tool capability alone than by how educators negotiate professional values, making the regulation of AI use a matter of ongoing judgment rather than a one-time acceptance decision (Clemons et al., 2026; Rasa, 2026).

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The widespread anxiety over diminished critical thinking highlights a distinct disciplinary paradox experienced by pre-service language teachers. Unlike students in technical fields who prioritize output speed, English Education majors view linguistic formulation as central to their professional competence (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). The fear of atrophying writing skills voiced by the majority of participants reflects an awareness that bypassing the struggle of composition risks undermining pedagogical expertise (Arifin et al., 2025). The contrasting cases of R2, who restricted tool use, and R9, who succumbed to dependency while maintaining full disclosure, show that individual metacognitive self-regulation varies widely even within a shared ethical climate. These divergent trajectories suggest that disclosure norms alone are insufficient to prevent overreliance, and that sustained support for metacognitive monitoring is needed to keep pre-service teachers' writing competence intact (Fütterer et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2025; Xiao-hua et al., 2025; Zhai et al., 2024).

In terms of academic integrity, participants' selective adoption and rigorous source verification align with practices documented among postgraduate writers (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). However, the finding that most undergraduate participants practiced conditional non-disclosure points to persistent institutional ambiguities regarding generative AI policies. As noted by Lund et al. (2025), in the absence of explicit institutional guidelines, students establish their own normative boundaries, defining linguistic editing as ethical assistance and verbatim copying as academic misconduct. For teacher preparation programs, this reactive disclosure posture highlights the need for explicit curricula addressing ethical AI integration rather than leaving transparency to individual student discretion (Barrett & Pack, 2023; Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025; Parker et al., 2026; Pietsch & Mah, 2025; Smits et al., 2025).

These findings must be interpreted within the contextual parameters of a single-institution qualitative case study involving ten participants. The reliance on asynchronous written responses, while yielding deliberate and candid ethical reflections, naturally precluded the dynamic follow-up questioning characteristic of oral interviews. Furthermore, self-reported accounts of academic integrity and dependency may be subject to social desirability effects, particularly among pre-service teachers cognizant of professional standards. Future studies should employ multi-institution mixed-method designs incorporating keystroke-logging or real-time writing observations to examine how pre-service language teachers navigate automated assistance across diverse tasks.

CONCLUSION

This case study demonstrates that English Education students perceive generative AI as a valuable procedural scaffold for brainstorming, structuring outlines, and refining grammatical expression during academic writing. Concurrently, participants experience significant challenges, including fabricated bibliographic citations, formulaic syntax, and pervasive anxiety regarding the deterioration of their independent critical thinking and compositional skills. In response, students negotiate academic integrity through selective adoption, verifying AI content against scholarly literature, maintaining conditional disclosure based on institutional requirements, and drawing a firm ethical line between procedural linguistic support and unreflective textual plagiarism.

These findings emphasize the urgent necessity for teacher education programs to transition from punitive or ambiguous stances to proactive, discipline-specific pedagogical frameworks. Teacher preparation institutions should establish explicit syllabi policies delineating permitted uses of AI, implement mandatory bibliographic cross-verification

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protocols, and train prospective educators to model transparent technological disclosure. Continued empirical investigation is recommended across larger, multi-campus cohorts using longitudinal observations to evaluate how pedagogical training influences the sustainable and ethical adoption of artificial intelligence in language teaching contexts.

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