THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHATGPT DURING UNDERGRADUATE THESIS WRITING: INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (AI), particularly ChatGPT, has transformed academic writing practices in higher education by providing immediate support in idea development, language refinement, and information processing. However, its increasing use in undergraduate thesis writing also raises concerns regarding academic integrity, responsible AI use, and students' dependence on AI-generated content. This study aimed to explore Indonesian EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of employing ChatGPT during the undergraduate thesis writing process through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). A descriptive case study design was employed, involving two eighth-semester undergraduate students from the English Education Department at Siliwangi University. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged: (1) the conditional role of ChatGPT in thesis writing, (2) the ease of usability through prompt formulation, (3) academic integrity and AI reliance, and (4) selective integration of AI in professional settings. The findings indicate that ChatGPT primarily functioned as a complementary writing assistant for brainstorming, academic language refinement, grammar improvement, coherence, and organization. Nevertheless, effective use depended on students' ability to formulate appropriate prompts, critically evaluate AI-generated responses, and adapt outputs to their own academic voice. Participants also demonstrated awareness of academic integrity and the risks of excessive reliance, positioning ChatGPT as an assistant rather than an authoritative source or substitute for independent academic work. The study concludes that responsible ChatGPT use requires critical engagement, ethical awareness, and AI literacy. Institutional guidance is therefore important for supporting the ethical and purposeful integration of generative AI in higher education.

Keywords: *Chatgpt, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Indonesian EFL Students, Technology Acceptance Model, Undergraduate Thesis Writing.*

Abstrak

Pesatnya perkembangan kecerdasan buatan (AI) generatif, khususnya ChatGPT, telah mengubah praktik penulisan akademik di perguruan tinggi dengan memberikan dukungan instan dalam pengembangan gagasan, penyempurnaan bahasa, dan pengolahan informasi. Namun, peningkatan penggunaannya dalam penulisan skripsi sarjana juga menimbulkan kekhawatiran terkait integritas akademik, penggunaan AI yang bertanggung jawab, dan ketergantungan mahasiswa pada konten yang dihasilkan AI. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa sarjana jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia

mengenai penggunaan ChatGPT selama proses penulisan skripsi dengan menggunakan *Technology Acceptance Model* (TAM). Desain studi kasus deskriptif diterapkan dengan melibatkan dua mahasiswa tingkat akhir (semester delapan) dari Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Siliwangi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Empat tema utama muncul: (1) peran kondisional ChatGPT dalam penulisan skripsi, (2) kemudahan penggunaan melalui perumusan *prompt* (perintah), (3) integritas akademik dan ketergantungan pada AI, serta (4) integrasi selektif AI dalam konteks profesional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ChatGPT terutama berfungsi sebagai asisten penulisan pelengkap untuk curah pendapat (*brainstorming*), penyempurnaan bahasa akademik, perbaikan tata bahasa, koherensi, dan pengorganisasian tulisan. Meskipun demikian, efektivitas penggunaannya bergantung pada kemampuan mahasiswa dalam merumuskan *prompt* yang tepat, mengevaluasi respons AI secara kritis, dan menyesuaikan hasil keluaran dengan gaya penulisan akademik mereka sendiri. Para partisipan juga menunjukkan kesadaran akan integritas akademik dan risiko ketergantungan yang berlebihan, dengan memosisikan ChatGPT sebagai asisten, bukan sebagai sumber otoritatif atau pengganti kerja akademik mandiri. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penggunaan ChatGPT yang bertanggung jawab memerlukan keterlibatan kritis, kesadaran etis, dan literasi AI. Oleh karena itu, panduan institusional sangat penting untuk mendukung integrasi AI generatif yang etis dan bertujuan jelas di perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Chatgpt, Kecerdasan Buatan Generatif, Mahasiswa EFL Indonesia, *Technology Acceptance Model*, Penulisan Skripsi Sarjana.

A. INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate thesis writing is one of the most complex and high-stakes academic tasks undertaken by university students. As a requirement for completing a bachelor's degree, a thesis requires students to identify a research problem, engage critically with relevant literature, conduct a systematic research process, and construct a coherent and original academic argument. These demands require not only academic literacy but also intellectual independence and disciplinary competence. For students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the challenge is intensified because they must manage the cognitive demands of research while producing academic texts in a language that is not their primary language. Difficulties in vocabulary, academic register, grammatical accuracy, and written expression may intersect with the demands of independent research (Fitria, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The development of generative artificial intelligence has introduced a new dimension to these academic practices. Large language models, particularly ChatGPT, can provide immediate assistance in idea generation, language refinement, text organization, and information processing (Chaudhry, 2022). The accessibility and versatility of such systems have encouraged students to incorporate AI-

assisted tools into different stages of writing, from brainstorming and drafting to revision (Habibi et al., 2023). Previous research has indicated that AI-assisted writing tools can support linguistic accuracy, coherence, organization, and writing efficiency. In EFL settings, ChatGPT has also been perceived as useful for addressing lexical limitations and reducing difficulties associated with complex academic writing (Fitria, 2023; Su et al., 2023).

At the same time, the use of generative AI creates important questions concerning authorship, academic integrity, reliability, and dependence. Because ChatGPT can produce fluent and convincing text, the boundary between legitimate assistance and inappropriate substitution of students' work may become difficult to determine. Concerns have also been raised about the reliability and potential bias of AI-generated information, making critical evaluation and verification essential (Kasneci et al., 2023; Lee & Choi, 2023). In high-stakes academic writing such as an undergraduate thesis, these concerns are particularly important because originality of thought and scholarly independence are central to the task. Institutions therefore face the challenge of developing guidance that recognizes the usefulness of AI while protecting academic integrity (Garcia & Davis, 2024; Perkins et al., 2023).

Existing studies have examined students' general perceptions of ChatGPT and the effects of AI-assisted writing on writing performance. Su et al. (2023), for example, reported benefits in linguistic accuracy, coherence, and organization. Fitria (2023) found that Indonesian EFL students perceived ChatGPT as useful for overcoming language-related difficulties, while Park (2023) reported that EFL university students viewed ChatGPT as a writing companion for idea development and language refinement. However, these studies largely address general academic writing or broad perceptions rather than the specific experience of employing ChatGPT during the sustained and high-stakes process of undergraduate thesis writing.

The present study addresses this gap by exploring how Indonesian EFL undergraduate students perceive and employ ChatGPT during thesis writing. The study is guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly the concepts of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward use, and behavioral intention (Davis, 1989). Rather than treating technology acceptance as simple adoption, the study considers how students' perceptions are shaped by task-specific usefulness, interactional demands, ethical awareness, and intentions for future use.

The research question is: What are Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of the employment of ChatGPT in undergraduate thesis writing?

The study contributes theoretically by extending discussion of TAM to the context of generative AI in high-stakes academic writing. Practically, it provides insights for students, lecturers, and thesis supervisors concerning responsible AI-assisted writing. Empirically, it contributes context-specific evidence from Indonesian EFL undergraduate students and

highlights how students negotiate the benefits and limitations of ChatGPT while maintaining responsibility for their academic work.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model was introduced by Davis (1989) to explain users' acceptance and use of information technology. Two central constructs are perceived usefulness, referring to the extent to which a person believes that a technology improves performance, and perceived ease of use, referring to the extent to which a person believes that using the technology requires little effort. These perceptions influence attitudes and intentions toward technology use. TAM has remained influential in educational technology research because of its concise structure and explanatory value (Scherer et al., 2019).

In the context of generative AI, TAM provides a useful lens for understanding why students employ ChatGPT and how they decide the extent to which it should be integrated into academic tasks. Perceived usefulness may be reflected in students' experiences of grammar correction, idea development, and organization, while perceived ease of use may be reflected in accessibility and the ability to obtain relevant responses. Attitudes and behavioral intentions can be observed in students' willingness to continue using ChatGPT, recommend it to others, or reduce their use because of limitations and ethical concerns.

2. ChatGPT in Academic Writing

Within this study, ChatGPT is conceptualized as an AI-based language model used as a supportive tool in academic writing rather than as a substitute for students' original ideas or research work. Its functions may include brainstorming, paraphrasing, grammar correction, academic language refinement, organization of arguments, and revision. The educational value of these functions depends on students' ability to critically evaluate generated content and integrate only appropriate suggestions into their own work (Dwivedi et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

3. Academic Integrity and Responsible AI Use

Academic integrity requires students to retain responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and intellectual substance of their academic work. Generative AI creates an ethical tension because it can provide language and content that may appear to be student-authored. Previous research has therefore emphasized the risks of overreliance, unclear authorship, and inaccurate

AI-generated information (Kasneci et al., 2023; Perkins et al., 2023). Responsible use requires human oversight, verification, transparent academic practice where appropriate, and recognition of the limits of AI systems.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive case study design. A case study is appropriate for examining a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundary between the phenomenon and its context is not clearly defined (Yin, 2017). The use of ChatGPT during thesis writing represents an emerging and context-dependent phenomenon that requires an in-depth understanding of students' experiences rather than a broad numerical description.

2. Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Siliwangi University, Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia, within the English Education Department. Two eighth-semester undergraduate students who were actively completing their theses participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used because the participants met specific criteria relevant to the phenomenon: they were final-year English Education students and had employed ChatGPT as a writing support tool during thesis preparation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participation was voluntary and participant identities were represented as P1 and P2 in the findings.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research and their right to withdraw. Written informed consent was obtained before interviews were conducted. Personal information was anonymized, and the interview data were used for academic purposes.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guideline was developed around TAM constructs, including perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward use, and behavioral intention (Davis, 1989). Individual interviews lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain alignment with the research question while probing participants' experiences in greater depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

4. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved six stages: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Initial codes included grammar correction, personal drafting priority, prompt difficulty, context drift, academic integrity awareness, transparency with supervisors, AI accountability limitations, and future-use intention. The codes were then organized into broader themes that captured recurring patterns across the participants' accounts.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis generated four major themes: (1) the conditional role of ChatGPT in thesis writing, (2) the ease of usability through prompt formulation, (3) academic integrity and AI reliance, and (4) selective integration of AI in professional settings. The findings show that both participants viewed ChatGPT positively but did not regard it as an independent academic author. Their acceptance of the technology was selective and shaped by task requirements, prompt quality, critical evaluation, and ethical considerations.

1. The Conditional Role of ChatGPT in Thesis Writing

The first theme demonstrates that ChatGPT was employed as a supplementary rather than primary writing tool. Both participants generally developed their own ideas or drafts before consulting ChatGPT. The tool was then used for specific tasks such as grammar correction, academic language refinement, coherence improvement, brainstorming, and organization. In some situations, ChatGPT also helped participants interpret unclear supervisory feedback by offering possible explanations or revision directions. However, the participants did not simply adopt generated responses. They evaluated, filtered, and revised suggestions before incorporating them into their theses.

P1 demonstrated a particularly selective pattern of use. ChatGPT was valued mainly for grammar correction and academic language improvement. The participant described drafting independently first and then asking ChatGPT for suggestions. The participant also compared language suggestions with other tools before deciding which version to use. This indicates that ChatGPT functioned as a linguistic assistant rather than a replacement for independent reasoning. P1 also considered the overall improvement in thesis quality to be limited because the main ideas and arguments remained based on personal understanding.

P2 emphasized different benefits. ChatGPT was considered useful for brainstorming

theoretical ideas, identifying possible frameworks, deciding what information might be relevant, and restructuring less-developed drafts. P2 also described ChatGPT as a useful conversational partner when other people were unavailable for discussion. This indicates that the perceived usefulness of ChatGPT included both cognitive and affective dimensions. The finding is consistent with Park (2023), who reported that EFL university students viewed ChatGPT as a writing companion for idea development and language refinement.

From a TAM perspective, the participants' continued use can be understood through perceived usefulness: ChatGPT provided concrete assistance with particular writing problems. However, usefulness was not interpreted as evidence that the system should replace the writer. Instead, students' authorial agency remained central. This pattern is consistent with research emphasizing that generative AI can support academic work when users maintain critical oversight (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023).

2. The Ease of Usability through Prompt Formulation

The second theme concerns perceived ease of use. Both participants considered the basic operation of ChatGPT simple because users can interact with the system by entering written instructions. Nevertheless, producing academically useful responses was more demanding. The participants' experiences suggest that ease of use was strongly dependent on the specificity and quality of prompts.

P1 explained that ChatGPT sometimes misunderstood the intended meaning of a prompt, requiring repeated revision of the instruction. Although grammar correction was considered relatively easy, academic writing suggestions sometimes failed to match the participant's preferred writing style. The generated text therefore had to be adapted so that it sounded natural and remained consistent with the student's own academic voice. P1 also reported instances of topic deviation, in which the system moved away from the intended research context.

P2 highlighted technical constraints. The participant referred to limitations associated with premium features and the loss of conversational context when a long conversation required a new chat. Starting a new conversation meant that previous context could no longer be relied upon automatically. These experiences show that perceived ease of use was influenced not only by interface simplicity but also by technical functionality and continuity.

The findings refine the TAM concept of perceived ease of use in a generative-AI context. The interface may be easy to operate, but meaningful use requires prompt literacy, contextual awareness, critical interpretation, and stylistic adaptation. In other words, technological ease

does not automatically produce academic usefulness. This supports the view that effective prompting is becoming an important form of digital literacy in education (Mollick & Mollick, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

3. Academic Integrity and AI Reliance

The third theme reveals that positive attitudes toward ChatGPT were accompanied by strong ethical self-regulation. Both participants recognized that direct copying of AI-generated text without personal processing would conflict with the expectations of thesis writing. They positioned themselves as the persons responsible for the intellectual substance of the thesis and regarded ChatGPT as a tool that should remain under human control.

P1 acknowledged that ChatGPT could be useful for discussion writing, brainstorming, and grammar correction but warned against excessive reliance. The participant emphasized the need for students to control the technology rather than allow the technology to control their academic work. P1 also believed that if a lecturer asked whether ChatGPT had been involved in the writing process, students should respond honestly while clarifying that the AI output had not simply been copied.

P2 similarly regarded ChatGPT as only a tool and rejected the idea of using it as a primary academic source. The participant expressed concern about becoming overly dependent on the system because students are expected to master their thesis topics themselves. P2 also questioned the accountability of AI-generated responses, noting that the system cannot take academic responsibility for information it produces and may generate unsupported answers. Consequently, human-written scholarly sources remained more important for academic authority.

These findings demonstrate a form of cautious acceptance. Students recognized usefulness while simultaneously establishing boundaries around acceptable use. This is important because the risk of AI reliance is not simply determined by how frequently a technology is used; it is also shaped by whether users retain intellectual responsibility. The findings support concerns raised by Perkins et al. (2023) and Kasneci et al. (2023) regarding academic integrity, while also supporting the principle of human oversight emphasized in guidance on generative AI in education (UNESCO, 2023).

4. Selective Integration of AI in Professional Settings

The fourth theme concerns behavioral intention beyond university. Both participants anticipated some continued use of AI, but neither described an intention to depend on ChatGPT

unconditionally. Their future plans differed in intensity and purpose, suggesting that technology acceptance was selective and context-dependent.

P1 intended to continue using ChatGPT after graduation but expected to use it less frequently than during thesis writing. The participant viewed it mainly as a comparison tool and believed that other AI platforms might be more suitable for some forms of academic discussion. P1 also expected human collaboration in the workplace to reduce AI dependence because colleagues could provide alternative perspectives and share responsibilities. Thus, ChatGPT was understood as an additional support resource rather than a substitute for professional interaction.

P2 expressed a stronger intention to continue using ChatGPT because of its accessibility and conversational practicality. The participant viewed it as useful for situations in which immediate assistance was needed and was willing to recommend it to peers. Nevertheless, P2's account still positioned ChatGPT as a practical tool rather than an authoritative decision-maker.

The contrast between P1 and P2 is consistent with the behavioral-intention dimension of technology acceptance. Both participants recognized usefulness, but their future use depended on anticipated needs, alternative technologies, and the availability of human collaboration. This suggests that long-term AI adoption may be better understood as strategic integration rather than habitual dependence (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

5. Synthesis of the Findings

Taken together, the four themes indicate that the participants' acceptance of ChatGPT was positive but qualified. Perceived usefulness was evident in language refinement, brainstorming, organization, and discussion support. Perceived ease of use was evident in the simple interface but was moderated by prompt formulation, context maintenance, and technical constraints. Attitudes toward use were shaped by ethical awareness, particularly concerns about authorship and dependence. Finally, behavioral intentions showed that future use would be selective and adapted to academic or professional circumstances.

The central finding is therefore not that ChatGPT is either beneficial or harmful, but that its educational value is conditional on how students employ it. The participants retained responsibility for generating ideas, evaluating evidence, revising text, and making final academic decisions. Their experiences suggest that AI literacy should include more than knowing how to operate an AI system. It should also include prompt literacy, source

verification, awareness of limitations, ethical judgment, and the ability to preserve one's own academic voice.

E. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored Indonesian EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of employing ChatGPT during the undergraduate thesis writing process. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis: the conditional role of ChatGPT in thesis writing, ease of usability through prompt formulation, academic integrity and AI reliance, and selective integration of AI in professional settings.

The findings show that ChatGPT primarily functioned as a complementary writing assistant. Participants used it for brainstorming, grammar correction, academic language refinement, organization, coherence, and selected forms of discussion support. However, they did not regard ChatGPT as a replacement for their own academic work. The usefulness of the tool depended on the specific task and on the students' ability to critically assess and adapt its outputs.

Perceived ease of use was similarly conditional. Although the system was simple to operate, effective interaction required precise prompts, repeated refinement, contextual maintenance, and adaptation to the student's own writing style. Technical limitations could also affect continuity. These findings indicate that AI-assisted academic writing requires prompt literacy and critical AI literacy in addition to basic technological familiarity.

The participants also demonstrated awareness of academic integrity and the risks of excessive reliance. They viewed themselves as responsible for the intellectual substance of the thesis and regarded ChatGPT as an assistant rather than an authoritative academic source. Their future intentions further showed that AI use would likely be selective and context-dependent, with human collaboration remaining important in professional settings.

The study has several limitations. It involved only two participants from one university, which limits the transferability of the findings. It also relied primarily on semi-structured interviews and therefore reflected participants' reported perceptions rather than direct observation of their writing behavior. Future studies should involve more participants from different universities and disciplines and could combine interviews with observations, prompt histories, document analysis, or screen-recorded AI interactions. Future research could also include lecturers, thesis supervisors, and institutional stakeholders to examine how academic policies and supervision influence responsible AI use.

The findings suggest that universities should promote AI literacy and establish clear, context-sensitive guidance for the ethical use of generative AI in academic writing. Rather than treating ChatGPT only as a threat or as an unrestricted productivity tool, educational institutions can emphasize responsible use in which AI supports learning while students retain intellectual ownership and accountability.

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