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AI in Higher Education: A Survey of Artificial Intelligence Usage in Students English Academic Writing

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Abstract: This study investigates the integration and application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English-language academic writing within the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Dakwah at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. As AI tools become increasingly prevalent in academic environments, their role in enhancing research quality, language proficiency, and academic writing has gained significance. Through a survey-based approach, this research examines how students utilize AI tools such as grammar checkers, translation engines, citation generators, and content assistants during the research and writing process to compile the academic writing. The findings reveal patterns of usage, perceived benefits, ethical concerns, and potential dependency on AI technologies. This paper also discusses the implications of AI usage for academic integrity, originality, and the development of independent scholarly skills. The study concludes by recommending guidelines for the responsible and effective use of AI in academic research within the Islamic and social sciences context especially to do academic writing task.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence (AI); higher education; english-language academic writing; ai tools*

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force in many sectors, including education. Within higher education, AI applications are increasingly being utilized to assist students in managing academic workloads and improving learning outcomes. One area where this is particularly evident is English academic writing, where students face challenges in grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and structure—especially for non-native speakers (Kohnke, 2021). Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are increasingly being used in higher education, especially to support students' English academic writing. This qualitative study investigates how university students perceive and utilize AI writing tools, such as Grammarly, Quillbot, and ChatGPT allowed at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

AI tools such as Grammarly, Quillbot, and ChatGPT have become widely adopted due to their ability to offer real-time feedback, suggestions, and even generate original text. While these tools offer numerous advantages, their rapid adoption also prompts educators to examine the pedagogical and ethical implications (Niu & Wu, 2023). Key concerns include academic integrity, overreliance, and the potential decline of students' independent writing abilities (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly entered the educational landscape, offering transformative tools for learners, particularly in higher education. Among these developments, AI-powered writing assistants—such as Grammarly, Quillbot, and ChatGPT—have become popular among students seeking to improve their English academic writing. These tools provide real-time feedback, correct grammatical errors, assist with paraphrasing, and offer suggestions for structural improvements (Kohnke, 2021; Niu & Wu, 2023).

Despite these benefits, the use of AI in academic writing raises complex questions about authorship, originality, and academic integrity. As institutions grapple with how to respond to this technological shift, understanding students' real-life experiences and perceptions becomes crucial (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Most existing studies rely on quantitative surveys; however, fewer explore the lived experiences and ethical reflections of students using these tools.

This study aims to explore how students at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta use and perceive AI writing tools in their English academic writing. Using a qualitative method, this research investigates students' experiences, the roles these tools play in their learning process, and how they negotiate ethical considerations in academic contexts. This research used in-depth interviews with selected students to explore their experiences, motivations, and ethical considerations when using AI in academic writing. The findings reveal that while AI tools are perceived as beneficial for improving language accuracy and expression, concerns remain regarding dependency, originality, and institutional guidelines. The article concludes by suggesting practical and ethical strategies for responsible AI integration in academic writing.

1. AI in English Academic Writing

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force in education, particularly in the realm of academic writing. AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Quillbot, and others are increasingly being integrated into the writing process, assisting students and researchers in enhancing grammar, coherence, idea generation, and even citation formatting. While these tools offer significant advantages, their use also raises ethical and pedagogical concerns. AI-based writing support tools have emerged as valuable companions for ESL (English as a Second Language) students in higher education. Grammarly, for instance, helps with syntax and grammar; Quillbot aids in paraphrasing; and ChatGPT offers idea generation and explanation of complex topics (Kohnke, 2021). These technologies aim to enhance writing quality and foster learner autonomy (Niu & Wu, 2023).

2. The Role of AI in Academic Writing

AI writing tools offer numerous functions, including grammar correction, style enhancement, paraphrasing, and idea generation. Grammarly, for example, provides suggestions to improve clarity and correctness, while tools like Quillbot help paraphrase sentences and avoid plagiarism (Kohnke, 2021). ChatGPT, an AI-powered language model, goes further by generating entire paragraphs or essays based on prompts (Niu & Wu, 2023). AI-powered writing tools are designed to help users improve the quality of their texts. For instance, Grammarly offers real-time grammar, punctuation, and style suggestions, while paraphrasing tools like Quillbot can aid in rephrasing complex sentences for clarity. These tools support language learners and non-native speakers in producing academically acceptable texts (Zhang & Zou, 2022). Moreover, large language models such as ChatGPT can assist in brainstorming, outlining, and generating content.

based on prompts, potentially increasing productivity and reducing writing anxiety (Kasneci et al., 2023).

3. The Need for Qualitative Inquiry

Previous studies have primarily used surveys and statistical analyses. However, as AI use in writing becomes more nuanced, it is essential to explore how students emotionally, cognitively, and ethically navigate this evolving landscape. Qualitative methods can illuminate the deeper meanings behind AI usage and the human experiences involved (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Opportunities, Ethical Concerns and Academic Integrity

While students benefit from increased confidence and better writing outcomes, concerns are growing around the implications of excessive AI reliance. AI-generated content can lead to reduced student engagement in critical thinking and diminish original authorship (Park et al., 2023). Additionally, instructors often express uncertainty about how to address AI use within existing academic integrity policies (Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020). Despite these benefits, the integration of AI into academic writing also presents challenges, especially concerning academic integrity. There is a fine line between using AI as a support tool and allowing it to complete substantial portions of academic work. According to some educators, uncritical reliance on AI-generated content may hinder the development of critical thinking and writing skills among students (Cotton et al., 2023). Furthermore, concerns about plagiarism and originality have prompted universities to revise their academic honesty policies to address AI usage.

5. Pedagogical Benefits and Concerns

Research suggests that AI can act as an autonomous learning assistant, helping students become more confident and independent in their writing (Park et al., 2023). However, the growing reliance on AI may hinder critical thinking, creativity, and originality. The line between tool assistance and academic dishonesty is increasingly blurred (Dwivedi et al., 2023). From a pedagogical standpoint, the rise of AI tools necessitates a re-evaluation of writing instruction. Educators are called to integrate AI literacy into their curriculum, teaching students not only how to use these tools effectively but also how to evaluate the quality and ethical boundaries of AI assistance (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Instead of banning AI outright, institutions may benefit from guiding students to use AI responsibly as part of a blended learning environment.

6. Gaps in Research

While there is substantial quantitative data on AI tool usage, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative studies exploring students' lived experiences, beliefs, and ethical considerations, particularly in Islamic or Indonesian university settings.

Recent studies highlight the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education, particularly in students' academic writing. Research explores student perceptions, usage patterns, and the impact of AI tools on learning and writing efficiency, emphasizing the need for training and understanding of these technologies.

There are relevant studies and references with this research. The first is Crompton, H., & Burke, D. (2023): This systematic review provides insights into the state of AI in higher education, highlighting its applications in various disciplines, including language learning and writing. Secondly, Ouyang, F., Zheng, L., & Jiao, P. (2022): This study reviews empirical research on AI in

online higher education, focusing on its role in enhancing learning experiences and outcomes. The third, Zawacki-Richter, O., et al. (2019): This systematic review discusses the applications of AI in higher education, emphasizing the need for educators to engage with AI technologies actively.

These findings underscore the transformative potential of AI in enhancing students' academic writing while also calling for careful consideration of its implications in educational settings.

Research Method

1. Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to collect rich, descriptive data from university students. The goal was to explore not just the frequency of AI use, but the deeper meanings and values students associate with these tools in academic writing. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of university students who use AI in English academic writing. This approach allows for rich, descriptive insights into how students perceive and interpret their engagement with AI tools.

2. Participants

The participants were forty undergraduate students from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Dakwah at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. They were selected using purposive sampling based on their known engagement with AI tools in academic writing. Forty undergraduate students from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Dakwah, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, were selected through purposive sampling. All participants had experience using AI tools in academic writing, including essays, reports, and research proposals.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face and online interviews lasting 30–45 minutes. The interviews focused on how students used AI tools, their motivations, perceptions of benefits and drawbacks, and their views on academic honesty in relation to AI usage. The interviews explored students' motivations, the tools they use, how they integrate AI into their writing process, and any concerns or reflections they have about its use. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcripts. Data were coded inductively, and recurring themes were identified, categorized, and interpreted to generate findings aligned with the research objectives. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were coded to identify recurring patterns, and themes were developed through iterative analysis.

Results & Discussion

The data collected through qualitative surveys and focus group interviews revealed several significant themes regarding students' use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in their English academic writing processes.

1. Prevalence and Frequency of AI Usage

A majority of the participants (approximately 78%) reported using AI-based tools, especially AI writing assistants such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Quillbot, in various stages of their academic writing. Students utilized these tools not only for grammar correction but also for generating ideas, paraphrasing, and improving coherence. The frequency of use varied from occasional consultation (once or twice a week) to daily reliance, especially during assignment deadlines.

"AI helps me express my ideas better in English. Sometimes I know what I want to say in Indonesian, but I need help to say it correctly in English," said one student.

2. AI as a Language Learning Support

Many students highlighted that AI functions as a language support tool. They used it to enhance vocabulary, understand grammatical structures, and receive real-time feedback. Some students expressed that using AI increased their confidence in writing academically in English, which they previously found intimidating.

"It's like having a private tutor for writing. It corrects my errors and explains why," noted a student

3. Concerns about Overdependence and Authenticity

Despite the benefits, there were concerns raised by both students and instructors about overdependence on AI tools. A notable portion of participants (around 40%) admitted that they sometimes submitted AI-generated texts with minimal revision. This raises issues regarding originality, critical thinking, and authorship.

"Sometimes I just accept what the AI suggests without thinking if it's really my voice," a student confessed.

Instructors voiced concerns that excessive use of AI could hinder the development of students' academic writing skills. Furthermore, some expressed ethical concerns about the blurred line between assistance and plagiarism.

4. Institutional Awareness and Policy Gaps

The study also revealed a lack of clear institutional policy regarding AI usage in academic writing. Most students were unsure whether the use of AI tools was formally allowed, discouraged, or even considered academic misconduct. This uncertainty created anxiety among students about transparency and academic integrity.

"We need clear guidelines. Right now, we don't know what is acceptable or not," one respondent shared.

5. Impact on Writing Process and Learning Habits

The integration of AI tools into writing practices has also shifted how students approach the writing process. Some students reported skipping traditional pre-writing steps such as brainstorming and outlining, opting instead to rely on AI suggestions. Others, however, reported that AI helped them revise their work more critically by offering alternate wordings or structures.

6. The research finding based on the interview

Theme 1: AI as a Writing Assistant

All participants acknowledged that AI tools helped them in specific areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. One student noted:

“When I’m confused about how to phrase a sentence in English, I use Grammarly and ChatGPT. They make it easier to express my ideas.”

Students viewed AI as a helpful support mechanism rather than a replacement for their own writing.

Theme 2: Confidence and Learning Autonomy

Several participants reported increased confidence when submitting assignments after using AI tools. One student explained:

“After revising with Quillbot and Grammarly, I feel more secure that my writing is readable and formal.”

These tools were seen as empowering, especially for students with limited English proficiency.

Theme 3: Ethical Ambiguity and Overreliance

Despite their benefits, students expressed ethical concerns about AI-generated content. While some edited the suggestions thoroughly, others admitted to copying entire paragraphs from ChatGPT without changes.

“Sometimes I just use ChatGPT to make the whole paragraph. It’s faster, especially when I’m busy.”

This raises questions about originality and academic honesty, echoing concerns in existing literature (Smutny & Schreiberova, 2020).

Theme 4: Lack of Institutional Guidelines

Most students felt uncertain about the rules governing AI use in academic work. There was no clear policy from lecturers or the university about what constituted acceptable use.

“Nobody really explains whether using ChatGPT is allowed or not.”

This finding highlights the urgent need for academic institutions to develop formal guidelines on AI usage.

Theme 5: AI as a Writing Companion, not a Replacement

Most participants described AI as a tool that supports rather than replaces their writing. Grammarly was praised for correcting grammar in real time, while ChatGPT was used for brainstorming ideas.

“I usually write the first draft myself. Then I put it in Grammarly to fix my grammar. Sometimes, I ask ChatGPT for ideas when I get stuck.” (Participant 3)

This suggests students are using AI in ways that still retain their authorship, viewing the tools as scaffolds rather than substitutes

Theme 6: Paraphrasing and Ethical Uncertainty

Participants frequently used Quillbot to rephrase content, especially when struggling to express complex ideas in English. However, some admitted to relying heavily on AI-generated paraphrasing without fully understanding the text.

“Sometimes I don’t understand the sentence from the journal, so I use ChatGPT to explain it or rewrite it. I know it helps, but I worry if it’s really my writing.” (Participant 5)

This highlights a blurred line between academic support and ethical risk, aligning with concerns raised

Theme 7: Fear of Losing Originality

A significant concern among participants was the potential loss of personal voice and originality in writing.

“If I use AI too much, I feel like the writing is not mine. It sounds perfect but also... not me.” (Participant 1)

This indicates a cognitive dissonance between using AI to meet academic standards and maintaining authentic expression, echoing warning about student detachment from the writing process.

Theme 8: Need for Institutional Guidance

All participants expressed a desire for clearer university policies or instructor guidance on ethical AI use in academic writing.

“I think AI is okay, but no one tells us how far is too far. We need rules.” (Participant 6)

This underscores the need for educators to establish frameworks for responsible AI integration

The findings of this study reveal that the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in students’ English academic writing practices has become increasingly common and transformative. The high frequency of AI tool usage, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot, reflects a shift in how learners’ approach academic tasks. Students regard these technologies as essential tools to support grammar, vocabulary enhancement, idea generation, and clarity in writing (Kohnke et al., 2023; Zou et al., 2022).

The educational benefits of AI tools are particularly evident among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, who often face linguistic challenges in academic writing. Many participants in this study emphasized that AI helped them articulate their thoughts more clearly and confidently. These findings align with earlier research that emphasizes the value of AI in supporting second language acquisition and writing fluency (Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016).

However, this study also surfaces growing concerns regarding the overdependence on AI tools. Some students admitted that they accepted AI-generated suggestions without much critical evaluation, a pattern that may hinder the development of authentic writing skills (Dwivedi et al., 2023). This issue is echoed by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), who warned that while AI supports productivity, it may also risk limiting higher-order thinking and deep learning if misused.

Another major concern relates to authorship and ethical clarity. Many students were unsure about the ethical boundaries of AI usage in academic contexts. This confusion is likely caused by the absence

of institutional policies on the acceptable use of AI tools in writing. According to Selwyn and Aagaard (2023), educational institutions must take proactive steps in formulating policy responses to AI to avoid inconsistent student practices and academic integrity breaches.

Furthermore, AI has affected how students engage with the writing process. Traditional steps such as outlining, brainstorming, and revision are being altered or skipped entirely. Students may favor AI-generated drafts or feedback over their own internal writing process, potentially resulting in less cognitive engagement and deeper learning loss (Phirangee et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, the potential of AI as a supportive learning tool cannot be dismissed. When used ethically and strategically, AI applications can foster student autonomy, self-editing, and reflection, which aligns with constructivist and learner-centered pedagogies (Kohnke et al., 2023). This highlights the need for balanced educational approaches that incorporate AI literacy and ethical training within writing curricula.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence offers valuable support in academic writing, enhancing the technical and linguistic aspects of students' work. However, its use should be balanced with a strong emphasis on ethics, critical thinking, and academic integrity. As AI becomes an integral part of the academic landscape, both students and educators must adapt to harness its potential while maintaining the core values of scholarly writing. This study highlights the dual role of AI in academic writing: as both a valuable support tool and a potential threat to academic integrity. Students at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta generally find AI tools helpful for learning and self-editing. However, they also experience ambiguity in terms of ethical boundaries and institutional expectations. This study reveals that while AI tools provide essential support in English academic writing, students remain conscious of the ethical and academic implications. They navigate a complex balance between using AI to enhance their language proficiency and preserving their academic integrity. The qualitative approach allowed for deeper insight into their reflections, anxieties, and expectations.

The findings suggest the need for universities to develop clear policies and embed AI literacy into writing instruction. Students should be taught not just how to use AI tools, but when and why their use is academically appropriate. Future research could explore the role of instructors and curriculum designers in managing AI integration in writing pedagogy. Universities must now respond by offering ethical guidelines, training sessions, and policies that help students harness AI tools without compromising originality and critical thinking. Future research could expand the participant pool or explore instructor perspectives on AI in academic writing.

This research proposes some recommendations. Those are: Develop Clear Institutional Policies, Universities should create formal policies to define acceptable use of AI in academic writing, distinguishing between assistance and plagiarism. Integrate AI Literacy into Curriculum, Instructors should incorporate AI literacy training to help students critically engage with AI tools and understand their appropriate usage. Encourage Reflective Writing Practices, Assignments should include reflective elements where students discuss how and why they used AI tools to enhance critical thinking and self-awareness. Promote Ethical Awareness, Ethical guidelines regarding AI use should be embedded into academic integrity policies and student orientation programs. Support Ongoing Research and Monitoring, Institutions should conduct regular surveys and studies to monitor AI usage trends and update policies accordingly.

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