



Integrating ChatGPT into Academic Writing: An Exploration of EFL Undergraduate Students' Challenges and Strategies at Private Universities in Lampung

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Abstract

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology is accelerating rapidly, making it easier for English for Foreign Language (EFL) students to support their academic activities. This study aims to examine students' challenges and strategies in utilizing ChatGPT for their academic writing. The study focuses on private Islamic higher education institutions in Lampung Province by including 65 English undergraduate students. Data were collected through a structured Yes/No questionnaire designed to assess various aspects of students' activities. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that the level of ChatGPT use in the writing process was very high and covered various stages of academic writing activities. Most students (96.9%) used ChatGPT to assist in writing opinion texts and to generate ideas or outlines, while 95.4% utilized it to check or revise the organization of their writing. Its use for language development was also quite dominant, with 81.5% of students using ChatGPT to improve grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, AI Literacy, ChatGPT, EFL Writing, Higher Education*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly influenced various aspects of education, particularly in the domain of academic writing. One of the most prominent innovations is ChatGPT, a generative language model developed by OpenAI that employs Natural Language Processing (NLP) to simulate conversations, provide feedback, and generate structured text (Gilson et al., 2023). ChatGPT has increasingly been adopted to support EFL students in producing coherent, logical, and contextually appropriate texts.

Opinion writing is one of the most demanding genres of academic writing because it requires students to express personal viewpoints, construct logical arguments, and support claims with credible evidence. For EFL learners, these requirements often pose challenges related to argument organization, lexical variety, and critical reasoning. ChatGPT offers potential support in overcoming these issues by providing real-time feedback, vocabulary suggestions, and structural guidance. Previous studies have explored the integration of ChatGPT in higher education, especially in developing students' writing competence (Fuchs, 2023; Dewi, 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2024). The majority of these studies, however, have been carried out at state universities, where students typically have better access to digital resources and more structured academic writing training. Private universities, like Muhammadiyah University in Lampung, on the other hand, deal with unique difficulties, such as lower levels of English proficiency, less exposure to real-world writing practice, and a lack of institutional integration of technology resources. Therefore, in order to give a more thorough knowledge of how AI-based tools might improve writing performance across various educational contexts, it is imperative to examine how ChatGPT is used to facilitate opinion writing among EFL learners at private universities.

ChatGPT is beneficial in generating ideas, refining text organization, and improving grammatical accuracy (Apriani et al., 2025; Arifin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, challenges such as unequal digital access, overreliance on AI, potential plagiarism, and the difficulty of evaluating AI-generated content remain pressing issues (Royani & Sihombing, 2024; Yazid & Dzulfikri, 2024). Furthermore, some students perceive AI feedback as overly generic and insufficiently tailored to specific tasks (Liu et al., 2024). These issues highlight the need for localized, context-based investigations that explore how EFL students actually engage with ChatGPT in their academic writing.

Indonesia is grappling with ethical and pedagogical issues as AI tools become more embedded in EFL writing instruction (Raharjo & Rohmadi, 2025; Yunita et al., 2025). Studies involving English lecturers highlight concerns about data privacy, fairness, academic integrity, and student autonomy with AI-assisted writing tools (Yunita et al., 2025). Simultaneously, national policy reviews and empirical work indicate infrastructural disparities, particularly in less urban or less-resourced provinces, which constrain the ethical governance and meaningful pedagogical use of AI (Raharjo & Rohmadi, 2025). Regions such as East Java show high student uptake of AI tools for writing efficiency, grammar help, and idea generation, though with recurring concerns about over-dependence and authenticity (Purnomo & Andriani, 2025). Lampung, which shares some of those regional challenges in digital literacy and institutional support

(Eryansyah et al., 2019; Istiara & Hastomo, 2023), represents a critical case for examining how students navigate AI in opinion writing, how educators balance ethical issues, and what pedagogical practices can ensure AI tools support character-based education and writing integrity rather than compromise them.

Literature Review

The Role of ChatGPT in Higher Education

Since its public release in late 2022, ChatGPT has rapidly transformed higher education, particularly in language learning and writing. Review studies indicate that ChatGPT automates lower-level writing tasks such as grammar correction and drafting, allowing students to focus on higher-order skills like argumentation and analysis (Sadikin & Santosa, 2024; Yang et al., 2024). However, this shift also raises ethical and equity concerns related to AI bias, data privacy, and unequal access to technology (Munaye et al., 2025; Panagopoulou et al., 2023). Indonesia is similarly facing ethical and pedagogical challenges as AI tools become embedded in EFL writing instruction (Raharjo & Rohmadi, 2025; Yunita et al., 2025). Studies involving English lecturers highlight concerns about fairness, academic integrity, and student autonomy when AI is integrated into writing practices. These findings suggest that although ChatGPT provides substantial pedagogical benefits, its use requires clear ethical frameworks, equitable access, and responsible governance to ensure fair and effective educational outcomes.

Benefits of ChatGPT in Academic Writing

Research consistently shows that ChatGPT assists students in drafting, revising, and refining texts, enhancing both linguistic accuracy and organizational quality (Apriani et al., 2025; Gultom et al., 2024; Mahapatra, 2024). Its affordances, such as error recognition, vocabulary enrichment, and genre-sensitive feedback, promote learner autonomy, self-efficacy, and engagement. Previous findings reveal that ChatGPT can elevate writing scores, support idea generation, and enhance coherence and cohesion (Arifin et al., 2025; Soelistiyowati et al., 2024). Furthermore, by providing scaffolding through suggestions and revision support, ChatGPT allows EFL students to transition from mechanical revision to deeper cognitive processes like argument development and synthesis, thereby improving writing competence. Research also emphasizes that AI-assisted learning can foster meaningful interaction between technology and pedagogy when applied within guided academic frameworks (Yang et al., 2024; Fuchs, 2023; Dewi, 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Challenges and Ethical Issues in AI-Assisted Writing

Despite its advantages, ChatGPT presents challenges such as overreliance, generic feedback, and ethical concerns regarding plagiarism, authenticity, and data privacy (Royani & Sihombing, 2024; Yazid & Dzulfikri, 2024). Some students find AI-generated feedback too general and struggle to assess the credibility of its content (Liu et al., 2024; Al-Alami, 2024). Research indicates that unequal access to AI tools can exacerbate digital inequities between students at state and private universities

(Munaye et al., 2025; Panagopoulou et al., 2023). These issues highlight the importance of developing critical literacy, guided prompt training, and plagiarism awareness to ensure that ChatGPT complements rather than replaces human judgment and creativity in academic writing.

ChatGPT Use in the Indonesian EFL Context

Within Indonesia, empirical studies on AI-assisted writing are emerging. Hidayat and Sujarwati (2024) found that undergraduates perceived ChatGPT as useful for improving grammar accuracy and generating ideas, yet expressed concerns about plagiarism and overdependence. Similarly, Arifin et al. (2025) reported that while ChatGPT supported lexical variety and coherence, students faced challenges in creating effective prompts and evaluating AI feedback. Azwar and Jayanti (2025), using the Technology Acceptance Model, showed that students valued ChatGPT for writing efficiency but questioned the reliability of its responses. At a broader level, Purnomo and Andriani (2025) revealed that although many Indonesian students employ AI tools for grammar checking and idea generation, concerns about authenticity persist. These studies indicate that while ChatGPT offers pedagogical value, its integration must be accompanied by structured training and ethical awareness.

ChatGPT in Private University Settings

Private universities, unlike state institutions, often face limitations in infrastructure, AI literacy, and digital access. Sugiarto and Suhono (2023) observed that students at Islamic private universities in Lampung showed enthusiasm for using ChatGPT but encountered unstable internet access and lacked institutional guidance. Similarly, Sangadji et al. (2025) found that postgraduate students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Pringsewu demonstrated positive perceptions of ChatGPT yet lacked sufficient awareness of ethical use and academic honesty. This aligns with Eryansyah et al. (2019) and Istiara & Hastomo (2023), who noted disparities in digital literacy and infrastructure between urban and provincial institutions. Such limitations may hinder the effective integration of AI-based writing tools unless supported by targeted training and institutional policies that promote responsible use.

Research Gap and Focus

Although ChatGPT is widely used for academic writing, few studies have specifically explored its role in opinion writing a genre that requires critical reasoning, evidence-based argumentation, and logical coherence. Research shows that while ChatGPT aids in idea generation and structural organization, it lacks the intrinsic capability to foster evaluative reasoning or nuanced argumentation (Mahapatra, 2024; Apriani et al., 2025; Arifin et al., 2025). In the Indonesian EFL context, findings reveal that ChatGPT can enhance coherence and vocabulary development but does not guarantee improved argument quality without instructor feedback and critical engagement (Hidayat & Sujarwati, 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining how EFL students at private Islamic universities in Lampung utilize ChatGPT for opinion writing, emphasizing their activities, challenges, and strategies in navigating AI assisted academic writing.

Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to examine challenges and strategies of English Education students in using ChatGPT for their academic writing. The participants involved in this research consisted of fifth- and seventh-semester undergraduate students enrolled in English Education programs at Muhammadiyah universities in Lampung Province. There are five Muhammadiyah universities in the region; however, only three institutions were included in this research: Universitas Muhammadiyah Metro (UM Metro), Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi (UMKO), and Universitas Muhammadiyah Pringsewu (UMPRI). These universities were selected based on academic and logistical considerations, including adequate student enrolment, program availability, and accessibility for data collection. Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalianda (UM Kalianda) was excluded because it did not offer an English Education program, while Universitas Muhammadiyah Lampung (UML) was excluded due to its limited number of English majors (fewer than five active students) and restricted accessibility. The final sample comprised 65 respondents across the three universities, ensuring representativeness of the private Islamic higher education context in Lampung and adequate data for descriptive analysis.

The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, targeting students who meet the following criteria: (1) they are active students during the 2024–2025 academic year, and (2) they have used ChatGPT at least three times in the past six months to assist with writing, particularly opinion texts. The threshold of three uses was determined based on findings by Arifin et al. (2025), which indicate that repeated and sustained engagement with AI writing tools allows learners to move beyond initial experimentation toward more strategic and reflective use. This aligns with Hyland's (2000) argument that academic literacy develops through recurrent and reflective writing practices, a perspective especially relevant for examining how EFL learners integrate ChatGPT into their writing processes.

Data were collected through a structured, closed-ended Yes/No questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument consisted of three main sections: (a) students' activities when using ChatGPT, such as creating prompts, generating ideas, drafting paragraphs, and editing texts; (b) challenges encountered, including plagiarism, accuracy, and prompt formulation difficulties; and (c) strategies employed to overcome these challenges, such as revising prompts, verifying AI outputs, and integrating personal input into ChatGPT-generated suggestions. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, processed through Microsoft Excel. This method provided a clear overview of students' engagement patterns, major challenges, and adaptive strategies without inferring causal relationships, aligning with the study's objective to describe the phenomenon of ChatGPT use in EFL opinion writing at private universities in Lampung.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The quantitative data obtained from 65 respondents demonstrate a distinct pattern of extensive integration and adaptive utilization of Generative Artificial Intelligence

(GenAI) within academic contexts. At the same time, the findings underscore notable ethical implications and gaps in critical literacy skills associated with its use. The subsequent section presents a synthesis of the principal findings generated through the Descriptive SPSS analysis across the study's four major categories.

Category	Indicator (Questions/Statements)	Valid Percent (NO)	Valid Percent (YES)
I. Activities			
	I have used ChatGPT to help me write opinion texts or other academic writing tasks.	3.1%	96.9%
	I used ChatGPT to generate ideas or outlines before writing.	3.1%	96.9%
	I used ChatGPT to improve my grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure.	18.5%	81.5%
	I asked ChatGPT to find references or supporting information for my writing.	7.7%	92.3%
	I used ChatGPT to check or revise the organization of my writing.	4.6%	95.4%
II. Benefits			
	I think ChatGPT made my writing process easier.	6.2%	93.8%
	Using ChatGPT increased my confidence in academic writing.	23.1%	76.9%
	ChatGPT helped me understand how to write an opinion essay better.	6.2%	93.8%
	ChatGPT was useful in developing my ideas and arguments.	7.7%	92.3%
	ChatGPT motivated me to complete my writing tasks faster.	15.4%	84.6%
III. Challenges			
	I found it difficult to evaluate whether ChatGPT's answers were accurate.	33.8%	66.2%
	I had trouble understanding the meaning or context of ChatGPT's feedback.	56.9%	43.1%
	I was worried that ChatGPT's answers might cause unintentional plagiarism.	13.8%	86.2%

	I found it difficult to make effective prompts to get relevant responses.	40.0%	60.0%
	I felt confused about how to combine my own ideas with ChatGPT's suggestions.	66.2%	33.8%
IV. Strategies			
	I modified my prompts when ChatGPT's answers were not suitable.	3.1%	96.9%
	I compared ChatGPT's answers with other academic sources before using them.	7.7%	92.3%
	I edited and adapted ChatGPT's suggestions before adding them to my writing.	3.1%	96.9%
	I checked ChatGPT's output using plagiarism detection tools.	16.9%	83.1%
	I used ChatGPT mainly for generating ideas, not for writing entire paragraphs.	6.2%	93.8%
Category	Indicator (Question/Statement)	Valid Percent (NO)	Valid Percent (YES)
I. Activities			
	I have used ChatGPT to help me write opinion texts or other academic writing tasks.	3.1%	96.9%
	I used ChatGPT to generate ideas or outlines before writing.	3.1%	96.9%
	I used ChatGPT to improve my grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure.	18.5%	81.5%
	I asked ChatGPT to find references or supporting information for my writing.	7.7%	92.3%
	I used ChatGPT to check or revise the organization of my writing.	4.6%	95.4%
II. Benefits			
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ChatGPT helped me understand how to write an opinion essay better.	6.2%	93.8%
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I. Pervasive Integration Across the Writing Process (Activities)

The data strongly suggests that ChatGPT is no longer a peripheral tool but a deeply embedded assistant throughout the academic writing lifecycle. With an overwhelming consensus (96.9% for both A1 and A2), students predominantly leverage

the tool for initial ideation, outlining, and even drafting opinion or academic texts. This signifies a fundamental shift, positioning the AI not merely as an editor but as a *co-creator* in the preliminary and core stages of task completion. Furthermore, its frequent use for checking and revising organization (A5, 95.4%) and finding supporting information (A4, 92.3%) underscores its perceived utility in improving structural coherence and research efficiency, even though its reliability for fact-checking remains a concern.

II. Positive Perceptions of Efficiency and Learning Support (Benefits)

The perceived benefits underscore AI's role in facilitating both *productivity* and *pedagogical support*. The highest agreement is on the ease of the writing process (B1, 93.8%) and, notably, its contribution to better understanding how to write an opinion essay (B3, 93.8%). This suggests students view ChatGPT as an active learning partner that models genre conventions and enhances argumentative development (B4, 92.3%). While time-saving motivation (B5, 84.6%) is high, the relatively lower consensus on increased academic confidence (B2, 76.9%) warrants attention. This discrepancy may indicate that while the AI helps produce *better outputs*, it does not necessarily translate into a fully self-assured belief in the students' underlying *independent writing capabilities*.

III. Critical Concerns Regarding Integrity and Accuracy (Challenges)

Despite the widespread adoption, students are keenly aware of the inherent risks, particularly those related to academic integrity. The most pronounced challenge is the worry about unintentional plagiarism (C3, 86.2%). This finding confirms the urgent need for institutional clarity on proper AI citation and disclosure. Furthermore, a substantial number of students found it difficult to evaluate the accuracy of the AI's answers (C1, 66.2%, Yes), a finding that correlates with documented issues of AI "hallucination." Conversely, only a minority felt confused about integrating their own ideas (C5, 33.8%, Yes) or understanding feedback (C2, 43.1%, Yes), suggesting that the core difficulties lie more in *critical assessment* and *ethical application* rather than operational use. The difficulty in creating effective prompts (C4, 60.0%, Yes) also points to a need for explicit instruction in AI literacy.

IV. Proactive Strategies for Responsible Adaptation (Strategies)

Encouragingly, the data reveal a high degree of critical and adaptive user behavior. The highest rates of agreement across the entire survey belong to editing/adapting suggestions (D3, 96.9%, Yes) and modifying prompts (D1, 96.9, Yes). These results are paramount, demonstrating that most students do not engage in simple copy-pasting; instead, they treat the AI output as a draft or suggestion requiring significant human intervention and iterative refinement.

The prioritization of using ChatGPT for generating ideas rather than entire paragraphs (D5, 93.8 %, Yes) further supports a responsible, process-oriented application of the tool. While a strong majority compares AI answers with other academic sources (D2, 92.3%, Yes), the figure for checking output with plagiarism tools (D4), 83.1%, Yes) is slightly lower, indicating a potential gap between self-reported critical validation and utilizing specific technological safeguards.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data and the analysis conducted, several critical challenges regarding the use of ChatGPT among the respondents were identified. These challenges primarily fall into the categories of Academic Integrity Risk and Critical AI Literacy Deficits. The findings of this study indicate that students experience significant concerns regarding unintentional plagiarism when using ChatGPT in academic writing. A total of 86.2% of respondents expressed worry that incorporating AI-generated content may unintentionally lead to plagiarism. This concern aligns with previous studies (Cotton et al., 2023; Guleria et al., 2023), which highlight that AI-generated texts can blur the boundaries of authorship and originality, creating ethical dilemmas in academic work. Therefore, the students' concerns are not merely based on perception but are supported by scholarly discussions emphasizing the critical need for proper citation practices and awareness when utilizing AI-assisted writing tools.

Furthermore, the data also revealed challenges related to AI literacy, particularly in evaluating the accuracy of AI-generated information (66.2%) and formulating effective prompts (80.0%). These findings reinforce previous literature (Science Editing, 2024), which states that without adequate skills in verification and prompt construction, students are likely to use AI passively, resulting in content that may be inaccurate, irrelevant, or misaligned with academic expectations. Additionally, Luo (Jess) et al. (2025) suggest that limited prompt literacy can reduce students' critical engagement and analytical depth when engaging with AI tools. Thus, although students are frequent users of AI, they are not yet proficient controllers of the technology. This highlights the urgent need to develop structured AI literacy programs to support responsible and critical use of AI in academic writing.

CONCLUSION

This descriptive quantitative study successfully provided a clear overview of the activities, challenges, and adaptive strategies of English Education students in Lampung Province regarding the use of ChatGPT for opinion writing. The study, involving a purposive sample of 65 students from three Muhammadiyah universities, confirmed the strategic integration of GenAI in the EFL writing process.

The study has suggested three key findings: pervasive activities, dual challenges, and adaptive strategies. In terms of pervasive activities, students exhibit a high and diversified adoption rate of ChatGPT, utilizing it across the entire writing cycle from generating initial ideas and outlines to revising grammar, vocabulary, and organizational structure. This indicates that ChatGPT is integrated not as a marginal tool, but as a central assistant in academic productivity. For dual challenges, the primary challenges fall into two critical areas: First, it deals with academic integrity. This aspect is widespread anxiety concerning unintentional plagiarism (86.2% worried), reflecting the core ethical difficulty of integrating machine-generated content. AI Literacy Deficits: Students struggle with critical evaluation, finding it difficult to assess the accuracy of AI output (66.2%, Yes) and to formulate effective prompts (60.0%, Yes). Despite the challenges, students demonstrate strong critical and adaptive behaviors. The

highest reported activities were editing and adapting AI suggestions and modifying prompts when output was unsuitable (96.9%, Yes) for both. Furthermore, students strategically prioritize using the tool for generating ideas rather than writing complete paragraphs (93.8%, Yes).

In short, while ChatGPT has become a standard and beneficial tool for enhancing efficiency and structural understanding among EFL learners in this context, its widespread use necessitates urgent pedagogical intervention to strengthen critical AI literacy and institutional clarity to mitigate the pervasive risk of unintentional academic misconduct.

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