

EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ETHICAL CONCERNS ON USING CHATGPT IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the application of artificial intelligence (AI), namely ChatGPT, for educational purposes. However, EFL students' insights into the ethical use of ChatGPT in academic writing remain unexplored. The purpose of this study is to reveal the EFL students' perspectives on the ethical use of Chat GPT in academic writing. Data were obtained from 54 EFL students who have taken academic writing course by using a Likert Scale questionnaire, with a focus on ethical issues such as plagiarism, academic integrity, over-reliance on ChatGPT, data biases, and unclear guidelines. The responses to the Likert Scale were statistically analyzed. The findings reveal that the majority of the students were concerned about the ethical use of ChatGPT, particularly plagiarism and over-reliance, though a small number remain unaware of these issues. The study recommends lecturers or teachers should focus on helping students understand the ethical concerns related to the application of ChatGPT, and its clear guidelines for academic writing.

Keywords: *academic writing; ChatGPT; EFL students' perception; ethical concern.*

INTRODUCTION

Learning academic writing is essential for students because it can improve students' critical thinking, reasoning, and the ability to combine complex ideas. It also supports students to express their thoughts clearly, create well-structured arguments, and back up their ideas with evidence (Tahira et al., 2019). These skills will improve, and prepare students for future studies or careers (Castillo-Martinez & Ramirez-Montoya, 2021; Chan, 2023). In other words, without these skills,

students may find it hard to share their ideas or understand academic texts, which can make it difficult to succeed in their studies and even their future careers.

When learning English academic writing, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students frequently encounter numerous challenges (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Mustafa et al., 2022; Pasaribu, 2022). A common problem is a limited vocabulary, which makes it hard for them to express their ideas clearly and formally.

Grammar and sentence structure are also perplexing because academic writing requires accuracy and following complex rules (Li & Akram, 2024; Nenotek et al., 2022). Students may find it hard to understand how to organize essays, use citations, and keep the right tone. Cultural differences can add to the struggle, as they may not be used to the critical thinking and argument styles expected in English. Limited exposure to academic texts and lack of feedback from teachers also slow their progress. To help EFL students succeed, they need proper support, practice, and resources designed to meet their learning needs.

Accordingly EFL students use different strategies to overcome challenges in academic writing (Taye & Mengesha, 2024; Riadil et al., 2023). One strategy the students use is by improving their vocabulary through reading academic materials, using learning aids, such as flashcard. This strategy can improve students' academic writing. Other strategy is by focusing on grammar and sentence structure by studying grammar books, doing exercises, and getting feedback from teachers or classmates. This strategy also significantly improve students' writing skills. Furthermore, they may attend workshops or watch online tutorials to improve their writing skills. Working with peers, such as in study groups or by sharing drafts for feedback, also helps improve their skills. By practicing these strategies, EFL students gradually build their confidence and ability in academic writing.

A current helpful method for EFL students to handle academic writing problems is by using AI tools like ChatGPT (Al-Sofi, 2024; Song & Song, 2023). These tools can give instant assistance, making it easier for students to improve grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. With AI, students also can get quick feedback on their writing, helping them spot and fix errors. AI tools can likewise explain complex academic rules, such as organizing essays, using citations, and writing in a formal style. Furthermore, ChatGPT can also provide examples, suggest better wording, or clarify grammar points, making it a great learning tool. Besides, the benefits mentioned above, these tools are easy to use and let students practice at their own speed.

While AI tools like ChatGPT offer valuable support for EFL students in academic writing, they also raise concerns about ethical use (Malik et al., 2024; Perkins, 2023; Farhi et al., 2023; Huallpa et al., 2023; Jarrah et al., 2023). One of the ethical issues is students rely too heavily on ChatGPT in academic writing. They struggle to

balance using ChatGPT for learning purposes while ensuring their work remains original and reflects their skills. Furthermore, they might lack clear guidelines from teachers or lecturers on the appropriate use of ChatGPT, increasing confusion about its role in academic tasks. This ethical ambiguity can lead to hesitation or misuse, affecting students' confidence and development.

Research on learning academic writing often explores a variety of topics. Some research are concerned with the challenges that students face, such as grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and understanding academic conventions like citations and organization (Li & Akram, 2024; Nenotek et al., 2022). Some research are also concerned with the role of cultural differences in shaping writing styles and how students adapt to different academic norms (Jessiman et al., 2022; Hagenauer et al., 2023; Grassini, 2023). While other topics are focused on the effectiveness of educational approaches such as feedback, peer cooperation, and writing workshops.

Research regarding the use of technology, such as AI tools and online platforms, to improve academic writing skills has gained traction. Some studies examine students' attitudes and motivation toward academic writing and the impact of these factors on performance. Other concerns include the role of critical thinking, argumentation skills, and the transition from general to specific writing. Current research on the use of AI in academic writing, notably tools like ChatGPT, focuses on their potential to enhance the writing process and increase student learning results (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Song & Song, 2023). However, ethical considerations, such as plagiarism, academic integrity, and the appropriate balance between AI support and students' efforts, remain relatively unexplored, making them crucial to this research.

Using AI tools like ChatGPT in academic writing raises a number of ethical considerations (Valova et al., 2024; Firat, 2023; Guleria et al., 2023). First, plagiarism is a serious issue, as students may rely too heavily on AI-generated content and pass it off as their own. Second, there are issues regarding academic integrity, as AI may provide shortcuts that impede the development of critical thinking and writing abilities. Third, AI may lead to over-reliance, in which students become reliant on technology, limiting their capacity to independently organize ideas, reason critically, and create creative content. Fourth, bias in AI models is a potential issue, since AI systems might repeat or amplify biases in training data,

resulting in inaccurate or unbalanced academic output. Finally, the lack of clear criteria on appropriate AI usage leads to confusion, with students unaware of how much assistance is permissible without breaking ethical standards. Addressing these problems necessitates clear ethical rules and a balanced usage of AI in academic writing.

METHOD

The study used a quantitative approach. A questionnaire was used as the primary tool for data collection, ensuring that responses could be measured numerically. The study sought to determine EFL students' insights into ChatGPT as a writing tool in academic writing.

The research's data collection process includes using a Google Form to deliver a questionnaire with five questions intended to investigate students' ethical opinions regarding the use of ChatGPT in academic writing. The questions focused on five aspects of ethical concerns on the application of Chat GPT in academic writing, such as plagiarism, academic integrity, the over-reliance on ChatGPT, bias, and the unclear guidance of using chatGPT. Each question offered respondents a range of options, typically from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," allowing them to express the intensity of their opinions. The Likert Scale format (as shown in this link:<https://forms.gle/8XT9CczBbbAkg38>) ensured that the responses were easy to quantify, enabling researchers to identify trends and measure the overall sentiment. By concentrating on ethical concerns, the questionnaire acquired key insights into how students perceive the appropriate use of ChatGPT and its possible risks. This structured approach provided a clear and detailed understanding of students' attitudes, forming the basis for data analysis and interpretation.

The research involved 54 students from the English Department of a private university in Medan, all of whom have studied academic writing course in the fifth semester. The demographic status of participants consist of 41 females and 13 males. These participants were purposively selected to explore their perceptions of ethical concerns related to using ChatGPT in academic writing. As students actively engaged in developing their academic writing skills, they provided valuable insights into how ChatGPT tools influence their work. The purpose of the survey was to find out how they perceive about topics like academic integrity, plagiarism, and the

proper usage of AI to help with tasks. By focusing on this specific group, the research captured data relevant to students directly impacted by academic writing challenges and ChatGPT.

The data analysis was conducted through google form sheet and manual statistic formula. The data analysis focused on students' ethical concerns about using ChatGPT in academic writing. First, the analysis highlighted that plagiarism was a significant issue, with students expressing concerns about over-reliance on AI-generated content, potentially claiming it as their own work. Second, academic integrity emerged as another critical concern, with participants noting that AI tools could provide shortcuts that hinder the development of essential skills like critical thinking and independent writing. Third, the risk of over-reliance on AI was evident, as students worried about becoming dependent on technology, reducing their ability to organize ideas, think critically, and create original content. Fourth, bias in AI models was identified as a potential problem, where AI might reflect or amplify existing biases in its training data, affecting accuracy. Lastly, the lack of clear guidelines on appropriate AI usage caused confusion, leaving students uncertain about ethical boundaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The issue of plagiarism

There are major plagiarism concerns when students utilize ChatGPT for academic writing, as it enables the creation of text that may be submitted as original work without proper acknowledgment. This behavior compromises plagiarism and diminishes the value of authentic intellectual contributions. Additionally, the challenge of differentiating between original and AI-generated work complicates fair grading for educators. The table below presents students' perspectives.

Table 1. *The issue of plagiarism in using ChatGPT in academic writing*

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	Strongly Agree	9	16.7%
16-20	Agree	33	61.1%
11-15	Neutral	10	18.5%
6-10	Disagree	2	3.7%
1-5	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total		54	100%

Table 1 indicates that the majority of students (61.1%) agree that using ChatGPT in academic writing can result in plagiarism. Additionally, 18.5% of students, representing 10 individuals, hold a neutral stance on this issue. A smaller group, comprising 16.7% or 9 students, strongly agrees that ChatGPT contributes to plagiarism in academic contexts. Only 3.7%, equivalent to 2 students, disagree with this perspective. These findings highlight a significant consensus among students regarding the potential for plagiarism when employing ChatGPT in academic writing.

The issue of plagiarism has also been highlighted by some scholars in their research. Jarrah et al., 2023 and Malik et al., 2024 emphasized that ChatGPT can serve as a useful tool for writing, however it is vital to adopt responsible practices to maintain academic integrity and ethical usage. Proper citation and acknowledgment of ChatGPT's contributions are key to preventing plagiarism and preserving the standards of scholarly writing. They further suggested that adhering to established citation guidelines allows authors to utilize ChatGPT effectively while ensuring responsible and ethical application.

Similarly, Cotton et al., 2024 confirm that ChatGPT, as an AI tool, provides various advantages such as enhancing student engagement, fostering collaboration, and improving accessibility. They also highlight concerns about its impact on academic honesty and the potential for plagiarism. In conclusion, the issue of plagiarism is of paramount when using ChatGPT, thus the teachers should address this issue when the students apply ChatGPT in academic writing. The teachers must inform the students to avoid plagiarism when applying ChatGPT.

Academic integrity

The issue of academic integrity with ChatGPT in student writing has become more imperative. As AI tools like ChatGPT are easier to access, students may be tempted to use them for content creation instead of doing their own research and analysis. This can lead to academic integrity if the AI-generated text is passed off as their own work without giving credit. Since students can quickly create text that looks original, it raises doubts about the truthfulness of their academic work. Institutions need to make sure students use AI properly, focusing on honest practices like proper citations. By teaching academic honesty and setting clear rules for AI use, educators can help

students maintain the integrity of their work while using these helpful tools. Table 2 below shows students' views on how using ChatGPT in academic writing can weaken academic integrity by offering shortcuts that bypass the need for critical thinking and personal effort.

Table 2. The issue of academic integrity

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	Strongly Agree	2	3.7%
16-20	Agree	28	51.9%
11-15	Neutral	20	37%
6-10	Disagree	4	7.4%
1-5	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total		54	100%

Table 2 presents students' perspectives on the implications of using AI, such as ChatGPT, for academic integrity in academic writing. The survey results indicate that a majority of students (51.9%) agree, with an additional 3.7% strongly agreeing, that the use of AI can undermine academic integrity. Conversely, approximately 37% of students express a neutral stance on the matter, while only 7.4% disagree with this viewpoint. The findings are in line with the concern of some scholars investigating the application of the ChatGPT in writing. (Mijwil et al., 2023) highlight that ChatGPT serves as a versatile tool capable of generating text in various formats, performing literature searches, and proposing titles for written work. However, relying on ChatGPT to choose topics with low similarity scores in plagiarism detection tools could result in ethical breaches. The study emphasizes that the use of AI applications in academic research raises concerns about academic ethics, compounded by the limited availability of effective technologies to detect such violations, which presents a notable challenge for academic writing.

Perkins (2023) emphasizes concerns regarding academic integrity associated with the use of ChatGPT for educational purposes. He highlights the tool's capability to generate original and coherent text that can evade detection by current technological methods and trained academic staff, presenting a significant challenge to maintaining academic integrity. Perkins concludes that the determination of plagiarism or a breach of academic integrity is not inherently tied to a student's use of AI tools but rather to whether their usage is transparently disclosed.

Over-reliance on Chat GPT or AI

Students who rely profoundly on ChatGPT for academic writing may experience a decline in their ability to independently organize ideas and think critically. This dependency can lead to a diminished engagement with the essential processes of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation required for academic success. By outsourcing the creation of coherent arguments and structured content to AI, students may miss the opportunity to practice these cognitive skills. Over time, this reliance may hinder their ability to construct logical narratives, assess the validity of sources, and develop original ideas. Critical thinking, a cornerstone of academic and professional growth, is cultivated through active problem-solving and reflection, which may be undermined when students depend on AI-generated content. Furthermore, this practice can foster a superficial understanding of topics, as students might prioritize completing assignments over truly engaging with the material, ultimately compromising their intellectual development and academic integrity. Table 3 illustrates students' perspectives on whether they are overly reliant on ChatGPT for academic writing.

Table 3. *The issue of Over-reliance on AI-generated content*

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	Strongly Agree	7	13%
16-20	Agree	22	40.7%
11-15	Neutral	16	29.6%
6-10	Disagree	8	14.8%
1-5	Strongly Disagree	1	1.9%
Total		54	100%

Table 3 highlights the issue of excessive reliance on ChatGPT in academic writing. The survey results reveal that a significant proportion of students (40.7%) agree, with an additional 13% strongly agreeing, that the use of AI in academic writing can lead to over-reliance on ChatGPT. In contrast, about 29.6% of students remain neutral on the matter, while 14.8% disagree and 1.9% strongly disagree with this perspective.

The findings have also raised significant concern among scholars (Farhi et al., 2023; Al-Sofi, 2024). They noted that students are increasingly dependent on AI tools such as ChatGPT for educational tasks, particularly academic writing. These tools aid in content generation, idea organization, and the production of well-structured texts, often streamlining the completion of assignments by saving time and

effort. However, while these tools enhance efficiency and offer learning support, they may also reduce students' involvement in essential cognitive processes, such as independent thinking, analytical reasoning, and creativity. Therefore, the implication of the results suggest the teachers or lecturers be aware of this issue and they should address it at any time students apply AI or ChatGPT in academic writing.

Bias in AI model

Using ChatGPT in academic writing raises concerns about biased responses, which may come from the data it was trained on. ChatGPT learns from large amounts of publicly available data, which can include biases, stereotypes, or inaccuracies. As a result, the content it generates might reflect these biases, leading to incorrect or one-sided information. In academic writing, where accuracy and fairness are important, such biases can weaken the quality and credibility of the work. Students might unknowingly use AI-generated content that includes these biases, affecting their writing. This emphasizes the need to carefully check AI-generated material and compare it with trusted sources to maintain academic integrity and factual accuracy. Relying too much on AI without this caution may result in spreading incorrect or biased information. Table 4 shows the students' perceptions on the issue of bias concern using the data revealed by ChatGPT.

Table 4. *The issue of bias in AI model*

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	Strongly Agree	5	9.3%
16-20	Agree	25	46.3%
11-15	Neutral	20	37%
6-10	Disagree	3	5.6%
1-5	Strongly Disagree	1	1.9%
Total		54	100%

Table 4 highlights concerns about biased responses from ChatGPT in academic writing. The survey results show that a notable percentage of students (46.3%) agree, with 9.3% strongly agreeing, that using AI in academic writing can lead to biased information. On the other hand, around 37% of students express a neutral opinion, while 5.6% disagree and 1.9% strongly disagree with this view.

The issue of biased data or information generated by AI, particularly through tools like ChatGPT, has been extensively discussed by several scholars, including Ray (2023), Rozado,

Rozado (2023), Duncan & McCulloh (2023). These researchers agree that biased information is frequently produced by AI models, a consequence of the data on which these models are trained. They highlight that such biases can manifest in various forms, affecting the accuracy and objectivity of the content generated. Given this, the scholars stress the importance for students who use ChatGPT to be aware of these potential biases and exercise caution when incorporating AI-generated content into their academic work. By doing so, students can ensure that their work remains credible, accurate, and free from unintentional misinformation. This growing concern calls for a more critical and thoughtful approach to the use of AI in academic contexts, where the integrity of the content is paramount.

The lack of clear guidelines

The absence of clear guidelines on the use of ChatGPT in academic writing has created significant confusion regarding what constitutes ethical use of the tool. While ChatGPT can be a valuable resource for generating ideas and drafting content, there is little consensus on how it should be appropriately integrated into academic work. This lack of clarity leads to uncertainty about whether using AI-generated text is acceptable, and if so, to what extent. Students and educators alike struggle to define boundaries between legitimate support and academic misconduct. For instance, it is unclear whether using ChatGPT for brainstorming or content generation without proper attribution is considered plagiarism or ethical assistance. Without explicit rules, students may inadvertently cross ethical lines, compromising academic integrity. This ambiguity emphasizes the need for institutions to develop clear policies on AI use, ensuring that students understand how to responsibly use tools like ChatGPT while maintaining scholarly standards.

Table 5. *The issue of lack of clear guidelines*

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	Strongly Agree	6	11.1%
16-20	Agree	30	55.6%
11-15	Neutral	18	33.3%
6-10	Disagree	0	0%
1-5	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total		54	100%

Table 5 underscores concerns regarding the lack of clear guidelines for using ChatGPT in

academic writing. The survey results reveal that a significant proportion of students (55.6%) agree, with an additional 11.1% strongly agreeing, that the use of AI in academic writing can result in biased information. In contrast, approximately 33.3% of students remain neutral on the issue, while no students expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with this perspective.

Several scholars (Oviedo-Trespalacios et al., 2023; Sallam, 2023; Wang et al., 2023) have raised concerns about the lack of clear guidelines regarding the use of ChatGPT in academic settings. They emphasize that the absence of defined rules creates confusion about what constitutes ethical use, potentially leading to misuse or unintentional breaches of academic integrity. This uncertainty highlights the need for universities and institutions to establish clear, consistent policies for AI tool usage.

The novelty of the research lies in its exploration of students' ethical concerns regarding ChatGPT use in academic writing. The results indicate that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who have participated in academic writing courses have expressed significant concerns regarding the ethical use of ChatGPT in academic writing. These students appear to recognize the potential ethical issues related to relying on AI-generated content, such as plagiarism or academic dishonesty. As highlighted by Albayati (2024), Eke (2023) and Rosyanafi et al., (2023), there is a growing awareness among students regarding the ethical concerns associated with the use of ChatGPT. Despite growing awareness, a small number of students remain unaware of the ethical issues surrounding the use of ChatGPT in academic writing. These students may not fully recognize the risks of plagiarism, bias, or academic dishonesty associated with relying on AI tools, highlighting the need for further education on these matters (Yu, 2023; Rosyanafi et al., 2023).

Their concerns reflect an awareness of the importance of maintaining academic integrity while using AI tools like ChatGPT, highlighting the need for clearer guidelines and ethical standards in academic settings (Mijwil et al., 2023; Oviedo-Trespalacios et al., 2023; Perkins, 2023; Sallam, 2023). These findings suggest that students in academic writing courses are more attuned to the ethical implications of AI use in academic writing.

CONCLUSION

This study has concluded that the majority of students are aware of the ethical concerns associated with ChatGPT, although a small portion remains either unaware or uncertain about these issues. They agreed that the practice of ChatGPT in academic writing has led to violation in ethical concerns, such as plagiarism and academic ethics. These findings, therefore, is essential for students to receive further education on the ethical implications of using ChatGPT in academic writing. Additionally, establishing clear guidelines for the use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, is necessary to mitigate ethical concerns and ensure proper academic practices.

The findings of this study have implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the research highlights the need for more focus on ethical guidelines for AI tools like ChatGPT in academic contexts. It shows that students' understanding of AI in academic writing is complex, pointing out gaps in existing theories of academic integrity. Practically, the study suggests that ethical education about AI should be included in academic programs. Universities and teachers should focus on helping students understand the ethical issues related to AI, such as plagiarism, academic integrity, and etc. In addition, clear guidelines for using AI in academic writing should be established to support academic integrity and encourage responsible use of AI or ChatGPT.

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